Capability Expansion in Upper Secondary Schools in Norway?

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Over the course of the last century Norway evolved from being a relatively poor country to being one of the richest in the world. The educational system has played a prominent role in and significantly influenced the nation building and the development of the Norwegian welfare state (Werler 2004).

The purpose of this paper is to seek insight into and evaluate capabilities and capability expansion among students in both vocational and academic education in upper secondary schools in Norway. More precisely, we investigate potentials and opportunities students are given to develop skills and virtues according to the intentions stated in the most recent major curriculum and structural reform encompassing upper secondary education (1994) (Volckmar & Werler 2015).

The approach will concentrate on a criticism of last decade’s neoliberalism, which has led to an educational policy focusing partial on the efficiency of schooling (Giroux, 2004; Nussbaum, 2010; Werler, 2011). It will also raise questions about the Norwegian welfare system’s relevance to human development, wellbeing and equality.

The following text reports from work in progress. Because of the large amount of data we present just some impressions from the material. The working paper is divided in two parts. Whilst the first part discusses some general issues, the second part presents some impressions from the material that we see as typical (by now).

Please note, ask before quoting/ referring to the text.

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1 Capability asymmetry among Norwegian youths?

During the last decade Norway regularly achieved top scores on parameters measuring human development (UNDP 2015). These achievements seem to reflect quite well with the overarching principles for education in Norway. According to Norwegian legislation, education has to be equitable, inclusive and adapted to the student. In general, education has to focus on achieving equal opportunities for the students and developing an inclusive learning environment (Ministry of Education 2016). Findings from the recent PISA studies show that Norway has succeeded in de-coupling school performance from individual socio-economic background (OECD 2001).

1.1 Guiding ideas for Norwegian school development

Seen from a historical perspective, four main dimensions have characterized the political vision of the comprehensive school model in Norway (Telhaug 1994). First, all students shall have access to the same economic, material and human resources, regardless of their geographic location or municipal and province (fylke) settings. Second, schools shall facilitate interaction between all groups of students. Third, the school curriculum (content) should familiarize students with the common cultural heritage and set of values. Fourth, in order to respect the diversity of students, the students have the right to education adapted to their individual needs (Norwegian School Law (opplæringslova), chapter 1, §1-1). Several researchers have pointed out that it is a goal of education to increase social mobility, inclusion and equality (Lie, Linnekylä, Roe 2003: 9; Werler 2007: 40) among various population groups. Hence, the school system has been labelled “a School for All” (Imsen & Volckmar 2015). The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research seems to go even further, and argues that education is “regarded as means of promoting equity, and for reducing inequalities, poverty and other forms of marginalization” (Ministry of Education 2008: 6).

The development of this school model would not have been possible without state intervention and regulation (Telhaug & Mediås, 2003). Public school policy was, in its
first phase, focused on preserving national culture, language and the history of the nation state (Volckmar & Werler 2015: 604-606). Efforts to merge primary school system (grunnskole) and upper secondary school (videregående skole) were primarily introduced in the following period of the welfare state (Werler 2011). Subsequently, efforts have been made to create a more holistic, comprehensive school system.

1.2 A policy for capability enhancement?

In order to make education more democratic, encourage social cohesion and provide a common horizon of knowledge and culture for both vocational and academic upper secondary education, a major curriculum, structure and law reform was implemented in 1994 (Meld.st. 33 (1991-92)). As a first step, academic and vocational education programmes were integrated and coordinated in 1974, resulting in a single institution (enhetsskole) (Telhaug & Mediås 2003). The so-called reform ’94 (R94) was subsequently implemented starting in 1994. Since then, a common law has regulated both primary and secondary schools. The official aim of public schooling in Norway is to provide, for all students, a common horizon of knowledge and culture as well as greater freedom to choose their life (Norwegian School Law, §1-1):

“Education and training in schools and training establishments shall, in collaboration and agreement with the home, open doors to the world and give the pupils and apprentices historical and cultural insight and anchorage. [...] The pupils and apprentices shall develop knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they can master their lives and can take part in working life and society. They shall have the opportunity to be creative, committed and inquisitive.”

The two main models for secondary education according to R94 are: 3 years of school in academic track programmes (AC) as well as the so-called 2 + 2 model structures the vocational programmes (VET). Students attend upper secondary school for 2 years and continue their education for another 2 years as apprentices in businesses, based on a corporatist-inspired system (Markussen 2011: 255). All students who have successfully finished lower secondary school are entitled to proceed to upper secondary school. The right to upper secondary education for everyone was a key element of the reform (R94), which guaranteed that all students would be offered upper secondary education (Bueland & Mathisen 2015: 214). Since both AV and VET have common core subjects in general studies students, including those in vocational education, may qualify for
higher education; students in vocational programmes are able to choose a 3rd year of AC studies to qualify for higher education instead of seeking an apprenticeship. Students who have chosen AC studies qualify for all higher education programmes. The key idea behind this reform was to allow for greater social mobility (St.meld no. 33 (1991-92), St. meld no. 32 (1998-99)).

