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Control and agency in student–teacher relations: a cross–cultural perspective on Finnish and Korean comprehensive schools

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on a cross-cultural, qualitative study in Finnish and Korean comprehensive schools, we explore how teacher control and student agency are manifested and exercised in the teaching and learning practices of the "official school" and in the student–teacher interactions of the "informal school". We also elaborate on how students reflect on control and agency. Bernstein's concepts of framing and classification are employed as a theoretical lens with which to examine control, agency and hierarchy. Data consists of school observations and interviews with students aged 12 to 14 and their teachers, conducted in six schools. The findings indicate that student agency is intensively constrained in their participation in teaching-learning practices. The analysis also reveals a paradox where students do not welcome increasing their agency through student-oriented lessons. Moreover, the controlling and caring roles of teachers and the exertion and limitation of student agency appear differently in the Finnish and Korean schools studied. Students seem to desire a refined balance between control and agency while revealing conforming and self-critical attitudes towards the school system and teacher control. Finally, our analyses of control, agency and hierarchy among school members leads this article into a discussion of democratic school culture from a cross-cultural perspective.

Introduction

Student agency in education encompasses contradictory interpretations (Rönnlund, 2010, 2014). On the one hand, in many post-industrial societies including Finland and the Republic of Korea (Korea), the agency of learners is specified as one of the focal points of the national curricula (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.; Korean National Curriculum Information Center, n.d.; see also Eurydice, 2017). For example, promoting student self-directed learning abilities is frequently mentioned in the Finnish and Korean national curricula. Related to this, there have been critical views on how student agency is contextualised in education policies and curricular reforms, and researchers have discussed the phenomenon as a manifestation of neo-liberal education

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policies that define the identity of students as self-responsible and performative learners in marketised schooling (Beach & Dovemark, 2009; Jeffrey & Troman, 2011; Rönnlund, 2020).

Conversely, the Finnish and Korean curricula encourage increased student agency through autonomous activities in their classes and school communities in order to develop democratic schooling and cultivate a sense of democratic citizenship among students (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.; Korean National Curriculum Information Center, n.d.). However, in practice, the restriction of student rights and agency by means of school control still exists in contemporary mass schooling (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2000). From an institutional perspective, school is an institution which students should attend and adapt to the regulations of in order to obtain a diploma and be integrated into society as future workers, rather than a place where they enjoy emancipation and the rights of citizens. Thus, many scholars have insisted that student agency and their active participation in everyday pedagogic practices and in other parts of school life still need to be improved for the sake of their democratic schooling (Baroutsis, McGregor, & Mills, 2016; Rönnlund, 2010, 2014; Vinterek, 2010).

The aim of this study is to explore the multifaceted manners in which teacher control and student agency are manifested and exercised in the various pedagogic practices of everyday school life. Our focus is on teaching and learning practices in the "official school" and student–teacher interactions in the "informal school". The official school consists of the national/school curriculum, teaching-learning practices, pedagogy and formal hierarchies, such as timetables and school rules. The informal school indicates unofficial interactions among students, among teachers and between school members whose positions are different, such as the interactions between students and teachers as detailed in this article (Gordon et al., 2000). The official school brings order to school life, whereas the informal school is more spontaneous and constantly changing (Paju, 2011). We also pay attention to student reflections on their experience of agency and control. By agency, we refer to student capacity to increase their own control and to make and carry out their decisions in relation to teaching-learning practices and other informal interactions with teachers (cf. Bernstein, 1996; Gordon, 2006). Furthermore, we discuss the pedagogic practices and interactions between students and teachers in relation to democratic schooling. In this study, democratic schooling denotes school culture where students exercise their agency by engaging in actual decision-making that consists of constructing, maintaining and reconstructing control, order and social habits in school life (cf. Bernstein, 1996, p. 7; Dewey, 1916/2010).

Student agency, participation and influence have been covered by a substantial number of studies in the field of school ethnography and sociology of education (e.g. Gordon, 2006; Gordon et al., 2000; Hjelmér, Lappalainen, & Rosvall, 2010; Klette et al., 2018; Rosvall, 2011). As several studies have elaborated, in institutionalised educational settings the balance between student agency and teacher control is a pedagogic dilemma (cf. Anttila, Turtiainen, Varje, & Väänänen, 2018; Cho, 2000; Gordon, Holland, Lahelma, & Thomson, 2008; Park, 2002). For example, students have constantly exercised their agency, which rejects the authoritative roles of teachers and school structures (Lanas & Corbett, 2011). Moreover, student agency can be interpreted and performed in a number of diverse ways, depending on the given institutional and sociocultural contexts (see Hjelmér, Lappalainen, & Rosvall, 2014; Lahelma & Gordon, 2010). In line with previous studies, this cross-cultural

study can contribute to understanding the multifaceted manners in which teacher control and student agency are manifested and exercised in various pedagogic practices and sociocultural contexts.

In the following sections, we briefly present the sociocultural contexts of Finnish and Korean comprehensive schooling, the theoretical frameworks and the process of data collection and analysis. Subsequently, control and agency are described and analysed in two sections: teaching-learning practices and informal student–teacher interactions in daily routines. The findings are then synthesised in connection with the theoretical concepts of classification and framing (Bernstein, 1996). In the final section, we discuss control and agency from the perspective of democratic schooling.

