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Family and Primary School in the Faroe Islands

Firouz GAINI

Institute of Education, University of the Faroe Islands

Abstract

The Faroe Islands have been described as a latemodern society with traditional family relations. This article investigates the relation between the family group and primary school from different perspectives in order to unveil the complexities of contemporary society. It presents the Faroese debate on primary school subjects and curriculum from a parents' viewpoint. Also, it defines four family categories with different values and communication patterns. Finally, the family capital of Faroese families is analyzed in an attempt to understand the family's impact on young people's schooling and educational fortune.

Keywords: Family capital, family type, education, religious identity

1 Introduction

The Faroe Islands, with a population of 48.000, is an autonomous region within the kingdom of Denmark. Faroe Islanders have their own culture, language and traditions. The eighteen islands were settled by Norwegian Vikings during the eighth and ninth centuries. Faroe Islanders belong to the Nordic region regarding ethnic, cultural and religious identity. Because of its small geographical scale and relative isolation, Faroese society has preserved ancient customs and rituals that vanished from continental Europe centuries ago. Faroe Islanders were, until the 20th century, independent fishermen and farmers living in small collective village communities (Joensen 1982 & 1987). The second half of the 20th century was characterized by a fast development towards an industrial society in close contact with the outside world. Today the society is technologically and economically advanced, but quite traditional concerning family values.

The family and primary school are central institutions of any modern society. The pattern of a society's family-school interaction is shaped by its social, cultural and political fabric, as well as its belief and kinship systems. The Faroe Islands are often identified as a late modern society with traditional family relations. This presentation seems at first glance incoherent, but closer examination reveals a society in shift – between tradition and modernity – struggling to find its path in a global world. This article concentrates on two questions: [1] Are the family and school contexts congruent regarding cultural and educational values and capital? [2] Is late modern society a threat to traditions and family capital?

The local debate on children's education presents interesting viewpoints, but it gives hardly any information about the family system. Some reference to children's social backgrounds appears, but no comprehensive analysis of the family factor. The family is normally taken for granted as a 'natural' primordial institution, rather than as a contested cultural construction. Thus, I regard this article as an early attempt to explore the Faroese family in the field of educational sociology. My objective is to analyse the family and home in order to get an understanding of main Faroese educational challenges.

2 Social and family capital

'Family capital' is affiliated to the more common 'social capital' concept. R.H. Putnam, J.S. Coleman and P. Bourdieu have among others developed distinct acclaimed theories of social capital (Svendsen and Svendsen 2006: 36-38). Bourdieu's general definition of 'capital' operates on a qualitative micro-level that gives family relations strong attention (op cit). Bourdieu's individual-oriented approach with focus on power-relations and strategies is relevant for any delimitation of the 'family capital'. Capital can accumulate and grow – visibly and invisibly – through time. Family capital is mainly invisible, hence difficult to measure with clear comparative guidelines.

Family capital refers to cultural values and symbols within the family entity, while Putnam's macro-level theory examines social capital as networks and norms with societal functions (op cit). While social capital, according to Putnam, through the framework of the civil society and political system, produces efficient cooperation benefiting all groups in society, family capital serves family members without common national goals. Family capital affects intimate interpersonal relations underlying social networks. 'Human capital' that persons internalized in a family context embraces skills and knowledge that subsequently enter the community context before becoming part of the social capital (Imig 2000). Family capital,

like Bourdieu's social capital, is a potential capital not necessarily converted into practical benefits.

Social capital, according to Putnam, is about relations of trust between citizens on the one hand and societal institutions on the other. This trust is fundamental for civil society. Family capital establishes strong bonds of confidence between relatives, but at the same time this capital might indirectly result in conflict at a higher level in society. Anthropologists have for decades studied societies with 'anomalies' that in many cases are symmetrical, hence generating stability and continuity rather than breakdown (Eriksen 1993). The social capital of the family, says Coleman (1988: 384), is the relation between children and parents. Families represent a more hidden and symbolic capital that does not necessarily result in university and working careers for the children.

