“IT WAS TOO EARLY TO CHOOSE, WE WERE JUST BABIES.”

YOUNG PEOPLE’S NARRATIVES OF BALANCING BETWEEN VOCATIONAL AND GENERAL UPPER SECONDARY PATHWAYS

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University of Helsinki

Critical perspectives on agency and social justice in transitions and career development, Copenhagen 23.10.2019
My topic today

• Current situation of upper secondary education in Finland
• Background
• Research frame
• Methodology & data
• Preliminary analytical ideas concerning:
  • Choice-making and negotiations between VET & GUS
  • (Agency, resistance and resources)
• Questions & conclusions

Anna-Maija Niemi / University of Helsinki, Faculty of Educational Sciences
Research consortium “Skills, education and the future of work” (Academy of Finland 2016–2019) and our research project within it “Employability, education and diversities”

PAHE Research project:
“Privatisation and Access to Higher Education. A study on power relations, guidance devices and private capital in the transition to higher education (funded by Kone foundation)

DILE Research project:
“Diverse paths to adulthood. Lifehistorical study on young adults entering higher education and employment” (Faculty of Educational Sciences)
Definitions of support vary between different levels of education system.

**Special support**
- Intensified support
- General support

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**Definitions of support**
- **General support**
- **Special support**
- **Intensified support**

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**Labour market? Independent living?**

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**Education system in Finland**

1. Pre-primary education (6-year-olds)
2. Early childhood education and care
3. Basic education (7-16-year-olds, Comprehensive schools)
4. Matriculation examination (General upper secondary schools)
5. Polytechnic bachelor's degrees (Tecnopoli, Polytechnics)
6. Polytechnic master's degrees (Polytechnics)
7. Master's degrees (Universities)
8. Doctoral degrees (Licentiate degrees)
   - Universities

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**Voluntary additional year of basic education**

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**Vocational qualifications**
- Vocational institutions
- Further vocational qualifications

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**Work experience**
- 3 years

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**Duration in years**
- 3
- 2
- 1.5
- 3.5-4
- 1-1.5
Vocational education and training (VET) and its reform

• Still a sharp divide into separate types of schools — vocational and general — after basic education

• The current VET reform:
  • a legislative and system level reform, transforming the structure, funding and implementation of VET
  • aiming towards more rapid transitions and efficient attachments to working life
  • individualising study paths, emphasising work-based learning, recognition of previously obtained competences
  • the amount of basic degree programmes decreased to 43
  • students’ study paths may significantly vary between each other

• Complex political situation around VET:
  • financing cuts implemented by the previous government, the reduction of teaching
  • the worry discourse regarding the drop in the learning results of young people has gained ground
Reforms concerning General upper secondary education (GUS)

• In recent years, lively political discussion on whether special education should be mandated by law for general upper secondary education.

• The new law obliges schools to offer special education and strengthen counselling and guidance; endorsed in 2018 and it will come into force during 2019–21

• The central structural element in general upper secondary education is the final test called the Matriculation Examination.

• The ongoing reform of higher education student admission:
  • will further strengthen the role of the Matriculation Examination
  • will provide the option to apply for higher education on the basis of the matriculation certificate and to some extent, replace entrance examinations.

Anna-Maija Niemi / University of Helsinki, Faculty of Educational Sciences

(see Niemi & Laaksonen 2019)
Background

- Transitions within education and into labour market are commonly more disjointed and longer for students regarded as having special educational needs (see Kirjavainen et al. 2016; Niemi & Kurki 2014; Yates & Roulstone 2013).

- Educational hopes of those young people contradict with the choices offered for them in study counselling. Experiences about educational support in upper secondary level vary.

- Young people have been guided towards the study fields which are considered as 'safe and suitable' for them → to VET programmes

- Similarities between the research results concerning choice making and guidance of students with migrant backgrounds (Kurki 2019; Souto 2016)
1) How do the students narrate their previous choices between vocational and general upper secondary education and their possibly forthcoming educational and working life futures?

