

STRUCTURED AGENCY

STUDENTS' SCOPE OF ACTION IN THE TRANSITION
PHASE FROM BASIC EDUCATION TO UPPER
SECONDARY EDUCATION IN FINLAND

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Structured Agency
Students' Scope of Action in the Transition Phase
from Basic Education to Upper Secondary
Education in Finland

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To
Johannes, Lucas and Linus

May you find
your own path in life

Abstract

Veronica Salovaara: Structured Agency – Students’ Scope of Action in the Transition Phase from Basic Education to Upper Secondary Education in Finland

The Finnish education policy is based on the principle of equity and a non-selective system with the aim of providing all students with equal educational opportunities. Although Finnish education policy strives to achieve equality in education and to decrease marginalization, socioeconomic background has a significant impact on educational trajectories, positioning in education and in the labor market. Young people tend to pursue a similar educational and professional trajectory as their parents, and unemployment appears to transcend generations. The transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education is a crucial phase in young students’ lives as this is the first transition phase when students are divided into different tracks; to either general upper secondary education, that prepares them for university, or vocational education, that prepares them for a profession. Until this phase, young people in Finland have presumably had the same opportunities in education due to the comprehensive education system.

This study examines students’ scope of action in the transition phase from basic education to further education and training. The focus in this research is on how inequality is reproduced in the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education, as well as the role of family, school and other social networks in contesting inequality. The analysis shows the complexity on how students navigate in the transition phase from basic education to further education and training. A *student’s scope of action* in this study is understood as the scope in which students make their decisions and reflect on their options, whether it is a more agency reflected process, or a process steered by the capitalistic power mechanisms or habitus. Young peoples’ *agency* is therefore understood as *structured* by the interplay between students own choices and wishes, social background and habitus, situated in a sociopolitical and education policy context.

The data set has been derived from a three-year (2010–2012) comparative European project called GOETE - Governance of Educational Trajectories in Europe, funded under the Humanities and Social Sciences section of the EU’s 7th Framework Programme. The data set is a multifaceted qualitative data set comprehending interviews and focus groups with 101 people from three local schools in Finland,

social and youth work as well as education policy; students, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, principals and other experts at school, such as school social workers, school nurses and school psychologists. In addition, the data consists of interviews with experts in education and social work, e.g., education policy experts, social and youth workers and guidance counselors from the upper secondary level as well as relevant policy documents.

Several theoretical perspectives have influenced my thinking and interpreting the phenomenon of my study. These are: 1) the Marxist perspective 2) theories on social reproduction, and 3) the concept of agency and how it is practiced and the shift in focus from the social constructivist way of thinking to individualism and reflectivity.

The main research question in this thesis is: How is inequality produced and reproduced in the decision-making process of students in the transition phase from basic education to further education and training? To operationalize the main question three sub questions were formulated: 1) How do students position themselves as agents in the decision-making process? 2) How do parents reflect on the decision-making process of students? 3) How do teachers, school professionals and other professionals reflect on the decision-making process of students? I concluded my analysis by situating the multifaceted discourses in the socio-political context of national education and youth policy and asked: How are the discourses presented by students, parents and professionals situated in the sociopolitical context of Finnish education and youth policy?

To analyze students' scope of action in the decision-making process, a multifaceted and multileveled approach is required as there are several contexts and circumstances available supporting, regulating, encouraging or discouraging students. By juxtaposing the viewpoints of different actors as well as using a range of methodological tools from discourse analysis, focusing on the big D Discourses as well as conducting a little d discourse analysis with some linguistical tools, I have shown an in-depth approach on how structures of inequality are reproduced in education, showing a structured agency, how students are negotiating decisions on a predetermined path.

The results showed a paradox in the discourses: students are responsible for their own educational trajectory, however the trajectory is predetermined. Throughout the analysis, there is a discourse emphasizing students' *agency*, or a discourse emphasizing *responsibility*, that students should choose their educational trajectory by themselves

without interference from others. Students used *various modes of reflectivity* when choosing their educational trajectory. Students justified their decision with values on intrinsic values, personal interests and an interest in the field, showing the internalization of postmodern values and ideals of agency in contemporary society.

A discourse on accepting *predetermined educational trajectories* was present among school professionals, either by accepting predetermined educational trajectories as something static that is difficult to change, or by fighting against these predetermined educational trajectories. Family background shapes the student's decision-making process and therefore when students are using agency in the decision-making process, the agency is merely a reflection of the social structure as the social structure and the structural position of the individual is generating the individual's agency. The responsibility that students are demanded to take, while making the decision within a certain context, or within 'predetermined limits', gives the students an illusion of choice.

Parents *deliberately take a passive role* in guiding students, justifying this role with a pedagogical function of allowing children to make their own, independent decision such as claiming that young people should be allowed to make their own mistakes in order to learn from them. Parents simultaneously show a trust in Finnish society and its education system, by verifying that the decision is not necessarily final and that the system allows for second chances.

Structures of inequality and class relations casts a long shadow in education and is reproduced through the practices of accepting educational inequality by not contesting the role of the gatekeepers of equality and equity. At the national level, education is regarded as one of the more effective means *to prevent the marginalization and social exclusion* of young people. Statistics on intergenerational inequality and 'the model from home' are lifted up and may be discussed as something static, something that is difficult to change, although some school professionals contested it. National statistics and empirical experiences work as evidence to confirm these views and opinions and statistics is used as evidence and legitimations on why school may fail in supporting young people.

Key words:

Educational trajectories, transition phase, inequality in education, agency, discourse analysis

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1 Introduction

This is a doctoral thesis on how inequality is reproduced in the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education. Studies on reproduction of inequality may have diverse approaches depending on discipline and the researcher's focus and theoretical perspectives. In this dissertation I have taken a sociological approach in analyzing students' scope of action, i.e., how choices in the transition phase are constructed by the interplay between students' own choices and wishes, social background within a sociopolitical and education policy context.

Although Finnish education policy strives for equality in education and to decrease marginalization, socioeconomic background has a significant impact on educational trajectories, positioning in education and on the labor market (e.g., Myrskylä, 2009, Rinne, 2014, Saari, 2015, Vanttaja, 2005, Vauhkonen et al., 2017, Kallio et al., 2016). Young people tend to pursue a similar educational and professional trajectory as their parents. Research shows that family background influence on young people's future position in education and in the workforce. For example, children with highly educated parents are more likely to attain higher education, while children of parents with vocational education are more likely to attain vocational education (Myrskylä, 2009, Saari, 2015). The likelihood of marginalization is lower for young people with highly educated parents and parents with a stable position on the labor market (Vanttaja, 2005). Even the educational and professional field appear inherited in many cases: for example, children of parents with background in arts are more likely to pursue art and the children of teachers are three times more likely to become teachers themselves (Myrskylä, 2009). However, there is great variety in how students manage in life and in education; not only family background is relevant for future position in education and in the labor market. While children of well-off families in Finland tend to complete secondary education, there are more variations among children from disadvantaged families (Kallio et al., 2016). In policy documents, research concerns have been raised on how unemployment is inherited; how unemployment appears to descend in generations as unemployed young people are more likely to have unemployed parents. In Finland, the increasing inequality gap between affluent and disadvantaged families calls for more comprehensive research on how inequality is reproduced as well as the role of family, school and other social networks in contesting inequality. How, and the extent to which social networks, social support, environment and other contexts influence on students' life trajectory needs further research.

In Finland, as in many other countries, education is seen as an important asset to decrease marginalization in society and therefore an objective of Finnish education policy is to guarantee “all people – irrespective of their ethnic origin, background or wealth – equal opportunities and rights to culture, free quality education, and prerequisites for full citizenship” (Government program, 2011; 50). The starting point in my research derived from the paradox regarding the Finnish education system and inheritance of educational background; if the structure of the education system itself is equal, by providing in principle all students with equal opportunities, how come there is a strong connection between family background and future position in society? Why do children of parents with vocational education tend to attain vocational education and children with higher education tend to attain higher education? Are children, actively or passively, choosing the same educational trajectory as their parents and why? And more importantly, are school professionals guiding students, implicitly or explicitly, to certain educational trajectories? My research examines these questions by analyzing students’ scope of action in the decision-making process and asking why parents’ background appear to be inherited by young people, and more importantly; what is the school’s role in this process?

Political and organizational structures in society regulate the choices one can take in society and education. When analyzing transitions in education and from education to work, one needs to understand this societal context and the structures in society which both enable and disable transitions. Finland can be described as one of the more egalitarian societies among western countries. Finland is widely known for its equal education system and is often set as an example in research as a country providing equal opportunities to all students as well as a country that performs very well in international education comparisons (e.g., OECD, 2015, Sahlberg, 2007, Reay, 2012). The schools in Finland are considered to provide all children with equal opportunities, as they provide a somewhat similar basic education to all children regardless of wealth or place of residence. Almost all children in Finland are enrolled in the public education system, and the schools’ funding is built on the idea of an equitable system, providing schools with equitable resources to support their students. Schools situated in disadvantaged areas, or schools with students requiring special attention, receive increased funding to support their students. The differences between public schools are relatively small, in comparison to other OECD countries (Vettenranta et al., 2016). All students are provided a somewhat similar basic education, due to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education. However, research has shown that school

segregation is increasing in the capital area in Finland (Bernelius & Vaattovaara, 2016) and there are some variations in students' learning outcomes that are not connected to socioeconomic background, pointing towards some differences between schools in Finland (e.g., Ouakrim-Soivio et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education is a crucial phase in young students' lives. This is the first transition phase where students are divided into different tracks; to either general upper secondary education or vocational education. Until this phase, young people in Finland have had, theoretically, similar opportunities in education due to the comprehensive education system. In practice, we know that family background, as well as many other elements, influence learning and opportunities in education. In the transition phase from basic education to further education, at the age of 15–16, young people take their first step towards choosing their own educational path and therefore also the preliminary direction for their professional career. Young people are for the first time required to make their own informed decision about further education. Students choose according to their best knowledge, abilities and competencies, but receive also guidance and support from school and family.

Applying a discourse analysis approach (e.g., Gee, 2011, Fairclough, 2010, 2003, 1992, Schiffrin et al., 2005) the focus in my research is how family background – for example socioeconomic, educational and immigrant background – emerge in students', parents' and school professionals' discussions regarding the transition phase. Questions on how students discuss their family background in relation to the decision-making process, how parents discuss their views, values, and requirements for their children, and how school professionals reflect on the relevance of family background in the decision-making process of students are at focus. Another point of departure is the self-reflective process of students, how students are making their decision, how they draw from various sources of knowledge and processing this information into a decision they call their own. Analyzing students' decision-making process, the school's role in reproducing structures of inequality emerge. By juxtaposing agency and so called predisposed educational trajectories, the role of school professionals becomes important; how school professionals are hindering or supporting a predisposed educational trajectory. In my research I did not focus only on students with a certain type of socioeconomic background, implying an increased risk of marginalization. Instead, I included students and parents from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds

to allow a multifaceted way to understand inequality, the decision-making process of young people and agency in the transition phase. An important focus in the research is how students navigate in their specific social context in the decision-making process when they are choosing the upper secondary school; how students use agency in the decision-making process and the shifting balance between agency and the predisposition of family background. Furthermore, the role of school is at focus; how school is supporting, guiding or even neglecting students in the decision-making process. I situated students' choice of school as a choice constrained by their own wishes and best knowledge, but the outcome of student's wishes and knowledge is more or less constructed within a specific social context.

Students' scope of action is in this analysis not equivalent to Bourdieu's concept field, or a synonym to Margaret Archer's concept agency. Scope of action is in this study understood as the scope in which students make their decisions and reflect on their options, whether it is a more agency reflected process, or a process pushed by the capitalistic power mechanisms or habitus. Young peoples' agency is therefore understood as being structured by the interplay between students' own choices and wishes, social background and habitus, as well as political trends, structured by national and global environment and history. Drawing from a multifaceted theoretical approach, *structured agency*, is suggested as a concept to describe this phenomenon.

To summarize, the focus in this research is on students' scope of action in the decision-making process from basic education to post-basic education and training, how young people reflect on their choices in education in the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education in Finland and the context forming and reforming their decisions. On one hand, young people are encouraged to make the decisions themselves, but family, school and the broad range of settings of out-of-school contexts also play a significant role in constructing and reconstructing the choices of young people. Hence, the focus is not only on young people's views and experiences, but also on the various constellations of social contexts of young people, including the views and experiences of family, school professionals and other relevant experts. Furthermore, the constructed choices are situated in local and national contexts and analyzed within these contexts.

The research is based on a multifaceted qualitative data set with interviews from informants at three basic education schools in Finland, education policy as well as social and youth work. The data set from the three Finnish schools consists of

interviews or focus groups with 32 students, 19 teachers, three principals and 34 other educational experts or welfare experts. In addition, 13 parents and seven policy experts shared their input on the decision-making process in the transition phase. Applying a discourse analysis (DA) approach, I analyzed talk concerning the decision-making process; how respondents talk about family background, predisposed educational trajectories and their interpretation of students' scope of action. Analyzing discourses on inequality in the transition phase, similar 'ways of speaking' and ways of justifying, legitimating and explaining educational trajectories appear; these forms of interdiscursivity are a special focus in my dissertation and in particular discourses on maintaining or reinforcing predisposed educational trajectories.

2 Background and outline to the study

2.1. The GOETE-project

My research started in 2012. I was working in a three-year (2010–2012) comparative European project GOETE - Governance of Educational Trajectories in Europe, funded under the Humanities and Social Sciences section of the EU's 7th Framework Programme. In the project, educational trajectories of young people in eight European countries; Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, were compared (c.f. Walther et al., 2016, www.goete.eu). The project explored the structural and institutional contexts of educational trajectories and decision-making processes of students. The project adopted an approach combining a life course and governance perspective on education and analyzed how educational trajectories of young people evolve in different ways in different educational systems in Europe. The research adopted a mixed method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. In addition, the research was interdisciplinary, using researchers from several disciplines providing their perspectives and input into the research questions. The Finnish data set has been analyzed and compared in several research reports and journal articles (cf. Salovaara & Litau, 2016, Felczak & Julkunen, 2016, Ule et al., 2016, Cuconato et al., 2015).

Working as a researcher in the Finnish team, I had the privilege of conducting most of the interviews and analysis in the schools in Finland. Although comparing the national data with other national data resulted in interesting analysis and results, some questions regarding the Finnish context remained unanswered. I noticed some interesting discourses in the Finnish data set, that allowed a more in-depth analytical approach. The richness of the Finnish data allowed for a more in-depth analytical approach, focusing on the different views of students, parents and professionals, analyzing these views from a Finnish national context. The interviews and focus groups with students, parents and professionals in Finland hinted towards not only a set of similar discourses but also discrepancies in discourse. Therefore, I wanted to continue analyzing the data set already collected, by analyzing the data from different theoretical perspectives and discourse analytical approaches. My research questions were constructed from the already collected data and reconstructed through the research process. I constructed my research questions by focusing on the discourses which emerged from the data, situating them in a theoretical framework concerning agency and social reproduction.

2.2. Situating the research in the light of previous research

Educational trajectories have been analyzed from several perspectives and by using various theoretical approaches. The most interesting and controversial perspectives raise questions whether, how, and in what amount, educational trajectories are bound to social or institutional structures of inequality and how much individuals are able and capable to influence on their own educational trajectory.

The concept of class has changed in contemporary research. Young people in contemporary society are not attached to certain professions according to class or social background as they were before; educational trajectories become individualized and middle-class children may end up in working class jobs and vice versa. Young people have more opportunities and knowledge to choose and change their own educational trajectory. Late modern theorists (Beck, 1992, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001, Giddens, 1991, Skeggs, 2004) have problematized class as a more differentiated and multifaceted concept, including understandings about individualization and how race, gender and sexuality have transformed how we should understand class in contemporary society. Analysis of growing inequalities, using terms such as class, need to be reinvigorated and not buried (Reay, 2006). Skeggs (2010) suggests that class should be interpreted as a relationship between people who inherit the *values* of different categories, the values of inequalities and injustice, or as she writes: 'Class relations are dynamic forces that underwrite all social encounters.' (Skeggs, 2010; 356). Simultaneously, educational and professional trajectories become more destandardized; young people may switch back and forth between education and work, high-income and low-income jobs, work and unemployment during their lifetime, something researchers call yo-yo transitions (Walther & Plug, 2006).

However, statistics show how educational trajectories and position on the labor market are still in many ways predisposed by social, financial and immigrant or ethnic background (e.g., Saari, 2015, Rinne, 2014, Kilpi-Jakonen, 2011, Myrskylä, 2009, Vauhkonen et al., 2017, Vanttaja, 2005, Vanttaja, 2000). According to statistics, children tend to choose a similar educational trajectory as their parents. Children with highly educated parents, tend to choose general upper secondary education, the traditional route to university. If both parents hold a university-level degree, master's or doctoral degree, about 80% of children choose general upper secondary education (Saari, 2015). Only 15% of children of parents who do not hold any degree in education after compulsory education choose the general upper secondary education

route (Saari, 2015). Even the educational and professional field is strongly connected to the parent's educational and professional field (Myrskylä, 2009, Saari, 2015). According to Myrskylä (2009), children of parents with an educational background in the natural sciences, educational sciences and teacher education, humanities and arts, tend to choose a similar educational trajectory. In addition, the educational field is passed down from father to son and mother to daughter (Saari, 2015). In the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary school, children with an immigrant background are more likely to drop out than children from the majority (Kilpi-Jakonen, 2011). However, children with an immigrant background are also more likely to choose general upper secondary school than vocational education (Kilpi-Jakonen, 2011). Furthermore, research has shown that immigrant-origin youths have a strong belief in education and aspirations to apply for entry to tertiary-level education, immigrant-origin youths are in particular more likely to aim for tertiary education via vocational education than youths with a Finnish origin (Holmberg et al., 2018).

By analyzing statistics, it is evident that the child's position in education and in the labor market is strongly connected to family background. Social disadvantages are 'intergenerationally inherited' in Finland, family background is strongly associated with children's school dropout and receipt of social assistance (Vauhkonen et al., 2017). Furthermore, children whose parents have received long-term social assistance and come from families with cumulative disadvantage are less likely to complete secondary school (Kallio et al., 2016). Young people with the least educated parents and parents outside the labor market are more likely to end up in a similar position, with an increased risk of marginalization (Vanttaja, 2005). School achievers end up in white-collar positions and their incomes are higher than the average (Vanttaja, 2000). However, Kallio et al. (2016) has also showed that there are more varieties among disadvantaged families in completing secondary school than among affluent families. In well-off families, children tend to complete secondary school, while completing secondary school varies in disadvantaged families (Kallio et al., 2016). Why some children from a disadvantaged background tend to manage well is interesting, and requires a broader analysis of these children's circumstances and context.

In Finland, a specific focus has been on the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education, as this is an important phase prompting the educational trajectory and career choice of young people. There has been extensive well-conducted research concerning young people in school, regarding their reflections, youth

cultures and challenges (e.g., Tolonen, 2001, Hoikkala & Paju, 2013, Lahelma & Gordon, 2003). Finnish research has particularly focused on young people at risk of marginalization. Marginalization is strongly connected to inequality, an uneven distribution of social power, resources and status. On one hand, inequality entails inequality of opportunities and on the other hand, inequality of conditions, and it is maintained by social processes and institutions. However, the concepts of inequality and marginalization have changed in contemporary research and there seems to be an agreement on that research regarding inequality cannot derive from predefined concepts. Inequality and marginalization should be understood in relation to other people, and it is important to reflect on what is defined as normal or standard in contemporary society. Concepts such as marginalization are relative, i.e., they depend on who is talking and from what position (Helne, 2002, Järvinen & Jahnukainen, 2001, Tolonen, 2012). In addition to unequal resources young people possess, they also may have various ways of coping with marginality, depending on their family background (Tolonen, 2012). Sonja Kosunen and Piia Seppänen shows in their research how educational trajectories are still closely connected to class, and how highly educated parents are picking out and negotiating the 'best' schools for their children (Kosunen & Seppänen 2015, Kosunen 2012, Kosunen, 2014). However, although Finnish education policy proudly states how all schools in Finland are equal, some parents still find it necessary to increase their children's opportunities to enter the 'best' school and the parents' role is clearly important in the transition phase.

An extensive amount of ethnographic research has been conducted in Finnish schools, which has influenced contemporary research. Tuula Gordon, Elina Lahelma, Pirkko Hynninen, Tuija Metso, Tarja Palmu and Tarja Tolonen have analyzed the Finnish school with an ethnographic approach, spending one semester in two secondary schools in Helsinki. Their research resulted in a robust amount of knowledge on life in the Finnish school (see Lahelma & Gordon, 2003 for an overview). These researchers focused on the informal and formal school (Gordon & Lahelma, 2003), on time and space in school (Gordon, 2003), social order, gender and social class (Tolonen, 2001, Tolonen, 2003, Tolonen, 2008). In addition, Tarja Tolonen has conducted a rigorous amount of research on youth cultures in school settings, gender and class (Tolonen, 2001, 2008, 2014), Harry Lunabba have analyzed the importance of social relationships for boys in secondary education (Lunabba, 2013) and Tommi Hoikkala and Petri Paju have conducted ethnographic research in the 9th grade of a school in Helsinki (Hoikkala & Paju 2013).

In Tero Järvinen's doctoral thesis (1999), students were divided into four groups depending on how they choose their educational trajectory: reproducers of culture, individualists, seekers and drifters. The reproducers of culture are sure of their path, supported by their family and the role model for their choice came from the family or close relatives. The individualists had searched for alternatives and information themselves and not necessarily connected to their family background. The seekers were not yet sure of their choice or interests and were in need of additional time to figure it out. The drifters showed a challenging relationship to their parents and were not showing a positive attitude towards education as the other groups.

The research of Brunila et al. (2011), has suggested how educational trajectories are affected by taken-for-granted cultural assumptions. Their research indicates the power and influence parents, and school professionals may have directly or indirectly on their students. Also, Tolonen (e.g., 2012) has shown how style cannot be detached from locality, class, gender or ethnicity. Therefore, it is important to reflect the results of young people's voices continuously to the context school, home and overall the context of society. Furthermore, the school's role in the decision-making process, influencing actively or passively these hidden structures and processes, often remain vague and unclear. Researchers have focused on school professional's role in the transition phase, how school professionals are actively or passively directing students towards an educational trajectory of 'their kind' (Brunila et al., 2011) and how students are actively or passively choosing a certain educational trajectory that aligns with their family background. Although previous research in Finland also includes the adults at school (teachers, principals, guidance counselors, school social workers, etc.) to some extent, less emphasis has been placed on the voices of these adults and situating the discourses of adults within the students' discourses.

Responsibility of schoolwork is a theme that has been recognized in previous Finnish research (Metso, 2004, Lahelma, 2009, Vanhalakka-Ruoho et al., 2018) and this theme can also be found in my data, which is why I chose to analyze this theme particularly with tools of analyzing agency in the decision-making process. The responsibility young people are committed to take becomes visible with linguistic analysis on how young people distance themselves from, or commit themselves to events, by word choices on how they reflect on their own agency in the events or occurrences. How much responsibility, or the degree of agency, is analyzed with discourse analysis, focusing on not only the 'big Discourses', but also on the 'ways of

speaking'; for example, discourse markers, word choice, what is left unsaid, what is taken for granted and the positioning of self (pronoun use) (Gee, 2011). For example, drawing from research on the use of shifts in pronominal forms, exemplifies the degree of responsibility or agency (Yates & Hiles, 2010a, Yates & Hiles, 2010b). Agency and analysis of 'I' have been discussed by Tuula Gordon (2005) and Tarja Tolonen (2008) in previous research, although from a slightly different perspective. They have conducted analysis on the how young people reflect on their own role in their life courses; for example, how frequently young people talk in 'I' form (Gordon 2005, 121) and how young people position themselves in social space (Tolonen, 2008).

Even though educational transitions are a well-studied research area, and young people's views on education has been studied from different perspectives, every new piece of research encounters new ways of understanding how decisions are made about the educational trajectory in the last grade of compulsory education and how this decision is influenced by family, school and peers as well as the current society. For example, we know from statistical research about the connection between family background and future position in education, and we know about what kind of support and guidance schools provide to students. However, the context of young people is continuously changing. The labor market is changing; part-time jobs and temporary unemployment becoming the norm for young people. The income gap is increasing in Finnish society, leading to an increased risk of marginalization for some individuals. Labor market fluctuations and the increasing income inequality gap in the Finnish society are challenging school professionals to gaining a multifaceted comprehension of young peoples' opportunities in their educational trajectory. Schools face changing demands of the increasing inequality. In addition, in different contexts, whether they are contexts of school, the sociopolitical context or the context of peers, there are hidden structures and processes of values, ideals and principles that influences how students reflect when they are making important decisions about their future. These hidden structures and processes may be revealed through discourses and with an in-depth analysis on discourses and discursive practices. Mira Kalalahti and Janne Varjo have analyzed school choice from an educational policy perspective and how, on one hand, school choice is a question of supporting individual choices and rights, whereas school choice and specialization of school on the other hand may decrease a fair equality of opportunity (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2012). The institutional perspective and the impact of how education is structured in society is evidently relevant. Therefore, the results of the analysis are situated in the relevant education policy context.

2.3. Objectives, scope and research questions

The aim with my research is to increase knowledge and understanding on how inequality is produced and reproduced in the transition phase from basic education to post-basic education and training. Studying how students make their decisions about their educational trajectory within the context they live in provide information about the school's role in the decision-making process. My focus was therefore not only on students' talk, but also on the context of school and the discourses at school to be able to show the scope of action students are situated within when making their decision about their educational trajectory. I analyzed students' scope of action, school practices and family influence in the transition phase from basic education to later education and training with a special focus on how inequality is produced, reproduced or tackled in the transition phase. Students make their decision about their subsequent education in the last grade of basic education, and they make their decision based on knowledge and information acquired from school, family, peers and previous life experiences. The decision about education was situated in the specific context students navigate. To analyze students' scope of action in the decision-making process, family background, school practices and discourses of school policy, are important parts of the context in which students navigate. I therefore approached my research question by dividing the research question into three sub questions; each of the sub question illuminating different parts of the decision-making process.

First, students' own presentation on the decision-making process were analyzed, asking how students position themselves in the decision-making process. Next, parents' reflections on the decision-making process were analyzed, how they reflect on their role in supporting, guiding or steering their child. Finally, I turned to the context of school and education policy, asking how school practices and discourses were visible in the decision-making process. I concluded my analysis by situating the multifaceted discourses in the socio-political context of national education and youth policy. This context is relevant in understanding how students', parents' and school professionals' views are shaped and hence shape the process of young people's decision-making.

The main research question in this study is: *How is inequality produced and reproduced in the decision-making process of students in the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education?*

To approach the main research question, three sub questions were formulated:

1. *How do students reflect on their decision-making process situating themselves as agents and on the support and guidance received by parents and school?*
2. *How do parents reflect on the decision-making process of students and support from school?*
3. *How do teachers, school professionals and other professionals reflect on the decision-making process of students and support students receive from family and school?*

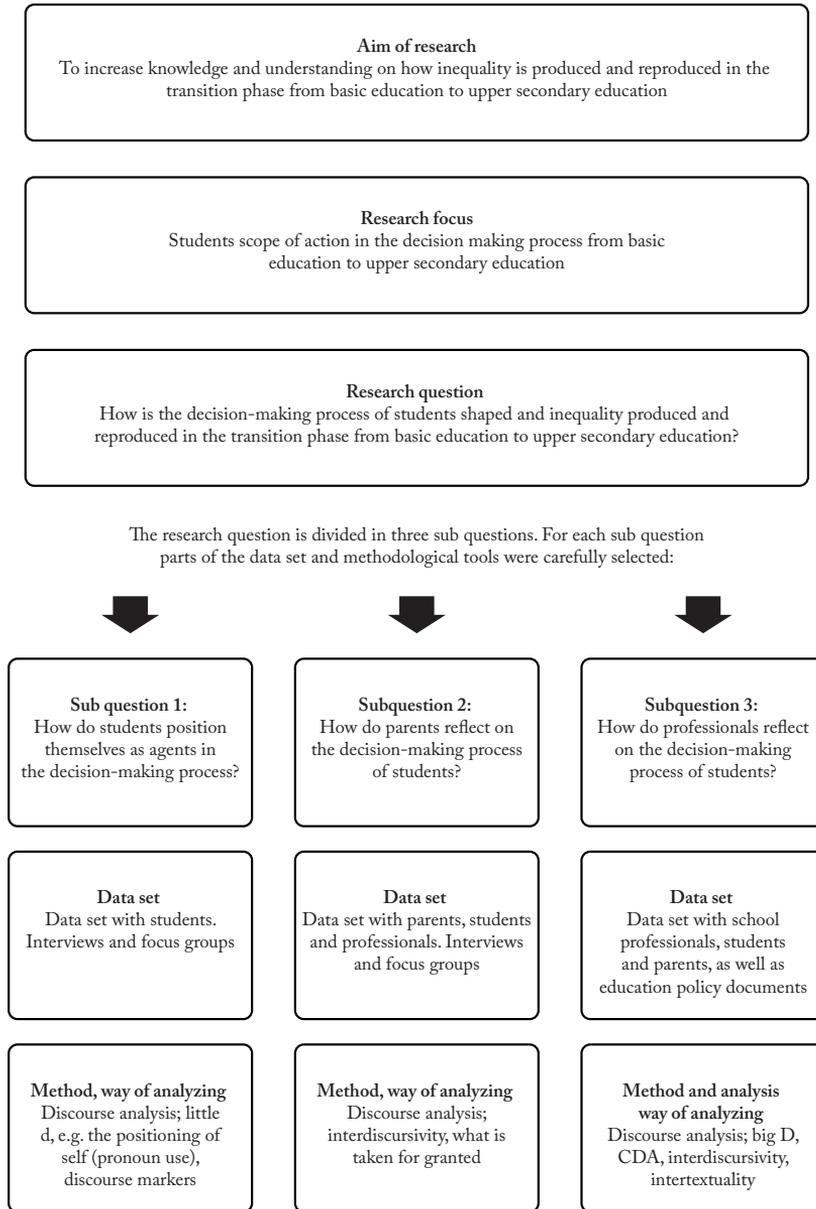


Figure 1. Aim of research, research focus and research questions.

2.4. Dissertation structure and research process

Throughout the analysis, a holistic and comprehensive approach was aimed for, analyzing students' discourses in detailed terms and situating these discourses in a broader social context. The relationship and negotiation between the social context and students' scope of action was at focus throughout the analysis. The social context restrains and enables the social terms schools are working in, and moreover, the social context restrains and enables the students' perceptions about their opportunities and boundaries. By analyzing and recognizing these perceptions and social context simultaneously, an understanding about how to cross the borderline between perceptions of opportunity and boundaries was developed. In this dissertation, I therefore started with contextualizing the frame and social context Finnish students are living in and making their decisions about their future. In Chapter 3, I describe the Finnish education system and explain why the transition phase from basic education to further education and training is crucial. The expansion of schooling is a phenomenon not only visible in Finland, it comprehends an ideology typical in other Western countries as well (Baker & LeTendre, 2005, Tyack, 1976). What are the justifications and legitimation for prolonging education and to keep young people in education? I discuss some explanations why education is regarded as relevant, drawing from historians as well as social scientists. Next, I discuss some contemporary political benchmarks, to situate and describe the context in which young people make their decision regarding further education. The contemporary context, including both ideas of individualization and privatization of schooling, an increasing risk of unemployment and unstable labor market, is directing young people into a context of yo-yo transitions. This context influences young people's understanding of their opportunities and certainly influences their decision-making process.

In previous research, questions regarding reproduction of inequality in education have been answered by using different theoretical approaches: 1) a Marxist approach; focusing on the power domination and structures of society, 2) a post-Marxist approach; adding emphasis on social structures, 3) social reproduction theories; explaining how social structures are reproduced in society, 4) a biographical approach; situating the students' educational trajectory within a context of their life history and reality, 5) a critical realist approach, focusing on agency and reflexivity of the student. In Chapter 4, the main ideas of these theories are explained and it is shown not only how they contribute to my research, but also the contradiction between agency and

social structure. The chapter includes discussion on how agency and individuals' ability to make their own decisions have gained ground in contemporary social research, and how social structure is still present in everyday decision-making process.

In Chapter 5, the data, the data collection process and methods used are elaborated. I explain the methodological approach, a discourse analytical approach combined with linguistic analysis, and how this approach supports my comprehensive analytical dissertation process. Furthermore, I explain the slight variation in the contexts of the three local schools at which the research was conducted and include important ethical considerations regarding the research process. As my research included young people, I also added considerations concerning ethical challenges and good research practice.

The analysis (Chapters 6-9), started from a detailed linguistic analysis of young peoples' decision-making process (Chapter 6), continued with an analysis of parents' views on the decision-making process (Chapter 7). After that, an analysis of how school professionals understand and tackle challenges of reproduction of inequality in their own work (Chapter 8) was conducted, and in Chapter 9 the results are situated in a broader sociopolitical and education policy context.

In Chapter 6 I started by analyzing students' reflections on choices regarding their educational trajectory: How do young people choose their educational path, in what ways are they guided into certain educational trajectories, how do they receive information, support and guidance in the process, from whom do they receive information, guidance and support and how do they justify their decisions. I analyzed how students justify their choices and how they rationalize their decisions in the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education. I turned to the local context and the life world of the students with a focus on family and school. How do students reflect on the support and guidance they receive from family and school? How, if at all, do families and schools support and guide students into a certain educational trajectory according to students?

Next, I turned to the contexts students navigate in; the contexts of family (Chapter 7) and school (Chapter 8). Turning to the families and schools, I analyzed how parents and school professionals are constraining or enabling choices of young people. I asked, how do parents, teachers and other relevant experts reflect on their role in the transition phase of students? How do they reflect on students' backgrounds when they provide students with information,

guide students and support them? How, if at all, are they guiding students into different educational trajectories?

In the final chapter of the analysis (Chapter 9), I situated my results in a sociopolitical and education policy context, framing the broader framework young people are living in, constraining and enabling their choices and decisions.

In the final chapter of the thesis, (Chapter 10), I discuss how the different theoretical approaches can contribute when considering the results in my analysis. I situate my research in and juxtapose different theoretical frameworks, analyzing the topic from several perspectives. I draw from a theoretical framework of the interplay between agency and social structure, with a special focus on students' reflectivity in the decision-making process; how students make their decisions and how they draw from their social context(s). I draw from a different set of theories that discusses the interplay between social structure and agency. I analyze the relevance of theories of social reproduction when explaining the choices young people make in the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education. I analyze how choices can be explained by using Margaret Archer's critical realist theory. I explain that although theories of social reproduction and critical realism may to a great extent explain how choices are constructed, the context contemporary young people live in determines in a broader degree how young people form their choices of their future. Finally, I add some reflections regarding suggestions about further research.

3 Contextualizing the transition phase

This chapter explains the context in which students navigate from basic education to upper secondary education. In the subchapters I have described the Finnish education system and in particular the joint application system, which is relevant for the 9th grade students in their last year of basic education, when they apply for entry into upper secondary education. After that I have presented some important justifications and legitimations on why education is relevant from a historical perspective, but also how young people are guided by education policy and financial instruments. Next, the relevance of education has been exemplified by the expansion of schooling and theoretical models used to explain the relevance of expanding schooling, models that may even stand in conflict with each other. Also different transition regimes are presented, showing how transitions are formed by socio-economic, institutional and cultural contexts. Different countries have taken different paths in providing education for children, and while neoliberal ideas have gained a foothold in several countries. It is relevant to discuss Finland's position on this matter as the ideas in Finnish education policy are closely connected to ideas of equality and equity. Finally, I have concluded with a relevant discussion on how equality and equity are present in current Finnish education policy.

3.1. The Finnish education system and the joint application system

All Finnish children are enrolled in compulsory basic education from the year they turn seven, however most children have been enrolled in pre-primary education since the year they turned six¹. Since the 1970s, Finnish education policy has strived for an equal education system, including all young people into a similar basic education system. Since then, almost all children have been enrolled in publicly funded schools regardless of their socioeconomic background². Basic education lasts for nine years and is free of charge.

After completing basic education, students in Finland apply for entry into upper secondary education in the joint application system, either to a vocational education

1 Until 2015 pre-primary education was voluntarily, although almost all families chose to enroll their children in pre-primary education. In 2015 pre-primary education became compulsory, which means that since 2015, all children are required to receive education from the year they turn six.

2 Under 3% of all children in basic education are enrolled in private schools (Merimaa, 2009). Non-public schools in Finland are connected to a specific language, religion or pedagogical philosophy; for example German or English schools, Christian schools or, Steiner (Waldorf) schools.

program (*ammattillinen koulutus* in Finnish), which leads to a qualification and profession, or a general upper secondary school (*lukio* in Finnish), which is the traditional route to university. In the transition phase from compulsory comprehensive education to secondary education, young people are required for the first time to make their own informed decision about their educational trajectory. Simultaneously, this transition phase is the first crucial phase in which not all students have the same opportunities and for the first time, young people are facing challenges concerning access to education.

Although it is now easier for all students to access higher education, the traditional route to university proceeds through the general upper secondary education. General upper secondary education is a general education program that does not qualify students for any particular occupation, but it prepares them for the matriculation examination and after completing this examination the student is eligible to apply to university. Students in a vocational upper secondary education program receive the basic skills required in the field. Students can also complete vocational education and training in workplaces through an apprenticeship agreement or a training agreement. This is however not very common. The traditional route to higher education among students with a degree from vocational education is to enroll in a program in what are now referred to as universities of applied sciences³ (Figure 1). In theory, all students who have completed upper secondary education are eligible to apply to either traditional universities or universities of applied sciences. In reality however, students who have completed general education apply for entry to a traditional university and students who have completed vocational education either transfer to the labor market or continue in one of the universities of applied sciences.

In the joint application system in the transition phase from basic education to further education, the student may apply for entry into five schools or programs according to their preferences, vocational or general upper secondary education. The requirements vary depending on the program and school, however traditionally, a higher basic education diploma is required for admission to general upper secondary education. The popularity of the school also affects the entrance requirements, some popular vocational educational institutions may have higher entry requirements than some general upper secondary schools and other vocational schools. Students who are not accepted by a school of their choice, are offered another place in upper secondary education or a place in the tenth grade, an additional year in basic education during

3 Previously called polytechnics

which the student is able to enhance their final grades for the School Leaving Certificate. Students enrolled in vocational education may also complete both vocational and general upper secondary education, a dual qualification program. However, the amount of coursework students need to complete also increases. In addition, students can choose apprenticeship training, however students need to find a place for the training themselves. Apprenticeship training has not gained a strong foothold in Finnish education, instead the traditional path students choose are either general upper secondary education or vocational education and training.

Successfully completing the matriculation examination at the end of general upper secondary education gives the student the right to wear a student cap, a white cap with a black visor. This graduation cap is a symbol of graduating from general upper secondary school and also related to university occasions and May Day festivities. Although students who have successfully completed vocational education also nowadays have their own graduation cap, 'the cap' in the interviews with students, parents and school professionals still refers to the symbol of graduating from general upper secondary school.

The joint application occurs during the spring in the final year of basic education, i.e. 9th grade. In this application process, students choose their place in education, with guidance provided by the school guidance counselor, parents and other relevant people. Students in the 9th grade receive information from school primarily from the guidance counselor and make study visits to schools in the upper secondary level. As students are 15-16 years old, and most live with their parent(s), most students apply for a place near their home. Students' choices are therefore limited to the area, to their school success, i.e., their grades and basic education certificate, and guidance they receive from guidance counselor, parents and others. The structure of the joint application system, the regional differences, and the dependence on 'external' guidance raises some important questions: How are students navigating in the transition phase? Do all students receive an equal and sufficient amount of support and guidance? In addition, the historical perspective on education, and the role of education in Finnish society also need some discussion to comprehend the context in which students navigate. Next, I discuss some legitimations and justifications of the relevance of education, connections between education and the labor market and the Finnish education system in an international context.

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN FINLAND

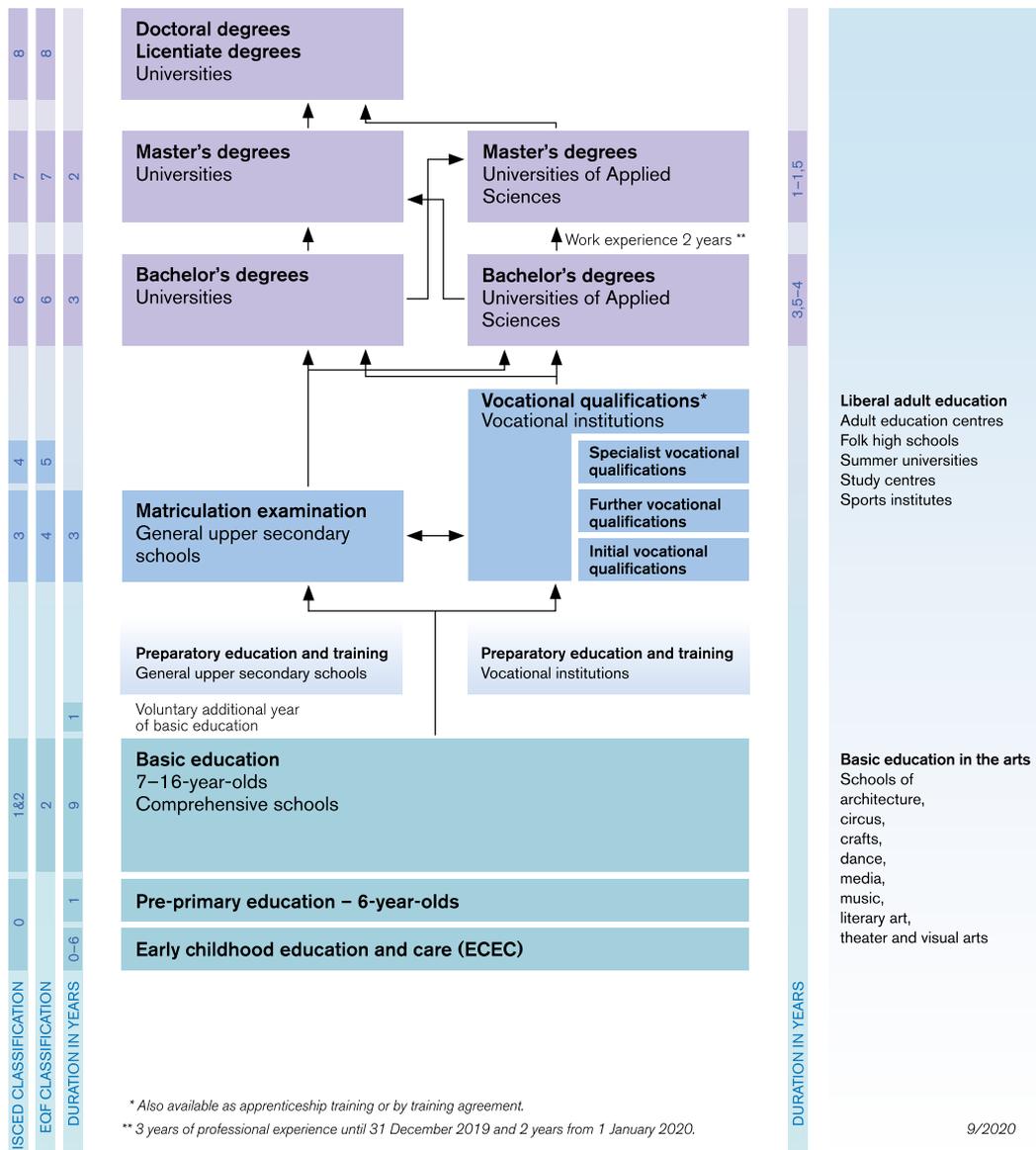


Figure 1. The Finnish education system. Ministry of Education and Culture.⁴

⁴ The Finnish Education System. Retrieved from the website: <https://minedu.fi/documents/1410845/15514014/Education+system+in+Finland/7c5a920b-47a5-c3ce-cbca-818ff3a5f848/Education+system+in+Finland.pdf>

3.2. Justifying and legitimating the relevance of education

Education appears to have an important role in today's society. Although different political parties in Finland may disagree on various matters, as they might in many countries, they all seem to agree on the relevance of education and in particular on the relevance of keeping young people in education. It is therefore relevant to reflect on some relevant and persistent arguments on why education matters and why politicians and authorities seem to encourage young people in education.

Education has an important ritual role in society; education acts as a selective tool of distinction between groups (Kivinen & Rinne, 1995, Meyer, 1977). The allocation power of schools affects the anticipations and socialization of students and non-students. School may teach useful skills and values to pupils, but still, schools allocate people to positions of higher social status. A school is an organization with power to confer status on the individual, and education redefines the individual legitimately in society. Education is therefore significant because it gives credibility to the person in the eyes of other members in society. For example, only when receiving a degree in medicine, one receives the credibility to not only work as a doctor, but also to express opinions regarding medical matters. Education is associated with power and authority, an association so strong that education has even been referred to as a myth; as John W. Meyer writes: "If education is a myth in modern society, it is a powerful one." (Meyer, 1977; 75). However, the credibility a person receives in the eyes of other members in society is also closely connected to the values of other members in society, what is regarded as important and valuable in society.

Intrinsic value is something that has a value in 'in itself' or 'for its own sake' and extrinsic values are values that are not intrinsic (Zimmerman & Bradley 2019). In education, intrinsic values are related to learning 'for its own sake', for self-development or the pleasure of learning, whether extrinsic values are connected to learning for a purpose, for example receiving a prestigious degree to earn more money. In a work environment, intrinsic values are connected to how interesting the work is, work that provides variety and responsibility. Extrinsic values in a work environment are connected to pay, material possessions and power. Of course, philosophers may argue that there may not be intrinsic values at all, as all learning may be conducted to receive a goal, for example to learn more or the enjoyment of learning is the extrinsic value of learning (Zimmerman & Bradley, 2019). However, in this thesis I simply refer to intrinsic values in education as values connected to self-development and a young

person enjoying learning 'for its own sake' and extrinsic values as values connected to instrumental values, for example a degree, money or prestige.

Young people's well-being is closely connected to their values, intrinsic or extrinsic values, however values also align with the values emphasized in the environment they live in (Van Den Broeck, 2019). Twenge et al. (2010) show, that while previous generations of worker have values more connected to extrinsic values, such as status and money, younger generations emphasize intrinsic values, such as interesting work tasks, leisure time and flexible hours. The changing values of generations have practical implications when emerging generations are entering the labor market (Twenge et al., 2010).

The relevance of education can also be justified and legitimated with reasons of risk of unemployment, marginalization and financial costs. According to estimations that are recited in society and media, marginalized young people cost society €1 mill. (Valtionalouden tarkastusvirasto, 2007). The transition phase to upper secondary education is therefore crucial, as this is the phase when young people dropping out of school are regarded as being at risk of marginalization. A smooth transition to upper secondary education has been on the education policy agenda for many decades. Most young people continue in further education; about 8% do not immediately continue in education after finishing compulsory education (OSF, 2015a). Although most are enrolled in some kind of educational institution, some young people drop out from upper secondary school because of motivational issues, an insight that the school was not the right choice or other issues (Numminen & Ouakrim-Soivio, 2009, Numminen et al., 2002). Dropping out from the upper secondary level does not automatically lead to marginalization, because in most cases young people leave one educational field and apply for another as they realize that they had initially chosen the wrong field (Haapakorva et al., 2017).

Financial means and policy instruments are used to guide students in their transition from basic education to post basic education. Students who do not apply through the joint application system, cannot apply for unemployment benefits. Young people in Finland are not given any other realistic options after basic education, also because few employers hire young people with only basic education. However, child and youth policy use support mechanisms to help students to find a place after basic education. One important policy instrument is the Education and Training Guarantee, first implemented in 2013. This instrument guarantees that each young person under 25 is

offered a job, a traineeship, a study place, or a period in a workshop or rehabilitation within three months of becoming unemployed. In addition, in 2020 the Finnish Parliament approved the proposal of extending the age of compulsory education in Finland to include all young people until the age of 18 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020, Oppivelvollisuuslaki, 1214/2020). The extension of compulsory schooling is a result of a substantial discussion in education policy and was also discussed during the time of data collection. Although this decision does not affect the young people in my thesis per se, it illuminates the persistent aspirations and discourse on extending education for young people, with a final conclusion on the relevance of keeping young people in education. The message from the policy level is clear: the preferred place for Finnish youth is within the education system.

The relevance of keeping young people in education and nudging them towards the labor market is not a 'new' agenda. Drawing from international contexts and history, one can find the same ideas reoccurring in a range of contexts. Schooling has been expanded to include virtually all young people in Western countries. Next, I will discuss traces of similar ideas and agenda from a historical perspective. To understand why a successful transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education is important in Finnish education policy, a historical approach can help to see the patterns and justifications that still affect education policy today.

3.3. The expansion of schooling

Researchers indicate that education is a key factor in reproducing structures of social inequality (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Kivinen & Rinne, 1995), but also a part of the policy in the Nordic welfare state to decrease social inequality in society (e.g., Rinne et al., 2004). Expanding education to include all children in society, increasing the years of compulsory schooling and making education more accessible and inclusive have been on the agenda in Finnish education policy. At the end of the 19th century, more and more young people attended educational institutions, and the expansion of schooling became a global trend in the Western countries. In Finland, the Compulsory School Attendance Act was enacted a couple of years after Finland declared its independence in 1917 and within ten years around 90% of all 7-15 years received schooling (Statistics Finland, 2007). While secondary school attendance was rare until the 1920s, these rates increased rapidly (Statistics Finland, 2007). The

expansion of schooling continued after the wars. In 1930 Finland had about 200 secondary schools, in 1950 they had increased to a number of 300, and by 1970 the number was over 600 (Statistics Finland, 2007).

Before the transformation into the comprehensive education system Finland has today, the education system in the 1970s consisted of a parallel education system with “folk schools” (kansakoulu) and grammar schools (oppikoulu). All students were enrolled in a similar elementary education until the age of 11. After that, some students, often those from privileged backgrounds, continued into grammar schools, which was the academically oriented source of education leading to university. Students participated in the folk school for six years, whereafter they continued to education in “kansalaiskoulu” for two or three years, and after this stage they could continue with vocational education. In the new comprehensive school system, the age of transition was increased to 16. After the 1970s, there was a prompt increase in the number of people completing basic education, while 50% of young people had completed upper secondary education in 1975, the proportion increased to 85% in 2005 (Statistics Finland, 2007). In 2012, only 18% of the whole working age population in Finland had not completed basic education (Kalenius, 2014; 8). Furthermore, the number of people awarded a degree by a higher education institution in Finland has increased. In 2012 38% of the Finnish population held a higher education degree, in contrast to 25% in 2005 and 11% in 1975 (Kalenius, 2014, Statistics Finland, 2007).

Historians have used several models to explain the expansion of schooling. There does not seem to be a single precise explanation on why education suddenly became so important, but in a short period, young people attending schools became the standard. Instead, historians show us how controversial these explanations or models are. In his essay, David Tyack (1976) uses several explanatory models to describe the rise of compulsory schooling in the United States. The models are contradictory, showing how the expansion of compulsory schooling can be viewed as a form of organizational interpretation or political construction to create members of the national state, or as an outgrowth of ethno-cultural conflict. Furthermore, showing growth in schooling can be regarded as an investment in human capital, in contrast to a Marxist approach, where compulsory schooling is viewed as means of reproducing the class structure. Cohen (2005) takes another approach, showing how the expansion of public education had a stimulating effect on the growth of social welfare programs and it can even be argued that the expansion of education was made possible to support social welfare

programs in the United States (Cohen, 2005). The World Society Theory demonstrates how mass schooling developed simultaneously in western countries with similar changes occurred in several nations (Meyer, 1977, Meyer, & Ramirez, 2000). Even countries that are very different from each other adopt the same ideological principles of schooling (see also Baker & LeTendre, 2005, Meyer & Ramirez, 2000, Boli et al., 1985). One reason for these ideological values is that education is built around a broad ideological mission of education, a model to create members of society. The content of the educational system has little variation because the rational model of society is institutionalized in civic culture.

