Chapter 9
"A Lesson Is Most Exciting [When] the Teacher Typically Explains Complex Topics": A Student Perspective on Public Schooling in Greenland

Lars Demant-Poort and Louise Pindstrup Andersen

Photographer: Lars Demant-Poort

Abstract Research on and knowledge about the Greenlandic school system is primarily based on quantitative, evaluative measures, such as grade point statistics. Though the aforementioned research is centred around schooling there is a lack of pedagogical research on schooling based on the voices of students and knowledge about what happens inside classrooms. This chapter describes the findings from a survey study of students' experience of public schooling in Greenland. The goal of

L. Demant-Poort (✉) · L. P. Andersen
University of Greenland Institute of Learning, Nuuk, Greenland
e-mail: lodp@uni.gl; loand@uni.gl

D. B. Hirshberg et al. (eds.), *Education, Equity and Inclusion*, Springer Polar Sciences, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97460-2_9

the study is to identify students' perceptions of schooling and lessons and to broaden available knowledge on what schooling is in Greenland.

Keywords Arctic education · Children's perspective · School-life · School-quality · Greenland

9.1 Introduction and Background

A range of challenges in the Greenlandic school system have been documented, these include: lack of qualified teachers where teachers' qualifications are not matched with demands in teaching (Agency of Education, 2018; Demant-Poort, 2016), students from less privileged backgrounds, teachers describing students with inappropriate behaviour, and head-teachers who often fail in providing a qualified work frame for teachers to teach in (Brochmann, 2015). Other studies show how challenges in schools are inevitable in a country where an indigenous culture meets a western school system and pedagogy (Berger et al., 2006; Christensen, 2014; Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010). Grade point statistics show a drop in students' grades across all subjects in the past 10 years – except Greenlandic (Statistics Greenland, 2019). The general quality of schools regarding learning outcome is often debated and seen as a challenge (Demant-Poort & Lennert, 2019; Økonomisk Råd, 2018 [Economic Council]). The quality of school structure also suffers from severe governance gaps (Lennert, 2018).

Research on and knowledge about the Greenlandic school system is primarily based on quantitative, evaluative measures, such as grade point statistics (Demant-Poort, 2016). The same tendency is applicable in research on children and youth (Glendøs & Berliner, 2017) where focus is on statistical health measures, i.e., the International survey Health Behaviour in School-aged Children [HBSC-Greenland] (Niclasen, 2019), repeated every fourth year.

Though the aforementioned research is centred around schooling there is a lack of pedagogical research on schooling based on the voices of students and knowledge about what happens inside classrooms. This chapter presents a survey study on students' perceptions of schooling and lessons [Greenlandic and mathematics] in Greenland to broaden available knowledge on what schooling is in Greenland.

9.2 The Setting of the Survey

In Greenland elementary schooling consists of 10 years of compulsory schooling from the age of 6–16, There are roughly 56.000 inhabitants in Greenland – living in 73 towns and settlements along the 4.000 km coastline, from Qaanaaq in the very north to Nanortalik in the very South – to Tasiilaq and Ittoqoortoormiit on the east coast. There are no connecting roads or railroads between towns and settlements. The vast geography of Greenland means that towns and settlements in many cases

are extremely isolated, which in many cases mean that teachers teach on their own and have little room for collaboration with other teachers and schools. Furthermore, the immensely varied socioeconomic background of the students often provide very challenging conditions for schools and teaching. (Brochmann, 2015; Demant-Poort, 2016; Rasmussen et al., 2010; Øgaard, 2015).

9.3 Theoretical Framework

9.3.1 Different Domains on Schooling

Schools have as their goal to educate students, to prepare students for a life full of opportunities and challenges. Often schooling and what qualifies as a measurement of the outcome of schooling is based on grade point statistics (Schneider, 2017). Gert Biesta (2010, 2014, 2017) argues that the continued search for learning 'evidence' leads to a strong focus on measurable learning – such as grades. Grades and test scores and other statistical data then become the value in the discourse on what is "good education". The current test regime, not only in Greenland, but in most western countries, emphasises through surveys such as PISA, TIMSS etc. barriers for educating democratic individuals. Biesta argues that the objective of schools is to educate democratic individuals, schools therefore always operate in three equal domains: subjectification, socialization, and qualification (Biesta, 2010). Where *subjectification* is concerned about the process of becoming a subject – becoming an individual, *socialization* deals with the student becoming part of society and thus acquiring social, cultural and historical knowledge and competencies, and *Qualification* deals with providing opportunities for individual students to achieve the proper qualifications to be able to *do* – e.g. acquire skills for a specific job.

