

“We Kind of do not Dare to Tell Everybody that we are in a Program for Disabled Students, Because Some are Afraid that they will be Made Fun of.”

Mapping Students’ Power Relations and Resistance within the Discursive Norm of Special Education

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Abstract

Implementing inclusive education has proven problematic all over the world. The reasons are multiple, but one of them can presumably be related to the way students with disabilities are “created”, viewed, and responded to as “special education students” within schools. To challenge this, we need to understand students’ position within the school. In this article, the focus is on identifying the position of students who receive special education in schools in Iceland by mapping their power relations and resistance within the discursive norm of special education. We use the method of thinking with theory and read data in accordance with Foucault’s theories of power relations and resistance and Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of line of flight and becoming. Findings show that power relations affect students variously and although students’ resistance is manifested differently between individuals, a common thread is visible when resisting their static position as special education students.

Keywords

social justice – disability studies in education – Foucault – power relations – resistance – Deleuze and Guattari – line of flight – becoming

1 Introduction

Since the Salamanca Statement first appeared more than quarter of a century ago, inclusive education has been implemented in school systems all over the world, still with mixed results, however, since the implementation has proven to be problematic (Ainscow & César, 2006; Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011; Haug, 2017; Messiou, 2017). The placement of students with disabilities is more often than not the issue when debating inclusive education (Baglieri et al., 2011) and the reason can perhaps be traced back to the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) when emphasis was placed on educating students with disabilities within general schools and special education became the teaching form. This structure has emphasized support as a placement, leaving the term of inclusive education open to interpretation (Magnússon, 2019; Naraian, 2021). In recent years, however, more emphasis has been placed on supporting and enhancing students with disabilities' participation in regular classrooms as well as that of other students who can be distinguished by various social categories, for example race, gender, or other types (CRPD, 2006; Naraian, 2011; Slee, Corcoran & Best, 2019). Thereby added weight has been given to inclusive education as a social justice issue and not merely a school reform to include students who have been labeled as disabled (Connor, 2014; Gabel & Connor, 2009; Sverrisdóttir & Van Hove, 2021).

Iceland follows international agreements on inclusive education and also meets challenges when it comes to implementing inclusive education. A recent report reveals that stakeholders at different school levels interpret inclusive education in various ways which serves as a barrier to its implementation (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017). The education system in Iceland is, however, said to be inclusive, at least in laws and regulations relating to education (Compulsory School Act, No. 91/2008; Regulation on students with special needs in upper secondary schools, No. 230/2012). In pre-school (1–6 years) and at compulsory school level (6–16 years), children are expected to attend their neighborhood school, which is mainstream (i.e., general education combined with special education) and within which they can receive support, either within the classroom or in a segregated special division. However, when students who need extensive support and have been diagnosed with intellectual disabilities enter the upper secondary school level, they are faced with a different set-up. They are not expected to apply for general education, and they cannot apply for just any school they would like because they have to apply for *a program for disabled students*

(= special education unit), combined with a valid diagnosis to gain access to such programs which are not located within every upper secondary school in the country.

A common justification used to support the notion that the Icelandic system is inclusive is that, although being in a special education program, students who need support are in the same school building as their non-disabled peers and have the possibility to attend regular classes, if they want to. Inclusive education, however, as accepted within disability studies in education (DSE) means promoting meaningful access to *all* aspects of society for people who have been labeled disabled and that entails *rejecting* deficit models of disability (including the extreme emphasis on medical diagnosis) and most importantly assuming competence (Connor, 2019; Taylor, 2006). That, however, is not the scenario in Iceland because students are segregated when it comes to applying and attending upper secondary school, based on medical diagnosis and support needs (Sverrisdóttir & Van Hove, 2021), through a process that highlights the ableist structure of the system (Sverrisdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2020). This process also creates a group believed to be less able than other students and this is sometimes reflected through teachers' and students' reaction to "the labeled student" (Allan, 1996; Biklen & Burke, 2006). However, this procedure has more profound consequences than merely directing students into a special program. The creation of this marginalized social group constructs a phenomenon that can be seen as one link in the intersection of other axes in shaping complex social inequality for this group (Anthias, 2012; Collins, 2015).

In this article the focus is on identifying students' position by mapping their power relations and resistance within the discursive norm of special education with the aim of highlighting points of resistance that need responding to and disrupting the normative order caused by the discursive norm of special education, in order to move closer to social justice in education. We use narratives of disabled students to navigate these power relations, but personal narratives of disabled individuals are important when disclosing repressed knowledge within schools (Naraian, 2021). According to Foucault (1982), by studying the distribution of power, it is possible to see how subjects are constructed through social relations and cultural practices. Furthermore, focusing on resistance makes it possible to bring to light power relations and 'everyday resistance' and discursive forms of challenges, which usually go unseen and unheard (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). While building primarily on the work of Foucault (1982) we did, however, in our analysis, also integrate concepts from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as has been done in critical disability studies (Goodley,

2007a, 2007b) and, which we believe is valuable in relation to our aim. In our discussion we will reflect on the analysis by using Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of assemblage when making sense of unpredictable and fluid social relations and subjects in becoming (Tamboukou, 2008).