2) How does the agency become constituted in the narration of young people?
Ethnographic methodology and data

• Fieldwork in one VET and one GUS institute in the Helsinki metropolitan area during the year 2017
• 67 schooldays observations in the schools
• What happens in the school’s everyday life and how students and teachers conceptualise both attending school and the educational practices in use
• Analysis stretch out from particular institutions towards current education policy discourses (see e.g. Lahelma et al. 2014; Marcus 1995; Niemi 2015; Troman et al. 2006)

• **IN VET:** 27 days with two classes of Business and Administration — fieldnotes, informal discussions. Special emphasis on support practices such as special education. Interviews and group interviews with students (26) and teachers & other educators (6)
• **IN GUS:** One study-group of preparatory programme, lessons of Finnish as a second language and study counselling lessons observed. Special emphasis on following the work of special education teachers. Interviews and group interviews with students (41) and teachers & other educators (7)

• The student interviews: (school) biographical thematic interviews (see Niemi & Mietola 2017; Henderson ym. 2007).
Making choices between VET & GUS

VET & GUS as mutually exclusive
Grade point average didn’t enable a study place in GUS
"Well I didn’t want to apply to anywhere. I didn’t have any idea, but I didn’t want to apply to GUS. I felt that I wouldn’t get along at GUS.”
"I’ve been thinking about that why I wasn’t brighter at school. I’d rather wanted to go to GUS. I’ve thought it many times that why I didn’t work so that I would have got in.”
To choose VET means not to choose GUS
If you know the study field you aim at, then it is no worth applying to GUS
VET offers better work experiences

Too early choice-making
You have to choose too early. One can’t make a choice at that young age.
A lower secondary school has to be reformed. More familiarisation with different study fields and options to try out those.
"For me it is strange that at a very young age one should more or less know the (following) path. It’s just so.”
"In my opinion, one could somehow change (the study field) or so. I wasn’t really aware of what I really wanted at that time. And suddenly you had chosen and the decisions came out.”
Choices in the context of special educational needs?

- Students who studied in VET with a statement of special educational needs described that they were encouraged and clearly guided towards studies in VET instead of GUS.
- "GUS is not for you"
- Diagnoses worked as an explanation to not guide towards GUS
- Only few of the students that we interviewed in GUS had a statement of special educational needs. All of them had been the only students from their former special education classes who had applied to GUS.
Bea:
Bea’s occupational dream was to become a hairdresser. She sought admission to hairdresser’s study programme and get accepted. After two weeks of studies she dropped out and went to the preparatory programme called “Vocational Start” in which the main objective was to ponder one’s educational aspirations and make a decision concerning further studies and strengthen one’s study related skills. She decided to apply for a place at Business and Administration basic programme. She applied and got accepted.
I didn't really get along in that programme. I quit it. And after that I went to "Vocational start". Because I have learning difficulties, it may reflect on that, that I'm not able to. There (in the hairdresser programme) is a lot of manual work, that kind of a basic manual work, to fiddle, so that perhaps it wasn’t for me. Well, I would have done that work. I liked it a lot, but when you could not do that, then I decided to quit. I felt very bad about that I'm not able to do that work or so, won't get along, so that I can very well quit [...] Well. When I now think about it, it was very difficult at first and I was very sad and so, but I don't (think about it) anymore as such. I've got over it.
Bea: They (teachers) thought that we won’t get along in GUS. They just all the time emphasised that VET programmes [...] I’ve had that kind of a feeling that I would’ve tried in GUS, or would I have been able to get along there? [...] They perhaps thought that it’d be the easiest way for us. And sure it is [...] It would’ve been okay to tell something about it, what kind of it is, and at the same time why we would not apply to GUS because of certain learning difficulties. You have to do more work than the others, but still. One could advertise it little bit, that you can get along there, if you really want. If you are motivated.

Anna-Maija: Did you ever talk about your idea of applying to GUS?
Bea: No I didn’t, because I had that feeling. I was walked over, that "do not apply". It is so difficult in GUS. So I didn’t bother to say.
Among some other students, Bea comments on the Finnish system in which the students have to make their decisions “too early”. She suggests more flexible and general upper secondary education in which one could familiarize herself with different kinds of study options.
Further questions and conclusions

- Paradox: educational choices are generally considered as individual choices of an autonomic subject but there seem to be school cultural understandings of right and suitable paths for students depending on their backgrounds.
- The paths considered as suitable for each student seem to relate to social categories (such as learning difficulties & immigrant background) and stereotyped assumptions related to these.
- Educational choice-making as processes where young people shape their subjectivities and create spaces for their agency while negotiating with the guidance.
  → Different resources and restrictions to act agency and to express own ideas and to resist
- Reconsideration of ones choices? Study places in which one could try and practice studies in different programmes and make further decisions
  → the direction of upper secondary education in Finland?
Reflections of the first day

Please complete the following three sentences for yourself

1. What I really like about today is that....
2. During the day, I have been wondering about...
3. Something I think that I would like to do, read, look at, include, explore, investigate, describe, analyse...

