Research Article

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Transition space: navigating dilemmas between mainstream and minority language classrooms

Abstract: From policymaking to classroom practices, educational language policy implementation is a complex process filled with a cacophony of voices. This article examines policy implementation as it unfolds in micro-level transitions between mainstream classrooms and lessons in Sámi, Kven, or Finnish as a second language (SKF) in Norway. In such situations, SKF pupils need to leave their mainstream classes to receive their language instruction. To examine these transitions, I draw primarily from ethnographic data (e.g., classroom observations and semi-structured interviews) collected over several months in public schools in a town in Northern Norway. The findings suggest that organizational circumstances construct an in-between space, which I refer to as *transition space*, in which classroom actors can or need to negotiate and make choices about which of the theoretically co-available classes/activities will be chosen at which times. Such choices involve dilemmas and consequences on different scales. In this study, (1) I demonstrate how (non) movements between mainstream and SKF classes are made in time and space, and (2) I propose transition space as a new conceptualization for researching micro-level transitions in educational settings.

1 Introduction

In a school in Northern Norway, a group of pupils who receive second language instruction intended for a historical minority in Norway are supposed to have their weekly lesson. The group consists of three primary school pupils of different ages. Although all three of them are present at school on this day, only one attends the language class. (Observation 1)

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Micro-level transitions, which are between activities within an institution occurring on a regular basis (Pedersen et al. 2023), often may represent an arena for language policy implementation. Such situations involve local interpretations, negotiations, and perhaps even resistance (Hornberger and Johnson 2007) from classroom actors (pupils and teachers) as "the final arbiters of language policy implementation" (Menken and Garcia 2010: 1). This article deals with micro-level transitions between mainstream classrooms/class activities and lessons in the minority language subjects of Sámi, Kven, or Finnish as a second language (henceforth, *SKF*). During such moments, classes coincide with other subjects or activities in which SKF pupils also qualify to participate. Thus, different school activities compete, and choices must be made regarding pupils' participation in time and space to bridge the dilemma gap that educational policies create. The space in which classroom actors negotiate and make choices about which one of the theoretically co-available class activities will be chosen is referred to as *transition space* in this article.

SKF school subjects are intended for the Sámi as Indigenous people and Kven/Norwegian Finns as a national minority. These subjects aim to be the cornerstones of the Norwegian state's official efforts to strengthen these languages' position in society (Sollid 2020). However, publicly accessible data reveal high rates of SKF pupils opting out of these subjects during their educational journeys (Nygaard and Bro 2015; Vangsnes 2021). Previous research has pointed to some possible reasons why students opt out, including a lack of teachers and teaching materials (e.g., NOU 2016: 18), pupils' dissatisfaction with their language learning progress (e.g., Niiranen 2011), and an organizational structure failing to effectively integrate these subjects into the school schedule (e.g., Hermansen and Olsen 2012). However, none of these studies employed an ethnographic approach that would provide perspectives from SKF pupils, SKF teachers, and homeroom teachers on the subject's organization in relation to their other subjects.

In this study, I draw primarily from ethnographic data (classroom observations and semi-structured interviews) collected from four primary schools in an urban space in Northern Norway. Inspired by nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2004), an action-focused and scalar approach to ethnography (Hult 2017), this article examines the interplay between educational language policies, everyday practices, and classroom actors in second language education as it unfolds during micro-level transitions. Paying attention to situations such as those described during Observation 1, I pose the following research question: What constitutes making (non) movements between mainstream and SKF classes?

The article is structured as follows: First, I present the educational language policies that frame SKF subjects' context and the minorities to which they are designated (Section 2). I then present and discuss the conceptual framework, focusing on transitions, in which I introduce the concept of *transition space*

(Section 3). I then present the methodology employed in this study (Section 4). After that, I present and analyze the findings concerning (non)movements between mainstream and SKF classes (Section 5). Finally, I discuss the findings' implications and conclude the paper (Section 6).

2 Research context

In Norway, the Sámi, Kvens/Norwegian Finns,[1] and Finns are minorities with different legal statuses and linguistic rights that are reflected in Norwegian education and language policies (Sollid et al. 2023). Based on Norwegian law (Ministry of Culture and Equality 2021) and international treaties, the Sámi are recognized as Indigenous people and Sámi languages as Indigenous languages. Norway has committed to protecting Northern, Lule, and Southern Sámi under Part III of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Kvens/Norwegian Finns have a lower legal status as a national minority and Kven has been granted the status of a national minority language protected by Part II of the charter (Regjeringen 2022). Finns, defined as those who moved from Finland to Norway after 1945[2] or their descendants (Hyltenstam and Milani 2003), have no special status as a linguistic minority in Norway, like other transnational minorities in the country.

The Sámi and Kvens/Norwegian Finns are historical minorities in Norway that have suffered under harsh Norwegianization assimilation policies during the period stretching from approximately the 1850s to the 1980s (Minde 2003). These policies, among others, have resulted in language shifts in large parts of Sámi and Kven communities (Sannhets-og forsoningskommisjonen 2023). Education has been a main driving force for Norwegianization, and nowadays, the same domain is viewed as a cornerstone of the Norwegian state's official efforts to strengthen the position of the Sámi languages and Kven (Sollid 2019, 2020).

The pupils in my study attend classes in Sámi, Kven, or Finnish as a second language – subjects geared particularly for children whose parents do not speak the given minority language themselves. Sámi (Northern, Lule, and Southern) is offered as a first and second language subject in the Norwegian school system anywhere in the country. At the primary level, two curricula comprise Sámi as a second language: Sámi 2 and Sámi 3. Whereas Sámi 2 is designed for pupils who start with Sámi as a

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1 Kvens/Norwegian Finns are recognized as one national minority. While some prefer the ethnonym Kven, others choose to call themselves Norwegian Finns (Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen 2023).
2 *Regulations concerning operating grants to organizations for national minorities* (2022) use the year 1950 instead of 1945.

second language at the beginning of their primary education, Sámi 3 is designed for pupils who start with Sámi as a second language later in their primary or lower secondary education (Sametinget n.d.). Kven or Finnish as a second language is offered only in Norway's two northernmost counties. The subject has one curriculum, and pupils choose whether they want to learn Kven or Finnish. The subject is intended for children with a Kven/Norwegian Finnish background (Opplæringslova 1998), but many children with Finnish backgrounds, i.e., children connected to modern mobility from the nation-state of Finland, also choose this option (Niiranen 2011).