We use Alecia Jackson and Lisa Mazzei's (2012) method of thinking with theory. Our analytical questions were two: *What kind of power relations are at work within the discursive field of special education at compulsory school level and upper secondary school level in Iceland and how is students' resistance manifested within these power relations?*

2 Theoretical Perspectives

Power and the discursive norm. Foucault outlined three forms of power: 1) sovereign power, 2) disciplinary power and 3) biopower (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). Our focus will mainly be on the resistance to disciplinary power since we are focusing on students with intellectual disabilities in upper secondary schools who have, through disciplinary power, been categorized and normalized as such. Disciplinary power is the bearer of discourse, according to Foucault (1982, 1995), and the form of power that normalizes and makes subjects or, in a Deleuzian and Guattarian term, it 'territorializes' (Fried & Smith, 2018). The power of the discursive norm involves identity normalization that affects all of us and has the effect that those who deviate from the norm are seen as abnormal (Clarke, 2008; Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). The production of students' subjectivity relies not only on the institutional structures of the system but is also the effect of a network of social, cultural, material and power relations within discursive fields (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

Power relations. The school system with its institutional structure and bureaucracy can be said to have a hierarchical power built into its composition, allowing the system to exert power in different ways on different groups. An example of this would be creating marginalized groups such as disabled students, also known as special education students. Foucault, however, contests structural and oppressive modes of power with his theory of power relations which assumes that power is constantly on the move, flowing among people and not only exercised from the top down or someone's possession (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). In this regard it is, however, important to note that sometimes students are in a more privileged position within school which can affect the balance of power relations (Rigby, 2002; Rose, Monda-Amaya & Espelage, 2011; Slonje, Smith & Frisén, 2013). Foucault regarded power not merely as oppressive but also productive in the sense that it produces something new, such

as a new behavior. These power relations are unbalanced, unequal and produce knowledge about the self (Foucault, 1978a, 1995; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, Medina, 2011).

Subjectivity, being and becoming. Our cultural identity is linked to dominant disciplinary discourse and according to Foucault (1982) our identity, the united self, is fragmented and contested. He uses the concept of subjectivity to describe how the individual is constituted in various ways. Identities are regarded as inseparable from the discursive context in which they develop and are consistently informed by the specific forms of relations of power that enlighten those contexts (Naraian, 2011). Thus, our cultural identity is linked to dominant discourses and power which plays a significant role in how people see us and respond to us (Clarke, 2008).

According to Weedon (1997) social relations are always relations of power and they can decide the scope of subjectivity positions open to everyone. These subject positions are based on intersecting categories such as gender, race, class, and social background. Conceptions of subjectivity show this as an active process of commencing certain subject positions in a constant process of becoming, rather than merely being in the world. Here it is helpful to incorporate Deleuze and Guattari's concept of difference which offers a diverse frame for understanding how people become who they are (Davis et al., 2013; Jackson, 2010). In their approach they challenge the traditional being, just as Foucault challenges the static subjectivity, but they focus on being as pure difference or becoming, where identity is in constant process of becoming (Bogard, 1998; Markula, 2006), which is made possible through open and smooth spaces (Tamboukou, 2008). Difference in the context of Deleuze and Guattari does not refer to categorical difference, it characterizes fields; that is, reality itself. It is a connection between fields, and it moves beyond dualism and pairs; that is, man/woman, abled/disabled, masculine/feminine (Davis et al., 2013; Grosz, 2005; Jackson, 2010). "A line of becoming is not defined by points it connects ... on the contrary, it passes *between* points, it comes up through the middle ..." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 293, emphasis in original). Focusing on the concept of 'becoming' rather than 'being' cracks open spaces for resistance (Goodley, 2007a).

Resistance. Foucault (1982) suggests analyzing power relations from the perspective of resistance, by locating their position and uncovering the method used. By exploring the forms of resistance, we are better equipped to understand what power relations are and how they are being disrupted. Power and resistance have often been seen as opposed, an understanding that is fading because forms of resistance are shaped by power relations, but resistance also creates power relations, indicating the connectivity and the

interaction of these two concepts. (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). According to Giroux (2003), “theories of resistance are useful as highly nuanced theoretical tools for understanding and intervening within structures of power as they define diverse contexts across a range of institutional and ideological formations” (p. 9). Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of line of flight and deterritorialization are useful and do in fact connect to Foucault’s ideas of power relations (Avolos & Winslade, 2010). Line of flight involves resisting, although not escaping the normalizing practices of society (Goodley, 2007a), since creating a line of flight means reconstructing or going against prevailing social structures through deterritorialization and becoming (Deuchars, 2011; Friehe and Smith, 2018; Ringrose, 2011; Tamboukou, 2010). Line of flight also offers an opportunity to be constantly on the move between territorialization and deterritorialization, where people escape or free themselves of the rigid structure of the system.

