Chapter 6
Policing the School: Dialogues and Crime Reports

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Introduction: Youth at Risk and Youth as Risk

> Police officer: There were some schools that didn't report to the police, even when it got quite serious. Then we were told that we were required to report. Schools don't stand beside the legal system. The same rules that are applied in society should be applied in schools. It was a good thought. Nevertheless, it created quite a lot of confusion at school.

In the famous British study, *Policing the Crisis. Mugging, the State and Law & Order* (1978/2013), Stuart Hall and his colleagues investigated the moral panic surrounding the phenomenon of mugging in British society during the 1970s. A central thesis in their study was that the institutions of social control – e.g., the police, the school and the media – played an active role not only in controlling anti-social behaviour, but also in how this behaviour was labelled, classified and publicly understood. When a society feels threatened by the pace and direction of social and cultural changes there are often tendencies towards the development of more traditionalist views on law and order. Although it is probably difficult to follow Hall and his colleagues' model of investigating crime and order, we have been inspired by their description of how *signification spirals* are developed, where certain issues of concern are identified, certain groups of people are targeted, and the issues are gradually multiplied and linked together, leading to an escalation of the threat and calls for firm measures.

As regards criminality and subversive behaviour, young people are seen both as a *risk group* – there are data showing, e.g., that young people show high levels of anxiety, stress and psychological ill health – and as a *security risk* (Kelly 2003; Follesø 2015). Kelly (2003) frames this as an *institutionalized mistrust of youth*.

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Following Foucault's theory of governmentality, Kelly discusses different forms of regulation as well as subjection of youth. Many interventions and institutional practices aim at controlling and managing young people "for their own good". Kelly argues that there is a need to investigate and problematize different attempts to predict normal behaviour among youth. In discussions on young people's transition into adulthood, risk has become a self-evident term. Follesø (2015) argues that there is a need to develop new terms and approaches to youth and social work. There is always a risk that the categorization of youth at risk tends to lead to exclusion. Consequently, there is a need to investigate categorizations and definitions of young people 'at risk'.

The chapter is based on a study designed as two interlinked case studies. The purpose of this design is to allow us to discuss and analyse how different professional views and attitudes regarding school violence are expressed and manifested in the narratives (Becker 1970). The cases in this respect consist of, on the one hand, principals and school health teams working closely with young students in the school. On the other hand, we have the local police, working to prevent violence in different neighbourhoods, both inside and outside the schools. We have had no ambition to match schools or representatives of the local police force, but instead primarily focused on the professional attitudes and views. When possible, however, we will also try to bring the local urban contexts into our analysis of the material.

The student welfare team can be described as an expert system, in that it contains competences relevant to assisting children and young people in need of support. This expert system is also tied into other expert and knowledge systems, such as child psychiatry, social work and the police. The knowledge and expert systems permeating schools today lead to categorization processes. For example, when approaching unruly behaviour and violence in schools, it is now common to see this as a police matter. Incidents and situations are thus framed and categorized through juridical and social discourses. These processes can be framed in terms of discipline and control systems (Foucault 1979). On the one hand, categorizations can be helpful when deciding what measures should be taken at schools. On the other, using them moves the focus from the social context to the categorized and stigmatized individual. Central to the present analysis is also trying to understand how different forms of power are connected to the processes of categorization of conduct. In his work, Foucault (1990) has shown how repressive power works through the law by defining what is forbidden and what is not. Schools, on the other hand, have been used as an example of productive power, for the way in which they teach students self-discipline by teaching them to want to follow norms (Foucault 1979). Focusing on the key statements and attitudes of the professionals, where talk about police reports is present, our ambition is to get closer to the different ways in which schools approach violence and what forms of power are used. We will focus in particular on how different professional groups categorize and talk about school violence.

This chapter is structured into three sections. First, we will provide an overview of relevant studies in this area of research. Second, we will analyse how different professional groups tend to categorize and approach violence among young people. Finally, we will sum up and draw some preliminary conclusions.

