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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF CHOICE AND OPPORTUNITIES IN FINNISH SCHOOLING: RELATING DISPOSITIONS TO THE SCHOOLING FIELD

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Bourdieu’s theory of relationalism moves beyond the objective and subjective, to analyze a field, or social space, and unearth the perspective of individuals within society. Individuals operate these settings with an ongoing tension, as they determine whether to struggle against or reproduce valued principles, objectives and dispositions. In this way, they negotiate sometimes obvious, sometimes unwritten, expectations. This theoretical framework offers a unique opportunity to examine inculcation during schooling, by considering relational aspects between education policies and students, their intended targets.

The main objective of this thesis is to investigate how Finnish education policies’ aims and principles for basic education relate to what students perceive is expected of them. This necessitates a reflexive examination of students’ perceived purpose of schooling itself. The investigation is thus conducted from two data sets: a field analysis of education policy documents, and then a congruent categorization of dispositions and perceptions that the students voiced in semi-structured interviews. The latter culminates in a habitus investigation, or consideration of their choices to struggle or reproduce societal characteristics.

The analysis extracts emergent themes along societal principles, characteristics and the purpose of schooling, and student dispositions from both data sets. Statements that relate to these subcategories are then discussed congruently, with consideration of similarities and differences within and among data sets. Overall, policies describe a school system that is flexibly designed, in order to maximize inclusiveness and individualization, and to promote agency and student self-knowledge. Students describe how they are personally unstressed by external pressures, and feel self-efficacious and able to determine their own paths based on personal motivation and effort. Schooling purposes range from the intrinsic to its role in formulating a knowledge economy.

While students’ roles and expectations are barely described in the examined education policy documents, the great amount of agency and self-responsibility prescribed to them is indirectly thematic in its statements. Many overlaps exist among what is intended by policy and what students perceive, but the differences inform the complex nature of influences on any sociological field. By considering the struggles and self-beliefs of students, policy makers may surface unanticipated barriers or obstacles, lessening the gap between the theoretical and practical design of policies. This lends itself to the inclusion of students’ voices, and particularly of qualitative semi-structured interviews, in education policy evaluation.

**Keywords** Bourdieu, relationalism, semi-structured interviews, education in Finland, students
1 INTRODUCTION

In 2012, I went to Finland to examine the elements of Finnish society that lead to student success in mathematics. I was interested in this because my career in education began as a public school mathematics teacher in Brooklyn, New York, and I had become increasingly aware of the obstacles my students had to overcome to succeed in our classrooms. Many of these obstacles, such as a social disconnect from school in general and mathematics in particular, a lack of self-confidence, nutrition, exercise, low levels of literacy, and a series of responsibilities outside of school set an inequitable stage for them to achieve upon. Next, I completed my training to teach foundational math concepts with the City University of New York’s CUNY Start college preparatory program. This program achieved about a 70% success rate at moving students beyond remediation, which is incredible considering all entrants had struggled with math their whole lives. It owes its success to a combination of a solid pedagogy, an excellent teacher-training model and the external supports for its students, including an advisory program and subsidized transportation.

This experience shed light on the possibilities of improving student performance by aligning policies beyond the classroom, but it was still difficult to evaluate public school policy in New York City from my perspective. Bourdieu explains “the ground most difficult to see is always the patch one is standing on” (Pollitt 2006, 63). I felt too close to a largely failing system to be able to identify, and advocate for, transformative changes. Thus, I was eager to learn more about how Finnish education policy and its institutional practices create an equitable platform for student achievement.

Many aspects of education policy are hard to picture individually; they create culture and a learning environment that exists in the context of all of the elements that are shaped within a society. Students’ perceptions, just like those of all members of a society are thus influenced and contribute to many aspects of society, through interactions with peers or adults to their schooling experiences and those in their greater communities. Therefore, I came to Finland to listen to the complex first-hand accounts by students about what they think the purpose of formal schooling is, how relevant and helpful they feel it is, and what they think others expect of them with respect to schooling and their futures. I am not
concerned with students’ awareness of specific Finnish policies, nor do I attempt to
directly tie them to student responses in a causal relationship, but rather to see if my
interviewees mirror any of the policies’ intended outcomes or guiding principles.

While teaching math to all ages of students, I spent a great deal of time undoing the negative
messages that students got from society in general, and from their schooling institutions in
particular. These messages told students what is expected of them, behaviorally and
academically. In PISA 2012 Results in Focus (2014), the fourth chapter on Mathematics
Self-Beliefs and Participation in Mathematics-Related Activities, explains:

> How students think and feel about themselves shapes their behavior, especially
when facing challenging circumstances (Bandura, 1977). Education systems are
successful when they equip students with the ability to influence their own lives (4).

About half of the students in Bushwick, Brooklyn, never graduate from high school, often
crumpling under setbacks, low expectations, which culminate in a complete disconnect
from schooling. According to the Official Statistics of Finland (OSF), about “70% of the
population aged 15 or over had completed a post-comprehensive level qualification” by the
end of 2014. That is a heavy contrast to the less than 30% of Bushwick residents that hold
credentials beyond high school. Finnish students are seemingly inspired by, or connected
to learning enough to stick with it, and have a great deal of support at all levels of the
institution for a wide range of interests. I want to examine if the students actually feel
largely supported, and connected to their educational pursuits.

The significance of this thesis is in its examination of a school system that does not work
to reinforce gross inequalities based on class, gender or race:

> Extant evidence and literature reveals how parental support and expectations,
school and peer group influences in aggregate all tend towards the reproduction of
classed inequalities. Furthermore, they intersect in ways that often reinforce
classed outcomes. (Winterton & Irwin 2012, 862).

Instead, the Finnish school system attempts to apply as few barriers as possible for most
students, which effectively does the least amount of filtering for students. This is essential
because filtering or streaming by second parties is largely inaccurate, causing many human
capital resources to be wasted. It is inaccurate because among classes, “the assumptions of
family, school and friends tend to complement one another, reinforcing expectations and
the likelihood of university amongst professional classes and reinforcing the rejection of
higher education amongst the least resourced” (Winterton & Irwin 2012, 862). The Finnish system does not allow economic resources to be a barrier for higher education, leaving success in the system to be more in the hands of the students themselves. This thesis examines the level of choice recognition among its students, and explores the emergent thematic schooling policies, principles, guideline and the expectations of students within it.

Thus, my research question is:

**How do Finnish educational policies’ stated schooling aims, principles and their expectations of students relate to the perceptions of secondary school students?**

These themes emerge by exploring the following sub-questions:

- What societal principles and behaviors do the education policies aim to cultivate in students, and by what mechanisms?
- How do these principles and behaviors compare to what students perceive is expected of them within the purpose and structure of schooling? How do students relate these perceptions to their arenas of choice, responsibility and dispositions?

Each section of this paper will interweave a methodological reflexivity within the two sources of evidence: individual student experiences and the institution of schooling as portrayed through the Ministry of Education’s political documents. Chapter two introduces a brief history of the concept of Bourdieu’s relationalism, which is the theoretical framework for this study. After defining habitus, capital and field (3.1) and other specifically Bourdieuan definitions, there is a discussion of the role of schooling as an intermediary for reproduction in section 3.2. Chapter three describes the interviewee selection as well as broad overview of the Finnish school system. This section gives the background information needed to approach the political documents, and what to flag as significant. Chapter four presents the methodological framework and the choice of combining semi-structured interviews with a content analysis for a greater Bourdieuan investigation. Section 4.1 orients these methods in the greater context of qualitative research, while section 4.2 ties this to Bourdieu’s prescribed epistemology and ontology.

Chapter five presents the analysis for the findings in both the political documents and the interviews, organizing them by themes. Section 5.1 introduces the design for a mixed methods outcome space, as well as the general structure for the interviews. Section 5.2
presents the analysis and results from the political documents, while section 5.3 presents those from the student interviews.

Chapter six provides an in-depth connection of these findings, in the context of the methodology and theoretical framework. This begins with an exploration of the perceived and purported aims of schooling (6.1) and how connected to schooling students feel. Then, there is a discussion of the cultivation of self-knowledge through student agency (6.2), followed by an exploration of how certain values aim to stimulate a knowledge economy (6.3). Chapter six concludes with a critical look ahead, focused on current practical shortcomings as identified by the Ministry of Education itself and PISA.

Chapter seven revisits reflexivity and additional considerations, considering the validity and reliability of the study (7.1), ethical considerations (7.2), final remarks (7.3) and the limitations of the study (7.4). The study concludes and summarizes answers to the research questions in chapter eight, with a bibliography in chapter nine.
2 RELATIONALISM AND CULTURAL REPRODUCTION: A BOURDIEUAN THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bourdieu's relationalism functions as the theoretical framework for this thesis in order to present the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees with respect to the political doctrines that attempt to inculcate them. Grenfell & James (1998) reiterate that “rather than start with methodologies, Bourdieu's point of departure is a theory of practice, which, he claims, if followed to its logical conclusion, avoids the multiple problems of technique” (171). Relationalism encompasses both the objective and subjective, and instead of becoming fixated on granularity, it is the researcher’s task to analyze a field and unearth the perspective of individuals within that society, using a variety of methods. In this case, it permits a discussion of the aims and objectives of key political doctrines to either uphold or contradict their intended targets.

This chapter begins with Bourdieu’s definitions of habitus, doxa, capital and field, along with a diagram to connect the terms to one another. It also discusses how Bourdieuan-specific relationalism guides the language for all relationships, but it more importantly points to research analysis of the particular struggle that interviewees express, as they either accept (reproduce) or challenge (are in crisis with) societal norms and expectations. Section 2.2 ties these negotiations to the venue of formal schooling, connecting all of its relevant components to Bourdieuan definitions.

2.1 Definitions, History and Expansion

Bourdieu's relationalism methods are varied for the sake of practical application to the complex inputs and evidence in the social sciences. His theory coexists closely with structuralism, but with one crucial distinction: Bourdieu’s theoretical framework allows for meaning production by its participants, surpassing a mere reproduction or use of system structures. Participants’ sense-making, or their practice of making sense of the structures they function in, is a necessary element in the cycle of structural evolution. Relationalism allows the appearance of other influencers, such as family, media, friends and society as they are sited as relevant by the interviewees. However, source identification is not as important as understanding the bigger socio-political framework that function for cultural reproduction.
Bourdieu’s theoretical framework is most comprehensively visible in his analysis of France’s higher education system in (1964 and 1970) and of the Algerian kinship system (1960). In both bodies of work, Bourdieu locates social structures using statistics and empirical research, but focuses on the narratives from interviews. In addition, Bourdieu makes references to meaning transmitted through less traditional sources, such as through the media or popular culture. All observations, however, are always validated as a backdrop to the experiences of individuals within the structures. Thus, Bourdieu’s theoretical concern is always with the ongoing tension that exists between structures and subjects, centering on his concepts of habitus and field, both of which are involved with the transmission and sense-making of culture and capital. These terms are organized in Figure 1 below, which illustrates how Bourdieu’s theory of relationalism is understood in this research. It primarily situates the individual, or agent, within society, a space, and then a subspace or field.

Figure 1. Bourdieu’s Theory of Relationalism for This Research
In the Theory of Practice, Bourdieu (1977) defines habitus as an understanding of symbols, or “the strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations”, even though this may be conducted without an awareness to its source or existence (72). Habitus guides individual decisions about what and how much they want to invest in “appropriate types and amounts of capitals on a social field” but, as a framework, is not deterministic (Bourdieu 1977, 13). In The Logic of Practice, Bourdieu (1990) more simply defines the concept of habitus as that of ‘dispositions’, ‘perceptions’ and ‘expectations’, which is how habitus will be interchangeably referred to in this thesis (52).

In Figure 1, the habitus is connected to the individual and to capital distribution, in order to demonstrate that it functions as the negotiator between individuals and capital within any field. Since individuals are also constantly resolving functions with meanings, Bourdieu examines society’s concepts of capital, which may be social, cultural or economic; ‘cultural’ consisting of the embodiment of “both the consciously acquired and the passively ‘inherited’ features that characterize ways of being and feeling” (Saraceno 2014, 4). All three forms of capital transform into symbolic capital, which is a sort of shared, agreed upon value that weighs the capital in a societally negotiated way.

From his examination of the French educational system, Bourdieu defines culture itself as “that which has the highest legitimate aesthetic and social value”, which is now a more widely accepted definition of cultural capital (Sulkunen 1982, 13). Bourdieu’s further distinction of institutionalized cultural capital (largely through schooling), is seen to link “the conversion of cultural capital to economic capital by serving as an experience-based model that sellers can use to describe their capital and buyers can use to describe their needs” (Saraceno 2014, 4). In this case, the institution of schooling is the stage upon which cultural capital differentiates among its possessors, or students, who learn to reproduce these signalers of value and continue to operate in their own economic circles.

Lastly, agents make sense of their lives, exercising habitus on field or subspace, also pictured in Figure 1 above. Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) define ‘field’ as:

*A network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation... in the*
structure of their distribution of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions. (97)

These fields have doxa, or a set of rules or beliefs around what simply exists and how agents must relate. These doxa are more solid than the perceptions that have been filtered through an agent’s habitus: they make up the possibilities within a structure that appears unchanging. However, doxa is pictured within the habitus circle in Figure 1 to demonstrate that it only appears unchanging, as individuals relate to a field: it is not characteristic of the structure itself, but of their relations to it and one another.

As discussed in by Grenfell & James (1998), the interaction between habitus and field as they occur daily in the lives of agents is both the ontology and epistemology:

It is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of immanent necessity of a field (or of a hierarchically intersecting sets of fields). On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and with value, in which it is worth investing one’s practice. (Bourdieu 1989, 44)

Habitus is often described as a struggle or crisis, since agents are constantly resolving to either reproduce or to change beliefs. Throughout this struggle, habitus “transcends determinism and freedom, conditioning and creativity, consciousness and the unconscious, or the individual and society” (Mills & Gale 2010, 16). It is thus Bourdieu’s belief that a researcher’s task is to define the field that subjects exist in, and most importantly, to identify the particular crises of the habitus within its fields. In an interview with Wacquant, Bourdieu explains that his “task involved not simply telling the truth of this world… but also showing that this world is the site of an ongoing struggle to tell the truth of his world” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 35). His theory of cultural capital and cultural reproduction typically tracks the continual passage of capital to those who already have it, through structures that are designed to maintain the status quo. While the scope of this research does not examine specific instances of capital distribution, it will present the general distribution of economic capital as part of the field distribution.

An examination of capital distribution and major inequities is not appropriate for this study because of the findings in Figure 2 below. This is known as the Great Gatsby curve, which
compares income inequality (Gini coefficient) in a country with the ability of its citizens to move from the economic class they were born into.