3 Methodology

The method used to work with the data is theory driven and derives from Alecia Jackson’s and Lisa Mazzei’s (2012, 2013) “thinking with theory”. The role of theory has been shifting in qualitative data analysis (Grbich, 2019), but in Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) methodology it plays a valuable role in viewing text/data. Their methodology can be characterized as post-structural, even though, as they themselves state, they do not focus on specific theoretical frameworks (e.g., critical theory or poststructuralism). Jackson and Mazzei make use of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) phrase “plugging in” *as a process*, not a concept; *that is, the method itself which we use* (not to be confused with our concepts of analysis). In this way, they decenter the subject by plugging a theory into the data, so the data is read with theory and the theory is read with the data. Instead of centering the voice of students and conducting a systemic coding, we plug Foucault’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts into the data to map the power relations, lines of flight, deterritorialization and resistance. Thus, as mentioned in the introduction, our aim is highlighting points of resistance that need responding to and disrupting the normative order caused by the discursive norm of special education, in order to move closer to social justice in education. This method involves a researcher focusing on philosophical concepts and using them to think with the data and vice versa (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013), which is what we did. What characterizes this method is that it is not linear and does not serve the purpose of creating a holistic storyline of students’ experience in school.

The analytical process involves three phases: 1) applying philosophical concepts and using them to unsettle the theory/practice binary, 2) being meticulous and clear in what analytical questions are made possible and 3) working the same data extracts repetitively to bend them and distort (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). The previously mentioned philosophical concepts of both Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari guided our process and hence the analytical questions we were able to ask were: *What kind of power relations are at work within the discursive field of special education and how is students' resistance manifested within these power relations?* The former question draws specifically on Foucault but the latter one is a combination of both Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari.

Jackson and Mazzei (2012, 2013) use *threshold* as a metaphor to situate the plugging in; it is in the threshold that data and theory do their work and analytical questions develop. The threshold signifies the meaning making process, once you exceed the threshold, something new happens. Working in the threshold replaces the process of coding which produces themes and patterns in traditional interpretive qualitative studies. Instead, the data is used as brief stopping points which entails going back and forth from data to theory, theory to data. This process further involves what they call *folding* and *flattening*.

Folding, in this case, does not only relate to folding data into theory and vice versa, but instead, and to greater extent, folding the first author as a researcher into the text (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Coding would, however, have situated the researcher at a greater distance from the data which perhaps would have yielded more simplistic and predictable findings. By flattening, the researcher can avoid paying attention to only one of the various poles of the binaries of data and theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013). Thus, combining text (narratives), theory, and researcher into one assemblage within which multiple connections (plugging in) are made (i.e., in the threshold) enhances the possibilities of a deeper and a more complex understanding of the phenomenon (Naraian, 2021; Jackson & Mazzei, 2013).

The researcher's subjectivity is always an inherent part of any research project. Entering an assemblage allows the researcher to shift her control of data and in that process both data and analysis become infinite and ideally multiple (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016). Within the assemblage, while working in the threshold, connections between text and theory do not only constitute one another, they also constitute the researcher (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013).

3.1 Data and Participants

The data used in this study derives from interviews with students who were/are being educated within programs for disabled students in upper secondary

schools, as all students labelled as disabled must, in order to obtain the support they need. Originally interviews were taken with 11 students, from age 17 to 21, where the focus was on their education and social participation in school. For this article, however, parts from four interviews were chosen to represent our analysis, since by discussing only four narratives in the article we were able to attend to each narrative in more detail. The choice is partly based on maximum variation sampling where cases are selected across a range of variation (Patton, 2002) which, within our data set, refers to students' school settings at compulsory school level, their support needs, and their social background.

The interviews were semi-structured and included both closed-ended and open-ended questions and interviews were adapted to each interviewee by adding and rephrasing questions (Luo & Wildemuth, 2017). In the interviews, students were asked to describe their experiences in relation to the application process to upper secondary school, how they ended up choosing schools and their experiences in school regarding education and social participation. Some were able to answer open ended questions while others needed more guidance. Interviews were conducted by the first author in 2012–2013 and in 2018.¹ Students interviewed in 2012–2013² had already graduated from upper secondary school (aged 21), but students interviewed in 2018 were still in school. This provided different layers within the data, since students who were already graduated had the opportunity to view their school experience in relation to their then current context.