Another measure implemented to achieve the reform targets was the implementation of one general curriculum covering all school types in Norway. The general curriculum consists of subject-specific curricula for the various education programmes (AC & VET). The academic subjects are differentiated into three different educational programmes sharing core (academic) subjects (mathematics, Norwegian, English), in addition to various electives. Even the vocational education programmes share this common core. Today, one finds 9 broad VET-related programmes in the first and 35 more specialized programmes in the second year of VET (tab. 1). The very recent reform “The Knowledge Promotion” (Kunnskapsløftet 06; NOU 2002:10; NOU 2003:16) introduced in 2006 consolidated the integration of primary and secondary schools (Volckmar & Werler 2015: 608).

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Tab 1. The Structure of Upper Secondary Education and Training (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2016, s. 13)

Almost 96% of youths in any cohort are attending upper secondary education (SSB 2009a). About 49% of upper secondary students were enrolled in academic programmes and 51% were enrolled in vocational preparation programmes (SSB
About 70% of youths in any cohort complete their education within five years (SSB 2009b). At first glance, the values, ideas and structure of the Norwegian upper secondary school system seem to reflect basic ideas formulated by the capability approach movement (Nussbaumm, Robeyns, Sen, Alkire). Throughout the past decades, many students have experienced social mobility and successful lives. As the above-mentioned data on throughput reveals, serious problems are connected to this way of schooling.

1.3 Putting capabilities at risk – insight into research

Even if Norwegian school development seems to have been a success, there are still major problems that need to be addressed. Compared to other school systems (see e.g. Hörner et al. 2015), the Norwegian system has adopted late differentiation in terms of both structure and curriculum. As a consequence, students are attending school for as much as 12 years under a unified curriculum. Because of the unified school structure, the common core curriculum and the legal system, the Norwegian school system offers just a few alternative school careers.

There is relatively little available research focusing on upper secondary education in Norway. Except for evaluations of the major reforms and dropout research, the topic has hardly been mentioned in Norwegian educational research (Saklind 1998: 7). This is remarkable, considering that the Norwegian welfare state, as we have seen, has explicitly focused on equality and cohesion. In addition, vocational programmes are often associated with low status, and students in such programmes show little academic interest (Bakken & Elstad 2012; Dale 2008; Holen 2014). It is, however, the case that the VET field’s culture, history and traditions differ in many ways from academia and the primary schools culture (Mjelde Tarrou 2004, 2005; Winch & Clark 2012; Winch 2007).

Kvalsund and Myklebust (1998: 13) point out that late differentiation creates a situation in which young people are in general excluded from the production process. VET is particularly affected, as it postpones practical work experience. In general, Norwegian society (and policy) seems to expect that as many as possible attend schools. This policy attitude has shaped recent reform efforts and supported the development of one dominant qualifying route. It has been pointed out that this policy
has **resulted in a school concept that does not value and develop pupils’ self-identity** and active agency (Kvalsund 2004: 152). Since the requirements and the curriculum of a school system are the deciding factors when it comes to benefitting from the public good “schooling” (Werler 2011: 160-167), they determine what is valued and who is qualified.

The major evaluation of the reform showed that the school dropout rate remained **high** (Markussen, 2010). On average, 22% of the girls and 27.1% of the boys of any age group enrolled in vocational education will have left upper secondary education without having a leaving certificate. The same is true for 6% of the girls and 7% of the boys enrolled in academic programmes (Bueland & Mathisen 2015: 211). However, data from Eurostat (2016) reveal that about a third of the age group 16–24 are at risk for poverty or exclusion. Research done by Bäckman et.al. (2011) indicates that dropping out of upper secondary school is associated with suffering from immediate social exclusion and poor labour market attachment. Surprisingly, the risk is higher in Norway than in any other Nordic country (ibid., 28). The Norwegian white paper on redistribution (NOU 2009:10) documents deprivation effects. It is revealed that schooling beyond upper secondary school is the main factor determining total lifespan income one receives, and hence on long-term life chances and longevity. Dropout predicts quite well later unemployment and more permanent non-employment patterns (NOU 2009: 133, Falch et.al. 2010).

Recent studies on quality of upper secondary education suggest that these schools are characterized by a **local distinctiveness**. A number of studies have shown significant differences regarding learning outcomes as well as students’ well-being and motivation. A heavily criticized report (Falch, Bensnes & Strøm 2016) applying a value-added model measuring school quality reveals some severe differences regarding culture among upper secondary schools.

Even if official investigations (Dahl, Buland, Mordal & Aaslid 2012), as well as the PISA-studies, draw a generally positive image of the Norwegian education system, researchers have argued that the reform implementation has led, over time, to the opposite of the aims stated in the overarching policy principles. Trippestad (2009), among others, showed that the reform movement increased **social inequalities**.
Confirmation of this is found in an official report (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2011). It revealed that severe differences with regard to learning outcomes between social groups remain. Even the correlation of parents' levels of education with students' learning outcome has become stronger, despite reforms officially intending the opposite development. Others have pointed out that the reform wave starting in 1994 led to one of the most accountability based school systems among Western democracies at that time (ibid.; Werler 2004). However, the long-term effects of the reforms have not been unequivocally positive.