School Violence, School Professionals and the Police

School professionals and the police often have different perspectives on how to handle student misconduct. This has been described in terms of the existence of a number of obstacles to cooperation, including distrust between the police and school personnel. Whereas the police act based on a 'fear of crime', the school personnel act based on a 'fear of labelling' students as criminals (Coon and Travis 2012). Research has also shown a lack of agreement between the police and educators regarding the role and function of the police in schools. There are both educators who want to receive assistance from the police with disciplinary issues, and educators who believe that policing schools will 'criminalize' students and their behaviour (Theriot 2009). However, research has also shown that police officers refuse to file reports on students for minor misbehaviour in the classroom (Coon and Travis 2012). Police involvement in schools may be counterproductive. Police involvement may give the impression that educators have lost the initiative to promote a positive school culture (Tillyer et al. 2011). There is also a concern expressed by police officers that their involvement in enforcing school rules concerning minor infractions may provoke students and cause them to become aggressive (Coon and Travis 2012; Morris 2005). The presence of police in schools also contributes to a heightened awareness of potential threats, which may have a negative effect on students' feelings of safety at school (Tillyer et al. 2011).

Schools with a higher police presence also have higher recorded crime rates than do schools without a police presence. The pattern seems to be that when the police are involved in schools, acts of simple violence and disturbing behaviour are reported more frequently. One interpretation of this is that the presence of police serves to re-define behaviour problems as criminal justice problems, rather than as educational, psychological or social issues. Their presence also tends to undermine educators' competence in handling behavioural problems and bring confusion to schools' disciplinary procedures (Na and Gottfredson 2013). Educators are sometimes unwilling to use law enforcement in schools, because they do not want to feel they are relinquishing their own control (Coon and Travis 2012). Police presence in a school may also be taken as evidence that the school is unsafe. Previous research has revealed that there are fears that police involvement will cause both the school and the neighbourhood to get a bad reputation (Theriot 2009). Other scholars have argued that views on police officers' presence in schools need to be nuanced. The presence of police has in fact led to higher rates of detection of weapons and serious violence. Involvement of police officers is, however, more common in schools situated in disadvantaged urban areas where crime is more likely to occur. It is also not clear whether police presence prevents crime or is mainly reactive (Swartz et al. 2016).

Research from schools in US has shown that black, minority and poor students are more likely to be subjected to punishment than white middle-class students (Gregory et al. 2010; Skiba et al. 2011). However, different opinions have been expressed as to how this should be interpreted. One explanation is that because police involvement and security measures are common in a large number of schools, this has contributed to a general criminalization of disciplinary problems in schools.

Thus, youth growing up in socially disadvantaged and violent neighbourhoods are overrepresented in the statistics of arrested and suspended students (Kupchik et al. 2015). The presence of armed police in cafeterias and hallways leads to a climate of violence and fear, which in turn can lead to less academic motivation and increased misbehaviour (Watts and Erevelles 2004; Morris 2005). The perspective that the best way to handle behaviour problems is through legal action has been labelled the "school-to-prison pipeline". The overrepresentation of black, minority and poor students in prison stands as proof of the on-going reproduction of inequality (Casella 2001; Wacquant 2008; Irwin et al. 2013). In Sweden, residential segregation has contributed to increasing differences between schools (Beach and Sernhede 2011). This has led to a situation in which disadvantaged and immigrant groups are concentrated in the same schools, which are often seen as "immigrant schools". According to Milani and Jonsson (2012), the immigrant student has become, in the media and the public mind, synonymous with a violent and rowdy young man. In Sweden, there has been a debate about the impact this is having on how educators and other professionals exercise their authority (Estrada et al. 2012).

To sum up, research has shown that there is a complex relation between police interventions, schools' preventive work and the construction of safe school environments. Some studies point towards the negative effects of police interventions, in the form of criminalization and stigmatization of pupils and schools. Studies have also revealed that there is sometimes a strained and complex relation between the police, on the one hand, and the teachers and school health teams, on the other, not least as regards methods of handling school violence. Furthermore, we have discussed the relation between neo-liberal policy and juridification as part of more general changes in Sweden and other post-industrial societies. It is our hope that the present study will generate knowledge about how such changes may influence professionals' understandings of school violence.