The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 1 ½ hours and the first author met the participants either in their homes, at university, or their workplaces, depending on what best suited each interviewee. Some of the interviewees were met up with twice, depending on the length of the first interview as well as its content, but some students needed to take a break during interviews. Students were approached by various means, some through the intermediaries of program supervisors in upper secondary schools and others through mutual acquaintances. The sampling in relation to participants was both convenient and purposive. Purposive in the sense that a requirement for participation was the criterion of having studied in a program for disabled students in upper secondary schools. Convenient in the sense that participation depended on participants' willingness (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013).

1 The first author started collecting data soon after she entered her PhD studies, hence the time span.

2 Initially their interviews were supposed to be used in a different project. However, nothing was published from that project and thus we obtained their permission to include their narratives in this study, since the interviews provided valuable information on students' experience at upper secondary level.

Iceland is a small country and given the fact that programs for disabled students are not in every school in the capital city area where the study took place, details of participants' social background are not revealed. Names have been changed as well as particulars that might give an indication about who the participant is or where he/she was studying.

4 Findings: Reading Data with Theory

In this section we outline our reading the data with Foucault's and Deleuze and Guattari's concepts and vice versa. As has been mentioned, for the purpose of this article we unfold our reading of narratives of four youngsters, **Anna, Gunnar, Jón and Sóley**. Their support needs, pathways through school until they turned 16 and social backgrounds differ and provide an interesting spectrum of power relations to map. Anna, Jón and Sóley all went to general compulsory schools that can be considered mainstream, within which they received special education, either in class or a segregated unit within the school. Gunnar, however, went to a special school. At upper secondary level all of them were educated within programs for disabled students. We start by mapping some of their power relations, then we read their stories again with the concepts of subjectivity and being, and at the end we highlight points of resistance, lines of flight, and becoming. Although divided into different chapters, total separation is unachievable due to the interrelation of the concepts and hence discussion of these concepts will intersect between chapters.

4.1 *Power Relations*

We are all caught up in different power relations every day without perhaps ever paying attention to it. Children are no exception and as soon as they start school, they participate and are governed by multiple power relations with both peers and teachers.

Shortly after **Anna** started compulsory school, older students started to tease her because of an aid she was using, and it got so bad that her parents saw no other way than to transfer her to another school, *I was only just 6 years old and it was really, this was way too big for me and I immediately felt better when I came to [another school]*. This affected her whole school experience and to avoid going back to the neighborhood school she moved between different schools. Bullying is known to be more often directed at students with special needs than other students (Rose, Monda-Amaya & Espelage, 2011) and some have defined bullying as an imbalance in power (Slonje, Smith & Friséen, 2013) where some students are in a privileged position and exert power over

others. When considering bullying as an imbalance of power it is, however, important to be aware that the imbalance can be contextual – bound and fluid (Rigby, 2002). It is a form of power relations that can have grave consequences for everybody involved as shown in Anna's case.

In her education Anna needed assistance with her studies but the schools she attended were small and did not have such special education units as are common in the larger schools. Her aim was always to apply for general upper secondary education, and she worked hard to reach that goal, *I thought I would get better prepared [by taking 10th grade again] and then [be able to] go into a general school setting, I should have [had] a better chance*. Ultimately, though, she did not have the grades for that, so she had to apply to join a study program for disabled students, which is located in some upper secondary schools. This structure in having special programs for disabled students is stigmatizing and produces a power effect that affects the way students are being treated or viewed. Anna well describes these kinds of power relations:

So you know, if someone asks you, you know, for example if he is maybe talking to someone outside of school or from another school and he asks you know “what is your program of study” you know, like there was someone who asked my friend the other day and she just said language program, because she did not dare to say the other [that she was in a study program for disabled students] because she was afraid that he would tease her, because he was in general education in another school. So, we are like, we kind of do not dare to tell everybody that we are in a program for disabled students, because some are afraid that they will be made fun of. [All translations are those of the first author]

Sóley, who spent part of her day in compulsory school in special education, experienced a different kind of power relations with her peers where she was left out and did not have many friends her age:

I think everybody knew that I had no true friend and was a lot alone, everybody knew that who were with me in compulsory school, but still I had more friends; that is, boys who were a year older, they were acquaintances.

Being a special education student and having to spend time apart from her class each day in order to go to a special education unit had cost her the opportunity to build a relationship with her peers. When applying for upper secondary school she found herself in a new territory, a new set of power relations which required her to define herself as being disabled

(Sverrisdóttir & Van Hove, 2021) in a rather public way because she was, in the process, assigned to a special education unit within upper secondary school. In doing so, she had to deal with her own prejudice, indicating the discursive norm of special education (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014) present in the society.