Even though classes offered on the three subjects and the minorities using them differ in many ways, the subjects share the same organizational structure: SKF pupils follow the national curricula in all other subjects, so the subjects are chosen in addition to all mandatory subjects (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022). However, unlike their other subjects, SKF pupils, with parents' permission, may opt out of SKF subjects at any time (Opplæringslova 1998).[3] Thus, the subjects can be viewed as being located in *a curricular in-between space* (cf. Daugaard 2015) because they are neither compulsory nor intended for everyone.

According to educational policies, pupils choosing SKF subjects should get at least 608 teaching hours in 60-minute classes at the primary school level (Years 1–7) (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022). Approximately two-thirds of SKF subjects' teaching hours throughout primary school education are supposed to be taken from first language instruction (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022), which in this case is Norwegian. The remaining teaching hours are taken either from other subjects or are added to regular schedules. This policy forms the basis for the transitional situations between mainstream and SKF classes that are examined in this study.

3 Transitions and transition space

Previous research has recognized the various types of educational transitions. For example, Vogler et al. (2008) categorized transitions as *vertical* (between educational stages), *horizontal* (between schools and other networks), or *education-associated* (changes in children's lives outside of institutions). However, in this study, I focus on transitions in which pupils leave their mainstream classrooms to receive instruction in a different room, in a different subject, and with a different teacher. Similar situations are familiar in the international context from the research on pullout programs. In such models, pupils are taken out of the general classroom to get

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3 A few municipalities in Norway have introduced mandatory instruction in Sámi for primary school pupils (Rasmussen 2015); however, this study was not conducted in any of these regions.

specialized instruction based on their learning needs (Fernandez and Hynes 2016). Even though the rationale for the transitions between mainstream and SKF classes differs from the pullout programs, they share regular movements between rooms and activities occurring within one educational institution. This type of transition has been coined a *micro-level transition* (Pedersen et al. 2023; Ryan et al. 2021).

Micro-level transitions "do not just happen by themselves" (Juhl 2017: 59). On the contrary, the involved actors (pupils and teachers) need to make an effort to move or not move from and to particular physical spaces. During these moments, the actors may have different interests (Juhl 2017); thus, micro-level transitions may involve negotiations and even resistance to educational policies (cf. Hornberger and Johnson 2007) that materialize in a local school schedule. Such a dynamic can be associated with Hornberger's (2002) *ideological* and *implementational spaces*. These notions help in understanding how ideological spaces opened or closed by macro-level language policies carve out implementational spaces at local levels (e.g., classrooms) and how "the interpreters and appropriators (administrators and teachers) have agency to pry open implementational spaces and create their own ideological space" (Johnson 2011: 137). In this article, educational practitioners' and their pupils' agency is understood as achieved through "the interplay of individual efforts, available resources, and contextual and structural 'factors' as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations" (Biesta and Tedder 2007: 137). Micro-level transitions as an arena for policy implementation essentially deal with ideological and implementational spaces. However, these notions do not include repetitive movements or nonmovements between available activities, nor a metaphorical space that *enables* or even *necessitates* choices to bridge a gap in educational policies. Therefore, to gain a better insight into (non)movements at the moment of micro-level transitions, as well as how these are enabled and restricted, I use the concept of *transition space*, which I borrow from the field of architecture.

In my conceptualization of transition space, I draw from two different understandings of space: (1) physical (absolute), understood as a geometrical system of organization; and (2) metaphorical, representing a particular kind of relational space produced and reproduced by social practices (Kitchin 2009). I now discuss them in their respective order. Transition space in architecture describes an in-between space – an ambiguous physical space between two destinations, i.e., a transfer zone between outside and inside, or between private and public (Li et al. 2022). Examples of such spaces can be halls, corridors, staircases, etc. Transition space as in-between space is significant, as it "processes a change from one condition to another … and acts as both buffer space and physical link" (Nassar and El-Samaty 2014: 8306). In the context of this study, the physical dimension is represented by the fact that to receive their language instruction, SKF pupils must traverse transitional spaces, such as classroom aisles or school corridors.

However, in my conceptualization, transition space comprises more than just physical rooms "within which people and objects are located and move through" (Kitchin 2009: 269). Based on the qualities of the original concept, namely transition space being an in-between space connecting and separating spaces (in this case, classes), transition space in my conceptualization also represents a metaphorical space for transition-making that defines its own spatiotemporal frame (Harvey 2004). Here, choices must be made about where to go and when, and this process extends beyond the limited time frame of micro-level transitions, ranging from seconds to minutes. These moments are informed by earlier actions in different times and spaces, e.g., by a school schedule set up or earlier negotiations between teachers and pupils. Actions such as these are part of the transition space (in the metaphorical sense), ultimately unfolding in physical spaces. For this article's purposes, I developed the following illustration of transition space.
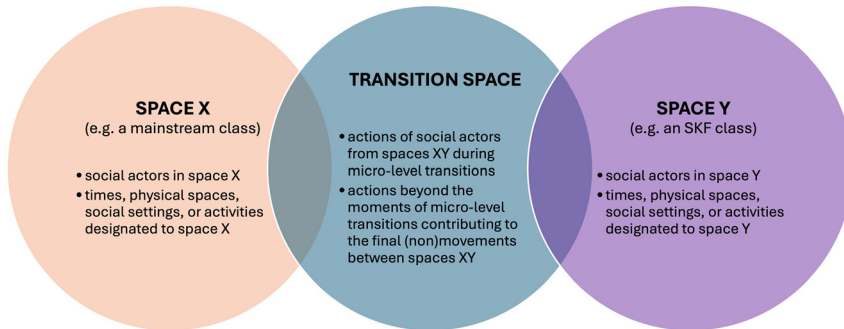
Figure 1: Illustration of transition space.