Sociocultural contexts of Finnish and Korean comprehensive schooling

Finnish and Korean comprehensive schooling (primary and lower-secondary education) provide school-aged children with single-tracked, state-funded compulsory education for nine years (Yoon & Järvinen, 2016). In both countries, the national core curriculum presents the missions of basic education and provides guidelines concerning the aims and core content of subjects and student evaluation. However, Finnish teachers are assigned a relatively high level of autonomy in implementing the national curriculum. Compared to the Finnish case, the Korean national curriculum prescribes in detail what to teach and how to teach it (Kwon & Kim, 2009).

In order to explore teacher control and student agency in everyday school life, we should understand the roles of schoolteachers in each society. Contemporary school practices in local contexts are increasingly influenced by globalisation and supranational organisations (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2003). However, varying sociocultural tendencies and institutional traits still seem to be linked to the roles of schoolteachers in Finnish and Korean schools and, accordingly, to teacher control and student agency. The identity of Korean teachers tends to be characterised more as care workers than as teaching experts because they are more accountable to society in general regarding student care and administration/guidance of their students' school lives (Kim, 2016). The lack of an educational welfare system also leads to the concentration of care/controlling duties to Korean teachers (cf. Kim, 2011). In contrast, Finnish teachers tend to define their identity more as teaching experts; in addition, comprehensive schoolteachers are conferred a higher degree of respect and professional autonomy than in many other advanced liberal countries (Kwon & Kim, 2009; Simola, 2005; Simola, Kauko, & Varjo et al., 2017). Furthermore, the tasks concerning student care and welfare services are distributed by means of more extensive and systemised interventions in the form of special education teachers and student support teams (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.; Kim, 2011).

Despite these different sociocultural contexts, an authoritarian ethos is historically found in both Finnish and Korean schooling. Because Korean modern schooling grew from the legacy of Japanese colonisation and existed during three decades of military regimes, the authoritative and totalitarian flavour remains in the organisation of schools and in the day-to-day school culture (Kang, 2007). Similarly, an Eastern authoritarian ethos permeates Finnish society and its schooling; many teachers prefer teacher-centred pedagogy in practice and endorse a professional distance from students, which distinguishes Finnish teachers somewhat from their Nordic counterparts (Simola et al., 2017).

Theoretical frameworks

Bernstein's (1996) concepts of classification and framing were employed as our theoretical lens with which to analyse the relationships between students and teachers and to examine the hierarchies in the official and informal schools. According to Bernstein (1996, p. 19), power always operates in the relations between different categories of social groups (e.g. students and teachers), and power relations create and legitimise boundaries between the groups. In a school with strong classifications, there are strong hierarchies and separation between the groups of school members (students, teachers, principals), and the relationships between the different categories are weak because they are strictly insulated from one another. In contrast, a school with weak classifications shows weak boundaries between various groups of school members, which allow for the establishment of alternative power bases and more complex power lines across the boundaries (Bernstein, 1996, pp. 20–26). In addition to classification, framing is an effective tool for analysis of the degree of control and agency between teachers and students. In a classroom of strong framing, the relationships between a teacher and students are socially hierarchical but also pedagogically stratified because a teacher exercises explicit control over the selection, sequence and pacing of lesson content and the criteria of knowledge to be evaluated. Where framing is weak, however, students have more apparent control over lesson content and teaching-learning contexts (Bernstein, 1996, pp. 27–28, 61–62). Bernstein proposed two types of discourses regulated by framing. Regulative discourse refers to the forms that hierarchical relations embed in the pedagogic relation and to expectations about the conduct, character and manners of the acquirers. Instructional discourse denotes selection, sequence, pacing and criteria of the knowledge (Bernstein, 1996, pp. 27–28).

Many previous studies (e.g. Arnot & Reay, 2004; Nylund et al., 2018; Rosvall, 2011) used framing and classification as concepts to uncover the manifestations of control and student agency in teaching-learning practices, as well as the segregation of curricula in the realm of the official school. Based on the previous applications of Bernstein's concepts in educational research, we sought to extend the scope of pedagogic practices by also incorporating informal interactions between students and teachers in daily routines. By applying Bernstein's theoretical concepts to both the official and informal schools, the intention was to broaden the application of Bernstein's theory, highlighting how power and control permeate into different layers of school life. From student perspectives, the experience of their agency through informal school life (e.g. ways of communication) can be as crucial as the increase of their influence in official school life (e.g. lesson contents) in order to live as democratic citizens (cf. Lundahl & Olson, 2013). The abovementioned theoretical frameworks were useful to explore power relations and separation among school members (i.e. students, teachers and principals) and to analyse teacher control and student agency, and therefore to deepen the understanding of the complex, but taken-for-granted, scenes of everyday schooling in both the official and the informal schools.

