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## **CULTURAL CAPITAL, EQUALITY AND DIVERSIFYING EDUCATION**

### **1. Introduction**

The aim of the chapter is to analyse the significance of cultural capital with regard to the social inheritance of education in the context of diversifying education. We are striving to give a holistic picture of the state of justice and equality of education in the Finnish educational system and policy. This task will be approached by analysing the mechanisms of educational selection at different educational levels, from primary to higher education, from the point of view of recent changes in Finnish educational policy practices<sup>1</sup>. Our empirical examples focus mainly on the importance of the *institutionalised form of cultural capital*, referring to the institutions which provide the credentials that signal attainment in the dominant culture, the school system chief among them.

In recent years Nordic educational policies including Finnish educational policies have gone through remarkable changes compared to the old historical tradition emphasising the equality of educational opportunities as the backbone of the whole educational system. Traditional Nordic models of welfare and educational policy have been reconstructed and influenced by neo-liberal educational policies and pressures from supranational organisations such as the World Bank, the OECD and the EU. At the core of these changes has been a reconceptualisation of equality in education, which has manifested itself, for example, in the mechanisms of ‘free parental school choice’ as well as in the formation of ‘the educational

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<sup>1</sup> While we are conscious of the fact that early childhood education has also been strongly affected by neo-liberal welfare and educational policies, we leave it outside our examination due to the limited space of the chapter.

markets'. The reforms whose origins lie in the global neo-liberal turn have not only changed the institutional context of education but have also reduced the equality of educational opportunities and outcomes. (Rinne, 2014.)

The article begins with an examination of the origins of the concept of 'cultural capital' informed by Pierre Bourdieu, after which educational selection on different educational levels in Finland will be analysed. The significance of cultural capital with regard to the social reproduction and social inheritance of education will be examined by considering the recent changes in 'the field', i.e. the changes both in policy practices and institutional arrangements in primary, upper secondary, and higher education in Finland. Special attention will be paid to the free school choice policy as well as the selection into and diversification within upper secondary and higher education. Finally, this chapter will provide a theoretical interpretation regarding the utility of the concept of 'cultural capital' in understanding the mechanisms of the social inheritance of education in the contemporary policy of the Nordic countries in general, and Finland in particular.

## **2. Cultural Capital and Social Reproduction**

Bourdieu employed the concept of cultural capital in order to explain the higher success rates of children of educated parents. These children succeed better in school, due not only to the support they receive from their parents, but also as a result of intimate familiarity with high culture, such as the fine arts and classical music. (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacqant, 1992; see also Prieur, Rosenlund & Skjott-Larsen, 2008.) Home practices such as verbally stimulating conversations, reading sessions, educationally relevant resources (books and magazines) and parental warmth have a substantial positive impact on academic achievement. (Kingston, 2001.)

The concept of cultural capital has become one of the most popular objects of analysis in the field, and has been thoroughly examined by sociologists of education. Bourdieu's concept is an attempt to expand the idea of capital to measure more than just economic capital, and to identify culture as a form of that more general category (Reay, 2004, 2012). In Bourdieu's own work, the concept of cultural capital was used prominently in research on education, consumption and taste (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984). In all economically advanced countries, schools play a crucial and growing role in social reproduction, the process through which status and class positions as well as educational advantages are transmitted across generations. Therefore, any comprehensive assessment of the concept of cultural capital must necessarily come to grips with its role in education. (Lareau & Weininger, 2003.)

Bourdieu (1986) divides cultural capital into three forms: **embodied, objectified and institutionalised cultural capital**. *Embodied cultural capital* denotes the ability to appreciate and understand cultural goods, which are 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' (Bourdieu 1986, 243). This process of embodiment (culture, cultivation) takes time and requires personal investment on the part of the investor. Bourdieu refers to this embodied capital as external wealth – an integral part of the 'habitus', which cannot be transmitted or exchanged. It can be seen more as a form of symbolic capital, unrecognised as capital and instead acknowledged as legitimate competence. Any certain competence produces profits of distinction for its owner. It is also strongly related to social reproduction and, according to Bourdieu, the most powerful principle of the symbolic efficacy of cultural capital is the logic of transmission to the offspring – 'the arrow effect', as Bourdieu calls it. The accumulation of cultural capital covers the whole period of socialisation. As Bourdieu (1986, 246) states: "[...]the length of time for which a given individual can prolong his acquisition process depends on the length of time for which his family can provide him with the free time, i.e.

time free from economic necessity, which is the precondition for the initial accumulation [...].”