Biesta's argument is that all three domains are equally important in the education system, but through the past several years, a tendency towards learning 'evidence' and the quest for 'what works' and best practices has led to a strong focus on the qualification domain. In this aspect academic performance becomes the sole focus of evaluation, and then the aspects of socialisation and subjectification become neglected.

In the mid-2010s a project aiming to define other school quality variables than grade point statistics was conducted (Schneider, 2017). The intention of this project was a recognition that grade point statistics only tell a limited amount about what school is really about, what influences schooling, what has an effect on the quality of everyday school life for the individual student. The outcome of Schneider's work was a framework – a mesh of five categories – split between two meta categories: 'essential inputs' and 'key outcomes' (Table 9.1).

The perspective of the framework is that the 'essential input' categories each influence 'key outcomes', hence underlies the importance of including broader aspects of schooling and school life on measuring school quality. Ultimately it is about recognising that schooling is much more than academic learning presented through statistical data, such as tests and grade points. One example is that the *culture* of a

Table 9.1 Aspect for measuring school quality

Essential inputs	Key outcomes
1- Teachers and the teaching environment	4- Academic learning
2- School culture	5- Character and well-being
3- Resources	

Schneider (2017), p. 100

school will affect how students build their character, and affect their wellbeing when in school (Schneider, 2017, p. 101–104). The culture of a school must be seen as" . . .an essential aspect of school quality. It shapes the experience students have in school, influences their effort, and strengthens their commitment to the process of learning" (p. 112). In other words, school culture affects students' learning processes, thus variables measuring school culture must be recognised in the discourse on school quality. In this perspective 'culture' is essential, so that students" see school as a place of learning and are invested in the learning process" (p. 117).

Schneider and Biesta both argue that schooling is much more than academic performance and when discussing and developing knowledge about schools, test scores and grades are not the only sufficient variables to use. Schooling is as much about school culture, teaching, teachers and developing democratic individuals as it is about specific academic qualifications.

9.3.2 Experience of Schooling

For some students, education seems to be a threshold; it does not make any sense to them – it may be meaningless; they are unable to connect the idea of an education with their current life experiences. Both Berger et al. (2006), Flora (2007) and Glendøs (2017) have documented how children in some Inuit communities may have an alienated sense of education as something which either does not contribute to their current way of life, or that an education is meaningless to uphold life in a settlement, in that an education would also be a ticket away from the haven of home.

The content of lessons can be viewed from at least two perspectives of experience; based on how content is able to make sense to students and how it is presented to students. The first perspective is that the content of lessons is based on transmitting knowledge from the past often through books. Dewey (1938) terms this 'traditional schooling', and it is founded on knowledge content determined by the past and omits the need for students' experience. When teaching content in that respect is unable to relate to students' previous experiences, or to any experience there is a risk that that teaching content may result in 'a set of catchwords used to render thinking (. . .) unnecessary or impossible' (Dewey, 1916, p. 80); learning in that context is arbitrary. The second perspective from a learning perspective is based on traditional transferring of knowledge to the student – to the role of the teacher being a guide for the student in his or her learning experience. The learning

perspective is that students learn through experience: '...basing education on personal experience may mean more multiplied and more intimate contacts between the mature [the teacher] and the immature [the student] than ever excited in the traditional school and consequently more, rather than less guidance by others' (Dewey, 1938, p. 21).