Constructing the "Perpetrator" and the "Victim"

We will start with a case study of the school professionals who work more closely with questions of school violence, and then move on to the local police forces and how they approach the same questions. This section will be concluded with a comparative analysis of the two cases.

Case Study I: The School Health Team

The results show that different perspectives on reporting to the police are found among the school officials. In an interview with the principal at Water Lily School, the routines that have been established through collaboration between the municipality and the police are described.

Principal, Water Lily School: In my view, this is a difficult balancing act. We are trying to communicate to the students that the same law operates on the sidewalk as at the school. We have no specific criminal law for the school. If you hit someone, the same law applies, whether at school or outside school, it's as bad as it is. Then there are a number of decrees the municipality has developed together with the local police, to be used when reporting a crime in school. We are supposed to use these forms when we report violence in the school. However, we still have to make certain distinctions. The students are not just in school to learn, but also to be good people. We have a dual mission.

This policy can be interpreted to mean that violence in school should be handled in the same way violence outside school is. This strategy would seem to result in heightened expectations to report students engaged in violent acts to the police. The principal also addresses how they communicate this to the students at school. Filing a police report is, in those situations, viewed as taking a stand, showing that the same laws are applied inside and outside school. In this way, a police report can be interpreted as having symbolic value – sending a message to students and parents about what behaviours are not tolerated in society. However, there is also a duality inherent in this policy. Reporting a student is not always thought to be in line with the best method of fostering good citizens. The difficulty of deciding what constitutes a crime is a repeated concern mentioned in our material. This is exemplified in the following interview:

Principal, Daisy School: This is always an issue; you have to find somewhere to draw the line. We cannot report everything that happens to the police. We don't want the police to do our work. But it's really hard to know where to draw the line.

The professionals often used the distinction between serious physical violence and pushing and insults, as examples of what kinds of situations are reported to the police, on the one hand, and considered conflicts that can be handled by educators, on the other: "It is mostly, or almost always, when there has been physical violence. Then we report to the police" (school counsellor, Thistle School). Smaller conflicts and occasional fights are described as an almost inevitable part of everyday life at school. These are considered difficult to avoid, especially when a great number of young people are compelled to spend most the day together in a delimited space.

The educators also emphasized that protecting and fostering students was the school's not the police's responsibility. The professionals emphasized the importance of telling the students that they were there for them and that they could be trusted. In the following interview, one of the school counsellors elaborates on this:

School counsellor, Cow Parsnip School: It may be an important way to show respect for those who have been subjected to a crime. You are a victim, just as if an adult had been in the same situation. However, I can also feel that it is a weak society that leaves everything to the police. It's a signal to the children, saying that we adults cannot solve this; that we were forced to leave it to the police.

One argument, often used, is that filing a police report shows that the professionals are concerned and considering the victim's perspective. However, as expressed by the school counsellor, there is also a downside to this, in that the professionals may lose their initiative in deciding how to handle the situation. Reporting to the

police could also damage the relation to the students. In the following example, the principal at Honeysuckle School discusses this:

> Principal, Honeysuckle School: A police report usually makes the work more difficult. This is because we lose the students' and parents' trust in the school. This occurs regardless of whether you are the victim or the perpetrator … The victims can feel very vulnerable, because we made a report. They feel like everybody knows they have been victimized, which makes them feel more vulnerable. The student you label as a perpetrator often feels betrayed by us, that we are letting them down.