It was a little bit difficult to adjust in my first year in upper secondary school; it felt like a very long year, and it was difficult to get used to being in a program for disabled students because I had prejudice without having gotten to know all the other kids that were in the room opposite mine. Those who were like me were in a special room, those who were like [hesitation] not with severe disabilities were in class with me.

She was now, herself, part of relations that she was uncomfortable with, and it proved to be a very difficult task for her to come to terms with this situation. She dealt with it by admitting that *"yes, I have a disability, but it does not show"*. She was torn between two social categories, one of which can be seen as a link in the intersection of others in shaping complex social inequality for the person assigned to that group (Collins, 2015), general education student vs special education student. These conflicting positions can clearly be linked to the disciplinary power of special education (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014).

As soon as Jón started school it became obvious that he would not be able to get around easily because of his need for a walker and that the environment would add to his impairment.

Keys had to be used in all the elevators [in the school], in all the bathrooms there were steps, stairs all over the place where the youngest students were and as soon as we walked in, I remember, people just shook their heads [...] And then there were many speculations as to what to do and soon the idea of [the school] came up, a considerably smaller school, maybe around 300 students.

When considering power relations, one must take milieu into consideration. Central to DSE and critical disability studies is the belief that disability is a social construct created within a socio-cultural context as well as through the interaction of an individual's bodily encounters with environmental factors (Naraian, 2021; Taylor, 2006). Hence, the material environment and its ableist structure is an important component in the power relations that affect students' opportunities to participate in the school community. Participation is however integral to inclusive education (CRPD, 2006; Slee, Corcoran & Best, 2019) and access is a crucial aspect in relation to that.

Gunnar spent his compulsory school years in a special school for disabled students. When entering upper secondary school Gunnar stepped into in a new territory with a new set of power relations. He was for the first time with non-disabled students in the same school building. For him, attending theater classes with kids from general education and being a part of a theater company in the school was a kind of social life.

Yes, we went to the freshman ball, or some of us, but just, yes and then I was of course in the theater company in school where I got to know other kids, that was social life for me too. We acted in a piece, *Romeo and Juliet*. That was a lot of fun. We were, this girl and just our friends, one was studying language, she is a really good friend of mine today, we were all put in a special group and we acted as backgrounds for various set ups, we acted candle lights, trees, ballroom guests and a character called Key-Peter and then we were servants.

Even though he had the opportunity to act with non-disabled students, the dominant discourse of special education students is reflected in the way they were cast; they were props for the play. They were put in a special group within the general education group. This reveals the impact of the discourse on special education students when it comes to attitudes and the belief in students' abilities and how the system continuously constructs and reconstructs a certain subject position (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). Every relation is a relation of power and powerlessness (Weedon, 1987). The power relations Gunnar faced each day were, however, not only bound to school. Even though he was studying his favorite subject, it proved to be challenging and his parents show a response that is probably supposed to protect and support him that way, when in fact it could have restricted his possibilities even further:

And so, I remember I was taking a class in Icelandic in general education, and I was doing a paper on childbirth. I remember, before we started writing the paper and the teacher was describing the assignment to me and my fellow students, I started to think about what I wanted to write about, and I got an idea to write about the employment market and I discussed it with my parents and my mother was like: "Are you sure you don't want to quit?" And I was very determined, just no and then she came up with the idea that I should write about disabled people and childbirth. And so, I did.

These examples of different power relations that students face give insight into the multiple subject positions they are offered through the discursive norm of

special education and general education (Weedon, 1987). These subject positions intersect in different ways and are an important part of their identity formation.

4.2 *Subjectivity and Being*

Day-to-day practices of education create differences in strength and skills between students, providing individuals with specific views of their identity and ability, which seems natural and real to subjected individuals instead of being the product of different forms of power (Weedon, 1987). This can be seen in Sóley's narrating:

I try not to think like this because it is obviously bad for me and no one else is thinking about like: "You are different", because it does not show. But the truth is, maybe I am a little bit different, because of my performance in education. I am just so glad it does not show.

This shows a moment in Sóley's recounting of her school years where it becomes evident how she seems to internalize the discursive norm of special education, which, through the disciplinary power of special education, defines children in relation to normality (Allan, 1996). This also reveals a fixed, deficit driven view of the student (Gabel & Connor, 2009; Goodley, 2007a). The power of the discursive norm involves identity normalization that affects all of us and has the effect that those who deviate from the norm are seen as abnormal. Our cultural identity is, for example, linked to dominant discourses and power which play a significant role in how people see us and respond to us; we are seen as static beings (Clarke, 2008; Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). Sóley's feeling of alienation and difference has its roots in her performance in education and learning outcomes. She is in fact preoccupied with the point that she learns in a different way than others and it affects the way she sees her educational opportunities:

But you can't just choose [an education], I don't have the ability to do that. This is dyslexia on a very high level, I would think, maybe not 100% I think, I mean I can read but when it comes to math everything goes upside down in my head.