In a study on students' perception of their [science] lessons Demant-Poort (2016) found that students' perception of their *everyday science lesson experience* was characterised by reading in books and filling out worksheets; they would venture outdoors to do hands-on science only rarely. One way of describing lessons where students are supposed to learn a specific content by reading only, where the learning content is presented to them in fully finished format would in Dewey's words be a traditional educational approach (Dewey 2008/1902). When students in the same study (Demant-Poort, 2016) elaborated on lessons that were not founded by reading in books solely, they would report on lessons where they work out answers to questions on their own, through their own approach. One way of describing this approach in more recent concepts *Inquiry Based Learning* (Heindl, 2019). A concept based on Dewey's fundamental ideas of progressive education.

9.4 Methods, Data and Limitations

9.4.1 Methods

The current study is based on a survey methodology (Evans & Mathur, 2005; Bryman, 2016; Frederiksen et al., 2017; Manfreda et al., 2008) with close-ended and open-ended questions. We chose to use an online survey platform as our primary data-collecting tool. The primary reasons for utilising an online tool were due to an ease of use for the respondents. Although we encouraged teachers to help administer the questionnaire in class, the online format also allowed for students themselves to decide when and where they chose to answer (Evans & Mathur, 2005; Park et al., 2019). Furthermore, an online survey platform also provides an ease of use for data-collection and analysis (Evans & Mathur, 2005).

9.4.2 The Instrument – Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire is divided into three major sections:

1. The first section contains questions related to demographics.
2. The second section contains questions related to students' experiences of well-being and lessons; both from a general perspective as well as from a specific subject matter perspective. The first two sections contain quantitative questions that are similar to all students across grades.

3. The third and last section contain questions related to students' ideas about their future; further education, where they want to live etc. The third section of questions was only directed to students from grades 9 and 10. Analysis of data from the third section will not be included in this paper.

In total there are 49 questions for students in grades 5–8, and 70 questions for students in grades 9 and 10.

The questionnaire consists of both open-ended and close-ended questions and was available to students in Greenlandic and Danish.

Close-ended questions form most of the questions in the survey and is partly based on a well-being survey from the Danish Center for Teaching Environment (dcum.dk, n.d.), and is subsequently developed within the context of the Greenlandic school system. The open-ended questions were added – primarily in section two of the questionnaire – to allow for students to give their voice on what schooling is – give them the opportunity to describe what a regular lesson in – any subject is like. Open-ended questions were not given to students in grade 5.

To administer the survey to schools across the country a two-step process was initiated. Step-one: all head teachers (n = 74) were contacted by phone – explaining the project to them. Step two: a letter was sent to every head teacher explaining in detail the procedure for students to access the online questionnaire.

9.4.3 Data

For this chapter we have limited the analysis of data to three key perspectives; well-being; perception of lessons in general, and perception of lessons in mathematics and Greenlandic.

A total of 1277 students responded to the survey – or 31,2% of the total student body in grades 5–10.

The 1277 students represent all five municipalities and are distributed across grades as shown in Table 9.2.

Of the 1277 participating students 15% (n = 194) attended settlement schools, whereas 85% (n = 1083) attended town schools. Between the two categories of schools in Greenland – settlement schools and town schools, their relative number of participating students is higher amongst settlement school students than town school students: Across all settlement schools (grade 5–10) there are 385 students, with 194 (50%) participating in the survey. Across all town schools (grade 5–10) there are 3709 students, with 1083 (29%) participating in the survey.

In the 18 towns in Greenland there are 23 public schools and one private school. In two of the 23 public schools there was only one participating student. Those two schools were removedfrom the data. In the 50 settlements in Greenland there are 50 schools – one in each settlement. Of the 50 schools 38 participated. Participation rates in settlement schools were generally higher than in town schools. In 10 settlement schools there was a response rate of 100%.

Table 9.2 Student participation Across grades

Grades	Number participating students per grade	Percentage of students per grade of the total possible number students in the country / grade	Percentage of students per grade of the total participating number of students (n = 1277)
5	201	26%	16%
6	175	23%	14%
7	316	42%	25%
8	313	39%	25%
9	225	30%	18%
10	47	6%	4%

Students from grades 5–7 and 8–10 have been combined in the statistical analysis. In the school system in Greenland, grades are divided in three major 'levels'; Grades 1–3: Step 1, grades 4–7: step 2, and grades 8–10 step 3. In the analysis grades 5–7 is thus termed step 2 and grades 8–10 is termed step 3.

