Chapter 13
Competing Policy Ideas in Classroom Practice: The Case of Student Group Work

Christine R. Stenersen

Abstract In this chapter, the policy–practice nexus is empirically studied by examining an example of student group work trajectory in the context of Norwegian classrooms. Research and policy highlight the importance of developing student collaboration skills in the school setting. At the same time, contemporary education is marked by a focus on the individual learner and the measurement of the learning outcomes of individual students. This chapter explores this apparent dilemma by contrasting the political and pedagogical ambitions related to desired outcomes of student group work with empirical actualisation of authentic student group work. A conceptual framework informed by discursive institutionalism and the theory of cooperation and competition provides a multilayered lens for exploring the policy–practice nexus and scrutinising how policy intent might turn out in practice. As such, the study can serve as an example of how policy ideas, the school as an institution and the agency of teachers and students interact in the complex field of educational practice.

Introduction and Background

Researchers have long argued for the positive academic, cognitive and social impacts of being able to learn and work as a group, both in educational settings and in working life (Akkerman et al., 2007; Brown et al., 1989; Derry et al., 1998; Gillies, 2003; Lou et al., 1996). In addition, major policy organisations like the OECD (2018),[1] the

---

[1] The OECD emphasises that students need a broad range of skills, including social and emotional skills like collaboration.

C. R. Stenersen (✉)

Department of Educational Science, University of South-Eastern Norway, Vestfold, Norway
e-mail: Christine.r.stenersen@usn.no

European Union (2002),[2] and UNESCO (2014)[3] also emphasise collaboration and teamwork as being central skills in the twenty-first century, and several governments have incorporated a focus on developing skills in working with others in their national curriculum frameworks (OECD, 2015). Yet in the contemporary education system, there appears to be a clear focus on the individual student's learning and measuring individual learning outcomes (Apple, 2018; Bjordal & Haugen, 2021; Dovremark et al., 2018; Youdell, 2004; Aasen et al., 2014). This development is also addressed as a culture of measurement in educational policy and practice (Biesta, 2016). The discourse of individualism in the contemporary education system works to legitimate practices that place the responsibility for educational outcomes on the individual student (Youdell, 2004). Moreover, students compete for good grades, respect from the teacher, and study positions in the context of school choice, establishing a competitive learning environment (Aronson & Bridgeman, 2011; Bjordal & Haugen, 2021; Dovremark et al., 2018).

These developments can clearly be seen in the context of the current study because Norway has undergone a reform-intensive period since 2006, where an outcome-oriented educational policy has been introduced (Aasen et al., 2012; Prøitz, 2014), along with an emphasis on collaboration as an important aspect in school development (Stenersen & Prøitz, 2020). A recent study of the use of concepts and ideas in educational governance indicates that more process-oriented ideas of schooling, such as creating a culture for learning, can be difficult to define and operationalise for teachers and school leaders in educational practice and may lose ground to concepts like learning outcomes, which are more concrete and easier to implement in practice (Stenersen & Prøitz, 2020). Hence, educational policy may have a downside, where goals that require more process orientation, such as creating a culture for learning or developing group work skills in students, may lose ground to more concrete tasks like working with learning outcomes in everyday pedagogical practices.

The policy developments in Norway are in line with an international shift in focus from the content of teaching to student learning, which have been partly influenced by the EU and OECD. In the Nordic countries, a transformation in teaching practices has emerged from individualised teaching to teaching of individuals, where the individual self-reliant learner is at the centre (Carlgren et al., 2006). During this shift, a discourse that emphasises the individual student as responsible for their own learning and new teaching practices such as 'own work', 'responsibility for learning' or self-regulated learning have also emerged (Bergqvist, 2012; Carlgren et al., 2006; Meland, 2011). Own work refers to the desired virtues of self-mobilising and flexible learners that can put themselves to work and evaluate their own results (Bergqvist, 2012; Carlgren et al., 2006, pp. 319–320; Meland, 2011). Further, the Norwegian government launched a renewal of the core curriculum in 2020 that details: 'Everyone must learn to cooperate, work with others and

---

[2] The European Commission refers to key skills such as teamwork, problem solving, project management and others.

[3] UNESCO refers to competencies such as cognitive skills, social skills and behavioural capacities like being able to act collaboratively and strive for the collective good (p. 17).

develop the ability for co-determination and co-responsibility' (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 10). Hence, the policy message is clear: there are national ambitions for developing student collaboration skills in the school setting. Yet this renewed focus on collaboration skills has been introduced in a well-established individual, competitive, result- and outcome-oriented education context. As such, both research and policy advocates for teaching practices with a built-in tension between collaborative and individual performance.