The family, often regarded as a centre of informal social networks, is linked to the larger community with social capital as a mediator. The family is often considered as a tool to improve community life as well as the well-being of individual citizens. But what happens in times of change? In the globalized 21st century era of rapid change, how do families adapt to new standards and priorities in society? The family, when it is defined as a durable exchange-based social network based on mutual acquaintances and recognition, is a source of social capital that can strengthen children's position in school and elsewhere in society (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119).

The family is at the centre of attention in contemporary society. Is there a revival in the academic interest in kinship after the decline of civil society based on local participatory democracy, national financial policies and the welfare system? Is the family back on the agenda because it is considered a desperately needed capital in a risk society? (Beck 1998). This seems to be the case.

"Debates about the future of the family in industrial society has been stimulated in part by anthropological evidence of the cultural relativity of family forms and supposed 'natural' family relations, and has centred also on the relationship which exists between family, socialization and political or ideological systems. This is a complex issue, since as family historical research has shown there are both contradictions and consistencies between family forms and values and wider political, economic and religious institutions. Families in some respects perpetuate through the socialization process the ideological and value systems of the wider society, but in some respects and in some contexts they may also oppose or contradict these: especially in periods of social change or in the formation of subcultures" (Seymour-Smith 1986: 111)

The family, as stressed above, is today in a complex and ambiguous relation to political and economic institutions, partly as a consequence of the cultural fragmentation in society. In nostalgic perspectives, the family is with its symbolic 'family capital', preserving threatened 'authentic' values. Families are thus often unintentionally in opposition to the surrounding changing society.

Today's family has many roles and duties; it is a network, a community and a safe haven in a volatile world. For most people the family still represents the main supportive 'capital' in their struggle for survival and success in life. The late modern family has a complex structure that is egocentric, non-authoritarian and based on relatively informal voluntary commitments. This is indeed a simplified image of an intricate world, and the Faroe Islands have strong links to the pre-modern collective family system.

3 Primary school and educational values

The primary school carries a societal responsibility hard to fulfil. The school is supposed to give all children – whatever their social, cultural, religious and ethnic background – equal fundamental education based on a set of cultural and ethical values, intellectual and creative ambitions, political and pedagogical traditions. This is a universal enterprise under pressure. Late modern society with its complex family system and cultural pluralism is forcing schools to move away from some of their goals. Pompous speeches on school education are becoming untrustworthy. Earl Warren, on behalf of the US Supreme Court, concluded the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) with these words:

“... Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is the principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available on equal terms” (in Hamann 2003)

This grandiose defence of the school illuminates some important principles underlying modern civil societies, but it displays the school as a ‘perfect’ institution representing all families in society on equal terms. Discourses on education are today characterized by disagreement in relation to the role and function of the school. The recurrent question circulating in all debate is – who is (mainly) responsible of the education of children? The American discourse on ‘home schooling’ is related to the same subject. Pro-home schooling voices say: “homeschooling parents may also want to protect their children from the threat of a state that seeks to foster unreflective commitment” (Glanzer 2008). This is exactly the same argument as the opponents use, just in reversed order: home schooling is a threat that public schools must protect children against.

The future status of ‘educational rights’, as part of universal human rights, is influenced by political, religious and social tensions in a globalized world. The cultural diversity characterizing a growing number of societies is also testing the parental powers in relation to children’s education, leading to these questions:

“How far may governments go in overriding parents’ wishes concerning the education of their children, and on what grounds? If the cultures or religions of some parents deny that all children have equal educational rights, how are the equal education-related rights of parents to be respected, while also respecting the equal educational rights of all children? How, indeed, should we interpret the proposition that all children have equal educational rights?” (Curren 2009)

The learning process that children go through has to do with culture. Education, says Varenne (2008), “is just another word for the more technical *enculturation*”. Culture is hence a trigger for education as well as its product. Education, in this academic context, is the methodological process of acquiring, transmitting and producing knowledge (op cit). Which roles, we may ask, do the school and the family play in the enculturation process of children? Through enculturation the child acquires knowledge, values and behaviours appropriate to the surrounding culture and society. In times of deep change societies don’t have clear

boundaries and standards regarding the national identity. Enculturation becomes a project with different paths and goals. This is the case in the Faroe Islands today.

