Situated inequality in career guidance in schools

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Critical perspectives on agency and social justice in transitions and career development

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Research on Youth Guidance in compulsory school in Denmark

Youth Guidance
- Supports students in lower-secondary education in grade 8 – 9/10 (14 to 16 /17 years old)
- Mandatory and optional activities.
Research interests

- How does career guidance and career education play out in lower secondary school (Danish grades 7-9/10, ages 14-16/17) in interaction with the school and structural conditions?
- How is youth career guidance meaningful to the students?

Qualitative research - Methods
- Participant observations
- Situated conversations
- Interviews.
Teoretical framework

Danish – German critical psychology

- A desire to study career guidance and career education from a participant perspective and include structural conditions in the analysis.

- Social practice theory – human agency, practice, community, horizons for actions, meaning, intentions, reasons for action, the conduct of everyday life.
Social justice – situated inequality
(Højholt, 2016)

- Analyses of how people (in this case children and young people in compulsory school) conduct their everyday lives may demonstrate structural inequalities in a concrete manner.

- Conditions of everyday life are often conceptualized in abstract ways, for instance related to different kinds of deviancy in social backgrounds. Participants (here children and young people in compulsory school) are positioned differently in relation to these processes.

- “The school not only measures differences, but constitutes differences” (Højholt, 2016).
Two cases

- A parents’ meeting in the compulsory school
- Career guidance of a student - Thomas.

Inequality can play out in guidance and teaching in different and often subtle ways and is linked to the many structural conflicts characterizing the career guidance field.

Social practice in guidance and teaching unintentionally (and unnoticed) can create unequal conditions for different students.
“many of the young people from this school choose the academic upper-secondary route. The reason why I tell your children – and you – about the vocational education programs is that it's the politically correct thing to do. The politicians want more young people to take the vocational route.”
Case 2

- Most of the parents have little or no education.
- The teacher and youth counsellor have the ambition to give the students an understanding that it is not necessarily more prestigious or more of an achievement to go the academic upper-secondary route than the vocational education route.
- This relates to a political focus on getting more students to opt for an vocational education.
• The students provide a tentative indication of which education program they want
• Assessed “ready” or “not ready” for education
• Many students wish to continue into the upper-secondary academic program. Many are assessed as being ready for this education. They have not yet decided what the education should lead to – and neither the counsellor nor the teacher ask them to provide reasons for their choice of academic upper-secondary.
• Thomas is interested in the academic upper-secondary program
• In grade 9, the teacher and guidance counsellor doubt that Thomas will be ready for the academic upper-secondary education after grade 9.
• Thomas is asked to explain why he wishes to continue into academic upper secondary education – but he doesn’t get support to obtain insight into the education system – a paradox.
• The fact that Thomas doesn’t have a ready answer to the question of why he wants to pursue the academic route is attributed significance and his educational interests are regarded as being less relevant
The case indicates

• young people have different insight and knowledge about the education system – and the career guidance doesn’t compensate for this inequality

• professionals sometime pose the most difficult questions to the young people who appear to have the greatest difficulties answering

• … and if they have no answer, their lack of an answer is attributed significance and their educational interests are regarded as being less relevant
• Guidance should be about “guidance” and not about “guidance to” a certain education.

• The goal of getting more young people into vocational education can result in losing sight of the ambition of social mobility.

• The two cases may indicate that some groups of young people – and not other groups of young people (with parents with higher education) – will be tagged to meet the political targets for young people in vocational education.
Questions...

- How can we provide career guidance to young people in a manner so that the guidance itself does not create unequal conditions?
- What happened to our interest in social mobility?
References


Should I Stay or Should I Go? Career and Life Plans of South African and Finnish Young People in the Margins of Education and Work

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Overview

- Calls have previously been made for research to examine marginalised youth from rural areas and their career development processes.
- Young people who live in rural or disadvantaged metropolitan areas have a very different starting point to build their careers than peers from socially and locally more advanced backgrounds (Tomaszewski & Cebulla 2014).
- Labour policies expect young people to be socially adaptive and ready to leave their local environments.
- We examine the tensions in the life narratives of South-African and Finnish young adults that exist between local youth identities and the changing labour market structures and educational opportunities in rural areas.
- The study is a comparison of two different cultural and geographical contexts in rural Finland and metropolitan South Africa, with youth considered in the margins of society because of their experiences of high drop-out and unemployment rates.
Research gap

- Public discussions concerning young people’s career paths and institutional support structures are dominated by an individualistic rhetoric and imperative of globalisation.