   The literature on student group work based on interview or survey studies is comprehensive (see, e.g., Ellis & Han, 2020; Freeman & Greenacre, 2011; Le et al., 2018; Pauli et al., 2008), finding, for example, that the teacher's focus on cognitive aspects of learning could lead to the neglect of collaborative aspects. A cognitive framing can be seen when the teacher's focus is on individual students' academic learning and on the final product, for example, *how to* analyse problems and search for information, not on collaborative skills like *how to* argue constructively or the collaborative performance or process (Le et al., 2018). Few studies have reported on authentic collaborative settings (Dahl et al., 2017; Patterson, 2016). Some studies zooming in on shorter episodes of student collaboration can be found (see, e.g., Dahl et al., 2017; Patterson, 2016), while the literature on intervention (experimental, correlational, design-based) studies is extensive. These studies are often conducted by researchers introducing teacher or student training in relation to group work, finding that certain methods or pedagogy give the best student outcomes (see, e.g., Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Wegerif, 2011); however, the actualisation of student group work in authentic everyday pedagogical practices in general remains understudied, especially following a longer teaching and learning trajectory. Hence, the current study supplements and extends prior work in three ways. First, the study is based on authentic classroom situations, meaning that there was no intervention or training of the teachers or students. The researchers collected data on ordinary classroom situations and behaviours in their everyday context. Second, the study follows a teaching and learning trajectory spanning the whole group work process in the classroom. Third, the study pays attention to the policy framing of the classroom practice. This is important because the empirical knowledge of how group work in the authentic classroom setting unfolds is scarce, and research calls for more knowledge about the conditions required for group work to have the desired positive outcomes in classrooms (Derry et al., 1998; Johnson et al., 2007; Slavin, 1996, 2014). Therefore, the aim of the current study is to explore potential tensions and challenges in educational policy ideas by investigating student group work in authentic classroom practice. In the present study, ideas are understood as the foundation for teachers' interpretive frameworks, which presents some aspects as more important than others (Béland & Cox, 2011). Furthermore, the concept of framing refers to how a package of pre-existing set of ideas can be used to win more adherents to one's position; hence, framing is one element in a broader battle over problem definition (Mehta, 2011, p. 33). The framing of a problem legitimises particular paths of action and delegitimises others; in this way, the framing processes of local actors shape how policies play out in practice (Coburn, 2006).

In this study, video data, audio data and teaching materials related to teacher-initiated student group work in six Norwegian lower secondary classrooms is analysed to answer the following empirical research questions: *How do teachers' discursive expressions of policy ideas frame student group work by means of instruction and assessment? How does this influence the dynamics and outcomes of student group work?*

Conceptual Framework

The current study draws upon discursive institutionalism (DI) for a contextual understanding of the interplay of policy-relevant ideas, discourse and institutions (Schmidt, 2015). DI is a framework for theorising about the dynamics of institutional change and continuity and how institutional frameworks create constraints and opportunities for actors (Schmidt, 2010, p. 2). Building on DI, the current study adopts the concept of *sentient* agents, that is, thinking and speaking actors whose *background ideational abilities* explain how they create and maintain institutions. Background ideas are often unspoken and taken for granted. This could, for example, be well-established policy ideas of how schools should be organised and what is valued and important in schools. An example could be the focus on individual student learning and measuring the learning outcomes of the individual students. The concept of *foreground discursive abilities* refers to more conscious perceptions and the agent's ability to communicate critically about institutions to change or maintain them (Schmidt, 2008), which here is analysed by zooming in on the teachers' framing of student group which is communicated both in text (written assignments and assessment scheme) and in the teachers' instructions and interactions with the students. The agents' ideas, discourse and actions must also be seen as a response to the material realities that affect them, for example, the unintended consequences of their own or others' actions (Schmidt, 2015). This is important to consider when dealing with a study of classroom practice because teaching situations are complex, with many actors involved and a lot happening at the same time (Archer et al., 2015).

In the analysis of the present study, DI is complemented by concepts from the theory of cooperation and competition (TCC) (Deutsch, 1949, 2014),[4] which addresses factors that can influence the dynamics and outcomes of student group work. TCC builds on two basic ideas: interdependence among goals and the type of action that members of the group take (Deutsch, 1949, 2014). Interdependence is the key factor for cooperative outcomes, and it exists when the outcomes of individuals are affected by their own and others' actions. There are two types of

---

[4] The theory of co-operation and competition was initially developed by Deutsch (1949) and much elaborated by David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson (See for example: 2009). Johnson and Johnson have refined and extended the theory (The theory of social interdependence) and created Cooperative learning, a procedure for teachers based on the theory.

interdependence: positive and negative. *Positive interdependence* is based on cooperative conditions, where the goal attainment of the group members is positively correlated, meaning that each member can only reach their goals if the others also reach their goals. This will lead to a solidarity orientation and effective action of the group members, a mentality of 'we swim together or sink together'. In contrast, *negative interdependence* is based on competitive conditions. For example, group members are rewarded according to their contributions to the work. Negative interdependence will lead to the bungling action of the group members, meaning ineffective, rival or individual-oriented actions (Deutsch, 1949, 2014). However, there are few purely cooperative and competitive situations; for example, a basketball team can be cooperative with respect to winning the game but competitive in relation to who is the star of the team (Deutsch, 1949, p. 132). The basic premise of TCC is that how a collaborative situation is structured has an impact on group dynamics and outcomes. Given the perception of positive interdependence, individuals will act to facilitate each other by helping, explaining, elaborating, encouraging and supporting when the group members have the collaborative skills to do so, out of recognition that they will benefit themselves. When social interdependence is established in the outcomes and means, the participants share the responsibility for the joint outcome, and each group member is expected to contribute and help group members do likewise. However, a competitive process shows more bungling action like impaired communication, lack of helpfulness, being unable to divide the work, disagreement and rejection of others' ideas (Deutsch, 2014).