Figure 2. The Great Gatsby Curve, Corak (2011)

The closer you are to 0 on both of these axes in this figure, the more evenly income is distributed among your country’s population, and the better your chances of getting out of any poverty cycle your parents were in. In other words, what your parents make, in a country at 0, will not predict in any way what you will make: people from all economic classes have the same shot at shaping their financial fates. There is a positive correlation between how equally income is distributed and your ability to shape your own economic fate.

As Figure 2 demonstrates above, economic distribution in Finland is relatively equal. My interest, then, is with what happens when you take the same theoretical framework to a country in which the Gini coefficient, and thus parentage does not determine the success of the next generation. PISA 2012 Results in Focus (2014) further demonstrates “some high-performing countries in PISA 2012, like Estonia and Finland, also show small variations in student scores, proving that high performance is possible for all students” (9). Thus, I am interested in figuring out how Finnish education policies aim to maintain a different kind of status quo – one that seems to uphold equity and self-reliance. While this forces an
examination back on the institution of schooling and the succinct compilation of policies that reflect its societal beliefs, it will do so by checking to see if the intended messages are received, albeit internally, by its students.

The main criticisms for Bourdieu’s theoretical framework are largely around its obscurity, and for lacking a ‘clear’ qualitative method. Admittedly, Bourdieu’s aforementioned research on schooling in France and the Algerian kinship system are a hodgepodge of methods that even he sites as complex. Furthermore, Bourdieu often states what his framework is not, as he explains in Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977). However, he is also quick to admit that the solution is simple: the complexity of society and the difficulty of the task of observing a level of determinism, require a research approach that critically incorporates many methods and considerations with a critical strengthening through the researcher’s reflexivity.

There are, however, proponents to his theoretical framework, who argue that its lack of routine and thus flexibility are more honest because “it is doubtful whether the appearance of methodological rigor is ever anything more than just appearance” (Sulkunen 1982, 110). Perhaps the nature of sociology as a “creative science” is responsible for Bourdieu’s insistence on using a variety of methods with a researcher’s reflexivity and knowledge of what it is not (Sulkunen 1982, 110).

2.2 Schooling: The Field for Reproduction

According to Bourdieu, schooling is an efficient venue, or field for socializing members, and for signaling their worth to others. Figure 3 below revisits the previous diagram of Bourdieu’s theory of relationalism to organize the field of schooling within this theory.
As an institution in a capitalist state, schooling demonstrates social division because the state is “first and foremost the ‘central bank of symbolic credit’” (Wacquant 1992, 162). Its operational characteristics or practices are devised through policies, which affect everyone and are “not only ‘out there,’ in the form of bureaucracies, authorities and ceremonies. It is also ‘in here,’ ineffaceably engraved within us” (Wacquant 1992, 162). These power relations are transformed into symbolic capital, as individual students negotiate the field.

Students firstly learn their socialization at home, and then secondly at school and in other life experiences (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011). As a signaler, “school means something to people, and defines the meaning of their actions for others” (Sulkunen 1982, 105). Students come to school with the social and economic capital that they possess from their families, and actively participate within this field as agents. Among other motivating factors, individual students internalize what is expected of them, and maybe be either driving or defeating in their performance. As they internalize the messages they receive, they filter the amount of influence these have because “children work within, towards and
as restructurers of, their own social identity” (Mason & Fattore 2005, 86). Their relations thus transmit these expectations through other societal participants, including peers, school workers, policies and family. Mason & Fattore (2005) refer to this as a honing of their self-beliefs, which can be either transformative and empowering or limiting and symbolically violent (86).

As a sorter, Bourdieu (1998) explains how schooling continues to distribute social capital in a way that maintains the status quo of a capitalistic system:

> Maxwell imaged a demon who divides all the particles that he comes across into those that are hotter and cooler, those that are faster and slower, and sends the fastest to one recipient, whose temperature rises, and the slowest to another, whose temperature drops. In so doing the demon maintains difference, in other words order, which otherwise has a tendency to disappear. The school system works like Maxwell’s demon. It maintains, at the cost of the energy, which goes into the sorting process, the existing order of things, in other words distance in regards to cultural capital between unequal students. (20)

Bourdieu’s focus on education has been useful for uncovering social inequalities, because even though they purport to sort by aptitude, for the most part, students end up being sorted by whatever capital they inherit (Bourdieu 1998, 20). Furthermore, as students conform to its structure, which is often universally accepted as the modus operandi, that schooling structure is thus reproduced (Bourdieu 1998, 14). Bourdieu often wants analyses of schools to go beyond their “ideologies of equal opportunity and meritocracy”, and examine the experiences of students to see if it is transformative for all (Mills & Gale 2010, 14).

At its worst, schools may be a vehicle for symbolic violence. This violence is the mechanism that keeps all members in accordance with it, even when they are disenfranchised by it. The field of schooling accomplishes this by individualizing “merits for success and the blame for failure, while, furthermore, it produces an aura of legitimacy to the values, tastes and life-style of the dominant classes” (Sulkunen 1982, 105). What is violent about this is the natural order that is accepted by all members of society, and the self-acceptance of blame for failing to break out of an economic cycle (Sullivan 2002, 145). Nash (1990) explains that schooling may function as exclusionary for “working-class and cultural minority children” in ways that are hard to recognize: through neglect, or
through missing portions of political doctrines (440). For example, there may be a lack of welfare for students, or expectations that would be impossible to comply with, without resources or knowledge of unwritten rules. In this way, students may drop out of the institution’s reach, leaving choices and opportunities for those already in possession of both. Given the high levels of school completion in Finland, its wealth distribution and the intergenerational elasticity, my interest is in unearthing the themes, ideals, and aims in its political documents as they relate to experiences of individual students in Oulu-based schools.
3 GENERAL BACKGROUND OF FINNISH SCHOOLING

While chapter five analyzes Finnish education policies that are created by the Finnish Ministry of Education, this chapter offers a close look at the general background of Finnish education and its ideologies through other scholars, such as Pasi Sahlberg, Marja Heimonen and Hannu Simola. Their works are selected because they are similarly concerned with the overlaps among politics, sociology and education and their focus on thematic elements, such as system flexibility, agency, equality and self-reliance. Pasi Sahlberg in particular is mentioned throughout this thesis for many reasons: for his background in mathematics education, for his role as a Finnish policy advisor, and for his comparative education experience. His academic and journalistic publications are sited often, as well as his most recent book, Finnish Lessons 2.0: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland (2015). I also had the unique opportunity to question Pasi Sahlberg in person in 2015, the content of which will be discussed in chapter six. This chapter begins with a description of the Finnish school system’s current structures, why they are significant to this research, and presents key historical developments and players that produced this structure.

In New York, I researched and taught middle school mathematics in a tracked system, in which public school students are streamed and separated by ability starting in the third grade, when they are between eight and nine years old. They are tracked according to their performance on the annual English and mathematics standardized state test exam scores, which may also determine students’ grouping, middle and high school selection, elective courses, level of difficulty in courses (gifted or remedial), or flags them to receive individualized support. The idea is to group students of similar ability levels in order to ease differentiated instruction, and to accelerate learning for those that demonstrate mastery. However, as all but non-gifted students struggle with the knowledge of lowered expectations, this leads to a glass-ceiling effect, impacting their self-confidence to achieve beyond what is expected of them.

From this perspective, the Finnish public school system allows for a great range of choice granted to students themselves, who are only advised by others about which track they should choose. This freedom of choice is essential in allowing students to pursue their self-
made goals. Sahlberg (2015) discusses the 1960’s emergence of *peruskoulu*, or ‘basic’ compulsory public schools:

_Such social pressure introduced a new theme in the education policy debate: the individual’s potential for growth. Researchers then argued that an individual’s abilities and intelligence always rose to the level required by society, and that education systems merely reflected these limits or needs._ (26)

Now, Finnish students are not subject to standardized tests until their national matriculation examination from _lukio_, or upper secondary school, which follows on from completion of nine years of _peruskoulu_. Performance on these exams is one of the criteria for entry into one of fourteen Finnish universities.

In order to self-pace and pursue one’s own academic or vocational interests, upon completion of _peruskoulu_, students may choose to improve their grades by attending an additional tenth grade year, (_kymppiluokka_). Alternately, students may also choose to attend _ammattikoulu_, or vocational school in preparation for polytechnic/applied sciences schools (_ammattikorkeakoulu_), of which there are 24 operated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Students may elect to change streams, attend _lukio_ or _ammattikoulu_, and sit for the national matriculation exam for entry into university, or continue to a polytechnic. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2015), “after basic education, 95.5% of school-leavers continue in additional voluntary basic education (2.5%), in upper secondary schools (54.5%) or in initial vocational education and training (38.5%).”

The flowchart in Figure 4 from the Ministry of Education and Culture website depicts the stages of Finnish schooling that is described above. It also contains a comprehensive indication of the various pathways available to students, of which there are many.
Figure 4. Education System in Finland (Ministry of Education and Culture)

In addition to system flexibility, no standardized testing in peruskoulu, and student choice among streams, Sahlberg, Simola and Heimonen identify many pervasive system characteristics that are based on societal principles. For example, in response to the most recent observed slip in 2012 PISA results, Pasi Sahlberg encouraged the continued emphasis on the joy of learning all subjects, not just the tested ones. Sahlberg (2013) explains in his blog, “this balance between academic and non-academic learning is critical to children’s well-being and happiness in school. PISA tells only a little about these important aspects of school education”. Though the scope of this paper does not include a focus on curricula or pedagogy, a direct thematic link can be observed in the Ministry of Education and Culture’s (2015) revised core curriculum, which states that:

*It is based on the learning conception that positive emotional experiences, collaborative working and interaction as well as creative activity enhance learning. The subject proportions have been renewed. Firstly, the content of each subject has been reduced. Secondly, the aims also emphasize the importance of learning environments and methods, guidance and individualization as well as assessment*
as a means to support learning... Collaborative classroom practices, where pupils may work with several teachers simultaneously during periods of phenomenon-based project studies are emphasized.

Simola (1998) dubs reforms like this a “‘school-free pedagogy’... answering the question of how the teacher should teach and how the pupil should learn in school as if it were not school” (339). Over the last fifty years, “four essential changes in the way of using language about teaching, learning and schooling have been identified. These are characterized as individualization, ‘disciplinization’, goal-rationalization, and decontextualization” (Simola 1998, 339).

These changes are incorporated into Finnish politics both as a governing principle and as an aim to produce “independently-acting human beings” (Heimonen 2014, 199). Heimonen (2014) explains that this translates to inclusion of a right to study many subjects, for example, in the Basic Education Act:

Finland gained independence late—only in 1917; national identity was strengthened via music and other arts in order to gain, first, an autonomous status under the rule of Russia, and later, independence as a sovereign state. In the historical time of oppression, the symbolic meaning of music was connected to the tradition that Finnish people knew music and poetry. (192)

Consistency in adherence to this value has resulted in a largely deregulated, decentralized, policy-free system with public access to basic schools of no significant difference to one another and no ranking lists of schools. This leaves a largely autonomous role for teachers and schools, who are regarded as professional experts. Sahlberg (2015) coins this as the Fourth Way to education reform, which “is about shared ownership and development of a community’s own compelling purposes.” (xvi).
4 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK – HABITUS AND FIELD ANALYSIS

Within the theoretical framework of Bourdieu’s relationalism, this research approaches the question: **How do Finnish educational policies’ stated schooling aims, principles and their expectations of students relate to the perceptions of Oulu-based secondary school students?** It does so by exploring a habitus analysis through series of semi-structured interviews, while doing a congruent field analysis of policy documents. These sources are examined to tell a story about how students feel their choices and opportunities are changing as a result of their schooling experience. Within the theory of relationalism, Speller (2011) reminds us:

*Bourdieu insists that the relation between these two structures is neither direct nor mechanical. Otherwise, we can see that his theory of ‘homology’ would quickly collapse into tautology, of the sort ‘the author did this because of that, and that because of this’. In between, so to speak, is the ‘space of possibilities’ (espace des possibles), which we can think of as including potential courses of action and works which were never in fact realized.* (65)

Section 4.1 describes the characteristics and interplay of these two sources, and the ‘space of possibilities; they create to first answer: **What societal principles and behaviors do the education policies aim to cultivate in students, and by what mechanisms?** And then, **How do these compare to what students perceive is expected of them within the purpose and structure of schooling? How do students relate these perceptions to their arenas of choice, responsibility and dispositions?** Section 4.2 describes of the epistemology and ontology that tie these two sources together, followed by a presentation of the objectives, mechanics and expectations of the key political documents.

4.1 Relationalism, Field and Habitus Analysis

In The Science of Qualitative Research, Packer (2011) explains that Bourdieu wants research to be: “composed of two “minutes”. The first is a stage in which one looks at the relations that define the structures of the social field. The second is an analysis of social agents’ dispositions to act and the categories of perception and understanding that result from their inhabiting the field” (321). In this case, the social field is schooling on the system-wide level, and the social agents are Oulu-based students. Thus, this thesis takes
student interviews as the narrative of their experiences, and considers their accounts of “perception, judgment and action” in the context of the field, as intended by education policy documents (Schäfer 2015, 3).

In order to establish a congruent analysis between these two ‘minutes’ and avoid a “rigid adherence to this or that one method of data collection”, this is done so by melding together a field and habitus analysis by completing the following three levels of analysis: (Bourdieu 1992, 226):

1. Analyse the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power;
2. Map out the objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by agents who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority of which the field is the site; and
3. Analyse the habitus of agents; the systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalising a determinate type of social and economic condition.” (Mills & Gale 2010, 22)

Figure 5 below demonstrates an adaptation of these three stages for this research, based on Bourdieu’s relational analysis. This diagram is designed after Fries’ (2009) research plan.

![Figure 5: Relationalism within a field and habitus analysis](image)

Fries (2009) similarly interpreted these three stages into a mixed methods research design for analyzing positions on alternative medicine. In his diagram, Fries (2009) mapped a sequence of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to arrive at a reflexive
methodology (339). In Figure 5 above, the ‘field investigation’ of this thesis locates Finnish schooling within society, which provides a backdrop for a field analysis in chapter five. This analysis concentrates on how political documents situate students, or its agents, within it and society. Though it is not discussed in these terms in any other section of this thesis, a field investigation is essentially a calibration of the beliefs and behaviors that should possess symbolic capital, or weight, as it descends from a combination social and cultural capital.

Chapter five also begins the ‘habitus investigation’, as referred to in Figure 5, with a congruent categorization of dispositions and perceptions that the students voiced in semi-structured interviews. According to Speller (2011), the three stages “should not be thought of as discrete stages, or a rigid program. Each level of analysis needs to take in the information provided by the others, so that the analysis may start at any point along the cycle” (46). The results of the habitus and field analysis are thus jointly discussed to describe ‘the space of possibilities’ throughout this thesis.