9.4.4 Coding of Qualitative Responses

The survey presented us with two distinct sets of data – answers to closed ended questions were analysed using SPSS. Answers to open-ended questions of qualitative character were analysed using NVivo 12.

Questions [23a and 24a] related to perception of lessons in the questionnaire asked students to describe when lessons to them was/is most exciting and most boring respectively. In NVivo, statements from each participant were coded individually, which lead to three main categories – the teacher, the student, and the lesson.

9.4.5 Limitations to the Study

Limitations to the study are concerned with the relatively low response rate of 31,2% – which challenges the generalisability of the study. That online surveys generally have a low response rate is also described by Evans and Mathur (2005). Other surveys in Greenland have similar response rates (Niclasen, 2019). The response across the five municipalities is uniform.

Though an online survey platform seemingly has a positive influence on gaining data from respondents, there are also a significant number of limitations when administering a survey through an online platform. Through Evans and Mathur (2005) we have identified the following strengths and weaknesses to our study:

Major weaknesses include attributes such as: "perception as junk mail, Unclear answering instructions, Impersonal, privacy issues, low response rate" (p.197). To ameliorate for the apparent weaknesses of it being an impersonal approach and to prevent a low response rate teachers and head teachers were contacted personally to help with technical difficulties. An obvious potential weakness to the study is anonymity. Greenland has a very small population (≈56.000 inhabitants) and a total student population of around 7.500. To heighten anonymity in this chapter, all data has been analysed from a country-wide perspective.

9.5 Findings

In this section we will present the major findings from the survey in three themes.

Theme 1: Students' general perception on schooling. Theme 2: Students' perception on everyday lessons in Greenlandic and mathematics. Theme 3: Students' perception on when and under what conditions lessons are perceived as either 'exciting' or 'boring'.

9.5.1 Students' General Perception of Schooling

The first part of the survey elicited information about students' general perception on schooling. The questions were designed to measure to what degree students like or do not like their school. Overall, the data revealed that students from grade 5 to 10 indicate a relatively high satisfaction towards their schooling. The overall response to the question "What do you think about your school at the moment" was positive (Fig. 9.1). The close-ended question utilized a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "really like" to "really don't like". 85% of these responses indicated they either "like" or "really like" their school. 15% indicated they either 'don't like' or 'don't like at all' their school. There is no substantial difference between boys and girls.

This overall positive attitude towards schooling is supported by HBSC-Greenland (Niclasen, 2019). Their quantitative survey showed that 78% of the students either "really liked" or "liked" their school, while only 3% "really don't like" their schools (Niclasen, 2019).

The relatively high satisfaction with schooling varies between grades. Students in grades 5–7 (step 2, n = 685), express a higher degree of satisfaction with their schooling than students in grades 8–10 (step 3, n = 582). 90% of the students in step 2 either "really liked" or "liked" their school. In step 3 78% either really liked or liked their school. On the opposite end of the Likert scale, only 10% of the students in step 2 indicated that they either "don't like" or "really don't like" their school. In step 3 21,7% either 'don't like' or 'really don't like' their school. This finding is