In the present study, the teachers are understood as policy actors while the students are also recognized as policy actors, especially noticeable through their interaction with the teacher (asking questions and suggesting alternative ways to work). TCC provides a toolbox for understanding how the discursive framing through the use of policy ideas in classroom activities can affect group dynamics and outcomes. The framework is presented in Appendix, which is partly inspired by the conceptual framework but also adjusted and tested against the empirical data material. The two categories are not mutually exclusive. During the analysis, the two idea dimensions have been used to theorise about which idea is at the fore and how the ideas interact in the different phases of the teaching and learning trajectory.

Method and Analytical Approach

The data were collected in one school and comprised video data, audio data and working materials from the Norwegian language school subject.[5] Six classes of 20 students in ninth grade, aged 14–15 years and two experienced teachers have been

---

[5] This study builds on and extends the finding of the larger LOaPP research project that finds students seldom sit alone or work alone, here based on observations of teacher-initiated student collaboration in 12 classrooms across three schools (Prøitz, 2020; Prøitz et al., 2019).

included.[6] In addition, data from interviews with the two teachers were used as background information. The student group work was related to a teaching and learning trajectory in which the students worked in groups with an assignment of multimodal text analysis and prepare for a presentation and conversation in an oral group assessment situation.[7] The assessment was arranged in groups of three to four students and one teacher. The students received both collective feedback and individual final grades. The student group work and assessment took place in the final stage after a period of teaching and working on multimodal text analysis, a central part of the subject curriculum. A combination of purposeful and convenience sampling strategy was used in the selection of the schools and classrooms studied, meaning that the selected cases were the best cases to answer the research questions from a larger dataset (Leavy, 2017).

In the selected classes, student group work is a familiar way of working, which makes this a good case to study to learn more about how teachers' discursive expressions of policy ideas framed student group work. The use of video recordings in classroom research enables the study of complex classroom processes because it allows the analysis to capture more detail than is possible in live observations or teacher or student self-reports (Janík & Seidel, 2009). The goal of the data collection was data generation of typical everyday classroom activity. Still, there is no guarantee against the observer effect (see, e.g., Klette, 2009, p. 62). The video material consisted of a total of 7 h and 39 min recorded over a period of 8 days. The material covers whole-class instruction by the teachers, student group work in the classroom and group instruction by the teacher related to the group work task. The audio data consist in total of 26 recordings of the assessment situation, lasting on average 30–40 min, including assessment and reflections on the group work process. The working material comprises the assignment and assessment scheme handed out to the students and used throughout the trajectory. As illustrated in Fig. 13.1, the
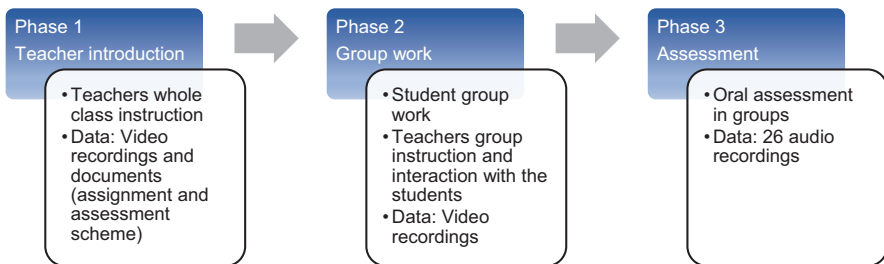

Fig. 13.1 Phases of the teaching and learning trajectory and an overview of the data material

---

[6] All students and parents had been informed about the research project and had given their written consent to participate.

[7] Subject talk: see Wiig et al. for more detail: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjT4S6wlZMQ&list=PLpffZV5CcJDR4tOcnpieazpMa-Cpwlv0X&index=2

teaching and learning trajectory are organised into three phases to provide structure and overview of the data during analysis and presentation of the findings.

Findings

Phase 1: Combining Individual and Collaborative Ideas in Instruction and Assessment

The teachers start with whole-class instruction, explaining what the students are to do, including what is expected to gain a good grade with reference to the assignment and assessment scheme. From the beginning, both teachers declare that the assessment is organised in groups and emphasise that the students will get individual grades. The written assignment and assessment scheme are read aloud by the teacher and/or the students in class. The assignment has two pages and two attachments, exhibiting explicit collaborative framing:

> It is important that everyone in the group participates actively and that everyone can answer questions of every part. You have joint responsibility for the final product, and we expect everyone to have an overview of the task. So you cannot simply distribute parts; you must work together. (Author's translation)

Six central goals from the national subject curricula are quoted in the assignment. Four of the goals are related to individual, cognitive outcomes, such as describing, reflecting, assessing relevant information and analysing. Two of the goals are related to more collaborative outcomes, such as participating in discussions with reasoned opinions and factual argumentation and evaluating one's own and others' oral presentations based on professional criteria.[8] Attached to the assignment is the assessment scheme, in which four criteria are described in relation to three levels of goal achievement. The four criteria are learning objectives, collaboration, content and assessment. Regarding high goal achievement (high grade), the student must show good collaborative skills and participate actively in the work. An operationalisable description of how the students can show 'good collaborative skills' is lacking. The three other criteria that are more individual and cognitive oriented are described in more detail, for example, show the ability to reflect on how one can be affected by sound, language and pictures and being able to talk freely without a manuscript.