Transition space is in architecture conceptualized as a Euler diagram – an intersection of two sets in which the middle part represents transition space (Lawrence 1984) – with an emphasis on the spaces' physical proximity. In my visualization (see Figure 1), to highlight the proximities and distances in temporal, spatial, and social configurations together with the view that transition space comprises a particular spatiotemporal frame, transition space in this model is represented by a circle on its own. The illustration takes the horizontal dimension, i.e., the real-time (non)movements between classroom spaces during micro-level transition moments, as a point of departure. Simultaneously, we can imagine this model as seen from an aerial perspective. From this perspective, we examine the moments of a particular micro-level transition as "points of intersection for discursive flows" (Hult 2017: 91), an instance of "layered simultaneity" that "occurs in a real-time, synchronic event, but it is simultaneously encapsulated in several layers

of historicity" (Blommaert 2005: 130). Therefore, to get a better understanding of what happens on the surface, it is necessary to plunge deeper into transition space as a metaphorical space for making transitions to map discursive flows across different temporal, spatial, and social scales (cf. Hult 2017).

The concept of scales offers us a view of space "as stratified and, therefore, power-invested; but [scales] also suggest deep connections between spatial and temporal features" (Blommaert 2007: 4). Simultaneously, as Blommaert (2007) pointed out, it does not reject horizontal images of space, but rather complements them with additional dimensions, including the power dimension. Thus, an examination of transition space is a multidimensional inquiry that seeks to map connections across various scales (cf. Hult 2015, 2017). In this way, I draw on nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2004) in which the focal point is a social action that occurs at the nexus of three key elements: *historical body* (individual scale, e.g., teachers and pupils' beliefs and preferences about various subjects and activities); *interaction order* (interpersonal scale, e.g., expectations that classroom actors have about each other); and *discourses in place* (higher scales on institutional, national, and societal levels, e.g., educational policies). These come together to enable a particular action (Scollon and Scollon 2004).

Therefore, with respect to the overarching research question, I utilize the concept of transition space seeking to examine how (non)movements between physical spaces/and or activities (the horizontal perspective) are made in different spatiotemporal and social configurations (the scalar perspective). I address this question by exploring which actors meet in the transition space; who transits where, what they leave behind, and how; what expectations the actors have of each other; where and when the transitions are made or prepared; and which discourses are foregrounded.

4 Data collection and analysis

This study draws from ethnography, which, as a methodological approach, provided me with a valuable insight into both "the fine-grained details of everyday discursive practices and their organization within larger cultural and historical frames" (McCarty 2005: xxii). Inspired by nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2004), I took micro-level actions, i.e., micro-level transitions and related negotiations and decision-making, as a starting point for this study. Simultaneously, I investigated these individual momentary actions as multidimensional phenomena, i.e., "nexus points for discourses across various scales" (Hult 2017: 91). Therefore, my methodological approach could be described as scalar ethnography (cf. Hult 2017).

Ethnography, as well as nexus analysis, involves participation and systematic observation (Lane 2014). This study's empirical point of departure was the participant classroom observations documented in field notes. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews supplemented this real-time ethnography (cf. Murto et al. 2020), with the interviews focusing on the pupils' and school staffs' experiences with SKF subjects. The observations took place from the beginning of February to the beginning of June, i.e., covering major parts of the school's spring term. All the pupils, as well as most of the school staff, were interviewed at the turn of May and June. One school staff member was interviewed in February and another in October. Relevant policy documents were used to contextualize the transitional situations addressed in this study.

I conducted participant classroom observations for 31 days at four primary schools in a North Norwegian town characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity. However, I observed transitions between mainstream and SKF classes, but did not make video or audio recordings. As a non-native former teacher who uses the languages that the pupils learned and a longtime resident of this study's geographical context, I straddled the dividing line as an insider and outsider (cf. Paulgaard 1997), positioning myself as a "helping hand," which enabled me to participate in various classroom activities. I helped the pupils with schoolwork if they and the teachers desired it, and it also allowed me to get better acquainted with the participants. I regularly discussed my level of participation with them and adapted it accordingly so that my role would not interfere with the participants' comfort in the classroom, independent research, or the teachers' authority (cf. NESH 2022). In this way, I also tried to reflect principles such as respect and reciprocity, which are among the key principles in Indigenous methodologies (cf. Kirkness and Barnhardt 1991).

In addition to classroom observations, I individually interviewed six SKF pupils (seventh-graders, ages 12–13) who had been learning SKF subjects since first or second grade. They all had either historical minority or Finnish backgrounds (see Section 2). Furthermore, I interviewed three SKF teachers, three homeroom teachers, and a school administrator. The interviews' length ranged from approximately 25 to 75 min, for a total of 9.5 h. I conducted most of the interviews in Norwegian and the remainder in Finnish and Northern Sámi. To ensure my research participants' anonymity, I provided only English translations of the interviews. For the same reason, the research participants were assigned gender-neutral names. The interview excerpts appearing in this article were, together with the original transcripts and main points of the analysis, sent to the research participants to clarify any potential ambiguities. Excerpts 1 and 3, originating from a pupil, were presented and discussed in person with the participant due to the extent of the material and the participant's age. In the interview transcripts, uncertain words are in brackets; the use of […] signifies omissions; double brackets signify non-speech elements,

such as laughter, e.g., "([laughter])"; and words in all capital letters signify loudness or emphasis (cf. Swann 2009). Specific mentions of languages or second language subjects were replaced by "SKF," which helped anonymize the research participants. Minimal responses, small pauses, overlapping speech, fillers, and repetitions were omitted to aid readability.