In his thesis, Osmo Kivinen (1988) describes the five state school doctrines in history of the Finnish education system. The first formed the 1866 Elementary School Act, when the systematization of basic education was initiated. In this doctrine, the establishment of an elementary school system was defended, and the goal was to develop a sense of national identity and patriotism. In the second doctrine, the 1921 Compulsory Education Act was formed, and was justified with arguments of obligations of educating an ethically strong-natured population for a common good, setting aside personal interests in order to maintain social order. In the third doctrine, implementing the Elementary School Act of 1957, the existing school system was consolidated and defended the agrarian tradition and life style and means of production. The fourth doctrine in the mid 1960s placed emphasis on values of well-being and equality, as well as social development and economic growth. In the fifth doctrine, in the mid 1980s, national conformity was accentuated (Kivinen, 1988).

Tuomas Takala (1983) discusses how different forms of qualifications, such as labor market skills as well as individual competence, which are prerequisites in society outside the labor market, relate to justifications on developing and prolonging compulsory schooling in Finland at the beginning of 20th century. He shows the different aims and interests of the Finnish population, how these aims are visible through the education plans, proposals and decisions. For example, the different interests of the agricultural population, wage-laborers and the middle class, are visible in the plans, and have shaped the education policy in Finland (Takala, 1983).

In financially challenging times, when there have been higher rates of unemployment in society, young people have been undertaking education more intensively than before. Young people have been seen as part of the reserve labor force, and education a way of keeping young people occupied until better opportunities on the labor market.

In the United States, school reformers like Horace Mann were more concerned about ‘youths wandering around the streets’ than youth working in factories (Kaestle, 1983; 109). In Finland, there were concerns about extending compulsory education due to loss of earnings for families in rural areas, as children were directed towards school instead of working in agriculture for their family (Takala, 1983; 132). During the increasing unemployment during the Great Depression in the 1930s, there was a rapid increase in the number of young people in high schools in the United States (Cohen, 2005). Also, in Finland, there was an increase in the unemployment rate during the Great Depression, and the “problem” with the idleness of young men in cities was solved by sending them to the rural regions to work (Kaarninen, 2003).

However, although there may be several explanatory models on the expansion of education, historians and other researchers tend to agree that the prevailing policy supported schooling. However, the standpoints and justifications why education is considered relevant vary. Education, and the expansion of education, has been a policy project most citizens support. The increase of mass schooling is supported by working class, middle class, ethnic minorities, etc., but for different reasons. According to Cohen (2005) the reasons for supporting the increase of mass education in the United States happened by emphasizing either democratic values or values of social mobility (Cohen, 2005). Furthermore, Labaree (1997) has identified three goals for American education, demonstrating two goals that see education as a public good and one goal seeing education as a private good. Also, these goals can be interpreted as conflicting with each other, showing how there are several conflicting views on the task of education and why it is important to keep young people in education.

Interpreting education as democratic equality is to accept a stance which sees the goal of education as preparing citizens for political roles. In democratic equality, all citizens are considered equal and social inequality cannot grow too great. In a conflicting view, education is still seen as a public good, but the goal of education is a goal of social efficiency, to train workers, the taxpayers, for certain positions in society. The goal in this view is a goal of human capital; to educate citizens so they attain the competence they need for a certain position in society. In this view, education is a public good in service to the private sector, and there are necessary roles in the market that society needs to educate people for. The third goal of education sees education as a private good, with the aim of enhancing social mobility. Seeing education as a social mobility goal describes education as preparing individuals to compete for social positions. The citizen is regarded as a consumer and education is a commodity. Education gives

people a competitive advantaged in the struggle for a desired social position and education is seen as a private good for personal consumption.

In addition, in Finland there have been several aims and justifications for expanding mass education. J.V. Snellman, a Finnish national philosopher who contributed to the development of Finnish education in the 19th century, saw education as an obligation of the nation to civilize its citizens (Ahonen, 2003). From Snellman's perspective, education should be seen as an investment in human capital and enabling citizens to become rational decision makers (cf. Labaree, 1997). However, Snellman emphasized different education for the upper classes and the peasantry as well as for girls and boys (Ahonen, 2003, Jalava, 2010). His views stood in conflict with those of Uno Cygnaeus, a priest and a contemporary of Snellman, who is regarded as the founding father of the Finnish primary school, stressed a more democratic education system and the importance of an education system that was equal for all students, regardless of class or gender (cf. Labaree, 1997). Cygnaeus's perspective aligns with an argument on democratic equality, to prepare citizens to be members in a democratic society. Snellman, in contrast, focused more on the perspective of social efficiency, with the aim of producing citizens to certain positions in society. During the struggle for independence and after the declaration of the independence in 1917, Mikael Soininen, who worked as a Finnish professor in education, as politician (including being the Minister of Education), argued that education is the means to unite the divided nation (Ahonen, 2003). This perspective aligns with the first political model in Tyack's essay: how the aim of school is seen as a national project and the aim is to create 'citizens' and education is seen as a tool to create members of the nation state.

3.4. Labor market changing opportunities in education

To understand how transitions are formed by the socio-economic, institutional and cultural context Andreas Walther (2006) presents a model of different transition regimes situated in various European countries. The ideas of the model are drawn from Esping-Andersen's welfare regimes (1990); however, the model adds contexts of education and youth policy and a biographical perspective of young people being agents in their own life trajectory. Walther (2006) describes the regimes as: a universalistic regime, a liberal regime, an employment-centered regime and a familistic or sub protective regime. The liberal regime can be exemplified by easy

access to employment, but by low access to welfare, and is represented in Anglo-Saxon countries. In continental countries, there is an employment-centered regime, where education is standardized and selective, and access to social welfare, in particular among disadvantaged young people, is challenging. The familistic or sub protective regime is present in Mediterranean countries and is exemplified by the important role of family in supporting young people, leading to young people depending on their family. In addition, the access to the labor market is challenging and represented by high levels of precarious and informal jobs. In the Nordic countries, in comparison to the other regimes, access to welfare is universal, and the education system inclusive. This regime is therefore called a universalistic regime.

The changes in the labor market have an impact on education policy and the choices made by young people in the transition phase; what kind of education is relevant and how can the supply of education be adjusted to match the needs of the labor market? In contemporary society, the labor market has become more differentiated and there is a demand for a more skilled labor force as there are fewer jobs for low skilled or semiskilled workers. The demand for a skilled labor force is connected to the expansion of education discussed in Chapter 3.3. However, the demands of the labor market are not the only explanation for young people seeking to educate themselves. Mikko Aro (2013) shows a clear correlation between the expansion of education and the inflation of education in Finland. The inflation of education is increasingly demanding that young people educate themselves more than previous generations (Aro, 2003). The consequence of inflation of education is an over-educated labor force. The level of education is increasing, meaning Finns are more educated than before, but higher education does not guarantee a job, and highly educated people must often agree to accept a job with lower educational requirements than their training. In addition, the structure of the labor market has changed; there are more temporary and short-term jobs in the labor market. The changing structure of the labor market has led to employees' weakened bargaining power and to the rise of the precariat (Haapala, 2016, Korhonen, 2009).

Researchers have discussed how a changing labor market influences the role of schools in society and how schooling should change to meet the demands of a new labor market. Young people spend more time in education than before and the distinction between youth and adulthood is blurred. European researchers talk about yo-yo transitions, with a metaphor of a yo-yo describing how young people are moving back

and forth between education and the labor market, between low and high skilled jobs (Walther & Plug, 2006; Walther, 2009, Biggart & Walther, 2006, du Bois-Reymond, & López Blasco, 2003). Educational trajectories are more de-standardized, requiring young people to re-educate themselves continuously to meet the requirements of the demands of a changing labor market (Walther & Plug, 2006; Walther, 2009). Simultaneously, new and different forms of standardization and re-standardization of life courses and educational trajectories have emerged, as continuous re-education has become the new standard (du Bois Reymond, 2009).

Unemployment and temporary unemployment are becoming more common among young people due to the unstable labor market. On one hand, the increasing number of young people working temporary, short term, part-time jobs or any other atypical job provides the precariat with freedom and individualized opportunities. On the other hand, it increases risks of marginalization as the structure of labor administration and labor unions lags behind these changes, incapable of adapting to the new structure (Haapala, 2016). In addition, as temporary unemployment is becoming common among youth, the question whether a young, unemployed person can automatically be regarded as marginalized arise. The high youth unemployment, an unpredictable labor market and changing job opportunities may demand a different approach to how one understands marginalization and inequality. The approach to employment and inequality needs to be reconsidered and reconceptualized. As temporary unemployment becomes more common, it may result in a tendency of normalizing unemployment. In addition, there is an increased tendency for individualization in contemporary society, young people require their jobs to be satisfying (Sell, 2007) and unemployment can be one option when waiting for the right job to come up (Pultz & Mørch, 2015). As unemployment becomes more common, it is not necessarily regarded as something adverse anymore among young people. The emphasis in marginalization and exclusion is more pointing towards social relations. According to a recent study in Finland, for young people marginalization is a matter of being left out, to be excluded from social life, a feeling of loneliness and feel lonely and not have social contacts (Gretschel & Myllyniemi, 2017).

3.5. Globalization, privatization and public schooling

Finland is a small country with a short history and has gone through many harsh

financial and political crises since its independence in 1917. Finland is not immune from influences from other countries and is constantly learning from other countries. In addition, as a small country, Finland is vulnerable when it comes to global financial challenges. Therefore, education policy and changes in the education system constantly need to be contextualized and interpreted through lenses of global and historical contexts. Which ideas, and more importantly how ideas and practices are implemented, demand contextualization. For example, although the neoliberal regime that has taken hold in many countries has not had the same direction in Finnish education policy, some ideas from the neoliberalist regime have been implemented to moderate extent. Traces of global influences, worries about the changing labor market, demand for an equitable education system with an increased focus on the individual, appeared as discourses among the respondents in my interview data. The discourse between an equal and equitable education system is constantly present and influences the choices young people make in the transition phase from basic education to further education as well as how students are guided by their parents, school professionals and peers. Therefore, this subchapter contextualizes the society and context students are making their decision in, to increase a deeper understanding of how choices regarding further education evolve.

In many Western countries, there has been a harsh shift towards privatization and the deregulation of public schools. This change has been taking place over the last thirty years. Antoni Verger and colleagues (Verger et al., 2016) point out different paths towards privatization, showing how different political and ideological motives have encouraged countries to shift their education policy to one supporting privatization and increasing choice in public schooling. Privatization in education has been driven as a state reform, as in Great Britain and Chile, or developed as historical public-private partnerships, such as in the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain. In the United States, the focus has been on school choice reforms, and in the Nordic countries, privatization of public schooling needs to be understood in the historical context of a new social democracy process and how neoliberal ideas may influence education policy in this context.

Neoliberal ideas in Great Britain evolved over many years since Margaret Thatcher's election as prime minister in 1979, although privatization in education was gradually implemented later, starting in the late 1980s (Verger et al., 2016). The neoliberal discourse is often identified as the main driver of restructuring the education

system in the Nordic countries, but needs to be understood within the context of the harsh economic recession in the 1990s (Rinne et al., 2002, Verger et al., 2016). Simultaneously, a shift towards a postmodern society, with an increased focus on the individual, was adopted in society, in political arguments and education policy. As Rinne et al. (2002) points out, individualization in society also had an impact on the influences of privatization and the implementation of neoliberal ideas; whereas citizens in the past were educated to serve society, citizens' rights to education and how education should serve citizens became the new focus in education policy in the 1990s (Rinne et al., 2002).

Citizens' rights to a proper education is also visible in school choice reforms, where the United States show some tangible examples of how school choice evolves from ideological ideas, turning out to work against the same ideological ideas and goals they were set out to integrate. Charter schools (that is, schools in receipt of government funding which operate independently of the established state school system) in the United States evolved as a protest against the decreasing quality of public schools, and families as well as politicians were seeking new tools to improve education. The effects of school choice reforms are noticeable. In the United States, the neoliberal shift in education has led to increasing standardized testing: schools are being judged and ranked by the market, based on students' performance. Schools which are not able to maintain good results, are being referred to as 'failing schools' and are at risk of being shut down (Ravitch, 2010). Schools conforming most to principles of deregulation and privatization are rewarded by selective grants. School choice is implemented with an increasing number of charter schools in addition to private schools in the United States. Although privatization and marketization have been strongly criticized in the United States, there does not seem to be enough political will or support to abolish this development (Ravitch, 2010). Sweden has engaged in a similar path of privatization and school choice policy, introducing a voucher system in the early 1990s, which made government funds available to nonprofit independent school as well as to for-profit schools. Parents received an increased spectrum of choices on schooling, which have been criticized for increasing inequality between schools and decreasing the quality of public schools (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2018).

In Finland, there have not been any significant initiatives to increase private schools and no clearly visible discussions about establishing charter schools. The discussions about schools are discussions about public schools; if and how public schools should

be allowed to specialize in certain topics and if and how they should accept students from outside their own school's neighborhood. Promoters of school choice have justified their view that they individuals should have the right to choose an education that aligns with their individual wishes and needs. Parents and students are usually satisfied with their schools, but a requirement of choosing specialized education and a specialized school has been the guiding force. In Finland, there has been a clear resistance against privatization of schooling, and one important reason why the neoliberalist approach and emphasis on privatization of schooling has not been successful, may be the lack of need to improve schools. When the OECD's Pisa tests started in 2000, nobody expected Finland to manage so well in education in comparison to other countries and the surprise of the excellent results are often referred to as the "Pisa shock" (Sahlberg, 2011). Some have even speculated that the PISA tests saved public schools in Finland and eliminated any voices supporting privatization in education.

The Finnish society has traditionally emphasized a social democratic system equalizing income distribution and social support. After World War II, the Nordic Welfare model became an important political project in Finnish policy. In Finland, public education was seen as a crucial factor in the developing the welfare state and the Nordic Welfare model in Finland. The Nordic Welfare model was established and developed after World War II and the founding father of the basic education system, R.H. Oittinen, a social democrat and Minister of Education, argued that education is indispensable for the welfare state (Ahonen, 2003). The Finnish education system went through great changes in the 1970s, when the unemployment rate peaked. At the end of 1970, the basic education system was implemented, providing education for all Finnish children in a nine-year comprehensive system. Since the 1970s, the goal in Finnish education has been to increase the level of education. Since the 1970s, the average education level of the Finnish population has increased, as more and more people aim to complete secondary and higher education. During 1970–2012, the proportion of people with only basic education decreased from 74% to only 18%, whereas people completing secondary education increased rapidly (Kalenius, 2014; 8).

Until the 1970s, mandatory schooling in Finland was based on a six-year-old "folk school" (kansakoulu). Some students continued to a grammar school (oppikoulu) after four years education at the folk school. The grammar school constituted of a five-year upper level of comprehensive school (keskikoulu) and three year of

general upper secondary education. During the 1970s the folk school and upper level of comprehensive school was transformed into a nine year of basic education comprehensive school that is the foundation for today's basic education. In the 1990s higher education for vocational training was implemented, that increased opportunities for people with vocational education to receive a tertiary education degree. In 1998 the Basic Education Act came into force and is still the current law concerning basic education in Finland.

In the 1990s, neoliberalists in Finland started arguing for an education system that increases an individual's opportunities to choose an education that aligns with their individual abilities and expectations (Ahonen, 2003). The neoliberal era provided a greater emphasis on the individual needs and demands of students and families. The question whether families should have the right to choose a school of their choice, a school that aligns with their own interests and views, has evolved as a contradictory question in a Nordic Welfare society. In the previous, traditional view, a similar education system for all students has been regarded as the most equal system. In the neoliberal era, an individualized education system in which students may choose their education on the basis of their individual interests, ability and needs, has been promoted by neoliberalists as an equitable education system.

Because schools are publicly funded, it is assumed that economic capital has little or no relevance when choosing schools. Instead, parents in Finland may use cultural capital (symbolic and social) in the process of selecting schools (Kosunen 2014, Kosunen & Seppänen, 2015). When basic education schools gained the right to offer classes with a "special emphasis", and simultaneously gained the right to select students with aptitude tests, parents and students gained the right to choose schools. This opened the game of diverging and guiding students with similar interests (and backgrounds) into particular schools. This is a game played by both schools and parents and the parents participate in this game with available resources (Kosunen & Seppänen 2015). Kosunen and Seppänen (2015) describe how upper-class parents are operating within the available education system, negotiating with families from similar backgrounds, selecting schools for their children. Financial capital can be transferred into cultural capital, e.g., being able to pay for an expensive hobby that aids the child when applying for a school with special emphasis. Children whose parents have a sufficient economic capital, who have been able to provide for expensive hobbies in for example sports or music, are in an advantageous position when applying for a school with a special emphasis such as

sports or music. The skills children have acquired are part of the habitus rather than a strategic plan in choosing a school. These skills acquired in their free time and through their hobbies, are important in the evaluation process as aptitude tests, when applying for school entry. The economic capital parents possess is transformed into cultural capital, and that gives children an advantage when applying for a school with special emphasis.

3.6. From equality to equity?

The transformation from the parallel education system to the comprehensive education system in the 1970s was justified with arguments on guaranteeing equal opportunities to all children, regardless of family background. Instead of dividing students into vocational and academic tracks at the age of 11, the transition phase was postponed to the age of 16. Of course, some other changes have also occurred, by increasing opportunities to complete tertiary education for students with vocational education. However, the focus in the 1970s was closely connected to arguments on equality (Kivinen, 1988).

In contemporary education policy, equity has been implemented as an important direction in contemporary education policy, increasing school choice policy and increasing opportunities for schools to specialize in certain topics. In the increasing of neoliberalist ideas and influences in education policy, equality – meaning providing same education for all – shifted towards equity – providing pinpointed resources in education for supporting students to reach their own potentials and goals. Although there has been a strong resistance against privatization of schools in Finland, there has not been a lack of discussion about privatization and specialization of schools. Throughout the history of Finnish schooling, there has been a tug-of-war between privatization, specialization and focusing on individual talents versus providing equal opportunities for all students (e.g., Ahonen, 2003, Kalalahti & Varjo, 2012, Kivinen, 1988).

Equal opportunity as a premise in education is clearly visible in Finnish Government programs and the Development Plans of Education and Research (Government program 2007, Government program 2011, Ministry of Education, 2004, Ministry of Education, 2008, Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012a). The key idea articulated in Finnish education policy is that everyone needs to have equal access

to education and equal access to educate themselves to the highest possible level. This is furthermore implemented by providing free, or almost free, education to all (Rinne et al., 2004). The *structure* of the education system is often regarded as its main feature in providing students with equal opportunities. Students are enrolled in a comprehensive, publicly funded, non-selective basic education system until they turn 16. The discussion regarding inequality in education is also concerned with the right to education, and more precisely the right to good quality education. Researchers are concerned with how to make education equal to all young people, regardless of financial background, race, ethnicity or gender. According to the Finnish Government program (2011), all people should have equal rights to educate themselves, regardless of ethnic origin, background or wealth.

The objective of Finnish education and cultural policy is to guarantee all people - irrespective of their ethnic origin, background or wealth - equal opportunities and rights to culture, free quality education, and prerequisites for full citizenship. In any educational, scientific, or cultural activity, sport, or youth work, the equality principle must be applied. All people must have equal access to services of consistent quality. (Government program 2011; 50)

This passage raises some interesting challenges. Students are already situated in different positions when they arrive for the first class in basic education; students come from different backgrounds, with different skills, abilities and opportunities. Some students have a significantly better vocabulary compared to other students; some students know how to write and read when they enter basic education, some students know more than one language and have already tried several hobbies. Some children have had fewer opportunities to learn, explore and develop their skills and abilities. Some children have experienced poverty, abuse or neglect. Some children do not know the language used at school, Finnish or Swedish, and have encountered racism and xenophobia in their early childhood. Although national statistics show how ethnic, socioeconomic and financial background influences on the educational trajectory, it is officially stated in education policy documents that the Finnish education system is equal and provides equal opportunities to all.

Ideas of *equity* are also visible in the education policy plans; there is a strong emphasis in the education system on preventing learning difficulties and supporting the weakest students to keep all students in the same school system. As education policy has been emphasizing equality and well-being as arguments for a comprehensive

education system, particularly from the mid-1960s, diversity among students was simultaneously recognized. On one hand it was regarded as important that every child receive a basic education. On the other hand, it was important to acknowledge the challenges with the diversity of students and how to teach all children of the same age in the classroom, as some children were regarded 'slow learners', 'ill-mannered' or 'educationally deprived' (Kivinen, 1988; 333). As a solution, the special education system was therefore developed to solve these challenges (Kivinen, 1988; 334). The inclusive education policy in Finnish education today is one important feature of the education system. About 30% of students in comprehensive education participate in part-time special education. As a positive consequence, part-time special education provides support for children without any diagnosis preventing stigmatizing of students. Students receive support in the early phase before they are facing severe challenges. Part-time special education is provided for free, that it is even said that there actually is "nothing all that special about it" (Graham & Jahnuainen 2011, 282). It has been suggested that having an education system based on equality is a major reason why Finnish students manage well in the PISA tests, in conjunction with early interventions for preventing learning difficulties, trust in teachers' research-based professionalism and an avoidance of external standardized tests (Sahlberg, 2007).

The social support system provided by the welfare state offers an explanation on the success of the Finnish education system; Finland's good results in PISA cannot be explained solely by its excellent teacher education, good pedagogical tools or a strong teacher labor union (Sahlberg, 2007). Instead, one must recognize the importance of the welfare system. Keeping child poverty rates low, providing free health care to all citizens and supporting families with a comprehensive social support system do provide children with more equal opportunities than a society with a scarce support system and high child poverty rates. In addition, in the welfare state approach, funding is divided equally between schools and schools are not dependent on external support. Schools may receive additional funding, so called positive discrimination funding, to support students with various needs, if the school is situated in an area with a higher rate of low-income families, immigrant families or single parent households.

Even though the political will for a long time emphasized providing equal opportunities to all students, later on some neo-liberalistic ideas on choice and individualization have been implemented to a moderate extent in the Finnish education system. Equal opportunities in education are no longer about providing

the same for everyone, latterly there has been an emphasis on more individual choices and individualized solutions for students. At the end of the 1990s there was a change in the principle of the neighborhood school – a principle requiring students to attend the school closest to home – with the implementation of the free school choice policy. According to the free school choice policy, parents were allowed to apply for entry to a school for their child, which was not the nearest school (Simola et al., 2002). The free school choice policy has led to an increasing specialization of schools. The number of lower secondary schools with weighted curriculum⁵ as well as specialized schools⁶ in general upper secondary education have increased (Järvinen, 2000). On one hand, there seem to be little evidence that the policy of weighted curriculum of lower secondary schools has changed the decisions of the parents, because most children still attend the nearest school. One reason for this might be that there is still a small difference in the quality of the schools in Finland (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011). On the other hand, because there are no ranking lists or official test scores of comprehensive Finnish schools, this might only create an image that the quality of all schools is equal. However, according to Järvinen’s results, there is a close connection between social background and selection into specialized upper secondary schools. The children of well-paid, highly educated and upper white-collar parents are more likely to attend specialized upper secondary schools (Järvinen, 2000). In addition, parents in Finland may rely on the reputation of schools and may consider moving to another area or enroll the child in a specialized school if the reputation of a school does not match parents’ expectations (e.g. Kosunen, 2014). In turn, this may increase school segregation and inequality. Although the Finnish education system may appear to be equal, providing all children with similar publicly funded educational opportunities and supporting the weakest students generously with several forms of special education provided with a very low threshold attitude, there still seems to be room for selecting and searching for the “best” schools (Kosunen, 2014, Kosunen & Seppänen, 2015). In the larger cities, where there are many schools “on the market”, parents seem to be aware of the differences between schools and try to negotiate the best school for their offspring (Kosunen, 2014).

5 Weighted curriculum (*painotettu opetus* in Finnish) which means that a class can specialize in a certain subject on top of the regular teaching, for example art or physical education.

6 Specialized schools (*erikoislukiot* in Finnish) are general upper secondary schools with a special educational task, an emphasis in for example music, physical education or natural sciences. the school is provided the special education task by The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

As Kalalahti & Varjo (2012) point out, a dilemma appears when aiming for fair equality of opportunity and supporting individual choices and rights. When supporting individual choices, rights or 'talents', the prospect of a 'fair equality of opportunity' simultaneously decreases. Although there has been a lot of resistance to marketization of education in Finland, there have been some efforts to implement school choice in Finnish secondary schools to meet the individualized demands of students and their families. More and more secondary schools are specializing in certain subjects, such as sports, arts or languages. Although they are still public schools, the specialization allows for some selection of students. Kosunen & Seppänen (2015) demonstrate how even this minimal specialization of schools increases inequality in the education system, where highly educated parents are in an advantaged position of picking out the best alternative for their children.

Specialization of schools and school choice have been legitimated with arguments of equity, that students should have the right to choose education that aligns with individual wishes and needs and that gifted students should be able to specialize in subjects according to their interests and talents. However, the most affluent families seem to be the winners in this equitable education system, as the more affluent parents seem to use the choices and opportunities available (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2012, Kosunen & Seppänen, 2015). Analyzing discourses on equality and equity in education, the paradox of democratic schooling becomes evident. The paradox with democratic schooling is that it rarely can be a democratic choice. The most equal and equitable education can be found in education systems which are centrally governed and funded. Even the slightest opportunity to choose, increases the risk of children being situated in unequal positions. When parental influence is added to schools, the schools immediately become less equal.

4 A multifaceted and multileveled theoretical approach on inequality in education

The inspiration for my theoretical framework derived from the essay “Ways of Seeing, An Essay on the History of Compulsory Schooling” written by David Tyack in 1976. Tyack used five explanatory models to describe the rise of compulsory schooling in the United States; two political models, one organizational interpretation, and two economic models. The models are contradictory, showing how the expansion of compulsory schooling can be viewed as a political construction to create members of the national state or as an outgrowth of ethno-cultural conflict. Furthermore, showing how growth in schooling can be regarded as an investment in human capital, in contrast to the Marxist approach, under which compulsory schooling is viewed as means of reproducing the class structure. Tyack (1976) succeeds in showing how the same phenomenon can be interpreted and explained by several models, each model explaining convincingly the same phenomenon. His article indicates the risk of relying on a single theoretical model and shows the richness when analyzing the same phenomenon from very different perspectives. Alternative ways of seeing draw on different kinds of evidence, and on how a phenomenon can be explained with different models, all models describing the phenomenon from different perspectives and different levels of social reality. The interpretation of a phenomenon depends in a way on the theoretical model a researcher decides to use, the perspective chosen guides the explanation. Therefore, my data set is analyzed by framing my research questions with different theoretical models, dissecting how different models can describe and explain the research results in different ways. Therefore, the theoretical framing of my thesis strived for a multifaceted and multileveled approach.

In the next chapter, the most influential theoretical perspectives that have influenced my thinking and interpreting the phenomena of my study are explained. These are: 1) a Marxist perspective 2) theories on social reproduction and 3) the concept of agency and how it is practiced. Furthermore, the theoretical chapter outlines some of the conclusions of what the various perspectives have in common as well as how they may stand in conflict with each other and more importantly, how these perspectives have evolved into more contemporary interpretations useful when analyzing the scope of action in which young people navigate today as well as the shift in focus from the social constructivist way of thinking to individualism and reflectivity.

4.1. The Marxist perspective

According to the Marxist perspective, schools work to legitimate class divisions and reproduces inequality in society. Marxists see class struggle as the foundation of historical change (Tyack, 1976). Louis Althusser (1971) argues that in the capitalist society, the main role of education is the reproduction of an efficient and obedient workforce. Schools are transmitting values of the ideology of capitalism, by teaching students to compete against each other. Students learn to compete for grades and internalize how one should always try to do better than their classmates. Teachers are considered to be authorities, and students learn the importance of obeying their teachers, just as they will be expected to obey their supervisors in the workforce. Bowles & Gintis (1976) take a Marxist approach in their view of the goals of education and interpret schools as an institution at which young working-class students are socialized into the broader capitalist workforce, casting a 'long shadow' in education. Bowles and Gintis (1976) interpret the expansion of education not as class domination, but as an outcome of class conflict. Working class people fought for more and better education for their children. The result, the expansion of education, became an unequal compromise between the capitalist class and the subordinated class (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Schools prepare young students how to interact in the capitalist system and students internalize how the bourgeoisie control the workforce.

Bowles & Gintis (1976) demonstrated how schools work to legitimate class divisions and how schools produce and shape a labor force that is necessary for the capitalist system. They analyzed school from an institutional perspective and demonstrated how the internal organization of school corresponds to the organization of the capitalist workforce. According to their correspondence theory, the norms, values and structure of school is like the structure of factories, with a hierarchy system, a principal as the managing director and students as workers lower down in the hierarchy. Yrjö Engeström (1970) recognized a similar structure of hierarchy within the stratification system between vocational and general schooling, in which vocational education is closely connected to the needs of enterprises. Students in vocational education are kept separated from students in general education, believing that they are not capable of any other education (Engeström 1970, 246). Students in vocational education are treated as a free work force, receiving only minimal pay for work conducted in apprenticeship training (Engeström, 1970, 245–247). Vocational students are motivated by the employment opportunities that awaits them and are therefore motivated by their vocational training (Engeström, 1970: 246).

The 'long shadow in education' is reinforced and reproduced by a 'hidden curriculum' that students learn in school. 'The hidden curriculum' refers to everything students learn and internalize in school, that is not part of the formal, education curriculum. Students learn to follow common rules at school; to raise their hand when wishing to speak, to interact with peers, how to address adults at school as well as other unwritten, unofficial insights they receive just by being in school. Students learn that the teacher's 'good morning'-greeting to the class is not only a polite greeting; it is a code for 'now I am here, please sit still and be quiet so the lesson can start' (Broady, 2007). Although Philip Jackson introduced the term 'hidden curriculum' in 1968, the concept had already been discussed by John Dewey in early 20th century (1916). Paulo Freire also discusses the hidden curriculum in his work 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (Freire, 2000). Freire criticizes traditional education, which he refers to as a 'banking method', in which the teacher deposits information into passive students. According to Freire, the hierarchy between the teacher and the student in the traditional method of teaching teaches students to adapt to an oppressive social order. Students are denied agency and stripped from any creativity they may possess.

As young children are brought up in a certain society, they learn to take the norms and values for granted in that system; they are socialized into a certain society. Ulla-Maija Salo (1999) has described the process how first graders learn the order of the school, and how children are internalized in the school system to become students. How social reproduction is visible at the individual level and the role of the structure of the education system to maintain this social reproduction is a theme visible in a post-Marxist approach, explicitly in the approach of Paul Willis (1977). The post-Marxist theoretical approach has criticized the view of the correspondence between the organization of schooling and work, where working class youth passively follow the predetermined path of their family background. Paul Willis, in his ethnographic work on working class students in a British industrial town (1977), showed how social reproduction persists at the individual level. The 'lads' in Willis' research, develop their own counter school culture, which is built around resisting the discipline at school. The 'lads' are in a way resisting the capitalist workforce system described by Bowles & Gintis (1976), however at the individual level, they are actually sustaining it by refusing the options of upward social mobility. Stated in another way, as they are practicing the counter school culture, working against the school system, there is no way they can be successful in the school system. Without school success, they are bound to continue in their own predetermined path, as working-class youth moving into working class

adults. The working-class youth is not less talented, but by maintaining the counter school culture, they are simultaneously decreasing their options to upward social mobility, they are maintaining the social order and social class structure. In Willis's analysis, the 'lads' are recognizing that they lack equal opportunities in their life course; no matter how hard they work, their chances of success are low in comparison to the middle-class students. Therefore, this leads to a certain adaptation of fatalism, and the 'lads' are deliberately failing themselves as they are aware of the inevitable working career in manual labor that awaits them. The 'lads' reject what the school offers, formal knowledge and skills that are needed for upward social mobility, because they do not feel that this knowledge will serve them in their lives. White collar work, working at a desk is symbolically less rewarding in their view, regarded as 'feminine'. Therefore, the students are actively failing themselves in school by resisting knowledge and skills connected to middle- and upper-class values. Another perspective is about the realization of the consistent class structure that is in their view impossible to change. Working class youths realize that no matter how hard they work, they will never achieve the white-collar work, because of the consistent class structure.

One can ask how much Willis' analysis can tell us about the Finnish youth culture, and how much of his theoretical view can be adapted to youth in Finland in the 21st century. Kärkkäinen (2004, 296) concludes that Willis' results cannot be adapted as such on the Finnish school institution, as Finnish youth have for generations acknowledged education as something favorable and have regarded education as important. In Finnish research, school resistance is not visible to the same extent as it is in Willis' research. On the contrary, education has traditionally been acknowledged as valuable for social mobility. Although Willis' results cannot be adapted as such for analyzing young people's educational trajectories in Finland, the theoretical framework is interesting and calls for some considerations. The paradox in Willis's work derives from the 'lads' stating how going to work at a factory is regarded as their own free choice, although this choice sustains the broader reproduction of class structure. There are two views in this theoretical work, 1) how the working-class students practice agency by resisting the school culture and showing how they are satisfied with continuing on the working-class path and 2) how the working-class students can be regarded as victims, forced to follow in the working-class path. Willis' research has inspired Finnish research, many researchers have used ethnographic methods when conducting research in schools, resulting in a rigorous, in-depth approach and analysis.

One can blame the structure of the education system, the institution of school and the capitalist system for casting a long shadow in education for reproducing inequality through generations in society. However, the school consists of people: principal(s), teachers, other school professionals, and students. Therefore, one cannot neglect to approach the theme of inequality at school without approaching the views of these important actors. What is the school professional's role in reproducing and maintaining structures of inequality? Paulo Freire encourages awareness of school power relations (Freire, 2000). Brunila et al., (2011) argue that general and vocational pathways, as well as between male- and female dominated sectors within vocational education, are affected by *taken-for-granted cultural assumptions*. Students are pushed in directions that 'suit them best'. Furthermore, why family background or education level of parents holds less explanatory power for second-generation immigrants is explained by *discrimination*; education provides less benefit for immigrant youth to achieve a privileged position in society (Hyvärinen & Erola, 2011). While school success and outcome of educational trajectory is typically explained by the educational background of parents, for students with an immigrant background, family background or education level of parents holds less explanatory power (Hyvärinen & Erola 2011). Children with an immigrant background have a higher risk of dropping out from upper secondary education; however, the success in school achievements of children with an immigrant background depends on national origin as well as the length of stay in Finland (Kilpi-Jakonen, 2011).

In the decision-making process in the transition phase from basic education to further education and training, students receive support from their parents, guidance counselors, teachers, peers and other significant family members and people within and outside school. The school must support students in the transition phase and help in the application process. Although the guidance counselor is usually the key person helping students in the application process, other people at school, e.g., teachers, school social workers and school psychologists have a significant role in supporting students in the transition phase. Therefore, how school professionals, supporting and guiding students, reflect on their role and how they reflect and interact with students in school is highly relevant. On the contrary, the discursive practice of the school professional is important in analyzing as they are significant adults guiding students in this crucial transition phase from basic education to further education. The post Marxist theoretical approach however fails to explain the broader reproduction of class structure as children also learn from their families and are internalized and socialized

into the world they live in, through their family. Therefore, I will turn to social reproduction theories (e.g., Bourdieu, 2011, Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Lareau, 2011, Reay, 1998), whose research can help one understand the connection between family background and choices of educational trajectories.

4.2. The social reproduction perspective

In sociological studies, a repeatedly discussed explanation on why socioeconomic background matters in such a prevailing way on educational achievements, is the explanation of social reproduction. According to social reproduction theories, the children of parents from the dominant class, who share a similar social and cultural capital as the teachers, manage better in education than other students. Children of the dominant classes learn the linguistic codes and receive the cultural resources which are required to be successful in education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu points out how symbolic power and domination is present in the education system; interactions at school are not only a way of communicating and transferring knowledge, but also dominated by the dominant classes' values and norms. The school appears to be neutral, however by means of education young people are entering fields or professions in accordance with the order of society and their social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, Rinne, 2014). Students with a similar socioeconomic position as their teachers have an advantage at school because of similar relation to culture and style of talking, behaving and acting (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Therefore, students from privileged families or middle-class homes have an advantage at school because of a similar socioeconomic and cultural background as their teachers (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Children adopt not only certain values and attitudes regarding education from their parents, but also a broader form of cultural capital which is incarnated as habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). According to Bourdieu (2011), habitus is closely linked to the different forms of cultural capital; institutional, objectified and embodied cultural capital. Each of the different forms of cultural capital plays an important role for students in their educational trajectory. The institutional form of cultural capital refers the academic qualifications, and the objectified form refers to books, instruments and other equipment. The third form, the embodied form of cultural capital, refers to dispositions of mind and body, values and norms that are transmitted in the family from early childhood. Students from privileged families are more comfortable with abstract language, they are developing a similar cultural

capital as their teachers and are more comfortable in ways of talking with adults and authorities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Lareau, 2002). Accepting the theoretical framework of social reproduction, young people are choosing the school according to their family background because they have adopted and internalized these norms since early childhood. Interpreting Bourdieu & Passeron (1977; 226), the decision on choosing a vocational or academic path, is governed by “what is ‘reasonable’ to expect”. Furthermore, the reproduction of social, cultural, symbolic and material resources is transmitted across generations (Bourdieu, 1984).

The embodied cultural capital consists of values, norms and practices, that are not necessarily conscious, and therefore result in ‘natural’ choices in the life course. Choices in the educational trajectory are therefore regarded as ‘natural’ choices, and the choice is easy as the students or parents, or referring to Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992), as the ‘players’, have developed a ‘feel for the game’. The decisions are unconscious, but feel right, as the students have internalized the values since early childhood and developed their tactics and strategies in playing the game, that is managing in a certain professional career. If a student chooses a different trajectory than the predisposed trajectory, the sense of feeling lost or misplaced may occur, in particular in social situations (Järvinen & Kolbe, 2007).

Furthermore, Reay (1998) discuss institutional and familial habituses, how the context and family background influence decisions and educational paths. While some students feel lost with the decision about further schooling, others apply for entry to a certain school with a sense of certainty. While institutional habituses have to do with the context students are internalizing, a student in a private school applying for entry into a higher education program, familial habituses concern the socioeconomic background (Reay, 1998). Harris & Robinson (2016) suggest the concept of ‘setting the stage’, how parents are affecting school success in abstract ways, by gradually changing the child’s perspective on life. This concept may offer an explanation on why some behavioral contributions to academic outcomes cannot be quantified.

Not only the socioeconomic background matters when young people are choosing their education, cultural capital also helps young people in managing in education and school, and therefore choosing further education. Lareau (2002) uses the term “concerted cultivation” to describe how middle-class families put much emphasis on reasoning and negotiating as well as stressing the importance of extra-curricular activities for developing their child’s world views and life skills, whereas children

in working class and poorer families are not encouraged to develop their opinions, attitudes or judgements, or reflect upon their observations. These competencies and skills may be important in how students manage at school, and furthermore may increase or restrict their opportunities in education and the application process. For example, students who possess similar cultural capital as their teachers, have greater opportunities to learn and better have prospects to achieve good learning outcomes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Bourdieu, 2011, Bourdieu, 1984).

Although Finland is known and promoted as a country with few differences between schools in its basic education, some differences between schools are recognized by parents, and some parents make decisions regarding choice of school based on their views and perceptions of the schools (Kosunen, 2016). Drawing from a Bourdieu's theoretical framework, Sonja Kosunen states in her dissertation how family background, or different forms and combinations of capital, strongly impact on school choice (Kosunen, 2016).

School success is a combination of not only the social position of the family, but also the relationship between the child and his/her parents; how much time parents spend with their children and how they are cared for and comforted (Kalalahti, 2012). How parents value education is reflected in students' school motivation, school success and goals (Kärkkäinen, 2004). Furthermore, social support is reflected in the relationship between parents and their children; students with highly educated parents support their children with their homework and place less emphasis on grades, because they know that stressing on grades increases unnecessary pressure on students (Ahvensalmi & Vanhalakka-Ruoho, 2012). Depending on the student's background, they are encouraged or discouraged to learn and to develop skills for learning, such as critical thinking or articulate their ideas, opinions and thoughts (Lareau, 2002). In working class and poor families, children are not encouraged to develop their opinions, attitudes or judgements, or reflect upon their observations (Lareau, 2002). In middle class families, more emphasis is put on reasoning and negotiating as well as stressing the importance of extra-curricular activities for developing their child's world views and life skills (Lareau, 2002).

However, reproduction theories do not always explain the anomalies in educational and life trajectories. Reproduction theories do not explain why some students end up in marginalized positions, although their family background should determine a prosperous future (i.e., downward mobility) and why some students from humble

backgrounds, end up in powerful positions in society (upward mobility). One explanation is the changeability of habitus, as habitus is created and changes throughout the life course. Habitus is not a static concept, as people receive influences and acquaint themselves with various forms of capital, the habitus itself changes. Students can change a predetermined educational and professional path, but why some students seem to exercise this capability more than other students remains unclear. This factor can guide the researcher to focus on how students use their own agency and reflexivity in selecting their educational path. On one hand, one can imagine that the school, as an institution and as the professionals situated in this institution, can impede and influence the habitus with the cultural capital they offer. On the other hand, one can imagine that the individual's ability to reflect on options vary, but 'how' needs additional consideration. Therefore, I will turn to several perspectives on agency, how students are not always passive receptors and victims of social structure, but how they reflect and make decisions in a world less bound to social class or status.

4.3. Agency and individual responsibility

In previous theoretical frameworks, researchers adopted structuralist theoretical approaches, indicating how educational transitions were 'beyond individual control' (Furlong, 2009, 344). However, in the 1990s this perspective changed, and the focus on individual agency and how young people 'navigate' in their life course evolved (Furlong, 2009, cf. du Bois-Reymond, 2009). In contemporary research, the focus has shifted towards the relationship between structure and agency. While the role of agency was neglected in previous theories of social reproduction, in contemporary social research, the focus has been shifted towards ideas of individualism and people's own agency (cf. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001, Gordon, 2005). Individual agency is both enabled and restricted by social structure (cf. Giddens, 1984; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The ideology of the post-modern society is focused on individual decision-making and individual responsibility, and not choices deriving from the social class or status, although the choices may turn out to be disappointing (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001, Lahelma, 2009).

In Great Britain, extensive research on young people's life courses has been conducted by e.g., Sheila Henderson, Janet Holland, Sheena McGrellis, Sue Sharpe, and Rachel Thomson, Robert Bell (e.g., Henderson et al., 2007, Thomson et al., 2002).

They draw and situate their research within a late modern theoretical framework, however acknowledging the impact of social capital in their research. Their research comprehends a qualitative and longitudinal research on around 100 people and developed many important tools during their research process. Young people make decisions in a certain reality, and this reality is constructed in situations entailing certain norms, values and resources. Sometimes agency is described and used on a continuum between agency and fate; where young people on one end make a choice and on the other end where the choice is absent (Thomson et al., 2002).

There is no universal way of making decisions, or more precisely: on reflecting in the decision-making process, if analyzing the reflective process of decision-making according to a theoretical perspective of critical realists (e.g., Margaret Archer, 2003, 2007). On the contrary, people reflect on decisions and their own life course in different ways. One approach to add an understanding on how decisions are reflected on among young people in contemporary society is Margaret Archer's work on the morphogenetic approach. Archer's research theorizes the interplay between society and agency, pointing out the reflective conversation of humans, which she calls 'the internal conversation'. Archer adds a reflexive approach to social theory with her understanding of how individuals make decisions in a reflexive internal conversation.

Although social constructivists such as Pierre Bourdieu may seem to be in conflict with the theory of critical realists, they are not mutually exclusive. Archer is a critical realist who has been influenced by several significant sociologists: Roy Bhaskar, Pierre Bourdieu, Ulrich Beck, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, Scott Lash and Anthony Giddens. Archer has been influenced by Bhaskar's critical realist approach, linking culture, structure and agency without conflating these. In addition, in one way, she is continuing Bourdieu's work, taking his work to contemporary society, to the late modernity by using the critical realist approach. However, where Bourdieu adapts an approach of how structure is incarnated in habitus, and habitus situates individuals to their specific position in society, Archer elaborates on how the causal power of social structures is mediated through agency in an internal conversation. In contemporary society, the role of agency has increased, social mobility has increased, and individuals are adapting a reflexive approach. Archer is drawing from these different theoretical approaches and without rejecting them, pointing out what previous theorists are missing when discussing the role of agency in a social order. Archer recognizes the role of the broader social order, or social structure, but points out that the individuals

subjectively determine their options through the reflexive deliberations in relation to their objective circumstances. Archer adds a reflexive approach to social theory with her understanding of how individuals make decisions in a reflexive internal conversation. Therefore, as an emphasis in my dissertation is on how young people make decisions in contemporary society, it is important to accept the influences an ongoing changing society has on choices.

According to Archer, the challenge with structuration theories presented Giddens and Bourdieu, is that these theorists see agency and structure as conflated and mutually constitutive of each other, and therefore the interplay of agency and structure cannot be fully investigated. According to Bourdieu, habitus is constructed by the different forms of capital, but this approach lacks the idea that individuals use their own reflective activity, the internal conversation, in decisions. Structure in Archer's theory does not refer to rules, such as in Giddens structuration theory. Structure refers to relations. Archer points out that individuals, who objectively derive from similar social positions, may choose differently because of their unique personal identities and singular constellations of concerns, which makes individuals heterogeneous in their decisions. Subjectivity in Archer's view is dynamic, individuals modify their goals according to their subjective situation and concerns (from Archer, 2007; 22).

People are constantly aware of the social structure and social order in which they make their decisions, however, the reflexivity they use vary according to the stance they adopt to society, i.e., people practice different modes of reflexivity (Archer, 2003). According to Archer (2003, 2007), reflexivity is an individual's ability to analyze him/herself, and this is a starting point for agency. This leads us to the internal conversation – the reflective activity, reflexive deliberations that take place inside the human mind, which is relevant for choices young people make when they are choosing an academic or vocational education track. Archer shows that there are different modes of reflexivity, and how reflexivity is created through stances in relation to society. There are communicative reflexives who turn to significant others to talk things through and dialogically resolve their questions. There are autonomous reflexives with goal-oriented internal reflections. They think and act and are not afraid to change their way of thinking. There are meta-reflexives who critically reflect on their reflections and continuously on the move searching for new ways of living. Lastly, there are the fractured reflexives who have a diminished power of reflexivity. Their reflexivity has either temporarily been taken away from them or they are at a turning point, moving from one mode of reflexivity to another.

As structure does not refer to social class, but to relations, the biographical approach focusing on how people draw from their own experiences is important. The biographical approach has been analyzed in the context of educational transitions and trajectories (e.g., Aaltonen, 2012, Walther, 2009). With a biographical approach, Sanna Aaltonen (2012) analyzes how students at the margins of schooling reflect on their educational trajectory. She shows how the students' previous life experience and challenges affects students' perceptions of themselves as students and their attitudes to education and school as an institution. Focusing on students' own reflections she recognizes how previous struggles affect students' perceptions and attitudes to schooling and how students may need to renegotiate their relationship to education. Aaltonen (2012) shows how previous life experience and challenges affect students' perceptions of themselves as students and in their attitudes about schooling.

Andreas Walther also analyzes the decision-making process of young people from a biographical aspect, but also situating the results in different international transition regimes (Walther, 2009). Different transition regimes shape young people's educational choices, but also the different welfare regimes shape young people's choices and opportunities in their life trajectory. Different welfare regimes support young people differently and allow young people to make different choices depending on which welfare regime they grow up in. In addition, different welfare regimes oblige parents in different ways how and to what extent they should support their child in their educational trajectory and life course. In social work, a social worker using 'biographical lenses' may be useful to understand the client's situation and this approach may be both holistic and empowering (Björkenheim, 2018). An individual's current situation and choices, whether it is a 15-year-old student or a client to a social worker, can be understood and realized using a biographical approach, focusing on important events in the individual's life. This approach may be a tool for changing the course of the individual's life. This approach differs from the other approaches, as it does not focus as strongly on the impact of social structures. However, the biographical approach may help the researcher to analyze how certain events and previous life history impact current choices.

4.4. Conclusions

Different theoretical approaches have been used in explaining why students appear to choose a similar educational and professional trajectory to their parents and why some students become marginalized.

Although research has shown that educational trajectories are ‘inherited’, meaning young people tend to choose an educational trajectory corresponding to their parents’ educational background, research has also shown that younger generations are not as bound to their parents’ educational and professional career as earlier generations. There has been a shift in the values of education among the younger generations. While previous generations more strictly adapted values from their family background, younger generations are more open to accepting vocational or general education for their offspring, and both options are correspondingly acceptable options (Ruohola, 2012). This shift can be explained by the shift that has occurred in education policy, in the content of upper secondary education, with an emphasis on transforming vocational education into a form of education that provides similar opportunities as general upper secondary education. In the 1970s the change to the current education system enabled the shift towards students receiving more equal opportunities to further education. In the 1990s students from vocational education also received the opportunity to apply to study at a traditional university, and to participate in the matricular examination, that had previously been the test completed only by students from the general upper secondary education stream. These historical changes in national education policy may be one reason why younger generations find both vocational and general upper secondary education to be correspondingly acceptable options.

While the focus in Marxist theories is on class domination and power relationships and theories deriving from Pierre Bourdieu focused on the social structure and habitus, in contemporary theories *agency* is given more space, although *how* agency is practiced and *what* agency is, are directing theorists in different directions.

Contemporary researchers discuss individualism, agency and reflexivity, how individuals are less bound to social structures and the increase of social mobility (Gordon, 2005, Skeggs, 2004). Class as we should understand it today is more nuanced and should even include categorizations of race, gender, nationality and sexuality (Skeggs, 2004). On one hand, class is denied while on the other hand, it

is simultaneously present in everyday life, ignored foremost by the privileged (Reay, 2006). Family background may have an impact on young people's life path but (life) style cannot be detached from locality, class, gender or ethnicity (Tolonen, 2008, 2012, 2003).

In contemporary society, the question about how much agency and what is the scope of action young people have in this decision-making process is still unclear. None of the theoretical approaches are perfect for explaining how structural inequality in education is reproduced and why inequality persists and is reproduced in society despite efforts to even up unequal structures. Drawing from previous theory and research, both social structure and agency appear to be a part of the decision-making process. However, as most young people still tend to follow in their parents' footsteps, can one draw a conclusion that the social background is the major force behind the decision? Or is the social structure that pushes students into a similar trajectory, perhaps guided by the institutional structures of school that the teachers and other school professionals are internalized in? Furlong (2009) discusses the conceptual implications of changes in youth transitions over a 40-year period. Although there may be a perception of increased opportunity and individual agency, and biographical approaches may be useful, the continued use of social class is still defended when discussing reproduction of social inequality and transitions in education.

In my research, I analyze the relationship between agency and social structure: how students use their own agency in determining their educational trajectory and how their social reality is constraining and enabling their agency in the decision-making process. Agency can be seen as a part of social practice. However, when discussing agency from a social constructive perspective (e.g., Bourdieu, 2011, Bourdieu, 1984, Lareau, 2011), the focus is on how social practice in everyday practice is typically and habitually performed. When discussing agency from a social realistic perspective, the focus is on a reflexive internal conversation (Archer, 2003). Archer points out that individuals, who objectively derive from similar social positions, may choose differently because of their unique personal identities and singular constellations of concerns, which makes individuals heterogeneous in their decisions. Subjectivity in Archer's view is dynamic; individuals modify their goals according to their subjective situation and concerns (Archer, 2007; 22). The biographical approach (e.g., Aaltonen, 2012) is useful when analyzing students' decision-making process and how they make decisions based on their previous life history and experiences. However, in my study, I did not

rely only on students' perceptions about their own reflective decision-making process, but I also added perceptions and reflections of parents, school professionals and transition phase experts. In addition, I analyzed young peoples' reflections in a broader sociopolitical context, analyzing how the structures of society and the dominant discourses in society are reflected in young people's perceptions and reflections about their own educational trajectory. This calls for a theoretical framework that adopts multifaceted and a multileveled approach. This enables understanding and exploring the phenomenon of how inequality is reproduced in the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education, as well as the role of family, school and other social networks in contesting inequality. In my analysis I found it useful to follow Archer's understanding on the interplay between agency and structure, however also including theories on social reproduction. The structures of inequality maintained and sustained by dominating power structures according to a Marxist approach should not be neglected, as power structures may prevent a change to a more egalitarian society from taking place. Furthermore, one needs to understand the change of concepts of class, understanding class relations as *dynamic forces that underwrite all social encounters*, as Beverly Skeggs (2010, 356) explains.