After going through the assignment, the teachers ask the students what they think is important to focus on. In several of the classes, the students suggest collaboration. However, the teachers typically respond by moderating the importance of the collaborative aspect and frame collaboration as a tool for reaching a better result:

---

[8] In the Norwegian national subject curriculum, the goals are found under the following subheadings: three goals from 'oral communication', two goals from 'written communication' and one goal from 'language, literature and culture'.

Good student collaboration, I agree. However, it is not the collaboration I am assessing. Usually, the final product is better when the group has collaborated well. (Teacher 1)

Here, we can see that the teacher communicates a contrasting message than what is written in the assessment scheme, where it is clearly stated that collaboration will be assessed. In addition, a focus on the result in the form of the final product is explicitly expressed as the desired outcome of the group work process, downplaying collaborative aspects such as the process where the students can gain group work skills. In parallel, the teacher emphasises the collaborative aspect by stating that the groups should not simply divide the tasks; *the groups should work together, and all students should understand the entire analysis so that the students can help each other out during the oral assessment*. Giving mutual help is a central aspect of collaborative ideas. However, the teachers continue to explicate that *this is what the highest-achieving groups have done before*. This can be interpreted as a shift in the framing from collaborative ideas like the process of working together and giving mutual help, to individual ideas with a focus on how collaboration can function as a tool for achieving a good final product, i.e., high grades. In the following examples, the group work is further reframed in an individual direction, which could counteract the collaborative aspects by downplaying positive group interdependence (Deutsch, 1949, 2014). For example, the teacher states, *the grading will be individual, so if one member of the group does not contribute, in the end it will be their own problem*. This could lead to a situation where the work of the other students in the group does not necessarily affect the others, which weakens the initial collaborative goal framing and may lead to a more individual and even competitive view on how the students can reach their goal within the groups.

When analysing the teachers' framing in this first phase using the theoretically inspired dimension of two somewhat competing policy ideas, individual and collaborative, it becomes clear that the assignment communicates a focus on both. However, how the actual collaboration should be conducted is not described in the assignment or in the teachers' instructions, not even when the students pose direct questions related to the collaboration process. The assessment scheme merely refers to showing good collaboration skills and active participation without elaborating on what this means. In contrast, the individual, cognitive goals are described in more detail, both in the written assignment, assessment scheme and teachers' instructions. Based on the students' questions, the collaboration aspect of the assignment remains unclear. The teachers' answers to these questions further overlook the collaborative aspects, pointing out that it is not the collaboration that will be assessed, but the final product, which contradicts what is stated in the assessment scheme. Yet another aspect shown in the analysis is the complexity of the assignment, which includes instructions and six goals quoted from the national subject curricula. Attached is also the assessment scheme, with both individual and collaborative aspects.

Phase 2: Student Interactions and Teachers' Reframing in the Complexity of Classroom Practice

After whole-class instruction, the students are instructed to start preparing for the oral assessment in groups. The students sit around four to five classroom desks, facing each other. The students have expressed in advance who they want to work with, and the students have mainly had their wishes fulfilled. They have approximately three school hours over a period of 1 week in total to prepare. In the early stage of the group work, some trouble can be seen in most of the six classrooms. Some groups have conflicts, resulting in students physically removing themselves from the group. Other students do not want to participate in the group work at all. Some of these students create a lot of turmoil, arguing and disturbing other students, while others withdraw from the group more quietly. The teacher uses a lot of time attempting to get these students to work with their group, without making any observable progress. Both teachers emphasise individual, cognitive aspects like progress in completing tasks and the consequences for the final product and assessment when interacting with the students in conflict. The teacher does not directly discuss or help the students handle challenging situations as a group. The following example shows the teacher's response to one student who does not want to work with the group:

> The assignment is half of your final grade this year … do you want to work all alone? Because you must do the assignment! How should I assess you? ... This means that you will get a warning letter. (Teacher 2)

This example shows the teacher's concern with the consequences for the individual assessment of the student if the student does not work with the group. Another example shows the teacher addressing a group where one student left the group after a conflict. The teacher's focus is on task completion; however, talking well together is also mentioned, but an elaboration on how the group can do this is missing:

> … You all must get over the disagreement about the commercial now so you can talk well together. Ok? That is the way it is with collaboration; you must compromise… I hope you all look at that analysis now because that is the most important thing. (Teacher 1)

These examples show how the teacher attempts to secure the start of productive work by responding to ill-functioning groups. In addition, when the teacher has the opportunity to guide the group on collaborative aspects, the teacher's focus is on individual, cognitive aspects like completing the tasks and potential consequences for the assessment.