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and coded in NVivo. I coded the data based on Tjora's (2018) Stepwise-Deductive Induction, initially grounding the coding closely in empirical data. I then progressively moved to code grouping, concept development, and testing. The code groups that emerged regarding this study were: (1) experiences with the parallel structure; (2) organizational conditions; (3) transitions between mainstream and SKF classes; and (4) "coordinations" in advance. These codes were used to analyze transition-making systematically and further identify actions I wanted to examine more thoroughly in this study. The field notes, coded in Microsoft Office software, were used to complement the interview data. The notion of transition space arose during this process from a need to find a conceptual tool that would allow me to capture the trajectories' complexity from different scales in relation to the physical (non)movements between classroom spaces. The materials used in this article are part of a larger data set collected to examine pupils' choices related to the SKF subjects during the transition from primary to lower secondary school. The data included in this study were part of the first phase of the ethnographic fieldwork during the pupils' last semester in primary school.

5 Constructing and navigating transition space

In the remainder of this article, I present, analyze, and discuss my findings. I first demonstrate how the school schedule creates transitions between mainstream classrooms/classes and SKF classes. Furthermore, I examine how the social actors (e.g., pupils and teachers) experience and navigate these transitions.

5.1 Construction of the transition space: an in-between space carved out by the schedule

One of the most important discourses that shapes transitions between mainstream classrooms/activities and language classes is the school schedule. The following table presents an example of a schedule from a class with two different SKF groups, marked as SKF1 and SKF2.

Table 1: School schedule with two SKF subjects (adjustments were made to ensure anonymity).

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
08:30-9:15	English	Math	Science	Norwegian	Norwegian
09:15-10:00	Food and Health	Math	Science	Norwegian	Norwegian
10:00-10:50	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
10:50-11:35	Norwegian/ SKF1 (10:30-12:30)	Arts and Crafts	Physical activity	Science	Social studies
11:35-12:20	Norwegian SKF1 (10:30-12:30)	Arts and Crafts	Math	Science	Social studies
12:20-12:40	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
12:40-13:25	Music		English SKF2 (12:00-14:00)	Religion	Physical Education
13:25-14:10	Music		English SKF2 (12:00-14:00)	Religion	Physical Education

School schedules, such as the one above, are set up on a local (school) scale, but are regulated on a higher scale through national education policies and Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training directives. These timetables are powerful texts, as they forge premises for when, how long, with whom, and what would be the main interaction content in the classroom in various physical and/or social spaces. The schedule in Table 1 also illustrates the different possible ways to include SKF in the timetable. SKF1 was taken from Norwegian classes, parts of SKF1 and SKF2 also were added to ordinary curricular hours (during breaks), and SKF2 was taken from math and English classes. Either way, the schedule allows for transitions between two spaces – activities in mainstream and SKF classes – that occur simultaneously in different places.

To receive their language instruction, SKF pupils need to leave their mainstream classrooms/classes, which entails leaving the social environment with their classmates and instruction in mandatory subjects that are also part of SKF pupils' study programs. Therefore, SKF pupils essentially qualify to be in two physical places with different academic and social content simultaneously. However, whereas the mainstream classroom usually comprises 15–20 pupils of the same age, an SKF group generally comprises one to four pupils, often of different ages and language skills.

In the municipality where the fieldwork was conducted, the SKF teachers are generally not part of the pupils' dailiness, as they usually work as *ambulating teachers* (see also Dewilde 2013). This means that on a local (municipal) scale, SKF classes were organized in the pupils' home schools and SKF teachers traveled from school to school to provide language lessons. Therefore, as the school schedule indicates, SKF classes are organized as double lessons once a week. This aspect of

the organization also influences communication between classroom actors, as SKF teachers have limited options to meet physically with SKF pupils and their teachers from each school. Moreover, it reduces the possibility of swapping classes between teacher colleagues to make up for eventually missed teaching hours in some of the subject(s).

Even though the schedule creates a premise for transitions from mainstream classrooms to SKF classes, the movements are not a matter of course. For example, in one of the schools, I observed that an SKF group received only 12.5 % of allocated teaching hours during a nine-week period (Observation 2). The reasons for the cancellations varied greatly from week to week, and illness was one cause. In such cases, it usually was challenging to find a substitute teacher, and SKF pupils then remained in their mainstream classes. However, in most cases, the SKF teachers and pupils were present in the schools, yet the pupils remained in their mainstream classes (see Observation 1). Furthermore, even when the lesson was not canceled, it was not realized as a full two-hour lesson as scheduled. These observations imply that policies are not the only element that enables or restricts certain actions with micro-level transitions. The policies create a pathway for micro-level transitions between two spaces (mainstream and SKF classes) and, thus, are a significant force in the construction of transition space. However, as the observations imply, the manner of the transitions' realization depends further on negotiations between the classroom actors (pupils and teachers) in the metaphorical transition space. Using Hornberger's (2002) metaphorical terms (cf. Johnson 2011: 129), the mainstream classrooms and SKF classes *carved out* by the policies are only *potential spaces* that need to be *filled* with (non) movements made in transition space. Later in this article, I examine situations in which (non)movements do not follow the schedule and discuss how these (non) movements are made, paying particular attention to (inter)personal scales.

5.2 Navigating transition space

> *A class of seventh-graders has math. Two pupils are supposed to have an SKF lesson. It is an hour after the SKF lesson should have started, according to the school schedule. The SKF teacher comes to the class, says something to the SKF pupils, then leaves. As an observer, I do not know what was said. The fact is that there was no SKF lesson that day. (Observation 3)*

5.2.1 Transition space: (non)movements between spaces

The manner of the transitions may vary significantly from class to class, and school to school, from one year to another. Some pupils move to SKF classes alone, often straight from a break, and they start a new lesson at the same time the rest of the class

starts a new lesson. Others might start in the middle of a different, ongoing lesson (see Observation 3), and in such cases, the pupils are picked up by an SKF teacher. However, what they have in common are the movements between different physical spaces and social settings.