4 Presentation

Faroese children start in primary school aged seven. Today's children have with few exceptions attended day-care institutions – nursery and kindergarten – before they start at primary school. Primary and lower secondary school – nine years in total – is compulsory. Primary schools are geographically decentralized and governed by the municipalities. Almost every village has its own independent primary school. The smallest schools comprise *one* single teacher and less than 10 pupils in total. The national school policy has for decades been based on a principle severely questioned today – the rule of not moving children away from their village before they are at the age of secondary school. Thus, the difference between remote village schools and Torshavn schools is huge.

The core aim of the school is, according to §2 of the Faroese primary school Code from 2007 (my translation):

“[1.] To carry out, with respect to the individual pupil and in cooperation with the parents, that pupils get knowledge, competences, methods/techniques and language skills that support the individual pupil in his/her diversified personal development. [2.] To establish such conditions for experience/movement, enterprising spirit and reflection that the pupils can develop their acknowledgement, their imagination and their learning-enthusiasm, and that they can exercise their skills in independent valuation, decision-making and action, and that they also can mature in relation to themselves and to the opportunities offered by the community. [3.] The school shall in agreement and cooperation with the parents help to give the pupils a Christian and ethical upbringing and education. It shall be based on the culture at home, advance the pupils' knowledge of Faroese culture and help them understand other cultures as well as the human interaction with nature. The school shall train the pupils in contextualization, joint decisions, common responsibilities, rights and duties in a democratic society. The lessons and daily life of the schools shall be based on intellectual liberty, tolerance, equality (of status) and democracy”

This protocol underlines the parents' essential role in relation to primary education in the Faroe Islands. It is unambiguously stated that the individual pupil's family has the right to influence parts of the school's pedagogical and cultural programme. Parents have in some cases the right to take their children out of the class and 'educate' them privately at home. Another debated rule in the Code states that children are to be given a "Christian and ethical education" at school. This principle has been left out from school Codes in many countries, because of its collision with modern values based on universal children's rights.

4.1 The crucifix

The European Court of Human Rights ruling (Nov. 2009) banning crucifixes from Italian classrooms has added fuel to the flames of the animated Faroese debate on Christian values and education. Mr. Niclasen, the Foreign Minister, reacted immediately to the news from Strasbourg by printing a public statement where he expresses his deep concerns regarding the

future of 'Christian values' and traditions in the Faroe Islands. The Faroe Islands, he says, have to resist the aggression from ambassadors of secularism abroad. The foreign minister's rather personal engagement in this case echoes the viewpoints of many Christian conservative families. On the opposite front, a growing number of young parents want their children to get primary education without any direct connection to the Lutheran-Evangelical heritage of society.

The child's right to freedom of religion is the core element in the seven judges' unanimous ruling in this remarkable case. The right of children to believe or not to believe, they say, should not be restricted. How does this relate to the Faroese context? The Faroe Islands are relatively traditional and conservative regarding cultural, religious and family values. Often people are heard uttering their concern in this fashion: "*Look at the situation in Denmark and Europe? Look how far they have moved away from their Christian identity and history! Is this something we also want to happen here? No!*" Also, many commentators stress that Christianity is more than a belief system – "*it is part of Faroese history, customs, education...*" Hence, any progressive project trying to modernize educational values along the lines of international trends risks to be judged as 'cultural ruthlessness'.

4.2 Morning song

The morning song tradition in Faroese schools is an example of the 'Christian education'. Every weekday morning, for about half an hour, school children and teachers gather in the assembly hall to sing songs and psalms with biblical themes. Sometimes the singing is accompanied by prayers. This is part of the primary school Christian education, but it is also an arena where the principal has the opportunity to communicate practical information to all the pupils at the same time. Mathias, a third-grade pupil from Torshavn, says in a radio programme (Summer 2009) that he "gets energy and inspiration, wakes up" when singing in the morning. At the same time he is aware of the religious roots of this activity. For many people the morning song is first of all a cherished tradition that they do not want to delete from the timetable. The morning song has symbolic value as many claim it is the only Christian tradition – except for seasonal Christmas and Easter celebrations – still to be found in school.