5 Carrying out the research

In this chapter the data and methods, as well as the rationale for choosing discourse analysis as the main method guiding me in answering the research questions is described. In addition, important ethical considerations when conducting research with young people are also discussed.

5.1. Data and data collection process

The data (Table 1) consist of interviews and focus groups with students, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, principals and other school experts, such as school social workers, school nurses and school psychologists. In addition, the data consist of interviews with several experts in education and social work, e.g., education policy experts, social and youth workers and guidance counselors from the upper secondary level. The data set is a multifaceted qualitative data set from three local schools, social and youth work as well as education policy. The data set is the Finnish interview data collected in 2011 during the EU funded research project GOETE (www.goete.eu, Parreira do Amaral et al., 2013). The data representing local school contexts was collected from one lower secondary school in three cities: Tampere, Turku and Helsinki. To expand the understanding of educational trajectories of young people, interviews were also conducted with respondents from youth centers, child protection, outreach youth work and guidance counselors from upper secondary schools. In addition, the data set consists of interviews with experts in education policy, practice and research and legislative documents, preparatory legislative documents, guidelines, recommendations and research used as rationalizing decisions for the policy of the transition phase from compulsory schooling to further education and training. In the research process, seven researchers or research assistants participated in collecting the interview data and transcribing it.

The interviews and focus groups were conducted in three lower secondary schools in Finland. All three schools are situated in different local contexts, impacting discourse and social practice. All three schools are situated in large cities: Helsinki, Tampere and Turku, with populations of 200 000-650 000 people. Although Finnish education policy is characterized by a long history of children attending the neighborhood school, emphasized teaching policy is changing this tradition. Also, in the present study, two of the schools have a strong focus on emphasized teaching, attracting students from several residential areas. One school is situated in the city center,

and two of the schools in the suburbs. The aim was to include schools comprising students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, schools situated in areas with high unemployment rates or other social challenges. Schools situated in affluent areas were not included in the study. One of the suburban schools was located in a disadvantaged area, an area with high unemployment and various social challenges. This school also had a significant number of students with an immigrant background. The other two schools had students from a range of social backgrounds, including middle class families, families with social problems and/or unemployment. However, in these schools the number of students with an immigrant background was low.

The interview data consist of interviews and focus groups with 101 individuals in total. Individual interviews were conducted with 16 students, five parents, three principals, two guidance counselors, five teachers, two school social workers, one school nurse, 13 external experts and policy experts. Focus group interviews were conducted with students (eight focus groups, two to six students in each group), teachers (three groups, four teachers in each group), two focus groups with student welfare teams (six participants in each group) and one focus group with a school psychologist and school social worker. The educational professionals, teachers, guidance counselors, principals, school social workers, school psychologists, school nurses, were chosen according to the different school positions they have and to provide the research with the various aspects and perspectives on the transition phase. These were professionals who have been working with young people for a long time, and who have developed an in-depth perspective on young people's opportunities in contemporary society. By allowing educational professionals from very different professions, the focus in the interviews shifted accordingly depending on their position. For example, when talking with teachers, the focus was frequently on educational achievements and behavioral issues in class, with school social workers the focus was mostly on challenges related to social work, and with the guidance counselors the focus was in particular on the transition phase, their experiences with students' challenges with the decision-making process as well as practical issues in the transition phase. Individual interviews were appropriate to gain a deeper understanding of the individual's perspectives on students' educational trajectories. In the focus groups prevailing discourses are sometimes contested and sometimes agreed upon. Therefore, the focus groups provide interesting viewpoints and insight on how discourses are contested or accepted and more importantly what arguments are used in accepting or contesting prevailing discourses.

Table 1. Interview and focus group data set

Respondents	personal interviews, (n)	focus groups	number of respondents (n)
Principals	3	-	3
Teachers	5	3	19
Parents	5	2	13
Students	16	8	32
School experts *	6	3	13
External experts** and policy experts***	13	3	21
Total amount	48	19	101

* School experts in school include guidance counselors, school social workers, school nurses, school psychologists who work in school in the basic education level.

** External experts include youth workers and social workers as well as guidance counselors from upper secondary education.

*** Policy experts include policy makers, contesters and researchers from e.g., National Board of Education, Ministry of Education and Culture, Education department in Helsinki, Confederation of Finnish Industries and the Academia.

At each school, the aim was to interview some of the key people at the school, the principal, guidance counselor, people from the welfare team at the school, for example the school social worker, school psychologist or school nurse. In addition, one aim was to include teachers and special education teachers who teach in the final grade of basic education. All participation in interviews and focus groups was voluntary. Recruiting school professionals and other professionals outside the school for the interviews was not a challenge, mostly because these professionals argued that participating in research is part of the ‘job picture’, or the respondents referred to a genuine interest in the research.

Students were interviewed before the transition phase in focus groups, and some of these students agreed to participate in individual interviews after the transition phase. Table 2 provides an overview of the data set with individual interviews with 16 students; the current school of these students, educational background of their parents as recalled by the students, and their elder siblings’ educational background

when applicable. These students were interviewed before the transition phase in focus groups, and after the transition phase, when they had started their new school at upper secondary level in individual interviews. The information about current school was retrieved from the student themselves. The parents' background in most cases was described as the student described their parents' education and vocation. In two cases, the information was more exact, as both the student and parent were interviewed (although separately), and the parents' background was retrieved from the parent. The table gives an overview of the socio-economic background factors involved in this study and helps to reflect on the statistical trends showing how students tend to choose a similar educational trajectory as their parents, although no statistical analysis is conducted based on this table.

Table 2: Data set with students participating in individual interviews after the transition phase

	National background	Current school	Mother's background	Father's background	Sibling's educational trajectory
Student 1, boy, Mikko	Finnish/ American	dual qualification program: vocational (restaurant) and general upper secondary	tertiary education	works in restaurant	vocational/ restaurant
Student 2, boy, Tommi	Finnish	vocational (practical nurse)	some upper secondary education, now unemployed	unknown	
Student 3, girl, Anna	Finnish	general upper secondary education	tertiary education	tertiary education	general upper secondary education
Student 4, girl, Emmi	Finnish/ Mediterranean	general upper secondary education (sports)	vocational education and some tertiary education	unknown	general upper secondary education
Student 5, boy, Masa	Finnish	vocational (business)	works in an office	business, works as an entrepreneur	
Student 6, girl, Leea	Finnish	general upper secondary education	tertiary education	tertiary education	

Student 7, girl Maija	Finnish	vocational (laboratory)	vocational education (laboratory)	vocational education (electrician)	
Student 8, girl, Hanna	Finnish	general upper secondary education	tertiary education	tertiary education	
Student 9, girl, Linda	Finnish	general upper secondary education (sports)	general upper secondary	business (level unclear)	
Student 10, girl, Taru	Finnish	vocational (vehicle painting)	vocational education	vocational education (vehicle painting)	
Student 11, boy, Miika	Finnish	vocational (car mechanics)	works in an office	vocational, works in car mechanics	
Student 12, boy, Amir	African descent	vocational (electrical)	stay at home mother	works at post office, mail delivery	
Student 13, boy, Absame	African descent	vocational (land survey)	stay at home mother	unemployed	vocational (land survey)
Student 14, girl, Ulla	Finnish	additional comprehensive education, tenth grade	works in an office	restaurant, works as a firefighter	vocational (restaurant)
Student 15, girl, Silja	Finnish	general upper secondary	works in an office	tertiary education	
Student 16, girl, Johanna	Baltic descent	general upper secondary education	vocational	vocational/ unemployed	

The data set consisted of eight focus groups with students before the transition phase, however I selected four focus groups for closer analysis. Table 3 provides an overview of these four focus groups, which were selected for analysis because these students discussed things among themselves very freely, interrupting and adding to the other students' talk. These discussions were also analyzed with a linguistically more detailed discourse analytical approach in Chapter 6. These students were interviewed in the final year of basic education, in the 9th grade.

Table 3: Data set with students participating in focus groups while in 9th grade

Focus group	Focus group participants	Description of focus group	Ethnic background
Focus group 1	Mikko, Suvi, Amanda, Nella	one boy, three girls, Tampere	1 Finnish/ American, 3 Finnish
Focus group 2	Pete, Joni, Milla and Janina	two boys, two girls, Turku	all Finnish
Focus group 3	Maija, Leea, Linda, Taru	four girls, Turku	all Finnish
Focus group 4	Amir, Absame, Yousof, Miika	four boys, Helsinki	3 African descent, 1 Finnish

In addition, I analyzed some key education and social policy documents, in particular chapters or parts referring to the marginalization of young people and/or the transition phase from basic education to further education and training (Table 4). These documents are analyzed in Chapter 9 and serve the purpose of situating the previous analysis in a national education policy context. In addition, in this chapter I also used and analyzed interviews with national education and social welfare policy experts, as I found that these experts' speech resembled the documents and they seemed to represent the same discourses and way of speaking.

Table 4. Data set of documents

Government program 2007. Programme of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's Government, second cabinet.
Government program 2011. Programme of Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen's Government.
Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012a. "Education and Research 2011–2016 A development plan". Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2012:3 (Koulutus ja tutkimus vuosina 2011-2016. Kehittämissuunnitelma. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön julkaisuja 2012:1)
Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012b. Ehdotus valtioneuvoston strategiaksi koulutuksellisen tasa-arvon edistämiseksi. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2012:28
Ministry of Education, 2004. "Education and Research 2003–2008. Development plan". ("Koulutus ja tutkimus 2003–2008: kehittämissuunnitelma". Opetusministeriön julkaisuja 2004:6. Opetusministeriö, koulutus- ja tiedepolitiikan osasto.
Ministry of Education, 2006a. "Report of the committee developing the system of application to secondary education". Reports of the Ministry of Education, Finland 2006:5. ("Toisen asteen koulutuksen sähköisen hakujärjestelmän kehittämistyöryhmän muistio". Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2006:5)
Ministry of Education, 2006b. "Valtioneuvoston koulutuspoliittinen selonteko eduskunnalle". Opetusministeriön julkaisuja 2006:24.
Ministry of Education, 2008. "Education and Research 2007–2012. Development plan". ("Koulutus ja tutkimus 2007–2012. Kehittämissuunnitelma". Opetusministeriö).
Valtiontalouden tarkastusvirasto 2007. "Nuorten syrjäytymisen ehkäisy". Valtiontalouden tarkastusviraston toiminnantarkastuskertomus 146/2007.

When approaching students, the interviewer was introduced by a contact person from the school, a teacher or guidance counselor. The contact person introduced the researcher to the students, who were usually in class, and the researcher described the project to the students. After a short description of the project and interview questions the researcher requested volunteers to participate in the interviews. All parents were also notified about the research project by the school through the Wilma/Helmi electronic messaging system. The students received a consent form for their parents, with additional information about the project and contact information. Although students received consent from their parents, the researcher described the project once again before the interview/focus group and reassured that the student could withdraw their consent at any time (on ethical considerations, see Chapter 4.2.). Consequently, the students were not selected by the researcher, instead the student pool represents a broad variety of students from a range of backgrounds.

Contacting parents and persuading parents to participate in the interviews was challenging as the schools are not allowed to release any contact details to the researcher. In two schools I gave my contact information to my school contact person, who forwarded this information, and information about the research and a request to participate, to all parents. A handful of parents contacted me, indicating that the parent was interested in the research, active as a parent or for some other reason chose to participate in the research. In the third school, no parent contacted me after several attempts to recruit interviewees. However, I received consent from the principal to visit the school after a board meeting at which four parents participated and they agreed to join a focus group discussion. Therefore, some parents participating in the research were not parents of the students participating in the research, although they were parents of other 9th graders. The parents who participated in the research can be described as active parents, as they participated in the school board meetings. The parents' data set may therefore be regarded as biased, but despite its limitations I believe that these data show some common values and discourses among parents.

The interviews were carried out using a semi-structured protocol (Appendices 1-5). All interviews were transcribed in full. Most interviews were transcribed by research assistants, although I also transcribed some interviews. The interviews were transcribed very carefully, although breaks, intonation and prosody were not included in the initial transcription process. Instead, I listened to the audio recorded interviews another time as my focus of my research interest became clear and I had chosen the

sequences I wanted to analyze. In addition, when listening to the selected sequences for the analysis, I simultaneously checked and corrected flaws in the transcription when necessary. All names have been changed and some details about respondents' lives may have been changed to guarantee anonymity.

The interviewers usually felt that students, teachers, parents and experts talked very freely and that a trust between the interviewer and the respondent was established. However, in some cases, concerning the national level experts, it was evident that the expert was representing an organization/institution and did not want to respond to certain questions. In these cases, the people did not talk freely, because of the distinction between the official role and personal role. In some situations, interviewees did not reply, taking the official role, as they did not want to share their personal experience. At the national level, among national educational experts, who continuously evaluate and develop Finnish education, one would assume that there would be a general opinion regarding education policy and practice. Instead, the carefulness among respondents to take a stance to burning questions was interesting. People who are in leading positions do not see it as their job to communicate their opinion on current education policy, although they are the ones who share recommendations and research results with politicians.

Haastattelija: Pitäisikö sitten oppivelvollisuutta jatkaa toiselle asteelle? Et se kanssa koskisi toista astetta?

Asiantuntija: No, tähän on erittäin poliittinen kysymys. Ja virkamiehen ei pitäisi ottaa tähän kantaa.

Interviewer: So, should compulsory education be extended to upper secondary level? So, it also would include the upper secondary level?

Expert: well, this is a very political issue. And a government employee should not take a position on this.

Expert, individual interview, National Board of Education

In my research, I faced several challenges. The data were collected within a European research project in which I participated as a researcher, holding a major responsibility for collecting the Finnish data. Working with several researchers during the data

collection process, I found collaboration to be very useful in formulating research questions, by learning from more experienced researchers or from researchers with a slightly different approach. On one hand, researchers with a slightly different perspective ask different questions that may sometimes be useful. On the other hand, analyzing and interpreting interviews that other researchers have also conducted raised questions that differed from my research interests and thus follow-up questions relevant for my study remained unanswered. As the data were already collected, there was no going back to ask additional questions of the interviewees. As the analysis proceeded, I realized that some questions that emerged from the data remained unanswered. In addition, as several researchers participated in the process, with slightly different research interests, follow-up questions and deeper reflections were driven by the researchers' own personal interests. My approach on how to deal with these challenges included accepting that the data is sufficient, although not perfect. The data offers an opportunity to conduct a multifaceted analysis, and hopefully may set the ground for further research.

To conduct rigorous research, it is important to understand the complexity of research. To me, that means keeping an open mind and to adopt an inductive approach. For example, if the interviewee shows an interest in focusing more on a specific topic in the interview, I want to give room for these emerging topics. It is however important to remain within a certain structure, determined beforehand. The research questions require a certain set of questions to be asked, to receive the replies needed. For example, some students could talk for hours about their hobbies, and in these situations the interviewer needs to steer the discussion towards other topics, for example towards discussing the school's role or parents' role in the transition phase. Often the researcher faced challenges with finding a balance between covering a semi-structured interview protocol and allowing for the topics suggested by students.

The aim of validity and reliability is to show credibility in the research. Reliability in qualitative research is about the trustworthiness of the results; are the results coincidental or do we get the same answers from all respondents? Validity in research concerns how interpretations of the researcher are supported by the data or not, and how this corresponds to earlier research (Peräkylä, 2011). Validity in research can be established by different procedures, to establish the credibility of the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In social research, and in particular within social constructivism, it is acceptable to think that there are many truths; different individuals draw from their

own experiences and from their own truth (relativism). By triangulating the research results, the researcher can systematically use multiple methods and analyze the data to find common themes or discourses (Creswell & Miller, 2000). By analyzing how discourses are justified and presented in different contexts, shows interesting differences, and therefore contextualization and triangulation of the results is relevant. In this dissertation, I analyzed discourses in different contexts, using interviews, focus group discussions and documents, analyzing them with different tools from discourse analysis, to provide a comprehensive interpretation on students' scope of action in the transition phase.

5.2. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are an important consideration throughout the research. The research followed both the European Code of Conduct of Research Integrity (2011) as well as the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics Helsinki (2009). Ethical issues are crucial when conducting research with minors. In research with young people, there are many practices on how to conduct research with a sufficiently ethical approach; are young people acknowledged as independent participants who may decide on their own matters, such as participating in research, or are they acknowledged as vulnerable minors, who need to be protected by their guardian, and therefore the research consent should be required by the parent? On one hand, guardians have a right to decide on a child's personal matters according to the Child Custody and Right of Access Act, section 4 paragraph 1 (361/1983). On the other hand, one could argue that 15-16 year old young people are old enough to decide themselves about some features in their life, such as participating in research. In addition, according to the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics Helsinki (2009), children should be able to influence matters that concern them. In some cases, asking parents for written consent to allow their children to participate in research may lead to a skewness of the data, while in other cases consent from parents is regarded as good research practice and should therefore not be neglected (Mäkelä, 2010).

In many cases, research conducted in a school is regarded as a part of the schoolwork, and in some ethnographical research studies, parents have not been asked for permission, but have been informed about the research (Mäkelä, 2010). The main parts of the research data were collected in three schools in Finland: in Turku, Tampere and

Helsinki. Research permit was sought in accordance with current regulations of the municipalities. Scientific good practice was applied which included information about the research; key research questions and research processes, as well as assuring the informants about anonymity and voluntary participation.

The students in the research were 15-16 years old during the time of the research. Conducting research regarding young people, there are some important ethical issues to consider regarding data collection; to conduct a rigid ethical research, one of the more important issue is using informed consent. Informed consent means that participants in research have all the relevant knowledge necessary to understand the content of the research and based on this knowledge they agree to participate in the research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Before each interview, the researcher explained the research project, key research questions and how the data were to be collected. The participants were also informed that their name and any information that makes participants identifiable were to be anonymized. Before each interview with a student, the researcher also ensured that the students participated in the research voluntarily. Furthermore, the researcher explained that they could end the interview at any time and choose not to answer any question if they did not want to. Moreover, the researcher promised that their names would be changed in forthcoming publications and that any details would be changed so that they could not be identified. The researcher also told the students that any information they shared with the researcher would not be shared with their parents or teachers.

Young people often shared their experiences openly with the researcher. The openness of young people should be handled with care. For me, ethics in research with young people is to secure the anonymity of young people, so that the young person can feel safe that the information they share will not be distributed to their parents, teachers or peers, for example. It is also important to try and understand the life situation of young people to make correct interpretations. Contextualization is particularly important when doing research with young people. For example, the researcher should consider what is taken for granted and what is left unsaid in the interviews as well as how young people experience their chances to make an impact and difference at school. For example, when asking students about what they would like to change at school, i.e., what they are least satisfied with, students often refer to the food served in the school lunchroom. Food served at school may be the only thing students feel that they could change. Students who are not satisfied with the education curricula or inappropriate

behavior of teachers may not mention that because they feel that school curricula and teachers are unchangeable.

No conflict between differences in values and interests between the parents and students seemed to appear. At one of the schools at which parents were asked to sign a consent form to allow their child to participate in the interview, almost all parents signed. In only one case did a parent not give consent. However, it turned out that the student had asked the parent not to give consent. When I arrived at the school and gathered the students for their interview, the student had apparently changed her mind and wanted to participate. She told me that her parents permitted her participation, if she wanted to. She was quite disappointed when I told her that she could not participate without the written consent of her parents. This is an interesting example of how students are used to deciding on their own matters; in this case whether they want to participate in research or not.

When interpreting the results, it is important to consider and acknowledge the different social and cultural realities of the respondents. In my research, I met with several young people who differed from the mainstream Finnish population, culturally and linguistically. These students may have parents originating from another country, with a different set of cultural and religious beliefs, speaking Finnish with varying levels of skill. I am drawing from an intersectional approach by applying it to understand the experiences of young people representing ethnic minorities at the school. In intersectionality, the aim is not to add attributes such as race, gender, age etc. to the analysis, but to understand that these attributes are entwined in a constant network of power relation structures and identity is shaped by multiple factors and dimensions (MacKinnon, 2013, McCall, 2005). Intersectionality in this research was applied to understand the multiple dimensions of students from ethnic minorities. It is evident that gender, ethnic background, socioeconomic background, etc., influence young people's educational trajectories, and not only as 'adding variables' but in a complex, interconnected network of social categorizations. In addition, a narrative approach may help the researcher to acknowledge the broad variety of social and cultural settings respondents are derived from. Interviewing students who come from a very different background from my own, increases the challenges in asking relevant questions. For example, interviewing students of African descent, the cultural differences between the researcher and the interviewee may be more distinct than interviewing students with a Finnish background. In addition, students of African

descent are a heterogenous group; many were born in Finland, some are fluent in Finnish, while others encounter challenges in Finnish. Some students live with grandparents or other relatives, some students have guardians with little or no capacity in Finnish. The schools may use translators when communicating with the guardians of the students, but often the students act as the translator between home and school in unofficial communications. Therefore, the role of the school in the transition phase may be different, and in many cases important, for students of African descent than for students with Finnish speaking parents. Here my challenges related to an ongoing uncertainty of not asking the correct, relevant questions, how to consider the unique position of these students. I am aware that bias exists in all research and also shapes the research, so my challenge is how to reflect on and decrease the effects of my biases and those of other researchers in the analysis of the data. During the interviews, my aim was to keep an open mind, and to be more sensitive to what students wanted to talk about. During the data analysis, I used a reflexive approach, a 'reflexivity in studying the unfamiliar' (Berger, 2015), to reassess continuously my positionality and assumptions that guides my research. Still, I am aware that relevant questions regarding how students perceive their reality may remain unanswered.

The researcher's role in conducting qualitative research is usually the role of an outsider, especially when the researcher meets the respondents only a few times. Although young people spoke to the interviewer very freely and shared intimate details of their lives, the tone and style of the interviewees' talk is not a style young people use with each other. Few slang words were used, and the students needed to provide a greater context to their replies, such as telling the researcher what subjects a teacher is teaching instead of only saying the name of the teacher. In other words, shared knowledge about the school context (as well as other contexts) is lacking. However, students seemed eager to provide the researcher with broad descriptions about the school and school professionals, showing a trust in sharing details that they perhaps would not be comfortable sharing with their teacher. For example, cases of bullying, violence among students outside school and a case of teacher hitting a student at school, were freely discussed with the researcher, although students admitted that these cases are not discussed openly with school professionals. Being an outsider in a school context can therefore be an advantage, although insiders might receive a different set of knowledge and insight.

Also, school professionals sometimes treated the researcher as an outsider, describing with many details the context of school, challenges and providing specific information. In many interviews, the educational professionals assumed that the researcher had some knowledge of the school context and political decisions. Some interviewees expected more knowledge from the interviewer while others occasionally checked that the interviewer had enough knowledge of specific details in the educational system or practical work at school. For example, interviewees could check that the interviewer knew about the electronic communication system between home and school, which is called Wilma or Helmi depending on the city. Interviewees could also check that the interviewer knew something about the system of child protection services or how the school health care system works. In some cases, the interviewee assumed that the interviewer knew about the school system in detail, such as a principal explaining about the different support forms the school has, talking in abbreviations (EDY, ESY, EVY and EMU) only a true school expert knows:

Rehtori: Meillä on kaks jopo-luokkaa⁷ ja kolme monimuoto-luokkaa

Haastattelija: Joo Mikä tää monimuoto-luokka on

Rehtori: Monimuoto-luokka joo eli niis on monenlaisilla monenlaisia erityisoppilaita erilaisilla erilaisista syistä [Joo] voi olla EDY:ä, ESY:ä, EVY:ä ja EMU:a meil ei oo sillä tavalla sitte on no on meillä mukautettuakin joo on

Principal: We have two jopo classes⁸ and three multiform learning classes

Interviewer: ok, so what is this multiform learning class?

Principal: multiform learning class, yes, so they have a lot of special education students for a range of reasons, [yes] it might be EDY, ESY, EVY and EMU, we don't have it like that then, well yes, then we have adjusted (syllabus)

Principal, individual interview, Helsinki

The researcher's position is never flawless; as an outsider, one may gain important information not shared with insiders and to an outsider, a respondent may be more

7 joustava perusopetus

8 flexible education

willing to describe shared knowledge or knowledge that is ‘taken for granted’ (Berger, 2015). For example, instead of just replying ‘well, you know what it’s like’, the respondent has to share this shared knowledge in detail. Being an outsider, young people may share details about incidents that they would not tell the adults at school. Students may share knowledge about how they cheat on tests, smoke or use alcohol during school time or about violence inside and outside school. Students are not afraid to get into trouble for sharing this information, as they know that the researcher will only spend limited time at the school. Also, school professionals may share their dissatisfaction regarding how school is run, something they may not be comfortable talking with the person in charge.

5.3. Discourse analysis

Qualitative research is often emergent; the research does not follow a fixed design, instead research questions and methods of data collection change during the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, 12). Also in my research, the research was first outlined by broader research questions, set by a European framework, within the Governance of Educational Trajectories in Europe (GOETE) research project. However, as the research project evolved, my research interests emerged inductively not only during the data collection process, but also through analyzing the interviews for the GOETE project. When analyzing interviews and focus groups interesting themes and ideas emerged from the data, and for my PhD thesis I aim to further develop and analyze these thoughts.

In all research, there is no such thing as one single truth or reality. Both the researcher and the interviewee are located within specific social, political, economic and cultural contexts. Participants in research share a reality that is different for the researcher, and also the research participants may share different realities. Correspondingly, students’ perspective on their reality at school may be very different from the perceived school reality of the adults. Young people navigate in different sets of social contexts; formal and informal school contexts, different contexts outside school consisting of family, friends and peers. In addition, young people from minorities may be navigating in different cultural and linguistic settings with different values and perspectives.

In my analysis my focus was on how inequality is reproduced in the transition phase. To analyze this question, I focused on both the student’s individual decision-

making process and on the context they live in. I focused on how students talk about themselves navigating in the transition phase, within their specific context. I focused on how students draw from their specific context, how they reflected on their opportunities and more importantly how they described the restrictions they encountered in the transition phase. The restrictions and limitations may be explicitly expressed, but also implicitly. Implicitly expressed restrictions and limitations included decisions that are taken for granted, for example, in cases where students have not even reflected on another option because this option is not for 'their kind' (Brunila et al., 2011). However, to gain an in-depth approach to the research question I also analyzed the context of students; how their family, peers and school are setting the rules of the decision-making and how these important actors reflect on this particular transition phase. How are the parents implicitly or explicitly guiding students in their decision-making process? How are the people in school accepting or contesting the decision-making process of the students? How are the school professionals accepting or contesting the formal and informal rules of the institution (the school)? Furthermore, how is the school, as an institution, setting the rules of the decision-making process?

I approached my research question about how inequality is reproduced in the transition phase from basic education to further education with several sets of interview data. Because my aim was to analyze the decision-making process with a comprehensive approach, illuminating the individual's own reflectivity as well as the limitations and restrictions of the social structure and context, my methodological approach also needed to be comprehensive, however not neglecting the individual decision-making process. Therefore, I applied a discourse analysis, focusing not only on what respondents said, but also how they said it and situating the interpretation of what they say in a context. By text, I mean the transcribed discussions with the respondents. Although my focus was analyzing the transcribed discussions, throughout the analysis, I listened to the audio recordings of the discussions in particular in cases in which I wanted to analyze how respondents are saying and arguing their views with a focus on intonation, tone of voice, prosody and pace.

I drew from the understanding that discourse analysis is an analysis of language 'beyond the sentence'. Language use is a form of social practice, discourse is a both a mode of action as well as a mode of representation (Fairclough, 1992). Language and use of language are a consequence and result of social reality including power structures. Discourse analysis pays attention to the structure of language, focusing on a

systematic analysis of utterances, on for example words, pauses, intonation or prosody. There is always a dialectical relationship between social structure and social practice, discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure, but discourse is also socially constitutive (Fairclough, 1992). However, social structure and social practice are different elements, not fully separated from each other.

Discourses are representations of social life and are positioned in a social context. One social context in my research is the context of school and education, where students learn and interact with peers and adults, however there are also other domains in actors' lives; home and places where they spend their leisure time that influence students' reflections. Teachers and other school actors act and function in different social contexts, and these contexts affect the discourses they represent. There is always a dialectical relationship between a discursive event, situation, institution, and social structure. Education policy, social policy, and social practice enable discourses and setting a framework for discourses in which they can evolve and change.

The aim in this dissertation was to recognize and distinguish different discourses and the hidden structures guiding the decision-making process of young people. Therefore, applying a Discourse Analytical approach in my analysis, focuses on ways of speaking and ways of legitimating and justifying the decision-making process. Among researchers, there are various interpretations of Discourse Analysis; what Discourse Analysis is, how to use Discourse Analysis and when to use Discourse Analysis. Discourse analysis has been interpreted by researchers as a study of language use, a study of social practice, an analysis 'beyond the sentence', or how social reality is produced in social practice (Hepburn & Potter, 2003, Gee, 2011, Schiffrin et al., 2015, Jokinen et al., 2016). Traditionally, in Finnish research in social sciences using discourse analysis, the focus has been on the social processes in how social reality is produced and reproduced (Jokinen et al., 2016). In more linguistically oriented approaches, the focus in discourse analysis is on a more linguistically detailed level, for example on grammar, while the focus in other approaches, such as in political and social sciences, the focus is on ideas and themes in talk and writing. Gee (2011) distinguishes between discourse with a small d and Discourse with a capital D. Discourse with a small d is referred to language-in-use and the specific instances when using language. Discourse with a little 'd' is used for any stretch of language in use. Discourse with a capital D refers to ways of thinking, acting and doing. People talk as members of certain groups; people learn to speak in a certain way from other

people. Young people have their own distinct way of speaking, and among young people, members of one sub youth groups speak in differently, use different words and style of speaking than members of other subgroups. In academia, students are taught to formulate their views in a specific academic style, using the right vocabulary and jargon. Medical doctors use their own style of social language as well as politicians, gang members, inmates, gamers, soldiers, etc. The little 'd' discourse is always embedded in the big 'D' Discourse.

In Discourse Analysis, there are several ways to approach the data. I analyzed the data focusing on certain linguistic tools, however not neglecting the broader 'big D' Discourse. Analyzing 'ways of speaking' I used several linguistic tools, such as discourse markers, word choice, prosody, intonation, interdiscursivity, what was left unsaid, what was taken for granted, the positioning of self (pronoun use) and deictic words, i.e., pointing words that are only understood from the context. These tools are also important deictic markers, which reveal the position a person is taking in a stance, and show how discourses are legitimated, justified and reproduced in different settings.

Discourses are not only expressions of social practice, but they also show exercise of power. Discourses are powerful because they institutionalize and regulate ways of talking, thinking and acting (Jäger & Maier, 2009, 35). When analyzing the data, I found that certain views were elevated in a more prominent way than others. Certain views were also more prominent than others among students, while school professionals and the national level experts were elevating other views. Some views were consistently legitimated in a similar way throughout most interviews, by students, school professionals and education experts on the national level. These observations guided me towards using additional tools from (Critical) Discourse Analysis, focusing on interdiscursivity and intertextuality. I drew from the assumption that texts (spoken or written), are constituted by other existing texts (see for example Kristeva, 1980, Kristeva 1986). This combination of texts resulting in a composition of another text, is referred to as 'intertextuality', a term first coined by Julia Kristeva, and now frequently used by (Critical) Discourse Analysts. Intertextuality focuses on how text – spoken or written – is reproduced in other texts, how words and grammatical structures are reproduced in texts. Interdiscursivity, or order of discourse, is a way of analyzing how discourses and genres are networked together (Fairclough, 2001, Fairclough, 2010; 96). By analyzing interdiscursivity, one can examine how discourses, justifications and legitimations from the national education policy level and the local school level appear.

When focusing on how respondents justify and legitimate their views and opinions, the views and opinion can be traced and the justifications and legitimations they stem from. In some cases, the original ideas, views or for example political opinions are clearly visible, however in other cases they are not as evident. I analyzed how different discourses appear and reappear on the local school level, in the discussions of school professionals, students and also parents. I situate these discourses in a broader sociopolitical context, by referring to texts on the national level, by focusing on how respondents refer to texts on the national level.

In addition, I wanted to analyze how these views, and how certain 'ways of speaking' were reflected and reproduced throughout the interviews, how a certain political jargon from the education policy level is reflected in the interviews with students. A close analysis of language and a use of linguistic tools can reveal power relationships, for example, the important values and ideals in society and whose views are regarded as important. Word choice, pauses, intonation and prosody are not necessarily random or arbitrary choices but can reveal values and ideals of society. By analyzing discourses and recognizing whose discourses are lifted up as important, whose discourse is valued, reveals a certain power relation. As one of my aims was to examine how the experiences of students are related to a broader network of social and cultural structures. I focused on how the views of the respondents are justified, legitimated and contested. Whose views are lifted up as important, whose views are valued?

Although the data collection was deductive according to a frame of reference constructed within the GOETE project, I started my analysis by inductively searching for common themes and discrepancies in the data set. I read and listened to the interviews and focus group discussions with students, school professionals and parents several times, focusing on sequences on how students choose their educational trajectory and how they draw from different sources in the decision-making process. After discovering common themes and discrepancies I shifted my focus to ways of speaking and how the respondents legitimated, justified and contested their views and opinions.

I situated the discourses presented by students within the context of the school professionals and vice versa. Many of the professionals, e.g., teachers and experts, are people who work very closely with students and who have gained significant own experience in their work. They represent various professions, and work with students in different ways and with different tasks. Therefore, these professionals provide a

broad range of perspectives on students' decision-making process. A school social worker at school may have an understanding about a student's social challenges, while a teacher may focus on obstacles related to learning. Furthermore, when situating these discourses in a broader context, understanding how discourses are reproduced and how inequality in educational trajectories is reproduced increases. Suddenly, the student's positioning of oneself, practice of agency in the decision-making process becomes clear, and the decision-making process becomes an interesting example of a *structured agency*, where the predisposed educational trajectory stands in conflict with the practice of agency and the final result may be highly influenced by a single school professional's input in this process. Furthermore, I situated the discourses in a broader national sociopolitical context. By analyzing government programs, education policy documents and social policy documents regarding marginalization of youth, the national context and political climate in which schools operate is illuminated.

When I started analyzing how students were discussing their decision-making process, I noticed that they legitimated and justified their views in a range of ways. It was not only the fact that some students were very sure about their educational choices, while other were uncertain. Neither was it the fact that some justifications and legitimations were taken for granted, while others were not. Instead, when I started to focus on how students were discussing their own role in the decision-making process, that is how students referred to themselves, using different forms of pronouns, I realized that students were using pronouns in very different ways. The Finnish colloquial (spoken) language allows a broad variety in how to refer to oneself, when referring to 'I'; e.g., 'minä', 'mä' or the 'null pronoun' form, and these students were using different kinds of varieties. Therefore, I started to analyze these different forms of use of pronouns with methods from linguistical research (Mühlhäuser & Harré, 1990). While analyzing the use of pronouns in focus group discussions, I noticed the variations in pronouns used by students and a change in pronoun use by students when they were arguing and debating about their decision-making process.

Pronouns are indexical indicators of people and have a deictic function. Pronouns are deictic, which mean they have to be determined from the context (Gee, 2011; 8-11). For example, to understand 'he said that', one has to know from the context who 'he' is referring to. In earlier sociological theoretical work, Goffman and Mead have for example theorized the use of pronouns. In his analysis of the role of pronouns in speaker footing (Goffman, 1981), Goffman demonstrates how speakers shift their

social role with the help of pronouns. For example, speakers may shift between I and we although they are referring to themselves, depending if a person talks about himself or speaks on the behalf of a group. G.H. Mead distinguished between the 'I' and 'me' as aspects of the self (Mead, 1934 in Malone, 1997, 42). Mead argues that the self is a social process and 'me' is the habitual self. The 'I' is an active problem solving 'self'. The 'I' creates new behavior (Mead, 1934 in Malone 1997, 24-25). Drawing from Norbert Elias, personal pronouns can be analyzed as a set of 'mutually exclusive alternatives', distinguishing how the 'I' takes a different standpoint from 'you' and 'we' takes a different standpoint from 'they' (Watson, 1987; 262). In psychological research, Stephanie Rude and colleagues (2004) found that college students who showed symptoms of depression used significantly more first-person singular pronouns, such as "me", "myself" and "I", compared to students with no symptoms of depression.

Pronouns have been analyzed mostly among linguists, and to a lesser extent among social scientists (Watson, 1987; 262, Malone, 1997: 42). Finnish linguists such as Liisa Raevaara (2015) and Lea Laitinen (1995) have analyzed different uses of pronouns. Laitinen (e.g., 1995) has analyzed the zero-person pronoun form in the Finnish language. Using the zero-person pronoun the speaker does not have to refer to themselves although describing their own experiences. She concludes that when a speaker uses the zero-person pronoun, they may strategically talk about themselves while simultaneously generalizing their experiences. Also, Hanna Lappalainen (2015), shows how the use of null-pronoun form cannot be interchanged directly with other forms of first-person pronoun form, instead the chosen form of indicating 'I' is a way of positioning oneself and others implicitly. Raevaara (2015) discusses different ways young people refer to themselves in Finnish; different uses of the colloquial form of 'I': *minä*, *mä*, *meitsi* and *meikä*. 'Meitsi' and 'meikä' are variations of 'I' used more by young people and not frequently used by adults. Raevaara (2015) notes how young people strategically use the different forms of 'meitsi', 'meikä' and 'mä' when situating themselves in their talk. Different uses of the colloquial Finnish form of 'meitsi', 'meikä' and 'mä' are used to show variations of contrasting oneself to other people in young people's talk. 'Meitsi' can be used as a third person, when the speaker addresses themselves in two distinct positions, as a character in a videogame and as the person playing the game (Raevaara, 2015).

In social sciences, Finnish youth researchers Tuula Gordon and Tarja Tolonen have analyzed the use of 'I' (*minä*) in young people's talk. Tuula Gordon (2005) discusses

the various forms of agency (toimijuus); how young people reflect when they are making certain decisions. She analyzed how young people use 'I' ('minä') and focused on sentences in the transcribed interviews when young people say, 'I am', 'I went', 'I don't want' and how frequently young people talk in this 'I' form (2005, 121). Tarja Tolonen (2008) also analyzed how young people position themselves in social space; young people's talk and sense of agency from a class, lifestyle and gender perspective. Their analyzes reveal several variations of agency and how young people position themselves in the decision-making process.

In my research I am proceeding with and advancing the tools from research conducted by for example social scientists as Gordon (2005) and Tolonen (2008), to a more linguistically detailed level, drawing from linguistic analysis conducted by e.g., Mühlhäuser & Harré (1990) and Yates & Hiles (2010a, 2010b) on the use of pronouns in self-presentation. My aim was to focus on different uses of 'I'; for example, when a student is talking in a dictionary form (minä), colloquial form (mä) or in a null-pronoun form. It is not arbitrary how people talk and express themselves. The way of speaking, of expressing oneself, can show the degree of responsibility one is ready to take in an utterance and a positioning oneself in social space (e.g., Mühlhäuser & Harré, 1990). The colloquial Finnish language is rich in that sense; there are several ways of expressing oneself and therefore the colloquial Finnish language allows this kind of analysis. I believe a further examination of pronouns is useful for locating agency and shows how people are positioned in the social space, but also how the views and arguments are reflected and reproduced in different settings in the social space. In interaction and in talk, pronouns indicate and show self-presentation (Malone, 1997: 43).

Mühlhäuser and Harré (1990) provide a theoretical framework on how use of pronouns can illuminate different expressions of agency. For example, the use of 'I' may illuminate a range of positions on commitment to the content and moral responsibility. Pronouns are a form of indexical device which positions participants with various degrees of autonomy. The pronoun indicates a location to which degree the person is assigned responsibility and commitment in the utterance. The difference between utterances such as 'There's a draught', 'I can feel a draught' and 'I think I can feel a draught', shows a variation in how much responsibility and commitment a person is prepared to take, and shows also a location of the point of view from which the world has been observed Mühlhäuser and Harré (1990;87-94).

Yates and Hiles (2010b) show how participants in their talk, shift their positioning with varied pronominal use relating to a critical ontology of themselves. How people relate to themselves, how people become constituted as subjects with varying degrees of power and knowledge is analyzed by focusing on how they refer to themselves. Yates & Hiles (2010b) demonstrate how the use of fourth-person pronouns is distancing the speaker from the deictic center of the self, decreasing agency. Furthermore, by shifting the pronominal use, participants are constantly positioning their agency according to their situation. For example, by using the fourth person ‘you’, can illuminate how a participant is distancing oneself from the deictic self, recognizing restrictions and limitations of one’s conduct. A person living in care, may discuss what “‘you’ can or cannot do” and how ‘you’ are supposed to conduct yourself” (Yates & Hiles, 2010b; 548). Furthermore, ‘you’ can also express principals on ethical and moral rules; “how ‘you’ are supposed to behave in a care home” (ibid).

Just as several youth cultures are represented at school (Tolonen, 2001), the way young people act and talk in different groups varies (Raevaara, 2015). In Raevaara’s research (2015), she acknowledges how young people use different words to describe ‘I’; for example, by saying *mä*, *meikä*, *meitsi*. This can be part of the youth subculture but does not necessarily have to be. Therefore, in my understanding it is not as revealing to count how often a person uses *mä* or *meitsi*, instead it is interesting to analyze *when* and *how* people choose to use different words for ‘I’ or even leaving out the ‘I’ as a null pronoun form or talking in a passive voice. This choice of style when referring to ‘I’, and this style emphasized or diminished by discourse markers is particularly interesting when the style changes within an utterance or when the style changes because of a previous utterance, for example in a focus group discussion.

In this research, I was interested in this degree of responsibility and commitment individuals show in their utterances. I claim that by analyzing pronouns one can gain a more profound understanding of different standpoints participants take and how participants position themselves and others in the social order. Moreover, I argue that pronouns can reveal what is taken for granted, what is regarded as shared knowledge and what is regarded as unusual in society. I have shown how standpoints are accepted and contested with the use of pronouns. In interviews and focus groups with young people, the focus is on the perception of agency in the decision-making process from basic education to upper secondary education. In addition, situating the results of my analysis in a broader context, in the context of school professionals,

parents and sociopolitical context, I identified the intertextuality and interdiscursivity of students' views, deriving from contexts of school, parents and sociopolitical settings. The documents analyzed in Chapter 9, and interviews with some national education policy experts, serve as the sociopolitical and educational context, to contextualize the discourses presented at the local level, by school professionals, parents and students.

Due to the multifaceted ways to analyze the data, moving from a linguistically oriented way of analyzing to a broader discourse analysis approach, the quotations are not uniformly presented. In some analysis, such as when focusing on the little d, or pronoun use, it is important to show to the reader even the small details in speech: pauses, word order, starting of sentences, but correcting the word order, hesitations, laughter, etc. However, when analyzing the big D discourse, the focus should be on the broader discourse, on intertextuality and interdiscursivity, how social reality is produced in texts and in social practice. In these quotations small details are not included, such as corrections of speech or pauses. Therefore, the quotations are presented according to the method of analyzing and presenting the relevant information of the quotations.

6 Students reflecting on the choice of education

Statistics (e.g., Saari, 2015, Myrskylä, 2009) show how students choose an educational and professional career that aligns with their parents' educational and professional career. The correlation between parents' and child's choice of vocational school or general upper secondary education is strong. General upper secondary school is the clear choice for students whose parents are highly educated. The probability of choosing general upper secondary education increases as parents' level of education increases. In cases in which neither parent continued to study after basic education, only 15% of students choose general upper secondary school. However, in cases where both parents hold a higher education or a doctoral degree, 80% of children choose general upper secondary education (Saari, 2015; 17–18). Even choices of profession correlate between parents and child, children of artists tend to pursue art and children of teachers become teachers themselves (Myrskylä, 2009). The reasons for choosing a similar educational trajectory as their parents have been described with habitus, values, norms and attitudes internalized since early childhood (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Reay, 1998).

In this chapter I focus on the students' own reflective process of choice of education. Contemporary theorists suggest focusing on how young people's own agency, individual decision-making and reflexivity in the decision-making process guide the choices of young people, and how young people are not dependent on social structures when choosing their educational trajectory (e.g., Gordon, 2005, Skeggs, 2004, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). I analyzed how students discuss their decision-making process in the transition phase from basic education to further education. I focused on the way of speaking, on uses of discourse markers, indexicality and pronouns. The focus is on how students express their reflective process, on the discursive practices in the decision-making process and how students describe, justify and legitimate their decisions about further education. I focused on how they describe their support from parents, siblings, other relatives, school and peers. I analyzed 16 individual interviews and four focus groups of students. The students came from a range of backgrounds and circumstances, representing students with excellent grades, students who receive a lot of support from their parents, to students with severe challenges in school. Therefore, by analyzing the discussions with these students, it is possible to adopt a more detailed and in-depth insight into how students choose their educational trajectory and how they draw from their own experiences and networks and other constellations when deciding about their educational trajectory.

The students participated in focus group discussions before the transition phase, and individual interviews after the transition phase. I examined how students express their decision-making process, how students draw from different contexts, and how they use knowledge from school, family and other sources when making a decision about their future. I analyzed the ways of speaking when students reflect on the support and knowledge they receive, and how the decision is guided by these different sources, if at all. I show how students express the importance of family and school, by examining how they justify, legitimate and describe their choices. I show how the decision is always made in a certain context, although expressing some reluctance in verifying the influence of family and school.

I focused on how these students talk about the relevance of parents, siblings, school and extracurricular activities when they reflect on their educational trajectory. Most themes were deductively selected beforehand based on previous research. However, 'siblings' as a theme was inductively selected as this theme appeared and reappeared throughout the analysis. I have shown how students express their decision-making process with intrinsic values, showing a strong sense of agency, but also the insecurity some students encounter when not identifying their interests or receiving sufficient support.

6.1. Demonstrating agency

All the students in my data set applied for entry to upper secondary education. All students turned in the application form for upper secondary education, which shows that students have internalized the values of relevance of post basic education. Students have internalized the importance of post basic education to enter the labor market, which requires students to have completed upper secondary education or that they are not able to apply for unemployment benefits if they have not turned in the application for a program in upper secondary education. Furthermore, they are aware that a young person who has only completed basic education has very slim chances in receiving a job and even slimmer chances to advance in their career. In addition, no student mentioned apprenticeship training as an option. Not even considering or mentioning apprenticeship training illustrates the marginality of this option. Apprenticeship training is marginal in Finland and applying for apprenticeship training demands strong activity from the student, as the students themselves need to take an active

role in the arrangements of apprenticeship training. As German or Dutch students may consider full-time work or apprenticeship training as an option, Finnish (and Slovenian) students are not even considering this option due to the structure of the education system and labor market (McDowell et al., 2016). In a couple of focus groups, I asked the students whether they had received any information about apprenticeship training; some of the students stated that the guidance counselor had mentioned this option once, however several students did not recall receiving any information about this option. As there are no genuine other options for Finnish students than applying for entry into upper secondary education, the focus in the research became to analyze the transition phase to upper secondary school, general or vocation, without taking into account other options. In what follows I will turn to the question of how students express and justify their decision, whether it is academically oriented general upper secondary education or the vocational upper secondary education.

Contemporary researchers have focused on agency and how choices are becoming more detached from social structures. For example, how young people are free to choose a profession outside their social class or status (cf. Archer, 2007, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). A first glance of the data set shows a strong agency among students justifying and legitimating of their educational choices without referring to social status or background. Students justify their decision with intrinsic values: they want to make the decision about their career that align with their own personal interests, either longtime interests or recently discovered interests. Students draw from their experiences when they choose, stressing the importance of finding something that interests them personally. Students justify their decisions by explaining what they are good at, interested in and what they like. Students tend to emphasize their own role and agency in the decision-making process, and they stress their own aspirations and strengths when deciding about upper secondary education. Listening to students, what students say and how they justify their choices, the decision-making process appear unproblematic. Students in my data convinced the interviewer that the decision is made by the students themselves. They tended to use discourse markers pointing out the reply as a decision they have been thinking about for a long time when legitimating their decision. Students are justifying this statement and legitimating it by stating how they have *always* known what they want to do, or that they have known *ever since they were little* (cf. Reay, 1998) and declaring a strong sense of agency using discourse markers as for example *always* and *for one*.

Haastattelija: Joo, ja miten te sitte keksitte mitä te haluatte tehdä?

Suvi: Mää on *aina ainakin* tykänny laittaa hiuksii ja silleen muutenkin laittautumisesta.

Mikko: *Määkin* ruuanlaitosta (kaikki nauravat) mitäs sitte, se vaan on niin.
(tytöt kikattavat)

Amanda: Ja mää on iha pienest asti halunnu tulla niinku johonki sairaalajuttuihin tai jotain vastaavaa.

Haastattelija: Joo

Nella: Mä oon *aina ollu kiinnostunu* jostai parturi-kampaaja jutuista ja just aina laittanu kaikkia hiuksia ja sellasta...

Interviewer: How did you come up with what you want to do (in the future)?

Suvi: I have, *for one, always* liked to do hair and also otherwise to fancy up

Mikko: I have also *always* enjoyed cooking (everyone laughing), so what, that's how it is

(all girls giggling)

Amanda: and *ever since I was little*, I have wanted to become something connected to caretaking or similar

Interviewer: Yes

Nella: I have *always been interested* in hairdressing stuff, and always style hair and stuff like that

Focus group 1; one boy and three girls, Tampere

Presenting the choice as a self-evident decision suggests that students either have not felt a need to reflect more thoroughly about this self-evident decision or that they are expected to present the decision with certainty. Both assumptions may be correct.

Students in Finland are expected to take an active role in their schoolwork and in their life course (Metso, 2004, Lahelma, 2009, Vanhalakka-Ruoho et al., 2018). Also, making a choice in a society promoting individualization and individual decision-making (cf. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001) encourages students to be directed to their own active role and agency in the decision-making process. Therefore, it is not surprising that students are not only expected to take an active role in choosing their school for further education, but they also emphasize this decision as their own. Although not all students had made up their minds about what they want to do in the future, these students expressed that the decision-making process was their own. Using discourse markers when expressing an active role in the decision-making process is not only used by students who express a certainty of their decision. Although students may be unsure about their aspirations, students talked about the decision-making process as a process they are actively engaged in and they explain how the decision is their own. Elina Lahelma (2009) shows how postmodern emphasis on individual choices also means making compulsory, individual choices when the choices turn out to be disappointing. Students may problematize and reflect on the decision in different and multifaceted ways, but the decision is presented as their own decision. Some students expressed severe challenges in finding out what their interests are and are not even sure whether they want to apply for entry to general upper secondary education or vocational education. For Linda, the choice was not clear at first. On one hand, she encountered some challenges with her grades, and therefore the choice to apply to enter general upper secondary school was not clear. On the other hand, she stated how she had ‘to get a grip of herself’ in order to “get the cap” (the symbol of having completed general upper secondary school) she *always* wanted:

Linda: Mul oli vähän semmonen et kyl pitää ottaa itteensä niskast kii.

Haastattelija: Mm.

Linda: Ensin mä aattelin vaan et suoraan am- niinku ammattikouluun mun en mä- sit mä miettisin et *mä oon aina halunnu lakin* (.). Et kyl mä oikeest pistän itteni niin pal likoon et mä saan sen.

Linda: For me it was like I needed to get a grip of myself.

Interviewer: mm

Linda: First I thought that I would go straight to vocational training, but then I thought that *I always wanted the cap*. So that I really needed to put myself on the line in order to get it.