Embodied capital is linked to *objectified capital*, which refers to cultural objects such as paintings, writings, instruments, and so on, which require special skills and knowledge to be appreciated and are transmissible in their materiality. By way of an example, Bourdieu states that if one wants to possess machines, he only needs economic capital. But in order to use them appropriately, he must have access to embodied cultural capital as a person or through an intermediary. One can think this *objectified capital* to the extent of their *embodied capital*. Objectified capital needs embodied capital in order to be appropriated properly. It is also a matter of power and authority, because deriving profit from one's own cultural capital by selling services is justified among dominated groups. According to Bourdieu (1986, 247), “if it is emphasized that they are not the possessors (in the strictly economic sense) of the means of production which they use, and that they derive profit from their own cultural capital only by selling the services and products which make it possible, then they will be classified among the dominated groups; if it is emphasized that they draw their profits from the use of a particular form of capital, then they will be classified among the dominant groups.” (Bourdieu 1986.)

In this chapter we are mainly focusing on *institutionalised capital* that refers to societal institutions, here the school system, which provide the credentials that signal attainment in the dominant culture. The institutional recognition of cultural capital makes it possible to compare academic qualifications and even exchange them. More importantly, “[...] it makes it possible to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital” (Bourdieu 1986, 248). These qualifications of monetary value can be exchanged in the labour market, and the markets are

governed by changes in the structure of the chances of profit offered by the different types of capital. (Bourdieu, 1986.)

Bourdieu also emphasised that despite the great regard that schools may have for high levels of cultural capital among their students, the institutions themselves do not usually provide this form of capital; rather, it is typically transmitted through the students' families. Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) conceived the system of education as an ensemble of institutions and practices which legitimate and reproduce the cultural significances of the dominant class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, 194–210). Bourdieu argued that schools are not the great equalisers, but rather help to reaffirm and reproduce social class and privilege by valuing the preferences, behaviours and attitudes of the dominant class over those of the non-dominant groups. Cultural capital thus contributes to social inequality and helps to reproduce social stratification across generations. The dominant groups are able to maintain their hold on rewards and benefits by minimising access to cultural capital for members of the lower and working classes, while maximising access for their own members. Several studies of social reproduction, e.g. the child's inheritance of the parent's social class, have shown a positive association between the educational success of parents and that of their children. The theory argues that the culture of the dominant class is transmitted and rewarded by the educational system. In order to acquire cultural capital, a student must have the ability to receive and internalise it. The acquisition of cultural capital and consequent access to academic rewards depend on the cultural capital passed down by the family, which is largely dependent on social class. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Dumais, 2002; van de Werfhorst & Hofstede, 2007; Hampden-Thompson, Guzman & Lippman, 2008.)

### **3. Global Educational Policies Capturing Finnish National Education Policies**

A global neo-liberal ethos present in educational policy has altered the field of education in a way which has stressed the importance of cultural capital in coping with new educational demands. It is important to note, however, that globalisation is not only the consequence of economic internationalisation and technological development, driven by some ‘natural forces’, but also the result of the conscious political decisions of people. In fact, little or nothing can be explained in terms of the causal powers of globalisation, but by processes that involve real economic and political actors with real interests. (Robertson, Xavier & Dale, 2006, 228; Niukko, 2006, 9; Simola et al. 2013.)

Globalisation is a deeply ideological construct being supported and framed by the neo-liberal agenda. Stephen Ball (2012, 2; cf. Lingard, 2009, 18) has denominated such global policy transformation in education the ‘neo-liberal imaginary’ and in the discussions of the ‘end on state education’ on its welfare forms. Over the past thirty years, we have witnessed neo-liberal globalisation, an ideology which promotes markets over the state and regulation, and individual self-interest over the collective good and common well-being. Individuals are deemed responsible for their own ‘self-capitalising’ over their lifetimes and become “*hybrid social subjects, who are spatially mobile, ethically malleable, and able to speak the languages of public, private and philanthropic value*” (Ball, 2012, 29, 145).

Finland is a country of five and a half million inhabitants in the northernmost periphery of Europe (Rinne 2012). Its social, cultural and geopolitical history is strongly linked to Sweden (until 1809), and after that to Russia (until 1917) as a Grand Duchy with its own legislation. Finland’s tradition of governance has been strongly influenced by the old centralised and bureaucratic governance systems of the two neighbouring countries.