Then share with the persons next to you for 5 minutes
Practical information
NoRNet Network meeting in Campus Carlsberg on Friday. If you didn’t sign up but would like to come. Talk to Michael Lindblad

The informal social dinner tonight is at H15. Address: Halmstovet 15. Close to the central station.

The next conference will be hosted by Professor Inga Andreassen in 2021 in Bergen, Norway.

The next network meeting of NoRNet will be hosted by Erik Haug in Lillehammer, Norway and the dates are November 5 & 6 in 2020.

Tomorrow we start at 8.50 coffee is served from 8.30
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON AGENCY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN TRANSITIONS AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT
NoRNNet
Transitions, Career and Guidance
Nordic Research Network
Dear youth, lower your shoulders, your choice of career does not determine your future
The four COs are: the acknowledgement of career and career guidance as embedded in context; community as important resource for career guidance; co-construction as the defining professional approach to career guidance; and collaboration between policy, research and practice across the Nordic countries as the usual way in which career guidance is developed and managed.
An Overview of the Career Management Competencies by Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>PHASE I</th>
<th>PHASE II</th>
<th>PHASE III</th>
<th>PHASE IV</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. PERSONAL MANAGEMENT</td>
<td>1. Build and maintain a positive self-concept</td>
<td>1.1 Build a positive self-concept while discovering its influence on yourself and others</td>
<td>1.2 Build a positive self-concept and understanding its influence on life, learning and work</td>
<td>1.3 Develop abilities to maintain a positive self-concept</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Interact positively and effectively with others</td>
<td>2.1 Develop abilities for building positive relationships in life</td>
<td>2.2 Develop additional abilities for building positive relationships in life and work</td>
<td>2.3 Develop abilities for building positive relationships in life and work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Change and grow throughout life</td>
<td>3.1 Discover change and growth are parts of life</td>
<td>3.2 Learn to respond to change and growth</td>
<td>3.3 Learn to respond to change that affects your well-being</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| AREA B | LEARNING AND WORK EXPLOITATION | 4. Ponder in having learning support of career goals | 4.1 Discover and focus on learning and its contribution to the life and work | 4.2 Unite lifelong learning to personal career orientation | 4.3 Unite lifelong learning to the career building process | 4.4 Promote in continuous learning support of career goals |
| | | 5. Learn and effectively use career information | 5.1 Understand the nature of career information | 5.2 Learn and use career information | 5.3 Learn and evaluate a range of career information sources | 5.4 Use career information effectively in the management of your career |
| | | 6. Understand the relationship between work, society and the economy | 6.1 Discover how work contributes to the individual lives | 6.2 Understand how work contributes to the community | 6.3 Understand how societal needs and economic conditions influence the nature and structure of work | 6.4 Incorporate your understanding of changing economic, social and employment conditions into your career planning |

| AREA C | CAREER BUILDING | 7.1 Secure, create and maintain work | 7.2 Explore effective ways of working | 7.3 Develop qualities to seek and maintain work | 7.4 Improve on abilities to seek, obtain, create and maintain work |
| | | 8. Make career-enhancing decisions | 8.1 Explore and improve decision making | 8.2 Link decision making to career building | 8.3 Engage in career decision making | 8.4 Incorporate realism into your career decision making |
| | | 9. Maintain balanced life and work lives | 9.1 Explore and understand the relationships between life and work places | 9.2 Explore and understand the relationships between life and work places | 9.3 Link the ability to balance work and life in your career building process | 9.4 Incorporate the work-life balance into the career building process |
| | | 10. Understand the changing nature of life and work roles | 10.1 Discover the nature of gendered life and work roles | 10.2 Explore conventional life and work options | 10.3 Understand and work to overcome stereotypes in your career building process | 10.4 Seek to optimize gender bias and stereotypes in your career building process |
| | | 11. Understand, engage in and manage the career building process | 11.1 Explore and understand the concept of the career-building process | 11.2 Understand and experience the career-building process | 11.3 Take charge of your career-building process | 11.4 Manage your career-building process |

List and taxonomies
Svend Brinkmann reminds us

Stand Firm
Resisting the
Self-Improvement Craze

SVEND BRINKMANN
Career competence – areas for exploration and learning

1) Me in context
2) Horizon of opportunities and limitations
3) Choice and chance
4) Change and stability
5) Adaptation and resistance
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON AGENCY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN TRANSITIONS AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT
The Playful Approach to Career Learning?