- A shift is needed to move a one-sided discussion, from ‘resourced, agentic and mobile' young people to a more holistic and contextually integrated dialogue.

- There is a need for more research on the relational processes through which young people situationally and spatially negotiate their futures (Massey 2005).

- Through the stories told from the margins of education and work, the neoliberal discourse of ‘career mobility’ is contested and scrutinized.
In career research geography and place have been taken into discussions recently.

Young people form their identities locally where current labour policies enhance fluid identities (Farrugia, Smyth & Harrison 2014).

Both educational and labour market policies are marked by neoliberal discourses that naturalize ‘free’ movement of resources and people, which according to Massey (2005) exist alongside spatial inequality.

Scholars have made calls to increase our understanding on the ways in which people’s lived experiences of their career pathways are placed and rooted in their geographical and social landscapes (Roberts 2009; Alexander 2018; Alexander & Hooley 2017; Reid & Westergaard 2017).
The diagram illustrates the interconnectedness of individual, past, present, and future environments. Key elements include:

- **Past**: Education institutions, employment market, socio-economic status.
- **Present**: Geographical location, political decisions, values, physical attributes, globalization.
- **Future**: Historical trends, change over time.

The diagram highlights recursiveness and chance aspects.
Theoretical framework: Theoretical concept of belonging

- We use the concept of **belonging** to highlight the intersubjective and social dimensions of young people’s paths through education and work.

- Cuervo and Wyn (2014, 905–903) propose, that belonging in young people’s lives can be interpreted in three dimensions.

  1) **Belonging to a place**, meaning a sense of rootedness and attachment.

  2) **Belonging is through relationships** to trusted people around them (Cuervo & Wyn 2012; Wierenga 2009).

  3) **Belonging ‘to their times’**. This means, that young people are making their lives and futures in the contexts of broader social conditions.
In this article we will explore, how the different notions of belonging form the web of relations within which young people construct their futures and careers.

Three dimensions of belonging – place, people and times – frames young people’s education and work choices as questions of connectedness and relationships (Cuervo & Wyn 2014, 905).
Data collection

- Data is produced through ethnographic field notes, interviews and follow-up interviews. This paper draws on data from two independently conducted PhD studies.

- Finnish data was produced in the context of a Youth Support project funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) in a relatively large municipality in North Carelia.

- Finnish data consists of 17 interviews and follow-up interviews (n=10) with 18 to 24-year-old young adults who did not have secondary education or work, who were attending vocational preparatory training.

- The interviewees were recruited during the 3-month-long (32 days) ethnography in the projects group-based vocational training program.
Data collection

- In the South African sample, data was collected from Kayamandi Township high school learners, between the ages of 17 and 20 years old (n=17).

- This data consists of a multi-phase mixed method research design funded by the NRF where repeated measures were embedded in an intervention framework in a South African Township with high school learners.

- Qualitative data and scores were tracked at four time points: T1 and T2 before administering a culturally-constructed career life-designing intervention, as well as at two time points after the intervention (T3 and T4).