In Excerpt 1, Sam, an SKF pupil, describes their experiences with the transitions between mainstream and language classes in which they get picked up by an SKF teacher after a lesson in the mainstream class has begun (see also Table 1):

Excerpt 1:

> **Researcher***: And how does it work because you get picked up not at the beginning of the class, but in the middle of it, right? So, you do something first in, for example, math, like …*
>
> **Sam***: Yeah, yeah, but we have just started, so that's nothing. One just takes the pencil case and leaves. But it's kinda bummer when they forget that we have SKF and then if they are about to do something fun and we have SKF, it's like ([deep sigh]).*

In the excerpt, Sam first portrayed the micro-level transition from the mainstream classroom to language classes, which I interpreted as a straightforward unproblematic business. Sam gets picked up by the SKF teacher and moves to another classroom for SKF lessons. However, the conjunction used immediately afterward, "but," signaled a contrastive shift in the narrative. Sam described how unpleasant it is to move to the SKF class when "they" (the subject teachers) forget about the SKF, and the pupil must leave what the pupil perceives as a fun activity. This highlights how the pupil not only moves to another space, but also leaves something behind. The deep sigh at the end of the excerpt signaled that what is being left behind affects the movement forward on a personal scale.

Also, the interviewed teachers talked about pupils' lack of desire to leave the mainstream classroom if the class is about to do something that pupils perceive as fun, interesting, or socially enjoyable. Conversely, they also may leave the mainstream classroom space gladly for more preferable academic and/or social content in the SKF class. Of course, such preferences on a personal scale vary and may even change from week to week. Either way, the SKF pupils qualify to be in both places, but they cannot be in both places simultaneously, which may lead to negotiations on an interpersonal scale. Sam's deep sigh in Excerpt 1 indicates that the parallel organization structure creates situations that make it difficult at times for pupils to move from one place to another. Thus, how the here-and-now is experienced depends, to a certain extent, on what is happening there and now where I (the pupil) could have been. It reveals that transition space invokes particular spatiotemporal and social configurations. In such cases, the classroom actors' interests might pull in different directions toward different spaces.

The potential for dilemmas is created not only by the movement to and from something, but also by the movement itself. Vanja, a homeroom teacher, talks below about why, based on her experiences, SKF pupils from the fifth to seventh grades opt out of these subjects:

Excerpt 2:

> [...] They start to reflect more and more on the group and those around them, and the individual somehow doesn't want to differ from the mass and becomes very concerned about just having to leave and get all those questions and be so different. It's been a bit tough for some pupils. And then it's very person-based; some are not affected by it at all, while others are a little more vulnerable to it, which has caused them not wanting to participate in classes or being reluctant to leave and get all those questions because it becomes very personal, as it is very visible because it's so in the minority.

The homeroom teacher provided an account of a type of action that can be described as an act of leaving. In such situations, the pupil(s) are put into the spotlight, which can be difficult for some of them. This might be particularly true around the age at which children undergo significant biological, psychological, and social changes, which also affect their identity development (Strand 2022). The act of leaving also is described as "very personal" and "very visible"; therefore, the pupils at times can be "reluctant to leave."

The expression "in the minority" is fitting, as it points toward various dimensions of SKF pupils leaving the class. First, the expression points toward the proportion of the SKF group within the mainstream classroom: Only a few pupils, or even one pupil alone, go from being part of a bigger social setting to being part of a smaller setting. In any case, the act of leaving signals being different from the mainstream classroom. The homeroom teacher described pupils' heightened awareness as individuals in relation to a larger group, i.e., their mainstream class. The act of leaving is an expression of one's identity, and even more so a minority identity, as the SKF pupils usually belong to historical and historically marginalized minorities (Sámi and Kven/Norwegian Finnish) or have transnational (Finnish) backgrounds. This is an example of how different elements on personal, interpersonal, and societal scales come together in micro-level transitions (cf. Scollon and Scollon 2004). As Vanja described it, leaving the mainstream classroom might even incur consequences from the larger group in the form of questions or comments that SKF pupils might deem uncomfortable to face (see also Hermansen and Olsen 2020). Thus, pupils in the transition space evidently might have certain concerns or discomfort with their (non)movements.

This aspect of the micro-level transitions between the mainstream classroom and SKF classes aligns with Sollid (2023), who examined the journey of a Sámi 3 pupil

in a primary school and analyzed what made her choice to learn Sámi at school possible, then difficult later. Sollid demonstrated the affective impact from the pupil leaving the mainstream classroom, which ultimately contributed to the pupil's choice to opt out of the subject. Such consequences demonstrate the vulnerability of transitional situations, which, on (inter)personal scales, are among other contributors affected by attitudes and accumulated experiences of the SKF pupils and other classroom actors.

The transitional situations are not always easy for the teachers either. Kari, an SKF teacher, experienced a situation (recorded in my field notes) in which they were supposed to pick up an SKF pupil who was watching a movie and eating popcorn in the mainstream class. The teacher let the pupil watch the movie instead of removing them. Later in the recorded interview, the teacher said that "it is not good for the motivation either to miss something nice." Thus, the teacher, as an actor in the transition space, reacted to the mainstream classroom's activity and social setting, and the pupil's expressed or assumed preferences. The example also illustrates a dilemma SKF teachers might face: balancing their responsibility for pupils' learning with creating good conditions for pupils' motivation to engage with the subject long-term, especially since pupils can opt out of the subject at any time.