or

Reduction of options or learning to cope – Strengthening the agency of young pupils by preserving both the creativity and rationality in career learning

Presentation at The Conference Critical Perspectives on Agency and Social Justice in Transitions and Career Development

Copenhagen 23.-24. October 2019

Trond Buland, Ida Holth Mathiesen, Siri Mordal

NTNU Social Research & University of Stavanger
Today’s story

• This presentation will focus on career learning activities in **Norwegian primary school** (grade 1-7, age 6-13)...

• ... with the aim of analysing how this can be designed to strengthen “alternative” career management skills, like creativity, courage, fantasy, optimism, flexibility and curiosity...

• ... and ensure that these skills, being natural for young children, is preserved during the transition into the more formalised career guidance in lower secondary school

• We hope to be able to call attention to specific career learning activities that can be integrated in already normal learning activities in primary school, thereby strengthening young pupils’ basis for the transition to the formal career guidance system introduced to them at grade 8...

• ....and making it more likely that the creativity of “young reflections” on work, life and everything, are not lost in the rationality of higher level career guidance and learning
Methods

• This paper is based primarily on a study of career guidance in primary school, conducted on behalf of the Norwegian Directorate of Education in fall 2017/spring 2018 (Mordal, Buland & Mathisen, 2018)
  • Individual qualitative interviews with representatives of school owners in six municipalities
  • Based on this, four case schools were selected for visits, during which representatives for school leadership, teachers and pupils in grade 4 and 7 participated in group interviews. A total of 68 persons involved
    • Four group interviews with 4th grade pupils and four group interviews at 7th grade. A total of 37 students, about career aspirations and dreams, career education at school, their knowledge of working life and so on
• In addition to this, we have recently carried out three major evaluations of career guidance in the Norwegian school system, and will also draw on experiences and findings from those evaluation projects
Starting out in a technocratic discourse - Career Management Skills

• The school’s first associations when confronted with the words “career guidance” - CMS?

”... a range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals and groups to gather, analyse, synthesise and organise self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions“ (ELGPN Resource Kit 2012, p.21)

• A technocratic approach to career guidance? (Sultana, 2018)
• an individualist understanding?

• In other words, the individual skills of rationality and rational choice, focusing on education and work, and socio-economic efficiency?
  • Personal and economic effectiveness
  • Finding and accessing work
  • Provide business with the skills/competence they need
  • Managing life and career
  • Understanding the world
  • Finding a place in working life?

• This was what the schools understood be “career” – and they didn’t find it very relevant for primary school

• “We should not worry them by this at this young age!”
From CMS to planned happenstance – “Ok, now that may be more relevant for us…”

Career – from climbing to the top of the pyramid to living our lives

• “...the fact that people live their lives across different contexts, such as education, work, leisure and family. These contexts create a complexity that requires daily handling to become meaningful to the individual. This is called a career, and in the understanding that a career is something that all people have” (Thomsen & Skovhus 2016, p 38-39)

• “Our careers are the way that we build a pathway through our life, learning and work. Career is how we pay the rent, but it is also how we find meaning in our life and connect with the people around us.” (Andrews, & Hooley, 2018)

Career skills - The skills of changing one’s mind

• In seemingly contrast to the CMS approach, and in line with a more modern concept of career, theorists like Krumboltz (2008) and Gelatt (1989), argue that the central competencies for choice in a world characterize by change and uncertainty, are skills like creativity, courage, fantasy, optimism, flexibility and curiosity

• Career skills understood more broadly, as stated in Thomsen (2014:4): “Career competences are skills needed to understand and develop yourself, explore life, learn and work as well as handle life, learning and work in change and transition. It is an awareness of what you do, but also what you can do”.

• Changing one’s mind will be an essential skill in the future ... What is appropriate now is a decision and counselling framework that helps clients deal with change and ambiguity, accept uncertainty and inconsistency, and utilize the nonrational and intuitive side of thinking and choosing. The new strategy promotes positive attitudes and paradoxical methods in the presence of increasing uncertainty (Gelatt 1989)
Career anxiety – “All work and no play...”

• Interviewing older pupils/students in Norwegian lower and upper secondary schools (grade 8-13) (Buland et al 2011, Buland, Mathiesen, Mordal, 2014), we often encountered young people trying to confront reality in the “rational way” – in a prison of rational choice.