Children that do not want to participate in the song ritual have, with parental approval, the right to stay away. Children feel a pressure to participate, and many opponents of the ritual claim that teachers do not tolerate their absence. It feels, children say, like a compulsory school lesson, even if the authorities stress the voluntary character of the morning song ritual. The most critical voices call it a sophisticated form of indoctrination. Moderate parents say that the singing tradition is valuable, but that the prayers should not be part of it. Today, they hold, we need an up-to-date morning song that fits late modern society.

4.3 Christianity as subject

Christianity is part of the compulsory school curriculum; even if most teachers enlarge the framework of the subject to include different world-views, belief systems and ethical values. Non-Lutheran families have according to the Code a right to take their children out of the religion classes. There is no alternative subject for non-Lutheran pupils, so they wait in the corridors without any programme (if the parents do not 'educate' them at home) while the

others have religious classes. The number of children from non-Christian homes is small. Nevertheless Faroese society has several important (Christian) Free Church communities with ethical values that differ from the Lutheran educational approach and style of school. Jehovah's Witness children, for instance, do not participate in Christianity classes, Christmas preparations and birthday celebrations.

Many modern non-religious parents dislike the Christianity classes, considered incongruent with contemporary lifestyles, values and late modern 'reality'. Many children feel stigmatized if not engaging in religious classes. Some feel ashamed because of the isolation from the 'normal' pupils with Lutheran parents. Many people want the content and form of the religious classes to change; few want a total exclusion of religion from school.

People voicing opposition to the conservative Christian hegemony in society use strong words in their critique of Christianity's 'belief monopoly' in school. The privileges that Christianity enjoys in schools is, they say, part of a societal model reproducing Christian domination over any other world-views and ethical values – including modern human rights principles. Families that propagate *status quo* – Christian classes for everyone – use other arguments and connect religion to Faroese identity and history. The Faroe Islands are, they say, small and sensitive – “*it is easy to fail to keep Faroese identities when the global world through the media puts pressure on the small remote islands...*” The powerful affinity between religion and culture portrayed by some commentators opposes the secular globalized classes more than any 'foreign' religious community. “*If I lived in Saudi Arabia I would not mind if my children got an Islamic education in the same way as they get a Christian education here*”, says a young Faroese theology student.

Today children have easy access to the digital media which gives them new liberties to search for information and meaning. Late modern society produces a 'democratization' in education, learning and information distribution that often amplifies the role of peers and downgrades the role of parents and school teachers in their socialization and education. The interpretation of Christian ethics is indeed influenced by the family background, but at the same time society's cultural individualization undermines the traditional power of family capital (Gaini 2008). Parents and school teachers might thus be relegated, being outperformed by informal learning arenas.

4.4 Evolution and creation

150 years after the publication of *On the Origin of Species* and the introduction of his evolution theory, Charles Darwin is still a controversial figure in the educational debate in the Faroe Islands. In some conservative circles parents disfavour modern science, as presented in school as incompatible with their religious thesis on the origins of human life. Biology teachers are sometimes confronted by pupils explicitly expressing mistrust towards modern science. Articulate and erudite critics claim that biology, as presented in primary and secondary school contexts, is rigid and idealistic as children are not able to criticize the hegemonic evolution theory. It is unscientific, they say, not to include 'intelligent design' and 'creationism' in the classes. Children from religious families with a strict biblical education find some of the science textbooks and lessons confusing as they are in conflict with their parents' stories. If the parents express strong scepticism towards modern scientific theories, it will without any doubt be a hard task for teachers to educate the pupil.