Research materials and methods

The analysis of this article draws on qualitative data that were implemented from a cross-cultural perspective and inspired by an ethnographic approach. The notions

of cross-cultural and comparative research are intertwined and overlapping; however, as argued by Keränen (2001), Gómez and Kuronen (2011) and Lahelma and Gordon (2010), cross-cultural and comparative research can be distinguished in terms of data and methods, the aims of comparison, and the unit and focus of analysis. For example, cross-cultural studies mainly employ ethnographic and other qualitative data and methods and often pay attention to cross-cultural comparisons at the level of local practices and people's everyday life and experiences. The aim is to identify patterns by exploring analogical incidents across groups and contexts, however, the unit of analysis is often more wavering than in most comparative studies, i.e. not specified in advance at a detailed level. Meanwhile, comparative research has a long tradition of large-scale quantitative comparisons, i.e. comparisons are made on a large and macro-sociological scale, often at the level of the nation state. However, defined more broadly, comparative education research utilises both quantitative and qualitative data and methods (Alexander, 2000). For example in education, ethnographic methods have been proved to play a vital role in contemporary comparative research (Troman & Jeffrey, 2007), which illustrates the connections and overlaps between the cross-cultural and comparative approaches. Based on the discussions above, we perceive this paper as a cross-cultural study since it does not employ standardised data collection nor systematic comparisons. The cross-cultural perspective is primarily considered to bring broader and deeper understanding of the phenomenon that is at the centre of the study, identifying patterns and challenging taken-for-granted familiarity indwelling in schooling (cf. Lahelma & Gordon, 2010).

Considering the fact that the contribution of knowledge in cross-cultural studies depends largely on the contexts that are chosen, schools in Finland and Korea were selected. In the process of discourse formation caused by international student assessments, Finnish and Korean education systems have often been compared in terms of similarly superior student performance and contrasting social ethos surrounding education (Yoon, 2019). However, despite a great deal of attention paid to the education systems in both countries, the affective aspects of schooling such as student-teacher relations have not been actively studied as compared to student performance or competencies (cf. Yoon & Järvinen, 2016). The intention was to collect data in places where the meaning of teacher control and student agency was likely to be variously demonstrated. Meanwhile, the balance between control and agency is a common dilemma in schooling and this issue can be better understood when the data from various cultural settings, such as Finnish and Korean schools, are analysed, combined and related.

The data was produced through compressed ethnographic fieldwork (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004) in two comprehensive schools in southern Finland, and in two primary schools and two lower-secondary schools in Seoul, Korea. Interest was in early-teen students who belonged to grades six to nine, as this age group has been known to experience a strong desire to increase their agency and participation in decision-making by challenging or negotiating with teacher/school control (cf. Rönnlund, 2014).[1] In Finland, the first author (FA) conducted fieldwork following a grade six class and a grade eight class in each of two comprehensive schools, visiting each school for 12 days in the period from February to May 2016. Subsequently, FA implemented fieldwork in Korea by spending from five to eight school days in a grade six class in

each of the two primary schools and a grade nine class in each of the two lower-secondary schools from late May to mid-July 2016. All were public schools located in urban districts, selected from both middle and middle-low socioeconomic districts in order to gain diverse perspectives regarding the ordinary school life of students (Yoon, 2019).

The data consists of field notes generated through observations and interviews with students and their class teachers. The observations captured ordinary school days (lessons, break times, lunch times) and special school days such as examination days, usually started from morning until students leave school for the day. They were carried out in various school spaces, such as classrooms, corridors, school cafeterias and schoolyards (cf. Hjelmér et al., 2010, 2014). The observations were implemented in a broad sense without limiting the focus to a particular topic, however the primary aspects were as follows: "everyday teaching and learning practices" and "verbal and behavioural interactions between students and teacher". Similarly, the semi-structured student interviews consisted of further explanations of student experiences and their wishes on the above-mentioned topics, such as "the experience of influence/hierarchy/control in lessons and other school events", "their perceptions on relations with teacher" and "their wishes for their school lives". The interviews were carried out in the schools during the school day, and were conducted in Finnish, English or Korean. The length of the interviews ranged from 34 to 117 minutes. In Finland, student participants were offered their choice of language for the interview; interviews were implemented in Finnish with nine students and in English with the remaining seven. In the Finnish-language interviews, questions were given directly in Finnish by an accompanying research assistant. While following the flow of the interview content, FA asked supplementary questions in the middle and at the end of the interviews.

The fieldwork began from observations in each school; from the mid-point of the fieldwork periods, its focus shifted to interviews with students and teachers. The interviews were conducted to confirm observations and to supplement knowledge on student school lives, which were not entirely understood by observation only. The observations and interviews not only confirmed analyses drawn from each other but also uncovered varied perspectives on control and agency in student-teacher relations. In total, fieldwork was implemented in six schools for 48 school days and generated a total of 184 A4 pages of field notes, 32 transcribed student interviews (16 Korean and 16 Finnish) and eight class teacher interviews (four Korean and four Finnish).

In the process of analysis, attention was paid to similarities as well as differences, and they were explored by combining and relating data from all the schools and both countries (cf. Gómez & Kuronen, 2011; Lahelma & Gordon, 2010). Initially, the data was coded and sorted into the two layers of school life – the official school and the informal school (Gordon et al., 2000; Paju, 2011) – focusing on teaching-learning practices and student interactions with teachers via daily routines. In the second stage of coding, data for the official and informal school layers were encoded separately, keeping the data of each fieldwork school discrete. In this process, which was mainly inductive (Charmaz, 2014), noticeable features concerning the manifestation of teacher control and student agency, as well as student perspectives and thoughts on them, were identified and coded. These codes were organised first into categories and subcategories and then into themes. In the third phase, synthesised analysis focused on relating the two layers and the institutional/sociocultural contexts to each other.