- In addition, ethnographic field notes, intervention feedback and evaluation exercises, interviews and follow-up interviews were included to enrich understandings of career-life changes.
Narrative approach to study young people’s mobility and belonging

- We conducted a three-dimensional narrative analysis to explore young people’s life stories in relation to the theoretical notions of belonging.
- Firstly, young people’s narratives demonstrated connectedness to spaces and places (belonging versus non-belonging).
- Secondly, narratives represent roadmaps to the ‘people’, in other words the trusted ones and meaningful relationships, of the young interviewees (Wierenga 2009).
- Thirdly, narratives could be analysed as cultural documents of the broader societal ‘times’ young people and their social generation are embedded in.
Data Analysis

- From the young people’s narratives mobility and belonging was analysed through three theory-informed categories of place, people and times.
- Braun and Clarke's (2006) content analysis was used to group themes.
- Polkinghorne’s (1988, 177) approach to narrative analysis was used in seeking for common themes or plots under these theoretical categories.
- Thus a research base was created, that centered on young people’s reflections about mobility and belonging in relation to work or educational opportunities.
Results

- We identified two different reconciliatory processes in young people's narratives of career mobility:
  - 1) subjective and familial or community expectations
  - 2) reconciliation of localities (i.e. old versus new experiences).
- We call these reconciliatory processes by which we mean that these created tensions and negotiations in young people’s reflections on mobility for career development.
## Finnish Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belonging to places (staying)</th>
<th>Belonging via Relationships</th>
<th>Belonging to Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deterioration</td>
<td>Leaving family behind</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to urban centre</td>
<td>Social support networks</td>
<td>Technological changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic constraints</td>
<td>Fear of moving away</td>
<td>Education/qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>Dis-belonging</td>
<td>Mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited opportunities</td>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>Decent work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detachment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Financial independence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socially suffocating</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Nuutti: They demand professional skills in Eastern Finland especially in the building sector. It is hard to get a job straight after school, if you can’t get the job through your In Job Training. I don’t know, what will I do if I will not get this job through my In Job Training. That will I leave of will I stay here for further education.

Sanna: But your intention is to stay in this region?

Nuutti: Yes, that’s my intention, that I would come back if I would have to leave to Helsinki (capital of Finland). East Finland has always been my home, so I would like to live here in the long run.

Sanna: It would be because of work, that you might have to leave?

Nuutti: If there is no work here, then yes, you have to go somewhere else in order to gain more experience which helps getting a job here then.
## South African Results

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Belonging to Places (staying)</th>
<th>Belonging via relationships</th>
<th>Belonging to Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worsening social conditions</td>
<td>Family as a support system</td>
<td>Feeling disconnected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic hardship</td>
<td>Social contacts</td>
<td>Technological changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distanced from urban centres</td>
<td>Fear of moving away</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>Loneliness &amp; self-doubt</td>
<td>Mobility for access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited opportunities</td>
<td>Stuck between two worlds (dis-belonging)</td>
<td>Materialistic work opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating the community gaze</td>
<td></td>
<td>Improved lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to escape current reality</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
“my family did not have these options, so now I need to be brave enough to dive in and explore” (P.69)

“Ja Ja, for me to not forget where you come from and who you are. It’s like, ja, that’s the big thing. When I’m there, being accountant, like is not like to look at my people, like saying ok, now I’m a good person. I have my money. So I can leave the Xhosa people. I want to be there and stay there in the Eastern Cape with them. And being that and I’m going to be that level of them. Not saying that ok, I’m educated, I have my money, I’m rich, now I’m not going to be here. I’m going to be overseas or there and there. I want to be here” (P.8)

“It’s close to my place. Because I’m living here in Kayamandi and this is Stellenbosch. So, it will be advantageous for me to stay here. I won’t be far from my family. And now I have to go very far.”
Discussion

- Two different contexts but similar negotiations in terms of place and relationships
- Issues of not belonging and disconnectedness arise
- Cycles of leaving and returning, for either social or economical reasons
- Mobility as an answer to social discrimination
- The need to address and recognize the institutional, economical, social and cultural structures which inform youth mobility and make it seem as imperative for these young people
Thank you for your attention!