• For them, integrated in the formalised career counselling system in school, the choice of future education and work is very serious business.

• They reflected on “serious” questions like future labour market, education possibilities, their own shortcomings (and occasionally strengths), wages, this restricting and forming their future choices.

• Some of them was worried, because they sincerely believed that the choice they were about to make at the end of grade 10 would determine what the rest of their life would be like, - “the rest of my life depend on what I choose now...” ...

• … at the same time as they where painfully aware that they knew far too little to make such a “good” choice for the rest of their life.

• Some of them were literally on the edge of tears at the thought of making a wrong choice and thereby ruining the rest of their life – in a prison of rational choice.
The power to dream, and to play, is still alive in 4th grade?

- A: I don’t want to be a substitute worker! And not a librarian!
- B: ...or fireman, police or teacher....
- A: I don’t want a dangerous job!
- C: Librarian work ain’t dangerous!
- A: No, but I don’t want a dangerous or boring job!
- C: Jørgen wants to be a crocodile-hunter!
- B: I don’t want to be a pilot or a sailor or anything like that. I don’t want a job that makes me sick. I don’t want to be a bus-driver or a taxi-driver. And I don’t want to be a diver because I hate sharks!
- C: I hate sharks too!
- A: ... and I don’t want to be anything that makes me cold or wet...

(C was the dedicated book-worm of the group)

- They demonstrated a playful approach to life, career, work and choice. They still had the power to dream, and experiment with the idea of different careers, unrestricted by narrow conception of what’s possible and impossible. Built upon different sources such as role models (parent, siblings, older friend and relative), TV-shows, comic books and what they see and interpret from daily life surrounding them, they construct an ongoing process, an open narrative about themselves in the context of working life
- We met young people with all the alterative career competencies mentioned by Krumboltz; creativity, courage, fantasy, optimism, flexibility and curiosity - playfulness
- They had yet to be included in the formal career counselling in school (starting at level 8) (Mordal et al 2018). - Their “fantasies” were often not even slightly censored by that strange thing called reality
- To them everything was possible, in the sense that their image of working life and their role in it was to a small degree filtered through the harsh realities of what is perceived as possible
- Still not captured in the iron cage of rationality? (But at the same time started on their own( playful ) process of circumscription and compromise? (Gottfredson, 2002))
- No tears in their narratives!
No such thing as Career Learning Activities in primary school?

• In the understanding of teachers and school leaders, there is no such thing as career counselling or -learning in primary school

• That is something starting in lower secondary school – while the law speaks about “all pupils”, not specifying a starting point

• On the other hand, all the schools could present a wide range of learning-activates taking place outside of school

• Utilizing the local community as an arena for learning different subjects from the schools curriculum: Math, social sciences, Norwegian language, and so on

• These activities were seldom seen as having a meaning outside the subject, as also being career learning

• The playful pupils are not met in their exploration of working life

“We don’t do that! That’s starting at level 8” (School owner)

”OK, I can do that (participate in an interview), but that will be quickly done, because we’re not involved in those kind of things…” (School owner)

”All the boys in first level are extremely interested in the machine contractor located next door to the school, they know the lorry drivers and everybody will work there when they grow up… But we’ve never visited them… strange, when you think about it…” (Principal)
Unconscious career related external activities in primary schools

• Activities aimed at learning the pupils to do good choices in life, regarding health, drugs, lifestyle, friendship - Social competencies

• Presentations of parents’ jobs as part of subject teaching – “inviting the engineer mom to teach math”

• Visiting firms/visits from firms – “To do math or economics where it is really done” – practical approach to learning

• Activities aimed at stimulating creativity

• Activities aimed at stimulating entrepreneurial skills – “eleverbedrift”/company programs

• Activities to learn about the pupils’ local communities – history and social studies
Example: The day the big trucks came to school

- Focus only on road safety, on how invisible small children are to the truck drivers up in their huge machines, and why it is therefore extremely important to be careful
  - and that is very important knowledge for sure!

- But why no “career knowledge”, no “career learning” at the same time?
  - Nothing on what’s great and not so great working as a truck driver,
  - What do they do
  - How they like it
  - How to become one
  - Their contribution to society
  - What would it be like if they disappeared -Why it is important to the local community
  - Environment and so on
Conscious, unconscious and playful career learning

• Crause, Watson and McMahon (2017) pointed out that there are two distinct categories of career development in childhood:
  • the conscious (formal career learning)
  • and the unconscious (learning from what children see and hear in their surroundings)

• Why not let the two meet in school, in a playful approach to career learning? Learning about traffic safety and being a truck driver at the same time? - Not to force young people to choose early, but to start a learning process ...