The examples above indicate that even though school schedules are powerful discourses that shape classroom actors' options significantly, the classes still are only potential spaces until the classroom actors fill them with movements in the actual transitional situation. Thus, the classroom actors' agency helps co-construct the transition space. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000: 169–170) noted that the "ultimate attainment in second language learning relies on one's agency," arguing that while the first language and subjectivities are given, the new ones arrive by choice. Having SKF as a subject at school is a choice, and it is a marked choice (Sollid 2023). It is not only a one-time choice made in vertical transitions, i.e., from one educational level to another, as discussed in extant research (cf. Nygaard and Bro 2015; Vangsnes 2021), but also a choice that needs to be reaffirmed in the transition space every week. Transition space, as a concept, helps understand the connections in these repetitive, yet always unique, situations. In the next section, I examine in more detail how the pupils and teachers used agency to navigate the transition space.

5.2.2 Transition space: agency in times and spaces

At the end of Excerpt 1, Sam (S), an SKF pupil, sighed deeply to emphasize how it feels when it is time to leave the mainstream classroom while the class is about to do something fun. The interview continued with my (R) follow-up question:

Excerpt 3: (Continuation of Excerpt 1).

1	R	*Can you tell, do you remember such a situation maybe?*
2	S	*Yeah, the others were going out to have P.E.*
3		*And then we were allowed to finish the SKF lesson a little bit earlier*
4		*so that we could join them. But we scolded the teachers and said*
5		*that they can't do anything fun when we have an SKF class.*
6	R	*([laughter]) Yeah…*
7	S	*And so it has been. So, they don't do anything fun*
8		*when we have SKF classes. They do just math.*
9	R	*([laughter]) Yeah … And what if they were about to do something fun*
10		*all of a sudden? Is it difficult to decide*
11		*if one wants to be with the class or to have an SKF lesson?*
12	S	*No, there's no choice. One has to go to the SKF class,*
13		*but we're allowed to, we, someone is good to persuade.*
14	R	*([short laughter]) To persuade whom?*
15	S	*The teacher, the SKF teacher,*
16		*so that we can go out a little bit before or after because we used to be allowed*
17		*to go out for a small break and then we come back.*
18		*Like when the weather is nice, for example,*
19		*then we can also go out for the small break.*

In the first part of Excerpt 3 (lines 1–8), Sam talked about a specific situation, and in the second part (lines 9–19), Sam answered more generally about their experiences with the micro-level transitions between the mainstream and language classes. I first focus below on the latter part.

In lines 9–19, the pupil was asked whether it sometimes can be difficult to decide whether one wants to move to the SKF class or remain in the current class environment. Sam first positions themself, as well as the SKF co-pupils, in a situation of no choice and clear expectations that "one has to go to the SKF class" (line 12) when the SKF teacher comes. Therefore, Sam expressed an understanding of SKF pupils' role on the interpersonal scale as not being involved in any decision-making process and expects that there is no room for negotiation. However, the pupil immediately pointed out that some pupils have good negotiation skills, which they, according to Sam, successfully use to persuade the SKF teacher to skip parts of the SKF lesson in favor of joining the rest of the class when they take a break.

This account demonstrates how a pupil with good persuasive skills (personal scale) invokes an agentive role (cf. Hult 2017) and reshapes flows in the transition space formed largely by the school schedule (local institutional scale). According to the schedule, transitions between the mainstream classroom and SKF classes are delimited by the start and end of an SKF lesson. However, the pupils challenged such a schedule. Pupils' agency modifies the connector of the transition space so that they

can "travel" between the two classroom spaces within the time frame allocated to the SKF class. Sam's words "we used to be" (line 16) indicate an established practice. This account demonstrates how agency, individual skills, and policies come together in a transition space to enable a certain (non)movement.

In lines 1–8, Sam provided an account in which the mainstream class went outside for P.E., an activity the pupil perceives as enjoyable, during an SKF lesson. The SKF pupils viewed this as unfair even though they were allowed to finish the SKF class earlier so they could join their mainstream class outside. Therefore, in the episode's sequel, the SKF pupils scolded the subject teachers for doing something fun while they were in SKF class. Not only did they successfully use their agentive force to finish the SKF lesson earlier, but they also managed to change practices in the mainstream classroom during their absence. Thus, even though the transition space here works primarily as a connector between spaces concerning the SKF pupils' (non)movements, the actions in the transition space also might affect the respective spaces' content – in this case, mainstream class content.

However, the negotiations and decision-making on being here and now or there and now do not necessarily occur in the proximity of the actual parallel classes. Vanja, a homeroom teacher, noted the following:

Excerpt 4:

> *We talk to the pupils in advance. And then it's us adults who check and coordinate a little bit first and then we talk to the pupils, and preferably not the same day, but a day before or at the beginning of the week. […] Sometimes they say no, that they would like to go to their language classes, and other times they say yes, this is something they would like to join, like to be present at part and then go back. I think it's important to include, so that it won't be so rigid like you must. It's, after all, their educational path, and it is important that they feel that they're taken care of, even though they choose differently.*

The teacher's account indicates that negotiations and choices concerning micro-level transitions are not necessarily made spontaneously or with immediate or close spatial and temporal proximity between the two class spaces. The teacher explained that they (the teachers) talk to the SKF pupils a day or days before actual lessons. Such discussions then take place again only after the subject and language teacher negotiate to shape the alternatives offered to the pupils. Such distance also allows for participation by other social actors who normally are not present in the school, such as parents, as another teacher revealed. It indicates that even though negotiations in the transition space always relate to actual lessons' time and space, they also can take place outside of the lessons' time, space, and usual social setting.

The teacher in Excerpt 4 emphasized the role of the pupil self in the decision-making process, referring to the principle of pupil involvement, which is found in

the Norwegian core curriculum (cf. Ministry of Education and Research 2017). This example illustrates that the teachers recognize the pupils' agency, and it is this agency that transcends the school schedule here. It is a process of dialogicity and responsibility (cf. Matusov et al. 2016), the latter meaning the ability to respond to the pupils' needs in the best possible way. Furthermore, similar to Excerpt 3, the excerpt above demonstrates that negotiations in the transition space do not necessarily result in a "one-way ticket" to the SKF lesson, but rather a tentative "itinerary" cocreated by the schedule and the teachers' and pupils' agency.

