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# Participation and Educational Choices

## Influence of Family and School on Immigrant Boys

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Bachelor of Social Services

Social Services

Thesis

April 2020

Author Title Number of Pages Date	Moritz Cartheuser Participation and Educational Choices: Influence of Family and School on Immigrant Boys 45 pages + 1 appendix April 2020
Degree	Bachelor of Social Services
Degree Programme	Social Services
Specialization option	Social Services
Instructor	Katja Ihamäki, Senior Lecturer
<p>The aim of this Bachelor's thesis was to gain insight into the influence of families and school representatives on the decision-making of boys and young men with immigrant backgrounds regarding their educational choices in the transition phase from lower to upper secondary school. In addition to that, their experience of communication and collaboration between family and school and suggestions to improve schools' support were of further interest.</p> <p>Two groups from different schools were interviewed and the recordings transcribed and analyzed with the use of the structuring content analysis method. Subsequently, the interviewees' individual experiences of participation and social disadvantage were evaluated as indicators of well-being. On the subject of participation, the capabilities approach co-developed by Martha C. Nussbaum as well as prior studies investigating immigrant families and education provided a basis for the theoretical framework.</p> <p>The findings prove that families and school professionals influence the participants' decision-making. Ethical values are transferred within families, showing in choice of education and profession. Teachers and school counsellors support this process by providing information on possibilities. Furthermore, idols play a role as supportive instances.</p> <p>The interviewees emphasized the importance of keeping family life and school separated. However, parents play an active role as motivating instances regarding school performance. I conclude that peer groups and supportive communities are crucial, inasmuch as they can have a mitigating influence in situations that challenge school performance and successful integration in general.</p>	
Keywords	school, education, profession, immigration, family, youth, participation, social disadvantage, capabilities approach, well-being, NEET, decision-making

Tekijä Otsikko  Sivumäärä Päivämäärä	Cartheuser, Moritz Osallisuus ja koulutukselliset valinnat: Perheen ja koulun vaikutus maahanmuuttajataustaisiin poikiin 45 sivua + 5 liitteet huhtikuu 2020
Tutkinto	Sosionomi (AMK)
Koulutusohjelma	Sosiaali- ja terveysalan ammattikorkeakoulututkinto
Suuntautumisvaihtoehto	Sosionomi
Opinnäytetyön ohjaaja	Katja Ihamäki, vanhempi lehtori
<p>Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli kerätä tietoa perheiden ja koulun ammattilaisten vaikutuksesta maahanmuuttotilanteista poikien ja nuorten miesten päätöksentekoon koskien heidän koulutuksellista tulevaisuuttaan siirtyessä yläasteelta lukioon tai ammattikouluun. Kiinnostuksen kohteena oli myös heidän oma kokemuksensa koulun ja perheen välisestä viestinnästä ja yhteistyöstä sekä heidän mahdolliset kehittämisehdotuksensa.</p> <p>Toteutin kaksi ryhmähaastattelua kahdessa eri koulussa. Osallistujista kaksi oli 26-vuotiaita ja viisi 16-vuotiaita. Litteroin haastatteluiden äänitykset ja analysoin materiaalin sisällönanalyysin avulla. Lähestyin aihetta tarkastelemalla yksilöiden kokemuksia osallisuuden ja huono-osaisuuden näkökulmista, jotka tulkitsin hyvinvoinnin indikaattoreiksi. Käsitelin osallisuutta nojaten Martha C. Nussbaumin tulkintaan kyvykkyyks-ajattelusta, jonka lisäksi hyödynsin muita aikaisempia tutkimuksia ja tilastoja maahanmuuttajaperheistä ja koulutuksesta.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tulokset vahvistivat, että perheet ja koulun ammattilaiset vaikuttavat poikien päätöksentekoon. Eettiset arvot siirtyvät perheiden sisällä. Tämä näyttäytyy koulutuksen ja ammatillisen uran valinnassa. Opettajat ja opinto-ohjaajat tukevat tätä prosessia välittämällä tietoa erilaisista mahdollisuuksista. Lisäksi roolimallit auttavat poikia muodostamaan kuvaa omasta tulevaisuudesta.</p> <p>Vaikka pojat painottivat, että on tärkeää pitää perhe-elämä ja koulu erillään, vanhemmilla on silti aktiivinen rooli poikien motivoinnissa koulun suorittamiseen. Työssäni kävi ilmi, että vertaisryhmät ja tukea antavat yhteisöt ovat tärkeitä lievittäviä tekijöitä tilanteessa, joka voi haastaa koulun suorittamisen ja perheen onnistuneen kotoutumisen ylipäätään.</p>	
Avainsanat	Koulu, koulutus, ammatti, maahanmuutto, perhe, nuoruus, osallisuus, huono-osaisuus, kyvykkyyks-ajattelu, hyvinvointi, NEET, päätöksenteko

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## 1 Introduction

This thesis deals with the basics and factors that prevent young men with immigrant background aged 15 - 29 at the risk of NEET (not in education, employment or training) of dropping out of the educational path in the transition phase from lower secondary school to upper secondary school. I focused on the role and influence of family and school at this point. Information, gained via group interviews, will contribute to a fundament of understanding and information about the special needs and features of this target group and helps the development of professional attitudes, tools and interventions within the Connex for Inclusion project (presented in greater detail in chapter 2.1.) to help preventing boys with immigrant background from falling into the NEET status and thus suffer from unemployment, discrimination on the job market and social exclusion. The aim is to support them to live a participatory, self-determined life and promote their wellbeing.

According to Pekka Myrskylä, former development manager of Statistics Finland and researcher in the social field, the amount of youth outside of the Finnish labour market and thus falling into the category of NEET was in 2008 larger than the comparable group being clientele of the Finnish public employment and business services. He interprets the risk of male youth with immigration background to fall into the NEET category being two times as high compared to the Finnish male youth. Furthermore, the figures show that the risk is higher for male than female. In his publication, which bases on statistics from Statistics Finland, he mentions, that integration of youth, male and female, with immigrant background is hindered by the fact, that within 5 follow-up years about 20 percent of them have left the country. (Myrskylä, P. 2011, p.10.)

The transition phase from lower- to upper secondary school is according to his findings a critical point in the educational and professional career of the young person, that can be supported with measurements from Finnish public employment and business services, such as work-placements. Thus we can see, that the topic plays a role in Finnish society. (Myrskylä, P. 2011, p.18.)

I chose to concentrate on the family and school as entities to find out how parents and other family members as well as school and education professionals influence boys and young men, their educational and professional decisions and possibilities. This influence can be based e.g. on educational background of the parents.

Pekka Myrskylä has findings on the role of the family as well. Youth living with their parents have the smallest risk of being outside of the labour market and education or training. This applies for immigrant youth and non-immigrant youth as well. Still the risk is four times higher for youth with immigrant background compared to their non-immigrant peers. The educational background of parents seems to play a role seeing that the number of parents, who have finished lower secondary school and no further professional education, is about two times higher in families, whose kids fall under the NEET category, than in the overall age group. Furthermore the number of parents with higher education is in those families two or even three times less than parents of all youth. (Myrskylä, P. 2011, p.15 – 17.)

In the following I will present the reader with the organizations, factors and concepts, that this work is embedded in. First, I introduce the working life partner Connex for Inclusion, for whom the study is done, the already mentioned term NEET and a brief description of the school system, on which I interviewed the representatives of the target group. After that, I will define the meaning of immigration and present research on the intersection of the subjects family, immigration and school. In chapter 4, I will present the theoretical approach from the social work field, that I chose to use for analysis of the interview data, followed by a presentation of the chosen methodology and the interview situations themselves. In the following, I will present my analysis, its' results and their discussion, followed by my conclusions and recommendations for Connex. In the end I provide an evaluation of this work and its' value in research in the field of social work. Ethical matters are addressed at the topical moments that they refer to, thus there is no individual chapter collecting respective thoughts.

## **2 Context of the thesis**

### **2.1 Connex for Inclusion**

Connex for Inclusion is an internationally run project supported by the European Social Fund. Participating countries are Belgium, Sweden and Finland. The Finnish part of the project is coordinated by Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. Other project partners are Sports Federation of Southern Finland, Helsinki YMCA, Omnia - The Joint Authority of Education in the Espoo Region Currently and Stadin ammattiopisto (vocational school). (Connex for Inclusion, n.d.)

The aim is to find ways and tools to prevent, that youth and specifically boys with immigrant background fall out of educational or professional career and into a category called NEET as explained in the next chapter. The critical moment for these young people is at the age of 17-18, when issues seem to accumulate. Thus, development of preventive interventions should take into account the critical moment of transition between lower and upper secondary school, happening right before that age, usually at 15-16. The transfer of social disadvantage or discrimination from one generation to the other and its' possible negative impact on professional career are of further interest. This is explained in further detail in chapter 3.

In order to reach these goals, Connex for Inclusion initiated sub-projects of different formats, e.g. thesis papers such as this one. With the help of game-based learning, a growing number of tools have been developed aiming at the students themselves, their parents, but also professionals from different institutions and organizations, that the young people are in contact with.