In later stages of the group work process, it is typical that the teacher moves between the groups, answering questions from the students. Overall, few students ask for help with the actual analysis. Based on the questions the students pose, it seems like they find it hard to get started because of unclear instructions about what they are supposed to do and how to plan and organise the group work in the 'right way'. The following is a typical example:

Teacher 2: Have you arranged the assignment? Who takes which part?
Student 1: But I thought you said we should not do it like that?
Teacher 2: Yes, but you must know each other's parts. You can answer each question together, and one of you can write up the answers; that is a clever way to do it.

The teacher leaves this group; however, the group returns to this question later, indicating that they still struggle with how to organise the group work:

Teacher 2: Who is writing?
Student 1: I do not know
Teacher 2: … You are supposed to answer these questions [points to the assignment].
Student 1: Should we write a text answering the questions?
Teacher 2: It can be keywords because you are not supposed to hand in a text; you have an oral assessment.
Student 2: But are we supposed to work on this now?
Teacher 2: Yes, you have this school hour and one more to prepare.
Student 2: Okay, so then we take one question each?
Teacher 2: Yes, but remember to know each other's parts.
Student 1: Ok, but then we can just read each other's answers?
Teacher 2: Yes, but then you must remember to do that.

The interaction shows that the students seem reluctant to work on the task until they have found out how the teacher expects them to work as a group and how the process will be assessed. Due to the student's questions and reluctance to work under unclear terms, the teacher reframes the terms of the group work in several cases. This is seen in the example above, where the teacher agrees to the student's suggestion that they could just work on different parts and read each other's answers. This contradicts what is written in the assignment and downplays the collaborative aspect. It seems that the teachers' focus is on progress with the assignment, not the group work process per se. Consequently, the teacher reframes the group work by emphasising progress and individual goals, overlooking the collaborative aspect and important opportunities to practice and enhance collaborative skills. This can be understood as an expression of prioritising individual ideas potentially at the expense of collaborative ideas in the reframing of the group work process.

Overall, many students solve the conflicting messages from the teachers in the framing and reframing of the group work by working individually in their groups. It is typical for each student to look at and work on their computers. As a result, the students have trouble establishing face-to-face interactions, which likely influences shared attention and the dialogue of the groups. On several occasions, there can be seen attempts of one student to orally communicate with the group, often without getting any or satisfying response. It is questionable if this way of framing student group work facilitates the development of collaborative skills, like the curricula goal to 'participate in discussions with reasoned opinions and factual argumentation'.

Phase 3: The Challenging Task of Balancing Competing Policy Ideas in Assessment Situations

This section focuses on how the teacher frames the assessment process in terms of individual and collaborative ideas and how this influences the student groups. A recurring topic in the teachers' feedback to the students is related to each student's individual contribution to the group, which, according to Deutsch (1949), could promote negative interdependence. The teachers often point out that one or two of the students in the group do most of the talking:

> I wish that all of you talked a bit more … Student 1 talked a lot; in the beginning you all contributed, but after that, the three of you drifted out a bit. (Teacher 1)

The teacher points out that an important part of the collaboration is the exchange of words and helping each other out during the assessment. This is in line with the written assignment and the initial collaborative framing. However, the teachers also refer to developing strategies for how to reach individual goals within the group setting:

> You must have some strategies for how to work together ... You disappear a little here, Student 3. Because it is an individual assessment, there is also something about developing strategies to reach our goals. How can we exchange words and help each other during the conversation? (Teacher 1)

There are several examples where the teacher points out that the students have done a good job in helping each other out during the assessment:

> Teacher 1: I really like that you also try to draw each other in. It is good, Student 3, for example, that you help Student 4 to explain a little. Student 4, It is Norwegian [language] that is a little difficult still, right? So it is great that you [Student 3] take that into account and that you try to make each other better.
> Student 1: We try to help him remember, or if he does not remember anything at all, we say it for him.

However, when analysing the group dynamics, there seems to be a fine line between 'sharing the word', 'helping' and 'taking the word out from someone'. Here, more able students have little patience with students who struggle. For example, non-native Norwegian-speaking students are 'helped out' a lot by their peers and permitted little time to answer questions. On several occasions, the teachers repeatedly interfere in the conversation, trying to regulate the group so that all the students could speak. However, this has a limited impact; the other members of the group typically do not let struggling students speak for long. This may be a result of the framing of the group work by including both goals of collaboration and individual goals. In particular, the individual grading based on the individual student's contribution to the group seems to complicate the group work in the assessment situation. A logical implication is that the students struggle with the balance of the aspects of collaboration, like sharing and helping and their individual goals. In the analysis, competition within groups is also evident when the students

strive to show their own knowledge in the likely effort of gaining the best possible individual grade.