This view of herself can be linked to the power relations at work in school, but these power relations stretch further into her environment and become clear when she speaks about working in the future:

There is no way that I trust myself to work, and everybody is aware of that at home, and no one expects me to be working because of my dis/ability

in learning. It is like, I went to the mall last night and I felt really bad because I envy all the young people that trust themselves to work, because I would do anything to be like everybody else.

Being defined as a member of a minority group may affect how one views oneself in relation to belonging and otherness (Anthias, 2012). One could argue that this illustration is a perfect example of how the disciplinary power of special education has affected her subjectivity in relation to belonging, but when looking more closely one can also see other power relations at work. The fact that no one at home expects her to work explains how she is also caught up in power relations at home that send her a message regarding her ability to do things. Whether the disciplinary power of special education has affected her parents' view will not be asserted here, but their response in relation to her working reflects a common view when it comes to expectations in relation to the incompetence of students in special education (Biklen & Burke, 2006). This also relates to the deficit-based view of students with disabilities (Gabel & Connor, 2008; Goodley, 2007a) and the view portrays a static way of being (Goodley, 2007a).

Reading the interviews shows the extreme power general education seem to have. **Anna** is intimidated because the system has taught her, through special education, that she cannot learn (see the last two lines in the next student reference) – and being in a program for disabled students somehow underlines this. However, early on in her education at upper secondary school, she was offered the chance to take a class within general education:

I was just like: What?! Are you asking me to go into general education? But you know I am in my first year? And she was like, yes because you have such good foundation in [the subject] and then you have improved your [subject] and I just think that you are ready. And I went out [into the general education settings], and I was a little bit anxious that I might blow it and then I just went to general class, and I just passed big time [proud]!

This example underlines the power relations that many students in the program for disabled students face in upper secondary school, which can affect their subjectivity (Foucault, 1982). Through the normative structure of the system, they are taught that they are not able (Biklen & Burke, 2006), they lose faith in themselves, which can affect their subjectivity. Furthermore, the low expectations can be seen in the way the studies are structured in the program for disabled students: Anna explains:

You know, if it is too difficult for you then you just quit that class and you choose something that is maybe a little bit easier, but they are not pushing you know “do this, take that class” you know, if you don’t want to. They ask like “would you like to try this” and if the student says “no” then they are not pushing they just let you choose for yourself. The studies are really individualized. They just give you time to finish and if you do not finish in class, you finish it next time when you are in that class.

In comparison to general education, the demands seem to be very low; the students have a lot to say about their studies, which is in itself not bad, but in this set-up, they are offered a way-out which can lead to the possibility that students begin to expect less of themselves. As Sóley points out: *But you can't just choose [an education], I don't have the ability to do that.* They begin to act like students that cannot do – adopting the expectations that others have of them (Biklen & Burke, 2006). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) offer us, however, to look at this as a site for becoming. Students are offered to influence their studies, participate in their structure with teachers (Goodley, 2007a), and their participation in regular classrooms offers the possibility of recognition for their difference and the prospect of becoming (Grosz, 2005; Jackson, 2010).

One of Gunnar’s characteristics is his proficiency in relation to the Icelandic language:

Because I was in Icelandic in general education, I was planning on studying Icelandic at the university, so my supervisory teacher in upper secondary school said that it would not be possible because I obviously did not have the upper secondary diploma in all the courses that is needed to apply for university, which is a bit of an obstacle for me. ... I remember – if we go way back, I was interviewed by a reporter who asked me what I was going to do in the future and I said that I was going to get a PhD in Icelandic [laughs a little bit]. But that is not, now I am not seeing that happening. It was a thoughtlessness, I admit that, to say something like this.

Gunnar’s recalling of school around his favorite subject seems to reveal a rigid system that is not sensitive enough to students’ strengths, it responds to the *static special education student* and through its discursive norm of special education affects students’ views of themselves, but this extract also reveals the self as a threshold between power and desire, the possibility of becoming because, even though the system did not respect his potential, Gunnar allowed himself

to enter the smooth spaces when dreaming about the PhD, where nothing is fixed and where becoming occurs (Tamboukou, 2008).

4.3 *Points of Resistance, Line of Flight, Becoming*

Even though schools can force an individual to behave in a special way within the school system, there is nevertheless, within this force, a room for resistance by subjects who refuse to identify with the subject position offered to them (Weedon, 1987). This can be seen in the following extract from Sóley:

In 10th grade, I try not to look back, but there were always some incidents, everybody knew. I think everybody knew that I had no true friend and was a lot alone, everybody knew that who were with me in compulsory school, but still I had more friends; that is, boys who were a year older, they were acquaintances, I have always found it easier to get to know boys than girls, I think it is more relaxed, I feel better with them. That is because in 9th and 10th grade I was a bit boy/girl, dressed ... there was a boy in me, there was a lot of play in me. I went out with the boys to throw snowballs, ring doorbells, and run away.