Previous research has shown that there are several obstacles to using categories such as perpetrator and victim in schools**.** The school professionals mentioned that the student categorized as an offender might feel betrayed. Another aspect of this, articulated in the interviews, was that the educators were afraid of placing the victim in a vulnerable position. In the educators' experience, students sometimes had doubts about being categorized as a victim. This was also something school officials discussed during the interviews. The following example is from a focus group interview at Thistle School:

> School counsellor, Thistle School: There are some students who define themselves as victims, and of course this makes it easier. When the students tell us that I'm a victim of this… Then we can act in line with our policies. This is, however, not always the case… There are students; we know that they are exposed. … But they don't view themselves as victims. They don't want that, it would be admitting defeat.
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> School officials, Thistle School: There is also a gender difference.
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> School counsellor, Thistle School: Yes, what I was talking about is this group of boys, who don't want to see themselves as victims. With girls it's often different …

The officials highlight how the category of victim could also be viewed as something problematic for the students. They describe how students exposed to bullying or violence are in a difficult situation in many respects. One aspect is admitting this situation to themselves and to others, which can itself be a painful process. The students' resistance to viewing themselves as victims also makes it difficult for professionals to provide students with the support they need.

Filing a police report is framed in different ways depending on where the schools are situated. The school professionals in the middle-class-area schools described the importance of being vigorous and re-establishing parents' trust in the school. At the Daisy School, most of the parents were well educated, had high expectations and placed great demands on the school. For example, parents used their social network and knowledge to get their way. One such example was of a family that was not satisfied with work of the school psychologist and came to school with two independent assessments from two other psychologists. Findings from conversations with school officials, or observations of dialogues among them, reveal the importance of documentation that allows school officials to show how they have handled various issues.

> Principal, Daisy School: It is important that we document the measures we take, so we can account for this later, if the parents go further to other agencies.
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> School counsellor, Daisy School: It is very important to arrange a meeting immediately with the parents! They are of course worried about their children – the parents are also aware of their rights, and are quick to make complaints to other authorities.

In the narratives of school officials at schools situated in middle-class areas, there is also a duality as regards reporting to the police, as this may cause parents to lose their confidence in the school. In the long term, this may result in the school becoming less attractive to future students. At schools situated in socially disadvantaged areas, the discussion was framed differently. The school professionals described filing police reports as an important way to show students, parents and other inhabits that the neighbourhood was part of the Swedish legal system. The principal at Cow Parsnip School said: "We have to show that we trust in the police and this society. Therefore, we call the police when something serious happens". In the narratives, concern was expressed about the development of parallel societies that apply their own laws and rules. However, at Cow Parsnip School there was also some ambivalence, in that the high police presence in the neighbourhood and the school could easily result in students being labelled as criminals: "Crime is handled much more harshly here" (*Principal, Cow Parsnip School*).

As we can see there is considerable ambivalence among the school professionals regarding how to respond to and deal with school violence. Some of the interviewees stress the importance of creating dialogues and of being able to create social bonds to the young students. Reporting incidents to the police could potentially threaten the bond between students and school professionals.

Case Study II: The Local Police

Now we will turn to the interviews with the police officers. This part will be structured in accordance with our three research questions, starting with the question of how the police frame and talk about police reports in schools.

The police officers are well aware that they frame and define violence and different problems in schools somewhat differently than the principals and school health team do. In their view, teachers and other school professionals tend to focus on and protect the long-term relation to the pupil, whereas the police tend to focus on questions of violence, guilt, crime and responsibility. These differences are also reflected in the following quotation from a police officer.

> They sometimes have problems seeing a police report as a way of helping the individual to accept that they did something bad. I get the feeling that they just don't trust our methods. No one younger than 18 years is put in jail, of course. Instead they get care. They are afraid of letting them face the consequences. They also feel that there is a risk that they will lose the young people's trust, if they talk with us. That could be true in the short run, but in the long run they will know what we stand for. There are many ways of showing that you care. But it is also important to draw a clear line: I will not accept this! It is crucial that you learn to face this, but some of the teachers aren't prepared to do this (Police officer, who has worked in different urban areas).

Comparing briefly with the school officials' narratives, it seems that two different *institutional discourses* meet in the school. Naturally, it is often difficult to distinguish between a well-defined "crime" and different kinds of everyday conflicts

and trouble between pupils. Moreover, different knowledge regimes meet here, defining, understanding and framing school violence in conflicting ways. There are, however, also examples of police believing that school professionals tend to exaggerate and over-report incidents as "crimes". Overall, the police identify a considerable ambivalence among teachers and principals.