Even though there are but few studies on students’ experiences of upper secondary education, a coherent picture can be drawn. As outlined, many students leave school without appropriate qualifications and they experience upper secondary education as irrelevant to their lives (Nevøy, Rasmussen, Ohna & Barow 2014: 192). Furthermore, Hernes (2010) showed that there is a correlation between dropping out of upper secondary school and ending up in a marginalized position regarding the workforce. Some indication for consequences of this can be seen in the current employment structure. Between 2000 and 2014 the number of employees in public and private sector holding a BA or a MA degree rose from 27% to 37.2%. During the same period the number of employees holding only a certificate of upper secondary education fell from 60.7% to 41.5% (all numbers are the authors’ calculations, based on figures from SSB). The study (Hernes 2010) reveals that young people who drop out of school are more likely to become dependent on government support. Furthermore, one may wonder whether experiences of irrelevance might contribute to halting processes that otherwise help students adopt healthy life styles (Elstad 2008).

The arguments provided suggest that high performance demands from an education system and its homogenous application to several school types seem to have a dysfunctional effect. They cause an asymmetric and rigid allocation of capabilities, something that serves the empowerment of certain groups. Having these strong indicators at hand, one can ask whether educational provisions in a highly developed country promote capability expansion for all students enrolled in vocational and academic upper secondary school.
2 Capability expansion and equality among Norwegian students?

Today, an instrumentalist and technical approach governs education systems worldwide (Noddings 2013; Nussbaum 2010). Efficiency and effective customization for achieving specific standards are governing the schools’ work (Anderson 2009; Gonon & Heikkinen 2009). In the neoliberal education regime pupils’ competence is viewed as a trade commodity (Werler 2016). Education is related to human capital (Becker 1993: 23-24), and students are valued as useful producers within an economic system (Schultz 1963: 22-23). The focus of school policy is directed towards achieving proficiency based on set of predefined standards.

In the landscape of globalization, the Norwegian school system is challenged by neoliberal influences (Trippestad 2011) and the current imperatives of the measurement culture (Biesta 2009). Market thinking and competition based on standardization measures seem to teach students to become economically productive and employed (Billett 2011; Rose 2005; Winch 2000; Ziegler, Berthet, Atzmüller, Bonvin & Kjeldsen 2015). Such a development has the power to devalue students’ development of agency and their ability to create a good life for themselves (Alkir 2005; Nussbaum 2000, 2011; Robeyns 2005; Sen 1993, 1999, 2009).

As already indicated, students that fail within the education system might be left behind, in which case “their abilities look like useless paraphernalia” (Nussbaum 2010, 134). Norwegian upper secondary education seems to have lost sight of the ultimate aim and purpose of education: to help students create a good human life for themselves and a democratic, fair society (Norwegian School Law, chapter 1). To get a closer look into students’ lives we try to take a step back from the research approaches traditionally used in Norway (Lindblad .et.al. 2013). We consider it important to investigate conditions and possibilities that allow students to realize valuable activities and states that constitute their wellbeing. Therefore, we wish to supplement what we judge to be instrumentalist research with a focus on education as a means to achieve a good life, and on how students are able to convert education and training into a good life.

Nussbaum argues that education’s main task is to support the development of internal capabilities (Nussbaum 2011: 21). As shown, even an apparently highly developed country such as Norway limits by the outcome of its system of upper secondary
education doings and beings of certain groups of young people. This paper looks for answering the question: in what ways do educational provisions in a highly developed country inhibit or promote capability development among students enrolled in vocational and academic upper secondary education? Moreover, we ask how students perceive what they are able to do, be or become, and for their views on their own futures.

The Capability Approach (CA) offers an alternative approach “that particularly implies to take more carefully into account the inter-individual differences in abilities of people to convert resources they possess and services they receive into valuable states, actions and affiliations” (Otto & Ziegler 2010: 9). When thinking about education within the CA, we recognize that the main research purpose has to be something other than the development of useful and marketable skills. Our research agenda takes into account students’ capabilities and capability expansion in upper secondary schools. We aim to identify potentials for and restrictions on the student’s wellbeing within the welfare state’s education system. We seek to analyze the students’ freedom of choice and their agency and actions towards their opportunities to attain valued states of being and empowerment.

Based on the above made arguments we ask how and in what ways upper secondary education facilitates or limits capability development of student populations enrolled in VET or academic programmes of upper secondary in Norway. More precisely, we look for students’ potential, what they express that they believe they can actually do, or are able to become or be. Additionally, we are interested in how the schools’ opportunities for learning facilitate or limit their capabilities as citizens and as human beings.

3 Design & operationalization
Identifying ideographic traits of different programmes of upper secondary education is the major research goal of the study. We applied a comparative research design/methodology based on the fact that our research is comparative social science (cf. Ragin 1987:2). The study was designed with a broad scope. It is a cross-school study where the level of analysis is several upper secondary schools in Norway. Here, the units of analysis are classes (vgs2) in which instruction is given. We designed our study
as a “cross-case study” to understand a larger class of cases (i.e. the Norwegian system of upper secondary education) through the intensive study of single cases (Gerring 2007: 95). Our case-oriented strategy of comparison investigates meso-social units (schools), resulting in a few-school comparison, which means that data availability is/has to be dispersed. This procedure is appropriate because if the number of cases is too high it will no longer be possible to investigate those cases intensively.