A congruent categorization of responses from the interviews and political documents can be thought of as the relational space between habitus and field analysis, in Figure 5 above. As Mohr (2013) explains, “institutions, according to Bourdieu, can be (and indeed, must be) read like a language (and vice-versa)” (4). In Mohr’s (2013) Bourdieuan relational design, he coded responses using content analysis to examine cultural similarities within organizations, by making a computer program seek word combinations to surface relevant statements. Section 5.1 of this thesis similarly presents a content analysis design for surfacing the research subtopics: principles, aims, schooling (field) characteristics and guidelines, and student dispositions. These are then labeled and categorized for emergent themes. Fries (2009) speaks to the importance of understanding the power of labels, and this warrants a reflexivity about the categories themselves. Chapter five further addresses how categorizations are labeled, as well as how items are flagged as significant to this research.

It should be reiterated, though, that the habitus itself is the resolution of struggles between structure and agent, and individual and society. In Speller’s (2011) consideration of Bourdieu’s methodology for examining literature, he describes the significance of the habitus as where “Bourdieu meets up with traditional biography, with the difference that
we should no longer simply be looking at an individual life or career, but also at the system of positions and relations between positions in which the events in an agent’s life take place” (59) Therefore, a great deal of weight is given to the interview responses for forming a full picture of all its relations and interpretations.

When the student interviews were conducted, there was a great deal of quantitative data on Finnish student performance, teacher interviews, demographics, and policy descriptions that have been widely published and analyzed. Semi-structured interviews, particularly those of students themselves, however, were more rare. However, in 2014, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture released a status report of the Youth Guarantee, an initiative for transitioning students from school to the workplace. This report incorporated a survey of 6,300 youth, asking students perceptions of their futures. By focusing on qualitative data particularly from student interviews in chapters 5 and 6, I rely on the strength of its specificity, which are the very limitations that its critics point at. This research does not point to implications of breadth and range of experiences, but it does capture what individual students want to voice about their own perceptions. How they reason, or make sense of the institution of schooling, its characteristics and its role in their own lives is thus the focus of this research.

Semi-structured interviews in particular require a depth of knowledge, the establishment of trust between the researcher and the interviewees, and then a personal surrender of ownership over the results. The ‘work’ of background research needs to be done up front by the researcher, so that she is prepared to completely leave the planned lines of questioning in constant response to the subject. This knowledge allows the researcher to ask richer follow-up questions, but more importantly, it allows student perceptions to emerge without requiring them to speak beyond their personal experiences or awareness.

In summary, this thesis presents and categorizes statements from major policy doctrines in Finnish schooling, followed by a similar categorization of students’ responses from semi-structured interviews, and then discusses both in a consideration of their principles, aims, dispositions and expectations. While these create a methodological reflexivity to strengthen or weaken, Bourdieu reminds us to be reflexive, as research is at its best when it is recognized as “a discourse in which you expose yourself, you take risks” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 219).
4.2 Epistemology and Ontology

Bourdieu positions himself in sociology along a series of tensions that almost leave behind structuralism, and completely circumvent consideration of the subject and object. Wacquant (1992) explains that these ontological assumptions are guided by what is doxically engrained, as discussed in chapter two:

For Bourdieu, men and women make their own history but they do not make it through categories of their own choosing. And we may also say without succumbing to idealism that social order is, at bottom, a gnoseological order, provided that we concurrently recognize that the cognitive schemata through which we know, interpret, and actively assemble our world are themselves social constructs that transcribe within individual bodies the constraints and facilitations of originative milieu. (161)

The power of individual agents is transformative when they choose to struggle and change the structures that already exist, that others create, and are thus not set in stone. This is especially true of students, as they navigate through schooling. Agency is knowingly made by individuals, as a “result of a coming together of the habitus and the specific cultural fields and contexts in which agents ‘find themselves’, in both senses of the expression (Schirato & Webb, 2003, p. 541)” (Mills & Gale 2010, 17). While there is a homologous, or shared structure and similar doxa among agents, the real Bourdieuan consideration is what is knowingly rejected or what is patterned, and even reproduced by agents without any awareness of the practice’s existence in the first place. This is explored in a congruent outcome space of the political document statements and the student responses about schooling principles, aims, guidelines and expectations.

In the forward for one of Bourdieu’s books, Wacquant (1996) explains that researchers must examine how the agent constructs “the social world through principles of vision that, having emerged from that world, are patterned after its objective divisions” (xvii). These divisions are why the ways of knowing are complex, because while structures may attempt to inculcate, and in general are successful, there is still the “post-structuralist understanding that all groups have a right to speak for themselves, in their own voice, and have that voice accepted as authentic and legitimate (Harvey, 1989, 48)” (Mills & Gale 2009, 21). So, researchers will always need to rely on a consideration of their own position
and bias to build out the parts that agents may not be aware of, which will be summarized in chapter seven of this thesis.

Understandably, Bourdieu thoroughly rejects positivism for limiting the researcher’s perspective, and thus contribution. Positivism only works “to disparage and reduce the creations and innovations of the scientific imagination (Bourdieu, 1990, 40)” (Sullivan 2002, 153). The study of sociology, being entirely ‘soft’ and non-substantialist, should instead be thought of in terms of relations. Consideration of the field itself is where “the relations of force that obtain between the social positions which guarantee their occupants a quantum of social force, or of capital” (Bourdieu 1992, 229). Thinking relationally, however, requires the context that a backdrop of statistics may provide.

Epistemological and ontological assumptions may be extended to the field of schooling as the ultimate transmission of societal values and capital outside of family units. It acts as the venue for possibility to improve or expand on students’ options, and thus may be examined for the degree to which students have been impacted by its structural mechanisms for distribution of capital. School experiences may influence student beliefs with respect to their futures, such as whether they intend to continue or complete certain levels of their studies.
5 EMPIRICAL DATA

This chapter presents the design and analysis of both the student interviews and political education documents. This design focuses on reproduced themes that emerge among descriptions of societal principles, the purpose of schooling, characteristics of the schooling field and of the dispositions of individuals operating within it. Section 5.1 presents the design for a congruent analysis of Finnish education policy documents and the semi-structured interviews along research subtopics. It also presents the interviewee design for interview questions along the same research subtopics, organized into segments. Section 5.2 presents the selection criteria for the list of Finnish political documents that are included in this research. It also organizes the results of analysis with a categorization of political aims and objective mechanisms along themes that emerged. From the language in policy documents, these themes appear not only as ideologies, but also by the political mechanisms that are designed to help reproduce these ideologies, or stated objectives. Section 5.3 explains who was interviewed and how they were selected. Section 5.4 provides a congruent analysis of the student interviews by presenting a shortened sample categorization of responses, for further analysis in chapter 6. From the students’ perspectives, these themes emerge in descriptions of perceptions, beliefs, goals and aims.

5.1 Design for a Congruent Outcome Space

In this chapter, the student interviews and Finnish education policy documents are filtered along subtopics by focusing on key words, statements and descriptions of how schooling and students should, and is perceived to, operate. The major Finnish education policy documents that are examined include, but are not limited to: The Basic Education Act of 1998, The Basic Education Decree of 1998, The Youth Guarantee in Finland (2013) and Education and Research 2011-2016: A Development Plan (2012). These sources, along with the interviews, discuss societal principles, the purpose and characteristics of school in general, and of the expectations of students within it. These statements objectively range from pertaining to individual students to all of Finland.

Table 1 below displays how this research is designed to organize various schooling field characteristics, such as the principles that it is founded on, its purpose and objectives, and the general guidelines that should apply to students. Whenever these surface in political
documents, these are considered ideologies and expectations, while student interviews along the same topics demonstrate the students’ interpretations and perceptions of these expectations.

**Table 1. Design for Content Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Subtopics</th>
<th>Field Investigation (I)</th>
<th>Habitus Investigation (II)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Societal principles for schooling</td>
<td>Statements of “value” and “principle” Statements of principled outcomes, to “promote”, “prevent” or “improve”</td>
<td>Attributions of values and principles to society or Finland in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling purpose</td>
<td>Stated “aim”, “objective”, “purpose” or “goal” Statements of societal or individual outcomes, “for...” or “to ensure”</td>
<td>Statements of expected outcomes Stated “purpose”, “hope”, or “aim”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling field guidelines/ characteristics</td>
<td>Descriptions of how schooling or should be run What schools should “offer”, “encourage”, “provide” or “allow”</td>
<td>Descriptions of choices, responsibilities, limitations, challenges or “decisions” that are given by the school system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student dispositions</td>
<td>Descriptions of how students should conduct themselves Prescribed student choices and responsibilities</td>
<td>Descriptions of attempts, failures, successes or “tries” Statements of perceived behavioral expectations Descriptions of student preferences, in terms of they “want”, “like”, “believe” or “think”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, distinction among the research subtopics above should be thought of as a helpful guide for lateral comparison from the field to the habitus, but rigidity among these is out of the scope of this project as it would be the parsing of language that Bourdieu warns against. For example, there were many statements in political documents that contained principles, goals and descriptions of what schooling should be like, all at once. The categorization of such statements is secondary to considering how they thematically relate to those in other documents, and to the content of the student interviews.

Also, the table above shows that the political documents and the semi-structured interviews are analyzed for their orientation of the individual within the field, or ‘student dispositions’, though only statements sourced from the interviews qualify as a description of habitus, or how students position themselves. The interviewees similarly lend perspective to the dispositions or principles that they struggle with, even when they perceive them as prevalent in society. They voice these in the form of personal opinions, limitations, setbacks or challenges within school experiences.
In order to broach research subtopics during the interviews, they needed to be organized into topical segments that fit with the flow of the conversation. These segments were designed to surface all forms of dispositions, such as opinions, experiences and beliefs about characteristics of the schooling field. Each segment contained about 7-10 sub-questions, including potential follow-up questions. These are summarized in Table 2 below, in the column titled ‘segment description’. For example, the first row in Table 2 describes a segment in which students were asked the following questions about their current school selection and their satisfaction with that decision:

- What did you have to do to get into your current school? Who made this decision?
- Does your school stand out in some way, compared to other schools in this community?
- Why did you want to go?
- When you made this decision, what did you expect to get out of it?
- Do you talk to any adults at school on a regular basis? Any that you go to for guidance?
- How satisfied are you with your school, as far as expectations from when you started there?

These questions potentially could have allowed the interviewee to discuss any of the research subtopics. While their responses are complex, most of them describe their opinion of the school, or ‘student dispositions’, their role in the decision-making process, and the ‘field guidelines and characteristics’ that allowed them to make that decision.

**Table 2. Interview Segments and Topic Descriptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Segment</th>
<th>Segment Description</th>
<th>Research Subtopic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Current School selection, satisfaction and connectivity</strong></td>
<td>How and why they attend current school, and who made that decision</td>
<td>Schooling guidelines/ characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptions of others’ opinions of school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amount of satisfaction with decision</td>
<td>Student dispositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Finnish school systems’ streams and barriers</strong></td>
<td>Description of schooling streams and barriers in general</td>
<td>Schooling guidelines/ characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Their current and desired future stream</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opinions of accessibility and desirability of various streams</td>
<td>Student dispositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Educational Goals, motivation and alignment</strong></td>
<td>Course selection</td>
<td>Schooling guidelines/ characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance and achievement motivators</td>
<td>Societal principles, schooling purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short and long term goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School alignment with personal goals</td>
<td>Societal principles, student dispositions, schooling purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the table above shows, many of the interview segments surfaced an overlap between the subtopics that relate to principles and the purpose of schooling. This distinction, however, is only important as long as it is helpful at relating the political documents to the interviews. Section 3 of this chapter provides more specific examples of how student responses are categorized whenever possible, but more importantly, allows them their complexity and instead focuses on the themes that are variously congruent with those in the political documents.

5.2 Field Analysis of Finnish Education Policies

In order to investigate the field of schooling as a backdrop for the dispositions of individual student interviewees, I first examined political education documents that broadly frame principles, roles, responsibilities and interactions. As introduced in chapter 2 of this paper, the policy-free nature of Finnish education lends itself to the production of fewer political documents. However, there are some core documents that are widely cross-referenced and relied on, throughout the theoretical and practical spheres of education. Though education policies are by no means an exhaustive representation of the field, let alone the society, they are a part of the field and thus a microcosm of what is valued enough to attempt reproduction in its targets, or students.

According to the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture website, The Basic Education Act of 1998, The Basic Education Decree of 1998, and related constitutional decisions, are the major guiding documents for national policies on basic education. Policies relating to curriculum and pedagogy, however, are based on the Board of Education’s Finnish National Core Curriculum.

The Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education and its subordinate the Finnish National Board of Education also more recently released: The Youth Guarantee in Finland (2013)
Education and Research 2011-2016: A Development Plan (2012). These two documents provide the most current language of principles, aims and expectations that are largely consistent throughout all other political documents. Education and Research (2012) is based on higher education Decree on the Development Plan for Education and University Research of 1998. This is summarized in the ministry’s publication, Finnish Education in a Nutshell: Education in Finland (2012). The following Ministry of Education publications are also analyzed in this section:

- Preparatory Instruction and Guidance (2011)
- Youth Guarantee Gender and Education (2009)
- Amendments and Additions to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2011)

These reports, legislative acts and decrees, lay the groundwork for mechanisms that characterize the objectives that Finnish education policy documents hope to achieve.

Analysis of these documents begins with a focus on key principles, as described in the Finnish Constitution and related acts and decrees. Firstly, free education including post-compulsory schooling, is listed as a basic right in the Finnish Constitution:

> Everyone has the right to basic education free of charge. Provisions on the duty to receive education are laid down by an Act. The public authorities shall, as provided in more detail by an Act, guarantee for everyone equal opportunity to receive other educational services in accordance with their ability and special needs, as well as the opportunity to develop themselves without being prevented by economic hardship. The freedom of science, the arts and higher education is guaranteed. (Suomen perustuslaki, 2 luku, 16 §)

Note that no distinction is made between societal and personal ‘economic hardship’, which potentially frees the institution of education from being dependent on the economic welfare of Finland in general and the internal economic distribution of wealth. Thus, this supplies the first emergent theme of free education, coupled with student welfare. Finland has, however, plans to charge higher education fees, to students that are applying from outside the European Union. According to the Ministry of Education (2015) website, these fees apply to only non-Finnish language degree programs.
All of the tables in this section present results of similar content analyses in a shortened manner, citing first the source for each selected statement, a summary of what the statement promotes or demotes, and the mechanisms by which they hope to achieve it. The first row in Table 3 below, for example, is extracted from The Basic Education Act of 1998. This selection states:

*A pupil shall be entitled to free pupil welfare necessary for participation in education. Pupil welfare means action promoting and maintaining good learning, good mental and physical health and social well-being, and conditions conducive to these.* (Chapter 7, Section 31a.1)

It is categorized in Table 3 for promoting ‘good learning, good mental and physical health, social well-being’, and for relying on, for example, ‘student health care, transportation, counseling, and school meal plans’ as the ‘objective mechanisms’ to reach this goal. It is thus thematic with the principle of ‘free education and student welfare’, just as the excerpt from the Finnish Constitution was, above.