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BECOMING A FINNISH STUDENT WITH AN IMMIGRANT BACKGROUND - LIFE COURSES AND EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORIES

Mira Kalalahti
Janne Varjo
https://blogs.helsinki.fi/transit-okl/
‘YOU WOULD DO WELL AS A NURSE’. IF YOU ARE A TOP PUPIL WITH BLUE EYES, NO ONE QUESTIONS YOUR ACADEMIC HOPES. IT’S ANOTHER THING IF YOU HAPPEN TO WEAR A SCARF.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

• Inter-ethnic relations and bounding agency in educational transitions – the social space of study guidance and counselling
  
  (under review in Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics)

• The aim was to analyse pupils’ inter-ethnic interaction in two events that took place at a multi-ethnic lower secondary school located in a relatively-deprived urban Finnish neighbourhood

• ‘How do young people construct their educational identities in a class-room-level interaction in a multi-ethnic class’
EDUCATIONAL TRANSITIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH IMMIGRANT ORIGIN

• Finnish opportunity structure for educational transitions
  • Wide range of targeted practices
    – the additional 10th grade
    – preparatory education and training for vocational studies
    – preparatory education for general upper secondary education
    – courses within adult education offering Finnish classes and opportunities to complete the comprehensive education track
  • Most of the instruction at the upper secondary level is provided in Finnish (or Swedish)
EDUCATIONAL TRANSITIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH IMMIGRANT ORIGIN

• Unequal opportunity structure for young people with immigrant origin (young people with mother tongue other than the official languages Finnish, Swedish or Same)
  
  • Right after basic education 76 % of students with immigrant background were in education leading to diploma compared with 94 % among young people with Finnish origins
  
  • Greater risk of dropping out of education, becoming early leavers from education and training, or remaining in various short-term training programmes
  
  • The young with immigrant background face 5 x odds to be positioned outside the education and work compared to Finnish-origin youths
  
  • NEETs in Helsinki: Majority 7% vs. Immigrant background 22 %
ABOUT TRANSIT

• Transitions and educational trajectories of immigrant youth¹: A 4-year longitudinal study from compulsory to further education

• Funded by the Academy of Finland for years 2014–2018. University of Helsinki & University of Turku, Finland

• http://blogs.helsinki.fi/transit-ökli/about-transit-research/

¹ By *immigrant* youth we refer mainly to young persons with *mixed origin* (first generation immigrants or second generation immigrants with at least one parent born abroad).
DATA

One-year fieldwork of a 9th grade school located in an urban neighbourhood with a low average education level and a high proportion of immigrants.

Selective observation (3 events): a tutorial session in which the pupils were trained to complete the joint application for upper secondary education and two excursions to upper secondary education institutions.

8 life-span interviews, made around two life spans (past and future)
ANALYSIS AND THEORIES

These events are analysed as

*lived social spaces* (de Haan and Leander, 2011), where the
*interaction* within *the inter-ethnic peer relations* constructs

*positional identities and figured worlds* (Roth and Erstad, 2016; Holland et al., 1998) and

*horizons of actions* (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) of the upper secondary education choices.
INTER-ETHNIC INTERACTION AND DISTINCTIONS

- Multi-ethnic class (13 pupils)
- Wide variety of life histories and socio-economic backgrounds
- Positioning and constant negotiations of ethnic and class-based identities
- During the lesson in which they prepared for the forthcoming upper secondary application, the question of nationalities came under inter-ethnic interaction.
- Inter-ethnic interaction also showed forms of educational integration, assimilation, and separation
INTER-ETHNIC INTERACTION AND DISTINCTIONS

Break: Three pupils with a variety of ethnic backgrounds were joking about ethnicities. These pupils, friends and peers from primary school, were jointly laughing at the definition of ‘coloured people’: ‘like hey I am the only really black [pupil] here, like you are actually yellow, aren’t you? And what are you then, white? Who cares?´ [all laughing together]

On the class they discuss their futures: One pupil takes very critical stance on Finnish society and its benefits. Another pupil raises his voice and complains to the others about he and his family pay lots of taxes which are used to help the families with the first pupil’s ethnic origin. -- ‘You should be grateful for the support’. -- The third boy, offended, shuts down the computer of the first boy causing the loss of his already filled-out form. –
The migrant-origin pupils work with the form together. -- The girl in the middle said she was not satisfied with the support provided by the study counsellor. Her five options on the form were general upper secondary schools. The study counsellor quickly tells the girl to make an appointment with her.