Following Gerring (2007: 102pp) one benefit of a cross-case study is that it provides insights into causal relationships in a school setting. We are not interested in investigating causal mechanisms. However, we are interested in the “magnitude of a causal relationship” (ibid., 2007: 102); that is, we are explaining the effects of schooling across a quite homogenous population of cases (age). We will also provide some discussion related to the precision of our results. We wish to identify typical characteristics of the effects of the two education programmes by emphasizing common and outstanding phenomena. At the same time we try to eliminate trivial and incidental “data”. We use the case studies of our research project as a substitute for experimentation with the intention of testing hypotheses because the conditions that supposedly gave rise to the phenomena or situations being studied are absent.

Since we build our research on deduction, we start the analytical work at the level of concrete statements and move to higher level of abstractions. Here, we categorize our data according to what we see as either specific or common to what students expressed as their experiences (Mouton & Marais 1990: 137). This allows for later comparison between the effects of VET or academic upper secondary education. The suggested research strategy enables us to make statements about ideal-type effects of upper secondary education programmes (VET & academic track).

3.1 Researching different school cultures
To understand, explain and interpret the outcomes of our study it is crucial to realize that there is a basic difference between upper secondary school types in Norway (VET vs. acad. track). Previous research has shown that cross-school similarities (i.e. school culture, what they value, and procedures) are significant features to schools. Hence, our ontological starting point builds on the idea that it is possible to identify single schools as education landscapes. Any education landscape is described by its own
topology, defined by a school’s input dimension (who and where), process dimension (what and how) and outcome dimension (output, benefits, capabilities) (Werler 2011: 167). Consequently, researchers have to consider these typologies when attempting to explain meso-social phenomena.

3.2 Operationalization of research question
It is a well-known fact that operationalization and empirical use of CA make for a demanding exercise (Lessmann 2012; Robeyns 2003, 2008). Capabilities and functionings available to a student cannot be observed directly (Sen 1985). One of the biggest challenges to the CA is to select and determine which capabilities are relevant to study. There has been a debate among researchers about whether studies should concentrate on functionings, capabilities, or both (Lessmann 2012).

Our starting point is a critique of neoliberal educational policy. This implies that our research is based on questions regarding the opportunity aspect of capabilities. To be clear, we do not wish to simply evaluate functionings (e.g. grades or achievements). Based on the debate about capability lists (e.g. Burchardt & Vizard 2011), it seems reasonable to evaluate capabilities students need “to undertake valued and valuable activities” (Unterhalter 2003: 219). A deductive research strategy of this kind gives voices to students, shows sensitivity to the current context, and is non-reductionist.

Having said that, we have to look for students’ real opportunities and options they claim to have for attaining certain educational achievements (Unterhalter 2009: 217-8). Since many of the basic needs are covered in modern Norway it seems fruitful to follow the selection strategy for research criteria proposed by Robeyns (2003: 70-71).

It has also been pointed out that functionings and capabilities vary with gender, ethnicity and class affiliation (Fukuda-Parr 2003). When transforming CA into an object of practical value we have chosen to ignore matters of student heterogeneity because Norway is characterized by a strong egalitarian mind-set.

One the key aspects of CA is individual liberation, and thus also the students’ own values and the reasons they have for making the choices they do. Our research task was to analyze what students themselves express as important and valuable. This is done
in order to see what inhibits or promotes capability expansion among students. Accordingly, the paper aims to answer the question of what students express as important and valuable. We have operationalized the research problem by identifying three sub-questions:

- **a) What do students enrolled in upper secondary education programmes (VET & academic track) express as being valuable?**

- **b) What do these students think they are good for? What do they express that they can actually do?**

### 3.3 Asking for capabilities

Based on the above argument we developed a deductive interview guide using a bottom-up approach. Four categories have primarily been used in developing the guide.

#### 3.3.1 Capability for democratic citizenship and student voice

The most distinctive purpose of education (schooling) is the development of democratic citizenship and the development of student voice. Both Nussbaum and Sen argue that both conditions are critical for capability expansion (Nussbaum, 2006, 2010; Sen, 1999). Only if the school succeeds in the formation these qualities will students be able to take active part in their own lives and educational processes. Students therefore have to learn to evaluate themselves, learn to make sound choices and learn to make critical judgements independent of traditions, habits or teachers (or any other authorities). In accordance with the Norwegian school law the school has to facilitate for student responsibility and give them a voice (§1-1). As others have pointed out (Malkenes 2014, Imsen & Volckmar 2014) these objectives seem to be put at risk by current school policies’ emphasis on instrumental and factual knowledge. Even though we are aware of the value of these features we think it is important to stress that education has to allow for the good life lived by active, free, independent and participating citizens. We have therefore chosen to understand how students experience their freedom to choose their education, their career and a life they have
reasons to value. In other words, we wish to learn about their opportunities and abilities to make reflected choices regarding future education, work and life.