Finland has closely exemplified the Nordic welfare and education system. Since independence, Finland has based its cultural and political position upon Nordic neutrality

between the power blocs of the East and the West. Because of good political and commercial relations with the USSR, it was accused of 'Finlandisierung' by Western commentators. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Finland sought membership in the European Union and rapidly strengthened ties to Western Europe. Until the 1990s, Finnish welfare policy was a part of the Nordic 'social democratic' model, which strongly stressed comprehensive social security, strong state control, significant income transfers, full employment and a high level of equality. Educational policy and its principle of equality of educational opportunities were considered one of the most important spearheads in the removal of all types of social inequality.

As a member of the Nordic family, Finland invested heavily and systematically in education. The level of education rose rapidly, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century. Of those born in the early 1960s, only a fifth entered working life with no more than basic education behind them, but among those born in the late 1970s the equivalent share dropped to less than one in ten (Kivinen & Rinne, 1998; Pöntinen, 1990; Antikainen, Rinne & Koski, 2013).

Finland joined the EU with Sweden in 1995 while experiencing significant difficulties due to a deep economic recession. In a rapidly and radically changing political climate, the traditional state-centred approach to welfare policy collided sharply with the more market-driven policies. Finland changed its tack on social and education policy astonishingly fast. The opposition may now look back and criticise the official policies for no longer bowing before the Kremlin commissioners in Moscow, but instead the European Union commissioners in Brussels. This criticism of the new 'Euro-Finlandisierung' argues that small nations like Finland are not fully able to carry out their own independent foreign, domestic or even educational policy (Rinne, 2000).

Finland is easily influenced by its more central and populous fellow Union members. Its former egalitarian policy, designed to safeguard the welfare and equality of all citizens by means of education in the name of social justice and highlighting the bureaucratic elements of the social welfare state guaranteeing safety, has given way in the 1990s and 2000s to a very different set of values and practices. Neo-liberal educational policies are being favoured in the name of competitiveness on the international market – a policy which is inevitably also increasing competition between individuals and schools. (Simola, Rinne & Kivirauma, 1999.) Only very little discussion and political debate arose from the sudden change of the course of educational policy despite the fact that it took place ten years later than in the rest of Europe. However, there were social, political, economic and global reasons for this, not the least of which were the significant diminution of Soviet influence over Finland and the election into government, for the first time in decades, of the right front and the Coalition Party as the prime minister party.

There was also the OECD impact. According to the OECD (2003; Niukko, 2006) Finland became the model pupil (Niukko 2006, 12):

*“Finland has a record of heeding the advice of past OECD education reviews [...] helping to shape the future growth of a dynamic new education sector.”*

The history of worldwide educational policy was already steered by a strong pro-market orientation in the 1980s (Ball 2012; Green 1997; Daun, 1997). Up until that time, changes in educational policy could be observed and understood to a large extent through the internal forces and struggles of nations (Husén & Kogan, 1984; Marklund, 1984; Antikainen, Rinne & Koski, 2013), but from this time forward the national viewpoint has proved to be clearly inadequate (Jauhiainen, Rinne & Tähtinen, 2001; Henry et al., 2001), as argued by the eminent British researcher, Stephen J. Ball (2004)

*“It is no longer possible to look at educational policy purely from the point of view of nation-states because in education it is a question not only of regional but also of global policy-making, and to an ever increasing extent also of international business.”* (pg. 7 – 8).

If national governments lose their grip on education, they will be substituted on the one hand by supranational, more global norms and, on the other hand, by more parochial local norms. This means a change in the basic historical task of nation-states’ education: the transfer and creation of national culture and the renewal of the national work force. Some scholars have warned that the role of education as the main means of social renewal and national integration is under threat of disappearing (Usher & Edwards, 1994). The most extreme visionaries are even asking whether the existence of national education is coming to an end (see Green, 1997, 3, 130; also Brown, Green & Lauder, 2001; Brown & Lauder, 2001; Rinne, Carrasco & Flores, in press).

As Roger Dale (2009, 40) elegantly writes concerning the Nordic countries and Finland:

*“In post-war social democracy it was assumed that education could contribute most effectively by expanding equality of opportunity by bureaucratic administration of access and availability; this often took the form of comprehensive schools, for instance. By contrast, in the 1980s and 1990s, the idea was that education could best contribute to the wider social project of expanding wealth through markets, by making education and schools behave themselves in market-like ways.”*

The limits and possibilities of nation-states to pursue their own traditional national education policies have changed dramatically during the past decades. The trends of internationalisation and globalisation have had an unavoidable role in steering and guiding the decisions of national policymakers and the direction of national education policies. Organisations such as

the OECD and the EU, the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO have also become increasingly interested in educational policy and human capital (Rinne & Ozga 2011).

