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Positions of Newly Arrived Students in Nordic Education Policies and Practices

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ABSTRACT
This article aims to investigate how Nordic countries – exemplified by Denmark, Finland, and Sweden – govern the education and inclusion of newly arrived students. Approaching this through policy as text and practice, we identify the subject positions of the newly arrived students. Our research data consist of national policy documents, legislation, and evaluation reports on the education of newly arrived students, which we compare and analyse. We conclude that newly arrived students are subject to underachievement, bullying, discrimination, and at risk of not continuing their education. Despite all good intentions the Nordic policies do not seem to include all students.

Keywords: *newly arrived students, education policies, subject positions, 'in lack of' language, in need of adaptation*

Introduction: Differentiation in the egalitarian systems?

The Nordic model of education has been based on a vision that schools should be inclusive, comprehensive, and with no streaming to provide equality of opportunity for all members of society (Telhaug et al., 2006). However, the problem of discrimination in

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relation to class, gender, race/ethnicity, and place of domicile remains a major political challenge (Beach, 2021; Horst, 2017; Hummelstedt et al., 2021). One implication of the discrimination that is taking place in the Nordic systems, can be found in the PISA results from 2003 to 2018 where 'students with immigrant background' compared to non-immigrant students are statistically under-achieving (OECD, 2019; Tørslev & Børsch, 2017). This raises the question of how discrimination against students with migrant backgrounds is done in Nordic schools.

To understand why and how discrimination takes place, we need to take a closer look at the students who are included in the category of 'students with migrant background' (Brännström, 2021a). A closer look at the category of 'student with migrant background' (or 'student with immigrant background' as used in PISA), shows that this category includes children with all kinds of backgrounds; the commonality being that they themselves or their parents have a migration experience. For instance, in PISA, the definition of a student with 'immigrant background' is that both parents are born abroad (OECD, 2019). However, the category conceals different socio-economic backgrounds, reasons for migration, background countries, schooling experiences and ethnicities, which expose students differently to exclusion and discrimination. Thus, the category of students with migrant background has evoked criticism since the use of it is not clear in academic and non-academic contexts (Helakorpi, Holm & Liu, 2023). Furthermore, in every-day use the category itself and its different variants often imply and constitute the Other (Hummelstedt, et al., 2021; Padovan-Özdemir & Ydesen, 2016).

In order to better understand how the achievement gap is constructed and what can be done to close it, we need a more nuanced analysis of the situation of the students who fall under the category 'students with migrant background' and especially the situation of those students with migrant backgrounds who are not achieving in the Nordic schools. To contribute to this need for a more nuanced analysis, we concentrate in this article on the policies and practices concerning school-age students who migrate to Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, in other words newly arrived students. Interestingly there is little research on the education of newly arrived students in the Nordic countries, despite the fact that between the years 2011–2017, almost 200,000 children and young people came to the Nordic countries as asylum seekers, alone or with their families. Most of these (148,725) applied for asylum in Sweden, followed by Norway (21,625), Finland (16,570), Denmark (12,510) and Iceland (460) (Gärdegård, et al., 2017). Thus, every year many newly arrived students start in Nordic schools with varying reasons for migrating to the Nordic countries. For instance, in the year 2022, many of the newly arrived students were fleeing from the war in Ukraine. There is little knowledge on the achievement or well-being of newly arrived students. As such there is a need for research to concentrate on newly arrived students since their situation is so different than other children. School is an important opportunity and platform for the inclusion and integration of newly arrived children and young people in a new country.

In this article, we aim to analyse how education for newly arrived students is organised in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden. We investigate and compare how the countries govern the education and inclusion of newly arrived students in relation to school addressing the following three questions:

1) What policy discourses frame the governing of newly arrived students?
2) How are the policies put into practice?
3) What are the subject positions created by these policies and practices?

The analysis of these questions is preceded by a description of our research process, the comparative approach, our data base, and a brief introduction of the education systems of the three countries. Following the above questions, we move on to first describe how newly arrived students are governed in these countries in legislation and policy, and to analyse the discourses they are constituted in. Then we address the education policy practices of these countries and who is responsible for putting these policies into practice. Finally, we analyse the subject positions that are created by these policies and practices.