The teachers often ask the groups what was challenging in the group work process, creating a good opportunity for group processing and to improve group work skills when talking about what behaviour to continue or change in subsequent group work. Several groups reflect on difficulties related to disagreements and that it is hard to accept and handle different opinions in the group:

> Teacher 1: I have been a bit worried about how the collaboration has worked. Because it looked like you worked well in periods, and in other periods, it looks like you have not …
> Student 2: Yes, it has been a bit like that when we have decided to work, then we have worked hard, but when we did not it is tiring…

There are some examples of the teacher trying to give advice on how to handle disagreements in the group, focusing on both the individual and collaborative aspects. However, the collaborative aspects are unspecified and undercommunicated:

> Teacher 1: Making groups is always difficult. I think this group will work well eventually. But something you must work on is when you disagree, you must have some strategies on how to move forward so that you do not spend a lot of time and energy disagreeing … Because you spent an awful lot of time deciding which advertisement to analyse that you could have spent on other things. And then at some point, you must put aside your egos, also in a way, simply decide quickly…You must have some strategies for how to work together.

Despite being a group marked by disagreement and division, this group manages to find a way to work together and perform well in the assessment. This group also states that they wish to continue to work together, making this group a good example of the positive effect that group work can have on desired policy outcomes, such as the development of social competences and creating an inclusive learning culture.

The students are asked to assess their own work at the end of the assessment situation. A salient feature is that most students start by reflecting on the collaboration process, not subject-related goals (like the analysis of the commercial), indicating that the students perceive the collaborative aspect as important to discuss and something they want to work on. However, the analysis shows that it varies if the teachers give the students feedback or guidance on how to improve their group work skills.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, the aim has been to present a study of how teachers' discursive expressions of policy ideas frame student group work in the classroom and how this influences the dynamics and outcomes of student group work. The analysis shows how teaching and learning trajectories where different types of goals are set in motion at the same time can be challenging for both teachers and students. Furthermore, the study exemplifies how individual cognitive goals becomes

prioritised over goals related to development of collaboration skills, like sharing, and supporting each other's learning processes. This is exemplified by how the teachers frame the final product and the assessment of individual students as the most important outcome. Hence, this focus seems to hinder opportunities to, for example, work on collaborative skills, like conflict management and communicative skills. The tensions in the group work process seem to originate in the teachers' framing of competing curricula goals in the assignment and assessment scheme, the result is a complex and divergent assignment. However, a conundrum is that even though the process of student group work seems challenging and frustrating at times for students and teachers because of confusion, disagreements and trouble with coordination of effort and division of labour, most students express that they wish to continue with student group work, explicitly stating that they would like to become more skilled in this form of working.

Students as Micro Policy Agents in Classroom Practice?

The current study exemplifies how the students take a prominent role in untangling the complex tasks in a contemporary school culture marked by high complexity. The students face a multifaceted assignment, with six curricula goals directly quoted from the national subject curricula and an assessment scheme emphasising both collaborative and more cognitive and individual aspects. In addition, the teacher sometimes provides conflicting instructions. Some students negotiate clearer, more operational criteria for the group work process and assessment with the teachers by asking questions and/or suggesting alternative ways to work on the assignment. This somewhat novel role may be referred to as students as micro policy agents, who, through interaction with each other and the teacher, are trying to make sense of the ambivalent assignment. The potential problem with students as micro policy agents is that work with more meta-cognitive tasks can put the students in stressful situations, as exemplified by the disagreements within the student groups related to how to proceed with the group work. This might decrease the students' (and teachers') feeling of control of the situation. In addition, the study exemplifies that the issues related to how to operationalise the assignment takes a lot of time for both students and teachers. Resulting in less time to work on the subject content (doing the actual multimodal text analysis). At the same time, the study shows that the students could benefit from more explicit guidance on group work skills, while the teachers' focus seems to be on progress with the assignment. The student's role in negotiating clear terms for their own work and assessment also serves as an example of how the policy–practice nexus can be manifested in students' work in the classroom.

Current Challenges and Further Research

Both research and policy emphasise the development of collaborative skills in students. There is a question about whether these ambitions consider the reality of contemporary school culture, where student group work can be complex to organise and places high demands on teachers and students. If the group work is to have the desired effects, many factors must be considered, for example, students do not have intrinsic collaborative skills at the age of 14; this is something they need to work on with their teacher's guidance. It is important that students and teachers work on collaborative skills; however, the current study suggests that a framing of the work with the main goal being to assess the final product in terms of the individual student's performance may be a disruptive element.

This study contributes to the policy–practice nexus discussion by tracing the policy idea of student group work and exploring what happens in everyday classroom practice when combined with well-established policy ideas related to the importance of measuring individual students' learning outcomes. The study shows some unintended consequences that may occur when different policy ideas are simultaneously at play in classroom practice, providing insights into what is going on in these six classrooms and their 120 students and two teachers. As such, the study serves as an example, contributing to empiric, analytical and theoretical development. Further, this is a study of policy in classroom practice and discourse; hence, the study does not consider the rationale of the actors directly, which could be an interesting question for further research. Moreover, the current study focuses on the teachers' work in framing the group work process throughout a teaching and learning trajectory; however, the study finds the students as impactful actors. Further research with a focus on the students' processes in classroom work, in groups or individually, along with their role in framing their own learning processes, would bring valuable knowledge to the field. Another interesting topic illuminated is related to the transnational desired outcomes of student group work, further research could explore more closely how to create a good culture for the development of group work skills within the contemporary education culture.[9]

---

[9] This chapter has been subject to double blind review in addition to the reviews of the editors of the book and the peer review process of the book manuscript.