Educational policy promoting free parental school choice has, since the 1980s, been a central part of the global restructuring of public education. It has been justified as a means to give the parents more freedom to use their cultural capital, already at the comprehensive education level, in choosing a school that better corresponds with their child's predispositions and wishes. The new policy has encouraged and promoted the early selection of children from different backgrounds into different educational tracks. The new policy also encourages schools to specialise in their particular areas of strength, and to differentiate themselves by stressing their distinctive features. Even in countries with a strong tradition of policy for educational equality, school choice is justified and top schools of 'excellence' can be created.

In the new global market-oriented society we may list some central features of the new supranational mainstream practices and technologies of educational politics at primary and lower secondary school level, such as: strong marketisation, consumer and parental choice, national testing systems, league tables and ranking lists, a growing inspection and monitoring system, a large sector of independent schools, high local accountability including intelligent accountability, large assessment enterprises, the administration of control, sanctions and rewards on the basis of collected assessment data and, finally, striving for individualisation and excellence. (Rinne, 2001; Maroy, 2008, 17–20; Power & Frandji, 2010, 385–386; Ozga et al., 2011, 124–125; Rinne & Ozga, 2011; Simola et al. 2013.)

These principles guiding the arrangement of basic education through market mechanisms have been applied for the longest time and on the largest scale especially in Chile, the USA, England, Australia and New Zealand, but also increasingly in non-Anglo-Saxon countries, for example in Estonia and some Nordic countries, especially Sweden. These policies have

strengthened a socially segregated school system, since parents' education, professional position and wealth affect which school their child ends up attending (e.g. Lauder et al., 1999; Thrupp, 2005; Bunar, 2010; Waslander, Pater & van der Weide, 2010; Seppänen & Rinne, in press.)

Unlike many other countries, the free school choice policy arrived in Finland solely within the public school system in the 1990s (Seppänen, 2003a; 2003b), emphasising electiveness and criticising the welfare state: basic education should be based on individuals and the balance between equality and the freedom to choose (Bowe, Ball & Gewirtz, 1994). School choice was added in small increments to the Finnish basic education system and is connected to the middle class's persistent search for advantages gained through education (Thrupp, 2007). In Finland, the start of the school choice policy in the early 1990s coincided with financial recession, widespread unemployment and a growing middle class (see e.g. Rinne, 2000; 2003). It was also connected with increased discussion in the late 1980s about equal opportunity and talent in basic education (Rinne & Vuorio-Lehti, 1996, 113–119). This coincided with the National Coalition Party's win in the 1987 election after 21 years in opposition. (Seppänen & Rinne in press.)

Finland still has an exceptional basic education system which is government funded and free of charge for families, including teaching supplies and school meals. The state and municipalities administer, govern and steer all basic education provided in Finland. Schools are not allowed to financially profit from their operation. The state regulates the central goals, content and distribution of teaching time for different subjects as well as the basic principles of student admission.

Whilst increasing marketisation is a reality in Finland today, it is not as extensive as in other countries, including Sweden. There are no national testing systems, no public league tables

and almost no private or independent schools. Finland has neither a growing inspection and monitoring system nor high local accountability. There are no large assessment enterprises nor control, sanctions or rewards on the basis of collected assessment data. However, there is stronger competition between schools for pupils, a desire for individualisation and excellence, as well as a strongly growing and freshly legitimised parental school choice system – three factors which form the basic core of the new Finnish neo-liberal education policy and new educational markets. The advance in Finland of the global travelling policy of strong marketisation was suddenly hindered by the surprising results obtained by the OECD's PISA study since 2000, showing that the Finnish comprehensive educational system produced top results in world rankings. The PISA results slowed the flow of neo-liberal educational ideas and mechanisms to Finland and made possible a return to Finnish educational policy tradition that focussed on equality of educational opportunities rather than competition and high-stakes testing.

The new Basic Education Act (L 628/1998) was passed in 1999, just before the first PISA results. The Act officially recognised and legitimised parental choice and school choice policy, stating that parents can apply for specific schools also outside their school districts and that schools can select their pupils based on specialisation and even tests (Seppänen, 2006, 10).

#### **4. The Social Inheritance of Education in Finland at the Beginning of the 21st Century**

##### *Families' cultural capital and parental choice in comprehensive education*

Recent changes in Finnish educational policy practices have altered the mechanisms of educational selection, a phenomenon which manifests itself differently at different levels of

education. This, in turn, has strengthened the importance of cultural capital in making ‘the right choices’ when navigating through different stages of the educational system. The change in this respect has been especially significant in comprehensive education. Since the long tradition of a child’s school place is determined by the municipality, and is dependent upon his or her place of residence, ended as a result of the Basic Education Act (L 628/1998); families have had the chance to apply for another school besides the one in their own neighbourhood, assigned by the city or municipality (neighbourhood allocation). The Finnish comprehensive education system consists of two levels: primary school (grades 1–6, pupils aged 7 to 12) and lower secondary school (grades 7–9, ages 13 to 15). School choices are usually made in the context of the transition from primary to lower secondary school, although choices are possible in the early years of school (Seppänen, Rinne & Sairanen, 2012).