The girl gets annoyed and mumbles with her friends – ‘the counsellors do not want me to apply for the general upper secondary school’. The grades seem to be between 6 and 7 (~7 required for general upper secondary]. The other girls respond and give support. She arranges to meet with the counsellor later. The third girl is applying for the same schools. She also makes an appointment with the counsellor.
He had friends in the class, but in the study guidance and counselling episode he withdrew from the interaction. He did not express any willingness to discuss his educational choices in public. The spatial separation expressed his overall aim to return to his family’s country of origin.

Her spatial separation from the class indicated the overall separation from the class, but she also took the position of being a ‘high-aiming’ and ‘well-performing’ student. She reinforced the separation spatially.
CAREER GUIDANCE EXCURSIONS AS BRIDGING AND BONDING

- Inter-ethnic relations are not only boundary-makers, but they also bind pupils.
- Bridging and bonding ties stem often from the locality.
- The second observation sequence portrays how the subway journey to the open day of a vocational upper secondary school was a social-spatial situation which empowered the pupils.
Eleven pupils on board. Very rich migrant background, lots of Russian and Estonian language. Pupils are joking about the ‘Finnishness’ -- (‘what a Finn group’). All of them are boys. We had already lost some of them when entering the subway station. Waited for a while and they came from a nearby shop. They were restless and managed to somehow stop the escalators. All still friendly and in good mood. Went on.

[...] At the school we are guided through the department of logistic service education. The atmosphere is very relaxed, and the students followed the introduction closely. The tutor is a female student with an ethnic-minority background, showing videos about pupils training and having fun with forklift trucks. The teacher is also female [in a male-dominant education field]. The boys are excited about the education, the atmosphere is open and supportive. Lots of jokes and joy. They warm up to discuss their choices with the counsellor. (field notes)
EXCURSION WITH BONDING TIES AND BUILDING WALLS

• A few pupils who were applying for business college built strong trust on their abilities and aspirations in very similar narratives (entrepreneurship, sport)

• The field of business is much more competitive, and the welcoming information was more exclusive for the pupils (mismatching skills and competence)

• For some, the visit to the business college confirmed the ethnic ‘othering’ and it was layered with other social ‘otherings’

• The bonding met the structural boundaries set by the institutions’ profile and competition.
SUMMARY

• The study guidance and counselling events open opportunities for the young people to contact other ethnicities in an adult-supported environment. This should be seen as an opportunity, not as a threat.

• The schools had succeeded in providing ethnically-heterogeneous peer groups and a solid platform for undermining ethnic boundaries and building bridging and bonding ties (see also Kivijärvi 2013).

• Nevertheless, the multi-ethnic interaction was open to constant identity negotiations as the pupils took equal positions in another event and hierarchical positions in another. The hierarchies were flexible but also unpredictable, difficult for the teacher to see and respond to.
• In the events and excursions, belonging to an ethnic minority served as a clue. These events portrayed bridging ties, which were built on individual life histories in the local neighbourhoods.

• Nevertheless, multi-ethnic spaces (neighbourhoods) like this are often located in working-class areas, which adds an extra dimension to the socio-spatial boundary-making: Some of the pupils recognized and accepted the working-class position (and enforced it with the local bridging ties), but others were actively othering themselves from it and taking a position of transnational or inner-city youth.
• In the observed events, young people actively constructed their educational identities with the support of the bonding peers and bridging ties of school community.

• In all, events of study guidance and counselling bring about the young peoples’ understandings about their educational opportunities. In a dynamic process of interaction, they construct and modify the horizons of actions of the young people – i.e. it determines what options are visible for them from their individual and structural positions.
• It is important for the study guidance and counselling policies and teachers to understand how multidimensional and laminated the ethnic boundaries and bridges affecting educational choices are.

• The issues of educational aspirations, language, support for learning difficulties and prejudice set up boundaries which make the negotiation between the pupils, parents and study counsellors highly complex.

• Local, bridging ties, as well as bonding peer groups could be utilized in the study guidance of multi-ethnic youth groups.
SELECTED REFERENCES