Linda, focus group 3, Turku

However, students may claim that they have always known what they wanted to do, and although they do not know what they want to work with when they grow up, at least they seem to know if they want to move into theoretical based education (general upper secondary school) or a more practically focused education (vocational school). Reay & Ball (1998) state how students are choosing their educational path with certainty if the path aligns with their family background. Students have internalized the values of what is accepted within their social class (Reay & Ball, 1998, Bourdieu, 1984, Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, etc.) and therefore they do not need to re-reflect on this decision. Analyzing Linda's answer above through the lenses of Bourdieu and Reay & Ball, her family background may have impacted her reflections and values she has internalized through her upbringing. Linda is a daughter with parents who both had attended general upper secondary school, the assumption within her social class may be the expectation of applying for entry to general upper secondary education, although she needed to reconsider this option because of her weak final grades.

Furthermore, while some students claimed how they have *always known* that they wanted to become a 'hairdresser', 'a chef', 'a car mechanic' or wanted "the cap", other students claimed that they have *never* been motivated enough to read a lot, so therefore they chose a vocational field instead of general upper secondary school. Many of the students appeared to justify their decision with a surprisingly strong sense of self-awareness, with a strong self-confidence.

Taru explains how she first thought about the decision at her own, and then talked about the decision with her parents. She described how she *never* thought about applying to get into general upper secondary school because her grades were not high

enough. She did not mention whether she had discussed any other options with her parents, school or someone else if she would have been able to apply to general upper secondary school⁹. She had probably talked about her grades with at least her guidance counselor, but she presents her decision as her own.

Taru: Siis määki mietin niinku ensin ite, sit mä niinku rupesin puhuu meiän äitil ja iskäl siit. Ja sit niinku sit se vast niinku meni et. Ku lukioo *mä en oo koskaan* ees ajatellu ku mul ei tuu koskaan riittää mun keskiarvot sinne saakka et.

Haastattelija: Joo.

Taru: Et amis on ollu aina se et mihin mä sit (.) haen.

Taru: So, I also thought about it myself at first, and then I like started to talk about it to our mom and dad. And then it became like. Because *I never thought* about going to general upper secondary school because my grades are not high enough.

Interviewer: yes

Taru: So vocational has always been the place to apply to

Taru, focus group 3, Turku

Some students in the data, who were not so sure what they wanted to work with or study, chose a general upper secondary school. The reason was not because they necessarily wanted to apply for a university place afterwards, or any tertiary education,

⁹ As students are expected to decide for themselves, they also express how they are aware that their grades would not be sufficient for general upper secondary education. However, this statement about how general upper secondary education automatically requires higher grades stands in conflict with statistics (see for example vipunen.fi where statistics regarding entrance requirements are presented) showing that not all general upper secondary schools require higher grades than vocational education, and depending on the vocational program, some vocational programs may even require higher grades than general upper secondary schools.

and not because of the general knowledge or cultural literacy provided at this level, but simply because these three years would provide them with more time to reflect on their aspirations and what they want to work with in the future. However, feelings of anxiety become evident, particularly for students with a working class background who are struggling to find an educational path of their choice. Reay & Ball (1998) have stated how students with a working class past who are situated in middle class context express uncertainty and feelings of anxiety. This can be exemplified with Ulla. Ulla was hesitating about her decision about upper secondary schools. Her father works at a restaurant and her sister is attending a restaurant school. She wanted to apply to a restaurant school but was discouraged by her father and sister (see a more detailed description below under family/sibling influence). She therefore decided to apply to a vocational school specialized in beauty and cosmetology. However, she was not accepted by the school, and therefore she had no option other than spend an additional comprehensive year in basic education, the so-called 10th grade. Now, still irresolute about her aspirations for the future, she decided to apply for entry to general upper secondary school. However, she has not changed her mind in her desire to start working as soon as possible. After general upper secondary school, she wants to start working and not continue studying, which seems contradictory with her choice of upper secondary school, as general upper secondary schools do not provide the student with a professional qualifications for a profession, but merely the right to study more. Ulla justified her decision and aspiration with a statement that this is something she has *always* known, *since she was a little girl*, that she wants to start working as soon as possible.

Mä *oon jo ihan pienest pitäen* halunnu niinku tosi nopeesti töihin just.
Opiskelu on, tai se ei oo niinku kiinnostanu mua niin paljon ku työt.

Already as a little girl I have wanted to enter the labor market quickly.
Studying is, or it doesn't interest me as much as work.

Ulla, individual interview, Helsinki

She stated that she *even as a little girl* had already known that working is something she wanted to start doing as soon as possible. However, she was not sure about what work she wanted or where. She mentioned work in beauty, cosmetology or clothing, but did not have a strong opinion about what work she wanted within these fields, and in addition, her aspirations were not locked into these specific fields. She spoke about a well-paid job somewhere abroad, perhaps New York, but her plan on how to get to this position was not clear to her. She replied to many of the questions regarding how she intended to succeed in her plans with ‘I don’t know’, expressing a discrepancy between her dreams and a pragmatic approach how to reach her dreams. Although she expresses a lack of a plan to reach her dream, she verified the discourse of individual decision-making, a discursive description on how the choice and decision is her own and not anyone else’s. She was hesitant about what she wanted to study, and she has yet to come to a conclusion about her aspirations and goal for the future, indicating how general upper secondary school will provide her with more time to think what she wants to work with in the future. Although she was hesitant about her plans, she still presented the decision as her own, not relying on school professionals or parents’ opinions or advice. When examining the data even more carefully, by analyzing how students refer to themselves as actors in the decision-making process by analyzing their use of pronouns, the discussions appeared even more multifaceted. Students referred to themselves using a different set of pronouns. Previous research has shown how leaving out a pronoun may indicate views, opinions or facts that are regarded as being common knowledge, something everyone can agree on or is a self-involvement responsibility (Mühlhäusler & Harré 1990). In my data set, leaving out the pronoun verifies these results. Students are strategically using different forms of pronouns or even leaving out the use of pronoun.

Se just et *mä en oo enää varma* mihin *mä* haluun opiskelee, ni lukio on sit se varmin paikka, et sit siel saa aikaa miettii, et mitä tulee tekee työks.

So, the case is that *I’m not sure* anymore what *I* want to study, so general school is the most certain place, there (one) gets time to think, what (one) will start working with in the future

Ulla, individual interview, Helsinki

In the example with Ulla, she expressed without using the first pronoun 'I', how applying for general upper secondary school is a good decision if one is not sure about their aspirations, because: 'there (one) gets time to think, what (one) will start working with in the future'. On one hand, she justified the decision to apply for the general upper secondary school with a statement that is regarded as common knowledge, although she spoke about her own educational path, meaning she will receive more time to think about her options. On the other hand, she is distancing herself from taking an active role in the decision-making by dropping the pronoun, referring to how this is a commonly accepted path for people who are indecisive about their plans. Just as in the Yates & Hiles article (2010; 68–70a), when Paul and Ann are expressing how 'you', as a care subject, are supposed to conduct yourself; 'you're supposed to be ...quiet,' "you have to ask permission". They are not referring to 'you' as in 'other people', but to themselves and to anyone situated in this particular situation, who are subordinated to other people exercising more power than they.

Shifting among different uses of pronouns show the varying degrees of self-involvement and responsibility in addition to power (Mühlhäusler & Harré, 1990; 200). In focus groups, the strategic use of pronouns becomes even clearer. In a focus group with four students from Turku, two boys and two girls, I asked the students the question if they already had thought about which school they would go to after basic education. The participants were in the 9th grade and had already turned in the application form for upper secondary education. Pete, Milla and Joni participated in the discussion:

Pete: Se yhteishaku oli jo, niin *pakko oli* miettiä.

Milla: Et se lukion valinta oli hirveen vaikee mut, kyl se on aina silleen ollu selkee.

Haastattelija: Oottekste aina tienny et mihin te haluatte mennä?

Pete: No, *en mä nyt ihan* koko ajan tienny niinku- aatellu sinne mennä mut-

Joni: Niin, kyl sitä oli semmonen, kun *sitä rupes miettiin* mihin haluu et ei sitä ennen ollu sitten mitenkään selvää et sikku rupes miettiin mitä haluis (.). Kyl se siit aika nopeesti tuli.

Pete: (one) already had to think about it because of the joint application system

Milla: so which general upper secondary school to choose was difficult, but otherwise it has always been clear

Interviewer: Have you always known where you want to go?

Pete: no, *I haven't always* known – or thought about going there but –

Joni: So yes, it was like, when (one) began to think about where (one) wants to go, it wasn't at all clear before but then when (one) started to think about what (one) wants then it became clear pretty fast

Focus group 2, two boys, two girls, Turku

Pete opened up the discussion replying to the question with a necessary clause about how the decision had to be made because of the deadline of the joint application. Pete left out the pronoun, however talking for everyone, indicating that this is a decision that had to be made by all students. By leaving out the pronoun and continuing with the utterance on how they 'had to think' about it he is referring to a state of fact that all students must do; all participants have to decide where they are applying to because of the joint application system. Pete's utterance is an example of how students use the null pronoun form when talking about something that cannot be contested. He is talking on behalf of every 9th grader in his class, his school or even in Finland. This utterance is also not contested by any other students, which indicates that the other students agree with this utterance. In the next utterance, Milla explained how the choice of general upper secondary school was difficult, but otherwise the choice to apply for entry to a general upper secondary school was clear. Analyzing this utterance through the lenses of Bourdieu and Reay & Ball, one can assume that she is choosing a path that aligns with the values and ideals about a path that aligns with her social background and habitus. For her, the path she chose was always a clear choice, attending a general upper secondary school, the challenge concerned which general upper secondary school. It is clear from the content that Milla was referring to her own challenges in choosing the right upper secondary school for herself, by saying that

applying for an upper secondary school place has always been an obvious decision. She is saying that although the choice of choosing *which* general upper secondary school was difficult, the choice between vocational upper secondary education and general upper secondary education was not difficult, this choice had “always been clear”. A similar citation can always be found in Elina Lahelmas’ data set (in Brunila et al., 2011; 314-315), showing how the decision to apply to go into general upper secondary school is a self-evident choice.

However, in this context, Milla’s utterance could also be analyzed that not using any pronouns is an indication that she is talking for a broader group, as in the previous example with Pete. The researcher (I) seemed to accept Milla’s utterance as being on behalf of everyone and continued with the question about whether the students always knew which upper secondary school they wanted to go to. Pete did not agree with Milla’s utterance, so he shifted to the first-person pronoun when explaining that for him, the choice of upper secondary school was not always clear. By using the first-person pronoun, Pete contested Milla’s argument that the choice was ‘always clear’ by stating that for him the choice was not always clear. He demonstrated his self-involvement responsibility by shifting to the first-person pronoun ‘I’. However interestingly, Joni next demonstrated a lack of self-involvement responsibility, distancing himself from the decision-making process by shifting back to the null person pronoun. When Pete opened the discussion on how the choice was not clear for him, Joni interrupted, and shifted to the null pronoun form. Joni agreed with Pete that the choice of school is not always clear. He spoke about his own experiences but talking in a null pronoun form. This utterance is interesting; the choice of not using a person pronoun indicates that he was talking of behalf of everybody. He used a null pronoun form to transform Pete’s argument into a general view, a view that he suggested everybody could agree on. He agreed with Pete’s argument that the choice of upper secondary education is not always clear. Simultaneously, he contested Milla’s argument that the choice is always clear. Joni accepted Pete’s argument and shifted the argument into a general agreement that the choice of school is not always clear. Joni explained how the decision was made, how students used their own reflexivity and considered the options (‘then when (one) started to think about what (one) wants’).

The students used pronouns and null pronouns strategically, when indicating whether a view could be regarded as something generally agreed on or demonstrating variations in their self-involvement responsibility (Mühlhäusler & Harré, 1990). Using different

forms of pronouns might also demonstrate exercise of power (Yates & Hiles, 2010a); how much say students actually have in the decision-making process. To apply for entry to upper secondary education is not really a choice (cf. Pete's utterance); to apply to a general upper secondary school can be a self-evident choice, perhaps it is a decision that is self-evident because it aligns with previously internalized values and ideals (Milla's utterance), or a decision that one refer to as something self-evident for anyone in this particular situation (cf. Ulla above, Yates & Hiles, 2010b).

Interestingly, in all the discussions, the students presented the decision-making process as their own process and no one referred to their parents' wishes, aspirations, to their social background or to how the school has supported or directed them. In the following subchapters, I will analyze further the students' experiences of influence by family, parents and siblings, as well as the school, to discuss how students reflect and experience the support and influence of these actors.

6.2. Parental influence

'Inheritance' of education has been explained by the internalization of certain values and practices that are incarnated as habitus (cf. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Bourdieu 1984, Bourdieu 2011, Reay, 1998, Reay & Ball, 1998, Lareau, 2011). Students learn to 'play the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) from early childhood and therefore choosing a trajectory that aligns with their parents' background seems natural to them and can even be regarded as not conscious choice. In my data set, all students declared that the choice of school was their own decision, but analyzing the data further, the parental influence become more evident. In this chapter I have analyzed students' arguments that the decision about further education is their own to make, simultaneously drawing from their parents' experiences, while using parents' experiences as a sounding board, and how the relationship to the parent may guide the decision-making process.

None of the students admitted that their parents were forcing, pushing, or even encouraging their children to choose a similar educational trajectory as themselves. Even though the students had discussed their choice with their parents and perhaps had even applied for the same field as the parent, students claimed they were allowed and were encouraged to make their own decision. Although students emphasized their own agency in the decision-making process, they admitted that they discuss

their choices with parents. The decision is not entirely disconnected from their family, although some parents seem to be more involved than others. For some students, parents are a *sounding board*, someone to discuss and reflect with. For other students, parents are someone they *announce* their decision to. Although students explained how they received support from their parents when discussing their options, they simultaneously expressed how the decision is still their own to make. In the following example, in a focus group with four girls from Turku, Linda states how she thought about the decision to apply to enter an upper secondary school which specialized in sports. She expressed how she had visited the school. For her, it was important to visit the school alone, to focus on learning about the school properly. She also mentioned her mother in the discussion; she explained how she *told* her mother about the decision. By *telling* her mother she was expressing how the decision was her own, she did not ask her mother for advice or permission, instead telling the mother is a form of *announcement* about a decision already made. In this example, it is interesting how Linda emphasized that her choice was her own by repeating *I* several times in the utterance and emphasizing the choice with *for one* and *on my own* several times.

Haastattelija: (.) Ketkä ovat auttaneet teitä tässä- näis päätöksissä? Vai oottekste niinku ite miettiny et mihin te halutte mennä? Vai onks- oottekste puhunu teiän vanhempien kanssa tai?

Linda: No *mä oon ainaki* niinku aluks *ite miettiny* ja *sit mä* (.) *kerroin* sit meiän äidil. Ja meiän kaveri on niinku käyny tuol- tai on käyny ton (--)
urheiluopisto, ja sit se on nyt ite siel niinku töis, ni sit me kysyttii silt niinku lisää sielt ja. Sit mä olin tutustumas siel yksin. Ja sit se oli tosi helppoo kun *mä olin vaan yksin* siel ni sit pystys vaa keskittys siihen. Ku ei tuntenu sielt porukast yht nii sit pystys niinku keskittys siihen kunnol.

Haastattelija: Joo.

Linda: Ja olee siel.

Interviewer: who helped you with this decision? Or did you think it through yourself about where you want to go? or did you discuss it with your parents or?

Linda: well, *for one*, at the beginning I thought about it *myself* and then I *told* my mother. And our friend has like attended the school in sports and worked there, so then we asked more from that person. Then I acquainted *myself* with the place. and it was really easy when I was there on *my own* then I could focus only on that. When (one) does not know anyone from the group (one) can focus properly.

Interviewer: yes

Linda: and be there

Linda, focus group 3, Turku

By *announcing* the decision to parents, students accentuate their own role in the decision-making process. The decision is discussed or announced to the mother after the student made the decision, demonstrating how decisions are made from their own individual aspirations and wishes, however, it is unclear in Linda's example if the decision was made beyond status and class (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001) or a 'natural' choice aligning with her family background (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Bourdieu 1984).

Also, Leea reflected on the decision herself at first. The decision to apply for general upper secondary school is expressed as a natural decision (Reay & Ball, 1998, Reay, 1998, Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), something she had 'always' thought about doing, and she did not receive any objections from her mother either. For her it was *always* clear that she would apply for general upper secondary school. She also expressed how her mother agreed with her decision. Leea is a girl with tertiary educated parents. Her mother is a medical doctor and her father an engineer, and this explains how the choice had always been clear to apply for general upper secondary school, the traditional route to academic study:

Leea: Mm. Joo. *Määki eka mietin ite. Ja kyl mä aina niinku lukioon oon aatellu et mä meen.*

Haastattelija: Mm.

Leea: Ja sit *mä* juttelin meiän äitin kans ja (.) nii seki oli sitä mieltä et mun kannattaa mennä lukioon. Et.

Leea *I also* thought about it myself. and I have *always* thought about going to general.

Interviewer:mm

Leea: and then *I talked* to our mother and she also thought that it would be a good decision. so.

Leea, focus group 3, Turku

Although no student claimed to have experienced any pressure from their parents, there still appeared to be a tendency for students to follow a similar educational trajectory to their parents. This tendency aligns with previous research results and statistics on how students tend to choose a similar educational trajectory to their parents (Myrskylä, 2009). In addition, statistical evidence has shown how inequality is reproduced in generations, how unemployment is 'inherited' by younger generations (Saari, 2015). Therefore, it is important to problematize and challenge why and how students choose their educational trajectory. Although students presented the decision as their own, I analyzed how students reflect on their family background, family influence and their own role in the decision-making process. Understanding how students choose their educational trajectory can be increased by focusing on justifications and legitimizations for how students draw from their previous life experiences and from the context of their family background increases.

In other European countries, parents seem to have a more active say in the educational path of students; educational achievement is treated as a family project and parents may openly disregard their child's choice, directing the student to choose another educational career that stands in conflict with the student's interests (Ule et al., 2016). In my Finnish data set, analyzing how students legitimate and justify their decisions revealed another perspective to the decision-making process, a perspective on how students are not only expected and encouraged to make their own decision, but are

also obliged to do so. In many of the discussions there is a strong emphasis and focus on the importance of making an own decision, a decision that has not been influenced by the student's parents. Leea stated how she first reflected on the decision herself and that she *'always thought about going to general (upper secondary education)'*. Mikko stated how his father did not interfere with his choice on upper secondary school by saying: *'he didn't say anything, just said, apply where you want'*. However, as Ule et al. (2016) point out, affluent and educated parents are keener on supporting their children in their search for an educational path that interests the child, even when the link to the labor market may not be evident or direct, due to their own social, economic and cultural resources.

Reay (1998) explains how the 'familial habitus' result in a decision that is acceptable within a certain social class, and how students therefore choose a similar educational trajectory in line with to their family background. Students with a middle-class background are particularly likely to choose higher education with certainty (Reay, 1998). Also in my analysis, students of parents who studied at university enroll at a general upper secondary school and students of parents with a vocational education background enroll in a vocational school, although there are some exceptions. Students draw from their own family background when making their decision about future education. They use the knowledge they have received during childhood years, through discussions with their parents and siblings as well as the information they receive from school. Students expressed the view that the decision was their own, although many declared that the decision had always been clear. The decision to apply to follow a certain educational track is a decision that has been self-evident, a decision that they have not contested or reflected on further, because they have always been sure about this decision.

Leea (a girl with tertiary educated parents) explained how she did not need any support in deciding where she wanted to go for upper secondary school, as she was already determined that she wanted to apply for general upper secondary school, the traditional route to university. She is therefore navigating along a similar educational trajectory as her parents. She did not express any form of distress about the guidance counselor being absent from school when she had to make the decision, and when the students had to fill in the application forms. She agreed that the absence of the guidance counselor was not easy for most of the students, but in her case, she did not suffer too much from this, as she had already decided. This form of certainty may point

towards a false decision-making process, one in which the choice is not a 'real' choice, instead students are following a path they are familiar with, a path that aligns with the values and norms internalized from their family.

Vanhalakka-Ruoho et. al (2018) hint that decisions about upper secondary school are guided by both intentional and tacit parental practices and support that evolve because of 'concerted cultivation', drawing from Lareau's (2002) discussion. Surprisingly, many students in my data chose the same educational field as a parent. Mikko for example is studying to be a chef, as his father had done, while simultaneously studying at a general upper secondary school (as his mother had done). Masa enrolled in a vocational business school, aligning with his father's profession, and Maija in a vocational laboratory school as her mother had done, and although this was not her first choice. she was satisfied with the placement. Taru is enrolled at a vocational school specializing in vehicle painting, as her father did. Some students admit the direct connection between parents' background and their own choice, showing an awareness about the influence parents profession have on their choice.

In the next quotation, Miika makes an insightful comment on how his decision was influenced by his father's profession. He describes how his father had always been building cars, and that he had always worked with cars. Miika states that he therefore chose a field that aligns with his father's field. After this comment, Yosuf also continued on the theme of parental influence, acknowledging the influence of his mother's work and profession.

Amir: Vanhempien kaa sillee ja perheen kaa..

Absame: mä mietin ainakin mun isän kans.

Miika: fajja on ite aina rakentanut autos, se on varmaan jääny siitä. Ja sit se ollu aina jotenkin autoon liittyväs töis.

Haastattelija: Entäs sä?

Yosuf: no mullakin on sillee et mutsi omistaa sen firman, et kyl se vähä business..siit mä oon ottanut kyl sen..mutsikin on et jos se on business, ni tuut vaan mulle töihin ja sillee..

Amir: with my parents, and family

Absame: I reflected on it with my dad

Miika: dad has always built cars, so it probably comes from there. And then he has always been working with cars.

Interviewer: What about you?

Yosuf: well, for me it was like, my mom owns her own company, so it's all about business, then I decided to go for it, mom was also like if I am interested in business just come work for me, like that

Focus group 4, four boys, Helsinki

However, in some discussions, the response describing a free choice was embedded within certain limits. In the following quotation, Leea claims that the decision is her own *per se*, hinting towards an understanding that she is allowed to decide herself, if the decision is accepted by her parents. This means that the decision is not fully her own, as she can only make her decision within certain limits.

et kyl meiän niinku äiti ja iskäki ihan niinku tai sano, et se on heille ihan niinkun *sinänsä* ihan sama et mihin mä meen [H: joo] et joka tapauksessa niinkun tuetaan et [H: Joo] ei ollu niinku esimerkiks mitään painostusta lukioo kohtaan

Well, yes, our mom and dad said that *per se* it doesn't matter where I go, in any case they will support me [yes] so there was no pressure towards for example general upper secondary school.

Leea, individual interview, Turku

The utterance translated as 'well, yes' ('et, kyl' in Finnish) in the citation above, may however point to a statement of indexicality, meaning that in her particular case, she

was free to choose her educational trajectory. Simultaneously, this indexicality suggests that other students are not as lucky, that some parents are guiding their students into different educational trajectories. In the next example, Linda explained how satisfied she is that her parents let her make her own decision and explains how her friend was not as lucky.

Mut mä muistan se tota mun se yhen mun kaverin, ni hänen äiti oli sillai, et niinku et vaan lukio. Lukio, lukio, lukio, lukio. [H: joo] Niinku oikeen painosti vähän niinku [H: joo] sellai ja mä en, siis mä olin niin onnellinen ettei meiän äiti ollu sellanen koska siin olis tullu kauheet paineet, et jos mä en haluukaa sitä samaa ku meiän äiti.

I remember one of my friends, her mom was like, only general (upper secondary school). General, general, general, general. [yes] so really pushed like [yes] that and I, I was so happy that our mom wasn't like that because I would have encountered so much pressure, that what if I don't want the same as our mom.

Linda, individual interview, Turku

The utterance also shows the values about who can make the decision. Students value decisions they make themselves. A successful decision is made by the student, or at least that students are under the impression that they are making by themselves, not allowing anyone else to influence the decision. Linda was 'so happy' her mother let her decide for herself, not forcing any opinions on her, as she explains how her friend was pushed along a certain educational trajectory.

Masa, a boy from Turku, explained how he struggled at first when he was supposed to decide which school he should apply for. His father works as an entrepreneur and his mother works in an office. He explained how he tried to figure out his interests and how he finally discovered his interest and strength in selling, and therefore chose a vocational business school, following a similar professional trajectory as his father. However, he did not connect his father's profession with his own educational choice

until later in the interview. Instead, he justified his decision by explaining about his own personal interests and strengths.

sillo oli, se oli tosi vaikeet. Mä en tienny yhtää [H: joo] mihin mä menisin. [H: joo] Mua ei kiinnostanu pätääkää mikää ammattikoulu, rakennuspuoli tai mikää tommonen ja mä et meeks mä lukioo vai meeks mä kymppiluokal tai mitä mää teen. Se oli tosi vaikeet. Sit jotenki, jostain syystä, mä tykkäsin tosi paljon niinku tommosest myymistyöstä. [H: joo] tykkään tosi paljon niinkun myydä ja tällee näin. [H: joo] mä ajattelin et no voin hakee kauppiksen et sielt sit mennä eteenpäin.

well, it was really hard. I didn't know at all [I:yes] where to apply to. I wasn't at all interested in vocational school, construction or anything like that and should I go into general or tenth grade or what should I do. It was really hard. Then somehow, for some reason, I really liked selling. I really like to sell and all that kind of stuff. I thought that I could apply to business school and move forward from there.

Masa, individual interview, Turku

Masa's parents tried to convince him to apply for general upper secondary school, but he explained to them that general upper secondary felt too theoretical for him and he was not comfortable with how much he would need to read. He justified the decision not to apply for general upper secondary education with how he would not manage in this school and his parents were satisfied with his decision. In his extra-curricular activities, participating in a youth group and selling items for fundraising in this group, he came to realize that he enjoyed selling and was good at it. In addition, he received compliments for being a good seller. This experience guided him towards realizing that his aspirations lay with selling and entrepreneurship, so he applied to get into a vocational school that specialized in business and marketing. He explained enthusiastically about how he came to realize his aspirations. However, when asked about how much influence that his father is an entrepreneur had on him, he seemed uncertain and cautious. He drew from his previous experiences of selling but did not acknowledge the relationship between his father's profession and his own educational

choice at first. Masa admits that he became acquainted with his father's work and his father's company is well known to him, and subsequently admits that it would be fun to own a company.

Haastattelija: joo. Mites kuin paljon sä ajattelet et sun omat vanhemmat on vaikuttanu tai ehkä sun isä on yrittäjä ollu ni?

Masa: no emmä tiiä, kyl se

Haastattelija: ooksä seurannu paljo hänen sitä

Masa: oon mä sitä tosi paljo on tullu seurattuu ja [H: nii] töissäki siel ni on se tosi kivaa et on semmonen oma yritys ni.

Interviewer: how much do you think your parents influenced your decision, or as your dad is an entrepreneur?

Masa: well, I don't know, well probably

Interviewer: have you followed him in his work?

Masa: yes sure, I have followed him a lot and I've worked there also, yes, it's really fun with owning a company

Masa, individual interview, Turku

However, Masa pointed out his own agency in the decision-making process, not willing to admit the influence his father's profession had, (well, I don't know, well probably) and shifting the justification on how *he* liked working at the company and how *he* thinks it is fun to have your own business.

Amir, a boy born in Finland with parents born in Africa, discussed with his father a lot his aspirations and wishes. The father wanted Amir to go to a general upper secondary school, justifying his wish with hope for a higher salary and prospects. However, Amir explained how he did not want to study at a general upper secondary school, justifying his decision that he would not manage at general upper secondary

school. According to Amir, the father was not mad at Amir's decision; he accepted the decision, saying that he only wanted what is best for his son.

Amir: Jutteli- mä sanoin mun fajalle, et mä en haluu mennä lukioon.

Haastattelija: Okei.

Amir: Koska mä tiedän et mä en pärjää siel hyvin, sit mä halu- valitsin ammattikoulun. Toi sähkölinja niinkun- mä olin niinkun kiinnostunu siitä alalla, sit mä valitsin sen.

Haastattelija: Okei. No mut sä olit isän kanssa eri mieltä ja päädyit meneen (paikan nimi) ni olik tää- olik tää niinku- olik teil tiukat keskustelut tästä asiasta, olik isä surullinen tai vihainen siitä et valitsit toisin?

Amir: Ei se ollu vihainen, se halus vaan mun niinkun mikä on hyvä mulle.

Amir: I talked- I told my dad, that I don't want to attend a general upper secondary school

Interviewer: OK

Amir: Because I know that I cannot manage there, therefore I chose vocational school. The electricity field, I was interested in the field, so I chose that.

Interviewer: ok. Well, you disagreed with your father and ended up going to vocational school – so was it, did you have tight discussions about this, were your father sad or mad that you chose another direction?

Amir: he wasn't mad, he only wanted what was good for me.

Amir, individual interview, Helsinki

Miika explained how he had always been interested in cars, and how he spent a lot of his time after school driving and fixing mopeds. He referred to intrinsic values and owning the decision-making process, although he is clearly following in his father's footsteps. Kärkkäinen (2004) shows that as fathers take on a more active role in a

child's upbringing as the child grows older, the father's influence on the child grows stronger. Therefore, the relationship may grow stronger between the father and the child when the child grows older, which may influence the decision-making process. The relationship between parent and child also seems to have had an influence on Miika's decision-making process. His father also works as a car mechanic, and the boy had spent a lot of time watching his dad working with cars. Miika explained how he had often watched his father in his work and helped and worked with his father as well as taken on engine-related tasks on his own, but the parents' role appears detached in the decision-making process. The decision about applying to go to a vocational school to a vehicle mechanics study program was his own decision and the role of the parents in making this decision seemed non-existent:

mun mutsi ja faija ei ees tiennyt mihin kouluun mä haen, mul vaan tuli et kiitos siit lomakkeest, ja sit mutsi ihmetteli et tai sielt tuli joku kirje, et ai jaa sä oot hakenu johonkin kouluunki. Mä olin et joo.

My mom and dad didn't even know which school I was applying to go to, they were just like, thanks for the form, and my mom was surprised about the letter, she was like; oh, you applied to some school? I was like, yeah.

Miika, individual interview, Helsinki

The same student expressed how he also drew from his mother's profession when justifying the decision about upper secondary school. He contrasted his mother's and father's work with each other, and sad why he did not want to end up in a profession like his mother's. He described how he wanted to work with something practical, as his father, instead of paper- and office work as his mother. He described these two different work pictures as two options to use when reflecting on his decision about upper secondary school.

Haastattelija: Joo. Onks se semmonen kuva päässä et mikä ois semmonen suosikkityöpaikka, mimmonen se paikka pitäis olla?

Miika: No en mä tiää, sellanen työpaja just. Mitä tuol (paikan nimi)

on, sellanen joku paja, mis on auto ja sitä pitää korjata tai tehdä jotain sille. Sellasest mä tykkään. Niinku tekemistä.

Haastattelija: Aivan.

Miika. Silleen et ei mitään just mitä mutsin duuni- mitä tekee mutsi, niinku silleen laittelee jotain papereit tai jotain toimistotyöt. En mä tykkää semmosesta.

Interviewer: yes. Do you have a picture in your head what kind of work would be a kind of favorite working place, what kind of place should it be?

Miika: well, I don't know, like a workshop. A workshop like the one in (name of place), that kind of workshop, where there's a car and you need to fix it or do something to it. I like that kind of stuff. Like doing.

Interviewer: right

Miika: so nothing like my mom's work, what my mom does, she's like sorting papers or some kind of office work. I don't like that.

Miika, individual interview, Helsinki

Although the student can also draw from other contexts and examples of professions, he chose to describe the professions of his mother and father. Perhaps these are the professions he knew best, perhaps these professions stand in a great contrast to each other, so they are easy to compare. No matter what the reason is for describing the professions of his mother and father, the description show that this student reflects on different options by analyzing the professions available. In this student's case, the professions available are his mother's and father's professions.

Also, Mikko chose the same field as his father, the restaurant business. Mikko explained how he made his own decision about applying to study at the restaurant school, and how his father did not push him towards this choice. Also in this case, the father's role seems neutral, almost indifferent.

Ei se mitään sanonu siihen, tai sillain niinku, ei se mitään niinku, ei se mitään sanonu, hae sinne minne haet. Kyllä se siis ysillä panosti ja sano mulle et lue nytte ja sillai, et pääset sinne minne haluat, mut ei se siihen sit vaikuttanu minne mä haen ja sillain

No, he didn't say anything, or like, he didn't say anything, just said, apply where you want. Well, he encouraged me in the 9th grade and said to me that I have to read and stuff like that, so that I can apply where I want, but no, he didn't influence me where I should apply to.

Mikko, individual interview, Tampere

Students emphasized their own agency in the decision-making process, and stressed that their parents did not pressure them to choose a certain educational trajectory, not even when the trajectory the student had chosen is a highly specialized field and occurs to be the same field a parent works in. Taru chose an educational program in vehicle painting. Her father works in the same field, he has a vehicle painting business. She was very quick to correct any misunderstandings with a 'yes, but' (line 2) on how her father's profession had influenced her decision by stating that although her father expressed satisfaction about her choosing a similar educational trajectory as his own, the main focus for her father was to find an educational trajectory that aligned with her interests and aspirations.

Haastattelija: nii justii, joo. No oliko hän tyytyväinen kun sä lähit samalle alalle kuin hän?

Taru: *joo, mut et se oli* [H: joo] *semmottii et kumminki et päätä semmonen, et mikä on oma ala et*

Haastattelija: joo, et ei mitään painostusta tullut?

Taru: niin.

Interviewer: ok, yes. well, was he satisfied when you applied for the same field as him

Taru: *yes, but* it was like, that anyway choose something that is your own field

Interviewer: so there was no kind of pressure?

Taru: no

Taru, individual interview, Turku

The correction reveals how the student may express how they are expected and even obliged to choose for themselves. No student admits any influence from their parents. Students are encouraged and expected to make their own decision, without the influence of parents.

Maija also drew from her own experiences when choosing her educational trajectory, however the parents' encouragement and support is constantly present in her reflection. First, she wanted to apply to become a primary nurse, but her second option was the laboratory program she started to attend. She was very excited to attend her new school and satisfied with the choice. When applying for the study place in the primary nursing program, she justified her decision with several reasons. She began her reply on how she decided to apply for a primary nursing program with a rather peculiar reason because she received comments on how she 'looks like a primary nurse'. However, she continued justifying this decision by expressing how her family encouraged her to apply for the program and because of her experiences taking care of her smaller sisters and experiencing the death of her grandmothers. She drew from these personal experiences and justifying the decision with these experiences. However, she expressed a reflective process, when stating how she then suddenly came to the conclusion that she did not want to apply for this program after all, but she did not explain why she suddenly realized that she wanted to apply for a program in another school.

Maija: öö, se oikeestaan, kaikki sanos, et mä näytän ihan lähihoitajalt.[H: aijaa] Kaikki mun kaverit. Et sähän sopisit vaiks kuin hyvin. Sit meiän pappali, meiän iskä sanos, sit meiän äiti sanos et sä voisit sopii sinne. Ja sit ku mä meinasin ottaa just kaksoistutkinnon, mut sit mä en ottanukaa. [H: joo] ni mä miettisin et jos mä oisin mennä siihen lähihoitaja et mä olisin ottanu sen siellä. [H: joo] Mut tota ja sit se niinku, sit me juteltii äitin kans, ni sit tuli vaan siit et ku mä oon niinku. Ku äiti vaa jutteli sillo et jotain et ku mä oon kokenu aika paljon tämmösi niinku et just ku vanhusten kans [H: joo] ja sit ku mul on kolme pikkusiskoo ni mul on pal kokemust näist asioist. [H: joo] Ja sit mä et ku mun niinku kolme mummia kuoli kolmen kuukauden niinku [H: aijaa] kolmen kuukauden aikana kaikki niinku siin ihan samas peräkanaa. Ni äiti sanos, et se on aika vahvoil niinku pitäny olla silloin et siin on sit taas niinku et se on hyvä kokemus. Ja sillai niinku, vaik ei kuitenkaa aina sit oo. [H: nii] Mut niinku ja sit kans ku on näit pikkusiskoi ja on joutunu olee sinä isosiskona [H: joo] ni seki on niinku [H: joo] ni se sanos et se on kans hyvä juttu et ois auttanu siel. [H: joo] Mut sit, ku sit ku mä sanoin äitille et en mä oikeesti haluu sinne enää. [H: joo] Ni se oli ihan et sä ite päätät sen niinku [H: nii just]

Maija: ummm, like really, everybody said, that I look just like a primary nurse [oh] all my friends. That it would suit me really well. Then my grandpa was like, my dad said, then my mom said that it could suit me. And then when I meant to take the double exam, but then I didn't. [yes].so I thought that I would have studied at the primary nurse school, I would have done that there (the double exam). [yes].But then I discussed it with my mom, so from that (discussion) came that because I am like. 'Cause mom just talked that because I have gone through pretty much this kind of stuff with old people [yes] and I have three smaller sisters so I have a lot of experience from these things. [yes]. And then because my three grandmothers died within three months at the same time, after each other. So mom said, that one is very strong, that this is a good experience. So in that way, although not always [yes] mut in addition when I have my smaller sisters, so that's also [yes] a good thing and I have been forced to be a big sister [yes] so that's also good that I have been able to help [yes] But then I told my mom that I don't want to go there anymore [yes] so she told my that it's my decision [yes].

Maija, individual interview, Turku

Although the first reason or incentive to apply for the primary nurse-program was her 'looks', she also justified her decision with the conversation she had with her mother and the support she received from her father. In Maija's case, the structure of her decision-making process can be interpreted as relations (Archer, 2007), showing the nuanced role of parents on the decision-making process. Maija explained how she based her school choice on her subjective situation and concerns. She drew from her own experiences from her life; how the deaths of her grandmothers and how taking care of younger siblings have provided her with the strength and skills a primary nurse requires. Finally, when realizing that primary nursing would not be the program for her, she still turned to her mother for support. The parents' support is always present in the utterance, how they encouraged and respected her decision to apply to the school, and afterwards, when she changed her mind. However, she continuously pointed out her own agency, and how in the end, she made the decision.

Several students who had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with their parents' work, admitted that learning about their parents' profession has had an impact on their choice. The decision-making process was shaped through the relations (cf Archer, 2007) between the student and parents as well as through leisure time, or extra-curricular activities, and thus not always detached from the parents. Students who were choosing a similar educational trajectory to that of their parents, have benefitted from learning about this profession in various out-of-school contexts, during summer jobs and some developed a passion for this profession within extracurricular activities. In Miika's case, leisure time and extra-curricular activities were closely connected to his father's profession. Miika had been fixing mopeds and cars with his father and was now looking forward to applying to a vocational school specializing in car mechanics. He explained how being around cars, mopeds and engines is a big part of his life and how a lot of his free time is spent in these activities. He admitted how his interests in this particular field developed as he has watched his father at work:

Nii, kyl sil varmaan on ollu jotain ku mä oon ite katellu aina kun faija tekee jotain, just ittelle jääny päälle se.

well, yes there's something there for sure, when I've always been watching my dad do something, something gets stuck on me

Miika, individual interview, Helsinki

Not only do students draw from their parents' experiences when choosing their educational trajectory, but students who are in a similar field as their parents receive strong support from their parents with homework and learning. Students studying at a vocational school in a similar field as a parent found a lot of support and encouragement from the parent. Taru had been working at her father's workplace during the summer with vehicle painting and is now studying vehicle painting at a vocational school. She found a lot of support and reassurance from her father. She appreciated the support and encouragement her father provided her; she worked at her father's business during the summer and gained a lot of experience and knowledge from the practical work. She turned to her father easily for help with homework or when there was something at school, she did not fully understand.

Haastattelija: joo. Niin sä sanoit et sun isällä on tän alan yritys.

Taru: joo.

Haastattelija: ni sä, ootsä siis sä paljon sit tiesit sun isän kautta tästä työstä ja?

Taru: joo. Mä olin niinko nyt kesäl iskäl töissä.

Haastattelija: aijaa. Joo.

Taru: et sit niinku sai vähän siihen sitä. [H: joo] Et iskä on yrittäny opettaa hirveen paljo [H: joo]. Et sit taas ku tuol koulus opetetaan vähä eri taval ni [H: nii] sit täytyy kuunnella sitä kouluuki sit taas [H: joo] pikkusen enemmän. [H: joo] Et kyl sit taas iskält mä taas kysyn apuu jossain koulutehtävis, et jos iskä osaa auttaa.

Haastattelija: joo.

Taru: et se on ihan kiva sit kysyy iskält [H: nii] sit apuu.

Haastattelija: nii justii, joo.

Interviewer: yes. so, you said that your father has a business in this field

Taru: yes.

Interviewer: so do, do you a lot, so did you know a lot about this work through your father?

Taru: yes. I've been working for my father throughout the summer

Interviewer: oh, ok

Taru: so, I got something from that. (yes) so dad has been teaching me a lot (yes). But then again, when they teach you in a different way at school (yes) then you have to listen to what they say in school (yes) but then again, I ask my dad to help me in some school assignments, if my dad can help

Interviewer: yes

Taru: so it's nice to get help from dad

Interviewer: yes, ok, yes

Taru, individual interview, Turku

Also, students attending general upper secondary school, of parents with a background in general upper secondary education and in particular tertiary education explained how they received support from their parents, parents who helped them with homework and know how to encourage them. Emmi is a high-achieving student in general upper secondary education, receiving high scores in tests. She receives a lot of help from her mother, who has been taking classes at university, and from her elder sister, who is also attending general upper secondary education.

No mää saan ihan sikana apua jos mä haluan, niinku kaikissa koulutehtävissä ja muutenki. Mun sisko, ku se käy nyt kans lukiota niin mä saan koko ajan siltä kaikissa koulutehtävissä apua ku se on itte just opiskellu kaikki ne samat asiat. Ja äiti on käyny kaikki yliopistot ja kaikkee (naurahtaa) ni seki osaa kyl hyvin auttaa.

I get tons of help, if I want, like in all school tasks and in other things. My sister, she's also in general, so I get all the time help in school assignments because she have recently studied the same things. And my mom has been enrolled in all universities (laughing) so she is also able to help a lot

Emmi, individual interview, Tampere

Students who were not in a similar field as a parent after the transition phase, did not find as much support from their parent, although the parents encourage them. For example, Johanna attending general upper secondary school, of parents with vocational education, stated how her mother was not always able to help her much with homework, although she supports and encourages her daughter.

Haastattelija: Miten äiti muuten auttaa ku tukee, mitä se tekee käytännössä?

Johanna: No siis jos mä joskus en ymmärrä jotain niin se yrittää auttaa, mut ei se itekään osaa näit lukiojuttui.

Interviewer: How does your mother help when she supports you, what does she do in practice?

Johanna: well, if I don't understand something she tries to help, but she doesn't know this general education stuff either

Johanna, individual interview, Helsinki

This subchapter has shown how students are aware that they are expected to make their own decisions about their future. They presented the decision as their own, either neglecting the influence of parents, or expressing how parents support their decision, although parents may have a different opinion about the decision. Even in cases in which students followed directly in their parents' footsteps, the parents' role in the decision-making process was minimal or even non-existent, according to students. The role of the parents appears to be indifferent or distant; the student appears to make the decision without parental consent or in some cases even without discussing the choice with their parents.

Throughout the interviews, there is a strong emphasis on how students are expected and encouraged to choose their educational trajectory themselves. Interestingly, in the sample of individual interviews with 16 students, I could not find much evidence of students who were guided by their parents. However, many students chose a similar educational trajectory as their parents, and they were happy about their choice. This

hints towards a conclusion that the guidance is disguised behind implicit guiding forces, whether they are disguised in the social structure or within values and standards in the social context of students. These implicit guiding forces may give the student an illusion of choice, although to the researcher, the educational trajectory appears to be settled and determined beforehand. This predetermined educational trajectory can be explained by habitus, that students tend to choose their life trajectory according to internalized values and practices or through the accumulated social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 2011). However, not all students tend to choose according to their family background; some students choose an educational trajectory that differs from the 'predetermined' path. Vanhalakka-Ruoho et. al (2018) concludes that in their data set the internalizing of a self-evident school choice particularly concerns students from academic families, while students from vocational families appear to have more options. Also in my data set, it appears that students from academic families rarely consider vocational education as an option, and vocational students struggle more with the decision-making process. However, although students may have internalized their educational path during their school years through intentional or tacit parental practices and support, or are struggling with the decision, or are choosing path that differs from the 'predetermined' path, all students presented the decision as their own. The main discourse appearing among students is the discourse of students making the decision themselves. The 'story' students want to tell is the story of students making the decision by themselves, not influenced by parents.

The support (or lack of support) parents are able to provide their children appears to influence how students manage in the upper secondary school. Students who entered the same field as their parents, and receive support from their parents in this field, appear satisfied with their choice and appear to be satisfied with their achievements in their education program. Some students whose education choice differs from their parents, seemed to struggle in school and seemed uncertain about their options and choices.

In statistics, the mother's background often shows a stronger significance for the child's educational path (Myrskylä, 2009, Saari, 2015). The strong connection between a mother and a child's educational path is explained by the close interaction between mother and child from early childhood, and therefore the connection between father and child is weaker, as the connection between father and child may be vaguer or

even absent (Kärkkäinen, 2004, 292). Also in Metso's research (2004), the father's role during school tends to be sustained on a rhetorical level, while the mother is the parent who is more involved in the child's schooling. Kärkkäinen argues that as fathers take on a more active role in the upbringing as the child grows older, the father's influence on the child grows stronger (ibid). Therefore, one conclusion that can be drawn from Kärkkäinen's results, is that the statistical connection between the child and the parent is connected to the relationship between the parent and the child. Therefore, the child's decision-making process may not only bound to family values, to the habitus, but also to the relationship between the child and other significant people. One important relationship that has not been analyzed to the same extent as the relationship between parents and a child, is the *relationship* between siblings and choosing the educational and professional path. In the next subchapter, I describe my analysis of the slim data I have regarding how students talk about their siblings influence on their decision-making process.

6.3. Support and advice from siblings

In earlier research regarding young people's educational trajectory, siblings have not been a major theme when analyzing different sources of resources young people draw from when they choose their educational trajectory. However, in several studies, siblings are mentioned among other significant people and networks, when students talk about their resources and sources of support around them. For example, in Thomson et al. (2002), 'Robin' drew from his brother's resources, getting advice on how to talk to the police. Holland et al. (2007) takes a step further in explaining how elder siblings can be a valuable resource for students entering a new school; elder siblings offer emotional support, 'insider information', practical help and work as a bridge to new friendships. Although these examples are more about the pragmatic support younger siblings receive from their elder siblings, Aaltonen (2016) concludes that in the transition phase, advice provided by siblings is connected to emotions, while advice from parents is more pragmatic.

For this subchapter I analyzed how students talk about their decision-making process with a special focus on talk about elder siblings; how they discussed the support they have received from siblings, again with a special attention to the 'way of speaking'. In my data with personal interviews, not all the students had elder

siblings. Although the data set for this analysis is not as broad as the data set for the other analyses, it still provides some interesting conclusions on how students express their siblings' role in the decision-making process; the focus is on how these students express their views and experiences when reflecting on the decision-making process with their elder siblings.

In several of the interviews in my data, elder siblings had provided their younger siblings with advice on how to choose the right study place. Students turn to their elder siblings for advice, and students are encouraged to do this by the school and parents. Elder siblings are expected to provide useful advice for their younger siblings, according to both parents and students, as they have recently gone through the process of the transition to upper secondary level. However, just as in the cases with the parental influence, students claim the choice as their own choice, and siblings take the role of informing and sharing experiences. In my data, there were two students who wanted to apply to a restaurant school to be a chef. Both students have a parent and a sibling in the same field, but both students were advised differently by their family. Mikko was encouraged by his sister to apply to the restaurant school, while Ulla was discouraged by both her father and her sister. Mikko, a boy, justified his decision by 1) intrinsic values: explaining how he has always enjoyed cooking, by 2) recommendations he received from his sister, who is also studying at the same school and finally by 3) convenience, clarifying how the school is close to his home.

No mäa tykkäsin siitä mitä siel niinku tehään, kaikki kokkijutut, mäa tykkään siitä ja sitte ku mun sisko on kans siinä koulussa niin suositteli et se on hyvä sellanen ja, niin, no, sitte sinne oli, tai se on kans aika lähellä kotia ja se on sillai hyvä.

Well, because I liked what they do there, all chef stuff, I like it, and because my sister is also attending the school, she recommended it that it's a good school and then one thing is that it's close to home and that's good.

Mikko, individual interview, Tampere

Mikko clearly analyzed his aspirations, reflecting on why this school suits his ambitions, he drew from a different set of relations and justifications. As Archer (2007) suggests, structure refers to relations, and individuals who objectively may come from similar social positions, may choose differently because of their unique personal identities and constellations of concerns. Ulla, whose father and sister also had attended a restaurant school (although in a different city to Mikko), chose differently because of the advice she received from both her father and sister. In her example, the parent's disagreement with the educational choice guided the student, and the sister's opinion also had a significant impact. Ulla explained how she wanted to go to vocational school, also a restaurant school, but ended up applying for another vocational school. Her father and sister also gained experiences from restaurant schools, the sister is currently studying at the school and her father studied at a restaurant school but is currently working as a firefighter. In contrast to Mikko, Ulla was discouraged by her father and sister to apply to the school, whereas she decided to apply to another school. In this case, the parent and sibling had an influence on Ulla's choice, although the final decision was made by the student, according to herself. In the interview, she spoke about how she did not choose the restaurant school, as no one recommended it to her. Although Ulla was clearly discouraged by her father and sister, she still refers to the decision as her own, by stating how she no longer wanted to go there.

No just mä halusin eka ravintola-alalle, mut sit ku mun sisko on ollu siellä ni sit se ei yhtää, se sano just ettei kannata hakee sinne ku se ei yhtää niinku tykänny siitä ja näin edespäin ja sit kukaa muu perheestä ei suosittelu sitä mulle ni sit en mä enää sitte loppujen lopuks halunnu sinne.

I first wanted to go to the restaurant school, but because my sister was there, she didn't really, she just said that there's no point in applying there, because she didn't like it and so on, and then no one from my family recommended it so then finally I didn't even want to go there anymore.

Ulla, individual interview, Helsinki

Ulla drew from her life experiences when reflecting on her educational career choices, emphasizing her personal aspirations and wishes. However, although Mikko was only encouraged by his sister and not by his father, he was certainly not discouraged as Ulla was. Because of the strong discouragement Ulla received from her father and sister, she seemed lost after the transition phase, not knowing what she wants to do. Both students have negotiated their educational aspirations in the context known to them, and for Ulla the challenge was to find alternatives within her context.

Students who received support from their family appeared to value the support and agreed on the importance of receiving help. Emmi is a well performing student with an immigrant background. She received support with her Finnish language skills at the beginning of her school years in Finland. She started swimming as a hobby because of her elder sister. She admitted that her elder sister had an impact on her choice, as she started swimming as a child because her elder sister swam. She explained how her father does not understand much about her hobby; his opinion is that a sport hobby is good, but it does not matter what she does. Her mother was very encouraging, supporting Emmi when she experienced challenges in her hobby or needed nutritional advice. Although her sister did not continue with the hobby, Emmi continued and is now applying to get into a general upper secondary school specialized in sports. She is a well performing student, who could have applied to any school because of her excellent grades. She acknowledged the continuous support she has received in not only choosing her educational trajectory and school, but also the continuous support with homework from both her mother and sister.

No mää saan ihan sikana apua jos mä haluan, niinku kaikissa koulutehtävissä ja muutenki. Mun sisko, ku se käy nyt kans lukiota niin mä saan koko ajan siltä kaikissa koulutehtävissä apua ku se on itte just opiskellu kaikki ne samat asiat. Ja äiti on käyny kaikki yliopistot ja kaikkee (naurahtaa) ni seki osaa kyl hyvin auttaa.

so I get tons of help if I want, like in all school assignments and otherwise. My sister, who is also in general, I always get help from her when she has studied the same things. I my mother has attended all universities and everything (laughter) so she is also able to help a lot.

Emmi, individual interview, Tampere

In Absame's case, his elder brother's experience and knowledge of the transition phase and upper secondary schools came in handy. His elder brother is studying at a vocational school and the brother's positive experiences in the land survey program influenced Absame to apply to the same school. In addition, Absame was clearly drawing from his experiences in his choice of school. In his case, it was natural to turn to his elder brother when he was reflecting on his choices. He visited his brother's school and became interested in the same field. Therefore, Absame also applied to this school, and even to the same program.