However, the first official choice all pupils make – whether to pursue the academic or the vocational track of upper secondary education – takes place at the age of 16. Thus the Finnish comprehensive education system is often regarded as free of ability grouping (i.e. streaming, tracking, setting; see also: van Houtte et. al., 2012, 75) (Reay, 2012, 595; Sahlberg, 2007). Nonetheless, there are practices within the system that lead to the grouping of pupils based on pupils’ school performance, even though comprehensive schooling does not officially involve any grouping of pupils into significantly different curriculums for certain subjects or use ability-based grouping. This grouping is carried out using classes with a special emphasis that offer teaching that emphasises a certain school subject (e.g. foreign languages, natural sciences, arts). These classes are allowed to select pupils based on their aptitude in the emphasised subject in question. Furthermore, such ‘tracking’ is connected to families’ cultural capital, i.e. their ability to and interest in making choices regarding schools and the various options offered in specific local contexts. (Berisha & Seppänen, forthcoming.)

School choice policies and their consequences in comprehensive education have been widely studied internationally and to a more limited extent in Finland. The domestic studies have shown that school choice is a forceful mechanism that leads pupils on different kinds of school paths very early on (Seppänen, 2006; Seppänen, Rinne & Sairanen, 2012). Recent research shows that pupil selection is a vast phenomenon in some of the largest Finnish cities due to the existence of classes with a special emphasis (Seppänen et al., in press). The share of school classes that select pupils varies significantly between schools in different cities (Seppänen & Kosunen, in press). In Finland, the municipalities control the geographical catchment areas as well as the profiling of the schools; thus their institutional school choice spaces can differ a lot from each other (Varjo & Kalalahti, 2011). Additionally, the implementation of criteria for pupil selection for the classes with a special emphasis differs greatly depending on the school (Seppänen, Rinne & Sairanen, 2012). Furthermore, the reputations of schools among parents differ greatly between schools and especially between school classes, and hence affect their desirability among parents (Kosunen, 2014; Kosunen & Carrasco, 2014).

In Finland, like elsewhere in Europe and overseas, parents (and, in particular, mothers) with institutionalised cultural capital (university degrees) and a high socioeconomic status, make more school choices compared to other parents (Thrupp, 2005; Seppänen, 2006; van Zanten, in press). According to a recent survey study conducted in five major cities in Finland (Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Tampere and Turku, n=2,617) in 2012, this holds true in the current Finnish urban context. Among the families in which the mother or the father has a university or university postgraduate degree, up to 43 per cent of the children attended a class with a special emphasis, whereas among the lowest educational group the equivalent percentage was only 22 (Table 1., see also Kalalahti et al., in press). A similar trend can be observed in the case of employment – especially among mothers – as well as income. Thus

when looking at the social class of the family, which was formed using the education, employment and income levels of the parents, the statistically significant results continue to support the fact that the families with higher cultural capital have their children attend classes with a special emphasis more often than those with less cultural capital. Among upper-middle-class and upper-class families approximately 40 per cent have made school choices, while among lower-class and lower-middle-class families only a quarter have done the same. Interestingly, it seems that the social class of the family trumps the effects of the child's school performance: even if children from a working-class background excel in school, they are not enrolled in classes with a special emphasis as often as the children with a middle- or upper-class background (Silvennoinen et al., in press).

**Table 4.1** Children attending a class with a special emphasis in relation to the parents' education, employment and income level as well as the family's objective and subjective social class

<TABLE 4.1 HERE>

### ***The significance of cultural capital in upper secondary education***

In the neo-liberal policy environment, there is pressure to organise education according to the hypothetical needs of different client groups. Not only in comprehensive education, but also at the level of upper secondary education, schools are being encouraged to specialise in their own areas of strength. In Finland, this can be most clearly seen in the functions of specialised upper secondary general schools. These schools have received a special mandate from the Finnish Ministry of Education to emphasise particular subjects, such as arts, natural sciences or foreign languages, in their curriculums. In addition, they have the right to set special criteria for student enrolment. (Järvinen, 2003.)