Science has a relatively weak position in Faroese schools as children do not have classes in biology, physics and chemistry before the age of ten or eleven. Christianity is already on the curriculum in first grade. Children from religious families are often also affiliated to private “Sunday schools” where they get additional biblical education from an early age. Children from Free Church communities, for instance the so-called “Baptists” (Plymouth Brethren), take part in other private religious programmes tailored for the youngest fellows. The educational values in Faroese families vary; some parents blame the school for delusional un-Faroese pedagogy, while others appreciate the school’s intellectual and social empowering function. For working-class parents from peripheral villages the school is sometimes educating children to migration: “*For what reason shall my children learn this?*” Darwin is, indeed, a friend to some, but the infamous enemy of others.

4.5 Sexuality as a school subject

In lower secondary school children have classes in human reproduction and sexuality in general. The school Code (chapter 2 – article 8) says (my translation):

In the primary school education, in relevant subjects and relevant age groups, these compulsory themes must be introduced: 1. Faroese traditional dance and ballad-singing. 2. Traffic. 3. Information on education and business. 4. Health and sexual information.

The sexual education normally takes place in the sixth or seventh grades, but many children do not get any sexuality information through their nine compulsory school years. The sexual education is characterized by ineffectiveness. There is no school material in the Faroese language aimed at sexual education. There is no official homepage with information on sexuality for young people. The school Code demonstrates an educational policy without interest in sexual information. Few children talk about sex with their parents and close relatives; hence they go elsewhere to find the information they are looking for. Sexuality as a subject, when kept out of school, is something obscure and unreal, not serious.

The way sexuality is taught in schools depends on the individual teacher. Teachers that give sexuality information at school without any noteworthy commitment use outdated uninspiring books, are not taken seriously by the pupils. In many cases the sexuality classes unintentionally turn out to be indiscreet entertainment instead of appropriate scholarly information. Many parents are aware of the youths’ general lack of reliable and adequate knowledge on sexuality.

Parents, who are satisfied with the current absence of proper sexuality information in school, believe it to be more ‘natural’ and ‘healthy’ to get sexual knowledge from peers without pedagogical education. “*We never needed this kind of education*”, says a man, “*and look at me – I am fine ha?*” This kind of conservative opposition to change is common and reflects scepticism towards ‘foreign’ influence on the socialization of Faroese children. Sometimes the argument against sexual education is based on traditional constructions of masculinity emphasising boys’ development into men without formal ‘feminine’ schooling. These anti-intellectual attitudes, giving practical skills and physical strength prime value, do not encourage children to heed the school’s guidance. Many parents from religious families consider the ‘modern’ open discussion on sexuality as a threat to Christian morality. Sexuality information, they argue, is legitimizing deviant lifestyles. Radicals blame the sexuality education for the promotion of homosexuality and other ‘disgraceful’ behaviour.

4.6 Culture

Education takes place in a cultural context, but education is also a question of cultural enlightenment. How does the school teach a cultural world? How does it communicate a cultural system? Varenne (2008) says that “*arguably, anthropology should claim education along with culture as its core concepts to the extent that one cannot hope to understand cultural evolution without also understanding education*”. Faroese customs and traditions have been kept alive in the family and local community, rather than through formal educational institutions. Faroese culture and language were for long periods excluded from school, as a result of the Danish colonialism. Until the end of the 20th century, it was virtually impossible to discuss Faroese national identity without reference to people’s consistently ambivalent relation to Denmark. The age of globalization challenges this dualism, independence versus union, putting other identity issues on the agenda (Gaini 2009a).

Faroese parents often express dissatisfaction when they evaluate the Faroese aspect of the primary school education. “*They do not learn anything about Faroese nature, Faroese history, Faroese customs...*” parents say in nostalgia, reflecting on the everyday life of their own childhood. “*Today children do not know anything about fish, sheep, birds...*” some nostalgic parents say in despair. The elegy continues with statements like “*they don’t speak proper Faroese*” and “*they forget their past, their roots*”. The grandparents are often more optimistic than the parents. The elders are impressed by the new knowledge that children internalize nowadays. An old man, proud of his grandchild, tells me that his generation got very limited schooling with very few subjects. For most Faroe Islanders the large family unit is the arena for Faroese cultural education. Knowledge and skills are transmitted from generation to generation through traditional work and leisure activities.