Table 3 contains other statements that are summarized and categorized for relating to ‘equity and inclusion’, or ‘school completion’ and the principle of ‘lifelong learning’. The statements are selected for containment of words such as “value” and “principle”, or for their description of principled aims: to “promote”, “prevent” or “improve” on some societal value or concern.

### Table 3. Societal Principles for Schooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Promote</th>
<th>Demote</th>
<th>Objective Mechanism</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Education Act (Chapter 7, Section 31a.1)</td>
<td>Good learning, good mental and physical health, social well-being</td>
<td>Student health care, transportation, counseling, and school meal plans</td>
<td>Free education and student welfare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amendments to Core Curriculum for Basic Education (3)</td>
<td>Interaction, cooperation, joint responsibility, involvement</td>
<td>Parental involvement, guidance, special, intensified support as needed</td>
<td>Equity and inclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Education Act (Chapter 8 a Section 48a.1)</td>
<td>Emotional life and ethical growth, welfare and equality, inclusion</td>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>Before and after school activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion of these principles are interwoven throughout chapter 6, but section 6.1 especially addresses the principle of equity in education access, as it relates to inclusion and necessitates valuing, and mechanizing, individualism.

Next, the same political documents are examined for statements about the purpose of schooling, including actual “aims”, “objectives”, “purposes” or “goals”. Distinction between ‘principle’ and ‘purpose’ statements is narrow, but the latter focuses on actual societal or individual outcomes (“for”, “to ensure”), while the former focuses only on ideal outcomes. For example, the first row of the table below is from Education and Research 2011-2016: A Development Plan (2012), which states:

*A primary aim for the Government is to enhance the competitiveness of Finnish knowledge and competence. As the working-age population keeps decreasing and the young age groups getting smaller, the challenge is to ensure a high level of competence and sufficient workforce by fields and regions. (7)*
Summarily, this statement’s objective is for competitiveness, competence and a sufficient workforce, centering on its official ‘Lifelong Learning Policy’, as described earlier in this plan. Many of the ‘purpose’ statements in the political documents tend to follow the mechanisms by which they hope to achieve them. In lieu of concerns over the decreasing size of the workforce, this statement is categorized along its goal in ‘ensuring a democratic, egalitarian, competitive, society with sustainable development’. It should be noted that this emergent theme is named for various other references to the type of society that the political documents aim to produce. The next statement in the table, for example, refers to this statement from Education and Research 2011-2016: A Development Plan (2012):

*Children’s and young people’s inclusion and influence in matters concerning them promotes growth into active citizens by developing knowledge and skills for operating in a democratic, egalitarian society working on the principle of sustainable development.* (18)

Language around societal aims is thus combined from both statements to form the theme. The two other themes listed in Table 4 are similarly formed from composites of descriptions of societal or individual outcomes, such as the types of members of society that they aim to produce.

**Table 4. Purpose of Schooling Statements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Promote</th>
<th>Objective Mechanism</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and Research 2011-2016: A Development Plan (7)</td>
<td>Competitiveness, competence, sufficient workforce</td>
<td>Lifelong learning policy</td>
<td>Ensure the future of a democratic, egalitarian, competitive, society with sustainable development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Research 2011-2016: A Development Plan (18)</td>
<td>Active citizens, sustainable development</td>
<td>No ranking lists, teacher self-evaluation, teacher autonomy, decentralized governance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Guarantee: Final Report 2013 (54)</td>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
<td>Electronic application system, support center, lifelong guidance</td>
<td>Help identify and pursue a job/career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Education Act (Chapter 1, Section 2.1)</td>
<td>Humanity, ethically responsible membership of society, life knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Ethics education, problem solving and project emphasis</td>
<td>Produce healthy, ethically responsible members of society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Education Act (Chapter 8, Section 47a.1)</td>
<td>Joint action, influence and participation</td>
<td>Student association, non profit organizational involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Though less frequent in the ‘policy-free’ decentralized design of the Finnish education governance, there was some discussion of what schools should allow and how they should conduct themselves. These are presented in Table 5 below, centering on themes of individualization and promoting agency through responsibility. For example, Amendments to Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2011) states:

Every pupil must be given an opportunity to succeed in learning, develop as a learner and grow and refine him- or herself as a person on his or her own terms. Diverse learners, different learning styles and starting points for learning as well as pupils’ cultural backgrounds must be taken into account in schoolwork. Pupils should be encouraged to take initiative and responsibility; they should be offered challenges for development and also provided with guidance and support to promote success (7).

This could be tied to the Basic Education Act of 1998’s protection of students’ free time in ensuring a cap on school work, as well as its emphasis on developing students’ ability to self-assess. In a way, all of the field guidelines (individualization, agency, responsibility and system flexibility) attempt to decentralize schooling even further, extending a philosophy of self-management beyond the local school level, all the way down to individual students. These practices thus aim to promote self-knowledge for the benefit of identifying and pursuing one’s own interests or paths, so that students are allowed to make choices and orient themselves as much as possible within schooling. Of course, students’ choices are still complexly guided, informed by, and tied to sources from all levels of society, but these documents seem to encourage schools to leave them some space and tools to create their own ‘space of possibilities’.

Table 5. Schooling Field Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Promote</th>
<th>Objective Mechanism</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Education Act (Chapter 6, Section 24.1)</td>
<td>Rest, recreation and hobbies</td>
<td>Cap on school work</td>
<td>Individualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amendments to Core Curriculum for Basic Education (7)</td>
<td>Opportunity, diverse learners, initiative, responsibility, development, success</td>
<td>Curriculum differentiation, individual study plans, counseling</td>
<td>Agency through responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Education Act (Chapter 5, Section 22.1)</td>
<td>Pupil self-assessment</td>
<td>Learning, work and behavioral assessment, Pupil self-assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lastly, phrases that describe the current expectations of students, as opposed to the ones describing what they hope to eventually form, are extracted along themes of self-reliance and participation. Statements of student expectations were rare in the political documents, perhaps because students are not their intended audience. However, the two excerpts found in Table 6 below thematically follow a belief of inclusiveness and self-responsibility. The Basic Education Act of 1998, for example, succinctly states, “the pupil shall complete his or her assignments diligently and behave correctly” (Chapter 7, Section 35.2). This expectation of self-reliance is bundled with some others that are perceived by the students in section 5.3, and discussed further in section 6.1.

Table 6. Student Dispositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Promote</th>
<th>Objective Mechanism</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Education Act (Chapter 7, Section 35.2)</td>
<td>Diligent work and correct behavior</td>
<td>Pupil responsibility</td>
<td>Self-reliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amendments to Core Curriculum for Basic Education (3)</td>
<td>Responsible human beings, members of society</td>
<td>Ethics education, problem solving and project-emphasis</td>
<td>Participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, the first research sub-question is: **What societal principles and behaviors do the education policies aim to cultivate in students, and by what mechanisms?** To synthesize the findings in this section and begin to answer it, emergent themes from the political documents are summarized in Table 7 below. They are categorized as they relate to the phrasing that delineates them across the research subtopics. The first two research subtopics: ‘principles’ and ‘purpose’, largely orient the field of schooling itself within society, focusing it on the production of a viable and educated workforce in an inclusive society that seems to be a good fit for everyone, regardless of their pursuits. The last two subtopic categories: ‘guidelines’ and ‘students’ dispositions’, connect closely with one another, aiming to free up students to identify their own pursuits while learning how to participate with others.

Table 7. Summary of Field Investigation Content Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Investigation (I)</th>
<th>Political Documents Phrasing</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In summary, these documents describe principles of equity in access and opportunity by means of student welfare, flexible study tracks and student self-evaluation. Reay (2012) explains that the Finnish system is characterized as one “in which virtually all children enroll in identical comprehensive schools regardless of their class background or personal abilities and characteristics has resulted in schools and classrooms that are heterogeneous in terms of pupil differences and diverse in terms of educational needs and expectations (Valljarvi 2003)” (596). They attempt to achieve this with as little external filtering and sorting of students as possible.

As the policies and the distribution of economic capital in Finland demonstrate, there is an overarching aim to maintain the status quo, as Bourdieu would normally fear. However, with an exceptionally equitable intergenerational elasticity and the relatively equal distribution of wealth, this status quo sounds like the maintenance of a system that seems to be working for all members of Finnish society. After familiarizing myself with the field of schooling in Finland, interview participants necessitate an even greater desire to unearth inequities or identify disparities between intent and outcomes. In particular, in consideration of the second research sub-question: How do these [policy statements] compare to what students perceive is expected of them within the purpose and structure of schooling? How do students relate these perceptions to their arenas of choice, responsibility and dispositions? In other words, if schooling is the prime mechanism for maintaining a status quo of fairly equalized distribution of economic wealth, what would students perceive is expected of them? What forms of social and cultural capital would they value: would they echo the same institutionalized valued forms, or would they voice barriers, divisions and a hierarchy? Next, I will describe the
interviewee selection, and then analyze these themes through the interview data.

5.3 Interviewee Participant Selection

The inclusion of candidates from various backgrounds is a Bourdieuan attempt to unearth inequities, since he “is suspicious of the language which is used, and again, draws attention to the inequalities of class, status, gender, race and age which are expressed in it” (Grenfell & James 1998, 180). Next, I will analyze Four sixteen and seventeen-year-old participants were interviewed in order to capture the opinions of students that are preparing to move into, or out of, trade or upper secondary schools because they have a fresh but holistic view of their experiences in basic school. Students at this age are also uniquely thinking about what they want to do next, while considering their academic strengths, weaknesses and interests, since the reality of choosing their future path draws near. They are tying up their institutional requirements, finishing projects or portfolios, and deciding whether they will course-correct in their limited remaining compulsory education, or move forward with what they have accomplished. The decision to focus on Oulu-based students in particular was one of practicality: as a full-time student at the University of Oulu, I was able to meet and talk to students during school visits, as well as network with upper-classmen for more potential interviewees.

Each of the four students was unknown to me directly, however, and was recommended by their classmates or teachers that I was in contact with. All four interviewees had a wide range of comfort with the English language, but all were recommended for their comfort with being interviewed, as perceived by our mutual contacts. However, interviewees were not selected for their ability to speak for everyone: they are only demonstrative of their own personal perceptions, preserving the singularity (thought not the uniqueness) of their experiences. Similarly, school-based experiences in Oulu are not meant to represent all of those in Finland, nor does it stand out as a unique example: the city is a part of Finland, and thus a valid focus, as it is encapsulated in its structure.

The participants are assigned fictitious names to respect their anonymity: Iida, Juulia, Eero and David. Iida was attending the IB school in Oulun Lyseon Lukio, or upper secondary school. Juulia was finishing her final year of peruskoulu, or basic school. Eero was attending lukio, or upper secondary school, and David was attending upper secondary
school at Svenska Privatskolan, a free Swedish private school. While not one of these students was currently attending a vocational school, omission of a vocational school student was not by conscious choice. Each interviewee was selected one at a time, and not because of the school they currently attended, but because they attended a different school from the previous interviewees. The participants are a deliberate mixture of genders, migration status and have various mother tongues. Criteria for selection secondarily emerged out of the research’s focus and the practicality, willingness and availability of the participants. Following this selection criterion, a fifth interviewee that was completing a work-study through her vocational school would have been the next addition, if the interview period could have been extended.

5.4 Analysis in a Habitus Investigation of Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews were conducted in person between May 18, 2013 and July 11, 2013. Each of the four participants was interviewed two times each, with each interview sessions lasting one and a half hours. The interviewees were initially approached by our mutual contact and were asked if they were willing to participate to help me with my university research project. All four consented to participation, and then I contacted them with a description of the time commitment. They were also told that this interview was designed to ask students their age “about expectations: what you think people expect of you, as it relates to your education”. They also choose where and when we met, and that their responses would remain anonymous.

Interview questions were pre-written and organized by topic, and topics were intended to be exhausted with follow-up questions before moving onto the next topic. However, to keep the structure of the interview loose and less formal, each interview allowed for questions to be revisited, skipped and/or expanded on, whenever appropriate. Most pervasive in our interview process were the unscripted follow-up questions to ask students how they made sense of what they asserted. This was taken from Bourdieu’s method for unearthing French Culture in La Distinction, in which he “makes its structure visible in the variety of cultural forms in which people express their aspirations, definitions of the world, common experiences and common meanings. This could not be done without the emphasis of meaning” (Sulkunen 1982, 113-114).
We covered roughly half of the interview segments in each session. The interviews were audio-recorded using Audacity (Version 2.0.3) and then transcribed. After the conclusion of each interview, I recorded my impressions of the interview itself, noting such topics as the appropriateness of pacing and relevance of questions. Interview questions were most heavily revised after the first interview. These changes are noted in the following topic descriptions.

As presented in Table 8 below, interviews were subdivided into segments. First, participants were asked for background and demographical information to get a sense of their schooling history, what their living situations are, and which adults they come in regular contact with. This helped to contextualize their current schooling situation and all of the people that they rely on, to help them make decisions. Bourdieu delineates these influences as being key in the primary (family, home) versus secondary (school, peers) habitus formation. Wacquant (2013) explains:

*The primary habitus is the set of dispositions one acquires in early childhood, slowly and imperceptibly, through familial osmosis and familiar immersion; it is fashioned by tacit and diffuse ‘pedagogical labor with no precedent’; it constitutes our baseline social personality as well as ‘the basis for the ulterior constitution of any other habitus’* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 [1970]: 42–6). *The secondary habitus is any system of transposable schemata that becomes grafted subsequently, through specialized pedagogical labor that is typically shortened in duration, accelerated in pace, and explicit in organization.* (3)

Though the purpose is not to try to source dispositions that interviewees describe, it was helpful to identify the major participants in the students’ lives, to ease clarification for the remainder of the interview. Thus, clarification of roles that friends and family play in the interviewees’ lives is interspersed with their responses, whenever they are mentioned.

In order to demonstrate the analysis of the remainder of the interview responses, a selection appears in the seven tables below. The responses are first sorted by interview segment (lettered A through G), and then categorized by emergent themes and research subtopics, just as the political document statements were in section 5.2. Interviewee responses are selected to appear in these tables for their relevance to this research, and for their typicality of the other interviewees’ responses. Thus, not all interviewees are represented in every segment, nor are their full responses presented unless necessary.
After explaining their demographical information, students were then asked about their current school selection process, how satisfied they are with that decision, and their connectivity to the school. A sample of their responses is included in Table 8.