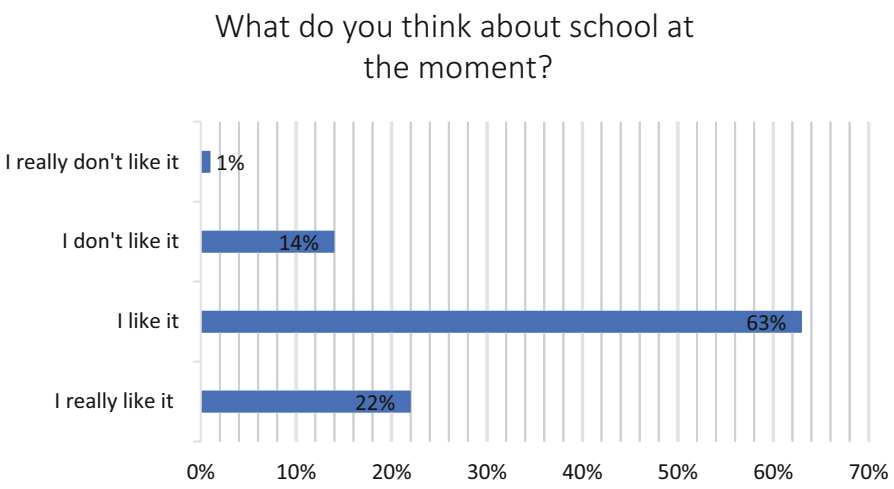

Fig. 9.1 (Question: 'What do you think about school at the moment?') N = 1267 students

consistent with Sørensen et al. (2013) who reports student's motivation towards schooling decreases with age.

In summary, the results indicate that most students from grade 5 through grade 10 like their school. There is a significant difference between step 2 and 3 in regard to how much they like their school. The students in step 3 do not like their school as much as the students in step 2.

9.5.2 Students' Perception of Everyday Lessons in Greenlandic and Mathematics

A considerable part of the questionnaire was designed to ascertain what students experience as 'everyday teaching activities across subjects. For each subject they were asked the following question "what do you do most often in subject x". For the purpose of this chapter we focus on Greenlandic (Table 9.3) and mathematics (Table 9.4) only.

In Table 9.3 students have indicated their experienced everyday teaching activities in Greenlandic. Activities such 'read in a book' and writing exercises seem to top lesson activities in Greenlandic, whereas activities such as projects or students' own presentations only rarely seem to happen.

In Table 9.4 students have indicated their experienced everyday teaching activities in mathematics. Activities such as calculating in notebooks and worksheets top their experiences of what happens in an everyday mathematics classroom. On the opposite end of the activity spectrum, we find mathematical investigations and student presentations.

The findings in Tables 9.3 and 9.4 suggest that students are exposed to a traditional teaching approach, where reading, writing and books are the dominant teaching activities. Also, the results indicate that teaching activities do not vary substantially between different subjects. When students describe everyday activities in their own words, they often state activities such as '*writing in the notebook*' (girl – grade 9). These findings resonate with the findings of Demant-Poort (2016), in the case of science lessons, where students express science lessons as largely based on reading books and answering close-ended questions.

Theoretically this indicates a shortage of activities based on students' own experiences and which are inquiry based (Dewey, 1938). that could provide a meaningful learning environment. The results also indicate an overwhelming focus on traditional academic activities that dominate lessons today and risk neglecting other aspects of learning such as socialization and subjectification (Biesta, 2014).

Table 9.3 Experienced teaching activities in Greenlandic N = 1260

Everyday teaching activities in Greenlandic	
We read in a book	22,60%
Work in a workbook	18,70%
Write in a notebook	16,40%
Work with grammar	10,90%
Read aloud from a book	10,70%
Listen to the teacher who tell stories	5,50%
Work in groups	4,10%
Solve tasks on a computer	2,80%
Work with different other activities	2,70%
Watch movies	2,10%
Other	1,40%
Work with projects	1,10%
Do student presentations	1,00%
TOTAL	100%

Table 9.4 Experienced everyday teaching activities in mathematics N = 1246

Everyday teaching activities in mathematics	
Calculating in notebooks	30,70%
Calculating exercises on a worksheet	17,10%
We read in a book	10,80%
Work with tools e.g. Centicubes	9,60%
Work with different other activities	8,20%
Work in groups	6,80%
Listen to the teacher who tell stories	6,10%
Do math investigations	5,90%
Other	3,00%
Watch movies	1,20%
Do student presentations	0,80%
TOTAL	100,00%

9.5.3 *Students' Perception of When and Under What Conditions a Lesson Is Perceived as Either 'Exciting' or 'Boring'*

When students (n = 1262) indicate when and under what conditions a lesson is either 'exciting' or 'boring' – data from close-ended questions reveal an apparent dichotomy – that schooling appears to be both exciting and boring at the same time.