The research process: A comparative analysis of policy and practice, and the created positions for newly arrived students in three Nordic countries

Our research data consist of national policy documents and legislation as well as evaluation reports on the education of newly arrived students. We approach the analysis by comparison when we identify differences and similarities between the national policies. However, the idea of taking nation-states as units of analysis in educational research has been problematised from various perspectives, for instance due to globalisation and the internationalisation of education (Green, 2003; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; see also Helakorpi, 2020). Green (2004, p. 42) raises the following questions: why should we be interested in a comparative perspective and how can we adopt it? Green stresses the fact that it is rare that equivalent sources exist for each case compared. This criticism is also relevant to this article. However, our aim here is to examine some characteristics or qualities of the differences and similarities that emerge in policy and research in relation to newly arrived students in the three Nordic countries.

In our ambition to compare, we mainly move along a *horizontal* axis of comparison, which not only contrasts the three cases one with another, but also traces documents and other influences across the cases, and to a minor extent conducts *vertical* and *transversal* comparisons across space and time (Bartlett & Vaurus, 2017). The cases of Denmark, Finland and Sweden represent the diversity of the Nordic countries with respect to geography, size, and culture, including education (Telhaug et al., 2006), which we consider ideal for the purposes of comparison. Through this analysis we elaborate on the similarities and differences of the positions that are constituted for school-age children who migrate to these countries. Thus, we will

carry out a juxta-positional comparison (Green, 2004) of the different countries from the perspective of each country's policies on and experiences of educating newly arrived students. As we compare the ways these three countries organise the education of newly arrived students, we also contextualise this as an issue in Nordic education.

We gathered law and policy documents that relate to the education of newly arrived students in the three countries, exemplified as follows.

Table 1: The data

	DENMARK	FINLAND	SWEDEN
The legislation	Education Act	Education Act	Education Act
Steering policies	National core curriculum: Danish as second language (basic) – Common Objectives	National core curriculum National core curriculum for preparatory classes	National core curriculum National core curriculum for preparatory classes Syllabus
Instructions for education providers	Documents from the Ministry of Education in Denmark	Materials from Finnish National Agency of Education	Documents from the Swedish National Agency of Education
Evaluation reports	Evaluations by Danish national evaluation centre (EVA)	Evaluations by Finnish national evaluation centre	Documents from the Swedish Schools Inspectorate

Our way of conducting the analysis can be described as analysis through discussion (Lappalainen et al., 2015). We collected the relevant documents from each country and made observations of differences and similarities as well as ommitances. We also analysed how students are governed through legislation and policy as well as their school attendance through reports and research. For our discursive way of reading policies and the positions they constitute, we draw on Carol Bacchi's 'What is the problem represented to be –approach' (WPR) (see e.g., Bacchi, 2012; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Theoretically, the study is based on an interest in how policy and practice interact. Different reforms and their intentions create different discourses and subject positions. By using Norman Fairclough's (1992, 1995) critical discourse analysis, our intention is to make visible how newly arrived students are governed through dominant discourses in text and practice. The ideological basis and the subject position the text producer has produced remain in the resulting relationship with the interpreter of the text. We read, consume and take a position on the ideological foundations and subject positions of texts based on our own experiences (Fairclough, 1989). The communication only becomes meaningful when the subject is positioned in the place that the discourse prepares, for example that newly arrived students are offered subject positions as mainly language learners and as someone to integrate. Through their representations, the texts discursively create possible and impossible positions for the students. Prior to the analysis, we briefly describe the Danish, Finnish, and Swedish education systems after which we turn to their governance of the newly arrived students.

Danish, Finnish, and Swedish education systems

The Danish, Finnish and Swedish education systems resemble each other. School starts at age seven in Finland and Sweden, and six in Denmark. Pre-primary education at the age of six is compulsory in Finland and Sweden. Primary and lower secondary education (i.e., basic education) lasts nine years. Most students continue to upper-secondary education in these countries. In Finland, compulsory education has been extended to age eighteen, which means it is practically mandatory for students to continue to upper secondary education.

The Finnish Basic Education Act (1998/628), the Swedish Education Act (2010:800) and the Danish Education Act (LBK no. 1887, 01/10/2021) govern primary and lower secondary education. Each country has national core curricula for different educational levels that steer how educational providers organise education. However, municipalities, principals, teachers, and in Sweden free school companies, have a great deal of autonomy. In Sweden, schools are controlled by the Swedish School Inspectorate whereas Finland has abolished school inspections. In Denmark, however, the responsibility for the schools resides with the municipalities, which own the schools, and the Agency for Education and Quality must inspect the municipalities to ensure that they fulfill their tasks and provide for the mandatory number of school hours and quality in their schools.