Table 8. Interview Segment A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Segment</th>
<th>Sample Responses</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Research Subtopic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. School selection, satisfaction and connectivity</td>
<td>My stepfather just told me that, this day, you’re going to that school. He arranged the whole thing... he thought I would learn Finnish faster, and have more contact with Finnish people. (Juulia)</td>
<td>Knowledge acquisition</td>
<td>Schooling purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It was my decision. No, not my parents. Just mine. I knew I’m going there. From when I was really young. (Eero)</td>
<td>Agency and responsibility</td>
<td>Schooling field characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So this is an easy decision for me. I talked to my parents and grandparents about this decision, but it was up to me. I wanted to find a good job. I don’t really know what I want to be in the future, but I hope this will help me find something... I really enjoyed the last year. I guess I grew up. I changed who I was within the school. (David)</td>
<td>Self-knowledge and self reliance</td>
<td>Student dispositions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three sample responses are categorized differently, however, because Eero’s response only discusses his role in this decision, whereas David adds explains how this decision is strategic and a good fit for him. Juulia’s response was most difficult to categorize because it lightly touches on what she talks in detail about later: how language acquisition is a substantial but achievable barrier to her access to education. According to Education and Research: A Development Plan (2012), “fewer young immigrants go on to study in the upper secondary school than the mainstream population and therefore they are also underrepresented in higher education” (15). This will be discussed at greater length in section 6.4, but for now, her response is categorized for school’s perceived role in acquiring necessary knowledge. Iida’s response was similar to David’s, because she chose to go to her school, but to help her have an internationally valuable credential.

Interview Segment B asks students about the streams that are available to all Finnish students, and which streams they think others perceive as the least and most successful. This segment was added after Iida’s interviews had been held, in order to get a better sense of the type and size of barriers that students identify, their plans for overcoming them, and the amount of self-efficacy they express. Translated words were also provided at the

Table 9. Interview Segment B Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Segment</th>
<th>Sample Responses</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Research Subtopic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Finnish school systems’ streams and barriers</td>
<td>They have all kinds of entry requirements. But some people try for like 10 years to go to the school. You can only try once a year. It’s really tough. I guess I just have to work hard... After lukio, if I don’t get in, I could take a year and go to the army. And try again. (Eero)</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The options for school are this lukio, or vocational school. I have a third option. It is called kymppiluokka; it is like 10th grade. My teacher said, ‘it is better if you don’t try to go there [lukio], study more for this year, and then try...remember that it is your choice.’ I’ll take it next year, in one year. I’m going to study more the Finnish language, and study the subjects that I need in kymppiluokka...There are no more barriers, once I improve language; I will be able to achieve. (Juulia)</td>
<td>Agency and responsibility</td>
<td>Schooling field characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is a fourth choice, but I don’t know if they do it often here because they like to study. It is very important for them. (Juulia)</td>
<td>Lifelong learning/school completion</td>
<td>Societal principles for schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you don’t want to go in high school, you can go to ammattikoulu. If you want to be a chef, you can start studying there, for example. If you know what you want to be, like if you want to be a chef, or a mechanic, you can go there. If you don’t know what you want to be, you go to high school, which sets you up for university. I really don’t know other options. Get a job or something. I really don’t know. (David)</td>
<td>System flexibility</td>
<td>Schooling field characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absolutely the university is the most successful. I will pursue this path, because I have been raised that way. (David)</td>
<td>Rigorous academic path</td>
<td>Student dispositions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eero’s response was his description of entry requirements to the theater school he wants to attend next, in southern Finland. His response is typical of the others, in their descriptions of challenging entry requirements and yet a resolve to continue trying. The interviewees also voice a great amount of knowledge of what they need to do to achieve entry. Eero’s acceptance of the hard work he will need to do is similar to David’s choice of phrasing, in which he says, “I will pursue this path.”. David is confident in his decision to try to go to university, which signals a good understanding of it being an effortful pursuit.

The responses from Juulia and David were selected above because they demonstrate how the four interviewees similarly describe which streams are available to people:

- A 10th grade year if they need more time to improve their grades,
- Vocational school if they already know what they want to learn,
- Upper secondary school (the most desired path) if they are ready to study hard for the matriculation exams for university, but
- The fourth option, which would be stopping school altogether is unclear or not a real choice.

These choices are discussed at greater length in section 6.2. Students were then asked more directly about their short and long-term goals, if their current schooling aligns with those goals, and how they classify the value that they place on their current courses.

As Table 10 shows, interviewees were asked if they selected each course they are currently enrolled in, why it was selected, what they hope to accomplish with school and in life, and if school seems to be aligned well with these goals. Students are thus given an avenue to express what they feel is the purpose of schooling.

Table 10. Interview Segment C Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Segment</th>
<th>Sample Responses</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Research Subtopic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C. Educational Goals, motivation and alignment</td>
<td>I want to find something I want to do. I have ambition, but I want to do too many things at once...I want to try to narrow it down. (Iida)</td>
<td>Self-knowledge and self reliance</td>
<td>Student dispositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think it has aligned like, with language. I need Finnish, to live here. And also, when I have English lessons to get better at the languages. (Juulia)</td>
<td>Knowledge acquisition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A lot of this school does align with my goals. I really hope it will help my chances to go to theater school. In life, I want to become an actor, then a famous actor, and to do all kinds of cool stuff. Do as much of everything as I can. Like skydiving, surfing, diving, traveling around. I want to see everything. The problem is, I don’t have money. But if I just work to get money, I don’t have time. Maybe working as a famous actor will help with that problem. (Eero)</td>
<td>Help identify and pursue a job/ career</td>
<td>Schooling purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think in our school, we usually work as a team, if you’re going to have a presentation or something...I think the social environment is really supportive. You learn how to interact with people, and learn to communicate with people, even if you don’t like them so much, you still have to work. I think other schools emphasize this too. I think school is helping, educating me in life, in general. (David)</td>
<td>Collaboration and cooperation</td>
<td>Societal principles for schooling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Iida’s response is typical of the others’ acknowledgements that they need more time to figure out what they want to do in the long run. The other three selections all were in response to the question about if school is helping or hurting them, in pursuit of their ambitions. They all affirmed for different reasons: Juulia again mentions its role in helping
her with language acquisition, Eero with its appropriateness for pursuing an acting career, and David for its emphasis on working productively with others.

Next, students were asked who, if anyone, they share their successes or failures with, as well as what their perceptions are of people that stand out, and what sort of pressures they feel, in terms of performance or achievement.

**Table 11. Interview Segment D Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Segment</th>
<th>Sample Responses</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Research Subtopic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. Social pressures</td>
<td>I share successes with my friends, if the subject comes up, but I don’t want to share my successes much, because I don’t want to feel like bragging. My mom said to hide your emotions. I won’t, unless you ask about it, necessarily. And failures? I don’t share these either. I don’t like when they’re pity-ful. I don’t want their pity. (Iida)</td>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>Student dispositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t see that anyone is thought to be better or worse here at academics. In Brazil, school is very different. Here, whatever you do could be very normal or really weird, but everyone thinks it’s just normal, and that anyone can do anything... I think it is culture, they are more relaxed here, it’s okay.... Here, if you are learning, it is the most important thing. (Juulia)</td>
<td>Knowledge acquisition</td>
<td>Schooling purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think teachers support both competition and working together a bit. It works to balance these two, so it won’t get stressful, and it can help us accomplish better things, without getting too serious. (David)</td>
<td>Competitiveness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yeah, because we maybe really don’t like to talk about this, and keep them inside. I think here in Finland that is the case. Men don’t really like to talk about their failures and stuff. I try to maintain strong all the time. I think this is true everywhere in the world. Probably because they are not comfortable with themselves. If I got a really good grade on math or something, the guys would be joking around, and tease me, and be quite jealous. So sometimes it is quite good to not say anything. It is a Finnish thing. (David)</td>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>Student dispositions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Juulia’s response, listed above, speaks of acceptance compared to her experience in Brazil, the other three students described the same type of student that stands out in a bad way:

*They scoff a lot at the person who sits in front of the room. I don’t, I don’t care... he is nice; sometimes...there’s the eye-roll when he raises his hand.* (Iida)
There are some people who are like, on our student government. They are doing all stuff for students, and speak to teachers. There’s one guy who stands out in not a good way. He’s kind of like full of himself. (Eero)

There are super students, doing everything they can. They stand out, both in a good way or a bad way. I think this depends on the other students’ perspective or personality. I think jealousy factors into it. And it is a good or bad thing, depending on how the other student is about it. (David)

This line of responses are similar to the excerpts selected from Iida and David above, in which Iida describes her antipathy to bragging about her successes, and David describes his hesitation to display his failures. Eero also agrees that he keeps failures from his friends, but for a different reason:

I might hide failures because I want them to believe I’m super. There is this dramatic thing that if I do really well in, I’m going to put it on Facebook, and everyone will know. I would hope that they would congratulate me! But my friends would say, ‘don’t brag about it’. (Eero)

Their perceptions of a disposition toward modesty are discussed more in section 6.3, in which the characteristics of the Finnish knowledge economy are considered.

Their perceptions of how they are supposed to treat successes and failures made a natural segue into discussing what they think others expect of them, with respect to how they should behave and perform in school and beyond. For example, participants were asked if they get the message that they should compete with one another, or if they are encouraged to rely on one another.

Students are also more directly asked what they think others want them to get out of their school experience, as it relates to their futures i.e. what they have been told is the purpose of school:

Table 12. Interview Segment E Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Segment</th>
<th>Sample Responses</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Research Subtopic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E. Perceptions of Expectations</td>
<td>They give us extra support and resources to study. In my mind, it is a way of them showing me they want me to succeed. Maybe yes. Like they hope that I go to high school, and then to university, and get a good life, and get a good job. We talk a lot about it. My first teacher always talks to me about life, and school. (Juulia)</td>
<td>Live and pursue the good life</td>
<td>Schooling purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In lukio, teachers expect you to take more responsibility. Tests are more demanding, but teachers are not. Now in lukio, it is optional. ‘You are here because you want it. We are not going to watch your back all the time, and tell you to do your own work. If you aren’t going to do your work, it is your own fault.’ (Eero)

I think my parents demand that I get a job, have a family, it's like basic stuff. They don’t talk about it so much, but I have an idea. They expect me to have a normal, good life. At least for my mom, it is having your whole family healthy, and having a stable job. (Eero)

When you go to school, you don’t do it for your mom or anybody else. You do it for you. So you get educated and move along with your life. Actually our school says it: ‘School is for life, it is only for you’... My parents agree with that motto. I think it is a Finnish thing. (David)

The interviewee’s responses typically connect their perceptions of others’ expectations with some kind of proof, such as Juulia’s discussions with her teacher continually discussing life with her, or Eero’s experience with increased responsibilities. Additionally, Juulia and Eero both mention their pursuit of the ‘good life’, which is discussed in section 6.1, because all four respondents mention and explain this concept during different parts of the interview. David adds that you go to school for yourself, and that this is “a Finnish thing” (David).

Next, Table 13 shows what the interviewees perceive friends, family, teachers, school, and Finland in general would say is the purpose of schooling. Though this had been touched on in other parts of the interview, we returned to the subject to see what they wanted to reiterate, add, and in some cases, revise.

**Table 13. Interview Segment F Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Segment</th>
<th>Sample Responses</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Research Subtopic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F. Perceptions of Schooling Purpose</td>
<td>I don’t know, because in general, if you don’t go to high school, it is frowned on. You basically have no future. So everyone does it. And then of course you go to university. And get a job. I think things have changed now, but at least with adults, you needed an education to do...now, there are more options I guess. Now I’m thinking vocational school. But here they don’t really think of it as proper school. (Iida)</td>
<td>Help identify and pursue a job/career</td>
<td>Schooling purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think generally, business wise, they’re innovative, because such a small country made a big phone company... but then my friends have these ‘MacGyver’ moments, like fixing my bike for me. (Iida)</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Student dispositions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here, no. You can relax. It’s free. The government is going to give you some money. Everything is easier in Finland. It’s easier for you to study, and go to school. I know people who study their whole life here. (Juulia)

In here, they don’t see only that I would get a good life. They like studying here. They are smart, intelligent, and they like to get information all the time. For example, I see the difference, like in my country, if you are a cook, they look at you like, ‘poor guy’. But here, they respect you, because you study for it. You study for a long time before you become a cook here. In here, they respect it. It is so different. In Brazil, I can’t do that because it is a poor profession. But here they just don’t care. Everything is the same they study because they like to study. If they want to be a teacher, if they want to be a president, it doesn’t matter, there is no difference. The purpose is to learn something you want to learn. (Juulia)

The purpose is to help you get a job so you will pay taxes, so Finland gets money. We have this class about society, and ethics stuff. We study these things, like why people should work. (Eero)

Most of my friends would agree that we are all aiming at having a good education. Some have higher standards to become a doctor or something. I think they want to get where you enjoy yourself. I have no idea what I am going to become. Some people want to be a dentist or doctor. I really don’t know what I want to be. I think school is to help you try to figure it out. (David)

For Iida, this surfaced a division between what she perceives is the purpose of school, as she is considering forgoing university for vocational school. She is concerned that it does not meet the prescribed course of things for Finland. Juulia compares the pressure she felt in Brazil to compete in schooling with the different sort of focus in Finland, where “the purpose is to learn something you want to learn”. Both Eero and David echo Iida’s sentiment at first: that school gears you up for identifying and pursuing a job.

The final interview segment, presented in Table 14, directly asks students what they’re good at, how they know they’re good at it, and if and how they ever challenge themselves. Sulkunen (1982) explains that Bourdieu’s “analysis of the cultural system of society it is not only a structure of given meanings, it is also a field of action” (106). One question, for example, considers the specific actions and experiences that have arisen for students, and asks them how they navigated those experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Segment</th>
<th>Sample Responses</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Research Subtopic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
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</table>

**Table 14. Interview Segment G Responses**
In response, the students described their general work habits, such as with Iida’s and Juulia’s excerpts above. While these responses were initially categorized for their expression of self-reliance and self-efficacy, this category is later grouped and renamed (along with stress-management and self-knowledge) under the Finnish word, *sisu*. Bandura (1977) explains that the concept of self-efficacy alone, or the “students’ belief that, through their actions, they can produce desired effects, which, in turn, is a powerful incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties” (“PISA 2012 results” 2014, 4). However, this fits with the other terms under Sahlberg’s (2011) description of *sisu* as “a cultural trademark that refers to strength of will, determination, and purposeful action in the face of adversity, coexists with calmness and tenderness (Lewis, 2005; Steinbock, 2010)” (61).