It is important to underline that we do not highlight individual choices based on the ontological individualism promoted by neo-liberal ideology. Instead, our approach to individual choices is rooted in ethical individualism. According to this perspective “individuals, and only individuals are units of moral concern” (Robeyns 2005: 107). This ontological point of view acknowledges students’ heterogeneity as being a fundamental premise for educational success (Werler 2011). We understand the unfolding of the individual life of any human being as having unique value and therefore as the ultimate purpose of educational activities. Therefore, the value of the life of a human being can never be seen as a measure to improve a school’s ranking (Seland, Vibe Hovdhaugen 2013), economic growth (Hanushek & Wößmann 2007) or human capital (Mincer. 1984). Capability for democratic citizenship and having a voice as a student takes as its point of departure the recognition of plurality and diversity as students’ own expressions of what they value and experience as meaningful for their lives (Walker 2005). Consequently, choice of education, work or life cannot be tied to the choice of a commodity. However, it is possible to imagine “a society that does well in creating context for choice in many areas but does not educate its citizens or nourish the development of their powers of mind” (Nussbaum 2011: 22). For the sphere of education, it is not necessarily of primary importance to be able to choose between many resources (e.g. between private or public schools). On the contrary, what is important is emancipation and education/self-cultivation (Bildung) that enables students to convert resources into capabilities for the good life (for themselves as well as for others).

On this background, we asked students about the choices regarding education and work they have faced throughout their life. Moreover, we were interested in whether they have ever considered changing school or programme, or quit school altogether. In order to learn more about their ideas about the future we talked about their plans for further education or work-life. Finally, we talked about what they value as a good and meaningful life and to what extent they experience that they can control their own lives.
Capability for democratic citizenship and student voice is not only a matter of development of critical thinking and introspection. Those capabilities concern students’ abilities to see themselves as members of the local community, workplace or school. To know that one is part of humankind, showing respect for otherness, and taking part in deliberative processes are important elements. Based on these observations we talked to students about their worldviews, their developing political awareness, participation in society, as well as about their own power to change (agency).

Sen (1999: 19) argues that agency implies “[...] someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements are to be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well”. In line with this perspective we discussed with students how they follow the news and how they keep themselves updated about the world around them. In more detail, we touched upon topics like the European refugee crisis, the economic crisis, as well as the rising unemployment rate in Norway. In order to see how they think about their own responsibility and agency for their lives we talked about current Norwegian politics, but also about how they express their ideas and opinions.

3.3.2 Capabilities for education
According to Nussbaum (2011), the purpose of schooling is to educate students to be capable of leading their lives, to be aware of the society they live in, and to develop the capacity to critically evaluate their society. Robeyns argues that education makes people knowledgeable, helps people to flourish, and supports the expansion of other capabilities (Robeyns 2005:12). Alkire discusses how education helps students develop their personalities (Alkire 2004). In other words, just as education capacitates students for their futures, it develops their potential to transform resources into capability sets (Otto & Ziegler 2006).

Here, we follow Noddings’s (2013) warning against mixing the purposes of education and the measures of education. We recognize that students’ individual performances, their abilities, as well as their knowledge, are measures that will be used to achieve
social positions. We also argue that allocation of resources to the institutions of education will not inevitably serve the purpose of education as defined above.

Following Nussbaum (2000), this perspective on the purposes of education does not value cognitive functions or (measurable) domains of knowledge. Practically speaking, a broader understanding of education in accordance with CA-focused research processes will include students’ experiences of their knowledge and their abilities; how they experience recognition of their choices; how they aspire for the future and how they imagine their futures will be. The capability perspective also compels us to ask whether students are allowed to reflect on and decide what is meaningful/valuable for themselves as students (Sen 1992: 81).

Based on these reflections we talked with the students about how they experience their education. The conversations included topics such as experiences of performance pressure, satisfaction with their own school performance and how they assess their future developmental possibilities. Furthermore, we discussed with the students their everyday life at school and how they experience recognition from peers, teachers or parents (family). These topics are of great relevance for those students enrolled in VET since these programmes are associated with low status and school drop-out.

Transitions from lower secondary school to upper secondary school as well as from upper secondary school to work life or further education involves many choices. Choosing a future does not only mean that students have to imagine that future; they also have to take active part, to aspire, in deciding about their own futures. We searched for insights into students’ understandings connected to situations of choice, and talked with them about situations of choice, life plans for education and work-life as well as their ideas about what constitutes a good life.

### 3.3.3. Capability for work

A major Norwegian education policy paper states that the school has to prepare students for work and life-long learning (St. meld, no. 30, Kultur for læring). Social integration and work for all have been the main aims of publicly communicated welfare politics (Slagstad 2001). Even if the employment rate is high compared to other
countries, there is a significant rate of drop-out from school and work-life in certain youth groups. A consequence of this development is increased marginalization of those dependent on public support (Hernes 2010). The neo-liberal policy focus on employability, competition and human capital may be an obstacle to creating equal chances for students and lead to social marginalization and establishment of a group of “working poor” (Ziegler & Rosendal Jensen 2015). Additionally, we see, based on Norwegian data on choice of professional preparation, that students choose their education based on gender-related stereotypes, school results, parents’ educational level and parents’ socio-economic status (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2011, Ekren 2014). A recent study from the OECD (2014) points out that Norway is characterized by declining social mobility.