Swedish education is highly marketised whereas the Finnish and Danish education systems are not. After nine years of primary and lower secondary education, upper-secondary education in Finland is a dual system where students can either choose a general upper secondary education or a vocational education. Denmark has a similar system. In Sweden students can choose between national higher education preparatory or vocational preparatory programs within the upper secondary school. For those students who are not eligible for a national program there are introductory programs. Just under 50% of the students enrolled in these introductory programs have a foreign background. In Denmark and Finland education is mandatory, meaning that children need to be educated but not necessarily in schools, in Sweden schooling is mandatory, which means that children must attend school.

Visible and invisible newly arrived students governed in national policies

When comparing the ways the newly arrived students are governed in these countries, our first observation is how differently the category of newly arrived students is conceptualised. In fact, in Denmark and Finland 'newly arrived student' does not exist as a category in legislation, whereas in Sweden 'newly arrived student' is clearly defined and governed in school legislation.

In Denmark, newly arrived students legally fall under the category of *bilingual students.* A 'bilingual student' is a child with a mother tongue other than Danish who does not learn Danish until their interaction with the community, maybe not until in

school, and who may or may not be able to participate in regular class lessons (LBK nr. 1053 of 29/06/2016). The students considered able to participate in regular education will attend *supplementary education* in Danish as second language, either as an integrated part of regular lessons or as individual lessons. This type of bilingual student is called a *student in need of supplementary education*. The students who are not considered able to participate in regular education will participate in preparatory education (in Denmark called 'Basic') for up to two years. Preparatory education is provided in special classes or as individual lessons, and students eligible for it are called *basic students* (EVA, 2019, p. 14).

Similar to Denmark, in Finnish legislation and policies there is not a definition for newly arrived students. In the Finnish Education Act the term 'immigrant' (*maahanmuuttaja*) is used, making no distinction between those who were born in Finland and those who have recently immigrated. In the Finnish Education Act 'immigrants' are mentioned in connection with their right to preparatory education. Preparatory education is provided to all children and youth who have a migration background (born abroad or one parent born abroad) who do not have the necessary language skills to study in regular compulsory education or pre-primary education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2017). However, in practice the participants in preparatory education are often newly arrived students (Tainio & Kallioniemi, 2019). The preparatory education lasts approximately a year, but if students have strong enough language skills they can transfer to regular classes sooner. Finnish officials have to some extent taken into use a category of 'late arrivals' which refers to those adolescents who have moved to Finland at the age of lower secondary education (grades 7–9) or later (Puukko, Vuori & Kuukka, 2019). There are, however, no direct policies or measures directed at this group as of yet.

In Sweden, a newly arrived student according to the Swedish Education Act (Chapter 3, §12 a) is someone who has lived abroad and who now lives in Sweden. The student must have started their education after the regular start of the semester in year 1 or later. After four years in a Swedish school, the student is no longer counted as a newcomer.

Although newly arrived children in Denmark and Finland are not defined as category and thus partially made invisible, in Denmark there is a clear definition of who has the right to education: children of school-age have a right to attend a public Folkeskole or similar schooling, and it is the responsibility of the municipality to ensure this. However, the requirement is that the child has been living in the municipality for at least three weeks and is assumed will stay in Denmark for at least six months (SIRI, 2019). This also goes for asylum seekers' children, though larger asylum centres may have an integrated school department. In Finland, each child has the right to education regardless of their legal status according to the Finnish Education Act (1998).

The Swedish legislation emphasises every child's right to education despite their legal status. Anyone who is or must be registered in the population register according to the Population Registration Act (*Folkbokföringslagen*) is considered a resident.

The person then has the right to all education in the Swedish school system. If they are not registered, or should not be, registered, they still may be entitled to some education. Children and young people who are undocumented have the right to all education if they enroll in school before they turn eighteen (Education Act). Asylum-seeking children and young people should be admitted as soon as it is appropriate regarding their personal circumstances. They should, however, enroll no later than one month after arrival in Sweden. This also applies to children and young people who have been granted a residence permit with temporary protection.