Emergent themes surrounding societal principles, the purpose and characteristics of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G. Self Confidence</th>
<th>I know I could be doing much better, so fingers crossed for next year. I just know that I could be doing something that I’m not doing. I know my own potential. (Iida)</th>
<th>Self-knowledge and self-reliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In psychology, I know the stuff. I remember it. I’m interested in it, and so I know I am good at it. I know this myself. (Eero)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am limitless with music. With academics, no. I might have a limit as to how much I’m going to do, or put into something, but that’s just if I get tired. I am either all in or all out. I won’t stop halfway. I have never been much of a settler. So I want to go to the extreme. Not the extreme, but cross to the other side, and see what it’s like. I have no idea where that comes from. (Iida)</td>
<td>Sisu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before I would study too much, and remember how I would forget. Now, I read once, I read twice, and think, ok let’s do it. I believe in myself. I believe I can do it. And I don’t worry. Maybe this belief comes from knowing yourself. I know I am able to do good stuff. And I believe it. I am a very positive person. Maybe it is in my personality. Maybe also positive experiences. If I do something once, and it goes right, then I can remember that, and think I can do it again. (Juulia)</td>
<td>Student dispositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s good because, I am always challenging myself with something. I always believe that it doesn’t matter what it is, I can get it. (Juulia)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, with my friend, we practiced things from the first. My friend didn’t fail before, he’s really good at math. He was helping me. And after school and on breaks, he helped me. So then I passed it. I didn’t get help from anyone else. I mostly just practiced with my friend. (Eero)</td>
<td>Collaboration and cooperation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|...|...|...|

[Table continued...]

|...|...|...|

[Table continued...]
schooling and the dispositions of student interviewees are summarized in Table 15. They appear alongside the key words and types of phrases that are sought for this analysis.

**Table 15. Summary of Habitus Investigation Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Habitus Investigation (II)</th>
<th>Semi-Structured interviews</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Societal principles for schooling</strong></td>
<td>Attributions of values and principles to society or Finland in general</td>
<td>Free education and student welfare, lifelong learning/ school completion, inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schooling purpose</strong></td>
<td>Statements of expected outcomes Stated “purpose”, “hope”, or “aim”</td>
<td>Intrinsic, knowledge acquisition, live and pursue ‘the good life’, job/career identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Field characteristics</strong></td>
<td>Descriptions of choices, responsibilities, limitations, challenges or “decisions” that are given by the school system</td>
<td>Agency and responsibility, challenging, system flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual dispositions</strong></td>
<td>Descriptions of attempts, failures, successes or “tries” Statements of perceived behavioral expectations Descriptions of student preferences, in terms of they “want”, “like”, “believe” or “think”</td>
<td>Agency, <em>sisu</em>, modesty, self-knowledge and self-reliance, competitiveness, collaboration, innovate, rigorous academic path</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The emergent themes listed above occur with a great deal of overlap among the research subtopics. However, they are categorized as such for the centrality of the role they play in their paired subtopic. For example, ‘system flexibility’ is characteristic for its role in the cultivation of a knowledge economy and inclusion as well, but the students more commonly discuss it as a description of schools’ characteristics or guidelines, and thus influences the amount of individualization students experienced. Subcategories are also not to be underestimated as less thematic or overarching; however, they are organized as such for characterizing even larger themes. It should also be noted that many of the responses, however, are complex and equally address all four of the research subtopics.

Table 16 below summarily presents the results from both the field investigation in section 5.2 and this section’s habitus investigation.

**Table 16. Summary of Field and Habitus Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Investigation</th>
<th>Habitus Investigation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Documents</strong></td>
<td>Semi-Structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Societal principles for schooling</strong></td>
<td>Equity and inclusion, lifelong learning/ school completion, free education and student welfare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Schooling purpose
- Help students pursue a good life, produce healthy, ethically responsible members of society, ensure the future of a democratic, egalitarian, competitive, society with sustainable development
- Intrinsic, knowledge acquisition, live and pursue the good life, help identify a job/career

### Field characteristics
- Agency and responsibility, individualization, system flexibility
- Agency and responsibility, challenging, system flexibility

### Student dispositions
- Communication, participation, self-knowledge and self-reliance
- Agency, sisu, modesty, self-knowledge and self-reliance, competitiveness, collaboration, innovate, rigorous academic path

In general, Finnish education political documents admittedly identify stagnation in growth and innovation, lack of student motivation and the remaining inequities in education access as the barriers that prevent an improved ‘realistic utopia’. Students share concerns over self-motivation and language barriers, and are aware of pressure to not ‘stand out’, and to choose the right path for themselves. Overall, though, students feel personally unstressed by external pressures and completely self-efficacious and able to change their motivation and effort, and thus achievement merely by studying and practicing. There is no class distinction due to academic excellence because students feel that all things are possible, based on effort, and they in fact are. What follows, then, is a discussion of the interaction between students as agents, and the schooling field, in what is reproduced or accepted, or challenged.
6 DISCUSSION AND CONNECTIONS AMONG EMERGENT THEMES

While the previous chapter presents the analysis for answering the research question: **How do Finnish educational policies’ stated schooling aims, principles and their expectations of students relate to the perceptions of Oulu-based secondary school students**, this chapter provides an even deeper exploration of the findings. Based on the themes that emerged in chapter 5, this chapter continues discussion by drawing connections between both sources, and considers additional data to reference theme’s relations. Following the framework of relationalism, this “approach makes constant connections between individual subjectivities and the generating principles acting on them in the fields through which they pass in their life trajectories” (Grenfell & James 1998, 180). Thus, this chapter considers individuals’ negotiation of the field of schooling, including perceptions of all those who add value to it, and their interpretation of Finnish society in general.

Each section discusses the emerging themes outlined in Table 16 above, elaborating on the purpose of schooling in section 6.1, the role of *sisu* in the cultivation self-knowledge in section 6.2, and then, how emergent themes interplay to produce a knowledge economy in section 6.3. More specifically, section 6.2 introduces a discussion with Pasi Sahlberg during a question/answer session, as he refers to values that are intentionally cultivated. Section 6.3 discusses student perceptions and related political language around encouragements to be innovative and entrepreneurial, while also modest and independent. Section 6.4 offers a look ahead at potential areas for growth and consideration. Thematic overlaps and discrepancies between policy language and student interviews are also revisited throughout this chapter, as they represent the habitus negotiation of whether to reproduce or struggle against field characteristics.

6.1 Inclusion, Individualization and the Purpose of Schooling

This section considers the field characteristic of individualization based on its principle of inclusion, by linking interviewee responses to the field’s policy documents. Additional data samples are also referenced, particularly for their aid in synthesizing characteristics of field and habitus, or society and individuals. Chapter 5 explained that schooling is
designed with minimal sorting so that all students may better themselves for societal membership and participation. This is based on principles of equity and inclusion, which Sahlberg (2015) explains, “are deeply rooted in the Finnish way of life. People have a strong sense of shared responsibility, not only for their own lives, but also for those of others” (12). Bourdieu would argue that Sahlberg’s explanation of these traits is best tested by the interviewee responses: if these beliefs are deeply rooted as doxa, then the interviewees will reflect them not just as their own agreed upon beliefs, but also on an unconscious and inherent level. Interviewees were directly asked what various community members think is the purpose of schooling, but their thoughts also emerge as justifications for many of their perceptions in other sections of the interview. Their perceived purpose of schooling focuses mainly on the intrinsic, and on how it will help them live a ‘good life’. While discussions of the purpose of schooling closely matched the language in political documents, their life experiences mirror these perceptions, making these as deeply rooted as Sahlberg describes.

As summarized in Table 4, the stated purpose of education appears in The Basic Education Act (628/1998), which was amended in 2010 to outline these objectives:

1. The purpose of education referred to in this Act is to support pupils' growth into humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them with knowledge and skills needed in life. Furthermore, the aim of pre-primary education, as part of early childhood education, is to improve children's capacity for learning.

2. Education shall promote civilization and equality in society and pupils' prerequisites for participating in education and otherwise developing themselves during their lives.

3. The aim of education shall further be to secure adequate equity in education throughout the country. (Chapter 1, Section 2.1)

The first objective speaks to education’s benefit for students themselves and for that of society. The next two objectives outline the promotion of equity, both in the classroom and in society in general. These objectives play a central role in individual betterment and in the inclusive aims of schooling. The language of equity is woven throughout the Ministry of Education and Culture’s (2015) publications and website, and sited as foundation for their policies:
Providing equal opportunities for all citizens to high-quality education and training is a long-term objective of the Finnish education policy. The key words in Finnish education policy are quality, efficiency, equity and internationalization. The basic right to education and culture is recorded in the Constitution. The policy is built on the principles of lifelong learning and free education. Education is seen as a key to competitiveness and wellbeing of the society.

There is thus a dual recognition of the benefit of equity, utilizing it not only for social justice, but also for its role in keeping Finland robust on the world stage.

Throughout all of the interviews, there was mention of the role of some purely economic benefits to education, in the form of money or jobs. However, only one of the interviewees expressed an internalized version of this purpose of education, leaving the sentiment’s ownership to others. Juulia, for example, expressed consistent pressure from her mother to study in order to increase her job options. Eero, as presented in Table 13, inferred that his friends think education’s purpose is “to get a job so you can get money and get food for yourself”. Eero believes Finland would want to educate people too so they can work “and pay taxes, so Finland gets money”. Eero knows this to be true because “we have this class about society and ethics stuff. We study these things, like [about] why people should work”.

David is also the only interviewee that voiced an internalized congruence of schooling for its economic benefit when he explained how he decided which school he wanted to attend. When his family moved to Oulu, he elected to be placed in the formerly private Swedish-speaking school, saying:

\[ It \text{ was an easy decision for me. I talked to my parents and grandparents about this decision, but it was up to me. I wanted to find a good job. I don’t really know what I want to be in the future, but I hope this will help me find something } \]

(David)

David agrees with Eero that some of his friends “have higher standards to become a doctor or something”, but adds, “I think they want to get where you enjoy yourself.” In his case, enjoying oneself thus becomes the ultimate purpose of studying for the benefit of improving one’s economic outlook.
Discussion of the ‘good life’ was pervasive throughout all four interviews, especially when they were asked what they their teachers, parents and school want them to get out of schooling (Interview Segment E). This question aimed to surface the perceived cumulative purpose of schooling, considering outcomes beyond the intrinsic. It served as a scaffold between a conversation about expectations and the purpose of schooling. Three interviewees replied in reference to a school-specific motto or mission, which they also weighed and interpreted. Juulia, however, replied by saying, “a good life”. Iida and David similarly explained that school can help you “excel in life”. Iida explains that this is “not a different perspective on life but a deeper perspective, that we’re intelligent people who question things and are very organized. That is what we are known for”. The ‘we’ she refers to are International Baccalaureate students, as known to ‘others’ in the greater Oulu community. Iida’s perception of parental expectations also echoed the purpose of education as knowledge acquisition in another portion of the interview, and remembers being told that if you “didn’t learn anything, there is no point – the value isn’t in the grade, it is more in what you get out of the studies”.

The interview responses were dominated by an expression of the intrinsic value of learning or formal education, both as a self-held belief and as one that is communicated to them by friends, teachers, school, parents and Finnish society. Out of all four interviews, Eero mentioned the intrinsic value of education earliest, in response to this same question. Eero perceived that “lukio’s purpose is to sophisticate. It doesn’t give you any profession; if just gives you more knowledge. It is just for knowledge. They expect you to get an education out of education” (Eero). During Interview Segment E, David interpreted the good life and the intrinsic value of learning with a more extensive description:

*When you go to school, you don’t do it for your mom or anybody else. You do it for you. So you get educated and move along with your life. Actually our school says it: ‘School is for life, it is only for you’... My parents agree with that motto. I think it is a Finnish thing. I think every school is aiming for it. If you weren’t learning for yourself, it would be a waste. It can’t come from outside of us. I think there would be much more pressure to be how others want us. If I were doing it for my mom, or someone else, I would be pressured in a way, and I would not enjoy it as much, as if I went all by myself, for me. And [that means] going through school how I want, and not getting as great grades. I think it improves my grades too. We had this English course, and [learned] that students in America people are getting*
pressured by society and parents, but mostly by society, and in Finland, we are not so pressured, so we enjoy it a bit more. (David)

The National Core Curricula reform echoes this sentiment in its newest objectives:

Developing schools as learning communities, and emphasizing the joy of learning and a collaborative atmosphere, as well as promoting student autonomy in studying and in school life – these are some of our key aims in the reform. (Halinen, 2015)

David’s interpretation of what one should get out of school simply refers to one’s own life enjoyment as its outcome, but refers to enjoyment of the life that one is currently experiencing, during school as well. Internal motivation, David explains, leads to a more positive and enjoyable, and thus successful, life experience. The enjoyment of education is what he perceives as the most important outcome for all of Finland.

Interview Segment F asked the participants about the purpose of schooling a little more directly with the phrasing: ‘What do you think your parents, friends, teacher, school, community and Finland think is the purpose of your education?’ David adds that school can help you figure out what you want to do with yourself, but refers to how friends would agree that the aim is to have a “good education.” His response supplies a crucial link between learning for the sake of a better life and learning for one’s own enjoyment, which Juulia agrees as a life-long Finnish phenomenon. Juulia explains this in a personal context, describing her stepfather as a full professional that continues to want to learn about anything new, and thus reads constantly. She justifies this behavior as being Finnish in nature:

They don’t see only that I would get a good life. They like studying here... for example, I see the difference, like in my country, if you are a cook, they look at you like, ‘poor guy’. But here, they respect you, because you study for it. You study for a long time before you become a cook here. In here, they respect it. It is so different. In Brazil, I can’t do that because it is a poor profession. But here they just don’t care. Everything is the same; they study because they like to study. If they want to be a teacher, if they want to be a president, it doesn’t matter! There is no difference. The purpose is to learn something you want to learn. (Juulia)

While Juulia and David agree that learning happens out of pure enjoyment, Juulia further explores the lack of external pressures occur because having a good education in Finland is normal:
Here, you can relax. It’s free. The government is going to give you some money. Everything is easier in Finland. It’s easier for you to study, and go to school. I know people that study their whole life here. (Juulia)

Both interviewees believe Finnish society does not communicate a pressure for people to perform well in school, but Juulia explicitly sites the policy of free education as alleviating the burden of timeliness completion as well. The experience of schooling thus feels lower stakes, allowing students to simultaneously enjoy the process and willfully continue it, formally and informally, throughout their lives.

Devoid of a high-stakes learning environment, there is a fear that students will not feel motivated to perform or complete formal schooling. Some American schools, for example, create a culture around mottos such as ‘failure is not an option’. They encourage a fear of failure as a motivator to prevent students from falling behind and out of the system. The *honus* is on individuals whenever they ‘waste’ opportunities, a violation that somehow moves them beyond society’s responsibility.

6.2 Agency for the Promotion of Self-Knowledge

The following section discusses the alternate approach to motivation that arises from the interviewees’ demonstrations of various behavioral dispositions, particularly when they discuss the types of choices they are faced with. These dispositions are bundled by choices and responsibilities given to students, and are characteristic of a school system that is flexible enough to allow for a relatively autonomous individualized learning. They are glued together by an understanding of achievement, and thus the increase of possibilities, based on effort.