When asked, most students, across age, gender and geography find their school experience more exciting than boring. 62% indicated their lessons as exciting either "always" or "often", whereas 31% indicated lessons to be boring either 'always' or 'often'. Overall, the students' responses indicate that they find their lessons more exciting than boring Though most find their lessons exciting, one third find their lessons boring most of the time.

To elicit a further understanding under which conditions students find their lessons either exciting or boring, they were given the statement: "a lesson is most exciting – when..." and "a lesson is most boring – when?" using 14 different statements as response categories. Students could indicate three categories. The following two tables show the results across grade, gender, and geography.

Findings from Table 9.5 suggests that students' experience of exciting lessons occur when the teacher tells stories, they watch movies or they work with computers/iPads or read in a book. The same table also reveals that very few students indicate activities such as presentations, Centicubes and doing the same again and again as something exciting.

In Table 9.6 students' indications of when a lesson is most boring reveals that reading in a book, writing in a notebook and doing the same again and again are the

Table 9.5 Students' experiences of when teaching is exciting. N = 1262

A lesson is most exciting when	
The teacher tells stories	15,30%
We watch movies	13,30%
We work with tasks on a computer/iPad	12,00%
We read in a book	11,90%
We write in a note book	9,40%
We are outside – in nature	8,90%
We do experiments or surveys	6,30%
We work with projects	6,00%
We work in groups	5,50%
We work with different activities	5,40%
We do student presentations	2,00%
Other	1,70%
We work with tools and instruments, e.g. Centicubes or microscopes	1,40%
We do the same again and again	0,90%
Total	100%

Table 9.6 Students' experiences of when teaching is boring. N = 1230

A lesson is most boring when	
We read in a book	16,30%
We do the same again and again	13,90%
We write in a notebook	13,40%
We watch movies	8,10%
We work with projects	7,30%
We do student presentations	7,00%
We work in groups	6,00%
The teacher tell stories	5,60%
We work with tools and instruments, i.e., Centicubes or microscopes	5,00%
We are outside – in nature	4,10%
We work with tasks on a computer/iPad	4,00%
Other	4,00%
We do experiments or surveys	2,60%
We work with different activities	2,20%
Total	100%

three most boring activities. Few students have indicated experiments and working with different activities as boring. The apparent paradox between findings from Tables 9.5 and 9.6 is interesting, because on one hand the students express lessons as something exciting with the somewhat same categories as when they experience lessons being 'boring'.

Activity categories such as reading in books, writing, listening to the teacher, are all categories which the students identify as experienced teaching activities. Some of the activities are identified as exciting activities, some are identified as boring activities. It is worth noting that only rarely do the students describe lessons as student-involving or that their own experiences are an active part of what teaching is. The above categories seem to resonate with Dewey's (1938) descriptions of traditional education: "Books, especially textbooks, are the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past, while teachers are the organs through which students are brought into effective connection with the material." (p.18). Dewey's take on traditional teaching points to a view on students who need to master the learning content of the past, where teaching is void from students' own inquiries and curiosity. When students describe their experiences of teaching activities using traditional terminology Biesta (2014) argues that it is an expression of a school with a high focus on the qualification domain.

In two follow-up open-ended questions we asked students to describe when a lesson is 'most exciting' and 'most boring'.

A total of 1074 students chose to describe their perception of when a lesson is 'exciting' (Item number Q23a), and a total of 1067 students chose to describe their

perception of when a lesson is 'boring' (Item number 24a). Students' description of when a lesson is either 'exciting' or 'boring' was coded and resulted in two categories *the teacher* and *the student.* Those two categories broaden the perspective on what influences students' perception of lessons.

An analysis of open-ended questions aims to broaden the perspective on students' perception of lessons as either boring or exciting.

9.5.3.1 The Teacher

Across statements and codes students are very aware of how the teacher influences their perception of lessons and class. One of the codes that was generated in the analysis was '*expectations*' – what students *expect* from their teacher.

When students express their *expectations* to the teacher they do so in a variety of statements ranging from short ones such as '*when the teachers are good*' to longer and more elaborated ones such as '*I am most happy when the teacher is prepared and has explained to us how we are to work, when the students listen and when they work respectfully and discusses their tasks*' (Student, grade 9).