The discourses of an egalitarian education and children's right to education are evident regarding which children have the right to education. Even though it varies how the newly arrived students are defined and categorised, preparatory classes are provided for this group in each of these countries. The goal setting for the preparatory classes and how they are governed vary. In Denmark, the preparatory education (Danish as second language Basic) aims to develop the students' linguistic competence to understand and apply spoken and written Danish, which should be tightly interwoven with other school subjects. Second, it should make the students conscious about 'language learning in consideration of an active and equal participation in school and society and prepare them for further education'. Third, it should 'strengthen the students' self-esteem and experience of language as a source of personal identity' (Ministry of Education in Denmark, 2017, p. 25).

Since 2002, Danish public compulsory schools are no longer obligated to offer mother tongue instruction to students whose primary language of communication at home is not Danish. Schools are only liable for offering mother tongue instruction to immigrant children from other EU member states and from the EEA, Greenland or the Faroe Islands. Whether it should be offered to children of other nationalities is up to the individual municipalities to decide (Tørslev & Børsch, 2017).

In Finland, there is a national curriculum for preparatory classes. Each education provider is obliged to have a curriculum for preparatory education based on the Education Act, the national curriculum for preparatory classes and the national curriculum for basic education. In Finland, the goal of the preparatory classes according to the national curriculum for preparatory classes is to 'promote pupils' Finnish or Swedish skills, a balanced development and integration into Finnish society and give the necessary abilities for basic education' (FNAE 2015, own translation).

In Sweden, a student who goes to a preparatory class receives partial teaching in a different teaching group than the one to which he or she normally belongs. Students may attend part of the preparatory class for a maximum of two years. But as soon as the school assesses that the student has sufficient knowledge of Swedish to follow the teaching of a subject in his or her regular teaching group full-time, the teaching in the preparatory class in that subject must be discontinued. This means that the teaching of different subjects is gradually transferred to the regular teaching group as the student's knowledge increases. Good access to study guidance in the mother tongue can mean that the student receives all teaching in his or her regular teaching group earlier.

It is the principal who is responsible for ensuring that the student's conditions for transferring to teaching in the regular teaching group in various subjects are assessed continuously (SEA, chapter 3, §12f). A preparatory class and a prioritised timetable are two different types of initiatives that the principal can decide on in support of a newly arrived student. It is possible to combine a decision that a student should receive partial instruction in a preparatory class with a decision on a prioritised timetable, but this is not a requirement. The principal must always start from the individual student's conditions and needs when deciding on support measures for a student (Chapter 3, §§ 2 and 12 f of the Education Act).

The overall discourses on immigration and integration frame how newly arrived students are governed, the right to education for every child, and the importance of the national language are similar between the three countries. The monolingual norm is emphasised more in Denmark and Sweden while Finland emphasises multilingualism alongside the national languages (see Zilliacus, Paulsrud & Holm, 2017). While Denmark and Finland do not have the category newly arrived students, in practice the right to education and preparatory classes are similar. While the preparatory class in Finland is at most one year and in Denmark two years, in Sweden a student can be considered newly arrived for up to four years. However, in Finland and Sweden a student can receive support in the national language and their first language until end of their schooling. In this respect, Denmark stands out from the other Nordic countries in the perception and provision of mother tongue education (Tørslev & Børsch, 2017, p. 8), as it is no longer a central right for all students of immigrant background to receive mother tongue education.

Responsibility for and organisation of education of newly arrived students

As stated in the previous section, although there are differences in how newly arrived students are categorised in the different countries, the practice of preparatory classes is a common feature, and many of the newly arrived students study in such educational circumstances. There can be separate (not entirely in Sweden) classes or the newly arrived student can be directly integrated into regular classes with language support (second language learning support).

In Denmark, it is the municipal authorities that have the responsibility for ensuring the reception and basic education of newly arrived students. Each municipality decides how the schools in the municipality are to receive the newly arrived students; whether they are to be allocated directly to ordinary classes or are to start up in special introductory/reception classes. The practice of sending newly arrived students directly into ordinary classes has been more frequent in recent years, especially in the wake of the large number of migrants in 2015 (EVA, 2016, 2019). Accordingly, there was an expansion of the existing framework for the reception of newly arrived students so that the maximum number of students allowed in the introductory classes was raised from 12 to 15, and the number of grade levels covered from three to five, and

the municipalities were allowed to set up alternative or supplementary provision (EVA, 2016). This included special support for students with learning disabilities or mental health problems.