Omnia, an educational provider in Espoo region, is offering open door days for parents from students who are in "Valma" groups (preparatory education). Games are designed for the parents in collaboration with Connex for Inclusion project.

To provide information about the different educational possibilities in Finland to immigrants and immigrant background students and their families, infographics were developed. Infographics are a visual storytelling tool, that combines data visualization, illustrations, text and images. (Krum, R. 2014. P. 6.) This enables for an easily understandable way to provide access to information about educational alternatives without the necessity of knowing the language and/or societal structures of the country in greater depth.

In collaboration with municipalities, organizations, clubs and educational institution ways are planned and piloted with the use of sport pedagogy in order to support integration and develop educational material for professionals.

## 2.2 NEET

The interest to gain information about the target group, stems from a phenomenon that was first observed in Great Britain in the late 1980's when it became obvious during a



reform of benefit system that a certain group of unemployed youth is not covered by any definition and thus falling into a niche of the system. At first the terms Status Zer0 or Status A were used, but later changed to NEET to remove the negative connotation of the previous terms and highlight the diversity and heterogeneity among the individuals falling under this phenomenon. (Eurofound, 2012, pp. 19 – 20.)

NEET is a defined category for youth who are not in employment, education or training. The heterogeneity of this group needs to be addressed while tailoring interventions that aim at re- integrating and including them into the labor market or finding ways to prepare them to do so. (OECD Data, 2017.)

In 2016 there were 2,88 % of boys aged 15-19 living in Finland defined as NEET, the figure was regressive as in 2015 there were 5,44 %. Looking at the age group 20-24, figures are even higher with 20,61 % in 2016 and 21,08 % in 2015. These figures include both youth with immigrant and non-immigrant background. (OECD Data, 2017.)

According to information from Eurofound (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions) youth with immigrant background have a 70% higher risk to become a NEET than non-immigrant youth, as mentioned already in the first chapter of this paper. Furthermore, a low level of education, low household income and having parents who experienced unemployment increases the risk to become a NEET. As in the case of immigrant families these factors have a higher possibility to be combined, the risk for their children to meet the defining features of NEET is multiplied. In 2011 Finland had costs 1,07 % of the gross-domestic product for covering expenses due to not integrated NEETs. (Eurofound, 2012, table 12, p. 79.) Also, their level of political and societal participation as well as trust into institutions is lower in comparison to non-NEETs (Eurofound, 2015).

The direct costs of this phenomenon make it worthwhile to gain information about NEETs and develop measures and interventions to prevent youth to get into this situation. But it is not realistic to make believe that full employment or coverage in educational institutions and organizations is reachable as the category NEET covers also e.g. youth with family or other commitments or simply not wanting to be part of the labor market. On the other side European societies are not able to provide the amount of jobs that is needed to gain full employment due to modern labor market. (Eurofound, 2012, p. 81.)

Other costs related to social capital become visible when looking at participation, marginalization and interpersonal as well as institutional trust. While European youth in general tend to have lower levels within the mentioned arenas in comparison to older generations, results still differ when comparing NEET and non-NEET youth with lower figures for the NEETs. But Scandinavian NEETs have the highest results showing that there is e.g. more trust into societal and governmental institutions and higher levels of political participation than elsewhere in Europe. (Eurofound, 2012, p. 81 p. 105.)

## 2.3 Schools

### **Lower secondary**

Comprehensive school in Finland starts for children at the age of seven and lasts for nine years unless they need special education.

### **Upper secondary**

Education can continue either in general upper secondary schools (lukio), usually for youth 16 - 19 years old, aiming for higher education at university or university of applied sciences or in vocational upper secondary schools (ammattikoulu) for youth and young adolescents usually 16 - 25 years of age. The later one last usually 3 years and aims at vocational and self-employment skills or further education. (FinnWayLearning, n.d.)

If the student is not ready to make a choice between these two educational paths or did not get a place in one of them, they can continue voluntarily in lower secondary school doing a tenth grade, which offers possibilities to gain more information about educational and professional opportunities as well as improving grades and chances to continue studies towards the desired direction (Helsingin Kaupunki, n.d.)

### **Pupil Care**

To facilitate and promote proper learning, psychological and physical development as well as social well-being, the Finnish school system includes a net of pupil care. Prerequisites for this is functioning collaboration with the student and their custodians. In case a student's results or behavior in school needs attention, he is automatically entitled with

support for learning and school visiting. This support can be given without the agreement of the custodians.

Individual pupil care on the other side includes services by nurses, psychologists and/or school curators and is applied only if the student and, if needed, the custodians agree. Documentation of the steps taken under these different kinds of pupil care is confidential and only available to the student's teachers and professionals who are taking part in the pupil care (Opetushallitus (b), 2020).

One of these professionals is the school curator, who is a social worker or social field professional, specialized in child protection. They help students who are having problems with school, learning, development or inter-human relationships. (Posio, n.d. (b)) Also, school psychologists are working towards a similar goal, but with other means and in special cases (Posio, n.d., (a)).

Another supporting person in students' life is the school counsellor. This counselling happens usually within the last three years of the lower secondary school. Topics that are covered here are learning skills, school visit, self-knowledge, further possibilities to study, different professions and professional fields as well as working life as such. One tool to cover these topics is the TET-jakso, a period similar to an internship spent in a workplace of the students' own interest. In this context it is possible to arrange visits to providers of professional educational needed in the workplace. In addition to the regular counselling lectures, students are entitled to get further guidance individually or in small groups. (Opetushallitus (a), n.d.)

#### 2.4 Collaboration between School and Families

The Finnish National Agency for Education defines that school and family have to collaborate regarding upbringing of the child or youth in order to support healthy growth and good learning outcomes (Opetushallitus, 2011 pp. 33-34). Communication to achieve this goal happens via software-based tools, meetings in person and discussions on the phone. Personal meetings seem to be the rarer case and parents wish them to happen more often as they provide the ground to gain trust and appreciation. (Säävälä, M. 2012, pp. 24 – 25.) The software-based tool in use is called Wilma. It enables communication between teachers, students and parents, keeping track of performance, e.g. in form of

grades and provides general information concerning daily life in school. (Helsingin kaupunki, n.d. *Mikä Wilma on?*.)

Wilma has been criticized to be used mainly for negative feedback. But one ought to bear in mind, that teachers often have to contact parents if there is reason for negative feedback, while in positive cases this might not be necessary. (Karhuniemi, T., 2013, p. 125.) Another study shows that the emotional reaction of boys' parents to communication via Wilma is more on the negative side compared to girls' parents, which seems to be a sign of higher amount of negative feedback.

When it comes to immigrant parents it appears that they are in general very satisfied with schools, teachers and communication between all the involved players, but this information must be seen critically as a need and tendency to express gratitude and appreciation towards school and teachers might play a role. In addition to that, some immigrant parents do not give feedback because of language barriers or other restrictions as this kind of data is usually collected in written form via online platforms. (Säävälä, M. 2012, p. 25.)

Furthermore a study that interviewed families with Somali background found out that there is a lack of understanding of the Finnish school system and curriculum which can result in a pessimistic attitude towards school and teachers especially in cases where the parents have a lower educational level and were unemployed (Warsame, S., 2010, p.22-24). This study seems to provide rather heavy weight information due to its qualitative character and the fact that the researcher is a member of Somali community himself and an experienced translator, thus interviewees were able to express themselves in their own language and loss of accuracy in data in the translation process can be diminished.

Another study looking at families with Russian background notes a strategy of separation in mothers' attitudes towards school. They do not want their children to adopt a Finnish way of thinking about education but prefer them to stay close to a Russian model. The researcher compares this "Russian" attitude to the approach of Kurdish mothers, who support an assimilative way in their children to be in school. (Säävälä, M. 2012, p. 25.)

There seems to be a need to improve communication between immigrant families and Finnish schools in terms of mutual, intercultural understanding as well as improving attitudes of parents towards school and the Finnish curriculum. The first of these can be provided to both parts of the communication process, teachers and parents alike, while the second clearly aims at supportive measurements towards immigrant parents. It appears that need for support differs individually and maybe according to the culture group as explained in the Russian/Kurdish example.

### **3 Immigration and Family**

#### **3.1 Definition of Immigration**

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines immigration as “travel into a country for the purpose of permanent residence there” (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Collins dictionary adds, that the individual plans to also work in the country (Collins, 2020).

According to Tiago Sequeira and Marcelo Santos, Immigration can affect a country’s economy and thus its’ society in many different ways. It can provide a plus in workforce, in many cases in the low skilled job market. On the other hand, it can lead to higher expenses in the fiscal budget, due to costs of social and labor market integration. In the long run, the immigrating person can contribute positively also in terms of monetary value for the receiving society, especially in cases, when they have received sufficient integrational support, i.e. expenditure for integration purposes pays off. (Sequeira, T. & Santos, M., 2018.)