Appendix

Framework for Analysing by Means of Two Categories of Policy Ideas: Individual Ideas and Collaborative Ideas

Educational policy ideas	
Individual ideas	Collaborative ideas
The focus is on the learning of the individual student and the measurement of individual students' learning outcomes. For example, emphasis on cognitive goals like analysing and searching for information	The focus is on promotive interaction and group work skills. For example, listening to others, accepting different viewpoints, constructive feedback, encouraging, giving mutual help and constructive management of conflict
Focus on output, the result or the final product. For example, completing tasks and productivity	Focus on the process, working together as a group, gaining group work skills and group processing
Student actions are marked by negative interdependence: competition and bungling action (within groups and/or between groups). The emphasis is on individual grades and/or rewards according to the students' contribution to the work	Student actions marked by positive means interdependence (all group members have significant roles in the work) and positive outcome interdependence (linked goals). The group receives the same reward for successfully completing a joint task

References

Aasen, P., Møller, J., Rye, E., Ottesen, E., Prøitz, T. S., & Hertzberg, F. (2012). *Kunnskapsløftet som styringsreform – et løft eller et løfte?: forvaltningsnivåenes og institusjonenes rolle i implementeringen av reformen* [The knowledge promotion reform. The role of levels of government and institutions in reform implementation]. (Report no. 20). NIFU.

Aasen, P., Prøitz, T. S., & Sandberg, N. (2014). Knowledge regimes and contradictions in education reforms. *Educational Policy, 28*(5), 718–738. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904813475710

Akkerman, S., Van den Bossche, P., Admiraal, W., Gijselaers, W., Segers, M., Simons, R.-J., & Kirschner, P. (2007). Reconsidering group cognition: From conceptual confusion to a boundary area between cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives? *Educational Research Review, 2*, 39–63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2007.02.001

Apple, M. W. (2018). The critical divide: Knowledge about the curriculum and the concrete problems of curriculum policy and practice. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 4*(2), 63–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2018.1492692

Archer, J., Kerr, K. A., & Pianta, R. C. (2015). Why measure effective teaching? In T. J. Kane, K. A. Kerr, & R. C. Pianta (Eds.), *Designing teacher evaluation systems: New guidance from the measures of effective teaching project* (pp. 1–5). Jossey-Bass.

Aronson, E., & Bridgeman, D. (2011). Jigsaw groups and the desegregated classroom: In pursuit of common goals. In J. Aronson & E. Aronson (Eds.), *Readings about the social animal* (pp. 425–435). Worth Publishers.

Béland, D., & Cox, R. H. (2011). *Ideas and politics in social science research*. Oxford University Press.

Bergqvist, K. (2012). 'Own work' in primary school – A teaching and learning practice in the context of administration and control. *Education Inquiry, 3*(2), 283–296. https://doi.org/10.3402/edui.v3i2.22034

Biesta, G. (2016). *Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics, democracy*. Routledge.

Bjordal, I., & Haugen, C. R. (2021). *Fra fellesskole til konkurranseskole: markedsretting i grunnskolen – sentrale virkemidler og lokale erfaringer* [From joint school to competition school: Market orientation in primary school – Key tools and local experiences]. Universitetsforlaget.

Brown, J. S., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher, 18*(1), 32–42. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X018001032

Carlgren, I., Klette, K., Mýrdal, S., Schnack, K., & Simola, H. (2006). Changes in Nordic teaching practices: From individualised teaching to the teaching of individuals. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 50*(3), 301–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313830600743357

Coburn, C. E. (2006). Framing the problem of reading instruction: Using frame analysis to uncover the microprocesses of policy implementation. *American Educational Research Journal, 43*(3), 343–379. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312043003343

Dahl, H., Klemp, T., & Nilssen, V. (2017). Collaborative talk in mathematics – Contrasting examples from third graders. *Education 3-13, 46*(5), 599–611. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2017.1336563

Derry, S. J., DuRussel, J. A., & O'Donnell, A. M. (1998). Individual and distributed cognitions in interdisciplinary teamwork: A developing case study and emerging theory. *Educational Psychology Review, 10*(1), 25–56.

Deutsch, M. (1949). A theory of cooperation and competition. *Human Relations, 2*, 129–152.

Deutsch, M. (2014). Cooperation, competition and conflict. In P. T. Coleman, M. Deutsch, & E. C. Marcus (Eds.), *The handbook of conflict resolution: Theory and practice* (3rd ed., pp. 3–28). Wiley.