The practice of direct enrollment in ordinary Danish classes has caused a debate as to whether the practice actually benefits newly arrived students, or whether it is a political measure to save money. On this background, The Danish Evaluation Institute, EVA, was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of practice in this area (EVA, 2019). The mapping shows that 56% of Danish municipalities enroll newly arrived students directly in ordinary school classes. It also shows that this is primarily practiced for the youngest students, which means in the first three grade levels, whereas it is less prevalent in the intermediate grade levels and even less so in the final years of schooling.

When interviewed about this practice, representatives from school administration, school leaders, and teachers estimate that it is beneficial for newly arrived students to be directly enrolled and participate in ordinary classes so that they become part of 'an ordinary community' from day one in school. They also stress the importance of giving newly arrived students the opportunity to establish social relations and friendships with their classmates without being uprooted from introductory classes once they obtain the necessary linguistic competence in Danish. However, the evaluation also shows that there are challenges involved when newly arrived students are enrolled directly in ordinary classes. It is considered especially challenging that newly arrived students need language support which cannot be met with current resources.

Likewise, other reports point to problems such as lack of accessibility for this group of children, despite their special circumstances (Jessen & Montgomery, 2010; Tørslev & Børsch, 2017). Although asylum facilities provide schooling run by the Danish Red Cross or municipal authorities in Denmark, and carried out by teachers specifically trained to work with asylum-seeking students, and intended to prepare them for the Folkeskole, only a few of these schools are available and children in many cases are required to travel far to reach the schools.

In Finland, the municipalities are responsible for organising preparatory education if they choose to do so. A preparatory class can be arranged for one or more students and students have individual curricula (Venäläinen et al., 2022). The purpose of the classes is to prepare students for transfer to basic education. Preparatory education focuses on language skills, reading and understanding text, but also on supporting the student's home language and culture. Each student has their own learning plan. In smaller communities as well as in some bigger communities it is common for newly arrived students to enter regular classes instead of attending preparatory classes. In municipalities with fewer migrant students, it is common for the students to enter regular classes with language support in the form of Finnish or Swedish as a second language.

When the newly arrived students transfer to compulsory education, they can study Finnish/Swedish as a second language. Various laws (see p.8 in Venäläinen et al., 2022) support the teaching of students' own or their families' first languages, which is also in

line with the emphasis on multilingualism in the national curriculum for basic education (Zilliacus et al., 2017). Students choose if they want to participate in first language instruction. The goals for first language instruction are specified per grade level in the national curriculum but overall, the goal is to support students' identity development and learning to value multlingualism as well as the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity for both the individual and the society. Finland has a well-developed three-step support system for all students, which is of special importance to newly arrived students since it can provide extra language support as well as other academic and health support (FNBC, 2015).

Newly arrived students in Finland, like all students, get non-confessional instruction in their 'own' religion. This creates a sense of belonging since students have something in common with another group of students. However, it can also create a feeling of isolation and otherness since the instruction is in separate groups. According to teachers, this also makes it visible who does not belong to the majority religion and can lead to discrimination (Zilliacus & Holm, 2013). In Denmark, the Education Act states that Christianity is central knowledge to all children but that children, with their parents' written request can be exempt from participating in religious lessons on Christianity, if the parents declare to undertake the religious lessons by themselves (chapter 2, § 6. 2). At the higher grade levels, schools also have to provide lessons on 'foreign religions and other outlooks on life' (Chapter 2, § 6.). In Sweden all students are taught together and learn about different religions within a non-confessional religious education. Studies show though that Swedish Christian traditions and history are often used as a way of defining 'us' vis-à-vis 'them'. The 'others' are largely religious people in general, Muslims in particular (Berglund 2013, 2017).

In Sweden it is the home municipality that is responsible for ensuring that everyone in the municipality who has the right to education receives it. This applies to new arrivals in the same way as for other children and young people who live in the municipality (SEA chapter 18, §27). Newly arrived students have the right to get a school placement even though they have not received a social security number. According to the SEA (ch 3, §§ 12 c-e) newly arrived students' knowledge should be assessed. When assessing in compulsory school and corresponding school forms, it is mandatory to use the National Agency for Education's survey material for assessment of newly arrived students' knowledge steps 1 and 2 (step 1 the student's language and experiences, and step 2 literacy). It is the principal of the school who is responsible for making an assessment of the student's knowledge. The assessment must be made promptly, within two months of the pupil receiving a school placement. When deciding on placement in which year group and teaching group, the principal must consider the result of the assessment of the student's knowledge. The result must also be considered when planning teaching and distributing teaching time.