5 Discussion

The communication between the school and the home takes place at different levels; from the everyday life in school corridors to the conferences at the Ministry of Education. Parents have representatives on all school boards which also include political representatives of the municipality. Parents with busy working lives are today unaware of what is going on in school. They skip the ‘*what did you learn today*’ question and are absent from parental meetings. Pupils are encouraged to express their personal opinion on school subjects and teaching styles today. Primary school education is today an individualized venture with the pupils in the centre – they have the right and duty to influence their own schooling.

In some cases the decision of a couple of parents can have a huge impact on a school’s future. The case of the remote village Mykines is interesting. When the parents of the *only* pupil in the school in 2008 decided to take their child out of school, the school was closed down. It cannot be reopened again without the permission from the municipality, which has offices in the town of Sørsvágur. Other small villages have similar experiences. In another village, Trøllanes, the parents moved their children to the school of the neighbouring village in a protest act in a local political conflict. The teacher, especially if he belongs to the local community, can easily become involved in local conflicts, which put him in a difficult position. The main threat against the village schools however is the migration out of the local community. Families with children move to larger towns with larger schools.

A more unusual case of parents taking their children out of school comes from the village Gøta. A young couple was after a short judicial battle with the authorities granted the

permission to teach their children mathematics at home. The couple refused to accept that the school did not provide the pupils with Faroese texts and science concepts. Most Faroese children in primary schools use Danish schoolbooks. For the couple from Gøtu it was a matter of principle. The Faroese language was the core substance of this case, not the skills of the teacher. Another problem arises when the roles are reversed – when the school principal wants to exclude a pupil from the school. This is an almost impossible mission, as the children and parents are well protected against such measures. Children with severe behavioural and psychological problems cannot be thrown out of school without parental consent or a long and exhausting judicial ‘game’.

Faroese families have different values and opinions regarding school education; it is impossible for the school authorities to satisfy all parents. The family capital is best portrayed by defining four main family categories.

The **traditional religious family** is divided into two main groups: the academic/educated family and the working-class family. These families are characterised by a religiosity that influences all aspects of life, but in a moderate style. They are deeply rooted in village communities with powerful families. The family members usually have a strong family capital and a firm cultural identity. The families are in general big with many members. They belong to the national Lutheran Evangelical church as well as to some of the old Free Churches established in the Faroe Islands. Most of the families have conservative values, which they expect the public school to preserve. At the same time they respect most ‘modern’ democratic values found in school. They have a core position in society and are not interested in cultural and social changes in the age of globalization. Education has a high priority in the academic subgroup of the category. Children from these families are academically ambitious, though they do not plan to move far from their parents’ path of life. Rather, education is considered a way to preserve *status quo*. The family capital of traditional religious families is in harmony with the Christian pillars of the public institutions.

The **traditional non-religious family** is a mixed group of largely working-class families from villages and towns outside Torshavn. These families of fishermen and farmers have kept the old customs at the same time as they enjoy most of the new liberties of late modern society. They are distinguished by their relatively traditional gender roles with mothers working at home and fathers working as sailors. They are, in the eyes of city-dwellers, usually considered parochial and ‘bygdaslig’ (derogatory remark on village lifestyles) with limited contact to the larger world. The children are more interested in practical manual work than in abstract schooling. Boys from these families are natural born ‘handymen’. Even if they are some kind of ‘action-seekers’, they favour stability and routine in life. Some persons from traditional families are directly anti-intellectual, disapproving people with a higher education. Reading and studying is a waste of time giving people strange ideas (Gaini 2006). The children are often unexceptional students without serious interest in education, even if many are clever and learn rather easily. The parents are in general sceptical to any foreign impact on Faroese educational visions.

The **modern religious family** engages actively in the contemporary debate on school and values. The family is often affiliated to new Free Church communities originally based in USA. The parents are often so-called ‘newborn’ Christians not belonging to old religious families. They are connected to global religious networks. They are supporters of ‘*Miðflokkurin*’ – the religious political party. In a much stronger way than traditional religious families, they speak out against the globalized secular state and school. The religious identity of the family members reflects new radical interpretations of Christian

values rather than the ancient cultural heritage of the islands. These ‘internationally’ oriented families appreciate formal education for their children, but they desire a much stronger Christian profile in school. Children from these families are hard-working primary school pupils, but many distrust scientific knowledge deeply – for instance the theory of evolution. The families are generally modern and individualistic, but belong to an association of radically religious families.