Dovremark, M., Kosunen, S., Kauko, J., Magnúsdóttir, B., Hansen, P., & Rasmussen, P. (2018). Deregulation, privatisation and marketisation of Nordic comprehensive education: Social changes reflected in schooling. *Education Inquiry, 9*(1), 122–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2018.1429768

Ellis, R., & Han, F. (2020). Assessing university student collaboration in new ways. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2020.1788504

European Commission. (2002). *eEurope 2005: An information society for all*. European Committee. Retrieved from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2002:0263:FIN:EN:PDF

Freeman, L., & Greenacre, L. (2011). An examination of socially destructive behaviours in group work. *Journal of Marketing Education, 33*(1), 5–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475310389150

Gillies, R. M. (2003). Structuring cooperative group work in classrooms. *International Journal of Educational Research, 39*, 35–49. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-0355(03)00072-7

Gillies, R. M., & Boyle, M. (2010). Teachers' reflections on cooperative learning: Issues of implementation. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*(4), 933–940. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.10.034

Janík, T., & Seidel, T. (2009). Introduction: On the power of video studies in investigating teaching and learning. In T. Janík & T. Seidel (Eds.), *The power of video studies in investigating teaching and learning in the classroom* (pp. 7–19). Waxmann Publishing.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2009). An educational psychology success story: Social interdependence theory and cooperative learning. *American Educational Research Association, 38*(5), 365–379. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20532563

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Smith, K. (2007). The state of cooperative learning in postsecondary and professional settings. *Educational Psychology Review, 19*(1), 15–29.

Klette, K. (2009). Challenges in strategies for complexity reduction in video studies. Experiences from the PISA+ study: A video study of teaching and learning in Norway. In T. Janík & T. Seidel (Eds.), *The power of video studies in investigating teaching and learning in the classroom* (pp. 61–82). Waxmann Publishing.

Le, H., Janssen, J., & Wubbels, T. (2018). Collaborative learning practices: Teacher and student perceived obstacles to effective student collaboration. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 48*(1), 103–122. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2016.1259389

Leavy, P. (2017). Qualitative research design. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory research approaches* (pp. 124–163). The Guilford Press.

Lou, Y., Abrami, P. C., Spence, J. C., Poulsen, C., Chambers, B., & d'Apollonia, S. (1996). Within-class grouping: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research, 66*(4), 423–458. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543066004423

Mehta, J. (2011). The varied roles of ideas in politics: From "whether" to "how". In D. Béland & R. H. Cox (Eds.), *Ideas and politics in social science research* (pp. 23–46). Oxford University Press.

Meland, A. T. (2011). Ansvar for egen læring. *Intensjoner og realiteter ved en norsk videregående skole* [Intentions and realities in a Norwegian upper secondary school]. Göteborg universitet, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Ministry of Education. (2017). *Overordnet del – verdier og prinsipper for grunnopplæringen. Fastsatt som forskrift ved kongelig resolusjon. Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet 2020* [Core curriculum]. https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/verdier-og-prinsipper-for-grunnopplaringen/id2570003/

OECD. (2015). *Skills for social progress: The power of social and emotional skills*. OECD Publishing.

OECD. (2018). *The future of education and skills education 2030*. https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf

Patterson, E. W. (2016). Exploratory talk in the early years: Analyzing exploratory talk in collaborative group activities involving younger learners. *Education 3-13, 46*(3), 264–276. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2016.1243141

Pauli, R., Mohiyeddini, C., Bray, D., Michie, F., & Street, B. (2008). Individual differences in negative group work experiences in collaborative student learning. *Educational Psychology, 28*(1), 47–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410701413746

Prøitz, T. S. (2014). Learning outcomes as a key concept in policy documents throughout policy changes. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 59*(3), 275–296. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2014.904418

Prøitz, T. S. (2020). *Learning outcomes changing education – Traces of policy in practice.* [Paper presentation]. vCIES Miami digital conference, Miami, FL.

Prøitz, T. S., Rye, E., & Aasen, P. (2019). Nasjonal styring og lokal praksis – skoleledere og lærere som endringsagenter [National governance and local practice – School leaders and teachers as change agents]. In R. Jensen, B. Karseth, & E. Ottesen (Eds.), *Styring og ledelse i grunnopplæringen* [Management and leadership in the primary and secondary education and training] (pp. 21–37). Cappelen Damm AS.

Schmidt, V. A. (2008). Discursive institutionalism: The explanatory power of ideas and discourse. *Annual Review of Political Science, 11*(1), 303–326. https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060606.135342

Schmidt, V. A. (2010). Taking ideas and discourse seriously: Explaining change through discursive institutionalism as the fourth 'new institutionalism'. *European Political Science Review, 2*(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1017/S175577390999021X

Schmidt, V. A. (2015). Discursive institutionalism: Understanding policy in context. In F. Fischer (Ed.), *Handbook of critical policy studies* (pp. 171–188). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Slavin, R. E. (1996). Research on cooperative learning and achievement: What we know, what we need to know. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 21*, 43–69.

Slavin, R. E. (2014). Cooperative learning and academic achievement: Why does groupwork work? *Anales de Psicología, 30*(3), 785–791. https://doi.org/10.6018/analesps.30.3.201201

Stenersen, C. R., & Prøitz, T. S. (2020). Just a buzzword? The use of concepts and ideas in educational governance. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 66*(2), 193–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2020.1788153

UNESCO. (2014). *Global citizenship education – Preparing learners for the challenges of the 21st century*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000227729

Wegerif, R. (2011). Towards a dialogic theory of how children learn to think. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 6*(3), 179–190. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2011.08.002

Youdell, D. (2004). Engineering school markets, constituting schools and subjectivating students: The bureaucratic, institutional and classroom dimensions of educational triage. *Journal of Education Policy, 19*(4), 407–431. https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093042000227474