As pointed out before, it seems that having to be in a special education division had the effect of her losing contact with her peers, so she began to look for friends older than she was and outside of school. That could be interpreted as resistance and deterritorialization (Tamboukou, 2008); she is escaping the oppressive structure of school and reconstructing herself in a way that defies current construction of her as special education student (Deuchars, 2010). In school, everybody knew she was in special education; making friends outside of school gave her an opportunity to resist that label and hence gave her ground to combat the subject position of a special education student and the subjectivity attached to it. Her acting out can also be seen as resistance or a line of flight where, through her difference, she is becoming something else (Jackson, 2010). What she becomes cannot be predicted and is not what matters because tracing the line of flight means to free oneself of normative and oppressive structures, if only for a moment, and making new connections within the process of becoming (Ringrose, 2011; Tamboukou, 2010). Through its structure, the school has created a certain knowledge about students in special education and as a result, Sóley is offered certain subject positions (Foucault, 1982; Weedon, 1987), not only as a special education student but also as a girl, which she is probably contesting through her choice of friends because it gives her another subject position that is even transmitted into school where boys in the 8th and the 9th grade were asking her to come play snowball.

Sóley's resistance stretches further as can be seen when she talks about work:

Like this summer when I was working, I was asked to be in the kitchen with another girl my age for about 2 ½ weeks. Then I said to my boss, that because I am diagnosed with dyslexia, I have trouble understanding; it's part of the dyslexia to have difficulties in understanding and they were attentive to me. I just said it because I wanted to, the people at home did not want me to say it but I just decided to tell it the way I felt it. If a misunderstanding came up, everybody would understand. Isn't that a bit grown-up like?

Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) state that the power of discipline is confronted with methods of resistance that challenge through avoiding, reshaping discourses and by disrupting the institutional control of behavior. The resistance to disciplinary power is more hidden in everyday acts of resistance and discursive forms of protests. By admitting openly that she needs support and understanding, she is emphasizing that needing support is something all people share, hence contesting the current discursive norm that sees support as denigrating (Biklen & Burke, 2006). It is in this energetic moment that difference emerges, by avoiding repetition, and the possibility of becoming something else evolves (Davies et al., 2013). The example above also gives an insight into her power relations with her parents who advise her not to reveal her disability which she decides to disrupt by following her own ideas, draw a line of flight by acting against normative ideas about support needs (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Ringrose, 2011), and perhaps produce a different subjectivity.

The following example comes from **Anna**:

So you know, if someone asks you, you know, for example if he is maybe talking to someone outside of school or from another school and he asks, you know "what is your program of study" you know, like there was someone who asked my friend the other day and she just said language program, because she did not dare to say the other [that she was in a study program for disabled students] because she was afraid that he would tease her, because he was general education in another school. So we are like, we kind of do not dare to tell everybody that we are in a program for disabled students, because some are afraid that they will be made fun of.

The way Anna describes her friends' reactions indicates that they refuse to suffer the stigma that follows being in a program for disabled students. This can

be linked to what Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) call everyday resistance. Here the friend chooses to trace the line of flight (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) since not revealing where you study allows students to deterritorialize and escape the oppressive label acquired through the normative structure of the system, and it gives them the freedom to become whoever they want to be.

After returning to his old school in 7th grade Jón's resistance can be seen in his responses to the repressive environment as he would not take it quietly that he was not able to get around the way he wanted:

And so, we had them make some changes, made them put wheelchair ramps in front of the house and electricity in the elevator door opener so that one did not have to use keys, so I did a lot for this school [laughs a little] and for those who ... because when I started school it was only me and my friend who were physically impaired in the school so I was doing this school a favor in relation to the future.

Jón had the opportunity to be active, a full participant in a school community; *but it was ..., there was naturally only one class, there were good connections between me [and peers], I got a really good connection* and so, he seems to return to his old neighborhood school filled with confidence, acquired not only through school participation but also a supportive social background, *I was naturally allowed to decide this* [choosing to go back to the old school] that encourages him to make things better. This decision, to go into a smaller school with a better access all around can be interpreted as resistance against the form of domination that creates a different subject position than merely being a student (Foucault, 1982); that is, a special education student. Coming back can also be interpreted as a point of resistance; he, with the support of his family, is refusing to choose sites that are accessible; they do not want their choices to be limited by a well-adapted or poorly adapted environment. So, he repositions within the oppressive structure, which can be seen as a form of reterritorialization, where his subject position is reconstituted in terms of his bodily encounter with the environment and the discursive norm of special education (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). However, beginnings and endings are not important; it is the movement between, when we trace a line of flight or escape, that counts and constitutes becoming (Tamboukou, 2008). Jón talked a lot about the social life in upper secondary school which was not good and that surprised him. The students in the program for disabled students went to big dances but that was it. He was not too happy about this, so he wrote a letter to complain:

And maybe two days or a few days later someone from the committee came to us and then only a few days later I was offered to be a representative in the student committee. And that gave me so much and this was so much better, but we still need to do better but we are getting there [in the social life]. We have our social life in the program for disabled students and we try to get the others in the school to participate.

His resistance becomes obvious through his determination to not to be put aside when it comes to the social life. In a way he reverses the power built into the normative structure where it is believed that social life planning is in the hands of the majority of those who are not disabled; this could be seen as one form of what Foucault calls reversed discourse where he is contesting the superior norm by making it his own (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). He, with his school mates, was planning social events that would include students within general education and thus he was fighting for access to general education settings by transforming the existing power relations (Weedon, 1987). Reading this extract with reference to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concepts indicates that he is resisting the territorialization of special education. Challenging a myth that students with disabilities are dependent on others (to have fun) he is resisting repetition and the pre-existing rigid social categories by taking action against them (Davies et al., 2013; Deuchars; 2011; Ringrose, 2011).

5 Discussion and Conclusion

In this article we have focused on identifying students' position by mapping their power relations and resistance within the discursive norm of special education, with the aim of highlighting points of resistance that need responding to and disrupting the normative order caused by the discursive norm of special education, in order to move closer to social justice in education. We used the concepts of Foucault (1982, 1995) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to uncover power relations, resistance, lines of flight and becoming.

When reading the data with Foucault's theory on power relations, it became evident that the participants were caught up in multiple and yet similar power relations, based on their position as special education students. These multiple forms of power relations start the moment they enter school at six years old and become clear in the message they receive from peers, teachers, and parents. The mapping shows how various power relations affect the students and at times their subject position (Foucault, 1982). The mapping

further uncovers a static, deficit based, view of students which floats within these power relations, as a form of power, expressed through communication with peers in the manner of bullying, teachers in the form of low expectations and parents in the practice of overprotectiveness. Their status is the one of *being* “special education students”. Mapping the power relations gave us an opportunity to identify points of resistance, and although these points varied among students, they constantly circled around resisting the subject position of “special education students” as well as its psychological and/or physical segregating effects, both of which are the product of the discursive norm of special education. Findings raise awareness of what the education system needs to respond to and further imply that, in order to adapt, structural changes need to occur.

Using Foucault’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concepts gives us a different view of students’ narratives, which is important within DSE, because it inspires a novel perspective when approaching inclusive education and social justice. They help us to understand that even though being caught up in different webs of power relations students are provided with multiple possibilities to draw lines of flight and make new unterritorialized connections. When tracing the lines of flight, they deterritorialize, and, although they can never completely escape the discursive norm of special education (the territorialization), as their narratives so clearly display, the analysis reveals that they are seeking ways to avoid it and along the way they are challenging and resisting the traditional being (Bogard, 1998; Markula, 2006). Perhaps it is useful to view the school as one assemblage. It helps making sense of unpredictable and fluid social relations and subjects in becoming (Tamboukou, 2008) because, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, “an assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously ...” (p. 22).

Responding to students’ resistance and acquiring a school system that is socially just entails abandoning the view of students as static entities and no longer focus on their placement within schools. Additionally, defining general and special education as separate (and static) units is an equally important stance to depart from, since its distinct conceptual foundation continually produces and reproduces social injustice, as experienced by various students within schools (Gabel & Connor, 2009; Naraian, 2021; Sverrisdóttir & Van Hove, 2021). The focus should rather be on recognizing and acknowledging students’ differences and, in the process, supporting their becoming within inclusive and social just school settings by, as Goodley (2007a) points out, viewing the interconnectedness and the productivity of becoming learner/educator, instead of the separateness of being a (special education) student/teacher. According

to Naraian (2021) the concept of inclusive education does not equate general and special education; thus, creating an innovative definition of this concept would be a step forward and helpful in future discussion. Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari provide useful concepts to start that journey.

We believe that this study, although only reporting the experiences of four students and thus limited in that respect, is an important contribution to discussion about social justice in education in Iceland, as well as internationally. Students' narratives disrupt the normative order caused by the discursive norm of special education within schools by uncovering a suppressed but at the same time extremely valuable knowledge (Naraian, 2021). As such, they are an important source of resistance that deserves to be allocated more space within future research relating to inclusive education and social justice.

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