Based on the analysis process, we elaborate on the most relevant and distinct findings about the aspects of control, agency and hierarchy/separation shown in the two layers of schooling: student agency was intensively constrained in teaching-learning practices and teacher control and student agency in daily routines appeared to be different due to the roles of the teachers.

Findings

The official school: limited agency in teaching and learning practices

Observations revealed that student agency was commonly regulated in strongly-framed teaching-learning practices in all the schools in the study. Strong pedagogic control in terms of selecting lesson content, pacing and sequencing activities and deciding teaching-learning methods was observed as a general pattern. For example, a history teacher in one Finnish school decided the lesson content and the pace of lesson activities, and the students took notes following the pace of the teacher's explanation. Moreover, the history lessons were conducted by whole-class teaching in which the teacher speech took more time than that of the students; student speech usually only occurred when the teacher asked questions. The strongly-framed pedagogic practices in this whole-class teaching, initiated by teacher questions and continued by the students' brief answers and teacher comments, seemed to be effective in transmitting crucial knowledge in a mass-populated classroom environment within a limited lesson time (cf. Beach & Öhrn, 2011, p. 11).

However, there were variations among teachers and some teachers carried out more student-oriented lessons by encouraging active student participation through small-group or individual work and by decreasing the lecture portion that targeted the whole class. In such lessons, students could increase their agency to some extent; for example they resolved given tasks by discussing them with their group members, they decided on the distribution of group work among group members and they negotiated the amount of homework with teachers. Nevertheless, even in the student-participatory lessons, student agency still seemed to be limited as concerns the essential decisions regarding pedagogic practices, as shown in the following example:

> The teacher introduces students to a group activity, which is changing a song lyric so the contents emphasise the seriousness of environmental pollution and its solution. […] Yuri's group (Group 2) decides to change the song lyrics of 'JJang-gu'. Group 1 decides to change the lyrics of 'Dulli', and two girls, Sora and Eunmi, go to the teacher's computer and search for the original lyrics. Then, Yuri and Yoonah from Group 2 go to the front of the classroom and search for the lyrics of the chosen song on the teacher's computer. […] After that, as the students of Group 1 go to the front again and play their chosen song with the teacher's computer, some of the Group 2 students wave their hands to the rhythm, and Yuri hums a few lines of the song. They do not use their smartphones to search for the lyrics in the lesson. (Field notes, Korea)

In this example, the teacher exercised strong instructional discourse in the student group work in terms of selecting the lesson content and learning methods. The topic (seriousness of environmental pollution and its solution) and the presentation method (changing lyrics) were the result of the teacher's predetermined intention. Moreover, strong framing was found in the use of the learning tools and school spaces. As the

students' own smartphones were collected and stored in the teaching staffroom during the entire school day due to school regulations, the students had to wait their turn to use their teacher's computer. In addition, because all the groups did their work in the same classroom, the groups seemed to distract each other when playing their songs using the teacher's computer. The classroom and corridor areas were designed by strong framing that did not support various groups working at the same time; the teacher also employed strong framing in using these spaces.

Meanwhile, student interviews indicated that their relationship with teachers during lessons was crucial to their experience of agency; some student interviewees elaborated especially on the teacher attitudes regarding what counts as legitimate knowledge. They said they felt appreciated and more respected when teachers showed permissive attitudes towards what was considered correct answers or information:

> FA: Could you give me one example of how teachers respect your opinion?
> Olli: When someone [a student] says that's not right or like this information is wrong, and then he [the teacher] is like "Okay, I will look for better information for this". (Interview, Finland)

This can be interpreted as Olli relating student agency with the transformation of the roles of teachers and the expansion of the boundary of legitimate knowledge. He seemed to think that their agency could be extended if the teacher's role were to be shifted from a transmitter of absolute knowledge to a facilitator of individual knowledge construction and of sharing it with other people in the classroom (cf. Beach & Öhrn, 2011, p. 11).

From the episode above, it could be assumed that students advocated student-oriented lessons where they could exercise more influence in pedagogic practices. However, paradoxically, many students appreciated lessons in which their teachers decided on the topics and activities. Student appreciation for strongly-framed teaching was noticeable especially in the core subjects. For example, Juho perceived his maths teacher's teaching methods of using the same routine as comfortable:

> Juho: We always have the same ritual. I mean, we come in [from the corridor], the teacher says everyone's name, and he sees who's like there who's not, and then we look at the homework. There are always three people who go and do them on the [black] board [in front], so he explains like what's wrong with this one and how to do them right. Then he explains a new topic, and then we begin doing exercises.
> [...]
> FA: What do you think about it then?
> Juho: I think it's quite good because then we know what to do [...]. (Interview, Finland)

Juho seemed to be accustomed to and satisfied with the strongly-framed lessons where routines concerning the sequence of lesson activities gently guided students from when they entered the classroom until they finished the last activity of the lesson. In fact, some students explicitly expressed their dissatisfaction with weakly-framed lessons and student-participatory pedagogy. In the following excerpt, Bora revealed her dissatisfaction about her maths teacher's teaching methods, arguing that such teaching did not prepare her well enough for exams:

> Bora: The maths teacher usually doesn't give [teacher-oriented] lessons, but he does something like jigsaw learning [task-distributed cooperative learning], so we watch

a video clip at home, write a comment on it, make a teaching plan and teach other kids in groups and solve exercises, nothing else. Honestly, I don't like it. […] I can understand best when a teacher teaches basic things, but he doesn't do it by himself, but he makes video clips and uploads them. It's not that easy to understand by watching the videos. […] The previous maths teacher emphasised note writing a lot, so she made us to set up formulas to all the exercises. And I used to get good marks because of this. But this year, I think this has influenced me a lot, our maths teacher didn't do much about how to set up formulas for open-ended exam questions, so I didn't get a good enough mark on the exam. (Interview, Korea)

Bora seemed to regard student agency encouraged by weakly-framed instruction as a confusing and contradictory thing that did not guide her to reach the criteria of correct answers (specified formulas), thus not helping her to achieve a "good enough mark". She appeared to request strongly-classified and framed knowledge acquisition at the expense of having more influence on pedagogic practices. This may be interpreted as that achievement-driven students, such as Bora, did not endorse student-oriented lessons in practice because they were fully aware of the connection between narrowly-defined legitimate knowledge and a better chance of succeeding in assessments, which function as a tool for selection in educational competition (cf. Beach & Öhrn, 2011). The contradiction between weakly-framed, student-oriented lessons and student discontent is reminiscent of what Rosvall (2011) depicted in his analysis of social science lessons at an upper-secondary school in which students felt uncomfortable with weakly-framed instructions and asked for explicit framing of pedagogic practices.

Furthermore, as Bora's interview excerpt alludes, symptoms of instrumental and conforming attitudes of students were observed in all the schools. Several girls and boys experiencing puberty, such as Anna in the following example, mentioned that they would like to change their own attitudes towards teacher teaching methods or relationships with teachers to better their school lives:

FA: If you could make your school life better, what would you like to change?
Anna: Umm, my attitude to the physical education teacher because I think my grades are dropping because of arguments with the teacher. (Interview, Finland)

Anna thus exhibited a self-critical attitude, willing and wanting to adjust her own behaviours to the evaluation system. Such a conforming attitude was also shown among students who were labelled as intractable and low-achieving. The episode below depicts that Sumi, the most "problematic" student in her class, revealed quite submissive attitudes towards examination, the representative control mechanism of school.

Sumi lays her face down on the desk crossly and plays with her pencil by moving her fingers. […] She sits up and draws floral leaves with the pencil on the exam sheet. […] She lies face down entirely on the desk again. […] Time is up, and the supervising teacher collects student answer sheets. After the exam, Sumi gets out of the classroom. Dohun brings a paper where correct answers are written, and he calls out the answers to his classmates. Students mark their exam sheets. Sumi comes back to the classroom and writes down the answers to her exam sheet standing by Dohun. (Field notes during mathematics final exam, Korea)

In the episode, Sumi did not attempt to increase her agency by ignoring the control system or requesting changes of lessons based on her frustration with school achievement. Student attitudes in this study, including Sumi and other low-achieving students,

were somewhat distinguished from the study-denigrating manners that intractable adolescents from disadvantaged social backgrounds had shown in previous studies (cf. MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1977/2004). Signs of frustration and dissatisfaction were observed among the students, however their frustration seemed to be channelled through rather submissive attitudes and conforming behaviours.

In sum, student agency was controlled by strongly-framed pedagogic practices. Furthermore, although some teachers employed student-oriented instruction by decreasing the lecturing portion and encouraging student participation via small-group activities, they still maintained strongly-framed instructional discourse concerning crucial issues such as lesson content and learning methods. In other words, student agency encouraged in the student-oriented lessons remained subordinate and illusory because the seemingly weak instructional discourse locked student agency within the boundary of small-group work or within the freedom of choosing optional activities and thus did not seem to fully guarantee student active engagement in their learning (cf. Arnot & Reay, 2004, pp. 145–146). Moreover, student agency was constrained in the circumstances where students enacted self-reflective and submissive attitudes. Their frustration with teaching and learning practices was not demonstrated in oppositional manners to any great extent.

The informal school: differing control in daily routines

In all the schools, student agency was limited not only in the official school scenes but also in their daily routines that accompanied informal interactions with teachers; student conduct and manners were constantly supervised and regulated. Such normal regulation of student agency consisted of a hierarchy among school members and control by teachers. The hierarchy and control permeated and were routinised in the schooling culture, for example, through everyday greeting rituals:

> As the teacher opens the door of the classroom, students who were waiting in the corridor go inside and take a seat. She asks the students to stand up and exchange greetings.
> Teacher: Hi everyone, how are you?
> Students: (with weak and mechanical voices) I'm fine, thank you. How are you? (Field notes, Finland)
> Class teacher: Please clean your [responsible] areas well. That's it [for today].
> Class president: Attention! Bow to the teacher! (Field notes, Korea)

As shown from the above examples, the hierarchical greeting rituals seemed to function as a micro-level power mechanism that culturally justifies the position of the teacher as a controlling adult and students as those to be controlled (cf. Beach & Öhrn, 2011, p. 11). Moreover, the hierarchy seemed to be intensified by the student management system and school rules that provided teachers with authority to regulate student conduct. In the Finnish schools, many teachers would record a student's absence or lateness and other noteworthy aspects of student behaviour or development (e.g. active participation, disturbance in the lesson, homework) at every lesson using a web interface. The marks and comments that teachers made were communicated to students and their guardians through the system. In addition, student behaviour was part of the criteria in the evaluation of each subject; thus, behaviour was recorded using a number from four to ten in a transcript of the students' academic records. In the Korean schools, teachers would supervise various

behavioural student matters (e.g. absence or lateness, behaviour during lessons and break times, appearance) using spoken or written rules. In most of the Korean schools, a penalty system was also implemented to regulate student behaviour. The misbehaviour of students who accumulated penalty points above certain limits was communicated to their guardians or the students were assigned activities, such as cleaning their school area, as punishment.