As all of the quotations that are categorized for relating to ‘agency and responsibility’ and ‘sisu’ demonstrate, the interviewees acknowledge that they are expected to be responsible for their own learning. However, academic failure along the way is not expressed as a fear, but rather as a natural component of this learning and character building process. Sahlberg (2015) sites this approach as being a lesson from Nokia, theorizing “that if people work or learn in an environment where avoidance of mistakes and fear of failure are dominant, they typically don’t think for themselves. Fear of failure does not engender creativity” (118).
Figure 6 below shows the definition of *sisu* in red, as a of bundle traits such as determination, stress-management and self-efficacy and self-reliance. Self-beliefs such as these affect “the choices students make about coursework, additional classes, and even educational and career paths (Bandura, 1997; Wigfield and Eccles, 2000)” (“PISA 2012 results” 2014, 68). According to Bandura (2002), this is especially effective in school systems when students are not only allowed to, but also equipped “with the ability to influence their own lives” (“PISA 2012 results” 2014, 68). As characteristic of Finnish schooling, many schooling choices are theirs to make, including the option to retake the matriculation exam. In Interview Segment E, Eero explains the expectations as a gradual increase of responsibility that even trickle down to the amount of effort they apply to their coursework:

*In lukio, teachers expect you to take more responsibility. Tests are more demanding, but teachers are not. In upper secondary, you needed to read 5-10 chapters for one test. Now you need to read like one book. But in upper secondary, they check you more to see if you have done it. Now in lukio, it is optional. You are here because you want it. ‘We are not going to watch your back all the time, and tell you to do your own work. If you aren’t going to do your work, it is your own fault’. (Eero)*

Thus, the cultivation of *sisu* is displayed in Figure 6 below as a result of the scaffolds of responsibilities and freedoms given to students.

![Figure 6. Cultivating sisu in Finnish schooling](image)

These are expressed, for example, in the students’ descriptions of path and course selection in Interview Segments B and C.

During a question and answer session at a talk by Sahlberg (2015, March 12), one American principal explained that he does not feel confident enough in his students to let them have free time during the school day. Pasi Sahlberg replied:
If you don’t do that, if you keep kids inside, and say you only give them a three-minute recess, because you don’t think you can handle this. These kids in your high school, they understand what’s going on. They think, ‘these adults, they don’t really trust that we can somehow handle this’. And it is kind of a spiral, where you begin to take the trust away from students and adults, and it’s not going to end well. (Sahlberg 2015, March 12).

I asked Sahlberg if he would qualify trust as a major characteristic or principle of schooling in Finland, and if so, what some of the other hidden characteristics of Finnish education are. He responded:

My sister is a pre-school or early childhood educator, a kindergarten teacher. In her place, and in many other kindergartens, one of the main goals or principles they have for the kids, is they try to raise them to be responsible individuals. So they can take responsibility of their own action and own things. So that when they go to school, they’re ready to be in charge of their own learning. This is something that’s completely different compared to many other countries. Where education systems educate kids to be dependent on a system, they don’t do anything unless someone is asking them to do something, and someone is controlling that they do those things. We educate kids in this other way, that they are responsible citizens. (Sahlberg 2015, March 12).

Sahlberg’s description of an early attempt at cultivating the principle of self and societal responsibility is thematic in language surrounding what sort of students should be cultivated, as shown in section 5.2. This includes statements concerning the purpose of school (Table 4) and field characteristics (Table 5).

In Interview Segment B, when Eero was asked which path he thinks is suitable for him, he describes the theater university that he wants to attend:

I will go to this university, I think. Theater University. It’s really hard to get into the school. Many hundreds try, and they take like 120 each year. It’s really hard to get in there... They have all kinds of entry requirements. But some people try for like 10 years to go to the school. You can only try once a year. It’s really tough. I guess I just have to work hard. And do theater, prepare myself, and do everything well. With time, not in one month... Yeah, I think I’m going to take more courses that interest me, and try to improve as much as I can. (Eero)

Eero thus speaks of failure as a natural part of the process. In the quotation above, Eero
demonstrates that his ambitions will require a great effort over time, with a series of choices that he will have to make and setbacks that he will have to navigate now in order to reap the benefits later. He also has a great amount of knowledge over the entry requirements and the appropriate benchmarks he needs to hit, in order to align to his goal.

On its website, the Youth Guarantee describes this responsibility and knowledge as “emancipatory”, aiming to ensure “that young people are heard and allowed to influence the course of their life.” (“What is the youth guarantee?”) The Youth Guarantee report on Gender and Education includes quotations that demonstrate young adults carry similar self-beliefs into the hardships they face, surrounding unemployment. One respondent says:

I believe that an industrious person will find work… Of course the current economic situation in Finland and around the world makes you wonder. I still trust that come what may, I can pull through. If I were to become unemployed, I would use my time doing something useful, such as voluntary work. I wouldn’t sit at home doing nothing. (2009, 24)

The value of failure, both at home and in school, also came up in Finnish schooling during the question and answer session with Sahlberg, who describes how responsibility and self-reliance are supported at home:

There was a survey a couple months ago, they were asking Finnish parents, what do they expect from different age children. Seven year olds in Finland were expected to clean their own rooms, make their own breakfasts. A nine year old is expected to go to dentist alone, independently, on the bus, and go and find it, and do these things. Parents really expect a certain level of independence very early on. If you go to school, and you work with them in this way, they will do much more independently and take responsibility, than if they were not educated that way. (Sahlberg 2015, March 12).

I followed up on his description of Finnish early childhood responsibilities by asking: “A lot of my Finnish friends have a scar from an early childhood experience of being handed a hacksaw, like, ‘oh you will figure it out’. Do you have this mark of a Finnish childhood?” He replied:

It is a very different…I realize now, I see here, we have a three year old at home. When I compare to how we Finnish parents think a three year old can do in a playground by themselves, for example, I see the American parents with their kids, all the time, they’re running around with them all the time, like ‘don’t fall down!’
Our boy’s playing. Sometimes he falls down. This is how they learn these things. When they go to school, it is the same attitude there. We let kids fail. We celebrate failure. Finland is the only country where we have a national day of failure. October 13, where everybody, in every workplace, we celebrate failure and try to understand how important failure is in all walks of life. (Sahlberg 2015, March 12).

His response speaks to the individualization, flexibility, non-traditional evaluation and trust that will need to be engrained in such a school system, as well as the perseverance, and self-knowledge that will need to be cultivated in students.

All interviewees share the same perception about the symbolic capital value of the various future paths, weighing upper secondary school and university as the most valued path. However, they struggled to name a fourth path, one beyond the three schooling tracks. One responded, “there is a fourth path, but they don’t do that here. They like to study” (Juulia), whereas two others expressed unsurety: “I really don’t know other options, get a job or something. I really don’t know” (Eero and David). Stopping school altogether does not seem like an option to them, with Eero offering the only alternative being “McDonalds or something”. Even Iida, who has no interest in post-compulsory education at present, recognizes the bizarreness of her disposition in the field: “In general, if you don’t go to high school, it is frowned on. You basically have no future. So everyone does it. And then of course you go to university. And get a job” (Iida). Their shared perception is the expectation that they pursue some form of post-compulsory education.

As the interviewees relate their ambitions to the reality that they expect to encounter, they continually refer to expectations of responsibility with the advantage of self-knowledge. In Interview Segment G, Iida describes a self-knowledge that she cannot source, but that motivates her to pursue new approaches to her studies: “I learn more by seeing something and practice...I just know that I could be doing something that I’m not doing. I know my own potential” (Iida). When one student was asked how he knew he was good at a particular subject, he too sites self-knowledge: “In psychology, I know the stuff. I remember it. I’m interested in it, and so I know I am good at it. I know this myself” (Eero). Juulia describes her belief in her ability to achieve on tests, crediting this to prior positive experiences: “maybe this belief comes from knowing yourself. I know I am able to do good stuff. And I believe it. I am a very positive person. Maybe it is in my personality, maybe also in positive experiences. If I do something once, and it goes right, then I can
These concepts and beliefs form a bundle of traits that are not as prevalent in New York City’s public education, where similar rhetoric refers to goal-orientation, self-esteem and self-confidence instead. Prior to my research in Finland, I would not have recognized the power in cultivating *sisu* through student agency for self-knowledge, as the version I had seen in the attempted cultivation through esteem and confidence-building mechanisms. Even now, there is more recognition of the importance of cultivating perseverance, such as in the Common Core math practice standards, or in Carol Dweck’s Mathematical Mindsets. In this context, the cultivation of *sisu* is attempted through emphasis on the students’ process, practice and effort, but never on responsibility, agency or self-knowledge. Thus, these have not translated into policy shifts that allow students more choice, agency and reliance on themselves to pursue their own interests. Similar to the growth mindset, however, all four interviewees strongly reiterated that success is dependent on the amount of effort they make, not on their intelligence levels. If they get low grades, for example, it is because they did not study or practice enough, or get help from their friends, or manage their time well. They reason that failures are no one’s fault but their own.

Still, students express a great understanding of the need for a balance to be successful in the pursuit of their interests. For example, during Interview Segment C, one interviewee describes his long-term goal:

> In life, I want to become an actor, then a famous actor, and to do all kinds of cool stuff. Do as much of everything as I can, like skydiving, surfing, diving and traveling around. I want to see everything. The problem is, I don’t have money. But if I just work to get money, I don’t have time. (Eero)

Hard work is how he anticipates navigating successfully to reach his goals as well. With an understanding of the hard work that is required to enjoy life, the Basic Education Act (1998) attempts to maintain a balance throughout schooling itself, as it declares, “The pupil's work load in basic education must be such as to allow him or her enough time for rest, recreation and hobbies over and above the time spent in school, school travel and homework” (Chapter 6, Section 24). The interviewees explain that they self-regulate in the same way, keeping a personalized cap on school work. Iida describes this cap as her only limitation, dismissing any evidence of a fixed mindset:
With academics, no, I don’t test my limits. I might have a limit as to how much I’m going to do, or effort I’m going to put into something, but that’s just if something happens, like I get tired. I am either all in or all out. I won’t stop half-way. I have never been much of a settler. So I want to go to the extreme. Not the extreme, but cross to the other side, and see what it’s like. (Iida)

While Iida names curiosity is her motivation, knowledge of her own interests, the paths that are available to her, and what she needs to do to achieve her goals continually help her and the other interviewees to plan, self-motivate and prepare for their futures, and to maximize the amount of options that are available to them through schooling.

6.3 The Formulation of a Knowledge Economy

In addition to identifying that the purpose of schooling is to help students identify and pursue ‘the good life’ as the best possible fit for the individual, interviewees also discuss dispositions that they think will be useful later in life. These include the interviewee’s perceived expectations to modestly compete with one another, collaborate, innovate and be self-sufficient.

A study on Finnish entrepreneurship education sums these traits up as a version of the self that is an “autonomous self-governing individual” (Komulainen, Korhonen and Räty 2009, 631). This study analyzed the prize-winning content from an annual Finnish writing competition among school children, with the majority of awards given to stories that featured a modest, as opposed to a risk-taking entrepreneur. The study explains, “historically, the virtues of modesty have been essential in the process of socialization at school (Koski 2001)” (Komulainen, Korhonen and Räty 2009, 645). The ethics of the modest entrepreneur are that “work is the basic human good, and the aims and motives of entrepreneurship are not the accumulation of material wealth but the fulfilling of one’s calling – ‘finding one’s self’ – and serving one’s community, family, village, and nation” (ibid. 637).

The interviewees draw from many personal experiences to discuss the expectations of “collaboration and friendly rivalry, not competition and race to the top” (Sahlberg 2011, 126). When asked, “Are people in your school competitive in any way?” in Interview Segment D, Iida and Eero both responded to the question on the individual level, explaining that their friends are not competitive, but that they get the feeling some others
Juulia, however, compared the role of competition now with her experience attending a school outside Finland. In Brazil, she explains, there was a lot of competition in her school, and her classmates constantly wanted to show off. Juulia used to brag and compare grades with classmates, but now in Finland, “I don’t do it here. Here, if you are learning, it is the most important thing.” David feels like competition “can help you achieve better grades, [but] not always though. Sometimes we have to work together. I think teachers support both competition and working together a bit. It works to balance these two, so it won’t get stressful, and it can help us accomplish better things, without getting too serious”. In this way, David echoes Sahlberg’s emphasis on ‘friendly rivalry’, instead of a more formal competitiveness.

Sahlberg (2015) credits the emphasis on collaboration, the other side of the balance that David mentions, as a Nokian practice because “in order to be on the cutting edge of innovation in the mobile communication business, they contended that people must be the key. Their objective in this regard was to hire the most innovative as well as the most collaborative people they could find and to give them the freedom to work together and take risks” (118). During Interview Segment C, David explains that the spirit of collaboration is encouraged in his English class in particular:

*I think the social environment is really supportive. You learn how to interact with people, and learn to communicate with people, even if you don’t like them so much, you still have to work. I think other schools emphasize this too. I think school is helping – educating me in life, in general.* (David)

However, the interviewees value weight collaboration differently from the practice of relying on others. This is prevalent in David’s opinion how people should conceal their successes and failures from one another. For example, he explains that the need to retake exams could be seen as shameful, as would be bragging about your high achievements. When asked if he is personally inclined to hide his failures, he says:

*Yeah, because we maybe really don’t like to talk about these, and keep them inside. I think here in Finland that is the case. Men don’t really like to talk about their failures and stuff. I try to maintain a strong front all the time. I think this is true everywhere in the world* (David).

Though at first he thinks this may be a Finnish trait, he imagines it might be universally true. David continues by describing how Finnish people also hide their successes:
...probably because they are not comfortable with themselves. If I got a really good grade on math or something, the guys would be joking around, and tease me, and be quite jealous. So sometimes it is quite good to not say anything. It is a Finnish thing. (David)

Here, he says that modesty about one’s successes is definitely a Finnish trait. However, he and the other three interviewees all describe instances of seeking help from their friends whenever they fail tests. Eero, for example, experienced a disappointing failure from a math test in Interview Segment G. He described how he reached out to his friend because he “didn’t fail before, he’s really good at math. He was helping me. And after school and on breaks, he helped me. So then I passed it” (Eero). They also admit to bragging to, comforting and congratulating one another on a regular basis. Like Eero, Juulia thinks her friends are helpful and empathetic. She says, “if I cry, they cry with me. If I am joyful, they are joyful with me” (Juulia). Not one interviewee reported to turn to teachers or tutors for academic support, however, though they described mentor-like relationships with them.