• ... contributing to create career management skills that goes beyond the rational, technocratic skills of CMS?

• Keep the power of dreams alive, maybe even when the dreams take the dreamers’ “career learning” beyond wage-based society, realizing that: “The imperative need for a sufficient, regular income is one thing. The need to act, to strive, to test oneself against others and be appreciated by them is quite another.” (Gorz, 1999)

• This takes us to the importance of learning by playing “… in play a new relationship is created between the semantic and the visible – that is, between situations in thought and real situations. (Vygotsky, 1933), and that is another paper altogether
What is this thing called «career learning» really all about?

«Dad?»
«What?» A small bird rises from a tree in front of us.
«What should I be when I grow up?»
The bird disappears over a far ridge. I don’t know what to say. «Honest». I finally say «I mean what kind of job?»
«Any kind.» (R.Piersig,, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintainance,1974)
References


NTNU Social Research & University of Stavanger - Reduction of options or learning to cope? - Work in progress
The impact of individual, family and school level factors on the educational aspirations of Finnish compulsory school leavers

Tero Järvinen – Jenni Tikkanen – Piia af Ursin
Background

- While school systems of developed nations are largely built on the meritocratic ideas of equal educational opportunities, the connection between one's socio-economic background (SES) and educational success and failure is one of the most consistent findings in the sociology of education (e.g. Reay 2010; Sirin 2015).

- If it is the case that gifted low-SES students voluntarily give up achieving higher levels of education, or that they do not get access to universities because of institutional selection mechanisms, education system is not only unequal but also inefficient → low-level of social mobility + a nation loses a large share of its talent potential

- Nordic education systems are internationally recognized for their good capabilities to promote not only good learning results but also educational equality. Due to a recent policy changes promoting privatization, marketization, individual responsibility, accountability, and parental choice, the situation has changed, although there are differences between countries in terms of volume and consequences of the changes. (e.g. Jørgensen, Järvinen & Lundahl 2019).
• In Finland, the connection between students’ socioeconomic background and their learning results and educational outcomes of various kinds has traditionally been relatively weak in international comparison.

• Recent trend, however has been the opposite → the impact of socio-economic background on students’ educational attainment and their selection into different educational tracks has become stronger (e.g. Berisha et al. 2017).

• PISA 2015 study revealed that the impact of family SES on students’ learning results was at least as significant as in the OECD countries on average (Vettenranta et al. 2016).

• → New interest in the old question about the relationship between social class and schooling

• What is less studied is the interplay of ability and socioeconomic background in determining educational aspirations, choices and achievement of individuals.

• When including students’ gender and school-level factors in the analyses, understanding individual aspirations and choices becomes even more complex.
Key question: What is the relationship between socioeconomic background and young people’s educational aspirations and how this relationship changes when controlling for the effects of gender, individual ability and school’s investment in students?

According to studies, career aspirations (idealistic preferences) and expectations (beliefs what will happen) predict rather well the future educational outcomes of individuals (Berrington, Roberts & Tammes 2016)

In Finnish education system, transition from compulsory (lower secondary) to further (upper secondary) education is the critical transition point where young people are divided and selected into academic and vocational tracks offering different future prospects for young people.
Research questions and data

1) What is the relationship between socio-economic background of Finnish compulsory school leavers (9th graders) and their a) short-term and b) long-term educational aspirations?

2) Does this relationship change when students’ gender, achievement level and the effect of school culture are taken into account?

Sample: 1,058 15-year-old students (9th graders) from 12 lower secondary schools of Turku sub-region (43% of all students of the region)

Data: Survey questionnaire and a modified version of PISA 2012 literacy test.