The mushrooming of specialised upper secondary general schools in the 1990s has contributed to the stratification of upper secondary education in Finland. The features of neo-liberal educational policy such as marketisation, the aspiration to excellence, the demand for efficiency and accountability as well as the performance-related allocation of resources have led to a situation where upper secondary schools are also using specialisation as a means to attract students and teachers of a certain kind. As a result, competition both among schools for students and among students for the limited number of places available in schools with a good reputation has increased in Finland during the past couple of decades. This has strengthened the significance of social background in the selection of students to schools with high status and thus emphasised the role of cultural capital in the educational choices and outcomes of young people. According to nationwide studies, the proportion of well-paid, highly educated and upper-middle-class parents is clearly greater among the students studying in the specialised upper secondary general schools than in the population at large, and also compared with the parents of students studying in upper secondary general schools without specialisation. (Järvinen, 2000; 2003.)

The opposite finding emerges when examining the social profile of young people dropping out of upper secondary education. An analysis of the connection between cultural capital, as indicated by parental education and young people's exclusion from education and working life, is an important issue from the point of view of educational equality and social justice. In the current societal situation, those with minimum education have the greatest risk of not only becoming educationally isolated but also socially excluded. The transition from lower to upper secondary education is a critical stage from the point of view of the educational and social exclusion of young people (e.g. Lamb et al., 2011; Järvinen & Vanttaja, 2013).

Although changes in the educational and labour markets have affected all young people, studies looking at youth transitions in European and OECD countries have revealed that

factors related to one's social background still have a powerful effect on the educational pathways and outcomes of young people (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). The effect is particularly strong when analysing the school-to-work transitions of educationally disadvantaged youths. According to a longitudinal study on the later life courses of Finnish young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) of the mid-1980s (n=6,983) and mid-1990s (n=7,508), social background is not only connected with young people's exclusion from education and working life, but also with the later educational and labour market trajectories of the excluded. The main result of the study was that the children of parents with weak labour market positions, low education and low income, not only have a greater probability of being excluded from education and working life than the rest of the population on average, but also experience the most difficulties in getting a job, advancing in their career, and reaching a stable labour market position. (Järvinen & Vanttaja, 2013.)

The significance of parental education on the employment careers of Finnish NEETs of the mid-1980s and mid-1990s is examined in more detail in Table 2. The career trajectories were constructed based on the information gathered from three observation years (NEET cohort 1985: 1990, 1995 and 2000; NEET cohort 1995: 2000, 2005 and 2007). One's employment career was interpreted as being 'stable' if she or he had been either employed or a student, and 'stagnant' if she or he had been either unemployed or outside the active labour force for some other reason in each of the three observation years. The third career type, 'unstable', refers to trajectories in which the statuses of both inclusion and exclusion were observed during the follow-up period. In both cohorts, there was a strong connection between parental education and one's ending up in both 'stable' and 'stagnant' careers. Among the NEETs of the mid-eighties, the connection was linear: the more educated the parents were, the more often their offspring had ended up in 'stable' careers and less frequently in 'stagnant' careers. Parental education was also clearly connected with gaining a successful labour market career

among the NEETs of the mid-1990s. Furthermore, although the connection between parental education and dropping out of education and working life was not as consistent among the NEETs of the mid-1990s as it had been ten years earlier, young people whose parents were less educated were still the most represented among those who had ended up in ‘stagnant’ careers. (Järvinen & Vanttaja, 2013; Table 2.)

**Table 4.2** Employment careers of NEETs by parental education (cohorts of 1985 and 1995 compared, %)

<TABLE 4.2 HERE>

### ***The caste division of Finnish higher education***

Going to university has historically been the unquestioned right of the few members of the upper class (Rinne 2012). Only after the baby boom generation did the system of higher education become available for the masses. When places in higher education became available to two thirds of a generation, the middle and higher classes started to regard not being highly educated as “*a sign of being somehow lesser, or it otherwise requires separate explanation, justification and apologies*” (Trow, 1974, 63).

As a certain level of education becomes the norm, it is usually followed by the segmenting of higher levels. When being highly educated is normalised, the value of basic degrees decreases and the focus shifts to university postgraduate degrees. Paths to the most valued elite will always assume new forms, and again only the few chosen will be able and know how to reach them (Weis et al. 2014). David Riesman’s (1956) metaphor sums up the situation well: the system of higher education is a snake-like creature whose head is composed of a selected few institutions, whose mid-section is a battleground for trying to

reach the head, and whose tail is fighting against succumbing to hibernation. (cf. Kivinen & Rinne, 1995a.)