The **modern non-religious family** embraces several different family types. The main groups are defined according to urban–rural location and working–academic class position. The stereotype of the modern non-religious family is the urban 2parents–2children family with ‘democratic’ non-authoritative relations between the wife and husband as well as between the generations in the household. Both parents work fulltime. The family forms a network of relatively free and independent persons that function as a ‘team’ at home. The parent–children interaction is characterized by complex discussions involving disagreements and provisory solutions (Halse 2006). Most families are part of the national Lutheran Evangelical church, but without any deep religious identity steering everyday life. A small minority are committed agnostics or atheists. Most of the families belong to the global middle-class of people with modern lifestyles and values that prioritize adventure, individual freedom and material power. The children are assertive and independent regarding their personal priorities and goals in life. They are in general successful at school, but the highly esteemed freedom of choice can lead to frustration. This situation is somehow related to the relatively weak family capital that the modern individualized family contains.

Focusing on the relation between family capital and family type in order to uncover educational values, another interesting group of four categories comes to light. These categories cross the boundaries of the previously described family type categories. The family capital is here evaluated according to four parameters: (a) parents–children relation, (b) family–school relation and (c) family–work relation as well as (d) ‘educational culture’. Other criteria could indeed have been added to the list.

Strong family capital. Two pairs of relations (a+b) are characterised by strong and well-functioning attachment and integrity. The harmonious bonds between the generations at home and between the home and the school give the child a promising start in school. The educational culture (d) of the family, manifested in the discussions at home as well as in the access to books and other educational materials, is an important addition to the before mentioned communication patterns (a+b). Without the educational values success at school is uncertain. The connection between family and work (c) is not direct and personal as the children find their work position through official channels after completed education. The family capital is seldom used to get a career through unofficial family-based channels. The parents–children consensus and unity turns the family members into a powerful impact group towards school and other public institutions.

This group represents intellectual globalized individuals, who in many contexts are the ‘winners’ of late modern society. They have a strong family identity at the same time as they are internationally oriented. They are in many cases from Christian religious families at the same time as they value new cultural freedoms. In the school they are often top end pupils, but they are not the dominant group that all other children admire. Their social skills are not always the best. Their family is a strong union, but they are seldom from the largest most powerful families.

Medium family capital (I). In this case the parents–children relation is friendly and painless, but the parents are not in regular contact with the school. The important link to the institution where the daily life of their children takes place is missing. On the other hand, the family has social and cultural resources that give the children a smooth passage to the labour market. The estrangement to the school is a consequence of the lack of educational values at home. The school has minor value in the family. The strength of the family, its main capital, is its social network bridging families together, as well as the impressive family loyalty manifested in attitudes and behaviour. The family capital is strong but vulnerable. Alliances between families are no warranty securing the young ones future full-time jobs. The meritocratic developments of society make it risky to use family capital without higher education as a strategy for the children's career.

The second group of families is usually more traditional and less interested in new trends in society. Some are against the growing global influence in the Faroe Islands, which they consider a threat to the peaceful, safe and family-based Faroese society. They have a strong work ethics, but often disapprove what relates to abstract academic schooling. This relatively conservative group of villagers is not really prepared for a society based on specialist knowledge and global communication.

Medium family capital (II). Here, at first glance, there seems to be a strong family capital empowering children in their educational struggle. The parents enjoy an excellent dialogue with the children and with the children's teachers. The parents take part in meetings and social activities at school. They are also in regular contact with other parents from the class of their children. They feel that their children are popular among peers, having friends and leisure interests. Their problem is that the family has no noteworthy educational culture. The school is first of all a social arena where people meet friends and have fun. When the exams are drawing close, the parents and children stop talking about the school. These are average relatively self-centred families. They do not have special qualities short-cutting the journey to attractive working positions. These families only change their educational values if young family members manage to bring new ideas home from the school context.