Mun is- isoveli on maanmittaaja ja sit mä oon käyny sen kaa tie- lomil, töissä siel ihan niinku, mä oon nähny minkälaista sen työ on, sit mä kiinnostuin siitä.

My elder brother is in land surveying and I have visited his work during vacations and I have seen what kind of work it is, and I got interested.

Absame, individual interview, Helsinki

He pointed out three important turning points in his educational trajectory and decision-making process. First, the year in the African country of his birth changed his perspective of education, he explained his previous experiences and relationships. Second, his elder brother pointed him towards the land survey program, acquainting him with the field. Third, which is the justification he used most frequently through the interview, is the justification of interest. He got interested in the field, and therefore he chose to apply for land surveying. All of his experiences in life were relevant and pointed him to a particular decision (cf Archer, 2007, 2003). He was using the experiences from his brother, following in the brother's footsteps, as he may not have received enough knowledge or information about other options. The internal conversation (Archer, 2003) is always present; he reflected on his options and decided based on this conversation. Absame pointed out that the choice of school was his own decision. He justified his decision by explaining how knowing what he will become is important in the decision-making process and in addition, to know what his prospects and options are. Absame appeared to have a clear plan for his future, namely to study

for a profession, the same profession as his brother and to work at the same workplace as his brother. He was also aware of his options to apply to polytechnics and mentions his wish to study for a tertiary degree to become an engineer.

Absame: Silleen niinku (.) ku mä en tiedä- sit jos mä menisin lukioon, ni mä en tiedä mikä musta tulis kos- sit mä- mun pitäis mennä vaan yliopistoon enkä mä oo vieläkään varma mitä mä oisin. Mut sit ku menee ammattikouluun, ni sit mä just, just mä tiedän mitä mä oon tekemässä ja mä silleen niinku harjotan sitä ammattii ja myöhemmin mä meen töihin ja sit viel kun meen siihen korkea- jatkokorkeakouluun, sit siel viel insinööriks et-

H: Aivan.

Absame: Mä oon varma mitä mä teen.

H: Eli nyt sä säästät aikaa ikään kuin, et sä et turhaan käytä aikaa lukioon vaan meet suoraan ammattiin.

Absame: Joo silleen niinku suoraan just siihen työhön mihin mä haluun.

H: Aivan. Mikä se toiveammatti on? Mitä se käytännössä tarkoittaa? Sä oot valmis sitten niin insinööri, mis sä oot töissä?

Absame: Ajattelin et tos (paikan nimi) lentokentällä maanmittaajana silleen-

Absame: like (.) as I don't know – then if I would go to general upper secondary school, I wouldn't know what I would become 'cause- then I- I would need to go to university and I still wouldn't be sure what I be. But when I attend vocational school, then I like, I know what I am doing and I can practice that profession and later I go to work and after that when I go to polytechnics and become an engineer so-

I: right

Absame: I'm sure of what I'm doing

I: so now you save time in a way, when you don't use time unnecessarily on general upper secondary education, instead you go straight to a profession

Absame: yeah, like directly to the work I want to do

I: right. So what is your desired profession? What does it mean in practice?
You will be a engineer, where are you working?

Absame: I was thinking the (name of place) airport as a land surveyor

Absame, individual interview, Helsinki

Students learn from elder siblings and many students share their experiences about how their decision was guided by elder siblings' educational choices and trajectories. For example, Emmi started swimming because of her elder sister, Mikko applied for entry to a restaurant school encouraged by his sister, and Ulla decided not to apply to a restaurant school because of her elder sister's bad experiences at this school. Elder siblings' educational trajectory appears to be even more important for young people who aim for a trajectory that is different than the one their parents took. Absame, explained how his big brother suggested he apply to a land survey program in a vocational school.

In addition, after the transition phase, students receive support from their elder siblings studying in the same field or program. The support students receive from their siblings supports learning and motivation and encourages the students to continue with their studies regardless of some challenges they encounter. The support is regarded as important and in cases the support ends, students express a concern about how they will manage. Anna, a hardworking student, applied to one of the most prestigious general upper secondary schools in her city, a school with the highest entrance requirements. Her mother and father each have a university degree and her elder sister is moving in a similar direction; the sister is studying at the university and has been studying at the general upper secondary school Anna is applying to. Although Anna said that she had not been guided down a similar educational path, emphasizing that this was a decision she made herself, she is drawing from the experiences from her sisters when justifying her choice. Her sisters, and in particular the sister who is currently studying at the general upper secondary school, provided her with support and guidance and practical advice on how to increase her opportunities in being accepted by a general upper secondary school. Anna had been receiving support from a range of school professionals because of the anxiety and pressure she has

experienced because of her ambition to apply for entry to a demanding general upper secondary school. Therefore, the support from her sister was also very important to her, and the practical advice on how to manage at that school. Anna recognized how her sister has influenced her educational path even more than her parents and expressed her concerns about her elder sister moving out of the family home. When discussing these concerns, and how the support from her sister was no longer as easily available, she changed her way of speaking; as she first has spoken in the first pronoun form, she changed to a null person pronoun form. She is referring to herself that 'one' has to get the support from someplace else, because 'one' doesn't get that kind of support from parents as 'one' wants. She is talking about herself, but the sudden change in way of speaking she is distancing her agency in the utterance, reminding of Yates & Hiles' research (2010a, 69-70) on how one, situated in this particular situation, is supposed to behave with obligations to manage and how one in this particular situation has to conduct yourself in line with. Null pronoun forms may also be the preferred way of speaking when discussing matters relating to strong emotional distress (Lappalainen, 2015, 418) and Anna's utterance can therefore also indicate concerns of managing without her sister's support, pointing towards the importance of the sister's support.

No on mulla kaks siskoo, niin se mun isosisko, joka nyt on yliopistossa, niin seki on aika paljon, melkeen yhtä paljon niinku mun vanhempien osalta vaikuttanu siihen. Se on niinku auttanu mua kans tosi paljon ja kannustanu eteenpäin. Se on nyt vähän taas tottumista, kun se muutti pois. Että *täytyy hakee* sitä tukee sitte jostain muusta, ku *sitä ei aina saa* vanhemmilta semmosta ku haluaa. Ni *täytyy* vähän niinku hakee sitä jostain.

Well, I have two sisters, so my elder sister, who is now at the university, has influenced me a lot, almost as much as my parents. She has helped me a lot and encouraged me forward. It now takes time to get used to her moving away. So *(one) needs to seek* for the support from somewhere else, when *(one)* doesn't receive the support from parents as one would want. So *(one) needs to* get it from somewhere else.

Anna, individual interview, Tampere

The support siblings provide is important both before the transition phase, when students choose their educational trajectory, as well as after the transition phase when

students may need support in the new study place. Still, students regard the support from the siblings as *support*, not as *directing* them down the educational path. Only in some cases do siblings push them down the educational path, as in cases when siblings are dissatisfied with their own educational choice and recommend another path for their younger siblings. The emphasis is once again on a pride students feel in choosing their own educational trajectory, which is not directed by anyone else.

In contrast to Aaltonen's recent article (2016), there has been little emphasis on studying siblings' influence on young people's decision-making process of finding their educational trajectories. In my analysis I saw the same tendency as in Aaltonen's research, that advice provided by siblings is connected to strong emotions. However, the students in my data also received and valued the pragmatic advice provided by siblings, information and practical experiences about school and schoolwork in upper secondary education. Naturally, siblings, as well as peers, use emotions in describing their experiences from school, but they also provide students with pragmatic insights on what it is like to study at a particular school, insights that adults, e.g., guidance counselors and parents do not have to the same extent. In addition, all groups of participants: students, school professionals and parents, in my research seem to agree that as the structure of the education systems is changing and the content of programs in educational institutions are changing as well as the requirements of the labor market, siblings and previous students have the most recent impressions and knowledge about certain educational programs and schools. Therefore, students might rely more on the knowledge of elder siblings than on their parents when making their decision about further education. Furthermore, as there is a strong discourse that students are expected to make their own decision about their future autonomously, perhaps parents take less responsibility in acquainting themselves with different options in further education and rely on the school and the elder siblings to provide students with this information.

In my analysis I see a similar tendency as the one in Aaltonen's research (2016) regarding the importance of advice and support from siblings for students with an immigrant background, although my data set of students with an immigrant background is too limited to be used as statistical evidence. As parents with immigration background may have had difficulties integrating into the labor market, elder siblings may have more knowledge and information about educational opportunities and labor market as well as personal experience from the Finnish

education system and labor market. Therefore, the importance of advice from elder siblings may be even more important for students with an immigrant background than it is for native Finnish students. In cases in which the parents' language skills in Finnish is weak or insufficient, both parents and students might trust elder siblings and the school to provide important practical information about students' educational options.

6.4. School and school professionals' role

For this subchapter, I have analyzed how students perceive the role of school; according to the students, how school professionals guide and support students in finding their own educational trajectory and how, if at all, they are directing students towards an educational trajectory of 'their kind' (Brunila et al., 2011). Analyzing how students define the school's role in the decision-making process, increases the understanding of how school professionals are able to influence the decision-making process. Again, I am analyzing the 'way of speaking', not just focusing on *what* students are saying, but *how* they are reflecting on the school's role. Situating their talk in a social context, drawing on talk and reflections about family background, previous experiences and support from other actors, the analysis reveals how students perceive the role of school professionals differently and express different needs in the provided support.

Students are pushed and compelled to make the decision themselves, and to take responsibility for their own educational trajectory. In my data set, students expressed a strong sense of responsibility about their own decision-making process. Even when students are encountering severe challenges at school, students express their own responsibility in learning and in finding an educational trajectory that aligns with their needs, interests and opportunities. According to students, the role of school professionals is mostly informative in the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education, and this is also how students seem to prefer the school professionals' role to be. Guidance counselors inform students about different opportunities and explain how students' wishes of school align with previous school achievements and grades. School, and in particular the guidance counselors, encourages students to visit several upper secondary schools to form their own opinions on what they would be interested in studying.

Mut se on aika paljon niinku esitelly niit eri- tai antanu kaikkii esitteitä ja mainostanu et menkää tutustuun, menkää tutustuun ja silleen.

But s/he has presented a lot of various- or provided all kinds of brochures and encouraged us to go and visit, please visit, like that

Hanna, focus group, Turku

The guidance counselor provides the students with alternatives; however, the student must take responsibility of going to the schools to learn more from the schools. The guidance counselor suggests and pushes students into visiting different places but is remain as an outsider in the decision-making process. When students talk about the support and guidance they receive from school, there is a strong sense of agency in the background, pointing towards the pressure on students in making their own decision about further education. The guidance counselor is helpful in providing a general understanding about a certain field as well as the restrictions and prospects of a profession, but the student is obliged to decide and choose the educational field and trajectory. The guidance counsellor supports students in finding the right school in upper secondary education, but the emphasis and assumption is that the students know what their aspirations are. The work, on how to come a conclusion about the student's aspirations has to be done by the students themselves. Students do not seem to appreciate guidance counselors who suggest a certain educational trajectory; however, students who are struggling with finding out their aspirations need more support in finding a suitable path. In cases in which the guidance counselor suggests particular professions to students, the reaction is not always positive, and students do not appear to find these propositions very helpful.

Taru: Se oli kyl aika vaikeet ja sit ku se meiän opo, se ei oikeen kunnol selittäny niist aloist niinko hirveest mitään. [H: joo] Et se keskitty välil siihen lukioon tosi paljon. [H: joo] ni sit just täs ammattikoulus ni vaa ihan johonki aloihin, johonki niinko semmotti vaan niihin et miten niinko siel menee se juttu ja tämmötti näin. [H: joo] Ja sit ku meil oli semmosii keskustelui, me saatiin käydä opon kans puhumas just näist valinnoist, ni se

niinku ehdotti vähän kaikil niit samoi aloi.

Haastattelija: aijaa.

Taru: et se ei oikeen.

Haastattelija: mitä aloja hän ehdotti?

Taru: siis just jotain maanmittausta ja [H: joo] tommosii aloja, et mikä ei oikeen innostanut sit taas et. [H: joo] Ja sit ku se monel just sanos, et ku halus niinko hakee lukioon, et se ei oo välttämättä se just se kannattava vaihtoehto, niinku se ei oikeen hirveesti kannustanukaan siihen et.

Taru: it was really difficult and when our guidance counselor, s/he didn't really explain a lot about the fields [I: yes] s/he focused on the general upper secondary education places a lot [I: yes] so in this vocational school only on some fields, just like how it works and like that [I: yes] and then when we had these conversations, we had the opportunity to talk with the guidance counselor about these choices, s/he only suggested the same fields for everyone

Interviewer: oh

Taru: so it wasn't really

Interviewer: what fields did s/he suggest?

Taru: just like some kind of land survey and [I: yes] fields like that, fields that didn't really interest (me) [I: yes] and then s/he said to many students who wanted to apply to general upper secondary education that it is not really a good option, so s/he didn't really encourage to apply there either.

Taru, individual interview, Turku

For some students, especially students who do not receive guidance and support from home, school professionals, and in particular the guidance counselor, provide students with necessary support and guidance. Tommi is a son of an unemployed, single mother and has several younger siblings but no elder siblings. Tommi was encountering several

challenges in school. According to the student himself, the challenges were mostly related to motivation and behavior. In addition, his health, for example allergies, was restricting his opportunities at the upper secondary level. The same student explained how his mother encourages him to educate himself, in order to increase his opportunities in life, but does not offer any further practical guidance or support with homework. In his case, the guidance counselor helped him to find opportunities in vocational education.

Joo, siis, se ehdotteli niitä mulle ja ku, mul on niin paljon kaikkia allergioita ni sitte yliviivas kaikki jota mä en oo pääsemässä, et mul ei oo ees mahdollisuutta. Siel oli kaks semmosta mihin mä en olis päässy. Sitte toi lähihoitaja oli semmonen et mä pääsin sinne niinku nipin napoin, niinku, kaikkien allergioitten ja muitten sairausten takia ni

Yes, s/he suggested options to me, when I have so many allergies and then s/he crossed out all alternatives that I cannot attend, that were impossible. There were two options that I didn't have a chance to follow. Then there was primary nurse to which I made it barely, like with all allergies and other illnesses.

Tommi, individual interview, Tampere

School motivation is a well-known challenge in Finnish schools and one of the more important reasons why students drop out of upper secondary education (Takala, 1992, Hämäläinen-Luukkainen, 2004). On one hand, students are encouraged and pushed to take responsibility for their own educational trajectory (Vanhalakka-Ruoho et al., 2018). On the other hand, students may express an ambivalence about education; they want to enjoy the moment, although they realize the importance of education for future life (Henderson et al., 2007). This paradox was also evident in my data set and here exemplified with the case of Amir, who expressed a clear lack of motivation, prioritizing time outside school and the internalized obligation to take responsibility for his own achievements. Amir accepts responsibility for his own learning, but stated how he tried to improve his grades throughout the school year but changed his aims after realizing that he does not *want* to put in sufficient effort to apply to continue studying in a general upper secondary school. At some point he gave up. The school offered additional support with homework in order to improve grades. However, Amir

explained that he *did not want* to attend the additional support class, because that would have been taken up his free time. Although Amir's grades were not excellent, later in the interview he expressed the view that they would have been for entry to a general upper secondary school. Amir stated that he could have wanted to go to upper secondary school if he had managed better. However, it seems Amir was under the impression that because he gave up during the last year, he didn't manage to read or work as hard as expected, therefore he wouldn't have a chance at general upper secondary school. His sister tried to help him, but that did not work out well, so he tried to help himself. Amir was aware of opportunities to participate in remedial classes, although he chose not to participate. Amir mentioned his own agency in the decision-making process, pointing out how 'he helped himself', and although his sister helped him with homework, he chose not to attend additional tutoring because that would have been taken up his free time. It is interesting that Amir did not blame the school for failing to support him, instead he is referred to his own agency and his own choice to discontinue trying.

Haastattelija: Saiksä mitään apuu siihen panostukseen, saiksä mitään ylimäärästä?

Amir: No siis sisko, se autto mua.

Haastattelija: Joo.

Amir: Sit mikä se olikaan- ei ei paljon tullu apuu, niinku mä ite autoin itseäni.

Haastattelija: Joo, mut eli koulussa ei ollu mitään semmosta niinku tukiopetusta?

Amir: On siin tukiopetusta mut en mä menny sinne.

Haastattelija: Olisiks sä saanu mennä?

Amir: Oisin mä saanut jos mä oisin halunnu.

Haastattelija: Okei, miks sä et halunnu mennä?

Amir: No se ois vieny mun vapaa-ajan. ((nauraa))

Interviewer: Did you receive any help

Amir: Well, my sister, she helped me

Interviewer: yes

Amir: and then, what was it... no, no help came, so I helped myself

Interviewer: so, there anywhere no remedial classes or something like that in school?

Amir: yes, there were remedial classes, but I didn't go to them

Interviewer: would you have been allowed to go there

Amir: I would have been, if I had wanted to

Interviewer: okay, so why didn't you go?

Amir: well, it would have taken up my free time (laughing)

Amir, individual interview, Helsinki

Students are encouraged and obliged to take their own responsibility of not only their own educational trajectory, but also learning and managing in school. However, as students are pushed to make their own decisions about their future, they tend to use this encouragement to make their own decision. In the example above, the student made his own decision; he decided that he did not want to study in his free time. He reflected on the options he had and was aware of the support he could receive from school. Although the school offered support, the student did not seem motivated enough to attend remedial classes. When a student does not manage, and the family is unable to help or support, the support from school becomes increasingly important. However, the reason why students are not willing to accept support from the school is interesting, and even more interesting is the question why a school would accept a response that a student chose not to participate because it would interfere with his free time? School motivation is an obstacle from managing in school, and it seems that the traditional ways of supporting students with motivational issues do not seem to work.

Some students are willing to accept support from school professionals and family, especially when the motivational challenges are lacking. However, the challenges and need for support may differ from the support needed for motivational challenges. Well performing students who lack motivational challenges may instead be struggling with challenges regarding mental well-being and fatigue from pushing themselves too hard (Ahvensalmi & Vanhalakka-Ruoho, 2012). Anna, a well performing student with high ambitions, encountered several challenges but was not afraid to accept support. She explained how she encountered a lot of pressure to perform well in school. She put a lot of pressure on herself, and the pressure led to depression and challenges to cope in school. She did not admit or confess that her parents or school pressured her to perform. However, by considering her family background, and her previous success in school, it is not hard to understand her wish to perform well at the next education level. Both her parents have a university degree and her elder sister also chose the same general upper secondary school, the hardest general upper secondary school to get in to in that city. She reflected on the support she received from her parents, sister and school; she met with both the school social worker and the school psychologist. She explained how she received continuous support from the guidance counselor to receive professional support as well as guidance in reaching her goals.

No se pystyy, siis se kertoo ainakin mitä mahdollisuuksia ja se kannustaa, että vielä jaksaa ja että ku teet tällain niin sit sä pääsetki tonne tai sit sulla on ainaki paremmat mahdollisuudet. Ja sit se sillain kannusti ja laitto vähä liikettäki jos alko valuu sillain et alko mennä asiat vähä huonosti, ja sit se laitto niihin asioihin liikettä.

Well, s/he could at least talk about all opportunities and encourage, so it's easier to cope and when you do this, you can attend that place, or then at least you have better opportunities. And then s/he encouraged and pushed forward if things started to go the other way, and the s/he moved things forward.

Anna, individual interview, Tampere

Although she received a lot of encouragement and a lot of support from both her parents and her school, she does not reveal if anyone tried to steer her in another direction, perhaps into a general upper secondary school with lower requirements. Instead, she felt encouraged and supported in her choice of school. Now, after the transition phase, she is studying at the school and is mostly satisfied, although she still has concerns about her mental well-being and a concern about how she will cope with the continuous pressure.

Some students need and wish for support from school but are dissatisfied with the support they receive. Most of the students are satisfied with the input and support of their guidance counselors, but some students wished for a more dedicated and personalized input. Some students tended to feel lost if they did not receive the support they required, while other students could take matters into their own hands. Linda could be described as an individualist according to Järvinen (1999), a person who takes matters into their own hands, finding out their own interests, and looking for information themselves. Linda had already decided what she wanted to study after basic education, and she received advice and support from a friend of the family who worked in the same field she wanted to apply to. In the application process, she sought the guidance counselor to look up information for her about alternatives regarding schools matching her interests. She was not very satisfied with the information the guidance counselor provided and did a lot of research about the schools with her mother.

Linda: ni mä kysyin silt erikseen ensin, et voisko hän hakee mul niinku erillisii semmosii urheilupainotteisii koulu, et lukiot käy ja sit tommoset ammattikorkeet ja nää muut käy. Ja sit tota noi. Ää, sit mä en saanu kauheest mitään tietoi niist ja meil oli semmonen paksu kirja, mis oli niit sit paljon koulu.

Haastattelija: joo.

Linda: ja sit tota noi, se selas sielt jotai ja sit sanos, et ei mun kannata mihinkää semmoseen mennä, et ei mul kuulemma oo mitää mahdollisuuksii ja tälle. Ja sit me otettii ite äidin kans selvää.

Linda: so I asked him/her separately, if s/he could collect information about schools specializing in sports, both general upper secondary schools and vocational, polytechnics and others. And then. Ah, I didn't get really any information about them and we had this thick book, where there were a lot of schools.

Interviewer: yes

Linda: and then, s/he paged through it and then said, that there's no use for me to apply to any of these, I didn't have a chance and so on. And then we figured it out with my mom

Linda, individual interview, Turku

Linda was disappointed with the guidance counselor's lack of support, and encountered challenges when she wanted to visit the school she was interested in. Because the guidance counselor arranges a certain number of visits to certain schools, there are indisputably many schools that students never visit, therefore never receive information about. Throughout the interview she expressed a strong sense of agency, how with the help of her mother, *she* took responsibility for her own decision-making process, visiting schools and pushing her guidance counselor and mother to provide information. She said how she *wanted* to apply to certain schools and how *she* had to *persuade* the guidance counselor to obtain permission to visit the school.

ja sit me otettii äidin kans niist selvää.[H: joo] ja tulostettii kaikki lomakkei ja muita.[H: joo] ja sit mä vein ne vaan täytettynä sille opolle [H: joo] ja mä sanoin, et mä haluun niinku näihin. Ja et ota, sit tota me löydettii ne myöhemmin tost kirjastaki. Mikset sä voinu mainita mul ku mä pyysin niinku näist aloist eriksee. Et se hankki mul kaikista muist aloist kyl niinku enemmän tietoo. [H: joo] mut sit et ei niinku niist liikuntapainotteisist mihin mä olin pyytäny.[H: aijaa.] Ja sit tota noin. Sit mä kysyin, et oisko sinne Varalaan just jotain tutustumiskäyntii ja sit se sanos, et itse asias on ja, mut et meiän koulu ei mee sinne. Et sinne menee joku toinen koulu. Ja sit mä kysyin, et oisko mul mahdollisuus päästä niinku niiden kans käymää siel. [H: joo.] ja sit se soitti sen koulun opol ja sit mä pääsin niiden kaa käymään siellä.

And then we figured it out with my mom [I: yes] and printed out all forms and other stuff. [I: yes] and then I took them filled out to the guidance counselor [I: yes] and I told her/him I wanted to apply to these places. And then we found these places later on from the book. Why didn't you mention these when I asked about these fields separately. So s/he looked up more information from all other fields. [I: yes] but not from these specialized in sports, which is what I requested. [I: oh] and then. Then I asked, could I visit (name of place), some kind of visit to acquaint myself with the school and s/he told me that yes but our school is not going there. Another school is going there. And then I asked if I could go and visit the school with them [I: yes] and then s/he called the guidance counselor from the other school and then I managed to visit the school.

Linda, individual interview, Turku

The guidance counselor provides students with information, however inevitably the information provided is always restricted. The student met with the guidance counselor for 15 minutes in addition to the general information provided. According to the guidance counselors, their role is to advise, but not to push students. Guidance counselors and other school professionals provide advice within certain limits, emphasizing the students' own responsibility for their educational trajectory. Students express awareness about their own responsibility in deciding their educational trajectory and show frustration when a guidance counselor is trying to steer students along a certain trajectory. The guidance counselor's agenda may be to guide students along a trajectory with good labor market prospects, however the students emphasize intrinsic values in the decision-making process. When a guidance counselor suggests a professional field with a low risk of unemployment, the students do not necessarily value the guidance.

In a focus group with four girls, there was agreement that the guidance counselor focused on vocational education when informing students about their options for upper secondary education. The students complained that the guidance counselor did not stress the intrinsic values of the students or the student's own aspirations and wishes. Instead, the guidance counselor focused on suggesting the same professions to

everyone. On one hand the girls strongly lifted the intrinsic and individualistic values of a student's aspirations for their future; the guidance counselor should focus on the student's goals, aspirations and strengths, what the student wants and not suggest the same professions to everyone. The girls stressed the importance of finding their own individual educational trajectory and rejected the idea of pushing students into any education. Linda revealed how the guidance counselor suggested certain professions to all students, because there would be a future need for people in these professions. Suggesting professions that do not necessarily align with the students' interest is wrong, according to the girls, although the aim of the guidance counselor appeared to be to guide students into professions with low unemployment risk.

Haastattelija: Miten tota- millanen rooli opolla on ollu tässä? Hän on varmasti kertonu teille jotain?

Taru : No silleen kun me puhuttiin näist nii se puhu nii se puhu niinku aika pal amiksist-

((muut myötäilevät: mm, joo))

Taru: -ja niitten niinku pääsykokeist ja näist et semmottis mut jos mä oisin hakenu luk- niinku lukioon, nii kyl se ois vähän haitannu et lukiost ei puhuttu pal mitään -

Leea: - Joo, ei puhuttu lukioist niinku sit mitään. Nii oli se vähä- Et mä joutusin ihan ite kattoo et mihin mä haluun. Niinku niit vaihtoehtoja -

Linda: - Nii ja sit toi se esit- niit ammatteja ja kaikkii niit esiteltiin aika huonosti niinku. Et moni ei niinku tiiä kunnol (.) mitä niihin ammatteihii sisältyy ja niinku-

Maija: -Ja et mitä siihen tarvitaan et pääsee siihe ammattiin.

((yleistä myönnyttelyä: mm, mm))

Taru: Nii ja sit ku me oltii just opon kans puhumas, nii sit se ehdottaa kaakil niit samoi juttui-

Linda: -Nii se ehdottaa kaakil jotai lähihoitaja- ja puutarhajuttui ja niit-

Maija: - Nii mun mielest se ehotti meil kaikil, pait no ehkä Leealle ei-

Leea: -Joo mul ei ((naurahdus)).

((yleistä myönnyttelyä: niin, niin))

Linda: -Mut siis niinku kaikil muil. Se ehdottaa niit mis on niinku vähän niinku täl hetkel. Mun mielest se on sillee väärin et se ehdottaa niit ku ei- ei niinku niit et mitkä ittelle sopii yhtään.

Maija: Mm, nii, ja sit meiän opo oli pois sen yhteishaun (.) ajan. Se oli-

Taru: - Se oli- [Maija:se oli aika]- se oli aika karmet koska sit [oli iha pulas]

Taru: [sit meil oli sijaine sillo]

Taru: -Mut sit se (.) sijaine oli vaiks kui hyvä mun mielest.

Maija: -Nii se oli parempi ku meiän oma opo.

Taru: -Mut siis se otti enemmän selvää niist asioist.

Maija: -Se oli itekki opo nii sit se tuli meiän sijaiseks nii se oli. Se oli- se jotenki oli tosi pal meiän kans.

Linda. -Nii mäki olisin niinku- tai et onneks se oli meil siin, yhteishaus koska se otti mul esimerkiks paljo enemmän niinku (.) sinne (paikan nimi) ku sinne piti soittaa ja lähettää niinku lisää niinku niit paperei ja kaikkee. Nii niist niinku ei mein- se meiän oikee opo ollu hoitanu niit niinku kunnol ees. (.) [X: mm]Nii mä olin ainaki ihan tyytyväinen et sit se oli (.) pois ja meil oli toi sijainen.

Haastattelija: Joo.

Maija: Sit taas ainaki mul oli ku mä haluun poliisiks, nii mun piti kauheen kauan miettii et mihin- et mist- mitä kaut mä pääsen sinne. (.) Nii sit mä vähän itte miettisin ja sit äitiki oli siin ja. Kyl opoki siin autto vähän mut (.) ei sillai (.) niin paljoo.

((joku yskii))

Haastattelija: Miten, miten teiän mielestä opon olis pitäny kertoa teille?

Linda: No siis ehkä enemmän just lukioist ja just semmosist niinku (.) amikses semmosest niinku, mikä, linjoist et totanoin nii mitkä niinku on (.) semmosii mihin oikeest porukka hakee eikä mitään maanmittaust mihin varmaan ei ketää ees hae.

((yleistä naurahtelua ja myönnyttelyä: joo, mm))

Leea: Joo ja just sitä et niinku auttais mieltii jo et mist on hyötty sit niinku (.) tulevaisuudes et.

X: Mmm.

Leea: Ku se tuntuu et vaan jotain, et menkää johonki, nii kyl te siit sit (.) niinku. ((hiljaista, epäselvää puhetta))

Maija: Ja sit oli se et ku (.) meil oli- meil oli niinku just ysin joulun tai sillo, ysin syksyl, nii meil oli (.) joku kakskyt, kakskyt viiva nelkytviis minuuttii nii juteltii opon kaa. Se oli semmonen niinku yksityis- et kaikki oli yksittäin siel, mut sit ku meil ei ol kevään alus, ennen niinku yhteishakuu mitään, nii sit otuli sellanen et mä en muista enää mitään sielt ((joku yskii taustalla)) syksyn puolelt et mitä me juteltiin, nii sit tuli vähän semmonen et ois kiva et jos pidettäis viel kerran sellanen et juteltais viel.

Interviewer: so, what role did the guidance counselor have here? S/he has probably told you something?

Taru: well like when we talked about this s/he talked quite a lot about vocational school

(the other girls agreeing: mm, yes)

Taru: and about the entrance tests and this and that but if I would have applied to general upper secondary school, it would have bothered me that there weren't any discussions regarding general –

Leea: no talk about general like nothing. So, it was kind of- So I needed to look up for myself where I want to go. Like the options –

Linda: that's right and then s/he present- the vocations and everything and

everything was presented really badly. So, a lot a people don't know enough
(.) what a profession withholds and like that

Maija; and what is demanded to enter that profession

(girls agreeing: mm, mm)

Taru: yes and then when we are discussing with the guidance counselor, s/he
suggests the same fields for everybody-

Linda: yes s/he suggests primary nurse- and gardening for everyone and the

Maija: - yes, I think s/he suggested these for all of us, except for Leea

Leea: yeah, not for me (laughing)

Girls agreeing (that's right)

Linda: - but for everyone else. S/he suggests these fields in which there is a
lack of people. I think it's wrong because no- like not something that's suits
oneself at all.

Maija: mm, yes, and then our guidance counselor was away during the joint
application (.) period. That was-

Taru: - that was- [Maija: that was] – that was pretty horrible because then
[was really in trouble]

Taru: [then we had a substitute then]

Taru: but the substitute was a good as it gets I think

Maija: -yeah better than our own counselor

Taru: - but s/he like found out more about the stuff

Maija: - s/he was a guidance counselor so s/he came as our substitute so that
was. s/he was somehow spending much time with us.

Linda: yeah, I also would have- or luckily s/he was there with us, in the
joint application period because s/he took me for example a lot more (.)
there (name of place) when (I) needed to call and send more papers and
everything. So, for them like no- our real counselor hadn't even handled that

right (.) [X: mm] so I was at least satisfied that s/he was (.) away and we had the substitute.

Interviewer: yeah

Maija: then when at least I had when I want to become a police officer, so I needed to think really hard about when- from what- how I can get there. (.) so I thought and my mom thought and then. The counselor helped also a bit (.) but not (.) much.

[someone's coughing]

Interviewer: so how do you think the guidance counselor should have tell you?

Linda: so more about general upper secondary in particular and more about (.) vocational like what fields there are there (.) like where people actually apply to and not any land survey where no one really applies to.

((girls laughing and agreeing: yes, mm))

Leea: yes, and like help us to think and what would be useful in like (.) the future so.

X: mm

Leea: but when it felt like, just go somewhere, you will then (.) like ((distant unclear talk))

Maija: and then it was like (.) we had- we had like at Christmas time during 9th grade or then, in the 9th grade during autumn, so we had (.) some 20, 20 to 45 minutes to talk with the guidance counselor. It was like these private, so everyone went there separately, but then during spring I couldn't remember anything from that meeting ((someone's coughing in the background)) from autumn what we had discussed so for me I would have appreciated a new meeting where we could have discussed once more.

Focus group 3, Four girls, Turku

Despite the emphasis on the students' own responsibility in the transition phase, that students emphasized their own agency and responsibility to make a decision that aligns with their own interests and values, the support and guidance from school professionals is still regarded as important, in particular for students who do not receive support from family or other significant people. Guidance counselors have an important role when students try to figure out different options.

6.5. Unexpected trajectories

Lappalainen et al. (2010) discuss how even small pieces of information and events become meaningful in the decision-making process; young people construct their perceptions about their aspirations about further education and professional career based on the small grains of information they have. This is evident also in my data set. In the final grade in compulsory school, the students must make a decision regarding further education, although they lack information or the information received is inadequate. For some students, the choice is self-evident, in particular for students following an educational path that aligns with their parents' background (Reay & Ball, 1998). For other students, the choice is more challenging – especially for students who are lacking a significant social network, a 'model from home' or elder siblings. In these cases, students agree that they draw from different sources of information, or 'the small grains of information' (cf. Lappalainen et al., 2010) when deciding their educational path. Students draw from sources available to them; in addition to the information provided by the school and parents, also extracurricular activities, peers and other experiences from out-of-school contexts influence the decision-making process. In some cases, even bigger events, occurrences or 'critical moments' (cf. Thomson, 2002) influences the choice and life course. In this chapter the focus is on alternative decision-making processes, how students who are navigating in different settings, using their previous life experiences, 'small grains of information', 'critical moments', experiences from extra-curricular activities as well as other relative out-of-school experiences.

In cases when students did not draw from parents' or siblings educational or professional trajectories, students discussed how previous *life experiences* have helped them in reflecting what they want to study or work with in the future. Early life experiences support students in learning about their aspirations. This is the case for many students who do not choose a similar professional trajectory as their parents, or

who do not have a model to follow, like students without elder siblings or with parents with only basic education or who are unemployed. Absame is a 16-year-old boy (see more about Absame in subchapter 6.3). He was born in Finland to parents born in Africa and he encountered some challenges in school, mostly behavioral challenges. However, after spending one year abroad in his family's home country in Africa with his father, attending a local school, he explained how he acquainted himself with his cultural heritage and moving back to Finland his motivation in school increased and suddenly he was one of the better students in his class. Absame did not draw from his parents' educational or professional background when making his decision about upper secondary school. In fact, he did not even recall the educational background of his parents and explained that his father is currently unemployed, and his mother is a 'stay-at-home'. Instead, the experience of spending one year abroad can be described as a 'critical moment' (Thomson, 2002, Henderson et al., 2007), or as a *meaningful occurrence* that clearly had a great impact on the student's educational path and life course. Without this experience, Absame might not have found the motivation to work harder in school and he continued on to be one of the best performing students in his class.

Johanna is the daughter of a mother who immigrated to Finland ten years earlier. Johanna is currently attending general upper secondary school, but she is not satisfied with the placement, and it was not her first choice. She applied to get into vocational school but was not accepted and is now reconsidering her options. As a child she lived in a childcare institution, and later on she re-visited this institution and has fond memories of her time spent there. She explains that her plan and aspiration is to enroll in a vocational school, and to study to become a primary nurse, as she wants to work in a childcare institution similar to the one she was in when she was a child.

Kolme vuotta lähihoitajaks. Ku jotenki mä haluisin päästä jonneki lastenkotiin töihin ku mä olin iteki siel.

Three years to be a primary nurse. Like somehow, I want to work at a childcare institution because I attended one myself

Johanna, individual interview, Helsinki

She explained how she came to the conclusion about her decision to apply for entry to the primary nurse program and described her internal conversation (Archer, 2003), reflecting on what she wanted to do in the future – drawing from her past experiences. She drew not only from her experiences as a child, but also described how she visited the childcare institution a couple of years earlier. In the interview, she described the emotions she went through when visiting the childcare institution as a teenager and how the fond memories of the childcare institution came back to her during her visit. All these memories and experiences convinced her what work she wants to do in the future and therefore she applied to an upper secondary school where she can pursue her aspirations.

Also, *extra-curricular activities and hobbies* play an important role on students. Although Emmi has a sister, and her sister introduced her to swimming, and she therefore has been attending swimming classes from early childhood, and even applied to a general upper secondary school specializing in sports, the swimming as a hobby was important in the decision-making process.

No mää oon harrastanu niin kauan uintia et mää hain siihe urheilulukioon että on helpompi yhdistää koulu ja uinti.

I have been into swimming for so long, so I applied for entry to the general upper secondary school which specializes in sports, so it would be easier to combine school and swimming.

Emmi, individual interview, Tampere

Combining sports with general upper secondary education felt like a convenient choice for her, as she explained how she sometimes felt like an outsider in basic education, when all her free time was spent at the swimming pool. Talking to Emmi after the transition phase, she stated that she was satisfied with her decision, as she no longer felt like an outsider and all her classmates in her new class share similar goals. Students expressed the view that peers do not have a significant influence on the decision-making process.

During one or two weeks in basic education, students acquaint themselves with a certain profession of their choice. This short period of work experience (TET)¹⁰ appears to be especially significant for students who do not learn sufficiently from other sources about their options. The short period of work experience is very significant for students who do not choose a similar trajectory as their parents, and perhaps do not have any older siblings, or who need more experience in finding out about their aspirations. Tommi, son of an unemployed mother and with only sporadic contact with his father, enjoyed working at a daycare facility during TET, and chose to apply to a vocational school to study for a primary nurse degree.

Mulla (TET-jakso) ainaki autto päättää sen että mihkä mä niinku, mille linjalle mä haen. Muutenkin siellä oli tosi kivaa.

It (period of work experience) certainly helped me decide which program I should apply to. And anyhow it was really fun being there (at the day care center)

Tommi, individual interview, Tampere

The students used an internal conversation, drawing from their past experiences when deciding on their educational trajectory. The decisions students make are in line with their life history. Students are encouraged to choose their educational trajectory themselves, and do not express any opposing views from parents or school.

6.6. Conclusions

The analysis concerning students' reflections on their decision-making process, opened up views on their own agency, the influence and role of parents, siblings, the schools and professionals as well as other critical moments intervening and influencing the process.

Students draw from their own personal context(s) and experiences when they reflect on their educational trajectory and when they decide what they want to study (cf. Lappalainen et al., 2010). Students draw from a range of contexts and experiences, depending on the student's individual situation. Students draw from the options

¹⁰ TET period: the mandatory period of work experience of 1-2 weeks students in the ninth grade carry out when they are studying.

they know and from available options. Students come to conclusions about their opportunities by learning from their parents' educational choices and working career, from elder siblings' educational choices, from their experiences in their own life course and from their own extracurricular activities and interests. In addition, students find the mandatory short period of work experience they complete in 8th or 9th grade, very helpful when reflecting on their aspirations. As students draw from their own personal experiences and their own context, they are more or less influenced by their parents' educational choices and professional careers. Some students realized this connection, but emphasized their own agency in the decision-making process. Although the students admit that they are following directly in their parents' footsteps, they still present the decision as their own. For some students, the choice has always been clear, meaning that they have not reflected on any other options. In these cases, the question whether the decision is the student's own arise: are students really making an informed decision, if they have not reflected on any options other than aligning with their parents' educational and professional trajectory? In these cases, the school's role becomes important, as the school can support students and provide students with a different perspective.

Students justified the decisions in a very similar way, emphasizing agency (cf. Archer, 2003, 2007), although there are some variations in the justifications. Students justified their decisions by claiming that the decision was their own, that parents did not interfere with the decision in an inhibiting or constraining way, that the guidance counselor's task was to help students to find the right study place. All justifications hinted at a *discourse of responsibility*: in which students are not only allowed to make their own decision about their future, but are even expected to do so. These justifications reveal some of the values and ideals in Finnish society, that young people in their teens, 15-16 years old, should know what they want in life, at least at a general level, and that no parent or guidance counselor should interfere with this decision. Instead, according to these values, parents and the school should support and help the students in any possible way to reach their goals and achieve their potential.

Although students' choices are limited by structures, grades and opportunities, self-reflection constitutes an important part in the decision-making process (Lappalainen et al., 2010). Students clearly reflected on their educational trajectory that can be described as self-reflection, or an internal conversation (Archer, 2007), however many students still followed in their parents or siblings' footsteps, and this path

seem to be a self-evident choice for students. Previous research (Myrskylä, 2009) has shown how the educational trajectory and even certain professions are ‘inherited’ and ‘run in the family’. Although students are not forced, pushed or even encouraged by their parents to choose a similar educational trajectory and profession as them, many students follow their parents’ example. In this analysis, my aim was to come closer to an understanding why and how this happens and what the school’s role is in the decision-making process.

As Vanhalakka-Ruoho et al. (2018) state, in Finnish research and career guidance, considerable emphasis is on the student’s choice. The decision has to be made by the student and how the student makes the decision in a sort of vacuum is separated from the social background and social position of the family. In my analysis, students appeared to be deciding about their educational trajectory, and they strongly imply that they are making the decision themselves. Why students tend to choose a similar educational trajectory as their parents may be explained by using the theoretical concept habitus, how values and norms are internalized in practices, i.e., how young people tend to choose their educational trajectory according to already internalized norms and values. Habitus is created through an interplay between agency and structure, these dispositions that are shaped by structures reproducing unconsciously current practices and structures. On the other hand, some students tend to show a broader spectrum of choices in the transition phase, pointing towards a weaker predispositioned educational trajectory or a sense of feeling lost in the decision-making process. These students may be struggling with the decision, perhaps because of a weaker predispositioned structure, a lack of knowledge about their opportunities, or a lack of a functioning support network. For these students, a successful transition often requires some form of support, either from the family or the school. In some cases, the support from siblings is sufficient. When there is a restrictedness in school professionals’ ability to support a student or incompleteness in the information provided, the support from the family becomes even more important and vice versa. However, students who are left without sufficient support still pointed to their own responsibility in choosing the ‘right’ educational trajectory. The values of how students should decide their education themselves are values that have been internalized by all students. No student expressed a wish for parents, the school, siblings or any other people to interfere with this decision. Students have internalized the value on how they are the decision-makers in their own life.

Students are obliged to use their own agency and take responsibility for their own learning and educational path and encouraged to use their imagination and dream about their aspirations and wishes (Lappalainen et al. (2010) which shows the values of society. However, as society is valuing and pushing towards strong agency, there may be a risk that the school neglects the restricted array of experiences 15-16 years old have in their first steps towards their educational and professional career. The restrictedness of the information is not providing all students with the same opportunities. Some students receive a lot of information and knowledge from their family, for example parents or siblings, other students rely only on the information school provides.

In previous research, the influence of parents appeared to be somewhat stronger than in my analysis (Vanhalakka-Ruoho, 2007). In previous research, young people described how the mother or father's opinion mattered a great deal to them when they were making their decision about their upper secondary education (Vanhalakka-Ruoho, 2007). My results do not show that parents push students towards a similar educational trajectory as themselves. Instead, parents encourage students to make their own decision about their future. However, my results also show how students drawing from the context and information they have when they are making their decision about further education. They use the sources available to them, and these sources are often parents, siblings, school and peers. Young people accentuate their own agency in the decision-making process, verifying the discourse on how young people are expected to make their own decision about their educational choice. As in Vanhalakka-Ruoho's analysis (2007), young people expressed themselves with a similar voice of autonomy in my analysis, describing how *students* made the decision themselves although they listened to their parents' opinions and ideas. In my analysis, the influence of siblings appeared in many of the interviews, not only by students *themselves*, but this phenomenon was also verified by the parents. However, in Vanhalakka-Ruoho's analysis (2007) the influence of siblings was not brought up as a theme in the analysis.

7 Parents reflecting on the decision- making process

From previous research, we know that parents' educational background plays an important role in the child's educational career. The statistical connection between parents' educational background and students' educational choices has been discussed frequently in research (e.g., Saari et al., 2015, Myrskylä, 2009). Parents may influence their child's decision directly, by discussing it with them and even demanding their children along a specific educational trajectory, but also influence their children indirectly through their socioeconomic status and values that their children have internalized from early childhood (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Bourdieu, 1984, Lareau, 2011, Reay, 1998, Kosunen, 2016). In addition, parents are different, and families have different needs and different resources to support their children on their educational path (LaRocque et al., 2011).

Some students received information about further education from their parents, while others received no information. Around 13% of students stated that they received no information about further education from their parents according to a recent survey (Myllyniemi & Kiilakoski, 2017; 31). Based on the analysis of the interviews and focus groups with students (results from Chapter 6), the support from parents varied in both quality and quantity. Students claimed to make the decision about the transition phase themselves, although also receiving support from parents and school. Some students discussed the transition phase thoroughly with their parents, or at least one parent, while others only announced their decision to their parent(s).

For this chapter, I analyzed how parents discussed their role in the transition phase vis-à-vis the students' own role. Are parents actively guiding students along a certain educational trajectory or are they requiring students to make the decision themselves? I analyzed two focus group discussions, each with four parents, and conducted individual interviews with four parents. I focused on how parents described their role in their children's transition phase, how they perceived their role is, should be and can be. In addition, I analyzed how they legitimate and justify their views in understanding the values and ideals behind.

The parents participating in my research cannot provide a complete picture of Finnish parents' views in general, as the data set is both biased and limited. Recruiting parents to participate in the research was one of the more challenging phases in the data collecting process. Because Finnish schools cannot provide researchers with parents' contact information, I gave my contact information to the contact person in school, with information about the research and a request to contact me. Therefore,

participating in the research demanded some activity and interest of the parents, and may have excluded many non-active/interested parents from the research. Based on the information I received from the parents participating in the research, most parents could be classified as middle-class parents, having a university degree, working in a white-collar job, etc. In addition, all parents were white, with a native Finnish background and (at least) one parent had been awarded a PhD degree. Although the data set of the parents is biased, it can nonetheless provide useful information about some common discourses and values of parents, although it is important to keep in mind the limitations and restrictions of the data.

7.1. Deliberately taking a passive role in the transition phase

Drawing from research by Diane Reay and Stephen Ball (1998), middle class parents are actively involved in the decision-making process of school choice while working class parents allow children to make their own decisions. Reay & Ball (1998) discuss how children of middle class parents can make choices regarding their education 'within predetermined limits', meaning that these parents set these limits, while working class parents use externally imposed limitations instead, including finances, lack of transport, etc. Kosunen & Seppänen (2015) have shown how parents choose schools for their children in accordance with their values, leading to a situation in which affluent children are clustered in certain schools.

In my data set, parents explained how they deliberately chose to take a passive role in the transition phase, allowing students to choose their own path. Parents drew on the intrinsic values of the students; an aspiration that students are capable of making an informed decision about their educational trajectory. Parents expressed pride if their child has made a reflective and independent decision regarding their educational trajectory:

mä koen että meidän ei kyl oikeestaan sinänsä tarvii olla muuta ku se kannustava ja tukeva... meiän nuoret teki itse omat valintansa, molemmat on tehnyt.

To me, it seems like we don't need to be but encouraging and supportive...
our young kids have made their own choices, both of them have.

Tiina, parent, focus group, Helsinki

On the other hand, parents expressed concerns about insufficient guidance of students, concerns about whether the school is providing students with enough information about their choices. Parents expressed the view that the school should also take a passive role in guiding students but were still concerned about how students chose based on the information they received. In accordance with the students, the parents in my data set also stressed intrinsic values when their child was choosing their educational trajectory. Parents hoped their child would find an educational trajectory that interested them and that they would enjoy. Parents were reluctant to tell their child where to apply to, and instead they encouraged their child to make their own decision about their future educational career. Parents claimed their role in the decision-making process was to support the young person in realizing their own aspirations and goals, and not to force the child into a certain educational trajectory. For parents, the ideal situation is one in which students make their own decision about their educational trajectory and the parents' task is to be encouraging and supportive. Some parents expressed a strong realization about their own important role in the transition phase, a realization that parents should be active, supporting students and guiding them in finding their own individual path. Still, the focus was on finding an educational path that was aligned with the student's interests and aspirations. Despite the emphasis on parents' important role, they expressed relief when the student already had an educational path in mind.

ei koulu hirveen silleen aktiivinen ollu, se järjesti sen yhden infotilaisuuden, mut toisaalta en minä odottanutkaan et koulu tekisi minulle kaiken valmiiks, vaan onhan se oltava itse aktiivinen siellä kotona keskustelua jos ei lapsella oo valmista mielikuvaa siitä asiasta, toisaalta me päästiin helpolla, koska hänellä oli niin selvä kuva siitä mitä hän halua tehdä.

the school was not very active, they organized an information event, but on other hand, I wasn't expecting the school to make everything ready for me, one had to be active at home discussing if the child doesn't have a clear image about it, and on the other hand, we were let off the hook, because he had a clear idea about what he wanted to do.

Marko, parent, focus group, Helsinki

Independence in the educational trajectory is regarded as something favorable; even when children transfer to the 7th grade, the middle school level, they may express to their parents how they are not to be handled as children anymore (Metso, 2004; 109). Independence in school and schoolwork is strongly valued throughout the middle school, 7th to 9th grade, in school (Metso, 2004; 111), and the encouragement of independence is also visible in the decision-making process. Although parents said that the decision had to be made by students, they also argued that they are more or less involved in the decision-making process. Parents actively supported their children in the decision-making process with discussions and by investigating about different options. However, they supported their children by taking a passive role, to stress that the students are responsible for realizing their aspirations, finding out about the options and making the decision themselves.

Gill Jones (2009) shows paradoxes and paradigms in parental support, how young people should learn to support and care for themselves, while a changing society, labor market and also different welfare regimes increase the need for parental support. Furthermore, parental support, both as a receiving and giving structure of support, is always bound to values, morals and practical restrictions, as different opportunities to support an (almost) adult child (Jones, 2009). In my analysis, *taking a passive role* is justified with a *pedagogical function*, that students should learn to take responsibility and make decisions themselves. Taking an active role in supporting students and investigating the options is justified if the students are still too young to make decisions and take responsibility themselves and with the responsibility parents have for their children. Some parents take a passive role to allow the student to work out what their aspirations for their future are, allowing an independent decision-making process. Parents justify and legitimate their view on how students should choose their

own educational trajectory not only with *intrinsic values*, but also with a pedagogical aspect. Parents who allow students to choose the educational trajectory themselves also serve a pedagogical purpose and function. A pedagogical function of allowing the child to make their own, independent decision is that young people should be allowed to make their own mistakes, to learn from them. Parents cannot be there 'holding their hands', instead it is an opportunity for young people to make a decision, a decision they need to own.

Tai sit jos mä rupeisin neuvomaan liikaa niin ehkä mun pitäis sit olla jotenkin niinkun semmosella, no.. toisen pitää aikuistua. Ei se niinku semmonen kädestä pitäminen, ei se vaan toimi. Et ne valinnat mitkä tietyssä vaiheessa tekee musta tuntuu että ne alkaa liian aikaisin mutta minkäs sille mahtaa. Mutta niitten valintojen kanssa pitää pystyy elää ja että ne tuntee omikseen. Sitte jos menee päin helvettiä, niin sitte tavallaan pestää pyykit ja jatketaan elämää. Et se niinkun, mut et se että se vastuu niistä valinnoista täytyy jotenkin olla siellä. Liikaa neuvomalla vanhemmat varmaankin ottaa sen vastuun sitte toiselta pois.

Or if I start advising too much, then maybe I should be somehow like that, well .. the other one has to grow up. It's not like holding hands, it's not working. The choices they make at a certain point, it feels they start too too early, but what can one do. But you need to be able to live with these choices and that they feel like your own. Then if it goes to hell, then you kind of just make it right and go on with your life. It's like, the responsibility for the choices has to somehow be there. If parents guide too much, they probably take that responsibility away from them.