> Sometimes schools want to file reports on everything, for example, trivial brawls between youngsters. However, sometimes we also have to push them to report things. We have to tell them that reporting a 13-year-old kid for a crime is not such a big deal. The principals often have a watchful eye on these things, but sometimes we have to tell them that this IS a crime. We know there will be no legal consequences for a 13-year-old, but the social services will talk with them, and the more information the social services get, the better they are prepared to develop their action plan. This is not our business. The more adequate information the social services get, the more resources they can mobilize to help the young person. A police report can make a difference and also lead to a good treatment plan. So, it's important not to hide crimes, because this can really destroy the young person's chances for a better life (Police officer in a segregated suburb).

Whereas the police have clear definitions of how to frame and define a crime, the school professionals have more diffuse ways of approaching school violence. According to our interviews with school professionals, the police's method of defining crimes can lead to a collapse of the relationship between the professionals and the youngster. This analysis, however, is not shared by the police officers. Instead, they frame their position in these questions in terms of guilt, boundaries and adults' responsibility to uphold laws and regulations.

> Interviewer: For the young person, a police report can serve as a reminder that his behaviour is not acceptable. Do you ever discuss these things?
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> Police officer: Yes, filing a police report is definitively a signal from society. However, we often tend to end up focusing mostly on the perpetrators, and not that much on the victims. But the perpetrators often turn into victims, later on (Police officer in a segregated suburb).

Looking more closely at the construction of the relation between perpetrator and victim, there are certain similarities between how the school professionals and the police define this relation. Both agree that it is a highly unstable relation, and that the roles can also change over time. According to the police, victims many times become offenders, and vice versa. This makes it even more import to put an end to school violence. However, compared to the schools, the police seem to have a clear picture of what needs to be done. The only way to stop school violence is to report all violent acts that can be legally defined as crimes.

> In my view, the schools should file more police reports. I often meet kids who are being harassed and exposed to violence, and when the schools refrain from reacting, they have hell to deal with. I've met so many youngsters who feel the adult world is looking away. I find this deeply disturbing. Who can you trust, then? There is no one, and you just have to stay in school (Police officer working in the centre of the city).

The police officers interviewed are well aware that there are significant differences between how they interact with young people and how they frame the schools in different urban areas. According to our interviewees, there is a greater police presence in segregated and "poor" urban areas than in more affluent areas in the city.

A common opinion among the police officers interviewed is that certain schools tend to avoid reporting serious incidents and violence. This was pointed out clearly in the following interview:

> At some schools, for example in segregated areas, it is, of course, impossible to report all incidents. There are a lot of incidents at such schools. The teachers somehow learn where to draw the line, and when the school has to report or not. They also learn when pupils have crossed the boundaries, and when it's important to show the offenders, the parents and the victims that "crimes" are taken seriously. Certain actions have consequences. However, we also have principals in other segregated urban areas that refuse to report crimes, even though some of the pupils tend to rule the school. This has been a huge problem for us. We have tried to talk with the schools. Through pupils we became aware that other pupils had been seriously abused, and the school had not reported this. This would never happen in the more affluent areas of the city. In these areas news about incidents at school is immediately spread among the parents. They form Facebook groups. But these kinds of actions are non-existent in the segregated areas. They don't have that kind of social cohesion (Police officer, who has worked in different urban areas).

Taking a closer look at this narrative, one thing is clear: At the same time as the police officer talks about different urban areas, he is also contributing to an ongoing process of social construction and categorization of these areas. There is always a risk that these kinds of polarized descriptions and constructions of urban areas will become truths and guidelines for police work. One police officer, working in a segregated urban area, also expressed certain concerns about the consequences of stigmatizing certain urban areas:

> Young people in this area have to face regular contacts with the police. This situation stands out and differs a lot compared to other more affluent urban areas. If young people gather here, well, then we automatically suspect they are up to something. We often have to perform a visitation, a protective visitation. This occurs more frequently in this area, compared to other areas that is, and sometimes we pick the wrong people. They are not always up to something, but of you hang out here during certain late hours, and in a gang constellation, then… Sometimes we are right on the mark, other times we fail. I understand how innocent youth can see this as harassment, and they also often confirm this (Police, segregated urban area).