The third group represents individuals that are always in the middle. They do not have clear-cut ideals and viewpoints. They form a gray zone between many other groups. They like school and other public institutions, but most of all, they like their house and garden. They are quite naïve and always looking for a friendly dialogue, a positive spirit and some comfort. They do not have a strong attachment to the working sector. Work, as well as school, is mainly a social arena for fun, adventure and experience.

Weak family capital. These families are relatively marginalized and do not possess a family or social capital that can support their children at school. They are not only isolated from the local community; they are also internally fragmented with problematic relations between all family members. These Faroese families may well have lost a firm position in society during the last decades' societal shift. The children feel alienated at school and ignored at home. They are searching for recognition in vain. The families are often single-parent families with a mother and several children. These families represent a new marginalization, because in the past their traditional family network safeguarded them against deep social crisis.

Table 1	Parent-children	Family-school	Family-work	Education Culture
Strong F.C.	+	+	0	+
Medium F.C. 1	+	-	+	-
Medium F.C. 2	+	+	-	-
Weak F.C.	-	0	-	-

The family capital is composed of the values, ethics and symbols that are encapsulated in a family unit at the same time as they define the family in relation to other families. The family capital is also linked to social capital, which links people together, within and between families, as well between family entities and institutions in society. Religion is a fundamental part of the family capital for many people in the Faroe Islands like elsewhere. The family capital can be relatively strong or weak, depending on focus and framework. The interesting feature of the Faroese family is that it has kept its traditional fabric at the same time as the surrounding society has changed radically.

6 Conclusion

The cultural capital congruency between family and school depends on various factors. It is not possible to claim that the contexts are perfectly congruent regarding cultural and scientific values and capital today. There has probably never been an even reciprocity between home and school in the Faroe Islands. Historically, the public school was strongly influenced by Danish language and values, while the family-life was Faroese and traditional. The gap between the learning environments was hence wide. School has changed during the last decades, even if the developments have not been as radical as the general societal shift. The school is under continual public debate. The family has also changed through the 20th and 21st centuries, even if this central institution has been a shelter for traditional Faroese values and culture in a modern world. Finally, the family is now entering the modernization process. There are several parallel family types in the Faroe Islands today. The curious transition from traditional and early modern family structures and values to variations of late modern families does not imply a family capital downfall. The Faroe Islands are still family based – and family capital matters!

The practical value of family capital is always evaluated in relation to specific situations. Family capital integrates the family unit, but does it necessarily integrate the family members as functioning members of the surrounding society? And is the individualized late modern society menacing the value of family capital? The family is and will also in the future be a core institution in Faroese society, but the meaning, function and status of family is changing. The families become more flexible, more egocentric, more project-oriented and more 'democratic' (Halse 2006). The family capital gives the children a 'home', a meaning and an identity in polycentric contemporary society. The family capital, which in the Faroe Islands very often included religious values and ethics, is the main prerequisite for the social capital that is immensely important for individuals in the Faroe Islands. Family capital is also a question of sentiments, attachment and life quality. As family members in a family-based society, Faroe Islanders honour personal unceremonious face-to-face communication. Family first, imagined society second.

One essential part of the family capital relates to the formal education of children. How do families today talk about education at home? How are parents involved in children's school life? The family-school relation is, as we have seen, very important for the future of the children. Families with a healthy and positive educational culture at home are generally strengthening their position in society nowadays. The family, in other words, has to be conscious about the relevance of non-family institutions, like the school, in their education of the sons and daughters in the house. Strong families with power in the local community will, on the other hand, fall down if they do not recognize the indispensability of modern educational values in the future. Faroese 21st century visions for primary school education need to look at the problems and challenges that have been discussed and analyzed in this text and to remember UNESCO's slogan "the future is theirs, the responsibility is ours".

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Author

Firouz Gaini
Institute of Education
University of the Faroe Islands
Frælsid 20
FO-100 Torshavn
Faroe Islands
Tel +298 35 94 00
Fax +298 35 94 01
Email: firouz@flsk.fo