Kari, individual interview, Tampere

Parents found it important for the student to make an autonomous decision, justifying this view with the pedagogical purpose it serves. Parents' interference is not beneficial in this discourse, because it is important to allow young people to make their own mistakes. As in Metso's research (2004), all parents were interested in their children's educational trajectory and schoolwork and confirm that parents play an important

role in their children's lives. Therefore, that parents deliberately are taking a passive role, is interpreted as a pedagogical function. However, by allowing students to make their own mistakes, by allowing students potentially to choose a 'wrong' educational trajectory, parents simultaneously verify that the decision is not necessarily final and shows trust in Finnish society and its education system. Allowing students to choose a 'wrong' educational trajectory shows that parents do not find this decision to be crucial, determining the rest of the student's life. This shows that there is trust in the Finnish education system. Parents acknowledge the Finnish education system as being flexible, allowing for second chances, and relying on the education system that a person may change their educational trajectory in the future. The trust in the Finnish education system, in the flexibility and second chances, is also verified with parents' own narratives about their own educational trajectory. Parents reflect on the student's educational trajectory and educational choices by remembering their own educational and professional paths. Many parents expressed their own educational trajectory as fragmented and disjointed, including re-education, change of education and professions. Although many parents had changed their education and professions, they simultaneously talked about education in a continuous way, education and re-education had been present in their lives ongoingly through adulthood. Education is not regarded by parents as being a trajectory one chooses once, instead it is a system of lifelong learning, including re-education, re-schooling and flexibility through life.

7.2. Contesting or accepting the influence of family background

The importance of encouraging students to find their own educational trajectory with minimal influence from parents, is also expressed through a refusal to realize the influence of their own background on their child's decision. Although parents are aware that their child has chosen a similar educational trajectory as one of the parents, they distance their role in the decision-making process. These results are interesting, because they stand in contrast to Metso's results; she found continuity between the background of the parent and the child (Metso, 2004; 167). In Metso's research, parents' own school success, how one enjoys school and education background, is clearly linked to what parents expect from their child. In my results, parents distanced themselves from this continuity, by expressing an unawareness of this connection, or they seem to realize the connection when the connection is pointed out by the researcher. Perhaps it is a connection they do not wish to admit to the researcher,

because that would reveal their perception about how they encourage their child to choose their own educational trajectory.

Research shows how the parents' educational field and professions are 'inherited' by their children (Myrskylä, 2009, Saari 2015). Saari (2015) has shown, that the connection is even stronger between father and son, and mother and daughter. In my data set, several students actively chose an educational trajectory in accordance with their parents' profession or education. For example, Mikko chose an educational trajectory that aligned with both his father's professional career and his elder sister's educational choice. He applied to a vocational school to become a chef, the same school his sister is attending. Although his father works in the restaurant business, the mother was reluctant to admit the connection between their children applying and attending the same educational trajectory as their father. Mikko's mother was surprised when finding out that Mikko was applying for the same field as his father, a restaurant school. She expressed astonishment about Mikko's interest in cooking, that his interest in cooking led to him applying for this field. However, she still emphasized the intrinsic values of his educational choice and emphasized how she allowed him to choose for himself. She justified her satisfaction with the educational choice with expressing that the most important thing is that he enjoys the education, but also that she is satisfied that he applied for admission to a (any) school. She verified the discourse on how it is important to apply to *any* school, but also the importance of intrinsic values when choosing the school. Simultaneously she neglected the role of parents' educational background, by pointing out how Mikko decided to apply to the restaurant school because he enjoys cooking *so much*. In the last sentence she discussed how she was generally happy that someone can study whatever interests them, by leaving out the pronoun ('että niinku on lähteny kouluttaan itteensä' and 'Et jos sitä itte tykkää nii se on pääasia'), and she is no longer referring directly on his choice.

Mikon äiti: Mut tota (.) sillai että mä olin yllättyny vaan niinku Mikon valinnasta, että se lähti- [H: joo]-lähti sitten niinku samalle al- tai no tavallaan samalle alalle et ku isänsä on ravintola-alal nii sitte on-[H: joo] -sitten on Minna (sisko) ja sitten Mikko perässä et. [H: joo] Et jotenkin et mää yllätyin siit et se niinkun tykkää ruoanlaitosta sitten niinku paljon, että se kiinnostaa niin paljon, et haluaa lähtee opiskelemaan.

Haastattelija: Joo. Joo. Olitko tyytyväinen hänen päätökseen?

Mikon äiti: Aina mä oon tyytyväinen siitä, että niinku on lähteny kouluttaan itteensä, on se sit mikä tahansa. Et jos sitä itte tykkää nii se on pääasia.

Mikko's mother: But yes (.) like I was surprised about Mikko's decision, that he [H: yes] went to the same fie- or well kind of to the same field as his father is in the restaurant business so then [H: yes] then there's Minna (the sister) and the Mikko after that [H: yes]. So somehow, I was surprised that he likes cooking so much, that he wanted to go on and study that.

Interviewer: yes. Yes. Were you satisfied with his decision?

Mikko's mother: I'm always happy, that one goes on to educate themselves, whatever it might be. So, if one likes it, that's the main thing.

Mikko's mother, individual interview, Tampere

Jesse's mother also expressed through the interview how it is important to find an educational field that interests Jesse. Jesse decided to apply to undertake vocational education in avionics, a field his father is currently working in. In addition, the boy completed his mandatory period of work experience (TET) training in this field. However, the mother insisted that the decision was made by the boy and as with Mikko's mother, at first she refused to admit that the parents had any influence on the decision. However, in the end she saw the connection between the father's profession and their son's educational choice. The laughter at the end reveals the understanding of how the father's profession implicitly may have influenced the decision, although they have perhaps not actively pushed their son in this direction.

Haastattelija: Joo. Tota, ootko sinä tai hänen isä yrittäny vaikuttaa tähän päätökseen et mihin hän hakee?

Jessen äiti: Ei.

Haastattelija: Ei?

Jessen äiti: Ei kauheesti.

Haastattelija: Joo.

Jessen äiti: Ei sillain oikeestaan että tota, Jesse oli ysiluokan TET-harjoittelussa (paikan nimi) lennostossa.

Haastattelija: Joo.

Jessen äiti: Ja ilmeisesti sieltä on sitte tää mekaniikkapuoli -

Haastattelija: Okei.

Jessen äiti: - ja lentokoneisiin kiinnostuminen. Tietysti (.) emmä tiedä paljonko sillä on tekemistä että isänsä on lennostossa töissä mutta ((molemmat nauravat))

Interviewer: Yes. Well, have you, or his father tried to influence on this decision where to apply to?

Jesse's mother: no.

Interviewer: no?

Jesse's mother: Not that much.

Interviewer: ok

Jesse's mother: not, like that really, well, Jesse attended the (name of place) air command for TET practice¹¹

Interviewer: yes

Jesse's mother: and apparently from there he got interested in mechanics

Interviewer: ok

Jesse's mother: and airplanes. Of course (.) I don't know how much this has to do with his father working in avionics but (both laughing)

Jesse's mother, individual interview, Tampere

11 TET period: the mandatory period of work experience of 1-2 weeks students in the ninth grade carry out when they are studying.

Although parents hope that their child will make a decision about their future career based on their interests, some still recognize that the educational background of the parents may guide students in the decision-making process. Anna's mother expressed the view that parents simply may have more knowledge about a certain educational trajectory, i.e., their own educational trajectory. Although she emphasized that it is important for her daughter to find her own educational trajectory, she still realized that she and her husband, both with a university degree, have more knowledge about academic education than vocational:

elikka vaikka mä oon käyny yliopiston nii heidän ei tarvi sitä tehdä. Että he saa itse valita sen oman alueensa mutta näin tietysti on että mä tiedän itse enemmän tän tyyppisestä koulutuksesta ja sitte, mun miehellenikin on, hänellä on kaks yliopistotutkintoo suorittanu, että meillä painottuu tää akateeminen koulutus tietysti näissä meidän omissa näkökulmissa väkisinkin. Tosiaan mä toivon että he löytäis sen oman alansa.

So, although I've attended university, they don't have to. So, they can choose their field themselves but of course it is so, that I know more about these types of education and furthermore, my husband has completed two university degrees, so for us the emphasis from our perspective is clearly on academic education. Indeed, I hope they find their own field.

Anna's mother, individual interview, Tampere

However, although parents may have more knowledge about a certain educational trajectory, no parent admits that they have any interest in pushing their child along the same educational trajectory. Instead, all parents justified their views with intrinsic values, the importance of finding one's own educational and professional path. These results stand in conflict with Metso's results (2004, 167-170), where parents admitted and acknowledged the continuity between parents' education or profession and the child's educational trajectory. Perhaps the conflict could be explained with the different background of parents in the data sets? In the personal interviews in my data set, the parents were often representatives of the middle class, with a university degree. In Metso's research, the citations she used are from parents with a working-class

background, although her data set also entails middle class parents. Perhaps working-class parents in her research provided the ‘best’ examples of continuity between parents’ educational background and these parents’ expectations of their child? Perhaps middle-class parents only interfere when they feel that the child is not making the right decision, a decision ‘within predetermined limits’ (Reay & Ball, 1998). In addition, in my research, it was always assumed that the student needed to apply to a school, any school. No parent considered the option of dropping out of school.

Parents did not seem to realize nor want to admit the influence of their own educational and professional trajectory on their child, although the connection in many cases appeared to be evident. Parents did not actively push their child along a certain educational trajectory, however they might ‘set the stage’ (Harris & Robinson, 2016) so that the choice feels natural. Harris and Robinson (2016) discussed how parents are ‘setting the stage’ for their children, pointing out the abstract influence parents have on their child’s educational trajectory, instilling academic motivation in their child, supporting efforts at school and in extracurricular activities so that the child’s perspective on life and school is gradually changing. Therefore, it is not surprising that students might choose a similar educational trajectory to their parents, although parents and students still emphasize the intrinsic values and the importance of students’ using their own agency in the decision-making process.

7.3. Restricting and allowing choices within predetermined limits

Students are required to make their own decision about their educational trajectory and parents are aware that in an ideal situation, they are not supposed to push the students into a certain educational trajectory. On one hand, parents do not want to interfere with the decision-making process, but on the other hand, parents do not want to see their children applying for entry to the ‘wrong’ field, although choosing the wrong field sometimes can be regarded as beneficial in a pedagogical sense. What happens if a child does not choose an educational trajectory ‘within predetermined limits’? (Reay & Ball, 1998). How do parents justify their decision to guide students into a different educational trajectory if they consider the student’s initial decision is ‘wrong’?

Parents who do not want to see their children applying for the ‘wrong’ field, are aware of the common discourse of students using their own agency and deciding

for themselves and they are aware of the disapproval that would follow pushing students into making the decision. As parents hope their child makes an informed decision about their educational trajectory, they implicitly want that the decision to align with the 'correct' values, values aligned with the parent's assumption about the right decision. In addition, parents are aware that students also wish to make their own decision, and that students are expected to make their own decision. Therefore, parents cannot interfere directly, because the discourse that students are expected to make their own decision is strong among both parents and students. Therefore, when directing students to a certain trajectory, they need to complete this task secretly, because they are aware that students need to make their own decision, a decision made by parents is not valued and not considered to be correct. Parents discuss how they cannot tell a student directly where they should apply to, instead they express the pressure they apply in terms of 'encouraging', 'insinuating' and 'guiding' students in order for them to 'realize' the right decision themselves.

Haastattelija: millainen rooli vanhemmilla on täs siirtymävaiheessa toiselle asteelle?

Tiina: on se aika iso tärkeä... pitää olla *kannustava* ja *uskoa* siihen lapseen.

Benita: kyl meill oli ainakin semmonen ohjaava sit kuitenkin kun just ei oo semmosta selkeetä mitä halua niin tavallaan piti osata sille *vihjailla* se et se löys itse tavallaan itse oivalsi sen mitä me haettiin koska ton ikäselle *ei voi suoraan sanoa* että hae kuule tonne et se *piti ohjata että se ite oivalsi sen mikä se voisi olla* että kyl ne on vielä sen verran pieniä että pitää olla mukana sitte siinä vaikka ne tavallaan sen itsenäisesti tekee *mutta..*

Interviewer: what is the role of parents in the transition phase to upper secondary education?

Tiina: It's kind of big, one should be *encouraging* and *believe* in the child

Benita: well at least we had a guiding (role), because as there is not a clear view what (they) want so in one way one need to know how to hint so that (they) find in a way by themselves, realize what we were looking for, because

to a kid that age *you cannot tell them directly* that you should apply to that place, *one have to guide them that they realize what (the study place) could be*, so they are in that way small, that one has to be with them although they are doing the decision independently *but...*

Focus group with parents, Helsinki

Parents justified their decision to guide or insinuate students in a certain direction with the younger-aged students: that students are too young to choose. Parents agreed that 15-16-year-old students are very young to choosing their educational trajectory. Raisa explained how a 15-year-old is very young to decide about their future, indicating a lack of experience and knowledge about different options:

Raisa: Hmm.. tää on jotenkin kauheen nuori ikä tää viistoista vuotta tehdä päätöksii oman elämänsä suhteen mitä mä haluan olla isona. Haluunko mä olla lattianlaittaja vai haluunko mä arkkitehdiksi, ni mist se sitä viel tietää?

Raisa: well, it is an awfully young age, 15 years, to make decisions about their own life, what do I want to do in the future. Do I want to be a floor installer, an architect, how would anyone know at that age?

Focus group with parents, Turku

In particular for students who are not 'talented' in a certain field or have expressed a 'deep interest' in a particular field, parents suggested general upper secondary education as an option providing three more years to reflect on the decision. Parents justified their view on why general upper secondary school is a better choice for their children with the young age of students, that a 15-16-year-old student is still too young to know what they want to do in the future. Saana said that students are very young when they complete from basic education and still young when they successfully complete upper secondary school. Therefore, a general upper secondary school provides students with more time to think about what they want to do in the future. So even

though a student shows talent and interest in a certain profession, students may still educate themselves for a profession after finishing general upper secondary school.

Saana: Määkin olin nimittäin sitä mieltä et ku hän on teknisesti lahjakas ja... mut turha käydä täs on pari vuotta aikaa viel, ni mä olin sitä mielt et ammattikouluun vaan, mut mä olen muuttanu ja ollaan niinku molemmat muutettu hänen kanssaa sitä kantaa et tottakai kannattaa käydä, hän on noin nuori ja hänel menee koulu tosi hyvin, et yks kolme vuotta, hän on tosi nuori kun hän pääsee ylioppilaaks.

Raisa: Niinpä.

Saana: Sit voi miettiä mihin menee.

Raisa: Kyllä. Kyllä. Näin on.

Saana: I also thought that because he's technically talented and... but still there's a couple of years' time to, so I thought that why not go to vocational school, but I have changed, and both of us have changed our mind, that of course he should continue, he's young and his school goes well, so one three years, he will still be young when completing the matriculation exam.

Raisa: that's right

Saana: then he can think where he wants to go

Raisa: yes. Yes. That's right.

Focus group with parents, Turku

Parents may also justify their decision to influence the students' decision-making process by the importance of protecting students from becoming disappointed. Laila, a mother of a 15-year-old boy applying for entry to a general upper secondary school, was worried about her son having too high ambitions and expectations about his educational trajectory. Therefore, she saw it as her duty to support her son as much as possible, to reduce risks of disappointment.

Laila: se on aika iso rooli taas.. täytyy sanoo että pojalla on ainakin odotukset hirveen suuret ja siinä sit haluisi tukee mahdollisimman paljon ettei tulis mitään pettymystä ja sitten toivoa että hän pääsis sinne mihin on toivonut tietysti.

Laila: it's a pretty huge role once more... have to say that the boy's expectations are big and there one wants to support as much as possible so that there won't be any disappointments and then hope that he gets into a place according to his aspirations.

Focus group with parents, Turku

All these examples show the reluctance to interfere in the decision-making process. Students are expected to make the decision themselves, and neither parents nor school are allowed into the decision-making process. In two of the schools, parents discussed the various levels of perceived 'direction' from school, and this was highly condemned by all parents. Simultaneously, all parents expressed awareness of their own limited scope of action to interfere with the decision-making process. When uttering their own wishes and scope of action to interfere, they argued that the student's wishes and wants matter the most in the process. When describing how parents have actively or passively interfered with the decision-making process, they still underlined their interference that the intrinsic values of the student matter the most and how the most important thing is to find an educational trajectory that aligns with the student's wishes and interests.

7.4. School legitimating and reinforcing class divisions

According to the Marxist approach, schools legitimate and reinforce class divisions and students are socialized into the broader capitalist workforce (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). One parent of a student from the school in the most disadvantaged area complained about how students in that particular school were encouraged to apply for entry to certain types of (vocational) upper secondary school. This middle-class parent was disappointed about a certain presumption he acknowledged from the school; that

students from this school were to choose a certain educational trajectory, instead of being provided with all available options. When asked about the school's role in the transition phase from basic education to further education, this parent expressed the view that students from this school were more encouraged to apply for vocational schools' programmes, rather than general upper secondary schools. Simultaneously, he hesitated when articulating his answer, keeping a pause before his reply and expressing 'I don't know' and making an excuse for expressing his view in 'a negative tone'.

Marko: sill on iso merkitys ja.... mä en tiedä... nyt puhun vähän negatiiviseen sävyyn, mä olen hiukan yllättynyt siitä viestistä mikä täältä tuli nimenomaan koulutukseen ja sen viestintään et minkälaiseen kouluun mennään ja siinä mulle tuli vaan mieleen et hiukan haluttiin ohjata että kun ollaan täällä koulussa niin mennään ton tyyppiseen ja olet tämmönen oppilas niin menet ilman muuta tommoseen kouluun et tommoseen kouluun ja tietysti jalat maassa pitää olla se on selvä mut tuota...

Marko: It has a huge impact... I don't know... now I talk in a negative tone, I was a bit surprised about the message concerning education and about the information about going to what kind of school and there I came to think of that in some amount (they) wanted to guide that when you are in this kind of school you go to that kind of and when you are this kind of student you go without doubt to that kind of school and not to that kind of school and of course one have to have their feet on the ground that's clear but like...

Focus group with parents, Helsinki

All actions and presumptions need to be placed in the right context, to allow for correct interpretations of the analysis. For this middle-class parent, the assumption about what his aim was for his child stood in conflict with the school's view of what kind of education was appropriate. This view can be compared with the suggestions from Brunila et al. (2011) that schools may guide students into a certain educational trajectory of 'their kind' and interpreted by a more Marxist view, stating how schools socialize students into a capitalist workforce, where children are learned to adapt their predetermined role in society (Bowles & Gintis, 1975).

Furthermore, Reay (1998) discuss an ‘institutional habitus’, how students in a certain type of school, internalize the norms of what schools are acceptable to apply to next, and if a student wishes to apply outside these acceptable norms, they experience a sense of being left without support. If parents felt that the student was making a ‘wrong’ decision, they interfered with the decision, justifying it on the basis of the child’s young age and lack of life experience. Raisa admitted that she thinks that her son’s place is in general upper secondary school. According to the parent, the school was pushing the son towards vocational school, so the parent therefore needed to interfere. She reflects on the conflict between school and home and justifies her view with arguments on lack of experience and knowledge. Also in another school, the guidance towards vocational education was dominant.

Raisa: kuitenkin se mikä mua häiritsi jossain vaihees oli semmonen et tääl painotettiin iha kauheesti tääl koulussa sitä et ammattikoulu, ammattikoulu, ammattikoulu. Ei oikeastaas ollu muuta vaihtoehtoa ku ammattikoulu. Sit ku me taas koton juteltii et ku sul on niin epäselvää vielä mitä sä haluat ja ku sä et nyt iha pöhkökää siel koulus oo, et josko sinne lukioon, ihan vaan sen vuoks et vähä selkiintys et mitä mä sit haluaisin ja onha niitä sit aikuisillekkii niitä ammattikouluja viel sit jos sen lukion haluaa jatkaa.

Raisa: However, what bothered me at some point was the huge accentuating of vocational school, vocational school, vocational school in this school. There really weren’t any options other than vocational school. And then when we talked at home that when it’s still so unclear for you what you want and when you are not a fool in school, so what about general upper secondary education, just to clarify what I want and still there are vocational schools for adults if one wants to continue after general upper secondary education

Focus group with parents, Turku

Raisa justified her view on why her child should apply for entry to general upper secondary school with two different reasons. One reason is that the student is not sure about what he wants to do in the future: “*ku sul on niin epäselvää vielä mitä sä haluat*” (*it’s still so unclear for you what you want*) and the other reason seems to be that the

student is smart enough for general upper secondary school: “*ku sä et nyt iha pöhhökää siel koulus oo*” (*when you are not a fool in school*). The first reason indicates intrinsic values, the importance of students entering a field of their interest. The other reason is pointing towards a view of differentiation of students, that general upper secondary education is an appropriate place for students who do well at school.

Although parents agreed that students should make their own decisions about their educational trajectory, and that the choice should align with the student’s own interests and intrinsic values, they still pointed out the differences between vocational and general upper secondary education. In the end, Raisa still justified her view with intrinsic values, that the most important thing is for her child to find out what they want to do in the future. She presented the main reason why she did not find vocational education to be a good idea at this point by referring to intrinsic values: that no vocational education programs are of interest to the child at this point.

Raisa: Mut kun sanottiin et ammattikoulu on niinku parempi, ni sillo mä otin yhteyttä tänne kouluun sit ja, vähän sit, en nyt pahasti, mut sanoin vaan sitä et ku sitä painotetaan niin paljon sitä ammattikoulua et se on nyt vähä ristis tän meidän kotipuhumisen kans, et meijä laps on melkee niinku aivopesty tääl koulus jo. (nauraa) No, saatiin me sit kääntymään kuiteki sit sinne lukion puolelle sit ku me yhdes sitte koton juteltiin ja hänkin sit sitä mieltä oli et niin se sit tapahtuu että hän menee sinne. Enhä mä nyt mitää kauheen painostettu.. (nauraa)

Elina: No comments (nauraa)

Raisa: No comments nii. (nauraa) nii, lukio. No ei vain ei se nii oo. Se oli meijä lukion tarkoituksena se et hän selvittä istelleen et mitä hän haluas tehdä isona, ku ei hänel oikeesti, ei hänel ollu mitää vaihtoehtoa niistä ammattikoululistoista. Ykskään ei kiinnostanu. Et se oli sillo huono mennä semmoseen ammattikouluunkaan jos ei mikään linja kiinnosta.

Raisa: But when they said that vocational school is better, then I contacted the school and then, a little bit, not much at all, but I only said that when they are so much emphasizing vocational school, that this stands in conflict

with what we're talking at home, that our child is almost brainwashed here at school [laughing]. Well, we got him turned towards general upper secondary school, when we discussed this at home and his opinion was also that it happens, he's going there. I wasn't pushing too much... [laughing]

Elina: no comments [laughing]

Raisa: no comments, that's right... so general upper secondary school. So that's like it's not like that. It was our purpose of general upper secondary school to find out for himself what he wants to do when he grows up, when he really didn't have a choice from the lists of vocational schools. Not one interested (him). So, then it is not satisfactory to go to a vocational school if none of the fields is of interest.

Focus group with parents, Turku

Raisa explained that she contacted the school, when the school, in her opinion, was guiding her child too much in the direction of vocational school, that conflicts with her own view. She expressed awareness of the paradox on one hand, guiding her child, and simultaneously advocating for the child to choose for themselves, by adding laughter and humor to her arguments. Elina, another parent in the discussion, supported Raisa's views, by joining her in with a humorous comment on 'no comment' and laughter. Raisa also expressed her view with the use of pronouns, that it was 'our' purpose with the choice of general upper secondary school to let the child decide what he wanted to do when he had grown up: *Se oli meijä lukion tarkoituksena se et hän selvittäis istelleen et mitä hän haluaa tehdä isona* (It was our purpose with general upper secondary school to find out for himself what he wants to do when he grows up) however not defining who 'we' are in this discussion; meaning herself and the child, herself and the other parent or who? In addition, at the end of her argument, she left out the pronouns, taking the discussion on a general level, leaving out whose interests and whose arguments she was actually stating. She is stated that none of the fields was of interest, leaving out who was not interested in the fields, she or the child: *Ykskään ei kiinnostanu. Et se oli sillo huono mennä semmoseen ammattikouluunkaan jos ei mikään linja kiinnostaa/ Not one interested (him). So, then it is not satisfactory to go to a vocational school if none of the fields is of interest.* Leaving out the pronoun may express a statement that is considered something all agrees on, that according to her it is general knowledge that

it is of no use attending vocational school if one is not interested in any of the fields represented there.

7.5. Conclusions

Analyzing parents' discussions about their role in their child's transition phase, there is a strong discourse on how students are expected to take responsibility in the decision-making process. Parents explained how the students *should* make their own decision, referring to the pedagogical aspects in their upbringing. The story parents tell, the discourse on how they discuss their child's transition to further education, underlines a strong agreement that the choice has to be made by the student, and that neither parents nor school should interfere with this decision. Parents encourage their 15-16-year-olds to reflect on their aspirations and wishes, and they trust the school in providing information about students' options. They also trust the school to provide students with personal guidance on how grades, health issues and entrance tests affect the student's opportunities to apply for entry to a certain school. However, parents have been 'setting the stage' (Harris & Robinson, 2016) for their children all through their childhood. On one hand, parents can be traditionally involved in their child's educational achievements, supporting with homework or taking them to extra-curricular activities or museums, guiding them towards a specific educational trajectory. On the other hand, how parents are 'setting the stage' remains unclear, how they steer their child in the background, affecting their academic performance in abstract ways, gradually changing the child's perspective on life (Harris & Robinson, 2016). In addition, Reay & Ball (1998) talk about a 'choice within predetermined limits', as a strategy middle class parents use. In the discussions with parents in my data set, many emphasized the student's own agency in the transition phase, but when the decision is not acceptable to the parent, parents do not hesitate to interfere. Kivinen et al. (2012) stated how the differences in equal opportunities are initiated before the student attends school. Privileged students of highly educated parents continue further on their educational path than students of lesser educated parents.

If parents approve the choice of upper secondary school, they trust the school with the guidance process. However, if the values and criteria of the school collide with the values of the home, parents react and respond with alternative options. In these cases, parents express conflicting views about their children's decision-making process in the

transition phase. On one hand, parents realize that children need to make their own decisions about their future, and they want their children to make their own decision. On the other hand, parents wish that their children are making the 'right' decision about their future. What the right decision looks like depends on the parents' views, and the student's abilities, interests and prospects. If parents are to interfere, they need to justify their interference. Therefore, parents refer to students' young age, students' lack of experience and lack of knowledge. Interestingly, students' young age and lack of experience and lack of knowledge are not considered challenges if the parent approves of the decisions young people make. For example, in cases when the student chooses a similar, or even the same educational field as one of the parents, this decision is not contested. Instead, this decision is accepted and regarded as being a decision made by the student. Parents do not see their own role in the decision-making process when the student chooses a similar trajectory to the one the parent would have chosen. Although their role may be passive, i.e., that they are not actively pushing the student along a certain trajectory, parents do not seem to realize the connection between the parents' background and the students chosen educational trajectory. Although all students are young and may lack significant experience and knowledge about the options, the lack of experience and lack of knowledge are not mentioned as a problem or as a hinderance in choosing an educational trajectory if the decision aligns with the parents' values and interests.

The way the parents in my data set described their approach to their child's educational choice, seemed similar to middle-class parents' way of speaking in the United States (Lareau, 2002, Lareau, 2011), emphasizing negotiation, reasoning and entitlement. As pointed out previously (Chapter 5.1), the parents in my research can be classified as middle-class parents, actively participating in their children's' lives. Therefore, the parental data set is biased, and the way of speaking, the values and approach to the student's decision cannot be generalized to comprehend Finnish parents' views in general. Parents who do not actively take part in their child's decision-making process, including working class parents, could result in a quite different perspective. Concluding from the students' and school professionals' interviews, there are parents who do not actively support and reflect on their child's educational trajectory, however unfortunately I did not succeed in including any of these parents in my data set.

8 Professionals' reflections on the decision-making process

How students choose their educational trajectory must be contextualized by analyzing the role of the school professionals and other professionals in the decision-making process. The school's and professionals' role can be analyzed from both an institutional perspective and from an individual perspective, i.e., how the school as an institution supports their students and how professionals, in school and outside school, support young people in finding their own educational trajectory. School may be regarded as an institution in which students are socialized into the broader capitalist workforce, casting a 'long shadow' in education (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Students learn not only certain subjects in school, but also norms and to follow rules according to the 'hidden curriculum' (Broady, 1981). Students internalize how the bourgeoisie control the workforce and learn how to interact in the capitalist system (Althusser, 1971, Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The institutional aspect of school has also been discussed in Finnish research by e.g. Ulla-Maija Salo (1999), who describes how first graders learn the order of the school. Small children are socialized into the school system, but simultaneously children also learn from their families, and internalize values and culture through their family of the world they live in (Salo, 1999). Teachers and other school professionals maintain and reinforce institutional practices but may also change them. What children learn from their families and how this affects learning in school as well as their educational and professional path has been discussed by social reproduction theorists. In addition, there may be a connection in how children succeed in school depending on their background versus their teachers' background. Because of similar values, culture and way of speaking as their teachers, children of the dominant classes may be successful at school, as they have internalized the linguistic codes and cultural resources which are required in order to be successful in education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Brunila et al. (2011) took one step further in pointing out prejudices of teachers, the power and influence school professionals may have on their students regarding decisions in the educational trajectory and how educational trajectories are affected by taken-for-granted cultural assumptions.

In this chapter, I have focused on how school professionals reflect on their responsibility in guiding and supporting students in the transition phase from basic education to further education and training. I elaborate on how educational professionals in schools reflect on students' decision-making process in the transition phase and how they define their role in supporting students from different social, financial and national/ethnic backgrounds. I focused on how school professionals discuss family background, the role of the student's own agency and national school

policy regarding the transition phase from basic education to further education and how discourses regarding social inequality are legitimated, justified and contested. Furthermore, I analyzed how school professionals reflect on their role in supporting students with various needs. My aim was to discuss the school's role in producing, maintaining or changing prevailing structures of inequality in educational trajectories, through the actions of the school professionals.

The data from the local level were drawn from interviews and focus groups with educational experts who work with young people in the final year of compulsory education and in the transition phase. These experts comprise teachers, guidance counsellors, school social workers, principals, special education teachers, youth workers, psychologists, etc. These are professionals who have been working with young people for a long time, and who have developed a deep perspective on young people's opportunities in contemporary society.

8.1. Contesting, accepting or reinforcing predetermined educational trajectories

In discussions with educational professionals, many professionals explained how educational trajectories are predetermined, based on students' background. Intergenerational transmission of social disadvantage is often discussed as obvious, self-evident and a natural continuation of family history. Professionals did not refer directly to class, the style of speaking, to cultural capital or how these students interact with them (cf Bourdieu, 1984, Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Lareau, 2011), but indirectly to their socioeconomic position, or as some school professionals state, to the circumstances at home. School professionals explained that many students end up on a similar educational trajectory and in a similar profession as their parents and this is justified with research on social inheritance, the model from home, parents' insufficient resources, or parents' attitudes and opinions about their child's education. The school's role in these cases is considered to be irrelevant. School professionals justified their view by explaining that despite supporting students in many ways, school cannot influence the student's life trajectory without support from the home. Research was used to justify why the school may 'fail' in supporting students, and to explain and validate why some students fail despite the support system that is available. Simultaneously, school professionals abandon their responsibility by

relying on these statistics, justifying their lack of success in supporting the students with the clear connection between future position in education and the mother's educational background.

Niin mut se miksi tippuu, se johtuu eniten kuitenkin siitä kodista, et sehän siin on, et aina sanotaan et se on se äidin koulutustaso, et me pystytään täällä tekemään tiettyjä juttuja, mutta meidän vaikutusmahdollisuudet on rajalliset kuitenkin että, et en mä oikeestaan tiedä mitä lisää me oikeestaan voitais täällä tehdä, mulla on nyt jo semmonen et niinku potkitaan näitä takapuolelle niin paljon kun vaan voi. Ei varmaan missään muussa koulussa potkita niin paljon takapuolelle kuin meidän ja auteta kun meidän koulussa, siis kyllä ei voi sanoo et niitä jätetään tyhjän päälle. Ja silti kaikista ei saa, ei silti millään niinku.

So, why someone drops out, it depends on the home, that's it, it's always said that it is the mother's level of education, we can do here certain things, but our influence is limited, however, that, I actually do not know what we could do here in addition to all we're already doing, I have a feeling that we're already pushing them as much as we can, I don't think that any other school is doing as much as we are and helping them, and still, so there's no way that one can say that we leave them alone, and still, it's impossible to get something from some of them.

Language teacher, focus group, Helsinki

School professionals use research on social inheritance, and in particular statistics, in legitimating and justifying why educational trajectories are predetermined. Educational professionals refer to previous research, from the national level, showing that students from a certain background turn up on certain educational trajectories and professions. Educational professionals at school refer to an inheritance of social background, such as families with several generations' unemployment.

Vaikuttaa sit, kun kuitenkin niin, tutkimustenkin, opetushallituksen tutkimustenkin mukaan, lapsen koulumenestyksestä selittyy 70% vanhempien koulutustaustan mukaan, niin kyl se näkyy

It seems that, after all, according to research, research from the National Board of Education, the child's school success is explained by parents' background up to 70%, so, yes, it is obvious

Vice principal, individual interview, Helsinki

Different values regarding education result in conflicts with both students and parents. Values are closely connected to family background; what kind of education is relevant (Bourdieu, 1984, Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Lareau, 2011). Some professionals explicitly discussed the culture of the home, how the 'culture of doing' is lacking. They discussed the support the model students receive from their home, and how this model or the culture they have been internalizing affects their attitudes towards school work:

Ei oo semmost niinku mallia sieltä kotoa, joskus niinku jos ilkeesti sanos tän, tai en mä tiedä onks se ilkeestikään sanottu, mut kun se fiksuin osa perheestä käy koulua, sillon on aika vaikee tehdä sitä kodin ja koulun välistä yhteistyötä. Et kuitenkin sitä hakee sitä tukee sieltä kodista mut sitä ei saa sieltä koskaan, ei oo semmost niinku tekemisen kulttuurin kulttuuria siel tota kotonakaan.

There's no model from home, sometimes it's like, it's mean to say, or I don't know if it's mean, but when the smartest person in the family is at school, it's somehow difficult to cooperate with the family. Anticipating support from the home, but never receiving it, the culture of doing is totally lacking.

Guidance counselor, Turku

Teachers and guidance counselors reported frustration when dealing with parents who do not share similar values regarding education. These parents have a "couldn't care less" attitude according to professionals, i.e., they lack interest in supporting their children in finding a place in education, or diminish the value of education in the eyes of their children. Educational professionals were concerned about students whose

parents do not encourage education and put down the value of education, e.g. parents with only basic education or some vocational training who condemned general upper secondary education, the traditional route to studying at university. In this discourse, there often seemed to be a dialogue between actors at school and in the home, but a conflict between the value and relevance of education. In this discourse it is also common that the aspirations parents have for their children may conflict with the student's own aspirations and wishes or the views of the school. This is a discourse in which students are situated in a difficult situation, if the school, parents and students themselves disagree about the prospective educational trajectory.

aika moni vois jopa mennä yliopistoon jos heillä on joku joka on ohjannut sinne yliopistoon menoa mutta jos lähtökohdat on se että on tämmönen opistotasoinen koulutus tai alempi ku opistotasonen koulutus vanhemmilla niin ei jos siellä ei oo ketään kuka tökkii eteenpäin niin ne jää helposti samalla tasolle et ne ei lähde sinne yliopistoon hakemaan sitä paikkaa vaikka iteleen vaik olis taitojakin

Many students could go to university if they had someone who had guided them towards university but if the starting point is that they have a vocational education, if there isn't someone who's poking them forward, they easily get into the same level, they won't go after a place at the university even though they would have the ability

Vice principal, individual interview, Turku

Educational professionals agree that the model from home explains much of the lack of motivation that can be found in students' motivation and aspirations. They expressed their concern about students who come from homes with several generations' unemployment. According to school professionals, students who have never seen their parents work, and who have been accustomed to their parents living on social benefits, receive a model that this way of living is 'acceptable' and 'normal'. Thus, the discourse of predetermined educational trajectories is legitimated by the socioeconomic background, or the model from home. Furthermore, according to school professionals,

in an area where several families are living in the same way, this way of living is normalized. School professionals also described a sense of powerlessness of not being able to support these students; they said they could not help these students although a lot of work and effort is put into helping students. For these professionals, the 'model from home' explained why some students fail, as if students are internalizing the model from home without further reflections or wishes to change this predetermined path.

koulukuraattori: Sit on meillä niit- niitäkin perheitä joissa on niinku vähemmän- ne lapset on- tai lapsista on tulossa toi kolmas sukupolvi jotka ei käy töissä, ainakin toinen. ((Haastattelija ja koulupsykologi hymähtelevät myönnyttelevästi)) Meillä on näitä lapsia joiden vanhemmat ei varmaan ikinä käyneet töissä.

Haastattelija: Joo-o.

koulukuraattori: Johan sen tulevaisuudenkuvatkin on jotenki menee siihen et sossu sitten maksaa.

koulupsykologi: Niin.

koulukuraattori: Et tietenkin sit on vähän vaikee motivoida mihinkään niinkun hakuun ja- ((Haastattelija ja koulupsykologi myönnyttelevät: joo, aivan)) et tulevaisuuden niinkun miettiminen saattaa olla tosi vaikee ku ei oo niitä malleja että-

Haastattelija: Aivan.

koulukuraattori: Mitä muuta voi olla sitä kotona olemista.

School social worker: we have these families, where there are less- the children are becoming – like third generation who does not work, or at least second (generation). ((other participants agreeing)) We have these children who have never seen their parents work

Interviewer: yes

School social worker: so the image of the future is like, social welfare is paying

School psychologist: that's right

School social worker: so of course, there's a bit of a challenge to motivate for the application and thinking about the future may be very hard when there's no models like

Interviewer: sure

School social worker: like what else is there besides being at home

School psychologist and school social worker, Helsinki

While many school professionals emphasized how family background determined students' attitudes, values and decision-making process, other professionals implicitly emphasized the important and supporting role of the school. School professionals also raised concerns about how students will manage after basic education, by reflecting on what will happen to students after basic education, and that students then will realize how much support they received from school and that they will realize that they are on their own and that no one will be interested in them after basic education except for the police. In this view, the parents' and family's role is missing or remains unclear, and the school's role is emphasized as supporting:

Kyllä, nimenomaan ne tajuaa sen että koulu et mehän ollaan mielettömän suojelevia ja halutaan niinku niil oppilaille kaikkee hyvää et kyl ne sen pohjimmiltaan tietää ja sit sen todellakin sen tajuaminen et kun sää täältä lähdet ni jollet sää itte sitä halua ni sinusta ei oo kiinnostunut ku poliisi.

Yes, they [students] definitely realize that we're tremendously protective here and want the best for the students, deep inside they know that, and then they actually realize it when they are leaving that when you are actually leaving no one else is interested in you than the police

Teacher, individual interview, Turku

Discussions about what the parents' role is, should be and cannot be, was often present in the discussions with educational professionals. Educational professionals agree that not all students are supported in the same way by parents or other family. Furthermore, lack of parental support has put students in different positions and providing different opportunities which has a clear impact on school achievement. Consequently, students who are not supported by their family do not have the same opportunities in the transition phase from basic education to further education in comparison to students who are supported by their family. In the most extreme cases, educational professionals referred to students who come from families with social problems, including problems with alcohol/drug abuse, mental illness, or other social problems. In all discussions, school professionals justified their own restrictions in supporting students by pointing out the challenges in supporting students who are not supported by their parents.

Opettaja 3: ei koulu loppujenlopuks voi tehdä kovin paljon jos ne perusasiat on pielessä. Siis se koti.

Opettaja 4: Koulu tukee sitä kotia mut se ei voi kodiks muuttua.

Teacher 3: School cannot do a lot if there are problems in fundamental basics. That is, the home.

Teacher 4: School supports the home but cannot turn into a home.

Four teachers, focus group, Turku

School professionals and experts agree that family is regarded as the most important influencer, guiding students in the educational trajectory. Educational professionals acknowledge that parents have strong opinions on the substance of their child's education. For instance, some professionals recognize that some parents have chosen specific school subjects for their children who are already in primary school (cf. Kosunen 2014, Kosunen & Seppänen, 2015). Furthermore, in the transition phase from basic education to further education parents may have strong opinions on whether the child should apply to vocational education or general upper secondary

school. Interestingly, the school's role in this discourse is more a matter of providing students with information about further education, but not questioning parents' views or choices. This can be exemplified with a discussion with a school nurse. This is a typical example in this discourse of the distinction between school's role and parents' role in the transition phase to further education. Parents are seen as a threat to students' own decision-making process. The school's role is seen as an institution providing students with neutral, good quality, information, from which the students should be able to make a rational decision.

Terveydenhoitaja: No, kyllä se varmaan suurin tuki mistä pitäis lähtee liikkeelle on varmaan se koti. koti, kodin niinku se semmonen (.) tuki että (.) niinku niissä vahvistetaan niitä (.) tai niinku varmistaa niitä nuoren vahvuuksia tavallaan ja. Ja kotihan näkee niitä nuoren vahvuuksia sit kuitenkin enemmän et mihin siitä ehkä on ja mihin ei oo että. Kyllä varmaan kodin painostus on näky jo pelkästään niissä, niissäkin oppilaissa jotka on tehny tiettyjä valintoja ala-asteella että. Et ne on vanhemmat valinnu jotkut tietyt aineet (.) mitä ne lukee koulussa ja sit ne on ihan niinku silleen et en mää tät oo valinnu vaan mun äiti ja isä on ((naurahdus)) valinnu tän. Et sit just et kuinka paljon siin on kuultu sitä nuorta että. Sit ne saattaakin tulla tässä vaiheessa sitten vahvempana vielä esille. [---] Et silleen tässä kun sit lähetään niinku niihin jatko-opintoihin. Ja sit vaatimukset voi myös olla tosiaankin et joillakin on myös se että mennään lukioon niin, vanhemmat kokee et se on ainut ja oikea tie (.) mennä eteenpäin se lukio.

Haastattelija: [Joo., kyl ihan] Mites sit koulu. Et minkälainen rooli sun mielestä koululla on (.) täs tukemisessa?

Terveydenhoitaja: Noo on iso kans se ja sitte että saa just sitä oikeeta (.) oikeeta tietoo ja oikeeta informaatioo. Ja kyl mä niinku ennen kaikkee niinku hirveesti et kyl noil on aika iso vastuu sitte et kyl noit kau- kamalasti kuunnellaan noita opoja (.) Elikkä oppilaanohjaajia. Et kyl mä luulen et ne on hirvittävän isossa roolissa tässä vaiheessa varsinkin kun niitä jatkoja.

School nurse: Well, yes, probably the biggest support from where you

should start is probably the home. home, home as a (.) support that (.) as it strengthens them (.) or like secure the strengths in the young person in a way and. And the home sees the young people's strength, what they can and cannot do . Yes, surely the pressure from home is already evident in those students who have made certain choices in elementary school. Parents have chosen certain subjects (.) What they study in school and then they are like I didn't choose this, but my mom and dad have ((laughter)). So it's not certain how much they've listened to the young person. And at this point these views may grow stronger. . [---] now when they are applying to further education. And they the requirements might be for some people that one have to apply to general upper secondary education, according to some parents, that is the only right way, to go to general upper secondary education

Interviewer: [Yeah, yes.] How about school. What role do you think the school has (.) in supporting (young people)?

School nurse: well, it is also huge, that you get the right (.) right knowledge and right information. And, it's a pretty big responsibility when you listen to guidance counsellors (.) Yes I think that they have a big role in these transition phases.

School nurse, individual interview, Tampere

According to some of the educational professionals, parents are guiding their child by “directing”, “pressuring”, or even “choosing for” their children as seen in the quotation above, towards a certain educational trajectory. The school's role is to guide students by “informing” them about available options but not take a stance on which direction, vocational or general upper secondary school, is suitable for the student. The problem with not taking a stance on direction of school becomes relevant when the student's interests clash with the parents' interests as well as when the child is not supported by their parents. Educational professionals also refer to parents from different cultural backgrounds, who decide what kind of education is suitable for the child, and where the student is not allowed to express an opinion. In the next quotation, the guidance counselor referred to a case of a Muslim girl, in which he described a conflict of interest between school and home regarding the student's educational trajectory. By acknowledging the role of the family and simultaneously criticizing the influence,

the guidance counselor emphasized the importance of young people choosing for themselves, using their own agency in the decision-making process. In addition, the guidance counselor highlights the importance of ability, what kind of abilities the young person has, implying that young people may have different proficiencies and abilities that need to be considered in when choosing further education.

Sit ku ei tiedä ku vaikka kysyy niiltä, tämmöseltä tytöltä että mitä sää haluat, se saattaa tulla että opettajaks, ni sitte ei tiedä että onko päätöksen tehny perheessä isä, että meidän tyttärestä tulee opettaja, piste. Ja tytär noudattaa sitä sitte kirjaimellisesti, mitä hänelle on sanottu. Vaikka hänellä olis millaset eväät tahansa sitten, tai valmiudet.

When it is impossible to know, even when asking them, stuff like asking this girl what do you want to be, she might say 'a teacher', and you do not know whether that decision is done by the father of the family, that our daughter will be a teacher, period. And then the daughter follows it literally, what is said to her. Even if she'd had any other proficiencies or ability.

Guidance counselor, individual interview, Tampere

Many teachers expressed frustration with certain students who lacked an interest in school and were not working hard enough and expressed a lack of motivation to study. In interviews and focus group discussions with youth workers, social workers, psychologists and school nurses, the challenges at school were explained by the situation in the home. School professionals who are aware of the situation at home seem to be more understanding about challenges in achievements in school. The results indicated that teachers and experts who work more closely with students gain a broader knowledge about the widespread spectrum of students' life course, and they have therefore developed a broader understanding of supporting and pro-actively working with students who receive insufficient support from their legal guardians. Therefore, a first glance at the research data indicated that school social workers and special education teachers demonstrated a more in-depth approach to pro-actively supporting students. However, examining the data further revealed that also some

subject teachers and principals also took a pro-active approach to supporting students from different backgrounds. Analyzing these interviews further revealed that these individuals legitimated their approach with an expanded knowledge about students' social backgrounds as well as acknowledging a lack of knowledge teachers usually possess about the life course of students. A principal, whose former work experience comprised 20 years as a teacher, justified the justificatory discourse teachers usually represent with a lack of knowledge of students' background.

Joo ja aika jännä mun mielestä siis sillee että tossa on kuitenkin toistakymmentä vuotta olin opettajana pelkästään, nyt on vähä niinku päässy tähän sisälle tähän, tähän mitä täällä on ja saa sitte sillee enemmän tietää oppilaista niin, se miten se tuolla luokassa näkyy niin se on aika vaikee suhtautua siinä joidenkin oppilaiden kanssa on tekemisissä kolme tuntia viikossa, --- hirveen huonosti kulkenu se tieto aikasemmin ainakin että mitä siellä taustalla on, --- niin aika vaikee suhtautua ennen kun saa vähän sitä taustatietoa. Eihän sitä nyt kaikkea tarvii tietää, oppilaiden tota noin taustoista, mut se auttaa aika paljon opettajaa kyllä auttais, niinkun et olis joku semmonen, että niinku pystyis suhtautuu sillälaillla --- miksi näin kävi, miksi näin käyttäydytään.

well I think it's quite fascinating, during 20 years I worked only as a teacher, but now [since starting working as a principal and subsequently as a member of the student welfare team] I have gained insight in this, what's here [in the student welfare team], and I have gained more information about students... and [as a teacher] it is difficult to relate to students if you are only interacting with them three hour a week, --- the information does not come through, what's in the background --- it is very difficult to relate without gaining some information. You don't have to know everything, about student's background, but it certainly would be helpful for teachers, to relate, or to understand --- why something happened, why students are acting the way they are.

Principal, focus group, student welfare, Tampere

Teachers and other school professionals may have different understandings about what the role of school should be versus the role of parents. According to previous research, parents and teachers define the role differently; while parent involvement for parents may be defined as getting students to school on time and keeping them safe, teachers define parental involvement as the actual presence of parents at school (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Understanding why students act the way they are, encountering challenges at school, supports educators in their role of considering students opportunities and prospects in the educational trajectory. For school professionals, knowing the background of the student makes it more difficult to merely explain the prospects of the educational trajectory with family background. The analysis suggests that school professionals who are working very closely with students are more bound to reflect on the whole complexity of students' educational trajectory, comprising school, family, other social relationships and networks, as well as contingency.

A trust between parents and teachers is crucial in setting the ground for a successful collaboration (Adams & Christenson, 2000). School professionals pointed out that the school needs to collaborate with parents in order to support the student, but this collaboration is usually challenging. In some cases, interaction and collaboration with parents is not only challenging but even missing. School professionals referred to a lack of trust between the school and parents, as well as a sense of powerlessness and helplessness in these situations. School professionals referred to challenges they encounter with parents; parents who are absent, parents who do not answer the phone or return messages from school, parents who do not support their children with homework or in the transition phase. There is a concern about students, the difficult social circumstances in which some children live, but also a helplessness about the situations. A lack of trust between school and home is justified as a reason why it is difficult to change predetermined educational trajectories.

On on, ja eikä ja oikeestaan sen huomaa et jos, jos luottamus puolin tai toisin katoa, tai erityisesti jos luottamus puuttuu, et koti ei luota siihen kouluun, niin on hyvin vaikea saada enää sen, sen nuoreenkaan koulunkäyntiä onnistumaan, koska ne kodin asiat siirtyy siihen nuoreen, niin jos sillä nuorella on epäluottamus kouluun, ja koulunkäyntiä ja opettajia kohtaan niin ei se oikeen, ei se oikeen se peli vedä.

if for some reason trust disappears, or in particular if there is a lack of trust, that the home doesn't trust the school, then it's very difficult to get the young person's school to succeed, because the views of the home is transferred into the young person, so if the young person distrust school, studying and teachers, it doesn't work

Vice principal, individual interview, Helsinki

Although severe social problems in the family are the most extreme examples of lack of support, school professionals also point out how parents are failing in their parenting tasks, such as lacking the capacity to setting boundaries for their children. Hämäläinen-Luukkainen (2004, 17–18) acknowledged the lack of boundaries in families in which parents fail to set boundaries for their children, resulting in tiredness at school, neglecting schoolwork and playing truant, however reminding us that behind the lack of boundaries, families may encounter severe challenges regarding substance abuse or physical violence. In my data, school professionals stated that parents incapable of setting boundaries for their children were placing students in a disadvantaged situation. For example, students who are playing on computers at night are tired at school and consequently underachieve. Moreover, parents transfer upbringing tasks to school; not teaching their children common rules of courtesy and politeness, to be on time, or to complete homework or other school tasks.

Ei välitetä, ei ne pärjää. Jos muksu sanoo et mä teen näin, ni ei vanhemmilla oon mitään sanaa siihen enää. Niinku peli menetetty. Ja mä nyt kuitenkin jotenkin ajattelen niin, et niin kauan kun samast jääkaapist syödään niin kauan vanhemmil ois jotain oikeutta ja vastuuta siihen muksun kasvattamiseen mut ei se näytä nykyään olevankaan.

no one cares, they don't manage. If the kid says that I'm doing this, the parents have no say in it anymore. The game is lost. And I think somehow like this, as long as one eats from the same refrigerator, parents should have some rights and responsibilities to raise the kid but it doesn't appear to be the case anymore

Guidance counselor, individual interview, Turku

Among school professionals, a discourse of pre-determined educational trajectories, guiding students' life trajectory is present, and is legitimated by the socioeconomic background or the model from home. However, how school professionals contest, accept or reinforce predetermined educational trajectories vary, and some school professionals emphasize ways to support students in their work. Next, further discussion of this matter follows: how do school professionals reflect on their role in supporting students from diverse backgrounds.