#### **3.2 Finnish Research on Immigration, Family and School**

The role of family is not easy to determine in this scenario as the target group varies largely regarding culture, socio-economic background and possibly language spoken at home.

In general, it can be said that the positive expectations of immigrants towards education and school show also in the hopes and attitudes of their children, thus there is an impact of parents and families in general (Kalalahti, M., Varjo & J., Jahnukainen, M., 2017).

This finds expression also in the PISA studies. Figures from 2015 state that in Finland students with immigrant background tend to expect more often a science-related career than their non-immigrant peers (Education GPS, OECD, n.d.). The study leaves open if this can be attributed to parental aspiration or the students' own expectations. But taking into consideration that families and parents in particular always have a strong impact on their children, the results from PISA 2015 might very well mirror the role that the family plays also in the particular situation when the young men that we are interested in choose their educational trajectory after lower secondary school.

Furthermore, the influence of adult family members, also older siblings, as role models for future professional choices can play a role. In a study carried out by Mira Kalalahti, Janne Varjo and Markku Jahnukainen among teenagers in Finland, it appeared that a considerable number of boys with immigration background showed interest in self-employed professions. In the same time there was a higher number of entrepreneurs among their fathers. The comparable number among Finnish boys does not show a similar trait. (Kalalahti, M., Varjo, J. & Jahnukainen, M., 2017, p. 1249 – 1251.)

Marianne Teräs and Elina Kilpi-Jakonen explain the difference between non-immigrants' and immigrants' school achievement with the lack of socio-economic resources of the later ones. This can be induced by difficulties to find work in the new country or low level of education in the country of origin. It can also affect the possibilities of learning the language of the new country and helping children to learn it. Another factor influencing the aspect of learning the new language is the length of the family's residence in the country and the age at which the child arrived. The younger the child, the easier the language can be learned. But they admit that this cannot be made a rule, as contrary cases exist and cannot be neglected where student with immigrant background perform better in school than their native peers. The reasons for this might be their parents' motivation to provide a promising future for the child or their believe in education as a mitigating factor against discrimination in the job market and social exclusion. (Teräs, M. & Kilpi-Jakonen, E., 2013, pp. 188 – 190.)

It is important to mention, that NEET is not an immigrant and male specific topic, but the risk to fall under this category applies for members of the native group as well. (Myrskylä, P. 2011, p.14 - 15). But as mentioned already in the introduction to this paper, the risk of immigrant male youth is about two times higher compared to the Finnish native peers (Myrskylä, P. 2011, p.10).

### 3.3 International Research on Immigration, Family and School

Research carried out in other countries than Finland show similar traits. A longitudinal study carried out in the U.S. between 1998 and 2004 looking at educational aspiration of immigrant background parents for their children between kindergarten age and fifth grade, found out that all immigrant parents have higher expectations for their children than non-immigrant parents. Furthermore, immigrant parents have higher expectations than U.S.-born immigrant parents. The study differentiates between specific ethnicities (Hispanic, Black, Asian and White), but the mentioned result applies for all of them. (Ra-leigh, E. & Kao, G., 2010.p. 1095 -1096.)

This phenomenon of a tendency to have high aspirations regarding education can function as a unifying element for the otherwise very heterogeneous group of immigrants that this paper is dealing with. In this case parents of a different age group were interrogated, than the one in this study. But tendencies are nonetheless similar. This is also underlined by another study carried out in the U.S. researching the transition from college to working life and starting a professional career. Participants indicate, that they benefit from social support by the family, esp. the influence of mothers on developing an adaptive work ethic is stressed here. (Murphy et al., 2010, p. 88.) But it has to be mentioned that this study does not take into consideration immigrant and different socio-economic background. It appears to me by interpreting quotes in the article that participants are of higher socio-economic status and rather upper-class background. Furthermore the transition from college to career is usually happening in a later moment in life than the one leading to upper secondary class, thus participants are in average older and have gained more life and particularly professional experience which can be mentioned as a positive effect on their identity development and thus presence and performance in the labor market.

A review on migrant education for OECD launched in Ireland in 2008 indicates a connection between socio-economic status and especially education level of immigrant parents and their children's school performance (Taguma, et al., 2009 p. 21). But a study carried out in Norway in 2014 did not find a similar connection. Instead the role of the teacher as a social support factor is stressed in this study. Moreover, the Irish scenario bears a special feature different to most European countries, namely a similar or higher educational level of immigrant parents in comparison to native parents in average. Target groups in these studies differed insofar as first- and second-generation immigrants were

included in the Norwegian case whereas the Irish review focuses on first generation students. (Ulriksen et al., 2015, p. 372.)

A literature review researching the situation in Great Britain in 2002 stated that “(...) educational disadvantage and disaffection are linked to (...) Membership of some minority ethnic groups (...)” (Coles et al., 2002, p.26). The review collects different sources that compare school performance and achievement of different ethnic groups. In general, immigrant groups underperform the native group. But one interesting observation here is that in certain areas, where an immigrant group has a large and already long existing community, they outperform representatives of other communities, including the native, non-immigrant group (Coles et al., 2002, p.27.) It is not possible to conclude a rule from this case, but the question how much influence the community, it’s proportion and actual support compared to the native community do have on their members’ school performance, is valid.

## 4 Theoretical ground for the Analysis

I chose to conduct this study within the theoretical framework of participation as a means to well-being and the entities of social exclusion and disadvantage and their relation as antipodes. The role of family, school and their interaction are looked at with the use of certain approaches to these concepts as presented in the following.

### 4.1 Participation

A person living his or her life in a participatory manner is making decisions that affect their life, personal affairs and change initiating momenta on their own or to a certain degree that allows them to feel in control of their life. This can show in particular activities, but in the bigger picture is internalized as an attitude to life. (Pierson, J. & Thomas, M., 2010, p. 384).

One key indicator of successful integration into the new society is the level of participation that the families of this papers’ interviewees experience. By referring to the families’ own experience their subjective participatory level is covered. Another point of view is the objective one, looking at how far a certain series of needs defined by experts is covered. This can be extended to wishes and wants, that these experts believe to be common. (Allardt, E., 1993 in Nussbaum, M.C. & Sen, A. (eds.), 1993, pp 91 – 93.)



One way to look at participation is through the Capabilities approach or Human Development approach developed by Amartya Sen and Martha C. Nussbaum. In this work I will focus on the version described by Nussbaum. This approach is a rather large scaled one and provides an understanding of participation on different levels as a part and means of well-being. Thus, it puts participation into a larger frame regarding the lives of the participants in this thesis.

According to Martha C. Nussbaum, different capabilities are skills, abilities or options, that a person has to live a life and meet their basic needs. They are based on free choice; no-one can be forced to execute them. The active realization of one or more of these capabilities are called functionings.

There are three different forms of capabilities:

- basic, innate capabilities are preconditions to gain further capabilities (e.g. hearing, seeing, listening skills),
- internal capabilities are learned skills
- combined capabilities are internal capabilities, that meet with the outside world, meaning there are institutional and material possibilities to realize them.

Nussbaum provides a list of ten capabilities, that ensure a life in dignity. In the following I will present a selection of those, that are of interest within the scope of this work. As the interviews with the boys highlight the topics educational choice, influence of the family as well as the interplay between school and family, these can be understood as functionings or supporting factors of several of the capabilities. Further capabilities defined by Nussbaum, but not used in this work are Life, Emotions, Affiliation, Bodily Health, Bodily Integrity, Other Species and Control over one's Environment. (Nussbaum, M.C. 2011, pp. 20-34.)

### **Senses, Imagination, and Thought:**

A state or attitude that enables oneself to appreciate, understand and make reasonable choices based on education and information. This is not reduced to only basic knowledge and skills but reaching out to the realization and experience of own labor and creativity,

including the religious and artistic realm and the freedom to exercise these. Furthermore, Nussbaum makes a general notion of positive encounters and prevention of pain. As this capability aims at education as a base for participation and well-being, it functions in the same way as a base for the theoretical ground of this paper. A sense and image of the self in the future is one of the most important steps to initiate a decision-making process like the one the students in the target group are going through. The right for religious freedom finds attention as well, which plays a role for some of them. Though this is not of further interest in this piece of work.

### **Practical Reason:**

Practical Reasoning provides the ability to build a personal understanding of a worldview and develop ethical awareness, that allows for a vision and construction of one's own life. Again entities, that protect and support this ability and its' development, find their mentioning in this part of the theoretical approach.

By using practical reasoning, it is possible to deal with or make use of opportunities and also emotions as a driver in decision making in a considered way. Practical Reasoning as a capacity can be seen also as a practical skill, being taught, among other places, in schools and developed further by personal experience. Thus, it finds its place in real life in families and schools, being profoundly influenced by both of these institutions and having in its' functional execution vast impact on decision making and future plans of the boys, whom this work is focusing on.