Methods: cross-tabulations, hierarchical logistic regression analysis
Variables

- **Short-term educational aspirations**: Whether a student is planning to continue in general upper secondary school (academic track) after compulsory school or not
- **Long-term educational aspirations**: Whether a student plans to apply to university or not
- **SES**: International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI-88)
- **Gender**
- **Ability**: Pisa 2012 literacy test results (scale 0-26)
- **School effect**: perceived school’s investment in students; a sum-score variable (scale 1-5):
  - **Question**: How would you rate your own school on each of the following?
  - **Items**:
    - Having really good teachers
    - Having interesting subjects to do
    - In getting good results
    - In getting the best out of you
    - In helping you plan your career
Results

Table 1. The proportion of students aiming at GENERAL UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION (academic track) by socioeconomic background and literacy test results (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Literacy test results/LOW</th>
<th>Literacy test results/MIDDLE</th>
<th>Literacy test results/HIGH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOW SES</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDDLE SES</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>82.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH SES</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>84.8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. The proportion of students aiming at UNIVERSITY EDUCATION by socioeconomic background and literacy test results (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Literacy test results/LOW</th>
<th>Literacy test results/MIDDLE</th>
<th>Literacy test results/HIGH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOW SES</td>
<td>14,3</td>
<td>19,0</td>
<td>27,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDDLE SES</td>
<td>27,3</td>
<td>26,7</td>
<td>52,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH SES</td>
<td>28,6</td>
<td>38,1</td>
<td>58,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 3. Hierarchical binomial logistic regression predicting students' university aspirations (by family SES, gender, PISA reading score, and perceived school's investment in students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODEL &amp; PREDICTORS</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>Pseudo $R^2_N$</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>OR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>47.06***</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>43.51</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family SES</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>43.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>59.17***</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>45.28</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family SES</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>45.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (ref. female)</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>102.92***</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>25.11</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family SES</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>25.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (ref. male)</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISA reading score</td>
<td>-0.59</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 4</td>
<td>122.70***</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>40.84</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family SES</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>23.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (ref. male)</td>
<td>-0.49</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISA reading score</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived school’s investment in students</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>19.30</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summarising the results

1) There is a strong, statistically significant connection between compulsory school leavers’ socioeconomic background and their both short and long term educational aspirations.

2) This connection remains statistically significant even when the impact of students’ gender, ability and a school effect is taken into account.

3) The finding according to which the weakest readers of High-SES group aim at university education more often than the best readers of Low-SES group suggests that many gifted low-SES students voluntarily give up achieving higher levels of education, which forms a challenge to educational systems in their fight against educational inequality.

4) The fact that perceived school's investment in students is also a statistically significant predictor of young people’s educational aspirations, in turn emphasizes the importance of the cultural environment of the school in the pursuit of educational equality.
WHO WILL MIND THE GAP?

State and employer engagement in Swedish career education and guidance

Lisbeth Lundahl, Ann-Sofie Holm, Michael Lindblad, Anders Lovén and Ewa Rolfsman
INTRODUCTION
I think that the students at my schools get far too few encounters with working life. Most of all, time is missing. I wish I had more time at each school. Then there would be more time for increased collaboration with the teachers and for booking actors from working life (career counsellor).

The students need more professionals as models, that is much better collaboration with the labour market, for example in the form of school visits and work practice (career counsellor).

Students on a possible new subject “Future choices”

- That would have been perfect (male student 1).
- Yes, that would have been great (female student 2).
- It is a little bit too late for us now, but... (male student 3).
- I myself feel that if I had been younger, I would have wanted it (female student 2).
- Yees ... I would have been helped by it. ‘Cause it didn´t feel very good in grade 8 (male student 3).
REASONS TO ENGAGE IN CAREER EDUCATION AND GUIDANCE (CEG)

• The reality facing 15-16-year olds is difficult to overview. The risks connected to failing in school and not making the ‘right’ choices are considerably higher than a generation ago.

• A plethora of education choices, difficult to overview.

• Working life undergoes rapid restructuring in the globalized economy.

• Growing mismatch between competence needs of the labour market and young people’s choices.

• Research evidence that CEG matters
AIM

The aim of our paper is to illuminate and explain the engagement (or lack thereof) of politics/the state and employers in forming and changing career education and guidance in the Swedish highly decentralized and marketized education context.
STRUCTURE

1. Notes on the theoretical points of departure
2. State involvement and steering of CEG in compulsory schools
3. The engagement of the largest private employer organisation in schools’ career preparation
4. Conclusions and discussion: how can we understand the resulting picture?
Departing from historical institutionalism (e.g. Streeck & Thelen 2005) when analysing change and stability of the CEG institution within the transformed institution of Swedish education.
Summing up so far, to us the closest general concept for the kind of institution in whose dynamics of change we are interested is that of a social regime.