In our investigation we do not deny the importance and relevance of the individual student’s school results when it comes to achieving a stable income and economic security. But focusing on “individual employability without providing the conditions for making meaningful employment available boils down to creating a modern and well-educated version of Marx’s reserve army” (Bonvin & Farvacue 2006: 132). The above-mentioned investigations say little about students’ capability development. Therefore, it is relevant to ask how students develop and whether they experience having access to equal rights and opportunities.

Based on these framework observations we talked with students about work and work-life. Among other things, we were interested in how they experience school as helping them prepare for work-life and the relationship between school and work. Students enrolled in VET programmes have been asked for their experiences of work-life. Additionally, we asked them about their views on future occupations and if they consider it likely that they will change their professional career.

By raising these issues, we tried to investigate how students are thinking about the world of work. Did they see work from a utilitarian point of view, or did they see it in terms of quality of life? Further, we tried to gain insight into their abilities to imagine a certain future, how they experience situations of choice and decision-making. In other words, we tried, by raising these issues, to assess students’ transformative potentials for freedom and emancipation.
3.3.4 Capabilities for cooperation and relation

Capabilities for democratic citizenship, education and work are dependent on the individual’s discursive and social competencies. As such, these competencies are closely linked to people’s relationships as well as to their ability to cooperate with other people in a society. CA emphasizes people’s attitudes, values and wishes. Therefore it was suggested to value a single persons live as well as the persons as a basic objective (Nussbaum 2000: 5). We believe that this point of view does not open up for radical individualism or subjectivism. Here we follow Sen, who argues that individual development and self-realization are bound to personal development and development of identity in dependence on relations to others. This means that a person’s quality of life and richness of life are dependent on other persons and the person’s engagement with other people. In fact, Nussbaum points to the Aristotelian concept of Eudaimonia (2011), and mentions that achieving the good life is linked to cooperation with other people. Both Sen and Nussbaum argue for the usefulness of people’s heterogeneity when it comes to cooperation. People’s heterogeneity get observable when people interact with each other since interaction and communication are based on comparisons with other people’s understanding of information, actions etc. In addition, Nussbaum attaches great importance to affiliation.

Based on these observations, we can argue that it is important to understand how students establish and show respect for and recognition of each other. We talked with them about their experiences of friendship and cooperation with others in a school setting. We were also interested in their social support, their experiences with bullying and their well-being. In order to get a broader picture of the students’ life-world we talked with them about their leisure time and leisure time activities. Such information will provide valuable insights into students’ understanding of their out-of-school life.

4 Data & Method

The data set consists of 31 semi-structured pre-categorized interviews with students enrolled in different upper secondary schools in Western Norway (VET, n: 18; ACAD, n: 13). They represent typical schools and have an average size of 400-800 students. The high number VET-programs suggests a higher number of interview partners
compared to those enrolled in academic-track. We used a comparative case design where we compare students from different schools and different programs. Tarrow (2010: 244) argues that such pairwise comparison bears similarities with an experimental design, in that both insulate some factors in order to better study how a single variable or mechanism affects the dependent variable. We gathered interview data on capabilities the pupils themselves expressed as important and valuable. However, we did not follow indicators of achievement and success that are set out in policy documents or via stakeholders. The interviews were conducted in spring 2016. Interview transcripts were subsequently prepared.

Qualitative content analysis and deductive analysis
In the analytical work, qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2014) was applied for all the national sub-projects. Qualitative content analysis (QCA) is a procedure for systematically text analysis. Applying QCA means interpreting texts governed by a compelling order to evaluate (ibid.). The basic idea of qualitative content analysis is to systematically analyze texts by processing the empirical material gradually in light of a guiding theory (here: CA). As such, the resulting category system is based on both theory and empirical material (ibid.). Applying QCA means looking for themes, meanings and context to build a picture of students’ “emplaced everyday experiences”, as well as to gain insight into how they “understand and frame [such] experiences” (Wiles et al 2005: 97–98).

In our case, the design builds on transcripts in order to identify categories of meaning. The category system, which contains categories, subcategories, category definitions and anchor examples, represents the latent meaning of the analyzed material. This system functions as a starting point for the interpretation of the text, and is the heart of the analysis.

According to Mayring the research team has chosen deductive category building (see above CA categories 1-4). Those categories are constructed a priori (Mayring 2015). Furthermore, text interpretation, and thus answering the question, is done based on the category system. Thus, the category determines the text analysis (Lamnek & Krell, 2010). Following the tradition of QCA three analytical steps are particularly important.
(Mayring 2014). Here, the research team developed (and piloted) a semi-structured interview guide that was mainly informed by insights from the CA research.

First, the empirical material is always understood as relating to a particular context of communication. In our case, this is the local school context, the school’s embeddedness in its space and place. Second, the analytical work followed a systematic procedure oriented towards rules for coding text that were defined in advance. All researchers applied those rules, which means that it was basically decided in advance how the transcripts were to be approached, which parts were to be analyzed and in what sequence, and what conditions must be obtained in order for an encoding to be carried out. The researchers focused mainly (for the purpose of this paper) on the capabilities for democratic citizenship and the student voice.