In all three countries it is the municipalities that are responsible for organising education for newly arrived students. In many cases, the education is organised in preparatory classes, but especially in Denmark many students start directly in regular

classes. All three countries also provide educational support for students with special needs. In Finland, the municipality decides whether it organises preparatory education or if a student is directly integrated into a regular class. In Denmark newly arrived students either receive language support in regular classes or are placed in preparatory classes. In Sweden, school principals have a huge power over the newly arrived students and assessing what they need. In Finland, it has been found problematic that there is no special qualification for teachers or staff in preparatory classes (Tainio & Kallioniemi, 2019). In Sweden students are supposed to have access to teachers in Swedish as a second language as well as study guidance in their own mother tongue, but as is the case in Finland this rarely occurs due to the fact there is a shortage of teachers with these qualifications within Swedish schools as well (Reath-Warren, 2017).

The subject positions of newly arrived students created by policy texts: Invisibility, language learners and integratability

We find that the analysed administrative texts create subject positions (Fairclough, 1992, 1995) for newly arrived students as partially invisible, as language learners and integratable. With the invisible subject position, we refer to Finland and Denmark where newly arrived students are not categorised in policy texts. Since both Finland and Denmark, like Sweden, simultaneously emphasise the individual assessment of students, this invisibility does not automatically mean that everyone is in practice treated as homogenous. The invisibility at the policy level may, however, lead to the fact that there is little knowledge about the situation of newly arrived students and that there is little research-based knowledge for the staff who work with 'immigrant' or 'bilingual' students to promote equal treatment for diverse students.

In fact, in Denmark, recent studies in the field of education for newly arrived students show that they are regulated as a homogenous group expected to be 'the same' but at the same time considered to be 'different' and through frames of 'normality' that are color-blind or culturally neutral (Li & Enemark, 2021). The same tendencies are found in Sweden, where newly arrived students are treated as one single collective (Brännström 2021a, 2021b; SSI, 2017a, 2017b). According to Bunar (2017) although the legislation has many positive aspects, based on previous research (Bunar, 2010, 2015; Dettlaff & Fong, 2016) there are three major challenges that have not been properly addressed: i) how to promote the social inclusion of newly arrived students; ii) how to bridge the gap between schools and newly arrived parents; and iii) how to make sure the new policy reaches classrooms.

According to the Swedish Schools Inspectorate there are principals, in both small and large schools, who have succeeded in receiving newly arrived students within the framework of their existing organisation in a way, which seems to benefit the newly arrived students' continued education. These principals tend to follow up and analyse their activities regarding the new conditions and needs of the newly arrived students.

However, more than half of the principals examined solve pedagogical challenges using general organisational models that they hope suit all newly arrived students. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate identified development areas in 27 of the 28 school principals examined in the autumn of 2016 (SSI, 2017c).

As stated above, there is very little research about newly arrived students in Finland. Reports related to preparatory classes and to Finnish and Swedish as a second language give some clues about the situation of the newly arrived students in the school environment. In an inquiry by Kuukka and Metsämuuronen (2016) it is found that pupils who migrate to Finland during lower secondary school and get preparatory education, reach better language skills by the end of lower secondary education than those who do not get preparatory education. In an assessment conducted for the Prime Minister's Office in 2019 about languages and religions in Finnish schools, the researchers point out the problems of not having any special requirement qualification for teachers or staff who work in the preparatory classes where most of the newly arrived students first study (Tainio & Kallioniemi, 2019). In 2019, they assess that every year there is a growing need for at least 50 more new teachers for preparatory classes. Simultaneously in the inquiry, it is brought up that organising the teaching of newly arrived students who have little educational background from before is facing difficulties. Furthermore, they argue that the newly arrived students are placed in special education arrangements although what they need is teaching by teachers who are specialised in language learning. Although the Finnish policy about preparatory classes seems well developed, the organisers of education are thus reporting challenges in practice and there is a clear lack of research knowledge of how students experience these educational arrangements.