### **Play:**

This describes the importance of enjoyment of life and e.g. use of hobbies as a means to revive and regain strength. Play exists in school, usually in a group setting e.g. in form of after-school clubs, student associations etc. But Play also finds realization in non-organized ways, as long-lasting friendships are often formed while being a student in school.

Further definition of these capabilities, their minimum standards and availability to citizens are a matter to governmental measures and influenced by the shared values of the country's society in perspective to its' history and culture. Nussbaum emphasizes one of the capabilities I focus on in this work. Practical Reason supports the ability to make

choices in life, also regarding other functionings. In other words, it is a substantial asset to execute the above-mentioned freedom of choice. (Nussbaum, M.C. 2011, pp. 20-34).

Jonathan Wolff and Avner De-Shalit have developed the capabilities approach and suggested further capabilities. As they draw in their work from experiences of professionals from the immigration field, I find it worthy to state one further capability, that they are presenting. The ability to understand and speak the local language adds at large to possibilities to take part in everyday life. (Wolff & De-Shalit 2013, p. 50) I will not examine this topic much further, as it is outside the range of this study. But learning the language of the new home-country is of high importance to all first-generation immigrant, possibly even in the second generation, thus the notion of the issue at this point.

#### 4.2 Social Exclusion and Disadvantage

Regarding immigrant youth and their families, social exclusion is a process that prevents them from accessing social and monetary capital to prosper as participating members of society. Elements that increase the risk of social exclusion are poverty or low income, unemployment or unattainability to the labor market, no or little social networks, social and physical condition of the housing area and non-accessibility of services. This can endanger the above described concept participation as a part of well-being. (Pierson, J. & Thomas, M., 2010, p. 485.)

Social exclusion as well as other phenomena as disintegration, passivity and alienation are often understood as the opposite conception to participation and stand in the way to achieve a sufficient state of well-being (Raivio & Karjalainen, 2013, p. 15; Vuorenmaa, 2016, p. 21).

Disadvantage is according to Mikko Niemelä and Juho Saari a phenomenon, that unfolds on two levels. The structural aspect is based on socio-economic status and shows in hierarchy in society. This is due to the functioning of society and its' inner organization to ensure productivity, production and consumption. Possibilities to move within this hierarchy do not change the structure but ensure its' flexibility.

The other aspect is the individual and relative experience of status. This can include a person's status, sense of being and acting, or capability to act (according to Nussbaum's

terminology). In other words, a lifestyle. Disadvantage exists, where these two levels interact and possibly aggravate life. (Niemelä, M & Saari, J., 2013, p. 11.)

Within the Finnish school system, the transition between lower and upper secondary school is a crucial point, when looking at socio-economic status and flexibility in hierarchy. As compulsory education ends at this moment, further steps define the position of the individual person in society. The experience of opportunities to choose from in this moment effects notably on the sense of being and in the end on the choice of lifestyle, possibly for a whole lifetime.

In the following I chose to focus on the term disadvantage, because I understand it as a concept and space, that can be put more suitable into discussion with participation than the term social exclusion. Furthermore, I see it as a concept that describes the process and its influencing parts rather than defining a status.

## **5 Conducting the Study**

### **5.1 Research question**

According to the findings presented in the chapters above from existing theory about the topic, there is a correlation between participation in the context of well-being, the risk of NEET and its prevention, the influence of families on educational choices and the work being done at school to provide hard and soft skills for further education and professional career. Especially the family, its' values and socio-economic status can have a direct and indirect impact on youths' everyday life.

The question is, how do boys at the transiting point from lower to upper secondary school experience the families' and schools' influence and the cooperation between these two institutions as a participation and well-being supporting factor in their own life? Furthermore, it is of interest, what kind of improvements they suggest in order to get more support from the school's side to support this decision-making process. I will look into the topic by asking about their personal experience of well-being, participation and social disadvantage.

The gained information derives from the boys and young men themselves as explained in the following chapter.

## 5.2 Methodology and Implementation of semi-structured Interviews

I chose to conduct interviews following the semi-structured interview method. This stems from the thought, that it allows the interview to turn into a dialogue and thus provide possibilities for participants to

- a) express their thoughts in greater depth and
- b) comment on each other's thoughts and statements.

A further advantage is that it needs to be prepared in beforehand, thus topics of interest can be formulated into questions with time at hand, not under pressure in the moment of the interview. This might result in better coverage of the themes of interest. (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008.)

I followed the interview-data-as-resource tradition, explained by Clive Seale, as the interviews' purpose was to gain insight into the boys' lives and circumstances. Critics of this tradition state, that every interview is always to certain extent a consideration of the social encounter between interviewer and interviewee, which might have an effect on what is discussed and how. (Seale cited in Rapley 2004, p. 16.)

The ideal situation would have been to create an atmosphere for dialogue as introduced by David Bohm that allows for exchange of thoughts and opinions without any kind of validation and judgement (Bohm, D., 1996, pp. 7-9). It was of best interest for the outcome that the boys were able to participate with as little restriction as possible, may it be peer pressure or extreme reservation. Possible restrictions still existed and are not easy to measure, e.g. group dynamics play a role.

My own role as an interviewer was of a less intervening character. I did not interrupt the flow of a narrative but posed follow-up questions if possible or necessary. Furthermore, I put effort in preparing this role in order to address the "interviewer effect" (McLeod, S., 2014). As a male with immigration background myself, it might be easy to build a bridge and trust based on shared personal specifics on the one hand. But on the other hand, ethnicity, age and cultural difference might have negative impact. Individual characteristics of all the participants including the interviewer and the quality of interaction

could not be estimated in beforehand, thus the best strategy was to enter the situation with an open mind and reactive attitude.

Furthermore, I entered the interview situation as a relative or total stranger, while the boys had known each other through the class setting for at least one year. I still chose to conduct group interviews, because I interpreted this familiarity among the group members as a positive influence on the outcome of the interviews and its' validity.

Most of the interview questions function on two levels. One is covering the hard facts, bearing within the content of the question. The other level handles the sub-text, which aims at the capabilities approach.

In the following I present questions prepared for the interviews and how they refer to the used theory:

Are you looking forward to your next school/education?

What school and path did you apply for?

Is it important that the future education/occupation has to do with your favorite school subjects and personal hobbies?

Are your parents interested in your school and education plans?

How did or could the family support your education and decision making regarding future education?

Is it important that the family is happy with your choice and supports you with it?

How is the family doing in general?

Was tenth grade/LUVA a good experience? How?

Were the teachers and school counsellors helpful in finding out about your future education?

Is there something they could have done better?

Do you think it is important, that your family (parents) know, how you do in school?

Should the teachers know how your family is doing?

Do you think that your parents' occupation influenced your decision regarding future education?

Do you think you could have chosen a completely different path, if your parents had a very different occupation?

With the help of these questions I got to know the boys, their actual choices and prospects and their experienced influence of family, teachers and school in general. The detailed content of their answers provided information on their experiences and understanding of the capabilities presented in chapter 4.1. in the controversy of participation and disadvantage.

Planning ahead and making steps is an indicator of imagination in combination with making sense of what is learned and giving it reasonable thought, also in terms of explaining the choice. Answers can show traits of envisioning one's own future, thus referring to Nussbaum's Senses, Thought and Imagination capability, as the action of planning ahead, executing plans and the preceding thinking process can function as hints of an attitude with high participatory quality. Personal preference and interest find expression in the arenas of favorite school subjects and hobbies, which mirror Nussbaum's Play capability.

Questions cover themes such as social interaction and dynamics within the family and the importance of its' socio-economic status and educational background in regard to educational choice. Indirectly emotional skills and the level of equality between children and parents are tested, when it comes to discussing the topic of further education.

Documentation happened with an audio recording device and later I transcribed the answers. The interviews were held in Finnish language in the schools during school time or after school. This influenced the outcome of the interviews, because some of the boys, who were not born in Finland, did not have the most fluent language skills. Furthermore, I have no information about the language situation of the other boys. It is possible, that

the everyday language spoken at home is another one than Finnish, which is the educational language, spoken in school. Also, my own situation as a first-generation immigrant and my set of Finnish language skills must be taken into consideration. On the one hand it led to situations, when singular words or phrases needed to be clarified, e.g. via English language, on the other hand I experienced that my own identity as an immigrant in Finland with imperfect Finnish skills functioned as an icebreaker and means to gain trust. The language level was still sufficient to conduct the interviews and discuss the topics in question with necessary depth and quality.

Other than that, the process included two major moments that involved translation from English to Finnish and vice versa. I translated myself. Once to translate the interview questions into Finnish and again to translate those statements, that found their way into the thesis as quotations, into English.

Furthermore, I guarantee that the participants' and their family members' identity will not be revealed in this study. Names or any other personal feature which could help to identify a person, voiced in the interview, are erased and replaced with a variable as a placeholder in the transcript. The same applies to the names of the schools. The recording of the interview will be deleted as soon as possible, latest when the process of assessment of this work is finished.