However, the strong classification and framing between teachers and students was more intensively and widely observed in the Korean schools. The authoritative and hierarchical attitudes of teachers and the rather compliant manners of students were also found in the Finnish schools; however, in general, there was relatively weak classification among the Finnish school members. For instance, the relationships between principals and students, the greatest and the least power-holders at school, appeared to be somewhat different in the Finnish and Korean schools. Principals in the Finnish schools would meet students by teaching a few lessons or counselling students individually, which connotes that classification disconnecting communications and interactions between the upper level and lower level of the school hierarchy were less rigid (cf. Bernstein, 1996). On the contrary, principals in the Korean schools seldom participated in teaching lessons or personal conversations where they were supposed to interact with students; this implies that communication between the upper position and lower position of the school hierarchy rarely occurred, and insulation between them was strong (cf. Bernstein, 1996).

Another noticeable pattern shown in student-teacher relationships at the Korean and Finnish schools was that the controlling and caring roles of teachers were framed differently. Class teachers in the Korean schools exercised intensive control. The intensity of the teacher control was clearly seen in the amount of time the class teachers spent with their own students. Observations revealed that, in the Korean schools, both grade six and grade nine students met their class teacher at every morning assembly and closing assembly, which amounted to 40–60 minutes per day. Their school days would start with their class teachers checking attendance, announcing changes in school timetables, emphasising compliance with certain school rules or informing students of school events, and they would end with class teacher comments asking the students to clean their own classroom and the school area that their class was responsible for. Furthermore, the class teachers were in charge of extensive student control and care work, such as supervising class students during breaks and lunch times (grade six) and collecting and storing student mobile phones during the whole school day (grade nine).

> 8:30 a.m. Class teacher comes into the home classroom and checks the mobile phone collection bag of the class. She says, 'Hey guys, hand in your phones.'
> […]
> A girl brings a black-coloured bag from the teaching staff's room and comes into the home classroom. She opens it. Inside the bag, student numbers are written on the small pockets, and they are filled with the student smartphones. Students approach the bag and get their smartphones back. (Field notes during morning and closing assembly, Korea)

The Korean class teachers also mentioned that they perform various student care and administration duties, such as "coping with school violence, supervising student cleaning, and stats and reporting duties" (Interviews, Korea). Moreover, the observations revealed that Korean class teachers tended to cultivate a collectivistic ethos in their own class. For instance, the class teachers organised a system of role division, in which all students were supposed to assume a certain duty regarding the cleaning or management

of their classroom life. Some of the teachers also encouraged students to write in an open diary through which students and their class teacher shared stories and emotions concerning the student life in and outside of school. A communal lifestyle was emphasised through their roles as members of the class. Due to this strong framing, which organised the school life of students, the roles of class teacher as a discipline-provider and caregiver and the roles of students as minors who were not yet entitled full agency appeared more distinctly in the Korean schools.

In the Finnish schools, class teacher student control and care were rather less intensive compared with the control and care of the Korean teachers. Observations depicted that students arrived at their classroom in the morning immediately before the first lesson started, and the students left school after the last lesson ended, without attending a morning or closing assembly led by their class teacher. Although the Finnish grade six students would spend time with their class teacher for at least two to three lesson hours and be informed about school-related matters every day, the control and care work of class teachers were exerted in less-intensive forms compared with those of the Korean teachers. Moreover, observations and teacher interviews indicated that the care duties for the students was not allocated to the class teacher alone but was also distributed to the subject teachers, special education teacher, school principal, career counsellor and so on.

Furthermore, the Finnish class teachers exerted less control, and student agency increased, among older students. Observations of, and interviews about, the grade eight student school lives revealed that the class teachers met their own students once a week, using 75 minutes of the teacher's class time. It was the only available time for face-to-face interaction between the students and their class teachers if the class teachers did not teach any subject lessons to their own students. Moreover, the teachers neither regulated student appearance/dress nor controlled the use of smartphones during breaks. Some teachers also permitted students to listen to music through their phones while they worked on individual tasks during lessons:

> Students do the practice tasks which are presented in their textbook. The teacher circulates his classroom. Some students raise their hands while solving problems. The teacher approaches and teaches them one by one. [...] Jessica and her friend do the practice tasks while listening to music through her phone, putting on each side of earphones. (Field notes during mathematics lesson, Finland)

In sum, as shown in the example above, due to this weaker framing that supervised student conduct, the roles of class teacher as discipline-provider and caregiver were less visible; and the students, especially grade eight students, were expected to become independent individuals who take responsibility for their conduct and had more leeway to exercise their agency in the Finnish schools.