Students across grades noted that the mood of the teacher influenced teaching. Several students wrote that they were particularly fond of the teacher when he or she was 'kind', 'happy' or 'when the teacher isn't angry'. The statements from students on the importance of the positive mood of the teacher – also reveals itself from the opposite perspective when students were asked to describe when schooling or lessons tend to be boring. Students' perceptions of what makes lessons boring seem to be closely linked to the mood of the teacher. Students seem to be particularly focused on incidents such 'when the teacher is angry' or when 'the teacher is sour and boring, but also blames you' (Student, grade 8).

Another perspective on teachers in relation to either exciting or boring is that students seem to be very aware of how *dialogue* between students and teacher is important for how a lesson is perceived as *exciting.* One student writes:

> When a lesson is most exciting the teacher typically explains complex topics, when the teacher asks us relevant questions that we answer. The teacher will also ask about our ideas and what we know about the topic. It almost ends with a dialogue between the teacher and students, and I feel that it gives a very positive experience on a lesson (student, grade 9)

The experience that the student expresses in the quote above points in the direction of the arguments of Dewey (1938), who argues that when education connects to students' experiences it is something social and collective, epistemologically all formation of an experience takes place in a social and concrete context. The student in the quote above expresses that a lesson is exciting when the "teacher asks relevant questions" and when the teacher "asks about our ideas and what we know". The students express lessons to be exciting when they connects to his or her (or their) prior experience and knowledge.

9.5.3.2 The Student

The analysis led to a category of 'student-behaviour'. This category in large part relates to Schneider's argument that school culture is an "essential aspect of school quality" (Schneider, 2017, p.112). As this analysis shows, students stress the importance of a classroom culture where students collaborate, and do not tease each other.

When students answer the question on when a lesson is boring or exciting and they address themselves – students acknowledge responsibility; both when a lesson is perceived as exciting or as boring. Across the qualitative data there are opinions that address 'calmness' as an important aspect in how students act in class; students express a quiet classroom and fellow students who are 'well-behaved' as important for their experience of what takes place in the classroom. When students on the other hand express 'boring' lessons it is often through statements on fellow students making noise: 'when my classmates don't pay attention', or 'when my classmates are unable to sit quietly'. Schneider (2017) argues that school culture has an important impact on students' learning processes. The students explicitly express how their own and their classmates' behaviour has a negative impact on their lessons. Related to the analysis of student behaviour are students' voices on how the social life in class has an impact on when a lesson is boring or exciting, the analysis also led to codes or categories of 'collaboration' and 'teasing'.

When students express lessons as exciting they are particularly attentive to what happens when they collaborate – when a group of students work together on a project, or when the mere idea of working together is what defines lessons. To collaborate on a given task is both a subject matter relevant event: 'When we collaborate and do stuff in projects…', and an event or incident in a classroom where students' collaboration efforts must be seen from the perspective of helping one another: 'when we are allowed to collaborate and help each other'. For some students there also seems to be a direct link between collaborating, helping each other out and the apparent importance of just being together as a class. This also links to Schneider's framework – students want to be a part of the social sphere of their class. Schneider terms this 'belonging' (p. 116). That students have a sense of belonging to fellow students, to teachers – to the school. In those situations, students notice that it is of importance to them that the student[s] are happy and not in a sour mood 'When we all in class are having fun, collaborate and there is no bullying' (student grade 7).

Between statements on when students have an influence on lessons being either exciting or boring, there is a contrast from what influences perceptions of *exciting* lessons and boring. The analysis also revealed categories that link perceptions of boring lessons with incidents of students *teasing* one another. When students tease one another, it seems as if it has a profound impact on how they experience lessons. Between students' experiences from the classroom there seems to be two different perspectives on how teasing affects students' experiences. One perspective is that *teasing* has a personal psychosomatic impact – that teasing feels like being 'put down'. Teasing in that perspective can lead to students being upset: 'When in class

stuff like that happens, for instance when someone is being teased, someone will become upset' (student grade 7). When students tease one another – it will have an impact on how the school influences student outcomes. Schneider would describe student teasing as an essential input, which influences a key outcome of schooling; character building and well-being (Schneider, 2017, p.101). When a school culture allows for students' teasing – then it has an influence on students' emotional well-being, and personal growth.