As welfare states grew stronger after the Second World War, it was usually thought that mobility would increase, the hereditary nature of professions would diminish in importance, and higher education would become available for the offspring of all social classes. The significance of societal origin is believed to lessen when university-level education is readily available and inexpensive. There is extensive research and discussion to support the thesis of 'industrialisation and diminishing inequality' (Kivinen & Rinne, 1995b; Rinne, 2012.), but there is also a lot of evidence against this thesis, and trends pointing in the direction of growing inequality.

The deep recession of the 1990s, Finland's entry into the European Union in 1995, and its changing political relations diluted the equality-based university policy typical of Nordic welfare states. Although Finnish universities have started to mass-produce higher education, it is still difficult to get into university. The low number of admitted students compared to applicants creates tough competition, and as a result about four fifths of applicants fail to get admitted into university every year.

In Finland, the idea of diminishing the inequality of educational opportunities has had a major influence on ideologies behind university politics at least after WWII. Still, embarking on academic studies in universities has always been easier for the children of upper social classes and higher-educated families (Rinne 2012).

In 1980, the likelihood of the children of highly educated families to end up in universities was approximately 13 times higher than that of the children of families with only basic education, whereas in 2000, it was only 8 times higher. Inequality has slowly decreased as higher education has become more commonplace, but the disparity clearly still exists.

(Kivinen & Rinne, 1995a; Kivinen, Ahola & Hedman, 2001; Kivinen, Hedman & Kaipainen, 2007; Rinne et al., 2008.)

Global neo-liberal educational mechanisms and education politics as well as supranational pressures have affected the stratification of higher education in Finnish educational politics in the 1990s and 2000s. This has happened very rapidly, turning Finland towards ideologies of the so-called ‘enterprise university’ and the new market-driven ‘top-unit’ ideology. (For a more detailed account, see Rinne, 2010.)

Figure 1 shows very clearly that the regional inequalities within the university system are high, and the system is quite diversified with regard to the applicants’ social backgrounds. The six top-ranked universities with respect to this ‘elitism’ criterion are situated in Helsinki, the capital of Finland. The six lowest-ranked universities are located in the more peripheral eastern and northern regions of the country. The differences were wide, with 40 percent of the fathers of top university applicants having a master’s degree while the equivalent figure for the bottom universities was less than 10 percent.

The universities at the top were the Helsinki University of Technology, Sibelius Academy and the Helsinki School of Economics. The bottom universities were the universities of Lapland, Kuopio and Joensuu. It is not by accident that the three top institutes were the ones to be united in 2009 by the power of the new neo-liberal university law to become the first private foundation enterprise university, ‘Aalto University’, which aims to become the most competitive and ‘elitist top’ university in Finland, selecting its students from the upper classes.

<FIGURE 4.1 HERE>

**Figure 4.1** Graduate level of university applicants’ fathers in the early 21st century, by university (Rinne et al., 2008)

Inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is clearly becoming more emphasised within the university system as the latter is segmenting into higher- and lower-status fields. This segmentation into higher- and lower-level fields is happening not only between the different universities, but also between the different faculties, disciplines and education programmes. These facts are not refuted by the results according to which inequality has been diminishing since the earlier decades due to, among other aspects, the Nordic countries and Finland focussing on education policy that emphasises equality – as well as many other aspects related to societal change.

When this reality is combined with the faith in the innocence of neutral educational choices prevailing in political discussions which hide and misidentify the class-based ‘symbolic violence’ (e.g. Bourdieu), we are headed for something new and unknown. It is of the utmost importance that we at least be aware of the hidden social and cultural facts and power relations influencing the selection processes and mechanisms in higher education.

A central conclusion with regard to social inequality in higher education is that it manifests itself above all as self-selection or -exclusion caused by differentiated levels of cultural capital embedded in the population and families, and their educational preferences now that higher education has become mass higher education, seemingly open to anyone. When children of highly educated parents seek university-level education more often than children of non-academic parents, the rationale behind the institutional selection mechanisms of university admissions and entrance exams remains distorted. The gates of universities may not be quite so tightly shut for those from lower social classes as long as they decide to apply. However, most often they choose not to even try. To put it simply: Choosing to apply to university is something that we already learn through our family background during basic

education; these tendencies are based on cultural capital, which makes certain choices for certain families feel natural and ‘right’, like for a fish in water, while making others uncomfortable and awkward. (For a more detailed account, see Rinne & al. 2008).

### **5. Social Justice and Equality in Diversifying Education**

The inequality of educational opportunities and outcomes between social classes remains a fact in Finland as it does in the rest of the world, and may be growing now that comprehensive education is becoming divided, upper secondary school is becoming stratified, and even in the 21st century, children from highly educated families are 8 times more likely to go to university, and 1.5 times more likely to get in compared to applicants who come from families with lower education.