Three different groups were formed. One, consisting of 4 students visiting tenth grade from a school from the City of Helsinki was a test run. Tenth grade is an offer for students to do one extra year in secondary school in order to gain more information and guidance regarding further education as explained in chapter 2.3. This interview happened in early spring 2018 during school time. Participating students were 16/17 years old. The interview group gathered around a table in one of the school's classrooms. This interview functioned as a test run for the questions and the interviewing situation itself and its' results were not recorded and transcribed. They are not included in the data and thus do not influence the analysis, results, discussion and conclusion, but are used as background information, e.g. in preparation of the other interviews.

A second group of tenth grade students from another school run by the City of Helsinki participated in the actual interview process in early summer 2018 in the last days of the school year. I will refer to this group in the following as group 1 and their school as school 1.



Three students took part, plus another one, who arrived a little later. This setting had a very familiar atmosphere as we had the opportunity to be seated on a couch, which contributed to leave the school environment at least in our minds. In between they were making jokes. The students commented each other freely and took their time to explain themselves, the topics we discussed and further questions to each other and me.

Two of the boys were first generation immigrants, one actually had just lived in Finland about a year at that time. He needed a little more explanation every now and then, but his language skills were still sufficient to take part and contribute to the interview. The other first-generation representative had perfect Finnish skills as he lived in the country since early childhood. The students were of age 16.

The third group included students from an education provider run by a private foundation. They were taking part in an educational path, that prepared them for further education in high school. This group will be named as group 2 and their school as school 2 in the further course of this research.

This interview took place in one of the school's classrooms in early summer 2018, almost at the end of the school term. This group consisted of three students. All of them were first generation immigrants, two aged 26 and one aged 16. Also, here the atmosphere was quite a relaxed and friendly one. I got the impression that they were content with their studies, which contributed to their motivation to participate in my interview.

It is important to mention in this context again, that these boys do not represent a homogeneous group, as their socio-economic and cultural background as well as the level of their and their families' integration might differ radically. Thus, the only unifying traits in these groups are, that they belong to a minority in Finland.

### 5.3 Target Group

Boys and young men with immigration background, aged 15 - 29 are particularly at risk to discontinue education after lower secondary school and be unavailable for the labor market as explained earlier e.g. in chapters 1 and 2.2. Thus, the transition phase from lower secondary education to upper secondary education is of a crucial point as here

students initiate first steps into their professional future. Representatives of first and second immigrant generation took part in the interviews and are labeled accordingly in the analysis parts. All the boys participated voluntarily.

Sampling and recruitment of the interview groups' participants bases on these mentioned parameters. In order to conduct the interviews, I was given a research permit by the City of Helsinki and concluded a written agreement with the director of the privately funded school. In one of the Helsinki City schools the actual recruitment of participants happened through the school counsellor, in both other cases I was invited by the teacher, respectively the school counsellor to introduce myself and the project and ask for volunteers myself. All of the participants got a project description in written form in beforehand to ensure that they and their parents are well informed about the nature, aims and scope of this thesis. Each of the groups met once during the interviewing process.

The idea to form these different main groups from two different educational systems based on the assumption, that the students from school 2 would probably have a higher level of motivation than the ones in the tenth grade of school 1, as they already have decided to a certain extend on their following educational steps and work on realizing them. At the moment when the interviews were held, this difference did not show drastically, because the second group was at the end of the tenth grade, thus they already initiated steps for their further education.

#### 5.4 Analysis method

I used structuring content analysis, which involves breaking down text into a limited number of categories and provides tools to analyze and examine the written content. Data can be reduced while at the same time its' meaning and quality need to be ensured. This happens by "coding, categorizing (creating meaningful categories into which the units of analysis – words, phrases, sentences etc. – can be placed), comparing (categories and making links between them), and concluding – drawing theoretical conclusions from the text". (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 476.)

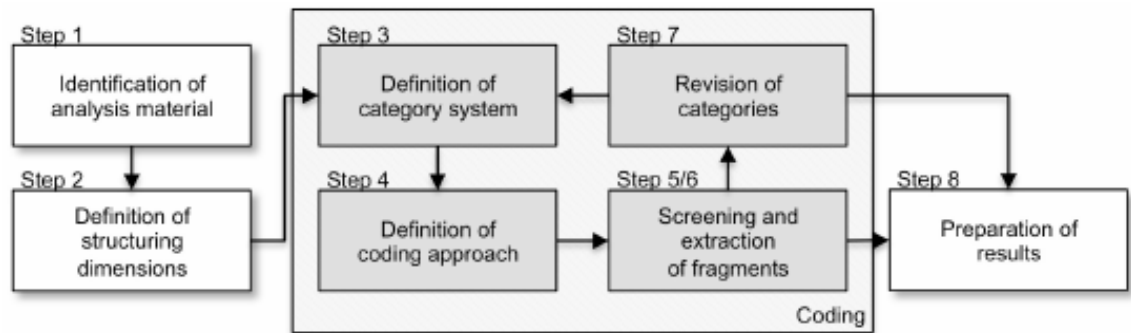


Figure 1. Procedure of a structuring content analysis (Mayring, 2008, p 84)

Step one and two of Mayring's visualization of the analysis process in figure 1 were close to self-explanatory in this case, as the data to be analyzed is defined by the material collected through the interviews. I chose the structuring dimensions, e.g. according to coding, to be defined by the contextual meaning of the boys' statements, as the accumulation of certain words, expressions and phrases is not of interest in this work. Categories and suitable codes were defined from the theory, as I was looking for information for certain topics. Statements, that drew my attention, but did not fit the defined set of codes, were a reason to revise the defined codes and categories, if necessary.

According to Klaus Krippendorff, text available to content analysis never contains one true interpretation, but findings are personal and furthermore depend on the context of the data and research (Krippendorff, K., 2004, p. 22).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison describe analysis in qualitative data of a character that contains a "...reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualized data..." (Cohen et al. 2007. p. 469).

Content analysis provides tools to take a closer look at characteristic features of communication, asking what is said, how it is said and who are the sender and receiver. It makes it possible to conclude the motivation of what is said as well as the consequences. (Krippendorff, K., 2004, p. 46.)

This describes the role and impact of the analyst during the process and emphasizes the question of validity and reproducibility of research. Another issue is, that the interviewer and analyst can be the same person. Thus, the working steps of the analysis (coding, categorizing etc.) do not strictly derive from data, but might be influenced by the research question, background theory and the aims of the interview questions.

I focused on the following steps, suggested by Miles and Huberman, in order to achieve results from the analysis of the collected data:

- counting frequencies of occurrence of categories
- noting categories and topics
- making sense of data by using informed intuition to reach a conclusion

This set of strategies makes it possible to generate results that have a more universal relevance compared to the content of an individual statement. (Miles & Hubermann, 1994 cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 470.)

According to the described methodology I broke down the students' answers to categories, present and compare them, reflect them to the theoretical framework, as displayed in chapter 4, and finally discuss the results.

Table 1. Categories and Subcategories

<b>main Categories</b>	Participation	Social Disadvantage	School and School-Family Communication
<b>Subcategories</b>	Senses, Imagination and Thought Reasoning Play support from Family negative Influence from Family support from School	-	suggestions for Improvement in School positive notes on Communication between School and Family negative notes on Communication between School and Family

As illustrated in table 1, the main categories used for the analysis mirror the polarity of the concepts participation and social disadvantage and leave space for practical suggestions how to improve support from schools directly regarding further choice of education. Furthermore, they cover collaboration between school and family, represented in subcategories on positive and negative notes. The main category Participation is divided into further sub-categories as well: Senses, Imagination and Thought; Reasoning; Play;

Positive support from Family; Positive support from School. Those reflect Nussbaum's Capabilities approach and further aspects of the research question as introduced in chapter 4.1. Categories are not mutually exclusive, because of the relatively wide scope of the research question and field of interest of this study. Thus, one statement can cover more than one part of the research question. The category on Social Disadvantage collects every statement made pointing out a situation or condition for themselves or the family, that is possibly due to their immigrant background and eventually a risk for well-being.

Table 2. Codes for the different Categories

<b>Categories and Subcategories</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Senses, Imagination and Thought	SITH
Practical Reasoning	REAS
Play	P
support from Family	SFAM
negative Influence from Family	NIFAM
support from School	SSCH
Social Disadvantage	SOCDIS
suggestions for Improvements in School	SCH
positive notes on Communication between School and Family	COM
negative notes on Communication between School and Family	COMneg

Table 2 explains the nomenclature of the different codes used in the analysis of the interviews and how they were assigned to the categories and subcategories.

## 6 Analysis of the Interviews

### 6.1 Features of the Data

4 boys, aged 16 participated in school 1. One of them was a first-generation immigrant, the others were second generation. The recording of the interview has a length of 59:30 minutes and the transcript contains 15 pages.

In school 2 there were 3 participants. As mentioned earlier, they were all first-generation immigrants, two of them were aged 26 and one 16. The recording is 48:45 minutes long and the transcript has 9 pages.