I understand the processes of spatiotemporally more distant negotiations initiated by the teachers as a way of taking responsibility to prevent or reduce dilemma situations for pupils, as well as to prevent unexpected situations for the teachers. However, the teachers mentioned that finding adequate solutions for the SKF pupils – as well as the rest of the class, particularly regarding collective class projects, class trips, and the like – can be challenging. Even though the teachers try to facilitate easier transitions for the pupils, everyday school reality, the school schedule, and human factors, such as communication flow between school actors, may hinder such experience. Activities in the language classes and mainstream classes may collide. "Then they often get into a little squeeze that they have to make a choice," as Jona, a homeroom teacher, noted, referring in particular to situations in which an outside-school actor (e.g., a cultural institution) is involved. Such a use of words implies that in these cases, pupils' role is not one of co-determination, but rather one of necessity: The pupils attain the responsibility to decide where to go. Such choices also have a cumulative dimension.

5.2.3 Transition space and the accumulation of time and responsibilities

As explained earlier, SKF subjects are chosen in addition to all the mandatory subjects, and the SKF teaching hours are taken not only from Norwegian, but also other mandatory subjects. Sollid (2023: 64) wrote the following about a Sámi 3 pupil's experiences in primary school: "When the instruction, which was primarily to take place during Norwegian classes, began to affect other subjects, she decided to prioritize what she experienced as central school subjects" (my translation).

SKF pupils miss subject matter in subjects overlapping with SKF, yet they are expected to reach the same competence goals as other students, which can create experiences of "lagging behind," as Andrea, an SKF pupil, described it. Such experiences can vary greatly on a personal scale depending on pupils' preferences and perceived strengths. While some do not experience missing two hours of Norwegian or math weekly as problematic, others can feel they miss something that can be difficult to catch up with. Therefore, over time, it can become "a burden"

(Sollid 2023). Thus, the collision of subjects on the time schedule involves not only movements from the mainstream classroom to language classes, but also implicitly future movements back. Such movements involve a new set of responsibilities – to get oriented and updated on what had been done in the classroom while the pupil was attending the SKF lesson. Sooner or later, pupils will be responsible/accountable for their "competencies," as the curricula describe them.

This academic aspect of the micro-level transitions between mainstream classes and language classes also is reflected in the transition space. Sasha, an SKF teacher, noted the following:

Excerpt 5:

> *We made an agreement that when SKF is at the same time as math, then we made a deal in a way that they first are in their classes for the introduction in math and then we go for the SKF class. That was the agreement. That I ADJUSTED (the start), Math, in my opinion, is also very important, so when they have this introduction to a new subject like they usually have on Tuesdays that new stuff is introduced. (So), that was an adjustment we made.*

Sasha first noted that "we," the teachers, "made an agreement." Unlike in the previous excerpts, pupils' role in this agreement was not mentioned, suggesting the teachers' capacity to act on the pupils' behalf (cf. Duff 2013). Sasha referred to a long-term agreement that has become an established practice confirmed by other research participants, as well as my observations. These initial negotiations took place months before the transitions that I was able to observe, demonstrating that week-to-week negotiations on the interpersonal scale, such as the one presented in Excerpt 4, can be framed by even earlier negotiations affecting flows in the transition space.

What I understand as being central in these negotiations is the perceived and/or experienced importance of the subjects, which is a topic that the teachers often raised during the interviews. In Excerpt 5, Sasha juxtaposed an SKF subject with math, both of which they perceived as important and which collide in the schedule. Therefore, Sasha's adjustment of the SKF classes may be viewed as a measure to prevent or reduce pupils' experiences of "lagging behind," which might affect pupils' development and academic results in other subjects. Such experiences may result in opting out of the subject, which was the case for a Sámi 3 pupil in Sollid (2023). Whereas Sam's narration in Excerpts 1 and 3 emphasized a dilemma on what was currently fun, interesting, or socially enjoyable, this excerpt demonstrates that classroom actors also relate to the academic side of the classes' content and the discourses of subjects' importance for future prospects circulating at higher scales in society and in the educational system.

The single weekly choices accumulate throughout the school years. The SKF pupils then might end up in a situation in which they get considerably less instruction in one or more subjects than their classmates. However, extant research (e.g., Niiranen 2011),

as well as the observations in my study (e.g., Observations 1–3), demonstrate that a substantial number of teaching hours in SKF subjects can disappear in other school classes and activities. Sasha argued that reaching competence goals within the two-hour time frame once a week in their subject is very challenging "unless the pupil makes an extra effort." It already is challenging to achieve the given competence goals with two teaching hours a week, so any additional shortage in teaching hours, such as those referred to in Observation 2, makes it even more difficult. SKF pupils then can find themselves in a situation in which they get the responsibility, in the meaning of obligation and accountability, for their own learning in the SKF subjects and/or some of the mandatory subjects (Sollid 2023).

At the end of each interview, the participants were asked whether they wanted to add anything else that we had not talked about or something they viewed as important. Kuura, an SKF teacher, expressed the following:

Excerpt 6:

> What do I call it? Structural indifference. Like the municipality or the Ministry of Education or the County governor, they are not interested in this subject, like it's such a small subject, that surely it will work out. […] You have to remember that indifference targets the field; it's targeted at the pupil. It's the language world of the minority language pupil, and it's his/her subject.

In this excerpt, Kuura described the SKF subjects' position in the educational system as something "less important," explaining that the SKF subjects can be experienced as small subjects on the periphery, in which the organizational structure effectively moves responsibilities to classroom individuals to find solutions for themselves and makes the pupils responsible for the consequences. Over time, this could even lead to restricted opportunities for historically minoritized groups, such as Sámi and Kven/Norwegian Finns, to reclaim their languages or keep up in other subjects. As I demonstrated, individual actors need to resolve these dilemmas created by the organizational structure in the transition space; thus, the organizational structure individualizes the responsibilities (cf. Hermansen and Olsen 2012). As Ola, a home-room teacher, noted, "it requires more from us; it requires more from the pupil and from the parents."