8.2. Supporting students and reinforcing agency

When analyzing school professionals' role in the educational trajectory of students, it is important to understand the role of the school professionals and what they could do to support students in the decision-making process in the transition phase from basic education to further education and training.

Guidance counselors have an important role in providing students with information, as most of the information students in basic education receives regarding further education is derived from the guidance counselor (Myllyniemi & Kiilakoski, 2017; 31). Guidance counselors emphasized that their role is to guide students and to provide students with information but reject their role in guiding the student along a certain trajectory. Guidance counselors emphasize students' agency and reflectivity in the decision-making process. They talked about students' wishes, wants and aspirations, but they also reflected on limitations, such as grades, health issues and geographic location of study places. They explained how they cannot tell a student what they should study, how they should choose their educational and professional trajectory. A guidance counselor stressed that she would not want to be in the position of telling students what they should study or what to become professionally. Instead, she stressed how her role is to provide the correct information for students to make their own autonomous decision:

meidän rooli on lähinnä nimenomaan siis sen että se tieto menee perille et on oikeenlaista tietoo et ne osaa käsitellä tietoo et mää itte niinku lähden.. en koskaan haluais olla siinä roolissa et mä oon niinku oon sanonu jollekin nuorelle et tee...tai ehdottanut jotakin et kyllä varmaan sitä tulee, mutta

niin..mut en mäa niinku sillai koe et mäa vaikuttaisin täysin siihen et minkälaisia juttuja on. Että et se on lähinnä sen organisoinnin ja sen nuoren herättäminen ja ((epäselvää)) et teeppäs nyt välillä tommostakin juttua.. et voisit kokeilla.

Our role is mainly to provide information, that the information is received, that they have the correct information, so that they are able to handle the information. I would never want to be in a position of telling someone... or suggesting to a student what they will become... so I don't feel that I am fully influencing their decision. It's more about organizing and waking up the student... like try out something like that, you could try.

Guidance counselor, individual interview, Tampere

While guidance counselors often have the official role in guiding students in choosing school after basic education, teachers often take a different approach to guiding students. Teachers may reflect on their role as being responsible for teaching students, but taking no active role in the transition phase from basic education to further education and training:

Opettaja 3: Ja sit se tietty haikeus, mutta se on kuitenkin et ihanaa tää on ohi. Mut me ollaan potkittu koko ysiluokka ja paasattu et nyt pitää yrittää et saa hyvät todistukset et pääsee valitsee sitä jatko-opintopaikkaa mut et ei meillä siinä siirtymävaiheessa sit oo enää mitään roolia.

Opettaja 4: Se on tää kun se valinta sitte jatkopaikkaan ni se on niin numeroilla tapahtuva et ei meil oo siihen mitään sen enemppää sanomista et..

Teacher 3: And then there is a certain sadness, but it's still wonderful that it is over. But we've been kicking the whole ninth class and fussing about trying to receive good grades so that they will be able to choose that education but the transition phase we don't have a role anymore.

Teacher 4: it's because the choice of subsequent education relies on numbers (grades) we don't have anything to say to that...

Four teachers, focus group, Turku

Teachers described constant and ongoing negotiations between parents, students and school regarding educational trajectories. Negotiations can take place in the classroom with students, in informal discussions, with only one student, several students or the whole class. School professionals may have an important role in either supporting students or in 'cooling out' students (Biggart & Walther, 2006). 'Cooling out' refers to how school professionals in their practices are not providing enough opportunities for students in reaching their educational or professional goal according to their aspirations (Biggart & Walther, 2006, Goffman, 1962). Drawing from Erving Goffman's theory (1962), there is a contradiction between the principle of equal opportunities and the limited number of higher social positions. Therefore, the mechanism is to 'cool out' the aspirations of some students, through persuasions that students' aspirations are unrealistic because of their abilities or the structure of the labor market. 'Cooling out' aspirations are disguised behind justifications on 'what's realistic' or 'what's possible'. Simultaneously, keeping in mind Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) suggestion about how students with a similar background as teachers, manage better at school because of shared values, language and culture.

Guidance counselors have an important role in providing information to students about available opportunities after basic education. At the upper secondary level, guidance counselors have a slightly different role, as the students have already been divided into certain educational tracks, while at the basic education level, students are still figuring out their interests and aspirations. Guidance counselors use a range of strategies in guiding students, and they justify their strategies in various ways. One guidance counselor recommended that students choose an educational trajectory that aligns with the student's *intrinsic values*, i.e., students' interests and aspirations. Another guidance counselor recommended that students choose an educational path based on the current and future prospects of opportunities in the labor market. Students acknowledge these strategies very clearly and do not hesitate to criticize the implications of these strategies. On the contrary, students express with a very straightforward attitude how the guidance counselor only suggested professions that

they were not interested in, for example, professions like primary nurse (professions that are expected to have a shortage of educated professionals). The other strategy is about pointing out intrinsic values and ‘following your dream’, however with the underlining thought *of preventing marginalization or perhaps idleness*; as a guidance counselor explained: ‘the most important thing is to do something, anything’. The justification on why it is important to do something, anything, is explained with motivation, boosting the student’s confidence and pride.

Et pitäs jotain niinku, olla ees jonkinlainen et tulkoon sitte vaikka minkäläinen sirkuspellekin joskus, mää sanon vaan että ‘So What!’ mut et tärkeintä on et sä lähdet sinne Englantiin tai Ruotsiin kouluttaa sirkusalaa. Mut et jonkinlainen olis koska se myös tuo sitä motivaatiota siihen opiskeluun että sit on niinku näitä et se semmonen tietynlainen sen oman ylpeyden herättäminen et se on aika tärkeetä.

So, that one should do something, one can become any kind of clown or anything, I just tell them: ‘So What!’ but the important thing is that you leave for England or Sweden to study at a Program in Circus. But to do something is important, because it increases motivation to study, it’s like waking up your own pride and that’s important.

Guidance counselor, individual interview, Tampere

One teacher provided some critical comments on false assumptions school provides the students within their school. The critical comments concern the discourse in school: school providing students with assumptions that if the student takes responsibility for their schoolwork, the student will manage in life, not taking into account the uncertainty about the labor market and in education in today’s society. The teacher confirms the discourse of responsibility young people are supposed to take, and how schools are not communicating the uncertainty that is always present in society (Walther & Plug, 2006):

Mun mielestä meidän koulussa ei ota huomioon sitä että se työura ei oo kovin suoraviivainen monestikaan, et mun mielestä tässä alleviivataan sitä että hoida asias hyvin, niin saat hyvän koulutuksen, saat sillä hyvän työpaikan, ja

sit niin kauan kun hoidat asiat hyvin, niin sit saat tota, ja olet vastuullinen ja aktiivinen ja tällä taas viestitään et niin kauan sulla on kortit omissa käsissä, et voi ite valita asioita, vaikka se ei oo ihan täysin totta

I don't think our school takes into account the fact that that career isn't very straightforward many times, I think it's emphasized here that if you do a good job, you get a good education, you get a good job, and then as long as you take care of your stuff, you get, you should be responsible and active and this again communicates that you as long as you have the cards in your own hands, you can choose things yourself even if it's not quite true

History teacher, focus group, Helsinki

Freire (2000) suggests students and teachers engage in a cooperative model and a critical dialogue, to reduce the hierarchical difference between students and teachers. According to Freire, the challenge with traditional education is the power teachers possess, in which the student takes the role of the oppressed and the teacher the role of the oppressor. Freire suggests that the monologues of teachers should be replaced by dialogues, and that students should be seen as active agents in their own learning process. In my data set, school professionals stressed the importance of students *taking on responsibility* in their own learning process as well as in their decision-making process from basic education to further education and training. They discuss students' agency mostly in terms of motivation, interests and ambition. Agency can be set into practice in a range of ways, such as by actively working towards a goal or by choosing to stay passive. Students may show strong motivation in school, or a lack of motivation. Teachers, who work closely with students, and follow students in their schoolwork, emphasized the importance of students' own agency and activity in schoolwork. Teachers expressed their concern about students who lack motivation and expressed their frustration about the challenges in helping and supporting these students, students who have no problem other than they are 'not doing any work'. In their view, it is not possible to help a student who lacks motivation, neither parents nor school are able to help these students, only the student is able to make the necessary change.

Opettaja 5: Ja sit jos sanotaan niist oppilaist, jotka sitte jää tavallaan, joiden on vaikee löytää opiskelupaikkaa kun nyt puhutaan tästä ni suurin ongelma heil on, he ei osaa tehdä töitä...He ei jostain syystä, syitä voi olla monia, mut he ei tee töitä.

Opettaja 6: He ei pysty ottamaan sitä haastetta ikään kun vastaan ku joku uusia paikka, niinku se ei oo vaan se et sä meet sinne kattomaan et onks tää nyt mua kiinnostava. Jokasest uudest paikast tulee niit asioit et jonka eteen sun täytyy tehdä töitä, sun täytyy lyödä se perse penkkiin ja ruveta työhön..

Opettaja 5: Ja siinä ei auta mitkään tukitoimet.

Opettaja 6: Nimenomaan.

Opettaja 5: Ei mitkään.

Opettaja 6: Ei mitkään. Näin on. Tähän asiaan.

Opettaja 5: Ja tää on niinku se, et on harhaluulo et voidaan auttaa oppilasta joka ei tee töitä. et sä voi auttaa häntä. tietysti voi olla oppilaita et jostain syystä heil on niitä oppimisen vaikeuksii ja kotona vaikeeta et ei pysty keskittyy ja muuta, ni siel tukitoimet auttaa heitä pääsemään mut on myös sellasii oppilaita jotka ei tee töitä, heil ei oo mitää muuta ongelmaa ku se.

Teacher 5: And then if we talk about students who are left (behind), who are struggling in finding a study place, as we talk about this, then the biggest challenge they have is that they don't know how to work... for some reason, there might be many reasons, but they don't work-

Teacher 6: They cannot take on the challenge, as every new place, it's not like you go there and have a look if this interests me or not. In every new place there are some things you need to work for, you have to sit down and work...

Teacher 5: and here no support system can help you

Teacher 6: that's right

Teacher 5: none

Teacher 6: none. That's right. In this situation.

Teacher 5: And this is, it's an illusion that one can help students who do not work, you cannot help them. Of course, there might be students who have challenges learning or challenges at home, they are not able to focus there and so on, there the support system can help, but there are students who do not work, they have no other problem than that.

Four teachers, focus group, Turku

By eliminating all other challenges students might have, such as learning difficulties or family-related challenges, and expressing how parents in general are supportive, the teachers in the example above pointed out the student's own role. They referred to the student's agency, the student's own role in the educational trajectory. The student's own role can be described as different practices of agency; school professionals refer to the student's own role in working towards a goal, or a decision to do nothing. They talk in terms of motivation; a student may decide to work hard in school or decide not to work at all. A lack of motivation does not however show a lack of agency. On the contrary, a lack of motivation shows as much agency as strong motivation. Both practicing motivation and practicing lack of motivation are active practices of agency. However, lack of motivation is regarded as more problematic than showing a strong motivation, although motivation is practiced too strongly if the student is showing stress, anxiety or other signs of increasing mental health challenges related to a too strong motivation. Students who aim for the highest grades at school, work hard towards a certain goal, show a stronger motivation at school, but not necessarily stronger agency. Students are expected to take responsibility for their own educational trajectory, and this is a task strongly related to students' agency. According to school professionals, no one but the student is able to 'do the work' necessary for the educational trajectory, pointing out the necessity of agency.

The emphasis is continuously on the student's own responsibility in finding an educational and professional path of their choice. Simultaneously, while the emphasis is on the student's own responsibility, professionals depreciate their own responsibility in the process. They justify this perspective with a view on how their power to control the decision-making process is restricted, because the decision and efforts have to be made by the students themselves; they cannot 'go visit places on behalf of students', therefore their power to influence the decision-making process is restricted

to discussions with students. Transition phase workers legitimate this perspective with utterances on how it does not matter if the choice later on proves to be a wrong decision, that the student decides to change the educational path.

Et se on niinkun siinä mielessä, aina yritetään löytää semmosta hyvää ratkaisua, mutta tietysti se on aina motivaatiosta kiinni että (nauraa) ei me voida kuitenkaan nuoren puolesta mennä minnekkään, et sitten vaan yritetään miettiä ja löytää sit keskustelujen kautta et mikä se olis se hyvä juttu ja mihkä nuori olis valmis sitoutumaan. Ja kun puhutaan aina et tehdään väärää valintoja, niin ei ei se ole välttämättä väärä valinta että valitset jonkun tieteen ammatillisen koulutuksen ja huomaatkin että tää ei mun juttu, niin se on vaan se että okei, että tää ei vaan ole, se on, ei siinä mitään. Se on sitten, mietitään seuraavaa vaihtoehtoa, että kuitenkin nuorella on työelämää ja opiskeluaikaa vielä paljon jäljellä ja tota ei sitä, se on vain, se on hyvä huomio että huomaa että tää ei ookaan se ala mitä, mikä on mun juttuni että täytyy kuitenkin sitä kunnioittaa sitä että nuori tietää sen parhaiten itse.

So it that case, we always try to find a good solution, but it is always about motivation, [laughing] we cannot go anywhere of behalf of the young person, so we try to find a solution through discussions, what would be a good match and what the student would be ready to commit to. And when people talk about wrong choices, we believe that there is no wrong choice necessarily, you choose a certain vocational education and realize that this was not my thing, that's ok, this wasn't it, that's fine. Then we discuss other options, young people have a lot of time to study and work, it is a good thing to realize that this wasn't the field, this wasn't my thing, one have to respect that the young person knows best.

Transition phase worker, outreach youth work, Tampere

Motivation is also closely related to agency in the sense of how students reflect on the relevance of subjects taught at school. Students who lack motivation do not see the relevance of learning the subjects set in the education curricula. Motivational problems can be interpreted as one dimension of structural inequality appearing at the individual

level. One explanation why some students encounter motivational challenges is the inflexibility of the basic education system. Students do not enjoy studying something that they are not interested in. On one hand, students are taught to find out their own interests and motivations, for example when they are reflecting on their decision in the transition phase. On the other hand, students are obliged to study certain subjects in lower secondary school that they may or may not be interested in. School professionals realize that a student who struggles at school may be very motivated when it comes to studying something of their own choice, but previous weak school achievements could prevent the student from entering the further education of their choice.

Experienced professionals in the transition phase realize that students need time to reflect on their choices. Some students need more time to reflect, while others have been confident for already some time what they want to study. Transition phase professionals explain how some students need a different approach when navigating in the transition phase, and how new experiences and searching for different alternatives with the student may support students in this task. A guidance counselor uses metaphors like throwing a 'spinning rod' and 'raking' as approaches when trying to support students in finding their educational trajectory.

Opinto-ohjaaja: öö, kyllä se on toi, kyllä se on nuori itse, joka lähtee sitä haarukoitsemaan et mikä se on se hänen opiskelupaikka elikkä tietysti siinä on et jos sanoo et mua kiinnostaa esimerkiksi tota nii, et tota nii et sit voi niinku heittää et ooks sä kiinnostunu et jos sua kiinnostaa sähkö et voisiks sää miettii rakennuspuolta tai jotai et siis siihen tuodaan niinku niitä uusia vaihtoehtoja. Tai sitte se et on useampia kouluja mut välillä nuoret on hyvinkin jyrkkiä et se on vaan se yks ainoa koulu vaikka vois olla sama koulutusala, elikkä jos vaikka haluis ni logistiikkapuolelle et sille ei välttämättä käy ku se yks koulu ku sanot et, hei tuollakin on logistiikka- En mä haluu sinne, siel on tyhmiä tyyppejä.

Haastattelija: Mmm..

Opinto-ohjaaja: Aha, kiva juttu et seuraava sitte yritetään seuraaval virvelinheitel et hei voisiks sä mennä ees käymään? En mä mee sinne, siel on tyhmiä- Aha! Ei sitte, tervemenoa..

Haastattelija: Joo..

Opinto-ohjaaja:..et siis, se on välillä hyvinkin jyrkkää et niinku miten sitä lähdetään haravoimaan, et siinä saa tehdä niinkun..Ei se mee yhdellä kerralla, ei se mee toisella. Sit yhtäkkii se voi olla jossain siellä, parin kuukauden päästä se voi olla se nuori voi tulla sanoon et hei et mä voisin mennä sittenkin käymään siellä..

Guidance counselor: aah, it is, it is the young person her/himself who tries to figure out what her/his place in education could be, so of course if they say that I'm interested in that, then I can ask that ok, if you're interested in electricity, would you consider construction or something, and then I provide them with new ideas. Or then there are several schools available, but the student may be very strict that only one of them will do, even if there's a similar program in another school, so if one wants to enter a program in logistics, the student accepts only one school, you tell them, hey, there's also logistics in that school, they reply: I don't want to go there, the people there are stupid.

Interviewer: mmm

Guidance counselor: oh, ok, then you try with the next spinning rod, 'so would you consider visiting?' 'I don't want to go there, the people there are stupid'- Ah, ok, hello...

Interviewer: yes

Guidance counselor: ...so it's like, it's very strict, how you start raking, how we start working... it's working the first time, not the second. But then, suddenly, in a couple of months, the young person can come by and say: 'I can consider visiting after all...'

Guidance counselor, individual interview, Tampere

Agency appears in the discussions with school professionals implicitly and explicitly, particularly regarding student's motivation and underachieving. On one hand, school professionals noted how some students actively decided about their future; these were students who were motivated and knew what they wanted to do. Agency does not

only appear among students showing strong motivation, working towards a certain goal. Agency is also evident among students who demonstrate a lack of motivation, or who are actively underachieving. School professionals acknowledge that students may underachieve in certain school subjects, because of a lack of interest in school and manage very well in other school subjects. Teachers discussed underachieving and practicing lack of motivation as an active choice made by students. On one hand, students are encouraged to use agency, to realize their own interests and aspirations, and to act accordingly. On the other hand, are students criticized for being lazy and unmotivated when they act accordingly and showing no interest in subjects that do not align with their own aspirations and interests. Teachers expressed their frustration and helplessness about students who lack motivation. They acknowledged that both parents' and teachers' resources are limited, pointing to the student's own agency.

Some educational professionals *pro-actively work against students ending up in a similar, disadvantaged position as their parents*. Still, they have a similar way of reflecting on predetermined paths as school professionals who justify the 'inheritance of education' with statistics; that education is inherited and students follow in their parents' footsteps. The difference in these professionals' way of thinking is that they believe that they are able to change this path. Some educational professionals are very concerned about students who do not receive support from their family, and they are aware of how parents' attitudes and resources to support their children play a role in educational opportunities for students and are situating students in unequal positions. They adapted a more reflective approach, believing a dialogue and support can help keep students away from marginalization (Freire, 2000). An acceptance of a deterministic educational trajectory based on students' social background is strongly contested. Professionals do not only see potential in students, despite their background, but they also feel that they have a responsibility to support students in finding their own path if the parents are not capable or willing to do it. Educational professionals negotiate with students and parents and compensate for a lack of parenting. The pro-active role school professionals take is justified with a moral duty of compensating for absent parents or parents who are not supporting their children. However, a similar set of values is also present; there is often one perspective of what type of education is relevant.

School professionals' and parents' views on the relevance of education and what kind of education is relevant, may be in conflict, depending on values and views related to an appropriate social position, salary, employment opportunities after graduation or a

student's abilities and competence. Educational professionals referred to an emergent need or demand for supporting students in cases in which students do not otherwise receive support. Schools often depend on multifaceted, well-established, professional networks, that simultaneously are a precondition for students being successfully supported in their life course and educational trajectory.

No kyllä koulu yrittää, no ainaki sillä tavalla et et, meidän kuuluu yrittää niinkun vähän paikata joskus myöskin sitä vanhemmuutta, mikä saattaa sieltä kotoo puuttua, koulu voi ottaa niinkun rajojen asetus kasvatustehtävän täällä ja tarvittaessa hakee tukee sitten vielä, vielä tota koulun ulkopuolelta, sosiaaliviranomaisten, nuorisotyön, nuorisotoimesta et ne, jotta me pystytään niinku sitä, eheyttään sitä nuoren ympäristöä ja, onnistua niissä kasvatustehtävissä, että kyllä koulu on tämmösen roolin täällä meidän koululla ottanut, koska se on huomannut, että, että sen on pakko ottaa se rooli.

The school tries, well at least in that sense, that our school tries to patch up for parenthood, that is lacking from the home, school can take on tasks of upbringing and setting boundaries, and where needed get support from outside school, from social authorities, youth work, so that we can support the student's situation and succeed in the upbringing task, well yes, our school has taken on the role of these tasks, because it has realized it has to take that role

Vice principal, individual interview, Helsinki

Although actors have taken on the role of *compensating for a lack of parenting*, a reluctance to undertake this role was also apparent in the discussions. School professionals might not always like the role they are required to take. They might disagree with assumptions that schools should take on the responsibilities of the parents. The reluctance to accept the role of compensating for a lack of parenting can be interpreted as feelings of inadequacy or helplessness school professionals in school

experience concerning the lack of responsibility of parents but also a responsibility school professionals experience regarding the students.

Joo. Tota no sanotaanko näin, jos ajattelee nyt noita ysiluokkalaisia siihen nivelvaiheeseen...Kuitenkin se pitäis olla kodin tehtävä se..ja koti kantaa vastuun mihin se muksu sit peruskoulun jälkeen hakee mut yhä enemmän tulee semmosii et tehkää te ne laput siel koulussa. Täyttäkää tes ne hakemukset siellä. Et jätetään niinku tavallaan viranomaisten tehtäväks tietyt asiat, mitkä selvästi kuuluis niinku perheelle.

Yes. So, let's say it like this, if we think of the 9th graders in the transition phase... it should be the task of the home... and the home carries the responsibility, where the kid applies to after basic education, but there's more and more of: you do the forms in school. Fill in the applications there. So leaving responsibilities to authorities, that clearly should be the responsibilities of the home.

Guidance counselor, individual interview, Turku

Guidance counselors and other school professionals use different strategies when guiding students in their decision-making process. Some professionals emphasize the intrinsic values of students; guiding students so they will follow their dreams, find an educational trajectory they feel motivated to complete. Other professionals emphasized guiding students into a professional career that aligns with the future demands of the labor market. In many cases, professionals use a combination of several strategies, emphasizing simultaneously the demands from the labor market, intrinsic values of the student, as well as considering the realistic demands of grades, entrance requirements and evaluating the students' opportunities to succeed in the field. Also, school professionals emphasized students' ability to find an individual life trajectory that aligns with the students' own aspirations and intrinsic interests. Furthermore, school professionals emphasized values related to students' own responsibility in the decision-making process. School professionals understand their role in the decision-making process to allow the student in making their own decision, to support the

young person in the decision and to provide correct information. Guidance counselors take on the role of providing correct information, while teachers are taking on the role of supporting students or not interfering with the decision-making process. School professionals who do not interfere with the decision-making process, justify their view with the importance of students making their own autonomous decisions. In this discourse, no one has the right to interfere with the decision; instead, the decision has to be made by the students themselves.

How students are expected to use agency is sometimes in conflict in the discussions with school professionals. School professionals refer to adolescence, a turning point between childhood and adulthood. On one hand, school professionals refer to students as children, that they are not mature enough to be responsible for their schoolwork and to determine what to study. On the other hand, school professionals refer to students as adults who should take responsibility for their own educational trajectory and schoolwork. Underachieving and lack of motivation are justified by lack of maturity and young age. When school professionals refer to students as children, the parents are regarded as being responsible for the student's success at school and in the transition phase. However, when school professionals refer to students as adults, they acknowledge that parents cannot be held accountable for students' success at school or the transition phase. In these cases, they refer to the student's own agency, the student practicing agency and being responsible for their own actions.

Opettaja 2: Ja onhan sekin totta et jos on tosissaa et jos on kaikista surullisinta jos se pahin murrosiän vaihe tulee ysin keväällä.

Opettaja 3: Niin sekin on totta.

Opettaja 2: Nehän on iha sekasin sillo. Ja ykshän on sellanen joku, vanhempi opettaja sano joskus et, et vanhassa keskikoulussa otettiin huomioon tää murrosikä sillä tavalla että sillä neljännellä luokalla ei tullu mitää uutaa asiaa, et hyvä et jos se tietotaso pysy samana. Nyt tulee sesikalla uutaa, kasilla uutaa, ysillä uutaa, ja sit ku osa porukkaa on puoltoista vuotta iha bimbo siellä niin, ne on iha niinku...sitten kyllähän nykykoulussa, jos yrittää, ja on paikalla, kirjat mukana ja tekeekin jotain, niin..

Teacher 2: and it is true, and seriously the saddest thing is that the worst part of the adolescence occurs during spring in the 9th grade.

Teacher 3: that's also true

Teacher 2: they are a mess then. And once, one elder teacher said sometimes that in the old middle school, they accounted for the adolescence, in a way, that in fourth grade there was no new knowledge, that it was enough if the knowledge base stayed intact. But now there's new knowledge in 7th grade, 8th grade and 9th grade, and then if some people are total airheads for one and a half years, they are like... so in school today, if you try and are present, books with you and do something, then...

Focus group, four teachers, Tampere

School professionals refer to adolescence, to the breaking point for these students, moving away from childhood towards adulthood, from no responsibility to responsibility. Teachers talk about the challenge young people face in the transition phase – as they had first been taken care of, but suddenly they are required to make their own decisions and are required to take responsibility for their actions. They are describing how students are expected to make decisions themselves. Why students are not capable of taking responsibility and underachieve is justified and legitimated with their young age and lack of maturity. These are similar qualities to those underlined by parents. Some teachers claimed that the transition phase from basic education to further education and training takes place at the most challenging phase of puberty, and this is particularly challenging for boys, because their puberty occurs at the time of the transition phase.

Teachers enter the teaching field with their own perspectives and expectations about collaboration structures with parents, and they do not receive sufficient training in how to collaborate with parents from different backgrounds and in different settings (Graue & Brown, 2003, Blomberg, 2008). Many school professionals agree that they have a responsibility to support students, and in particular, students who encounter challenges at school. This may not be the prime task of subject teachers, who are more

eager to direct the students to the school social worker or other relevant people who are able to support a student with issues not related to learning.

Among the school professionals, a concern emerges when the students are transferring to the next educational institution. The comprehensive school has had a great role in supporting students and school professionals are therefore concerned about how students will manage in later schooling without the support they are used to receiving during the basic education years. As previous research has shown, students may be very concerned about transferring to the next school. Students are concerned about how they will manage at school, how independent they are supposed to be, about bullying and finding friends (Mizelle & Irvin 2000). Also, the transition from basic education to upper secondary education in Finland concerns teachers; teachers express opinions about how the student has been cared for during basic education, and how the transition to upper secondary education could be challenging for some students. Simultaneously they are diminishing the support system in further education by showing how school professionals are protective and caring about their students, insinuating that this may not be the case in the next school.

The school as an important institution pro-actively working against students ending up in a disadvantaged position is also exemplified with experiences of students returning to the basic education school after the transition phase. In all three schools examined for this dissertation, there were examples of how teachers had found previous students drifting in the hallways in school after the transition phase. For some reason, these students were dissatisfied with their placement in upper secondary education and were either skipping classes in their current school or had even quit the current educational program. Returning to the old school, may point to a feeling of safety these students felt in the previous school, or perhaps they feel lost and do not have anywhere else to go to. School professionals who found a student hanging around in the school, found it important to guide this student further to the right professional. The phenomenon of students returning to their old school would need further research, as despite occurring at all three schools, this phenomenon has not been discussed in previous research.

8.3. Unexpected occurrences and false assumptions

Henderson et al. (2007) discussed how youth trajectories are influenced by ‘critical moments’; particular unexpected events in young people’s life trajectory. As Henderson

et al. (2007) described, the phenomenon has formerly been recognized and described as 'turning points' (Mandlebaum, 1973), 'fateful moments' (Giddens, 1991). Also in my data set, school professionals referred to unexpected occurrences, pointing towards a change in students' reflectivity or agency, when a student's motivation, ambition or interests take a different turn than expected. School professionals referred to a sense of surprise when students are starting to change their life trajectory, for example by suddenly showing an increased sense of motivation. School professionals saw how a student's educational trajectory could take an unexpected turn, intentionally or by coincidence. In my data I found two approaches on how educational trajectories are shaped unexpectedly; educational professionals referred to intentional efforts of students, or unintentional or unexpected actions in the educational trajectory.

Educational professionals referred to intentional efforts of students in situations when students work against ending up in the same trajectory as the parents. According to a principal, a challenging family background may have had a motivational impact on a student's educational aspirations; for example, a poor financial situation in the family could motivate students to educate themselves further. Teachers may have recognized the influence of a difficult family situation on students, but they would be uncertain of the deterministic effect it has on the educational trajectory.

eriarvoisuuteen vaikuttaa myös taloudellinen tilanne.. se näkyy vaatetuksessa ihan selkeesti, sitähan kautta saa itselleen nostettua jos on hyvännäköinen minihame se on suhteessa toisella on huonot farkut jalassa, se näkyy sille lapsella kenellä on se vaatetus on viimeisen päälle ja se nostattaa sen itsetuntoa ja hyvin monen lapsen kohdalla jos ei saa niitä asioita niin varmaan jos ei oo taloudellisii mahdollisuuksii niin laskeehan se itsetunnon määrää... nää on aika isoja asioita ja sit se vaikuttaa opiskeluun myöskin, jos on pikkunen pahanolon tunne sisällä niin se pudottaa opiskelu motivaatiota joittekin kohdalla se saattaa nostaa

inequality is also affected by the financial situation .. it can be seen in clothing quite clearly, one can feel good if they have a nice miniskirt comparing to one with poor looking jeans, it is visible who have nice looking clothes and that boosts the confidence and to many children who don't get

those things if they don't have the financial opportunities it lowers your confidence... these are pretty big things and it affects also the studies, if you always have a little bit of bad feeling inside the school motivation drops but for someone this may even increase motivation.

Principal, individual interview, Turku

The other approach is unintentional or unexpected occurrences in the educational trajectory. Educational professionals referred to unintentional or unexplainable cases in which it remains unclear what has had an effect on student's change of turn in the educational trajectory, although they agreed that something had happened in the ambitions and aspirations of the student. There might have been a change in student's own motivation and ambitions, or in the students' reflective decision-making process. School professionals refer to examples in which a parent has contacted school about positive changes in the attitude and motivation of a student, and neither the school nor the parents know the reason for this change. In some cases, a positive outcome in the educational trajectory might have happened randomly, by suggesting that there are always "exceptions to the rule", and that teachers may not know which student is the exception. Furthermore, because it remains unclear who the "exception to the rule" might be, educational professionals should invest in every student, as one teacher said.

Joo, mä oon ihan samaa mieltä siitä että rajalliset, mut mä hirveen varovainen oon tossa, et se koti määrittää niin paljon että, et se asettaa jotkut rajat. Siis monestihan se on ihan totta, monissa tapauksissa, mut nimenomaan, kun se on monissa tapauksissa eikä kaikissa, et sieltä nousee aina se yks poikkeus joka vahvistaa sen säännön, ja kun me ei tiedetä kuka se poikkeus on niin meidän pitää tietysti panostaa ihan kaikkien kohdalla

I agree that schools have limited [resources], but I would be very careful here, that the home determines a lot, that it is setting some limitations. Well, often it is true, in many cases, but in particular, because it is in many cases and not all, there is always one exception that proves the rule, and because we don't know who the exception is we need to invest in everyone.

History teacher, focus group with four teachers, Helsinki

Educational professionals legitimize the statement that students should be supported equally by referring to a surprise they experienced when they ran into previous students who have encountered challenges at school. Teachers expressed their astonishment when encountering students after several years, i.e., students who had not managed well at school and students who had been the subject of concern among actors in school, realizing that the student has “turned out ok”, into a “regular” young person, into a “smart kid” (Teachers’ focus group, Helsinki). These professionals expressed a lack of awareness of the cause of the change, they were unable to point out what impacted the change. School professionals have pointed towards a change in the practice of the student, a change in the student’s reflective practice as an agent, changing the life course or educational trajectory by their own reflective decision-making, or agency. Although professionals cannot point out what caused the change, the way of speaking revealed a certain prejudice and presumption about the student’s educational trajectory. The surprise that a young person could have turned out ‘ok’, reveals that turning out ‘ok’ was not anticipated by the professionals.

Teachers may react to an unexpected decision of educational trajectory that a teacher becomes aware of unintentionally; for example, a student with excellent grades not applying to get into general upper secondary education. Teachers are positioning themselves in a role in which they tried to change predetermined educational trajectories. Teachers accepted supporting students with a difficult family background, whose parents are not actively involved in supporting the student on their life course, or who see different potential in the student than the parents see.

Educational professionals also agreed that young people are surrounded by a range of networks, peers, family and friends, all of whom influenced the educational trajectory and life course. Moreover, educational professionals agreed that students themselves are active agents in their own path, and therefore what actually determines the decisions students make in their life course can be perceived as unexpected or unintentional by outsiders.

Muist sitte kauheen hankalaa sanoo, et sitte vähä sellasista kurjemmistakin oloista tulevat, et ei se niinku yks yhteen oo niinku et pärjäälee ja oppii ja.. kyllä toi oppiminen on aika semmonen monimutkainen tapahtuma. Et siihe vaikuttaa niin monet jutut.

I think it is very difficult to say that [students] coming from unfortunate circumstances, how [students] succeed and learn is not a one-to-one thing... learning is complicated event, there are so many things influencing [---]

Special education teacher, individual interview, Tampere

Educational professionals acknowledged that learning and school achievements is a complicated process, there are many factors contributing to school success and motivation. Students' educational trajectory is modified by friends, family, school, but in the end, what affected a sudden change in an educational trajectory remains unanswered.

The recognition of how some educational trajectories are influenced by unexpected turns or occurrences, and in particular the sense of surprise expressed by educational professionals when describing these cases verifies how the discourse on what the school's role is, should be and cannot be is strong in educational settings. Educational professionals are navigating in a context in which the common discourse is about the school's important role for students, although the dilemma and disputes concern the extent of the school's role in supporting students. The dilemma in educational settings concerns the dispute between school and home; which of these instances should take responsibility in supporting and guiding students in their educational trajectory? Although many educational professionals also refer to students' own responsibility in their educational trajectory and life course, educational professionals realize the importance of the home and school. These unexpected occurrences, when the student's educational trajectory has taken an unexpected turn that has not been monitored by the school or home surprise educational professionals.

However, it is difficult to give an objective explanation about underachievement and lack of motivation. There might be underlying features in the students' life that don't appear at school and neither school professionals nor young people may see the connection between a restless home life and difficulties at school (c.f. Aaltonen, 2012).

8.4. Conclusions

The questions about how students make an autonomous decision regarding their educational trajectory and how educational trajectories are predetermined according to their family background and what the school's role is in these, are present in the discussions with school professionals. School professionals did not directly refer to class, cultural capital or style of speaking (cf Bourdieu, 1984, Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Lareau, 2011), but indirectly to circumstances at home or parents' abilities to support their child. In these discussions, conflicting views on students' scope of action is always present; what is expected from students stands in conflict with what the school professionals estimate that students are capable of. On one hand, students are expected to make an informed, mature decision about their educational trajectory, while on the other hand they are presented as half-grown, immature individuals in need of guidance. School professionals agreed that a good relationship between the home and school is important (cf. Adams & Christenson, 2000), but the expectations on the role of parents and school vary (Anderson & Minke, 2007). On one hand, school professionals must consider the family as the most important influencer of the young person's decision and may explain how the 'wrong' model from home guides students towards 'wrong' values and life trajectories. On the other hand, school professionals point out the importance of students using their own agency and taking responsibility in the decision-making process. Some school professionals tend to work pro-actively against students ending up in a similar position as their parents, this is evidence of how school professionals to some extent realize the power they have to influence the decision. However, how much influential power school professionals consider they have, vary between school professionals. Some school professionals take a fatalistic approach, stating how the family background determines the educational and professional trajectory of the student, while other school professionals realize the important role of the school in guiding and supporting students with the aim of changing a predetermined path. Arguments are justified with statistics and their own experiences from working with young people.

Previous research has shown the importance of wellbeing in school and how connectedness to teachers and school is protective of emotional wellbeing (Lester & Cross, 2015). Professionals take several approaches in guiding and supporting students in their educational and life trajectory. While some refer to the irrelevance of guiding students, either because students need to take responsibility for their own choices and

use their own agency in their life trajectory, or because the educational or life path is already decided as a consequence of their family situation, other professionals try to guide students and use other justifications on why students need guidance and support. In the discussions with educational professionals, teachers, guidance counselors, principals and other professionals working with students at school, there is a constant discussion about the school's role: what it is, should be and cannot be.

Some school professionals discussed the importance of students finding an educational trajectory that aligns with the student's personal interests, while other school professionals pointed out the importance of doing something – anything, that the most important thing is to find any study place, and it is of less importance what kind of study place this might be. In addition, there is an ongoing discourse about the relevance of the family; the impact of family background as well as the impact on how parents support their child. School professionals realize the connection between a student's family background and future in education. Some school professionals take the connection between the family background and student's future in education and professional career for granted. This predetermined educational trajectory is justified with research, statistics and their own experiences. In many cases, educational trajectories are regarded as having been predetermined and schools have little impact on changing predetermined paths. This approach is often used as a justification for why the school 'fails' in supporting students from a disadvantaged background. School professionals legitimate failure in educational achievements or failure in the transition phase with the socioeconomic background. The discourse on predetermined educational trajectories does not only concern students with a disadvantaged background; the same tendency can be found in expressions and way of speaking regarding well-educated parents and their children. Many school professionals are legitimating a 'predetermined' educational trajectory with the student's background. However, agency is also evident in cases when a 'predetermined' educational trajectory takes an unexpected turn, when students for some reason start to show motivation and to make intentional efforts to find their educational trajectory. These examples are an example of a student's agency, how something has happened in the reflective thinking of the student, changing the educational and professional trajectory.

However, the discourse on determined educational trajectories is also contested; not all school professionals choose to see the connection between family background and educational trajectory. Not all school professionals want to accept challenges students

encounter at school with a certain predetermined life course. Some school professionals choose to see students as individuals, who are not following in their parents' footsteps. Some school professionals are even actively working against these anticipated predetermined educational trajectories. These school professionals work against gendered stereotypes in educational settings, stress the importance of a student's individual interests and abilities instead of parents' aspirations, push well-performing students towards a general upper secondary school choice and more practically oriented students towards a vocational choice, not continuing the educational path of the family, against parents' aspirations and wishes.

The surprised reaction among professionals when a student who had previously encountered challenges at school actually turns out 'ok' and succeeds in life, strengthens the assumption that professionals may have prejudices or a pre-assumption about students' educational trajectories. In addition, there is the counter-discourse, the strong message some of the teachers wanted to express. Teachers cannot know what will become of students, and they should therefore treat all students equally, which also enforces the assumption of prejudices and pre-assumptions of other professionals. Although school professionals in general aim to treat and encounter students equally, prejudices and pre-assumptions concerning students still prevail among school professionals.

9 Situating discourses' in an education policy context

My thesis focuses on students' scope of action in the transition phase and how the students are influenced, guided or even pushed by parent(s), school professionals or other people, institutions or broader contexts. I have analyzed the views of students, parents and school professionals, analyzing how students navigate in the transition phase, drawing from a range of resources. In this chapter, I conclude my analysis by situating the results in the context of national education policy. The context of national education policy is relevant in understanding how students', parents' and school professionals' views are shaped and hence how they shape the process of young people's decision-making.

9.1. The complexity of educational inequality

In contemporary society, the structure of the labor market has changed. Andreas Walther (2006) distinguishes between transition regimes in the various Western countries, placing the Nordic countries in a universalistic transition regime based on a comprehensive school system (see also Chapter 3.4). The universalistic transition regime, present in the Nordic countries, including Finland, is universalistic and inclusive, striving for young people to be enrolled in either education or on the labor market (Walther, 2006). Situated in a certain transition regime, do not only affect young people's biographical experiences in education (Walther, 2006), but also students, parents and school professionals understanding and perceptions of young people's opportunities. Drawing from in particular parents' and school professionals' views in the early chapters, a perception about 'second chances' in education have been drawn from the data; parents and school professionals have trust in the Finnish education (and social welfare) system, how the students are always able to change the educational trajectory if they realize that the choice they made was not right. Parents discuss the intrinsic values of the students' aspirations; students are encouraged to choose for themselves, finding an educational and professional trajectory that suits their aspirations. If the student wishes to change their educational and professional path, this is not only possible but also encouraged, as many of the parents had similar experiences of changing their professional careers, by re-educating themselves to enter new professions.

During the 2000s, equality in education has been a main theme in education and research development programs, prepared by the Ministry of Education (and Culture)

(Ministry of Education, 2004, 2008; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012a). Taking a closer look at the discourses of educational inequality, equal opportunities in education appear to be a key idea in education policy and education is regarded as a significant tool in the prevention of marginalization. In the Government program from 2011, equality in education was clearly formulated. Ethnic origin, (socioeconomic) background and wealth (financial situation) were emphasized as the main challenges or threats in educational equality.

The objective of Finnish education and cultural policy is to guarantee all people - irrespective of their ethnic origin, background or wealth – equal opportunities and rights to culture, free quality education, and prerequisites for full citizenship. In any educational, scientific, or cultural activity, sport, or youth work, the equality principle must be applied. All people must have equal access to services of consistent quality.

Government program (2011;50)

In the Proposal for a Strategy of Promotion of Educational Equality prepared by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012b), the same themes were emphasized as threats to equality, as in the Government Program from 2011: gender, parental socioeconomic background, financial situation of the family and immigrant background. This proposal stems from the 2011 Government program and is therefore one reason for the emergence of the same themes regarding educational equality. However, in this proposal, school differentiation and school choice are seen as main challenges, and the document refers to research done at the University of Turku (Seppänen et al., 2012). This theme has evolved as school differentiation and school choice has become one of the new popular topics in research (e.g., Seppänen et al., 2012, Kalalahti & Varjo, 2012, Kosunen, 2012).

At the national level, there seems to be a hegemony of the concept of inequality, which stands in conflict with how researchers, school professionals and experts define inequality. For example, in the Education and Research 2011-2016 development plan (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012a) socio-economic background and gender have been elevated as important features in educational differentiation:

Educational differentiation begins at an early age. At the primary stage already, there begin to be signs of correlation between a pupil's background and learning outcome. Many national and international studies have shown that children of families in the upper socio-economic brackets achieve better results in learning than those belonging to lower socio-economic brackets. In Finland, gender differences in learning outcomes and participation in education are also large in international terms.

Ministry of Education and Culture (2012a; 10)

In many of the national policy documents and interviews with national experts and policy makers, there are some common themes acknowledged in the discussions regarding equality in education, such as *socio-economic background, financial resources, ethnic background, gender, regional differences and individual needs*. These themes are often justified with statistical evidence showing the correlation between parents' income and students' school choice (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012b, 17–18), by reporting that students with an immigrant background are underrepresented in higher education and that compared to the mainstream population and that fewer students with an immigrant background continue their studies after basic education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012b;15). Gender differences are exemplified with statistical results, such as how well girls manage at school in contrast to boys and which sex is underrepresented in which areas. Gender inequalities are also justified with statistical facts, like describing results from PISA tests (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012b; 22). Regional differences in education and educational opportunities are exemplified with statistical differences in the number of students studying at the general upper secondary level and in vocational education, depending on educational opportunities provided in the regions.

Students, school professionals and other experts working closely with students also use the above-mentioned definitions of inequality. However, depending on the position they speak from, they also suggest other definitions of inequality, including bullying (students who are bullied by teachers or students) or language skills (students with an immigrant background who do not have sufficient language skills in Finnish). Asking school professionals and experts about equal opportunities in education and who they feel are placed into a disadvantaged position, discourses at both the *structural*

and *individual levels* evolve. School professionals are concerned about changes in the structures of society and the new demands being placed on education. The increasing youth unemployment and unstable labor market set different demands on education and on the choices young people make when they are applying to upper secondary education. Guidance counselors and teachers are aware that young people may need to re-educate themselves several times in their lives. On one hand, there is a strong discourse on *intrinsic values*, that young people should choose a field that is most appealing to them. Furthermore, the discourse presented by students, parents and school, is the *discourse of responsibility*, that is, that young people are demanded to take responsibility for their own educational trajectory. On the other hand, there is a strong discourse on *pragmatism*, how decisions should be based on the structure of the application system; students with the best Leaving Certificates are able to choose quite freely the school of their choice, while students with mediatory or weak leaving or weak Leaving Certificates are bound to choose within certain limits.

The paradox is that the discourse of intrinsic values stands in conflict with individual responsibility and pragmatism. Although the education system has been developed to provide equal opportunities to all, the same system may put students in a disadvantaged position because of the inflexibility of the system. The basic education system is providing same education to all, although all students are not interested in the same subjects. Students are required to study certain subjects although they might be not at all interested in them. Although many respondents praise the equal education system, which provides all students with same, commonly accepted, important basic skills, this structure is also contested. Respondents who work with students facing motivational challenges at school agree that forcing all students to study the same subjects is problematic if the student is already facing severe motivational challenges and/or is struggling in school.

In the transition phase from basic education to further education and training, the structural form of the education system is restricting some students from realizing their aspirations. A weak Leaving Certificate acts as a gatekeeper hindering students who could manage in some particular (vocational) education from being accepted into the program or from even applying. Some school professionals have criticized the transition phase system which focuses on the Leaving Certificate instead of student's motivation and talents relevant for the future education.

Sit ku siinä on, ei se auta sitte se että niinku on tää ammattilliseen koulutukseen pisteytys että siinä saa sitte pisteitä näistä taito ja taideaineista. Ku siinä on silti ne kakstoista lukuainetta sitten mukana siinä kokonaiskeskiarvossa mistä tulee eniten pisteitä. Nää on tällasia rakenteellisia juttuja.

So it's like, it doesn't help that they (students) receive points in practical skills and art in the assessment for vocational education. There are still twelve theoretical subjects included in the grade point average, from which they receive most points. They are these kinds of structural things.

Guidance counselor 1, individual interview, Tampere

Structural challenges in the education system are also discussed explicitly and implicitly about students who have special needs and who would need flexible solutions in education. Students with special needs are also regarded as students in a disadvantaged position who encounter unequal opportunities in education. Students in this discourse are usually students who underachieve at school, but also talented students who are “held back” by the mainstream education system providing same education for all. In this discourse, students are regarded as unequal in relation to how much support they need and receive. Obstacles to receiving support and extra teaching are often related to insufficient school resources or lack of comprehension of what support is needed.

Immigrant background is often mentioned as a feature putting students into disadvantaged positions. School professionals point out that immigrants face challenges at school and in the transition phase because they lack language skills. Respondents do not specify which language skills they are referring to, but the underlining understanding is that they are referring to *Finnish* language skills. Students with an immigrant background may understand and speak many languages, but in my data set these language skills were not brought up by the respondents as something worth mentioning. Respondents from the local school level imply that immigrant students who are not facing language challenges (i.e., in the Finnish language) are not situated in an unequal position. This is a strong view presented

particularly in one of the case study schools. However, this school is a school situated in a disadvantaged area and they have extensive experience of supporting students from different backgrounds and different needs and moreover, the school receives more funding from the authorities to support individual needs and language support. The following quotation shows how the professional points out that students with a weak knowledge of (the Finnish) language are situated in an unequal position compared to the mainstream population.

No maahanmuuttajat on varmaan yks iso ryhmä. Siis ne maahanmuuttajat joilla on heikko kielitaito.

Well immigrants are a big group. Meaning immigrants with weak language skills.

Psychologist, focus group, Helsinki

It is on one hand the inflexible structure of the education system, which requires similar language skills, that situates students with different mother tongues in unequal positions. Students are encountering difficulties in the transition phase from basic education to further education if they have insufficient (Finnish) language skills. On the other hand, it also shows that students with an immigrant background are not automatically positioned as students situated in a disadvantaged background, which is the case in national policy documents.

Financial situation is a contested theme within the discourse of socioeconomic background. Although some respondents argue that the financial situation might put students in a disadvantaged position, by not having the financial means to participate in school trips or not being able to buy the clothes students need for not appearing differently in the eyes of their peers, there is also the counter discourse which implies that the financial situation cannot be regarded as a representation of educational inequality, because education is free and available to all. However, in the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education, the financial situation is not recognized as a feature that puts students in unequal positions. The financial situation

is context-dependent in the discourse of inequality, as in the free education system it is not regarded as something situating students in unequal positions.

Parents' background, i.e., socioeconomic and educational background, is also often pointed out as an important element in educational inequality in national policy documents. Parental support is discussed with research based on statistics, in how reading and home atmosphere influence school achievements in all socioeconomic groups. Also, support from home, such as how students are encouraged to read by their parents, are explained by statistical facts from PISA tests (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012b; 27). In national documents it is declared that socioeconomic background should not be an obstacle to educational opportunities, although statistics show the correlation between students' educational trajectory and socioeconomic background (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012b, Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012a).

A focus on equity also appears in education policy documents and interviews. It is no longer enough to provide only equal access to education, there is a recognition that some people need more individual support or individual solutions to manage in education. Individual support is important not only in the prevention of marginalization but also for gifted students to support them in realizing their full potential. An expert from the National Board of Education stressed how the equality discourse has been the visible part of Finnish education policy, and equity has only become a noticeable task in education policy in recent years. The National Board of Education has even been enrolled in a special project with the aim of increasing the visibility of and support for gifted students.

Many documents use research in their justifications and legitimations of the goals and guidelines set in the documents. In preparing documents several experts are often heard and the people who prepare the documents also use evidence-based research, particularly evidence from statistical research. Evidence from qualitative research is rare. The practice of hearing experts was also confirmed by interviewees. Analyzing the documents and interviews with a critical discourse approach, focusing on intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2010), the same concepts, terms and ways of representing, reappear in the different documents. Development education and research programs are based on the goals set in the related government program. Documents are constructed on previous documents and educational experts are both

producers and regarded as consumers of the documents. Educational experts use documents in developing and producing succeeding documents.

Experts in education policy, i.e., the representatives from education departments, the National Board of Education, the Ministry of Education and Culture, also often rely on statistics in the interviews. Statistics become a general truth that intersects discussions with no sign of objections. These utterances of the anticipated general truth are expressed with discourse markers as well (no) and endings used in Finnish pointing out common truths that are taken for granted by the speaker, for example ‘nehän’.

No siis tilastokeskuksen tutkimuksethan --- nehän osoittaa aika selkeesti sen, että vailla koulutusta olevat on se riskiryhmä syrjäytyä

Well, research from statistics (Finland) – they show quite clearly, that (young people) without education are at risk in being marginalized.

Expert, Education department, Helsinki

Experts in education policy justify and explain predetermined educational trajectories and inheritance of marginalization by using statistics and previous policy documents and these results are not contested. However, at the local level, school professionals reflect on and may accept or contest these statistical ‘facts’.

On one hand, perceptions about marginalization and social inequality are constructed at the national level in policy documents, by policy makers, decision makers and educational experts. On the other hand, perceptions about marginalization and social inequality are also constructed at the local school level, in discussions and actions in the everyday life in school. Experts use policy documents as tools to legitimate and justify actions in decreasing educational inequalities. However, policy documents are written by policy makers and educational experts, who in many cases are the same people who use policy documents to legitimate and justify their views for their (political) agenda. At the local school level, teachers, school social workers, guidance counselors and other people who work closely with students receive instant experience-based understanding about students’ challenges in the transition phase

from compulsory to secondary education and experiences of educational inequality. At the local level, respondents prefer to talk about motivation, lack of parenting and model from home. The discourse on socioeconomic background and its relevance for educational inequality shows the complexity of school discourses. In school, interviewees discussed the “model” students receive from home, a model which entails what parents do or how parents support their child. Within schools, there is a clear concern about students with long term unemployed parents, parents with substance or alcohol abuse, parents who lack skills to set boundaries for their children. Previous research also supports these results, by showing that students from families with lower socioeconomic status receive less support in their schoolwork (Ahvensalmi & Vanhalakka-Ruoho, 2012). Parents’ alcohol and substance abuse can be difficult to recognize at school; children or young people may want to hide the fact that their parents are alcoholics to outsiders, or even to their best friend and a student may be suffering from their parental alcohol misuse but can still achieve good school grades (Roine, 2010). Students who suffer from mental problems/fatigue due to stress/pressure to manage well, might be achieving excellent grades in school (Ahvensalmi & Vanhalakka-Ruoho, 2012).