The subject positions as language learners and as integratable are not surprising. In the way the current Nordic societies and education are organised, especially with their emphasis on language learning, this seems reasonable since it is difficult to obtain education or employment in these countries without skills in the official languages. However, simultaneously we can point out that the subject positions as language learners and integratable also categorise the students as being 'in lack of' these qualities. For instance, in the Danish case, at the turn of the century, the then newly elected right-wing government started a campaign for national cultural rearmament, the so-called 'struggle on values', which also contained a post-9/11 negatively loading of the word 'Muslim' (Horst & Gitz-Johansen, 2010).

As an illustration of the above-mentioned rearmament and deprivation paradigm, integration material from the Danish Directory of Education in its preface states that 'the school must arm itself for the challenges of a multifarious society, which includes being aware of the specific conditions linked to education of bilingual students'. Accordingly, schools need to pay special attention to 'the bilingual students' learning of Danish and their general benefit from school subjects and social life' and 'that the parents of bilingual children like other parents contribute actively to the school life of their children' (Ministry of Education in Denmark, 2003). The same publication

clarifies that 'the particular challenge in educating bilingual students is to ensure that they (...) develop their Danish language' (p. 7) and that 'it is a natural thing that the student as second language speaker does not have the same Danish language skills as the mother tongue speaking Danish students' (p. 11). Thus, the construction of 'the bilingual student' compared to the 'Danish students' as one deprived of linguistic and cultural resources is clear. In research literature about the newly arrived students, it has been pointed out that newly arrived students are often depicted through discourses of cognitive or cultural inferiority or 'trauma' who need to be integrated rather than depicting them as active knowing subjects (see e.g., Brännström, 2021b). Simultaneously we can point out that especially in Finland and Sweden the policy emphasis on teaching and learning students' first languages also challenges this notion to some extent.

Conclusions and discussion

In line with the Nordic egalitarian discourse, the analysed policies in these countries can be described in many respects as well developed, aiming for equal possibilities for newly arrived students. However, considering the research on students with migrant backgrounds, we find that newly arrived students in all three countries end up in many ways in a similar place, with common factors being underachievement, bullying, discrimination, racism, marginalisation and not continuing their education. As stated at the outset, similar to many other countries, in these three Nordic countries there is a substantial achievement gap between students with migrant backgrounds and those without. Thus, the diversification is produced within these educational systems and the discourses they produce on the newly arrived students.

We have argued that the policies concerning newly arrived students construct the newly arrived students as 'in lack of' which is a typical way of depicting for instance ethnic minority students (see e.g., Helakorpi et al., 2020; Troyna, 1989). However, the Finnish and Swedish policies also to some extent challenge this through their emphasis on students' first language teaching and learning. In this respect, Denmark stands out by not having mother tongue instruction as a central right. While a monolingual norm is emphasised in Denmark and Sweden, Finland is a bit more supportive of multilingualism at least at the policy level. In Denmark and Finland, the partial invisibility of newly arrived students in policies may result in lumping together all students with migrant backgrounds as one homogenous group and with little knowledge about the diverse situations of diverse students.

Bearing these critiques in mind, we have also suggested that especially the Finnish and Swedish policies are fairly well developed and would allow for good practices for the education of newly arrived students. They frame practices for preparatory classes and the transfer to ordinary classes, which also supports the students' learning of their home languages and cultures. However, this can also create feelings of isolation and otherness since the instruction takes place in separate groups. We suggest that there is something in the school practices and cultures that result in students with migrant

backgrounds such as newly arrived students having a statistically higher risk of not reaching their educational potential.

Previous literature confirms that one of the problems in all three countries is that by being labeled as 'newly arrived', 'students with migrant background' or 'bilingual students', students are from the beginning not a part of the normality in school but regarded as different and problematic (see Brännström, 2021a; Horst & Gitz-Johansen, 2010; Juva & Holm, 2016). Furthermore, previous research shows that school cultures privilege white and middle-class students (Beach & Dovemark, 2019; Dovemark & Beach, 2016; Huilla, 2022). Previous studies also show that racism is embedded in the educational systems of all these three countries (see e.g., Arnebäck & Jämte, 2012; Dovemark, 2013; Helakorpi, 2020; Horst, 2017; Odenbring & Johansson, 2019; Rosales & Jonsson, 2019). Drawing on the analysis in this article, we suggest that the policies lack a clear emphasis on the discrimination and racism students racialised as non-white face, and an emphasis on inclusive school cultures.

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