6 Conclusion and implications for policies and further research

This article examined micro-level transitions between mainstream and SKF classes in Norwegian primary schools. The (non)movement creation between these two spaces is shaped largely by policies materialized in school schedules that place

activities in mainstream and SKF classes in the same time slots, but in different places. However, as I demonstrated, the transitions are not a matter of course, and the respective educational spaces are only potential spaces until SKF pupils fill them with (non)movements. Such actions involve negotiations and decision-making beyond moments of transition in an in-between space that I term transition space. In this space – stretching across various temporal, spatial, and social scales (cf. Hult 2015) – social actors, primarily SKF pupils and their teachers, resolve policy implementation issues by preparing and making (non)movements between mainstream and SKF classes.

This study also indicates the potential of transition space as a new conceptualization for researching micro-level transitions in educational settings, such as pullout classes. Transition space is a concept that uses the horizontal dimension (see Figure 1), i.e., micro-level transitions, as the analytical point of departure. However, transition space is more than a crossroads on the surface, emerging from the interplay of processes on different scales (e.g., national and local educational policies, classroom actors' preferences, skills or beliefs, etc.). Furthermore, it enables or even necessitates choices about where to go and when. The concept of transition space allows us to examine transition-making between spaces or activities at deeper temporal, spatial, interactional, and social levels.

In this study, the concept helped me reveal transition-making complexities by demonstrating how movements intended by policies change through actions occurring at various times and in various spaces. On an interpersonal scale, these involve, for example, long-term agreements between SKF and other teachers (e.g., Excerpt 5), negotiations between multiple actors in advance (e.g., Excerpt 4), or spontaneous negotiations during the time frame allocated to parallel-organized classes (e.g., Excerpt 3). Furthermore, as I have demonstrated, (non)movements on the surface are framed not only by past actions, but also by various imagined futures. On a personal level, a pupil's (non)movements might be affected, such as by their imagination of what would happen in the other room (e.g., Excerpt 1), what they need to catch up on, or how their prospects in a more distant future might be affected (e.g., Excerpt 5).

Transition space also sheds light on power dynamics in educational settings, establishing a context for a required action that, in this study, is created largely by the policies (e.g., distribution of teaching hours on the national level) shaping parallel-organized structure (e.g., school schedules on the local level). They have the power to carve out potential classroom spaces, as well as delegate responsibilities that, due to collaterality, may be manifold and even contradictory. However, what might seem to be a hierarchical top-down policy structure may be challenged and dissolved in the transition space by the agency of social actors (teachers and pupils). They ultimately make (non)movements, even though their agency to implement

remains constrained by policies, e.g., available destinations, allocated time frames, or competence goals. Thus, policies as "the given" shape and situate classroom actors' agency (Matusov et al. 2016). This interplay between policies and classroom actors' agency enables a certain continuity in the transition space, but simultaneously allows for new and even surprising flows.

Educational policies have power, and finding optimal solutions to local implementation from national policies is not an easy task. It should be noted that the current organizational solution also presents advantages compared with solutions, such as in neighboring Sweden. There, the most common practice for instruction in national or regional minority languages is organizing such classes after school hours (see Council of Europe 2020; Ganuza and Hedman 2015). In Norway, SKF subjects at the primary school level usually do not take place outside of ordinary school hours. However, they still can be experienced as something "extra" (Hermansen and Olsen 2012), as they are added to or removed from other school activities. The classroom actors then may find themselves in different dilemmas based on what they are eligible for or expected to be able to do. Thus, the organizational structure effectively moves the responsibility, i.e., the ability to respond to pupils' rights and needs, to classroom actors to find solutions for themselves. Simultaneously, the authorities make pupils responsible/accountable for consequences, such as in terms of competence goals in the curricula, even though they might have received considerably less instruction in some mandatory subjects, as well as SKF subjects. And if fair chances to achieve competence goals are constrained for children referred to as "good at school" from resourceful families, what might children with special needs or children from less-resourceful families experience?

The SKF subject situation often is presented as statistics (Sollid 2023) that focus on pupils and their parents' choices in vertical educational transitions. These statistics indicate a "leakage" (Vangsnes 2021) of SKF pupils (see also Nygaard and Bro 2015). My study enriches these circumstances by demonstrating that the choice of SKF subjects is not only a "one-time choice," but also a choice that must be negotiated and reaffirmed weekly. Such choices are tied to various sets of responsibilities and consequences, and perhaps even vulnerable situations for the SKF pupils. Based on my study's findings, as well as previous research (e.g., Hermansen and Olsen 2012; Hermansen and Olsen 2020; Sollid 2023), many opt-outs in vertical transitions, to a larger or smaller extent, might be the result of accumulated weekly choices.

Norway's official educational policies open ideological spaces that celebrate multilingualism and ascribe the school a pivotal role in revitalizing Indigenous and national minority languages (Sollid 2023). However, due to the SKF subjects' organizational framing, it is challenging to fill up classrooms as implementational spaces (cf. Johnson 2011), with practices reflecting such ideas and goals. Extant research has indicated that two hours a week of language instruction does not

usually provide enough space to become functionally bilingual (cf. Baker 2001; NOU 2016: 18). My study demonstrates that the parallel structure further reduces already-scarce spaces for minority language learning, which is particularly problematic for pupils for whom the school represents the only one, or one of only a few Sámi, Kven, or Finnish language arenas. Therefore, I argue that the organizational structure undermines fulfillment of intentions expressed in the policies. Consequently, Sámi, Kven, and Finnish, as languages and school subjects, remain marginalized in the Norwegian educational system (Sollid 2023), thereby weakening the broader societal endeavor to revitalize and reclaim Kven and the Sámi languages.

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