Another perspective is how teasing disrupts the otherwise harmonious social stability of a classroom setting. Students seem to be aware of how *teasing* affects their capacity to concentrate – that teasing when it happens will disturb other students' ability to concentrate and to keep up: 'A lessons is most boring when someone fights, and you would like to keep up, but fall behind' (student, grade 10).

Teasing – when it happens is thus the cause of both influencing the social dynamics in class on a personal psychological level as well as disrupting or influencing students' ability to keep up. A lesson in this perspective fails to create a positive and constructive learning environment.

9.6 Conclusion and Discussion of Results

The findings, though not ground-breaking in an international educational research perspective – are however a new perspective on how students in the Greenlandic public school experience education.

The first conclusion to be drawn from the study is that students are fully aware of the purpose and quality of their schooling. By asking the students we gain access to knowledge which has not previously been broadly covered across subjects and geography in Greenland.

The overall findings of the study point towards students' experiences of schooling and lessons as something which varies immensely. Firstly, the study shows that students are aware of how teaching activities influence their experience of a lesson itself; *is it a lesson that went well and where they learned something, or was it lesson where they spend 45 min answering close-ended questions, or was it a lesson where they were challenged into presenting their own written products*.

Secondly students point to the teacher as having a significant impact on how the students experiences a lesson, especially the mood of a teacher has immense influence on how students experience a lesson; teachers who are often grumpy have a very negative influence on how students experience schooling.

Thirdly students point to themselves (social environment) as having an impact on the lessons they experience; students' classmates, their behaviour, level of noise in the classroom – all influence their experiences of education. The school culture (Schneider, 2017) in regards to how the school and the teacher is able to orchestrate a sense of belonging to the school community is an important aspect of how students perceive their schooling.

The study presents students' perception on schooling in general, what goes on in lessons – when a lesson is exciting or boring, and what happens on a regular day in

all subjects. Findings from the analysis show that school – as an institution – for the students is just as much a place to socialise, as it is a place of teaching. Students' overall positive perceptions toward their schooling resonate with findings from similar studies and surveys from the Nordic countries (Niclasen, 2019). This study shows that students' attitudes towards their school worsens from grades 5–7 to grade 8–10.

Students are very attentive to when and under what conditions a lesson is influenced by student behaviour – when teasing has a negative impact on a lesson, or when student collaboration on a task has a positive impact on students' perception of lessons. Students' perception of the role of the teacher is divided between him or her as responsible for quality lessons and perceiving the teacher as responsible for creating either a positive mood in class or situations where the teacher is responsible for disharmony in lessons.

The current study reveals students' perception on a teaching practice that is characterised by teaching approaches such as reading, writing and doing exercises. This suggests an approach to lessons that reverberate back to a classic distinction between 'traditional' and 'progressive' schooling (Dewey, 1938).

9.6.1 Implications

The current study is based on student responses from around 30% of all students in grade 5–10 in Greenland. As such the study does not attempt to be generalizable on a regional Arctic level, however, from a more local perspective in Greenland itself, the study does present perspectives on lessons and schooling that have not previously been revealed.

In the current educational discourse in Greenland, the agenda for legislation and decision on schooling is primarily founded on grade point statistics. Grade point statistics from the past 10 years present a falling trend for almost all subjects (Statistics Greenland, 2019). However, the current discourse on the falling trend on student performance fails to address pedagogical challenges in schooling.

This study is an attempt to provide the student perspective on lessons – to qualify how we address challenges in lessons and schooling. For students to have a better school experience it is necessary to understand and recognise that social and psychological aspects play an important role in their school experiences.

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Lars Demant-Poort, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Greenland, at the Institute of Learning. He obtained his doctorate from the University of Greenland and Aarhus University in Denmark. His primary research interests are science education and students' perspective.

Louise Pindstrup Andersen, MA, is a PhD student, at the University of Greenland and University of Aalborg, Denmark. Her field of research is educational science and arctic research. Her research focuses on learning in the Greenlandic primary schools.