Informed by Mayring (2014) a clear meaning component analysis was chosen as the coding unit in the first cycle of the coding process (the entire material). Since the text of the empirical material consisted of interview transcripts, we used word groups or statements that could consist of several coherent sentences as coding units. Therefore, the category of capabilities for democratic citizenship and student voice was developed to capture what the students perceived as being valuable. As a coding rule for the material, we decided that students had to make statements about their choices, and consequences of these choices, concerning the educational programmes.
PART II

In our interviews we talked with students about their experiences regarding the two yearlong education and work training they have faced at upper secondary school. Students had the opportunity to talk quite freely about issues/topics they considered important to them. We were especially interested in whether they had ever thought about dropping out of school or considered making major changes. In short, we wished to listen to the voices, thoughts and ideas of the students regarding a choice they are confronted with only once in their lifetime, a choice that might have major impacts on their future lives.

In the following, we present, discuss and analyze examples from the “thickened” empirical material. This is done in order to illustrate the richness of the empirical material as well as to show how we were working.

In our empirical material, we find several dimensions related to what students told us about the consequences of their choice of an educational career (B2). Based on the QCA-concept we are able to identify some major topics, including students’ general experiences about the schools they are attending, the teachers, classmates as well as the place and space for learning. The following sections present material related to the first topic, the school.

Schools

Over the course of the last three decades upper secondary schools in Norway have become an important space and place for both living and learning. School is part of students’ daily life-world. The organization of upper secondary schools generates a specific form of learning, which is determined by trained staff, age groups, the school’s placement in time and space or by certain procedures for social and performance control. The modes of teaching and learning reflect political tendencies in a society, cultural values and demands or relationships between generations. In our material, we
find that students identify schools as being formed by *structures of expectations*, a certain *concept of knowledge and learning*, as well as the students view on *school qualities*. We will first present the thickened empirical material regarding schools’ structures of expectations regulating student life at school. Second, we show examples of analytical subcategories (subordination and freedom; discipline and punishment).

**Schools’ structures of expectations (towards student actions)**

Every public school (as well as private ones) is a collective endeavour to try to solve the problem of education. As social institutions, schools are characterized by their functional and intellectual diversity. In order to coordinate and administer activities at schools, shared understandings are necessary. The formulation and communication of expectations will promote cooperative behaviour. Formulating expectations for students tells them something about their future and its uncertainties; in other words, the school’s expectations for its students tells them something about what is regarded as valuable for and useful to mastering their futures. Schools’ expectations towards students’ behavior and requirements and performance are regarded as the basis for all activities involving students. Even if expectations do not seem to have the power to generate actions, they are constructed to link individual student actions with the schools’ societal tasks. Additionally, based on the schools’ expectations, students will, as Parsons and Shils outlined (1951: 68), develop an orientation to the future as well as to the present. The expectations a school put on its students (as a corporative organization) can be characterized as structures of expectations (Midtsundstad & Langfeld, forthcoming). Such structures are social actions guiding the development of student’s goals. A school’s structures of expectations are formed by how teachers ‘regard their students’, their ‘attitude’ as professionals, how they ‘communicate,’ and thus how this instructional practice influences the expectations related to the ‘student’s role’ (Schoen & Teddlie 2008). However, students learn about the school’s expectations for them mainly through their teachers’ work.

First, teachers **demand from their students self-discipline and discipline in the classroom**. One informant commented that “everybody has been young at some point, and everyone knows that it is difficult to have a job and get up early” *(Alle har vært ungdom i sin tid og alle vet at det er slitsomt å gå på jobb og stå opp tidlig)*.
Obviously, the informant points out the expectation to be on time. Others commented on the routines teachers have established related to instances of students interrupting the teaching: “if we just make a tiny noise, he (the teacher) will stand in silence for several minutes” (bare vi lager en liten lyd står han stille i gjerne fire minutter). Others experience punishment and censure as means to convey to the students the importance of following rules: “you get punished” (man blir straffet). Students feel too “that they get a bad remark” (at man får anmerkning). Other expectations are directed towards pressure to perform, efficiency and taking responsibility. As already indicated, students feel significant pressure to perform well. An informant comments that he “thinks that there are too many demands and expectations” (syns det er litt mye krav og forventinger). Other typical comments – underlining performance expectations – are: “I think that there are too many demands in school,” (Jeg tenker at på skolen er det litt for mye krav) or “here they expect that one is able to” (Her forventer de at man kan). Those comments were supplemented by comments related to experiences of having much to learn in a limited time (”De forventer veldig mye på kort tid”). In addition teachers demand efficiency from their students: “he – the teacher - says we should be more efficient” (han mener vi skal være sånn effektiv, han læreren). Finally, students express that teachers expect them to be able to assume responsibility: “When you're at school you're more independent, you need to take more responsibility” (Når du er på videregående er du mer selvstendig, du må ta mer ansvar). As we will see, this is a recurring theme.