By regime we mean a set of rules stipulating expected behavior and ‘ruling out’ behavior deemed to be undesirable. A regime is legitimate in the sense and to the extent that the expectations it represents are enforced by the society in which it is embedded.

Regimes involve rule makers and rule takers, the former setting and modifying, often in conflict and competition, the rules with which the latter are expected to comply. (Streeck & Thelen 2005, 12-13)
Tentatively using the model of skills formation regimes (Brusemeyer & Vossiek (2016) when discussing State and employer engagement in career education and guidance (CEG).

**CAREER EDUCATION AND GUIDANCE REGIMES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public commitment to CEG</th>
<th>Involvement of employers in CEG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>low Statist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>high Collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>low Liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>high Segmental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Developed from Busemeyer & Vossiek 2016, p. 152
Decentralisation and choice/market reforms of Swedish education in the early 1990s: from detailed top-down state steering and very few private schools to governance with pronounced neoliberal features: far reaching decentralisation, deregulation and marketization. Introduction of vouchers, competition between schools, liberal rules for establishing private (“free”) schools.

While the state has later introduced various forms of performance control (e.g. documentation, school inspections, quality assessments, more frequent testing and grading), CEG has largely remained unregulated since the early 1990s.
career education and guidance is school-based

“a responsibility of the whole school”

Up to the municipalities and schools to decide on organisation, resources and design of the provision

Contents vaguely stated in the national curriculum

not part of schools’ regular quality work, No recurrent evaluations or inspections


The obligation of the municipalities to have school-work councils disappeared in the 1994 curriculum.

Today: wide variation of school work contacts
The Swedish Schools’ Inspectorate (2013) concluded that study and vocational guidance appeared as a task that no one wanted to take responsibility for (Skolinspektionen 2013, p. 30).

In reality this task was delegated to the study and vocational counsellors – teachers and school leaders little involved.

The OECD (2016)
... career advice and counselling activities should have played the fundamental role of supporting a decentralised system such as this by informing students’ education decisions and promoting the alignment between students and labour market’s needs. Career and guidance activities have been, instead, a low priority for a long time. (---) Support to students is carried out on a local or regional basis and no effective central organisation co-ordinates career advice support (OECD 2016, p. 95).
A POSSIBLE REFORM – A TEST OF THE ENGAGEMENT

In 2017 the government appoints a public investigation on how to develop study and vocational guidance in schools.

In 2019 the committee publishes its final report.

- student’s rights to get CEG should be clarified and strengthened. A distinction between general and individual study and vocational guidance

- Introduction of a new, mandatory content area (however not a subject of its own), Future choices, with 80 assigned hours in grades 7-9 of compulsory school

- competence development targeting teachers, school leaders and career counsellors.

PRIVATE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

1970s: SAF - the Swedish employers’ Confederation set up an extensive campaign in order to ”regain the problem formulation initiative” and strengthen trust in enterprising and firms. To high extent students, teachers and counsellors were targeted.

1980s-90s: was proactive in advocating and supporting market and privatization initiatives in the welfare sector.

2010s: no concerted efforts to ensure that young people are properly prepared for educational and vocational choices, in spite of many such declarations.

Specialized organisations act as local “emissaries” by representing employers in the private and public sectors – giving “inspirational lectures” and similar short activities in schools.
CONCLUSIONS
CEG IN THE EDUCATION INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

National level

- No state efforts of strengthened steering of CEG in the deregulated, decentralised and marketized education system.

- Little pushing efforts from private employers, in contrast to their large engagement to create and maintain and expand the education market.

- Despite of many declarations about the necessity of good career education and guidance CEG remains unchanged from the 1990s, in contrast to the institution of education.

School level

- The market situation renders counselling and career learning more difficult.

- Heavy focus on preparation for choice of upper secondary program and school.

- Both students and counsellors strongly underline students’ need of more knowledge of and contacts with working life.
**TOWARDS A LIBERAL CEG SYSTEM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public commitment to students’ career learning</th>
<th>Involvement of firms in students’ career learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>Statist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>Segmental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Busemeyer & Vossiek 2016, p. 152

**SWEDEN**
**Path dependence** – from both sides reluctance to take on new responsibilities and reallocating resources vis-à-vis CEG

The ”school jungle” of public and private schools renders coordination and collaboration more difficult, both at the political and economic arenas

**Persistent individualization of young people’s decision-making** – ”it is about your interests, motivation and responsibility-taking”

But how in hell do you believe that you will ever get a job when you never ever have had a job before?