While the interviewees variably weigh the importance of competition, collaboration and relying on one’s peers, they all portray at least one arena in which they are inclined to really challenge themselves. In Interview Segment G, Iida says she is “limitless with music”, Juulia and David say that they test themselves with language acquisition, and Eero goes “totally crazy” in his theater classes. However, only Iida discusses the disposition to innovate. When asked follow-up questions about why she perceives people in Finland value university so highly during Interview Segment F, she says that they actually believe that there lots of things one can do:

_Finland is also very innovative: ‘the next best Nokia’. With innovation, I hear this all the time. Like with Oulu, I hear it is a progressive, technologically innovative city, and more so that anywhere in the world. It came up in the news, and in random conversation. I don’t feel pressure to be innovative, but I don’t go to a Finnish high school, or live in a Finnish household, but there is an idea that people are innovative here, naturally._ (Iida)

When asked if she thinks Finnish people are just naturally that way, or if it is a trait that they attempt to cultivate, she adds:

_I think generally, business wise, they’re innovative, because such a small country made a big phone company... but then my friends have these ‘MacGyver’ moments, like fixing my bike for me. On their own, they are very independent. If their bikes_
break down, they don’t go to the bike store unless they really, really have to. They fix their own cars. Finns are this way in general. (Iida)

Iida considers innovation as a trait that accompanies self-sufficiency, siting Finland’s geographic and cultural isolation from mainland Europe as a reason for perpetuating these qualities. She continues, perceiving that there exists “a little pressure to be self-sufficient; if someone wasn’t, they’d be like, ‘don’t be a spoiled brat’. Isn’t that how it is everywhere?” (Iida). Initially calling self-sufficiency a Finnish trait, she then shifts to thinking this must be universally true. This is evidence of a doxic crisis over that which is so pervasive to her, but still not resolved as reproduction-worthy.

Though equity in opportunity is consistently referred to as the main objective of education by the Ministry of Education and Culture, they also thematically refer to its societal benefits, such as those presented in Table 4. This includes rhetoric around developing active, working and independent members of society through various preparatory programs such as in Ammattistartti, which is post-compulsory education skills and guidance program for choosing one’s path. This ideal is similarly the motivation, or at least, the justification for ethics education within the curriculum, the Youth Guarantee, and new alternative study models. These models will allow students to flexibly combine modules from various study programs, such as incorporating work-studies and vocational courses to suit their particular needs. These initiatives are described in the Europe 2020 Strategy (16c/2014), which aims to reduce school dropouts to achieve 92% post-compulsory education completion in 2020 (44).

The Ministry of Education and Culture aims to keep Finland competitive on the world stage with improvements to human capital through education. According to Education and Research (2012), education can “ensure a high level of competence and sufficient workforce” (7). This feels especially dire “as the working-age population keeps decreasing and the young age groups getting smaller” (Education and Research, 2012, 7). The interviewee’s blended thoughts on collaboration, competition, innovation and self-sufficiency are reminiscent of the old-time lumberjack’s (jätkä) story written by a student in the study on Finnish interpretations of entrepreneurship (Komulainen, Korhonen & Räty 2009, 641). Here, a strong, self-reliant protagonist independently works hard as an entrepreneur, but is idealized “by connecting their work to the fatherland and family.
Ultimately, these men work for the whole nation” (Komulainen, Korhonen & Räty 2009, 642). As with striking an ideal balance between stress-management and determination, this is reminiscent of the balance between competition and working together that David mentioned in Interview Segment D.

6.4 A Look Ahead

The previous sections discuss the students’ experiences and perceptions of their dispositional expectations as well as the responsibilities that are afforded to them, as per the second research sub-question: How do these policy statements compare to what students perceive is expected of them within the purpose and structure of schooling? How do students relate these perceptions to their arenas of choice, responsibility and dispositions? With this, however, comes a final consideration of the arenas of choice that influence their ‘space of possibilities’. Language barriers, for example, are a Bourdieuan concern of access, and must be addressed in the “relentless disclosure of power and privilege in its most varied and subtlest forms (Thompson, 1991, p. 31)” (Mills & Gale 2010, 18).

As Interview Segment B demonstrates, when asked about the different paths that Finnish students may take when they finish compulsory school, the interviewees all could offer a detailed description of the various streams available to them. They also describe the requirements for switching tracks, and relate these hypothetical scenarios to their personal path decisions. In this way, all four interviewees echo the philosophy of ‘no dead-end’ paths, as described by the Ministry of Education. This knowledge allows them to consider all options and make decisions about their current coursework that reflect these pursuits. However, In Juulia voices concerns over Finnish language barriers, and David and Iida voice urgency around learning other languages to increase their employability and mobility.

During Interview Segment B, Juulia explains how she wants to go to upper secondary school and university, but has been advised by her teacher to delay her entry, attending the optional tenth grade year to improve her Finnish first. The Development Plan (2012) explains that even this has not been sufficient for all immigrants (15). It pledges to better prepare immigrants by improving the “the level of language instruction… and through the
development of guidance counseling, student selection and other support action” (16). Juulia does not find the language barrier as insurmountable, however, saying, “there are no more barriers, once I improve language, I will be able to achieve” (Juulia). Her account acknowledges the difficulties that she will face along a rigorous academic path, but does not consider this as a barrier to access because of the system’s flexibility with a timeline, as learning happens in the context of economic resources that support individualized pacing.

The Finnish economy, however, has suffered since my initial interviews, as it has been in recession for the last three years. It is troublesome to imagine students relying as heavily on student welfare, or even the promise of a guaranteed ‘good life’, given hard work and perseverance, when this form of success is market-dependent. Just as it is dangerous to make formal schooling market-dependent, it is dangerous to make schools dependent on equal distribution of wealth that already exists. There might be more extreme cases of inequity, for example, which will require the country to expand on definitions or conditions of inclusion and access in order to maintain intergenerational elasticity.
7 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

This chapter offers a final consideration of reflexivity, both methodological and as the researcher, by discussing the validity and reliability of this research, ethical considerations and final remarks.

7.1 Validity and Reliability

Concerns over the validity and reliability within Bourdieu’s framework of relationalism requires a consideration on many levels, in which the researcher is constantly acknowledging potential influence on the responses, outcomes and discussion. It must do more than “tell us whether the research tool is actually ‘measuring’ what it intends to measure” (Kuzmanić 2009, 48). Kuzmanić (2009) reiterates that, “however, we should not think that simply by virtue of reflexivity and transparency, the researcher ‘can ever completely control the multiple and complex effects of the interview relationship’ (Bourdieu, 1999, 615)”(48). Furthermore, this research only concentrates on the responses of four interviewees. This limited scope is intentional, however, because the data set also includes the content of political documents. In this way, it is possible to consider the interviewees’ unique habitus negotiations within the theoretical framework, maintaining the narrative quality of their experiences as much as possible. Validity and reliability begins with an open disclosure of the researcher’s position, limitations, bias and aims, as well as an articulated focus and lens.

Firstly, qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews is valid when it “refers to all steps of a research process separately and is hence manifold and multidimensional. It is constructed and reconstructed through the researcher’s engagement and relationship with his or her research interests and topics” (Kuzmanić 2009, 48). Interviews were actually conducted before the field investigation, limiting the researcher’s knowledge of the field to how it was described by the interviewees. However, there is an acknowledgement that “the interviewee never talks for her/himself, but according to the interest he/she believes he/she senses in the interviewer”(Carli, Guardiano, Kaučić-Baša, Sussi, Tessarolo, & Ussai, 2003, 868). This acknowledgement necessitates prewriting topics and questions, but then skipping, revising, or expanding on them, depending on its relevance to the content of the interviewee’s responses.
Furthermore, interviewees were asked follow-up questions for depth and clarification regardless of its relevance to the research: in this way, many of the research subtopics were addressed out of order, in the ‘wrong’ sections, as they naturally were surfaced. This approach is similar to the mathematics pedagogical method that I employ of allowing plenty of time for students to think and speak informally about topics, free from paraphrasing and not ever hinting if they are correct or incorrect. By allowing math students to respond to more open-ended questions, and face the same amount of scrutiny regardless of their argument’s correctness, the focus of our inquiry shifts to how the students reason and make sense of the math itself, which informs my practice and allows them to strengthen or alter their own arguments. Similarly, these interviews were characterized by restating exactly what the interviewees said, with regular follow-up questions like ‘why?’ ‘what for?’ ‘how so?’, and ‘where does that come from?’. The language that the interviewers used was thus maintained and meaning was clarified as much as possible, making interpretation of their responses more reliable.

This research was not rigidly concerned with division among subtopics (principles, purpose, field characteristics and student dispositions). More importantly, themes were allowed to emerge from the sources themselves with a post-categorization of statements and student responses. Even once this categorization occurred, language from the documents and interviews themselves was used as much as possible. This was facilitated because this research’s aim is not to quantify something that is unquantifiable; instead, it is to surface and relate themes that appear in both the political document aims and what students think is expected of them without the limitations of language barriers, pre-selected categorical responses, or even pre-knowledge of how the system works.

Lastly, methodological reflexivity emerges from the two-pronged approach of considering the field and the habitus through two different sources. While the students’ navigation of schooling is an individual experience within a context that is seemingly prescribed by remote political documents, “it is through participating in fields that these ethics can be made ‘alive’, be engaged, reproduced or transformed by people of different ethical dispositions acquired as part of their habitus” (Pellandini-Simányi 2014, 25). In other words, all individuals impact the ever-changing field of schooling that they interact with. Policy documents themselves are created within a context, making them just as permeable
to all of the other field’s relations.

7.2 Ethical Considerations

Considering the complex dynamics of unearthing sociological themes in general, and the power relations during interviews in particular, there was an even greater need to clarify to the interviewees that they did not have to be interviewed, or answer specific questions, if they did not want to. They also all received the same honest explanation for the researcher’s intended use of their interviews, and given the opportunity to ask any questions that they had, with respect to the researcher or the research.

I explained to them that their anonymity would be maintained, and did not even use their real names in the interview transcripts. Also, they were told that they have access to the transcripts or thesis drafts, and can revise or rescind their responses if they want.

7.3 Final Remarks

This section considers the overall success of this research, with consideration of its strengths as well as potential improvements on the approach, aim and lens.

This research selected students within a fairly narrow age range because it focuses on a single time in interviewee’s lives, in which compulsory schooling has shaped their perceptions as much, and as recently, as possible. This allows their responses to align with Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, in which people may “come to ‘read’ the future and to choose the fate that is also statistically the most likely for them. Practices within a given situation are, Bourdieu argues, conditioned by expectations of the outcomes of a given course of action, which is in turn based, thanks to the habitus, on experience of past outcomes” (Greenfell 2014, 57). In other words, it asks them to consider what others expect of them, how they know those expectations to be true, and how they perceive their ‘space of possibilities’. If this research were to become a longitudinal study, however, it would be able to consider their dispositions with the backdrop of their subsequent experiences. This approach would allow them to revisit expectations, and reflect on what they idealized versus what they realized.
There is an unapologetic aspect to the Bourdieuan researcher’s constant orientation, declaration of positions and biases that form a practical approach for allowing a ‘humanness’ to exist. However, even with the upmost attention to reflexivity, there is a tension that permeates whenever researching another culture or society. Furthermore, there was limited sociological research in education with a Bourdieuan lens in more ‘equitable’ places, where education is actually transformative by measures of intergenerational elasticity. These considerations made it more difficult to approach the content with a critical lens.

Now that I know how other researchers apply Bourdieu’s framework, I would revisit this research to enable a more critical lens by tracking symbolic violence, or the “mechanism through which the tastes and dispositions of dominant groups become valuable as cultural capital” (Miller 2014, 464). This concept was briefly discussed in section 2.2, but it could have helped narrow the scope of this research to focus on one or two forms of symbolic capital, and its manifestations in the media, politics and schools. For instance, Fries (2009) identifies the value weights given to traditional medicine over alternative medicine through a series of symbolically violent language and classifications (340). Also, Miller (2014) applied this concept to consider symbolic capital in specific music scenes, for examining symbolically violent differentiations in gender roles (468).

Symbolic violence also has a place in education policy research, such as in Thomson’s (2005) examination of misrecognition in British education policy initiatives and Maton’s (2005) research on autonomy in higher education. This thesis is most congruent with their Bourdieuan interpretations and approaches, but lacks their consideration of the journalism field. This source, in addition to policies and narratives, represents how a genuinely globalized “cross field” influence shapes education policy (Lingard, Taylor & Rawolle 2006, 668).

Lastly, while it was relatively easy to identify societal principles, political objectives, and general school system characteristics within the political documents, it was more difficult to explicitly identify what is expected of students, in terms of behaviors and responsibilities. It would be interesting to consider these student expectations in media sources. The semi-structured interviews, however, contained an abundance of evidence addressing all of the research subtopics. In retrospect, though, it would have been
interesting to also ask students if they had knowledge, or perceptions of specific objective mechanisms. I had assumed that they would not know of any, apart from the general system characteristics of flexible study tracks or matriculation requirements. In other words, I suspect that they are more aware of policy initiatives than I thought, and it would have been interesting to relate their perceptions to the actual document’s descriptions.
8 CONCLUSION

My original interest was to examine how students relate their experience of schooling in Finland to the most direct, yet most commonly held truths that they perceive. This research relates the political documents that characterize the field of schooling to the students’ dispositions, in terms of the aims, objectives and the purpose of schooling. These trickle down to students through the expectations and perceptions they compile as they navigate the system. Student performance is impacted greatly by these messages, so it was interesting to see what happens when the policies are designed to scale the system back in its role as a sorter, trust that students know themselves best, and set them up to live balanced lives.

We see how major Finnish political documents and the student interviews similarly refer to societal principles of inclusion, lifelong learning, valuing school completion, free education and student welfare. The purposes of schooling, however, are congruent among the interviewees, but only held slight overlaps with the intended purposes that are outlined in political documents. The greatest amount of overlap occurs in purposes that are specifically for the individual, as opposed to those that benefit society in general. Discussion surrounding the students’ perceptions of the ‘good life’ and what pursuit of this entails, surfaced many dispositions, valued behaviors, choices and responsibilities. Similar expectations were surfaced in the political documents, as the field characteristics defined arenas of agency and responsibility that are prescribed to students.

This thesis accomplished adding the voice of the missing student narrative to the greater characterization of Finnish education policy. It is interesting to hear how taking a policy-free political approach and decentralized governance add weight to the overall aim for equity. Other emphases, however, such as teacher and school accountability, evaluation and rankings, are completely non-existent in the narrative. This confirms that what is true ‘below’ - the practice of instilling trust in students - is true ‘above’, in the management and governance of the structure itself. In general, the interviewee responses closely relate the intended principles and purposes and to their actual experiences and perceptions within the schooling system. These interviewees thus provide an example of how efficacious, equipped and knowledgeable they feel in the face of the choices and opportunities that are available to them.
This study demonstrates that while Finnish schooling hopes to esteem all academic pathways, students add value to the same path: that which leads to university. However, they feel completely capable of pursuing this without any time, social or economic constraints. *Sisu* is reproduced in their day-to-day self-management of their schooling, as they consider challenges and setbacks as manageable and temporary. Hard work, they posit, is a natural part of a ‘good life’, as is lifelong learning.

This research informs the benefits of including semi-structured interviews in education policy evaluation. This methodological reflexivity helps check for even the tiniest cracks between what script writer Harold Sylvester refers to as “should and is”, which are “a long way apart” in the school system that I was trained in (Wolf, James & Sylvester, 1999). In this way, policy makers can remain critical of their own expertise while surfacing the everyday struggles of their intended targets. It also allows an outcome-oriented impact of influences that researchers cannot anticipate, which is essential in an already globalized world.
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