Table 3. Occurrence of Codes

Code	School 1	School 2
SITH	23	20
REAS	16	12
P	3	2
SFAM	22	13
NIFAM	5	2
SSCH	14	6
SOCDIS	3	6
SCH	3	0
COM	3	1
COMneg	4	5

The figures in table 3 are total numbers, thus I counted the amount of statements per student. If one student expressed one thought two times, e.g. while explaining it further, it was still counted as one occurrence as a coding measurement. In the next chapter I will present and explain the content of the statements.

## 6.2 Results of Analysis

The aim of the study was to gain insight into the influence from family and school on boys' and young men's' decision-making regarding further education. Further aims were to find out about how they experience communication between school and family and what kind of suggestions they have to improve the support received by schools. All this can find expression in their experienced level of participation.

In the following subchapters the total numbers of occurrence of statements per each category for both groups are mentioned separately. To explain these further, I added translated quotations from the interviews. For better understanding I added words in brackets in italics in some cases.

### 6.2.1 Influence of the Family

Signs of support from the family's' side were much higher in the group 1 (22). This is very likely due to the fact, that group 2 (13) consisted mostly of adult young men, thus the role of the family did not play that much of a role. Support shows, e.g. in discussions with the parents about future educational choices.

First, they thought, that I would go via the same high school to the medical field, because that was the way my brother chose. He is in university and studies medicine, but last year I sat down with them and told them that I am more interested in the technical field. In the beginning they were a little concerned, because they don't really understand that branch. But then, sure, they support me in that way, that they say, do what makes you happy. Of course, they understand that there are other possibilities, if the IT-field doesn't work out. So yes, they support me in that way.

Also, role models or ideals within the family were mentioned to be of help.

For me that could be my older brother. He has studied well, went to a good high school, then to a good university. I thought to take then the same way, but I had different things that interested me. He is a little bit like an idol for me that, when you work hard, that makes it possible to do the same things in the same way, that I work hard for what I want...

My grandfather, from my mother's line. He is a professor. He did not have a family, his father and mother died. He lived with others in *country x*, but still nowadays he studies a lot, he was good in school and that's why he did a lot in his life. I want to be like him.

But these idols and role models were not always found within the family or maybe consciously looked for outside of it.

Well, I don't really have an idol in our family. The people I look up to are not people within my family. I look up to those kinds of people who do what they love. Like doing that to the fullest. Like, they plan something and then start to realize what they had planned and succeed. (...) It is not like that, that I go there and work so that, ha, I can buy a car. But that you do what you love.

Negative influence of the family showed in group 1 (5) also in form of discussions with parents. All of these statements were issued by one boy in the group. I will come back to this in the discussion part in chapter 6.3.

My mother thinks, that am not I able to go to high school, but I say I can and that can lead to a little argument.

Group 2 (2) expressed thoughts showing a negative influence of the family in form of being worried about family members who are living at the country of origin, being a conflict-zone. This has an effect on them, e.g. in terms of concentrating on education.

Because they live in country x and it is not safe there and I am bothered. But it develops, I am worried about my mother. Sometimes we talk about that with my brother.

Another way how the influence of the family shows is a neutral one, that shows transition of values between generations.

My parents like oil (*industry*), because in their hometown there is a lot of it. But if you now study something, for example electrician, engineer or something similar, and that doesn't give you a lot of money, most probably you wouldn't study that. And my parents like a (professional) field where I get lots of money.

## 6.2.2 School support

The boys experienced school support regarding their future educational and career plans mostly through the help of the school counsellor. Group 1 had a total of 14 statements and group 2 six.



Sure, teacher x (*school counsellor*) helped a lot during that talk. He asked me, what do you want to do, what interests you. He gave me a large choice of professions, high schools, where I could go to. That clarified my picture, where I would go to...

Other statements related to the benefit of tenth grade as a way to gain time and think about future choices. Thus, the offer of doing the extra year in school during tenth grade can be understood as means of school support.

Tenth grade was a good experience in my opinion. More time to think what you want to do, because my grades from last year directed me to vocational school, that's o.k. (...) Now I have a better picture of what I want to do. When I was in ninth grade, I thought that I go to high school and look there what I want to do...

### 6.2.3 School-Family Communication

The amount of statements supporting communication between school and family was slightly higher in group 1 (3). In group 2 only one statement was made. All of those referred to a hypothetical case, where there was a problem in the family.

More statements were made in both groups aiming at the notion that communication between family and school is not necessary. In group 1 there were four and in group 2 five statements.

It doesn't matter, if he asks, it's o.k., if he doesn't ask, it's also o.k. That would be like small talk for me. It's not his business, he's the teacher and here we talk about school matters.

In my opinion, they don't need to, because not every teacher is able to know how things are in each child's home. That's the role of the parents, taking care, that the child feels good at home, that it's nice there. (...) But when there's bad feeling, then the teacher can ask. It usually mirrors from a student, sometimes when it usually goes well, then it's a bit like going bad, you recognize from the face and how he is doing in school (...) You can ask then. But they don't have to, that's more the duty of the parents to keep the home nice and good for the child. Taking care...

### 6.2.4 Well-being in regard to Participation vs. Social Disadvantage

As one of the aims of this study is to find out about the boys' and young men's well-being in regard to their experienced levels of participation and social disadvantage, I will present this topic's results in the following:

Statements that belong to the category reflecting Nussbaum's Senses, Imagination and Thought capability appear in both groups at a high rate. Group 1 had 23 and group 2 had 20 statements.

I'll go to media high school, because I want to get into the media program...

I want two jobs: If I can go to high school, I want to have a workplace related to history. If I go to vocational school, then I'm interested to be an electrician or cook."

Statements related to the subcategory Play had a very low occurrence. Group 1 had three statements, while group 2 had only one. Underaged interviewees emphasized the importance of enjoyment of the work, while the full aged stressed making use of personal interest in order to facilitate a successful career.

In my opinion, it's very important, that free time has to do with work. Because, you know, many people don't want to do work. (...) It's very important, that you love what you do. Everybody is seeking for happiness and go to work to get money and be happy. Money doesn't make you happy, but what you're doing. That's why it's important that you love, what you're doing.

The same quotation functions in the subcategory Practical Reasoning, because it is a good example how personal ethics and worldviews can be explained in a logical way. Group 1 had 16 statements on practical reasoning and group 2 had 12. Other statements contained a good salary after entering the job market. E.g. as the young men mentioned, who was quoted above in the subchapter 6.2.1. on family influence, when comparing the advantages of working in the oil industry in a country with lots of oil to those of being an electrician or engineer in Finland.

Expression of social disadvantage shows mostly in group 2 (6) in the form of language issues and thus a shortcoming in taking part in everyday life, e.g. finding friends in the new home-country. In group 1 (3) school performance played a role as well due to language issues, but disadvantage found expression also in form of statements on parents' socio-economic status in the new country of residence.

...In Finland I am alone. I have friends, but Finns are unfortunately quiet people, that's why life is challenging here. In winter people stay at home, in summer they go out and the system goes on the same way then. But it's a different culture, and in my culture in every hour they go out and meet people and I talk with them and here, when you meet people, one hour, one word, one hour, one word... You need one year to fill one sentence. And you know, when you want to practice Finnish, you have to talk with Finnish people, and they are unfortunately quiet. (...) Sometimes I feel like there's a big wall.

My mother is a cook, she went to this one school... like a cook. She graduated to be a physician. But the physicians (in Finland) don't understand anything, my mother herself graduated as a physician and she said that they don't understand anything...

### 6.2.5 Suggestions to improve School support

Only three suggestions were made in group 1 by two of the boys. One suggestion was to higher the ratio, in which certificates are issued. The student and parents would have a more detailed overview about the level of school performance and can thus take measurements that support the above-mentioned motivation if necessary. Another suggestion aimed at the motivation of individual teachers. The idea was to be less of a professional and distant teacher, but to be more of a mentor with empathic qualities, meaning to inspire on a more general level instead of motivating for a certain goal, e.g. a test. I will come back to these suggestion in chapter 7.1. on my thoughts about further research. Group 2 seem to have been content with the support they received, as none of the participants expressed any suggestions.

## 6.3 Discussion of the Analysis

In the following I will discuss the findings of the analysis in relation to the used theory on participation and other prior findings presented in earlier chapters. Furthermore, I will take a closer look at the contextual meaning of statements, differences between the two groups as well as differences between representatives of first- and second-generation immigrants among the target group. The structure of this discussion will, in the same way as in the analysis, follow the tasks posed in the research question.

### Influence of the Family:

The influence of families on decision making of the boys and young men shows in different ways. On the one hand it got obvious, that discussions with the parents on the topic future education are of a supportive character. On the other hand, one of the boys mentioned, that they are talking about this topic many times during a week at home, which might be of course too much, as that can cause pressure and easily turn into negative influence. It was the same boy, who stated the comments in the category negative influence from the family in group 1 (see chapter 6.2.1).