In spite of the differences reflected in the teacher-student interactions of the Korean and Finnish schools, teachers in the fieldwork schools implemented varying pedagogic practices regarding the control of student behaviour. In this respect, the student interviews revealed diverse and ambivalent desires to find a balance between their agency and teacher control.

> FA: What kind of teachers are good teachers for you?
> Juho: Well, a teacher can't be too tough with students, but a bit tough, has to be, because if there's a teacher that doesn't say anything about students being like doing stuff on their phones or talking or yelling and all that, then that's a bad thing. [...]

> FA: What do you mean by a too tough teacher?
> Juho: If a teacher doesn't understand students and doesn't know that they're just teenagers […] if teachers just say that's forbidden, you can't do that, then […] it can get really annoying because you cannot do it even if it's not like a bad thing. (Interview, Finland)

As Juho implies, the issue of balance between student agency and teacher control seemed to be important but complex. The predicament of balancing agency and control appeared when they described teacher practices that managed and controlled the class atmosphere during lessons. Some students preferred the loose control of teachers in which students have more leeway, whereas some supported the tightly woven control employed by their teachers in disordered situations. Especially when teachers' varying pedagogic practices confronted the youthful agency and the time-space structure of mass schooling that imposes restrictions on student agency, the tasks balancing student agency and teacher control seemed to be demanding (cf. Yoon, 2018).

In all the schools, strong classification appeared in the hierarchy between students and teachers, which shaped their identities and roles through their interactions. In addition, pronounced framing was manifested in the teacher use of control in daily routines. While some teachers sought to transfer their authority to some extent and to increase student agency by using weakly-framed regulative discourse, others maintained strongly-framed regulative discourse and the traditional role of the teacher as a caring but disciplining adult (cf. Bernstein, 1996). Furthermore, in spite of the difficulty in discussing pedagogic practices from a cross-cultural perspective due to the complexity of schooling (Lahelma & Gordon, 2010; Simola et al., 2017), somewhat differing degrees of classification and framing appeared in the Finnish and Korean schools. The vertical classification among the school hierarchies (students/teachers/teaching staff, e.g. principals) and the controlling-caring duties of class teachers were more clearly observed in the Korean schools.

Synthesised analysis of findings

In this article, we have presented how student agency was constrained or exercised and how students reflected on their experience of control and agency in their official (teaching-learning practices) and informal (student interactions with teachers in daily routines) school lives.

Even though it is difficult to argue about agency in the two separate analytical dimensions of schooling due to their interconnectedness, we interpret that student agency was challenged the most in the official school, that is, their participation in teaching-learning practices (cf. Rönnlund, 2014). It is noteworthy that many students also seemed to be more accustomed to the strong control manifested in the official school compared to that in the informal school. Moreover, many students did not welcome weakly-framed teacher instruction methods in student-oriented lessons. We argue that the contradiction between weakly-framed teaching methods and strongly-framed knowledge evaluation underlies this paradoxical situation where the students rejected increase in their participation and agency in teaching-learning practices (cf. Beach & Öhrn, 2011, p. 11; Rosvall, 2011). Regarding this, several teachers, especially teachers in the Korean schools, indicated that their autonomy in creating the types and criteria of assessments was limited due to the external evaluation

system and competition-oriented social ethos; they felt pressure to prepare their students to adapt to standardised assessments for future competition and selection.

Through this cross-cultural lens into school life, we realised that student lives were rife with pedagogic practices which entailed rigid classification and framing in all the schools. However, the vertical classifications between students and teachers and among teaching staff, as well as the roles of disciplined students and controlling/caregiving adults, were more noticeable in the Korean schools. In the same vein, stronger framing was found in the daily routines of the Korean schools, such as the class teacher-intensive control and care work represented by morning and closing assembly every day and the ban on using smartphones throughout the entire school day. The observations depicted that intense student control and care exercised by Korean class teachers seemed to be strongly-rooted in the culture of the Korean schools. We interpret this pattern as being related to the institutional background of the Korean society where a liberal welfare system is dominant, and the major responsibility for educational welfare is shifted to an individual caregiver (in this case, the class teacher) (cf. Esping-Andersen, 1990; Iversen & Stephens, 2008; Jang & Jeong, 2011; Kim, 2011). We also interpret this pattern as being related to the Korean social ethos in which schoolteachers are expected to fulfil responsibilities for student care and administration, whereas private education providers assume and prepare the ground for academic success (cf. Kim, 2016). Under such a social ethos and the insufficient educational welfare system, class teachers exercised strong control in order to provide student care and administer their students' school lives. Consequently, the classes observed in the Korean schools became a crucial collectivistic unit where educational welfare was provided and the sense of bond was strengthened by instigating intense control and care work by class teachers at the expense of student agency.

In the Finnish schools, fairly weak vertical classification between students and teachers and among teaching staff was observed. In addition, the universal educational welfare system rooted in social democracy would have contributed to weakening the control and care work of class teachers by distributing student care work to student support teams composed of the school principal, school nurse, social worker and psychologist (cf. Antikainen, 2006; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Iversen & Stephens, 2008; Kim, 2011). Thus, while student care was provided through class teacher-centred system in the Korean schools, this responsibility was distributed to several staff members in the Finnish schools. Moreover, the teachers in the Finnish schools did not perform strong framing as concerns regulating student use of mobile phones, appearance and clothing. In these circumstances, the students had more opportunities to exercise their agency related to individual rights and privacy. This may also be interpreted as a sign of governmentality in transition from the industrial discipline represented by surveillance and physical control to post-industrial self-regulation through optimising emotion (cf. Han, 2015; Yoon, 2018).