Within the Finnish comprehensive education system, the cultural capital of the pupil’s family does affect the likelihood that she or he studies in a class with a special emphasis – meaning the family has made a conscious choice concerning the child’s educational path. The children from upper-class families, in which parents have more cultural capital, attend these classes more than their peers of lower classes. Such grouping of pupils is known to have a connection with the school performance of the pupils (Berisha & Seppänen, forthcoming). In upper secondary education the division prevails, as the children of upper-middle-class parents are overrepresented among the students of specialised and general upper secondary schools, which are the most prestigious educational tracks in upper secondary education. Conversely, the offspring of the parents with low education, low income and unstable labour market positions are overrepresented among those who drop out of upper secondary education altogether. Furthermore, as students proceed to university they are still under the influence of their social background; their chances of getting into university, as well as the kind of

university they end up attending, are connected to their parents' educational level. Overall, the Finnish educational system seems to have many mechanisms that create divisions between pupils and students at different educational levels via a variety of emphases and specialisations.

The overall logic of educational selection is one part of social reproduction, and students tend to end up choosing majors that lead to occupations which are equivalent to their parents' social status and class background. According to Reay (2004), this mechanism of social reproduction has become even stronger in the 21st century. Economic capital has always been a significant factor, but the increasing emphasis on parental involvement and parental choice as well as on programmes for the talented and gifted has highlighted the significance of cultural capital even further. (Reay, 2004.) Ball (2010) argues that schools and universities are also encouraged to compete with each other and be more like corporations. This marketisation of education changes the relationship between students and schools, and parents are encouraged to compete and search for advantages for their children. This practical shift from education as an essentially valuable and shared resource to a consumer product or an investment fundamentally changes the relationship between citizen and state and emphasises the significance of cultural and economic capital at a growing pace.

Recent changes in education, in terms of both policy practices and institutional arrangements have made this field more complex and strengthened the importance of social class and cultural capital in making 'the right choices' when navigating through the system. This has also led to a widening gap between the educational outcomes of children and young people of different social backgrounds in the Nordic countries, where emphasising educational equality has previously been regarded as the backbone of the whole educational system. The empirical evidence supports the fact that young people's educational aspirations, future expectations and school-to-work transitions are, even under the conditions of individualisation and late

modernity, strongly connected with their social class (Furlong 2009; Aaltonen & Karvonen 2015; Biggart, Järvinen, & Parreira do Amaral 2015). Consequently, it seems that it is still relevant to use categories such as social class, as well as related concepts such as cultural capital, as tools for the theoretical and analytical understanding of the educational choices and careers of individuals, as well as the inequalities related to them.

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*Table 1.* Children attending a class with a special emphasis in relation to the parents' education, employment and income level as well as the family's objective and subjective social class

		<i>Child attends a class with a special emphasis, % (f)</i>	
		<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>
Education p<0.001	Comprehensive school / Vocational school / Upper secondary school	22 (136)	23 (178)
	Lowest level tertiary education ( <i>opisto</i> )	29 (201)	33 (157)
	University of applied sciences	30 (112)	29 (73)
	University / University post-graduate degree	42 (357)	43 (318)
	Total	32 (824)	32 (726)
	Employment p<0.001	Clerical support, service, sales, craft and related trades workers	25 (170)
Technicians and associate professionals (e.g. nurses)		29 (173)	41 (274)
Professionals (e.g. researchers)		41 (333)	32 (98)
Managers		38 (29)	24 (133)
Total		33 (705)	33 (574)
Income p<0.001		Under 20,000 €	31 (116)
	20,000–49,999 €	30 (460)	28 (256)
	50,000 € or more	40 (200)	39 (363)
	Total	32 (776)	33 (670)
		<i>Family</i>	
Social class p<0.001	Lower class		24 (19)
	Lower middle class		25 (206)
	Middle class		31 (151)
	Upper middle class		41 (318)
	Upper class		39 (20)
	Total		32 (714)

Table 2. Employment careers of NEETs by parental education (cohorts of 1985 and 1995 compared, %)

	<i>Parental education, cohort 1985 (n=6,983)</i>			<i>Parental education, cohort 1995 (n=7,508)</i>		
	<i>Basic education</i>	<i>Upper secondary</i>	<i>Higher education</i>	<i>Basic education</i>	<i>Upper secondary</i>	<i>Higher education</i>
Stable career	25	32	41	38	39	45
Unstable career	32	34	33	33	34	28
Stagnant career	43	34	27	30	26	26
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