At first sight the age difference between the groups seems to play a role when looking at this category. But at a second glance, it appears that all of the thoughts on negative influence from the family in group 1 are voiced by the boy, who just recently moved to Finland. It does not allow for any generalization but is still an interesting fact that in these interviews all the statements on negative influence were issued by first generation immigrants. This boy's case was unique in that way, that his mother wished, but doubted, if he was able to visit high school due to language skills. He himself was of that opinion, that he would manage to get to high school. His father supported him but did not appear to take much of a role in these discussions. Nonetheless, the father functioned as an indirect role model, as his profession was one of his son's preferred choices as well, thus there were traits of support in this family setting as well. This seems to go along with the earlier mentioned notion that boys have the tendency to be interested in similar professions as their fathers', as explained in chapter 3.2. in the paragraph referring to a study by Kalalahti, Varjo and Jahnukainen.

In group 2 traits of negative influence showed in form of worries about family members in the home country, which is a conflict zone. This finds expression in e.g. less concentration on school tasks. In a nutshell all of the negative influence issued in these interviews derives from different forms of worries, either about the boy and his school performance from the parent's side or from the young men's side about the parent's safety. None of the negative influence rooted in major social problems or even bad intentions.

On the base of these findings it can be said, that there is a congruence with existing research stating that immigrant parents have high interest in their children's' education and school performance as presented in chapter 3.3. It remains open, if immigrant parent's interest is higher compared to Finnish natives. Interest still continues after the boys have become of full age, but the influence decreases with higher independence and, in these cases, distance to the physical whereabouts of the family.

Our discussion about role models or idols made clear that they exist within the family. It seems, that through them, values like hard work, being informed or continuing education are transferred to the boys. But role models were also mentioned in particular because of their professional choice, which can also carry the notion of ethical values within. Most of the boys and young men mentioned other relatives than parents being role models, e.g. brothers, grandfathers or uncles. In case of the underaged interviewees, this might point at a feature of their development stage. They are emancipating themselves from

the family and confining their own life including values and lifestyle. The choice of idol might very well change from parents to other family members and also persons outside the family, as one of them stated very clearly. In case of the full aged participants, this is a sign of having already gone through this development.

But transfer of ethical value within the family shows also in a direct way from parents to children. A good example is the young man who is quoted in 6.2.1., stating that both him and his parents value a profession, that includes a large salary. In these cases, the transfer of values is one way of explaining the role, that the socio-economic background plays in the decision-making of boys. Values like education, a certain amount of income and hard work in order to reach a goal, that are clearly adopted from family members, represent the parameters, on which educational and professional decisions are made. This contributes to earlier research by Taguma et al., that indicated an influence of socio-economic status on immigrant children's school performance through the education level of their parents presented in chapter 3.3. However, one should keep in mind, that the parents of participants in this study as well as the one carried out by Taguma et al seemed to have a high education.

#### School support:

As the school support was mostly evaluated positively during the interview, it seems that the measures and tools that teachers and especially school counsellors have at hand to support students regarding school performance and providing information about further education and professional choices is adequate.

Thoughts on improvement of this support seem to relate to attitudes of individual professionals and can be interpreted as an interpersonal issue, not touching the institution school and its' functioning as a system presented in chapter 2.3. The tenor was, that teachers should be easier to approach and more involved in their work with their personality as well as handing out certificates more frequently to enable a more constant record of school performance.

#### Communication between Family and School:

All of the boys were very clear, that there should be a strict separation between private life and family life. And according to them, this separation is existing and functioning well.

The younger interviewees noted that, hypothetically, teachers and school counsellors are welcome to check and offer help, if a problem occurs at home, that asks too much of students' and has a noticeable impact on them. The full aged participants did not support this notion, the separation between school and private life was very important, thus age and supposedly less dependence from family and parents play a role in this matter.

Common means provided by the school, such as grading of school tasks and certificates were evaluated positively as a means to measure own educational progress and function as an extrinsic motivational aspect. Furthermore, parents were mentioned to be motivating, e.g. because one can make them be proud of one's self.

None of the above mentioned criticizes or comes in conflict with the school system and means of communication between school and family presented in chapter 2.3. Separation between family and school mirrors in a certain way the developmental stage of the participants, emancipating themselves from the family or having already taken this step, as it is the situation with the older ones. School was compared to working life, thus being a student was professionalized and private life, i.e. family, functions as a balancing factor. Furthermore, this notion is congruent with the presented study by Minna Säävälä in chapter 2.4., where Russian backgrounded mothers supported a separation between school and family life in order to prevent their children from adopting a Finnish lifestyle. But among the participants of this study, it was not a characteristic that only applied to Russian backgrounded interviewees. In addition to this, there was no notion of keeping own cultural traits preserved and separated from a Finnish way-of-being.

The lack of understanding of the Finnish school system, also presented in chapter 2.4. in a summary on Saeed Warsame's research, did not appear to be an issue in the cases of the participants of this study and their family members.

At this point one has to keep in mind, that all of the participants seemed to have a well-functioning family background, thus separation of school and family life and understanding of the school system are no risk-factors for performance in school. In other cases, this might look different. I will continue these thoughts in chapter 7.1. on further studies.

### Well-being in regard to Participation vs. Social Disadvantage:

The high occurrence of statements in the category on Sense, Imagination and Thought shows that all of the boys have a positive and partly even concrete vision of their educational and professional future, expressing a high level of experienced participation. In school they have a lot of possibilities to exercise their own creativity and labor, experiencing the results of those in form of grades, feeling of success and thus further motivation. The different outlooks on a variety of educational and professional choices add to the freedom of choice that Martha C. Nussbaum emphasizes in the capabilities approach (see chapter 4.1.). According to Nussbaum this is also proof, that they are equipped with suitable tools to appreciate, understand and make these decisions. When looking at the results from the category referring to Nussbaum's Practical Reasoning capability, this becomes even more obvious. The high occurrence of statements in this category and their contextual quality showed, how the boys and young men applied practical reasoning as a tool for visioning and constructing of their educational future. They used reasoning mainly as a means to explain and back up their decisions, e.g. because of the salary, interest in a specific profession or possibly even prior knowledge through school, private learning or hobbies.

Practical reasoning referring to hobbies or personal interest are a sign of Nussbaum's Play capability, stressing that future profession is at least partly congruent with hobbies or personal interest in order to enjoy work and live a good life. Among the underaged participants the enjoyability of the profession was the more important motivation to base their decisions on. The statements of both full aged participants in the Play category have a character that rather points at making use of own interest and prior knowledge in order to start a successful career. The notion of enjoyment was not of particular importance for them. This could highlight the different development stages that they are in. Topics like a stable income and providing financially for a family can possibly be of interest for a young man in his twenties, while not playing a role at all for a boy of age 16. Even more as both of the young men were first generation immigrants, originally coming from cultural rather collectivistic oriented societies that value the importance of family and a role of the man has the head of the family, meaning also being financially in the providing position.

Group 2 showed more traits of social disadvantage, which might not be surprising as the participants were all first-generation immigrants. The quality of the statements though

shows another phenomenon, because their problems highlighting disadvantage consisted mostly of language barriers, which certainly has an impact on educational possibilities, but the general attitude in the group was that this is a barrier that is possible to be dealt with. Another problem was to get into contact with members of the original Finnish population because of cultural differences showing e.g. in communication patterns that do not match or might even evoke misunderstanding. During the interview this topic caused a lot of cheerfulness, which is also an indicator for the fact, that these problems are of grave character.

In group 1 statements on social disadvantage were less but had a more severe character. School performance because of language problems was mentioned here as well by a first-generation immigrant, but the topic was not presented with lightness. It was obvious that he and at least one of the parents were worried about this. This might be due to the fact, that he is surrounded by peers, who do not have a similar problem, while group 2 shared this experience. The uniqueness of his case might lead to a sensation of isolation and being different to his peers. This is an early indicator or a risk factor of social exclusion and disadvantage as defined in see chapter 4.2., while in group 2 the collective and shared nature of the same issue mitigates this risk and allows for an experience of a participatory event.

Prior studies regarding the supportive effect of minority communities on their peers concerning school performance show similar results as presented in chapter 3.3 in the paragraph on the study by Coles et al. A surrounding support group in form of a wider community or a social peer group can have a positive influence on individual experience of participation, personal attitude and motivation and thus performance in school tasks.

Another remark on disadvantage concerned the situation of a parent who had been a physician in the country of origin and works as a cook in Finland. The statement had an undertone of disappointment, as the second profession is usually associated with a shorter education, lower social status and less salary. This is a typical example how disadvantage looks like in the situation of an adult arriving in a new country. Different standards in education or in some cases the absence of international agreements on recognition of professional qualification can result in immigrants working in a different field of profession than they used to do in the country of origin. This might result in limited access to social and monetary capital that would be of benefit to experience the full amount of participatory possibilities in the new society. The impact of this situation does



not apply to the parents alone, but to their families as well. If the situation results in poverty or too low income, again a risk factor of social exclusion is at hand as presented in chapter 4.2. As parents usually have an influence on their children with their attitudes and behavior (also if the child denies this influence), a feeling of disappointment can transfer to the child and have an impact on the sensation of fairness and possibilities of participation in the way that Nussbaum explains it (see chapter 4.1.).