As noted by Wong (2016), not only the sociocultural and institutional contexts but also other multi-layered contexts such as teacher education systems and local school contexts would have influenced and shaped the roles of teachers and students and their interactions. Nevertheless, the variation of classification among school members and the teacher control and student agency observed and heard in each school seemed to be related to 1) the sociocultural expectations of the roles of schoolteachers and 2) the

educational welfare system in the Finnish and Korean societies. In all the Finnish and Korean schools, a complex combination of collectivism and individualism in terms of the school culture and the education welfare system was reflected.

Discussion and conclusion: control, agency and democratic schooling

In this study, pedagogic practices and student interaction with their teachers revealed complex power relationships in which student agency was controlled and exercised in various ways. However, in general, student agency was intensively limited in every corner of school life. Accordingly, students who were in conflict with this control struggled and hoped to find a refined balance between their agency and teacher control. Meanwhile, many students also revealed conforming and submissive attitudes towards the schooling system and teacher control. Our lens into these scenes and listening to the student voices were naturally connected to the issue of democratic school culture in the transition from the disciplinary school to the school of self-disciplined and conforming individuals.

We described that many student participants experienced and spoke about aspects of the disciplinary school. They seemed not to be fully recognised as school members who were entitled to participation in the official and informal decision-making encompassing teaching-learning practices and their conduct in daily routines (cf. Hjelmér et al., 2014; Rönnlund, 2014). Students were extensively isolated from the experience of agency that alters the degree of classification and framing in school life. The limitation of agency hindered students from growing as democratic citizens through democratic school culture (cf. Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Dewey, 1916/2010). This study also witnessed and portrayed the school of self-disciplining and conforming students. Surely, many student participants revealed signs of frustration with teaching and learning practices. However, their attitudes and behaviour appeared different from the resistant behaviours of "lads" (Willis, 1977/2004) who could build up the anti-schooling culture and choose manual occupations in the growing second industrialisation. The anxiety stemming from the fact that respectable efforts would not guarantee a stable future in the era of the fourth industrial revolution and uncertainty might have infiltrated the conforming attitudes of the students. As the student abandonment of their own agency in teaching-learning practices and "intractable" student submissive attitudes shown in the exam scene indicate, many students tended to accommodate themselves to the evaluation system and strongly-framed pedagogic practices. This indicates that student agency and student right to grow as democratic citizens appear to be in a more subtle and complex predicament, compared to the lads' (Willis, 1977/2004) generation.

As an extension of Bernstein's theory, this paper suggests that the relation between student agency and teacher control needs to be studied in connection with evaluation system and social ethos. In this regard, future studies could elaborate more on student voluntary abandonment of their own agency in the performance-based school/society and its effect on student growth as democratic citizens. Leaning on and extending Bernstein's theory, this paper also sought to extend the scope of discussion of pedagogic practices, by illuminating not only official school life but also the informal interactions between students and teachers. We consider that the hierarchy and control that occurred in the informal school are interesting topics for further study, since values

and school culture are conveyed and acquired through ways of informal communication in student-teacher relations and school communities (cf. Bernstein, 1996).

Our findings suggest that democratic schooling is conceivable when boundaries made by strong classification among school members are permeable (cf. Bernstein, 1996, pp. 24–25) and when active and unconstrained interaction among school members across the school hierarchy (students, teachers, principals) is fostered (cf. Dewey, 1916/2010). A democratic school culture is also possible when schooling engages students in actual participation that leads to the construction, maintenance and reconstruction of the balance between agency and control (cf. Bernstein, 1996; Dewey, 1916/2010). Thus, an essential question is how teachers and students accept or alter their roles that are embedded in the control-agency relations in school.

This cross-cultural study of Finnish and Korean schools also suggests that both individualistic and collectivistic pedagogic practices/schooling systems have implications for democratic schooling. For example, even though student school life was still under considerable control, the class teachers in the Finnish schools encouraged student independent school life management and respected their rights to self-expression and privacy more actively. The Korean school scenes revealed strong control exerted over student behaviour and a steep hierarchy among differently-positioned school members; however, the class teachers and students often promoted communal ethos through their class life. Thus, another crucial task would be how student individual and collective agency and democratic schooling can be restored and strengthened under contemporary educational policies that induce the spirit of individual choice and shift the responsibility for schooling outcomes to students and teachers (cf. Sung, 2011; Varjo, Lundström, & Kalalahti, 2018). This study presented multiple profiles of individualism and collectivism in changing schools. What matters is the values of individualism and collectivism that should be cultivated through the interactions among students and teachers.

Note

1. In order to study the school life of early-teen adolescents, FA collected data from two Finnish comprehensive schools, which commonly provide schooling for students who belonged to grades one to nine. Subsequently, FA collected Korean data in two primary schools and two lower-secondary schools, which correspond to Finnish comprehensive schools.

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