Subordination and freedom: student liberation at risk?
As the presented excerpts from the interviews demonstrates, students experience several forms of pressure. First, we saw that students are experiencing considerable academic pressure and demands related to performance. They also experience pressure in relation to having to develop self-discipline and responsibility for their own learning. These findings apply to both VET- and academic track students.

One central finding is that students think that there is a social requirement to seek upper secondary education, and that they have no option but to submit to the education system. As one of the students put it: “Everyone has to go through it .... That’s just how it works.” The quote reveals that students have internalized an
instrumental approach to education. Since capabilities can be considered to be the “substantive freedom a person has to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value” (Sen 1999: 87), we think that the experience of being forced to attend school beyond compulsory school will not promote students’ capability expansion.

Students experience being forced to undergo a professional development they themselves initially selected. Nevertheless, in reality, they do not know what will happen to them in upper secondary education. Later when they are socialized with a schools culture they find out that the curriculum content (subject matter) is defined by stakeholders (business and industry; universities) and they have little opportunities to realize their interests. Further, they discover that the pressure based on the schools’ individual structures of expectation are not what they imagined when they initially chose to attend upper secondary education. Many students report that they like some academic content/advanced subject-specific training, yet they also point out that the pressure to perform leads to the exact opposite. In short, students have an academic and professional interest in the subject matter and motivation to study it in the first place, but do not experience that the school supports them in developing their abilities and strengths in the academic or professional fields.

If education is to promote students’ liberation and quality of life (Nussbaum 1997), it must be based on students’ active, reflective and genuine choices. It is therefore not sufficient, as the Norwegian welfare state through R94 has done, to establish equal access to upper secondary education for all students. Schools must also ensure that students can convert social benefits and resources (such as the right to education) to capabilities and potential functionings in areas like quality of life, human development and the good life (Sen 1979, 1999).

**Discipline and punishment: sedated classrooms**

Our informants raised the issue of discipline and punishment in school. This issue has, as Cumming writes, been relevant as long as schools have existed. In Cumming’s words “the pupil has appeared as a subject who must acquire a certain knowledge, perform certain actions and obey certain rules of life” (Cumming 1969). In other words, the price of any form of discipline is that the subject matter (the content of the teaching),
the teacher or the students are subjected to an unchangeable order. As the interviews reveal, the students seem to be subjected to authoritarian, teacher- or school-driven forms of discipline. The students’ narratives are ones in which control is achieved by enforcing obedience or order. Based on recent debates about lack of discipline and poor learning results in Norwegian classrooms (Simonsen 2009; Overland & Nordahl 2013) teachers seem to apply recommended authoritarian measures to stimulate students’ learning. This involves sanctioning measures (as identified by the students) which are very similar to the ones Cumming (1969) identified. Among other measures Cumming mentioned “the withdrawing or denying of privileges, [...] or learning by heart [...] the giving of bad marks, putting the child in a lower place in class, the use of a dunce’s seat or cap, reprimands and mockery in front of other pupils” (Cumming 1969: 368) as measures to make students obedient.

Furthermore, students reported measures introduced to create “sedated” classrooms. They described classrooms where students listen quietly to teachers talking, are silent, are present when the teacher asks and “receive” knowledge. In the light of the ambitions of the school law and the outlined problems regarding upper secondary schooling it is to some degree surprising that students do not at all report classroom work based on discussion and debates or other active and involving teaching methods such as partner or group work. However, these kinds of tasks are what students demand. Finally, we find student descriptions of classrooms that are characterized by non-activating teaching and learning processes. Noisy activities, which have the potential to activate even “inactive (silent?)” students, are not mentioned.

The notion of independent learning or the creation of the emancipated learners has become a mantra-like formula in Norwegian upper secondary schooling. Our respondents revealed this by pointing to the formulaic “responsibility for own learning”. Independent learners have the capacity to construct their being in a learning situation. Obviously, in our case norms work by disciplining students so that they become dependent learners. They are in need of more time allocated to certain topics, they are in need of detailed information, reassurance, feedback or specific interpretations of what is needed to achieve certain grades.
Bernstein urges us to be aware that “normalising processes produce norms and their agencies, which are rarely free of the contradictions, cleavages, and dilemmas they are set up to control” (Bernstein 1990: 159). Accordingly, sedating students never works as an activating way of schooling. However, we see that the disciplinary practice in Norwegian upper secondary schools “operates as part of an efficiency model and it can be easily captured to support a managerialist agenda” (Scott 2016: 75).

Authoritarian discipline was used in Norway and other countries for a long time, and it does not lead to active and participating students/human beings. Even if obedience is both pedagogically and socially undesirable, sedated classrooms are a reality in upper secondary education in Norway.

With regard to disciplinary actions, we have learned that students do not have a real say in defining the subject matter, student evaluations, teaching and learning. Moreover, we do not find emancipatory measures to help students become independent learners. The multifaceted experiences of authoritarian discipline inhibit students’ possibilities to convert resources into capabilities for a good life. We understand that what they value and experience as meaningful for their lives (Walker 2005) plays no role in the sedated classroom. On the subject of performance we can argue that students are treated as if they have chosen a commodity. Such approaches to upper secondary schooling might lead to a context in which it will be difficult for students to develop agency.

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