## 7 Conclusion

The original motivation for this work was to find out about the influence of families and school professionals on decision making of boys with immigrant background regarding their educational future. The working life partner is Connex for Inclusion, an international running project aiming at exploring and developing ways and means to prevent boys and young men to fall under the categorization of NEET and drop out of education and training and thus, be unavailable for the job market. In the beginning phase of this study it turned out, that their own thoughts on experienced well-being and on the question how to improve support from school are of interest as well.

As the author of this thesis, I am responsible for its' findings and conclusions. They should not be understood as attitudes or opinions of the Connex for Inclusion project. However, Connex for Inclusion has the right to use these results in any way it is beneficial for their work.

Role models are mentioned to be helpful when constructing one's own future. Through them values and lifestyles are transmitted. In late teenage years there might be a tendency to find them outside of the family due to the notion of seeking independence and individuality from the family and its' set of values. Reaching out to the social entities where this takes place might have a longer lasting impact on positive development of boys and their educational and professional prospect.

I realized the importance of peer support during the analyzing process of this work. Challenges like learning the new language are easier to carry, if shared within a group where everyone is in the same situation. Including a first-generation immigrant boy into a class with mostly or only natives is a great way to support him in learning the language faster.

But he needs to be accompanied during this inclusion process regarding his psychosocial development. I started to wonder how this situation looks like in other Finnish regions with a lot less immigrant population compared to Helsinki.

It was important for the boys to have a separation between school and family life. But parents are taking motivational roles, thus regular communication like grading, certificates and other feedback on school performance are appreciated. The boys did not express a need to discuss further educational choices with teachers and parents together in one forum. If the offering of such a forum appears to be useful from teachers' or parents' point of view, this could be arranged in the frame of workshops, available as a low-threshold event.

The boys see their future in a good light and show a high level of experienced participation. It is clearly visible that they have many possibilities and are or have been pondering what is the right decision. Among the younger ones, who were also mostly second-generation immigrants, there was in some cases a sense of lightness in the air regarding professional choices. It seemed as if no choice was irreversible or had to be the last one. Some others, especially the older ones were much more determined in that concern. This can be a result of a set of values, existent in the family or an expression of youth culture and the developmental stage. As mentioned above in chapter 6.3. in the part on well-being a mid-twenties man has different aims in life compared to a teenager. No matter what the reasons for this kind of attitude, as a professional one should remember to respect different assortments of values and expressions of culture and sub-cultural tendencies.

Disadvantage is according to my findings easier to handle in the beginning of the immigration process, if challenges are few and of minor character. A feeling of disadvantage, that has been carried by a person for a long time can have impact on other arenas in life including family. Again, the importance of peer groups and supporting communities can be emphasized here as a mitigating factor. It is helpful to share thoughts with others, struggling with the same obstacles in life and share ideas how to overcome or deal with them.

## 7.1 Further Research

As the families in this work were not of similar background, it might be of interest to focus research on different communities, e.g. defined by origin (Russian, Somalian etc.) or religious background, to find out how communities support families in regard to their children's' education, how they can be opened up to larger communities and how families that do not have a similar network around them can be introduced to them and participate.

The participants in this study were all preparing to continue their education in high school, one of them kept for himself open the option to go to vocational school, but the tendency in these groups was clearly pointing at higher and longer education. Consequently, it can be interesting to see if similar results come up in a group that is aiming at further education at vocational school.

It might be of interest to find ways, that support the family being a more important and stability providing factor in the lives of boys in their teenage years. In the cases of the participants in this study, relationships with parents and family in general did not seem to be major problems. But if this relationship is damaged, it might lead to problems regarding education and professional career, maybe even to falling under the category of NEET, described in chapter 2.2.

Furthermore, it might be of interest to examine how this process of decision making is experienced by the parents and if they feel a need to be included more in it, e.g. in collaboration with the school. Again, this might look different in cases where boys prepare for vocational education.

It was mentioned in the interviews, that teachers could be more empathic and easier approachable. The occurrence of this notion is very low in total numbers and the scope of this work does not allow conclusions in this issue, thus it might be caused on singular characters and events, however, the role of teachers is crucial in students' development and qualities like approachability and empathy are of high value when it comes to educating on multiple scale, including teachers being role models themselves.

## 7.2 Recommendations for Connex for Inclusion

Resulting from the answers of the participants it became obvious, that family influence is losing importance with age. Consequently, it makes sense to look into peer groups and communities of the target group, e.g. sport clubs, youth clubs, music schools etc. It could be of longer lasting benefit to find possibilities to strengthen those as supporting factors. Especially in the twenties those entities will play a large role in the lives of young men.

The same applies to the family, as their support network has influence on school performance and education prospect (see chapter 3.3 and 6.3). Peer support for the family can show e.g. in communities that are defined by language of the origin country or religion. These communities could be actively included into the education process already at an earlier stage before the question of further education and professional career gains in importance in order to animate activities within the communities that aim at support of families with children at school. Possible activities can range from presenting the communities' members' professions in a way that is suitable for boys to making use of members' language knowledge to strengthen boys' skills in their own or parents' language of origin.

For boys and young men, who are in the process of learning Finnish language, thus being first-generation immigrants, it appears to be of benefit to have a network of people around them, who are in the same or similar situation. I.e. a boy, who recently moved to the country, does not speak the language and is embedded in a class with Finnish natives or students, who speak Finnish fluently, might need support to deal with the uniqueness of his situation. Afternoon clubs with other boys in the same age could be of help. These could be available city-wide for all students of different schools in Helsinki, who are in the same situation. Topical content of these clubs can vary according to the participants but should be defined clearly in order to make it possible for the participants to commit to the groups and meetings.

## 8 Discussion

### 8.1 limitations of the study

During the process of this thesis the following issues presented themselves: Among the participants was a preference of high school education and professions that demand longer education. One of them had thought about the option to go to vocational school, but this was not his first choice. As mentioned above in chapter 7.1., results could be different, if the target group included students preparing for vocational school.

The chosen method of doing the interviews in groups might have influenced the statements of the boys and young men insofar, as they might have felt the need to save face in front of the other participants and present their cases accordingly. In addition to that, the interview situation itself was most probably new to them and might have an effect on the way they responded. This effect is very well described by Lave and Kvale: "We distort people's lives in the way we go about studying them" (Lave & Kvale cited in Cohen et al, 2007, p. 144). This is not easy to estimate, as I was not familiar with any of the group members in beforehand.

### 8.2 Evaluation of the thesis

In qualitative research the quality of a study is evaluated with the criteria internal validity, external validity, dependability and confirmability (Simon, M. & Goes, J., n.d.).

When it comes to internal validity, this thesis can be classified being of high value, as the results derive from statements issued by the participants directly. Furthermore, the analysis included high levels of reflective thinking in order to treat the data respectfully and achieve results that are dependable and confirmable. On the other hand, one must bear in mind that the data consists of statements from 7 participants. Furthermore, the interview situation is not repeatable. This, and the fact, that all of the participants live in the Helsinki region makes it an exemplary examination on immigrant families, educational decision-making and school. In other cities and areas in the country this might look very different due to e.g. smaller communities and less immigrant backgrounded students in schools. But with the help of detailed description of the analysis process, including the way how I arrived at these results after coding the participants statements and analyzing them, I aimed at restoring external value and confirmability of my work.

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## Information letter for parents

Hei vanhemmat,

olen sosionomiopiskelija Metropoliaassa, 35-vuotias suomalais-saksalainen mies ja nimeni on Moritz Cartheuser. Kirjoitan opinnäytetyön ja tutkin siinä, miten perheet vaikuttavat maahanmuuttajataustaisten poikien ja nuorten miesten päätöksentekoon siirtymävaiheessa toisen asteen koulutukseen. Työni on osaa Metropolia Ammattikorkeakoulun projektia "Trust Game", jossa kehitetään keinoja ja työkaluja opettajille ja kaikille muille nuorten parissa työskenteleville tukemaan heitä paremmin päätöksenteon vaiheessa.

Lapsenne ilmoitti olevansa kiinnostunut osallistumaan haastatteluun, jossa kerään tietoa ja palautetta koululaisesta itse. Haastatteluun osallistuminen on täysin vapaaehtoisesta. Olen erittäin kiitollinen ja onnellinen hänen kiinnostuksestaan.

Lapsenne henkilöllisyys-, yksityiset ja muut tiedot, joilla olisi mahdollista tunnistaa hänet, eivät tule missään vaiheessa tutkimuksessa ja opinnäytetyössäni esiin. Kaikki vastaukset ja hänestä saaneet ajatukset esiintyvät kirjoituksessani anonyymina.

Lisätietoja saa sähköpostitse: [moritzc@metropolia.fi](mailto:moritzc@metropolia.fi)

Kiitos ja ystävällisin terveisin,

Moritz Cartheuser