The discourse on ethnic background is clearly a discourse that appears both at school and in national policy documents, but the experience of this representation is somewhat different at the various levels. Many respondents agree that ethnic background increases challenges in the transition phase from basic education to further education. However, this view is also contested. In one of the schools, which gained a lot of experience with immigrant students, ethnic background was not per se regarded as relevant. Although the school also struggles with cultural conflicts, difficulties with language seems to be the main gatekeeper hindering students entering the education of their choice. Respondents agreed that immigrant students may encounter challenges with language, but otherwise they are not regarded as situated in an unequal position. The interviewees from the school also pointed out that the school receives more funding to support these students who are encountering language difficulties. In the school where extra funding and support have been provided for supporting students with an immigrant background, respondents seemed less expected to regard these students as situated in an unequal position. At this school, the concerns are more about the students who come from families with different social problems, drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, lack of parenting and long-term unemployment. At this school, respondents noted that immigrant students often received support from their family

and were encouraged to study and to educate themselves although they encountered practical problems, such as language difficulties or that parents do not know any Finnish or English, so communication with school was difficult.

9.2. Education preventing marginalization or a temporary stash for young people?

Walther (2006) discusses how youth unemployment in the universalistic regime, i.e., the regime present in Nordic countries, including Finland (see Chapter 3.4), is referred to as a paradox; young people not working are expected to be in education (Walther, 2006). The extension of compulsory schooling in Finland until the student turns 18 is an example on how to not only encourage but to also oblige students to be enrolled in education after they have completed basic education. In practice, all students have until 2020 had been directed into upper secondary education, but from 2021 all students leaving basic education are obliged to apply for post-basic education (Oppivelvollisuuslaki, 2020). The extension of compulsory education is justified with aims of improving conditions for learning and wellbeing among young people and to increase the employment rate (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). From this perspective, it is interesting to analyze how the relevance of education had been legitimized and justified in policy documents some years earlier, and how these discourses can be found in also earlier documents and research.

According to national education policy documents, education is regarded as an effective means *to prevent the marginalization and social exclusion of young people*. Why education is found to be relevant for young people is justified in several ways. Education is presented as relevant for *financial reasons*; it is stated that every young person who permanently drops out of school and the job market costs society at least one million euros before reaching retirement age (Koulutustakuu, 2013). Therefore, to avoid the high financial costs of marginalized young people, the political focus has been on developing tools to avoid marginalization of young people, such as guaranteeing them a place in education or training with political instruments like the education and training guarantee.

Education is also regarded as being a solution to *preventing marginalization* among young people as it simultaneously *prevents young people from 'doing nothing'*. The solution to preventing marginalization provided by education policy is the solution of

education; by encouraging and obliging young people to be in the education system, students are lost from the statistics as students doing nothing. The fear of students doing nothing is also explicitly discussed in some of the interviews with national level experts. Education is an effective tool to prevent marginalization by preventing young people from ‘wandering the streets’ as one interviewee from the Finnish National Board of Education told me. From this perspective, education can be regarded as a *temporary stash* to keep young people in, to keep them in an institution, preventing them from idleness and preventing them from increasing the unemployment rate. The discourse of education as a temporary stash for young people, a fear of young people doing nothing, appear continuously in history in different countries and times (Kaestle, 1983, Kaarninen, 2003). In the middle of the 19th century, school reformers in the United States were already more concerned about minors wandering the streets than working in factories (Kaestle, 1983; 109). Also in Finland, at the beginning of the 20th century, there were concerns about extending compulsory education due to loss of earnings for families in rural areas, as children were directed to school instead of working in agriculture for their family (Takala, 1983; 132). In the cities, loss of earnings had a minor role, instead, the Committee of Compulsory Education (oppivelvollisuuskomitea) was concerned about 13–14-year-old children, in particular boys, who were wandering unemployed in the streets learning bad manners, and the committee suggested therefore increasing compulsory education lasting seven years in the cities and six years in rural areas (Takala, 1983; 132-133). In the 1930s young men in Finland were sent to the regions to work to prevent idleness (Kaarninen, 2003). This discourse on young people, in particular boys, practicing idleness, doing nothing but “wandering the streets”, or even ‘practicing evil’ (pahuuden harjoitus) (Takala, 1983; 133) is most explicitly evident on the national education policy level, but also in some of the interviews with both students, parents and school professionals. A guidance counselor from Tampere presented her view on the relevance of education, saying that ‘the most important thing is to do something’, a parent said that the most important thing is to ‘apply somewhere’. All these views are internalized by students, who learn the most important thing is to ‘do something’. During the time of data collection for this research project and thesis, there were suggestions about reforming the upper secondary education system into a comprehensive system, extending mandatory education to the upper secondary level (Tikka & Suominen, 2009). This suggestion was taken into effect in 2021 as the Finnish Parliament approved the proposal of extending the age of compulsory education in Finland in 2020 to include

all young people until the age of 18 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020, Oppivelvollisuuslaki, 1214/2020).

Although intrinsic values on how students should choose their educational trajectory appear in interviews with experts, parents and students; in national policy documents and interviews with policy experts this perspective is either missing or scarce. The most important task on the agenda appears to be in finding students a study place, because a study place is regarded as the most effective means for preventing marginalization. A student enrolled in an education program is not regarded as ‘marginalized’, although statistics on school enrolment does not show how the student is managing in their school, but are they participating in the education provided in the school or what will the prospects be for the student when they complete? In national policy documents, motivational challenges and lack of aspirations among students is not the main focus. This is surprising, since lack of motivation is one of the more important reasons to drop out of education, along with life management skills, learning difficulties and social problems (Huhtala & Lilja, 2008; 10). Students who feel that the school doesn’t offer them what they want or need, i.e., they don’t understand the relevance of education, have challenges to find reasons to go to school (Takala, 1992). Instead, transition phase workers, who work with students who did not find a satisfying place in education, stress motivation and intrinsic values the most. These transition phase workers work with students who did not find a place, did not get accepted to a school, dropped out of school or are thinking about dropping out of school. These transition phase workers point out the importance of motivation, and how young people cannot be forced to enter any education program. Instead, they discuss the transition phase as a process; a process that may take more time for some students; a process that cannot be rushed. The professionals working directly with students realize the importance of motivation, and their justifications on how to increase participation in education seem rather unproblematic:

mutta tietysti se on aina motivaatiosta kiinni että (nauraa) ei me voida kuitenkaan nuoren puolesta mennä minnekkään, et sitten vaan yritetään miettiä ja löytää sit keskustelujen kautta et mikä se olis se hyvä juttu ja mihkä nuori olis valmis sitoutumaan.

Of course, it’s all about motivation (laughing) we cannot go anywhere on

behalf of the young person, we're only trying to reflect and find through conversations what could be a good match, and to which place the young is ready to commit to

Youth worker, individual interview, Tampere

Commitment is important, as the transition phase worker above comments. Transition phase workers, who work with young people who are struggling in finding a place in education, find commitment very relevant for a successful transition. They know that young people have to be committed to fulfil the education program in upper secondary education.

9.3. Education as a resource and part of the national identity

Even in Finland's early history, education was emphasized as the resource constructing and improving Finland nationally and internationally (Ahonen, 2003). Education, and the expansion of education, was important for the new nation of Finland to gain foothold in a globalizing world.

In national education policy documents and in interviews with national education policy experts, there seems to be agreement that education is an important resource for Finland, and as Finland lacks other significant resources, education is a resource Finns have invested in. Seeing education as a resource is visible not only in my data set but appear and reappear in different settings and discussions in political documents and among experts directing education policy at the national level.

The discourse on *education as an important resource for the Finnish nation* is reflected in policy documents as well as in national level interviews. In an interview in 2010, Matti Saarinen, a Social Democratic member of Parliament and a former school administrator, stated:

We had no choice. In Finland we have our timber and we have our brains. That is all. To become an economically modern nation, we had to have very good schools, which meant we had to have very good teachers (cited in Abrams, 2016; 281-282).

At the national policy level, education is explained as a resource, a resource that Finland depends on in a globalized world. Interviewing a high-level educational

expert and professional director from the Finnish National Board of Education, the almost exact words and expressions were used:

Me nähdään et koulutus on niin keskeinen osa-alue suomalaista yhteiskuntaa ja suomalaisen yhteiskunnan vahvuus. Se on paitsi yhteiskunnan kannalta tärkeitä, myös toisinpäin sen yksilön kannalta tärkeitä. Koulutus on se, jota suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa on se jota onneksi vielä arvostetaan, sitä koulutusta. Sitä pitääkin arvostaa. Meillä on vahva tällöinen koulutususkon ollut Suomessa, oikeastaan hyvin pitkään, jo 1800-luvulta lähtien. Koulutus on tärkeitä. Vanhemmat ovat aina halunneet että seuraavalla sukupolvella on parempi koulutus, jos mahdollista. Suomessa se on ollut mahdollista. Koulutus on ollut myöskin tällöinen sosiaalisen nousun väline Suomessa hyvin pitkään. Sillä on niin kuin hirveen iso merkitys suomalaisen yhteiskunnan kannalta. Ja sitten myös talouden puolelta niin Suomi on pieni maa. Meillä ei ole paljon noita voimavaroja. Meillä on metsää ja järviä ja sitten on ihmiset. Ja ne ihmiset ja se koulutus muodostaa aika ison kulmakiven.

We think that education is such a key aspect of Finnish society and the strength of Finnish society. It is not only important for society, but also vice versa for the individual. Education is what in Finnish society is fortunately still valued, we value education. Education should be appreciated. We have had a strong belief in education in Finland, we have had actually for a very long time, since the 19th century. Education is important. Parents have always wanted the next generation to have a better education if possible. In Finland, it has been possible. Education has also been such an instrument of social advancement in Finland for a very long time. It has a great significance for Finnish society. And then also on the financial view, as Finland is a small country. We don't have a lot of those resources. We have forests and lakes and then we have people. And people and education form a pretty big cornerstone.

Expert, Finnish National Board of Education

The ongoing discourse about education as a prime resource for Finland, may explain why politicians have decided to invest in education by reducing class sizes and increasing teachers' salaries. Samuel E. Abrams (2016) elaborates on concerns regarding the American education system, such as many other American educational scholars have been doing, speculating and explaining why the recent developments in the American school system have resulted in an increasing gap in inequality and test results of school achievements. In his book (Abrams, 2016), he does not reject a commercial mindset regarding education, although he criticizes how it is implemented. He explains that although Finland has a public school system and Finnish education policy is rejecting the trends of privatization of schooling, Finns are still adopting a commercial mindset in education. However, as he writes, in Finns think long-term and view the policy from the perspective of the child. The child is regarded as a consumer of education in contrast to the American system, where data on the child's process in school is documented for parents and statistics adding a severe burden on not only teachers, but also the school system in general.

As competition between schools increases in countries supporting privatization of schools, wealthy parents seek the best schools for their children and many parents are willing to pay tremendous amounts for a good education, amounts most Finnish parents condemn. The schools in Finland are trusted, and there is no demand for continuous testing and evaluation of students and schools. Testing is set to a minimum, and testing is not on the agenda in the interviews with parents or school professionals. Testing is regarded as unnecessary and unreliable, and as a principal explained to me, testing is not showing the true quality of the school or the school's capability to teach; a general upper secondary school taking on students with weak previous school performance may increase their final grades, but might land on the average level statistically.

siellä oli kavereita kenellä oli 5,3 keskiarvo ja ne kirjoitti C:n paperit niin kukaan oon sanonut kaikille näille pöyhkeilijöille lukionrehtoreille ja muille että mitatkaa sitä oman koulun tekosia siitä kun te vertaatte millä papereilla se lapsi tulee teidän kouluun se tulee 9,9 keskiarvon niin eiks se tarkoita että se vähintään kuusi laudaturia kirjoittaa, jumaliste ei se kirjoita välttämättä yhtään oletteko te onnistuneet... miettikää

there were guys who had 5.3 average scores and writing C papers and as I have told all of these arrogant general upper secondary education principals and others that measure your own school doings when you compare where the child comes from, the child comes with an average score of 9,9 so doesn't that mean that they will write at least six laudaturs, goddamit they may not be writing one... think about that

Principal, individual interview, Turku

According to the principal, documents schools are showing off on how their students have performed in general upper secondary school, do not show the true quality of teaching at that school.

9.4. Conclusions

The discourse of inequality in education at the national education policy level, is represented by themes regarding ethnic/immigrant origin, socioeconomic background, financial resources and gender as well as the new topics of school differentiation and school choice. At the local school level, school professionals and experts also include inequality at the structural and individual levels. Youth unemployment and an unstable labor market increases inequality and sets certain demands on education and its role for young people. In addition, bullying and knowledge in the Finnish language are putting students in unequal positions according to school professionals and experts.

Furthermore, at the local school level, school professionals and experts discuss how students should choose their education according to intrinsic values, take individual responsibility for their educational trajectory as well as pragmatically choosing their education according to the rules of the structure, i.e., work strategically with their grades and Leaving Certificate to enhance their opportunities. These discourses are also present in the discussions with the students, how they are supposed to take responsibility for their own educational trajectory, how to choose their educational trajectory strategically, how their school success and Leaving Certificate are always setting the rules for the choice as well as how students should always choose their educational trajectory according to their own intrinsic values.

Discourses are negotiated and shaped within different contexts and are therefore dependent on the context. The discourses appear at the local school level in a multifaceted way and many discourses from the national and local levels are also contested at the local school level. The local level offers a broad spectrum of reflections on educational inequality. Discourses regarding educational inequality at the national level is often defined, justified and explained by examples from statistics, while discourses at the local level are discussed in accordance with respondents' direct experiences gained from working closely with students. Many of the discourses regarding educational inequality at the national level can be recognized at the local school level, however respondents refer to these discourses in a different way in contrast to how they discuss their own experiences. For example, at the local school level, students with an immigrant background are not automatically positioned as students situated in a disadvantaged background, as they are situated in national policy documents. Instead, at the local school level, language skills in the Finnish language are setting the boundaries. At the national level, it seems that all students with an immigrant background are positioned as one group with risk of marginalization, while local school professionals and experts are focusing on the skills students have (e.g., language skills in Finnish). The reason for this is perhaps the choice of method when articulating the challenges; national policy documents and experts mostly use statistics and local school experts draw from their own experience with young people.

Why education is relevant for young people is justified in a range of ways at the national policy level; to prevent the marginalization and social exclusion, for financial reasons, by counting how much young, marginalized, people cost the society and the more hidden agenda: to prevent idleness and prevent young people from doing nothing. In the last justification, education can be regarded as a temporary stash to keep young people in and when analyzing this phenomenon from a historical perspective, it is interesting to see how this phenomenon appears continuously in history in different countries and at different times (Kaestle, 1983, Kaarninen, 2003, Takala, 1983).

In addition, the relevance of education for developing the Finnish society, to understand education as a resource for the Finnish nation is an ongoing discourse at the national policy level. Education is elevated as an important part of the national identity and resource for Finland to compete and manage globally, and therefore education is seen as a public good important for society.

10 Discussion

Equality and equity have been among the important justifications for developing the Finnish education system since the 1970s (e.g., Kivinen, 1988, Ministry of Education, 2004, Ministry of Education 2008; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012, Government Program, 2011). Since then, students in Finland have been provided with a similar nine-year comprehensive education¹². Although providing a similar education in the comprehensive school, the connection between family background and future position in society is still strong (e.g., Myrskylä, 2009, Saari, 2015, Vanttaja, 2005). The transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education is the first phase when young people are divided into different educational trajectories, into either vocational studies or a more academically oriented path, general upper secondary education. The research question was formulated to illuminate this particular phase; how inequality is produced and reproduced in the decision-making process of students in the transition phase from basic education to further education and training.

Analyzing students' decision-making process by using a multifaceted and multileveled theoretical and methodological approach has provided interesting results showing the complexity on how students navigate in the transition phase from basic education to further education and training. By juxtaposing the viewpoints of different actors as well as using different methodological tools from discourse analysis, focusing on the big D Discourses as well as conducting a little d discourse analysis with some linguistic tools, the analysis showed an in-depth approach on how structures of inequality are reproduced in education, demonstrating a *structured agency*, how students negotiate decisions on a predetermined path.

10.1. Students' scope of action

Knowledge and awareness about available options is always limited to the context of students, school and parents. How parents and school professionals support and guide the students is influenced by the context available. However, when statistics show how a student's educational trajectory is connected to their socioeconomic background, which also became clear in my sample, the researcher can and should start to question the 'truth' that students make their own informed decision. It is

¹² In addition, in 2015, compulsory education was prolonged to ten years, due to the compulsory 1-year pre-primary education, meaning that all children were required to receive education from the year they turn six.

evident that the students draw from a certain social context, and that the social context plays an important role when students navigate in the transition phase to upper secondary education. It is a false conclusion to draw that students make the decision independently, although both students, parents and school professionals state that this is the case, because statistics show otherwise (Myrskylä, 2009, Saari, 2015, Vanttaja, 2005, Vauhkonen et al., 2017), as does the small sample of this dissertation. By triangulation, using a multifaceted theoretical approach and a multileveled analytical approach, shows interesting results showing the complexity of how students navigate in the transition phase from basic education to further education and training. Drawing from a different set of theoretical approaches of power domination and structures of society, social reproduction, agency and reflexivity, young peoples' agency is understood as structured by the interplay between students' own choices and wishes, social background and habitus, situated in a sociopolitical and education policy context. Students make their own decision within their social context; the choice is made within a certain social context, and students are bound to choose within this social context. Therefore, analyzing how discourses on the transition phase are presented, justified, legitimized and appear and reappear in different settings, reveals how the decision-making process is forming the student's scope of action and structures agency.

On one hand, structures of inequality are regulated by class, gender, socioeconomic position and ethnic background (e.g., Skeggs, 2010, Lareau, 2011, Ruohola, 2012, Rinne, 2014, Reay, 1998, Tolonen, 2012). On the other hand, the student is encouraged to practice agency, to choose the educational trajectory her/himself, and to use their own reflexive deliberation in the decision-making process (Archer, 2003, 2007). Drawing from methods developed by Mühlhäusler & Harré (1990) and Yates & Hiles, (2010a, 2010b) by focusing on use of pronouns, demonstrates variations in young people's self-involvement, responsibility and exercise of power. Student's *scope of action* in this study is understood as the scope in which students make their decisions and reflect on their options, whether it is a more agency reflected process, or a process guided by the habitus or capitalistic power mechanisms.

The student's everyday activities and surroundings, family background, parents' guidance and influence, other important relationships, shape the scope of action, as well as the school and the practices of the local school culture, national and global policy context, historical traces of education and social welfare policy steering

mechanisms. In school, guidance counselors, teachers and social workers work in a certain local context, directed and influenced by regulations and practices from both school and policy. In addition, the local school context is influenced by the broader sociopolitical education policy context, and also somewhat influences it, and the practices of school are directly and indirectly predisposed to the policy and practices of education policy. The list of contexts is ongoing; for example, the context of sociopolitical policy and practices also defines and influences the structure of education policy and practices in a tangible way, for example in the wellbeing of students at school. In addition, global education policy and practices steer national and local education policy and practices both directly and indirectly. There are discourses regarding students' scope of action in all contexts, but how they are presented, justified and legitimated vary according to the context.

10.2. Main discourses

Julia Kristeva argues that authors do not create their texts from their own mind, but rather compile them from pre-existent texts. Thus, the text becomes “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (Kristeva, 1980: 36). ‘Texts’, spoken and written, appear and reappear in different settings, and how these different texts are therefore reproduced, neutralizes its content to become a part of a common discourse that almost everyone agrees on. Interdiscursivity is closely related to intertextuality, constituting combinations of genres and discourses, i.e., how discourses appear and reappear in different settings (Fairclough, 2010; 95). The focus in this research has been on the context of the student and the student’s personal experiences as well as the context of the school; the local policy and practices of the school. However, the context of national education policy and practice is constantly appearing and reappearing in the discourses of the local school.

The relevance of education is not contested in this study. Everyone agrees on the relevance of young people applying to undertake upper secondary education after the 9th grade, however why and how education is important vary depends on who is talking and from which position. While students tend to justify the relevance of education with discourses of intrinsic values, the national education policy discourse tends to emphasize the relevance of education with justifications on equality and equity.

At the national level, drawing from national education policy documents and interviews with national policy and education experts, the relevance of choosing an educational trajectory, *any* educational trajectory, is accentuated. Education is regarded as one of the more effective means to *prevent the marginalization and social exclusion* of young people. The focus has been on developing tools to avoid the marginalization of young people, such as guaranteeing them a place in education or training with political instruments like the education and training guarantee. Schooling has also been extended several times since the early 20th century. The most recent means to extend education occurred in 2015 and 2020. In 2015 compulsory education was prolonged to ten years, due to including a compulsory 1-year pre-primary education, meaning that all children became required to receive education from the year they turn six. In 2020 compulsory education was extended to include all young people in education until the age of 18 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020, Oppivelvollisuuslaki, 1214/2020). This may also be interpreted as a mean to provide *a temporary stash* for young people, deriving from fear of increased youth unemployment, a fear of young people ‘doing nothing’, preventing young people from ‘wandering the streets’ or even ‘practicing evil’, as this discourse appeared not only among school professionals and experts, but also continuously in history in different countries and times (Takala, 1983, Kaestle, 1983, Kaarninen, 2003). Also, *financial reasons* are part of the justification for preventing marginalization at the national level, justifying the relevance of education by referring to the costs to society of marginalized young people.

In both national policy documents as in the interviews with school professionals, *statistics* on intergenerational inequality and ‘the model from home’ are elevated and may be discussed as something static, something that is difficult to change. In national education policy documents, statistics are used as the prime source to show the correlation between socioeconomic background, immigrant background, gender, financial situation and school success. School professionals do not directly discuss class or habitus, but acknowledge the connection between the family background or circumstances at home and the educational trajectory. In the discourse, in which the educational trajectory is predetermined according to the family background, national statistics and empirical experiences work as evidence to confirm these views and opinions and statistics are used as evidence and legitimations on why school may fail in supporting young people. Some school professionals may say that they cannot influence the predetermined educational path, as the students have already internalized a ‘model’ from home. In the practice of contesting predetermined educational

trajectories, school professionals may understand and accept the statistical connection between family background and position in education and professional life, but they aim to contest and work against this connection. School professionals may contest this discourse with a discourse of need of patching up for lack of parenting and some proactively work against students ending up in a similar, disadvantaged position as their parents. They do not regard this connection as being a predetermined path one cannot influence, instead they challenge gender-related connections as well as connections between family background and educational trajectory in their work. Students agree that the decision is formed from what they know, from their own personal experiences and from watching their parents in their work. Parents, on the other hand, seem reluctant to admit their own role when students choose a similar educational trajectory as their own. However, considering the small data set of parents, this could be further analyzed in future research.

A discourse on accepting *predetermined educational trajectories* is present among school professionals, either by accepting predetermined educational trajectories as something static that are difficult to change, or by fighting against these predetermined educational trajectories. In this discourse, the educational trajectory is predetermined according to the different forms of capital students possess (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984, Bourdieu, 2011, Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Lareau, 2002, Reay, 2006). Family background shapes the student's decision-making process and therefore when students are using agency in the decision-making process, the agency is merely a reflection of the social structure as the social structure and the structural position of the individual is generating the individual's agency. In this perspective, students choose a similar educational trajectory as their parents, as this trajectory is one they have been socialized into and internalized through early childhood. The justifications for students choosing a similar educational trajectory as their parents differ somewhat among school professionals and students.

School professionals tend to explain the decision with statements that parents implicitly or explicitly guide their students in a similar educational trajectory as themselves, or that it is 'the model from home' that is pre-determining the educational trajectory. School professionals want students to find a place where they will thrive, however they also point out, to a varying extent, the pressure and demands from a changing labor market. School professionals encourage students to use these justifications of autonomy and self-responsibility by pointing out the relevance of

students making their own informed decision. How informed the decision actually is depends on the information provided to students not only by the guidance counselor, but also the information and knowledge the students have accumulated through their own life trajectory and experiences. Students use the information available to them when making their decision about their educational trajectory. Furthermore, on one hand students are referred to as children, who are not mature enough to be responsible for their schoolwork and to determine what to study, however on the other hand, they are treated as agents who are supposed to take an active role in the decision-making process. Underachieving and lack of motivation in school are justified by lack of maturity and young age, and the parents' responsibility in guiding students becomes important.

Throughout the analysis, there is a discourse emphasizing *students' agency*, or a discourse emphasizing *responsibility*, that students should choose their educational trajectory by themselves without interference from others. According to school professionals, students should choose an educational trajectory that aligns with their own *intrinsic values*, however acknowledging their own qualifications, abilities and competencies, prevailing limitations, such as their health condition, results from the Leaving Certificate, etc. In this discourse, school professionals referred to students as agents capable of making decisions themselves without interference from others. Students declare their own agency and responsibility in the decision-making process and draw from their own personal context(s) and experiences when they reflect on their educational trajectory and when they decide what they want to study. Although they are influenced by their parents' educational choices and professional careers and navigate in the transition phase according to their abilities and opportunities, the responsibility is emphasized through the discussions and they still present the decision as their own. Students explain how the choice always have been 'self-evident' or 'clear', perhaps insinuating that they have developed a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Students are obliged to use their own agency and take responsibility for their own learning and educational path, which shows the values of accentuating agency and responsibility in society. Even in some cases when the student is unsure about the decision or the decision turns out bad, the responsibility is still on the student.

Students use different modes of reflectivity and reflexivity when choosing their educational trajectory (Archer, 2003, 2007). While *reflectivity* is the action of how

students reflect on their alternatives from their own personal view and experience, *reflexivity* is an active process of including society and the context young people live in into these reflections. As there are several modes of reflexivity among adults (Archer, 2003, Tapola-Haapala, 2011), there are also different modes of reflexivity among young people. Young people reflect upon their choices in different ways, some are more goal-oriented, knowing what they want and how they want it, and what they want to do in the future, and some have even ‘always’ known what they want to work with. Some young people are more careful with what they want, and uncertain about their choices, and finally they may end up in general upper secondary school, only to get more time to reflect on their choices. Students justify their decision with values on intrinsic values, personal interests and an interest in the field, showing the internalization of postmodern values and ideals of agency in contemporary society (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001, Lahelma, 2009). Students use the information available to them to make their own informed decision. The choices young people make, may be based on ‘small grains of information’ (Lappalainen et al., 2010). In cases in which students are discouraged from follow a predetermined path, such as when a student is discouraged from choosing a similar educational choice as their parents or siblings, students are forced to change the mode of their own reflective activity and internal conversation, which is the starting point for agency (Archer, 2003).

Students, parents and school professionals stress responsibility in the decision-making process; how students are allowed and even obliged to choose and decide the educational trajectory for themselves. Students repeat the same discourse on responsibility; that the decision is their own, the decision is not to be influenced by anyone else, as this behavior and practice is expected of them. Emphasizing an autonomous and informed decision that students make themselves releases the blame and responsibility of school and parents. When the transition has failed, and the student is unsatisfied, the student may end up blaming him/herself. Students tend to justify their decisions with statements of autonomy and self-responsibility, how students are responsible for their own decision; how this choice feels natural for them, justifying their decision with statements that they have ‘always’ known they wanted to attend this particular trajectory (cf Lareau, 2011, Reay, 1998). The responsibility students are demanded to take, while making the decision within a certain context, or within ‘predetermined limits’, gives the students *an illusion of choice*.

The parents engaged in the research, mostly active and middle-class parents, encourage their children to find an educational trajectory suiting the aspirations of their child and encourage their children to find a study place based on intrinsic values. The ongoing discourse among parents emphasize students' own responsibility and agency in the decision-making process, however the decision should be made 'within predetermined limits' (Reay & Ball, 1998). However, how parents have been 'setting the stage' (Harris & Robinson, 2016) for their children, through abstract ways of influencing the child's perspective on life and on academic achievements and choices, is challenging to determine, although extremely important. Parents *deliberately take a passive role* in guiding students, justifying this role with *a pedagogical function* of allowing the child to make their own, independent decision as in claiming that young people should be allowed to make their own mistakes and to learn from them. In addition, parents simultaneously show *trust in the Finnish society and education system*, by verifying that the decision is not necessarily final, and that the system allows for second chances, that young people may change their educational trajectory in the future. Education is not regarded among parents as a straightforward decision the student chooses once, instead it is a flexible system of lifelong learning, including re-education.

Structures of inequality and class (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) casts a long shadow in education, and is reproduced through the practices of accepting educational inequality by not contesting the role of the gatekeepers of equality and equity. The Finnish education system is regarded and presented in research and education policy documents as a non-selective system that provides all students with equal educational opportunities. Structurally, all students in the Finnish education system are regarded as being equal, as they are served a similar educational curriculum and the same information in school regarding transition phase. However, school segregation is also increasing in the capital area in Finland (Bernelius & Vaattovaara, 2016), and opportunities of young people are driven by their socioeconomic background, gender and ethnic or immigrant background (e.g., Saari, 2015, Vauhkonen et al., 2017, Rinne, 2014). Students and parents raised concerns about how students are supported or not supported and guided towards different educational trajectories. Parents discussed how students were guided towards the 'wrong' educational trajectory, i.e., a trajectory that did not corresponded to their values of proper education, the message from school, that when 'you are in this kind of school you go to that kind of' (school) (Chapter 7.4). Students complained about some students receiving more support and guidance than others, about teachers who dislike some students, about guidance counselors

who do not support the student in their choices. Among school professionals, a lack of adequate skills in the Finnish language was regarded as inadequate language skills, showing how the Finnish language determine entrance to education and limiting the available choices in further education. Inadequate skills in the Finnish language are a gatekeeper to general upper secondary education, which is the conventional way to studying at university. It is however possible to study in other languages than Finnish at university level, Finnish universities have been for example expanding the number of study programs offered in English.

However, a different discourse on *unexpected occurrences* also appears. Henderson et al. (2007) and Thomson et al. (2002), acknowledge the phenomenon of ‘critical moments’, that previous researchers have discussed as ‘fateful moments’ (Giddens, 1991, in Henderson et al., 2007; 20) or ‘turning points’ (Mandlebaum, 1973, in Henderson et al. 2007; 20). The critical moments are often described as negative events in life trajectories, such as death, bullying, parental unemployment or conflict with teachers and events leading to a positive outcome (Thomson, 2002). In my data, a similar phenomenon also appeared, referred to as ‘exceptions to the rule’, or ‘unexpected occurrences’. These events were not always negative, but sometimes unexpected and it was difficult to say what event started the change. However, as teachers and other school professionals described how some educational trajectories take unpredicted turns, they emphasized how school professionals never may trust the statistical connection between the family background and student’s position in life, because one can never know the position of the student in the future.

When situating these discourses within the same local context, the paradox is clear: on one hand, students are responsible for their own educational trajectory, however the trajectory is predetermined. On one hand, prejudices of teachers and the power and influence school professionals have on their students may be affected by ‘taken-for-granted cultural assumptions’ (Brunila et al. 2011). Schools may be guiding students along a certain educational trajectory of ‘their kind’ and this may lead to socializing students into a capitalist workforce, where children are taught to adapt their predetermined role in society (Bowles & Gintis, 1975). On the other hand, according to school professionals, a student’s decision-making process is often pushed by their parents and that the family is the most important influencer guiding students or ‘setting the stage’ (Harris & Robinson, 2016) in the educational trajectory.

10.3. Supporting students from diverse backgrounds

Young people today have more opportunities in choosing and changing their educational trajectory, but their opportunities are defined with uncertainty. Temporary jobs, part-time jobs and other atypical jobs provide freedom and individualized opportunities to young people, but increases risks of marginalization as the structure of labor administration are incapable of adapting to the new structure (Haapala, 2016). The labor market and the educational and professional trajectory are more destandardized, so young people may switch back and forth between education and work, high-income and low-income jobs, work and unemployment during their lifetime (Walther & Plug, 2006). Uncertainty is becoming the norm in society. The context of young people is continuously changing, prompting new comprehensions of supporting equality and equity. Changes in society such as increasing youth unemployment and an unstable labor market, set different demands on education and on the choices young people make regarding their educational trajectory. Young people today may need to re-educate themselves several times in their lives. On one hand, according to themselves, parents and school professionals, young people should choose a field according to their intrinsic values, choose an educational trajectory that is most appealing to them. On the other hand, according to school professionals, parents and experts, students should be pragmatic, choose within certain limits, according to the boundaries and restrictions of the application system and their own limitations. The guidance counselor's role is not to push students along a certain trajectory, but to guide students in realizing what their interests are and has a great influence in supporting students in their decision, providing information about options (Felczak & Julkunen, 2016). However, for students to realize what their options are, they draw from their experiences, and from their own social context. Students draw from the experiences of their parents, siblings, peers, other relatives and close networks.

Educational trajectories and position in the labor market in many ways are still predisposed by social, financial and immigrant or ethnic background (e.g., Saari, 2015, Rinne, 2014, Myrskylä, 2009, Vauhkonen et al., 2017). Education is a key factor in reproducing the structures of social inequality (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Kivinen & Rinne, 1995), but also a part of education policy to decrease social inequality in society (e.g., Government program, 2011, Ministry of Education, 2004, 2008; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012a, Rinne et al., 2004). Both family context and school context set limits on how students can choose their educational

trajectory. Students navigate within several contexts, in their own scope of action, and these contexts restrain and influence, explicitly or implicitly, the decision-making process.

Research shows that families are very different and possess different forms of resources, cultural and social capital and have very different opportunities to support their children (e.g. LaRocque et al., 2011, Kosunen 2014, Kosunen & Seppänen, 2015). Analyzing how students navigate in the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education and the different ways of tackling educational inequality in the schools and the role of the school professionals need to be re-contextualized. According to their best knowledge, abilities and competencies, students choose either vocational education or general upper secondary education that prepares for studying at university. During childhood and youth, students from very different backgrounds draw from their own specific contexts about their opportunities and navigate in their specific contexts. Students reflect about their educational options in different ways and receive support to a various degree from their family and other important people.

Students who receive support from home, either in the decision-making process or with homework, seem to perform better in school and they justify their choices in a confident, direct way. Perhaps they have developed a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and are more confident in choosing an educational trajectory 'within predetermined limits' Reay & Ball (1998) and the 'stage' has been 'set' through early childhood (Harris & Robinson, 2016). Perhaps they have been taught by their parents how to reflect on their own talents and skills (Lareau, 2002). Some students in the data set analyzed for this thesis were more aware of their aspirations, talents and skills, whether other students may need more support in realizing their opportunities. Therefore, students do not make their choice from similar positions and they are situated in unequal positions; some students have the advantage of already knowing their aspirations and skills, whether other students struggle in finding their path. Students who struggled with their decision also described less support from their family. Students who do not share the same interests as their parents, or who do not find a professional model in their parents, turn to their siblings, extracurricular activities, the mandatory 1-2-week work experience through school or other relevant experience. For students who struggle with their decision, the support from school seems to be extremely important. Also, in cases when the support from the parents is not sufficient, for example when a school psychologist or school social worker is needed, the school's role becomes even more important.

The school's role is crucial in the transition phase, and the school has the opportunity to guide students further and to challenge predetermined educational trajectories. School as an institution can have the role of socializing students into the workforce. However, the school professionals are executing the practice and have the power to change existing practices. If schools are socializing students into the broader capitalist workforce, casting a 'long shadow' in education (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), the school professionals have the power to reflect on their prejudices and pre-assumptions and change their methods of socializing students into certain educational trajectories. Some school professionals justified their views on how the 'model from home' was determining the educational trajectory, as some school professionals were fighting against this view, contesting that educational trajectories are predetermined.

Some critical voices at school pointed out that the schools are not preparing the students sufficiently to deal with fluctuations in the labor market, providing all students with equal opportunities and knowledge. The main message from school seems to be that students are supposed to choose their own educational trajectory without being pushed by the school. However, instead of freely choosing from all available options, students tend to choose from what they know, they choose in their own specific context. Therefore, the choice they make is not a free choice, instead it is *an illusion of choice*, because the choice depends on their family background, gender, social position, siblings, school, work experience, hobbies, etc. The school is not necessarily guiding students towards a predisposed educational trajectory, however their passivity and reluctance of guiding students towards any particular educational trajectory is not supporting students to choose outside their specific social context. When the context is insufficient or when the student lacks alternatives, it is important that these students are provided with enough support, alternatives, information and guidance, so that they can reflect on their choices, and exercise their reflexive deliberations, in the decision-making process.

10.4. Suggestions for further research

Analyzing students' scope of action with a multifaceted and multileveled approach, focusing simultaneously on the big D Discourses as well as conducting little d discourse analysis with some linguistical tools, shows the broader discourses in society, interdiscursivity and intertextuality, and how students not only express self-

involvement and responsibility of their own educational trajectory but also how they are expected to do so. Furthermore, the focus groups showed some interesting results, hinting at students developing their decisions in reflective and reflexive discussions with their peers. How the big D discourse is developed in discussions with peers, taking into account the scope of action, could be further analyzed in future research.

The data set was collected from three schools in three cities: Helsinki, Tampere and Turku. All three cities are big cities in Finland, with populations of 200 000–650 000 people. Young people may have more opportunities in big cities to choose from regarding their educational trajectory, so the context of educational opportunities in rural regions may be different from opportunities in big cities. Therefore, to include schools, students, parents and experts from rural areas would be an important addition in understanding the decision-making process.

Although I cannot be sure about the family background of the school professionals, since this question was not asked, the diversity among school professionals is not as broad as among the students. School professionals are highly educated, usually with a degree in tertiary education. All school professionals in the sample were white, although a few of the people were born outside Finland. Analyzing the results within a social constructivist frame of reference (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Bourdieu, 2011, Bourdieu, 1984), highly educated school professionals may share a set of cultural resources and linguistic codes that are also shared with children from the dominant classes. Therefore, children from the dominant classes may receive a different reception than other students. Therefore, as pointed out in the analysis, some of the results should be treated with caution, regarding how only language skills are regarded as significant in the transition phase and not ethnic background and skin color. Skin color and racism were not identified by the school professionals as hindering students from realizing their aspirations. Instead, language skills and cultural differences were emphasized as the main challenges. However, as all interviewees participating in the research were white, a different perspective could have been gained with a more diverse set of interviewees. Therefore, one cannot interpret the results, as skin color and racism do not matter in the transition phase. On the contrary, color blindness could be hinting at a problem not even opened up for discussion. These issues could therefore be further investigated.

The data set of parents is both limited and biased. As described in Chapter 7, parents who wished to participate in the interviews can be described as active parents taking

an active role in their child's education and life course. The outcome of the results would most probably have been different in cases with a diversified set of parents. Therefore, further analysis is needed on parents representing different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Further research including parents who are not as active in their children's educational trajectory, unemployed parents and parents with an immigrant background, would open up new perspectives about young people's decision-making process in the transition phase.

My research shows that siblings also play an important role in the transition phase. However, no sibling was interviewed in this research. Further research analyzing and understanding the role siblings play, would increase understanding about the context students in the transition phase are making their decision in.

In education policy documents, it is often declared that social background should not be an obstacle to educational opportunities. School has an important role in securing a safe place for young people with different family backgrounds and for enabling equal educational opportunities for all students. Therefore, it is relevant how actors in school reflect on students' educational opportunities and social background. Reflections on how to support students from different backgrounds are necessary, particularly in cases in which students do not receive enough support from their parents. Should schools take a more rigorous role in influencing the path of educational trajectories and supporting students who do not receive support from their social networks? Schools should be aware, as they usually are, of the statistical connections between socioeconomic background and placement in education and labor markets. Accepting the statistical connection between socioeconomic background and placement in education and labor market could and should be contested. As students choose from what they know, they could be given more knowledge and raise awareness about their opportunities and options. Although students seem to be satisfied with the information provided to them, the fact that they choose from their own context provided us with enough evidence that students need more information and knowledge about their alternatives. Schools could take a proactive role, not only in providing information, social and emotional support, but also recognizing the challenging contexts students make their decision about their future. Therefore, there is a clear need for more research on how students are and should be supported in these situations, as well as how aspirations and wishes of students are considered.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview guidelines: students

Background information

- a) Your name and where you live
- b) Thoughts about being in the 9th grade
- c) What are the main tasks of the school?
- d) What kind of teachers do you have
- e) How do you define a good teacher

The transition phase

- a) when did you find out what you can do after the 9th grade, (who or who told you, the role of the school, the role of the parents)
- b) where you can get information about your options (school, friends, parents)
- c) how did you decide where to apply
- d) with whom did you discuss/ who helped with this decision
- e) what kind of information is useful
- f) how have you discussed the transition phase with your parents/legal guardians? (how parents influence the decision)
- g) what kind of support is useful
- h) thoughts about the connection between what you learn here and what you do in the future
- i) Have you visited upper secondary schools
- j) Is school easy?
- k) Is school equally easy for everyone? If not then why can school be difficult for some?
- l) Are everyone treated equally? Are some students encountered differently? Do you have any examples?

Finally

- a) Who do you think should be interviewed?

Appendix 2 Interview guidelines: ex-students

The newly selected students

- Please obtain information on the following:
- Age
- gender
- origin (migrant background)
- current place of residence (own place – alone or with other/s vs. still at parental home (address plus cell phone and/or email)
- parental educational level (highest of father or mother or both – if possible)
- parental occupation (as exact as possible)
- previously attended primary and lower secondary schools (with places)
- present school (or any other place/occupation)

This information should be secured in a formatted list to be filled in at the end of the interview together with the student and the interviewer to make sure that data is complete.

Previously interviewed students

- Please make sure that the information on the following is obtained either by checking the transcription on the previous interview with the student or during the second interview.
- Age
- gender
- origin (migrant background)
- current place of residence (own place – alone or with other/s vs. still in the parental home address plus cell phone and/or e-mail)
- parental educational level (highest of father or mother or both – if possible)
- parental occupation (as exact as possible)
- previously attended primary and lower secondary schools (with places)
- present school (or any other place/occupation)

The interview questions are the same for previously interviewed students and newly selected ones. However, please read through the first interview transcription with the student, and highlight the questions that were not discussed before, or if further elaboration on certain questions would be helpful. Then, discuss the new topics and the questions that remained from the previous interview.

- For both, the interview questions will consist of four parts:
- Narrative openings stimulus,
- Informative questions of the interviewer as far as not covered
- 3) Concluding evaluative questions,
- 4) Filling in formatted list.

Please realize that the interview, if properly and extensively conducted, might take two hours. If you do not manage to cover all issues, make another appointment rather than rush through the topics.

Narrative opening stimulus:

- "Please, could you tell me how your school life proceeded - from the beginning up to now. Be as detailed as possible. Just tell everything you recall and that is important for yourself. Take your time, I will not interrupt you. Later I may ask back for some points that I may want to understand better. But first you are free to tell me your version of your school life up to now."
- Some of the questions in block B and C will be covered or at least mentioned with this stimulus so after the first narrative you can ask back chronologically where information is thin (e.g.: you told a bit about primary school. Could you tell a bit more and how it went on from there ...; or: you told that you were not so happy in primary school. Do you remember a particular situation?).

Informative questions

Transitions (add: discontent/critique and looking back on previous school!)

- Inform about pre-school experiences, possibly including language support for migrant children. Inform about that also in primary school.
- Which primary school did you attend, and how did you like it there? Did you have the feeling – as far as you can remember – that you were well prepared/ advised for your future education? (pay attention to class repetition).
- How did you experience the step from primary to secondary school?
- Was the secondary school after primary your first choice (or why not?)
- Who had been involved in your decision, and what role did they play? (e.g. family, peers, other relatives, teachers, school management, social workers, youth clubs, others). (Pay attention to interesting transition cases!)
- Who has been most influential in the transition from primary to secondary?
- Did your previous secondary school provide enough support to help you decide what do to next? Were you pleased with their support? Why, or why not?
- In terms of support (generally speaking, not only from school but all sources), what did you miss in the period that you had to take further educational (or other) decisions? What would you have liked more to have in terms of support?

The new school (or any other place/ occupation):

- After spending a month here, what do you think of your new school?
- Is the present school (or any other situation) your first choice?
- Is your new school in the same city as the previous one or do you have to commute? Do you still live with your parents now or did you have to moved to another place because of the new school?
- If you moved, what is your experience of being away from home and family? Do you miss them or feel more independent now?
- How are your new teachers?
- Do you like the topics you are studying now? Do you feel that you were well prepared by your previous school? Are you still content with the subjects you chose – or not (why?)
- Do you like your new classmates?
- Are there some things you like/dislike about the new school?
- How is the school environment? (e.g. building, school yard, neighborhood).
- What will be the main challenges for you at this school?
- How do you plan to overcome these challenges?
- Do you seek support from others when you have difficulties? From whom especially?
- Do you feel that you get enough support from others? What do you miss in this regard? (Pay attention to different support people previous/this new school, especially mentor)
- What about your leisure time? Do you have less or more time for yourself? What activities do you have besides the school? Can you manage to reconcile all the activities and school obligations?

Future: Start question: Where will you be in 10 years?

- What are your plans for your life (Professional life? Personal life?) (Here we are looking for hints to their ideas, expectations and orientation towards work and personal life).
- If respondent appears to have no broad or specific plans, we should restate the question: What do you consider as most important in your life?
- How do you want to realize your plans?
- What are your feelings about that (Optimistic? Pessimistic?) Are you confident that you will be able to realize your plans/dreams?
- Do you know examples/ people having realized plans similar to yours?

- Do you think this school will help you reach your future goals? How?
- What will be the main challenges? Why?
- How important do you think education is for your future life?
- What other important factors would you name for your future career and well-being?
- Who or what do you think will have the most influence over your future life?
- To what extent do you think that your past life/experience will have influence over your future? Which events/things are crucial?
- What do you consider more important – your present or future life?
- Do you think the opportunities for you in the future will be better or worse than for your parents' generation? Why?

Make sure that you follow the rationale of the telling of the interviewee – which might change order of points to be covered.

Make sure that you get as many episodes, narratives as possible!

Concluding evaluative question (according to narrative technique: open, broad)

- If you look back on your whole school period, what was/is for you the most remarkable (positive/negative)? Do you want to add something which we did not talk about?

Fill in the formatted list

- Thank you very much for the interview!

Appendix 3 Interview guidelines: parents

Opening Q

- a) Who belongs to your family?
- b) Would you tell me about your own educational experiences? What kind of education do you have? Do you feel that this education has been helpful in your life? In what way?
- c) Do you feel that you have missed out on certain education experiences?

Access, coping support

- a) do you feel that your child is in a school that meets his or her wishes?
- b) Did your child want to go to this school, what were the other options?
- c) How would you describe the school atmosphere?
- d) Are you happy with this school? Do you think your child will enjoy school? Are there any specific things at school that make him / her feel comfortable / not comfortable?
- e) What kind of challenges do you think your child will face at school?
- f) What kind of challenges do you think your child will face outside of school?
- g) Are all students and parents treated in the same way at school?
- h) What kind of support do you offer your child? Do you help with homework? Does your child ask for help or do you offer help without your child asking for it separately?
- i) How do you get information about the child's schooling from school?
- j) Does your child get enough support at school? are you happy with the support your child has received? What kind of support have you missed?
- k) Do you feel that there is room for improvement in teachers or other staff? In what ways do you wish they could better support students?
- l) Who outside school is important to your child? Youth workers, sports clubs, guys.
- m) Do you know what your child does in his / her free time and with whom he / she spends time?

Life course, relevance

- a) Do you know what plans your child has for the future? After the 9th grade?
- b) have you talked about future plans together?
- c) What hopes do you have for your child's future?

- d) Do you feel that you have similar thoughts about what he should do after the 9th grade?
- e) Are you trying to influence his decision or is it his own choice?
- f) Is there anyone else in your family who is talking to your child about his or her future?
- g) Do you think your child will achieve what he hopes for in the future?
- h) Do you feel that there are any obstacles that may complicate these future plans?
- i) Are you talking to your child about the future of your child?
- j) Do you know what options your child has after high school?
- k) What would you say; Is it all about education today? Is education the most important thing for a good life, a life one wants to lead? Or are other things influencing, and how, (money, family background, social background, social networks, or who you know)?

Finally

- a) Thank you, how did you enjoy the interview. Did I miss something?
- b) Who should I interview?

Appendix 4 Interview guidelines: school professionals

The role of the expert in the school, the area and the atmosphere of the school.

- a) How long have you been at this school? Work history
- b) What is your role in school?
- c) How would you describe your school and the school environment? What about the region more broadly, what are good things in the region? Are there any specific problems or challenges here?
- d) What educational opportunities do young people have in this area?

Expert's thoughts on the relevance of education

- a) There has been a lot of discussions about the relevance and significance of education and the role of education in how young people integrate into society.
- b) What are your thoughts on these things?
- c) How do you discuss these issues with students at school?
- d) Does education play an important role in integration?
- e) Have you encountered any specific problems or challenges?
- f) How do you feel that young people's educational opportunities have changed during the time you have worked as a _____? Any new challenges?

Students situated in an unequal position

- a) In our research, we talk a lot about students who are in an unequal position. How do you understand the unequal and equality? For example, what kind of students are situated in an unequal position in your school and why?
- b) What are the challenges with these students who are in an unequal position? What kind of support can you give to these students? Examples?
- c) Do you feel that your school has sufficient capacity to cope with these challenges with these students? What shortcomings do you feel there are in this school and in what things have you done well?
- d) Does the school have partners outside the school? What kind of experiences do you have with this cooperation?
- e) How do you collaborate with students' parents?

On the transition from basic education to upper secondary school

- a) What kind of support do students need in the transition phase?
- b) From school, parents, outside school?
- c) What is the work input and what are the minimum requirements?

- d) What challenges do you have?
- e) What role do you have, the school has, the role of parents, teachers, the student's own responsibility, who has an important role? How?
- f) What are your experiences of the transition phase from basic education to upper secondary school?
- g) How do you cooperate with secondary education institutions? How has it worked?
- h) Do you feel that all students have the same opportunities to succeed in education? What factors influence school performance?

Forms of support

- a) What kind of support can you give to students in the transition to the upper secondary level?
- b) What kind of support is useful? / What kind of support is not useful?
- c) Do you feel that all students have the same opportunities to succeed in secondary education? What factors influence school performance?
- d) Good ideas how to develop a support system?
- e) How can students influence what support they receive?
- f) How much can the school decide for itself what kind of support is given to students in the transition from primary school to secondary school? How much can parents influence? How can students influence what support they receive?
- g) What kind of support does this school need? Do you feel that your school has some special needs that other schools do not have?

About the education system

- a) What are the main problems in the education system? What kind of reforms are needed?
- b) The role of the labor market in transition?
- c) What kind of wishes do you have / what kind of support do you need to perform your work/tasks even better?

Finally

- a) Who should I interview?
- b) Thanks to the expert and the expert's experience of the interview. Did I forget to ask something according to your opinion?

Appendix 5 Interview guidelines: focus group, teachers

Background information

- a) Your name and how long have you been a teacher at school, what subjects do you teach?
- b) Do you have any other responsibilities in addition to those of teachers?

The main tasks of education and the teachers role

- a) According to your point of view; What are the main tasks of teaching?
- b) What is the role of education in how young people integrate into society?
- c) Does education play an important role in integration?
- d) How do you feel that educational opportunities for young people have changed. Any new challenges?
- e) Do you feel that your school has sufficient capacity to cope with these challenges?
- f) what extracurricular factors influence learning?

About the transition phase

- a) What are the opportunities for your students after the 9th grade?
- b) How can young people be helped in the transition from the 9th grade to the upper secondary level?
- c) How can the teacher support the student? Support teaching / additional assignments?
- d) What kind of shortcomings do you feel that this school has and in what things have you done well?
- e) Do you feel that teacher education provides adequate skills to cope with different students?
- f) How do you collaborate with students' parents?

Finally

- a) What are the biggest challenges in the education system? What kind of reforms are needed?
- b) The ideal school according to you?
- c) Who should I interview next?



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