In this narrative, we can trace ambivalence and an awareness of the consequences of policing and, in the long run, also stigmatizing the young innocent people living in these areas. Segregated areas are pointed out as more 'problematic' and in greater need of police presence, whereas other areas are described as unproblematic. At the same time, the police officers are very clear concerning the need to always report crimes. In this sense, they differ from the school professionals, who take a more ambivalent approach to the same questions.

Dialogues and Police Reports

The school professionals have a dual mission: not only teaching, but also contributing to value and identity formation. Comparing the two professional cultures – that of the police and that of the professional school staff – there are both differences and

similarities in how school violence is approached and handled. Whereas the school professionals have a more ambivalent and complex way of approaching these issues, the police officers are clearer about their role and action plans. There is a high degree of institutional reflexivity in schools regarding what to report and when to file police reports. There is a fear that police reports may lead to labelling young persons as criminal, which may in turn lead to negative self-images and, in the long run, a negative spiral of Othering and construction of "deviance". The school professionals also care about protecting their relation to the pupils and their parents. Previous research has shown that school officials are afraid that police involvement will give the impression that the school is unsafe. Reporting incidents to the police may also make school professionals feel they are relinquishing control over the situation. According to the school personnel, police involvement may undermine students' and parents' trust in educators' ability to manage violence and behaviour problems. The police officers regard a police report as something positive and constructive, in that it mobilizes resources to help the young person assume responsibility for his/her actions. There are no reflections or thoughts expressed concerning how being defined as a criminal may affect the young person's self-image and identity.

The professional cultures of both groups have problems in clearly defining the perpetrator and the victim. Many times, the categories overlap: the victim may sometimes become a perpetrator, and vice versa. However, we can still identify a difference in how school professionals and police officers approach this diffuseness. Whereas the school professionals tend to work relationally and try to solve conflicts and violence through dialogue and interaction, the police officers primarily see their role as identifying offenders and crimes. Although police officers show a certain degree of institutional reflexivity, reflecting on the changing relation between offender and victim, they ultimately tend to freeze the situation and focus on the perpetrator and the crime.

Looking more closely at how these professional cultures approach questions of segregation, school violence and professionalism, we can identify reflexive ways of talking about the relation between crimes, social unrest, segregation and working with young people. Both professional groups seem to provide a similar analysis of the 'problem', and they also suggest similar strategies for handling violence and urban segregation. Both professional groups put more focus on policing segregated areas. The police put segregated areas under surveillance, targeting young people who gather in public spaces and defining them as potential suspects. The teachers in segregated areas also tend to use a more juridical approach to school violence, especially compared to teachers in more affluent middle-class areas.

Finally, the tendency of schools to treat unruly behaviour, bullying and violence as crimes can be viewed as part of a general political change in the welfare state in post-industrial societies, with greater emphasis on law and order as well as individual responsibility. These policy changes have contributed to a focus on legal measures. Such measures can essentially be understood as part of a repressive exercise of power. The criminalization of certain forms of behaviour is contributing to

an increased focus on aspects of schools' legal responsibility. However, more resources for surveillance and discipline do not necessarily facilitate mutual respect, dialogue and an inclusive school.

The present chapter generates new knowledge on how different professional groups relate to and understand the various measures taken to deal with school violence. In particular, the focus has been on the increasing tendency to report crimes in schools, and the consequences of this trend. The results provide knowledge about the juridification of the Swedish schools in relation to policy changes and socioeconomic conditions. However, the study also has its limitations, especially the relatively small amount of data. This makes it difficult to draw general conclusions and make policy recommendations. Clearly, in Sweden as well as internationally, more research is needed on violence in schools as well as on preventive measures implemented to create better psychosocial school environments.

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