

Title: Following the Footprints of Resilient Students: Challenges in Mapping Social Networks of Students in Upper Secondary School

Authors: Osman, Ali, Department of Education, Stockholm University, Sweden, email: ali.osman@edu.su.se

Carina Carlhed, Department of Education, Stockholm University, Sweden, email: carina.carlhed@edu.su.se,

Niclas Månsson, School of Education, Culture and Communication, Mälardalen University, Sweden, email: niclas.mansson@mdh.se

Relation to conference theme

The paper emanates from our project of studying mechanisms and factors of the educational success of students from adverse condition in their transition to tertiary education. The proposal is at the core of the conference theme exploring how these students develop career competences and mobilise social support in their transitions.

Keywords

Transition, social capital, upper secondary school, academic achievement, resilient

Type of proposal:

PAPER AND POSTER

General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework

This study examines how high achieving Swedish students from poor socio-economic and cultural capital decode school practices and embark on a successful educational career. By low socio economic background we mean students whose parents are either unemployed or are employed in low skill service sectors or single parents on welfare (Lareau 2003), while by poor cultural capital we mean students from household with caretaker(s) that have dropout or did not complete their secondary education. High achievers in this study are students that have above the average score in key subjects (Maths, the science subjects, Swedish and English) at the end of the first year of their secondary school experience. A high average score in these subject is a good indicator that these students are on the way to enrol in Higher Education. A large proportion of students that are classified as living in economically and culturally deprived households come from immigrant background.

A blind spot in Swedish research and internationally is the growing percentage of high achievers from low income household (see Bernard, 2004; Fraser, 2004; Crul, & Heering 2008). These students challenge the idea that poverty, racism/discrimination and low educational performance are linked (Wyner et al., 2007). In educational literature, these students are referred to as educationally resilient. Educationally resilient are student who have achieved or are on their way to embark on a successful educational career despite their challenging circumstances. This research project, hence, builds on and seeks to expand upon the deficit explanatory model which explain the failure of these of students' on their lack of cultural capital. This perspective emphasises that school privileges students who possess the cultural mannerisms associated with the middle classes.

As implied above, theory holds that students from adverse conditions have difficulty to hurdle school practice (Biddle, 2000) and embark on a successful academic career because of their poor cultural capital or wrong habitus (Bourdieu 1977). The educational difficulties these children encounter in the educational system (in Swede and in other countries) is well documented, however, far less attention has been given to students that have or are on their way to achieve a successful academic career despite coming from challenging backgrounds. Thus, the proposed research project addresses the following broad research aim: What mechanisms and factors contribute to the educational success of students from adverse condition in their transition to tertiary education? Departing from this aim the research project addresses the following research questions:

- What types of social resources are/were accessed by these students in order to achieve a successful educational career?
- How have these students' mobilised support to enable them successfully embark on in their educational career?
- What kinds of obstacles have the students and parents encountered in this process and what strategies have they employed to overcome the obstacles?
- How do the students' social resources interplay with the students' specific background to enable their successful educational career?

However, the paper will focus on the *methodological challenges* in selecting the students and mapping the social resources and social networks among these students.

Methods/methodology

We will target secondary schools in areas where there is a large concentration of the national groups we are interested in Stockholm County: Somalis, Turkish and Swedes of working class background. We then plan to contact secondary schools in these locations, and upon receiving consent, we will ask for a list of students that are higher achievers at the end of first year of their secondary education. Those students who agree to participate in the study will be asked to fill a short web questionnaire. The focus and objective of this questionnaire is to identify students from household with low economic, and cultural capital. We anticipate to select 90 students that fit the profile of resilient students 30 from each national group.

The data collection in this study will be conducted in three stages, however the paper only deals with the first stage, which is to contact the selected students and meet them in their respective schools at the end of their first year of their secondary education. In this first meeting they will be briefed on the aim of the research study. The students we will be asked to create a visual map of their social network using pens and paper. In this mapping we will adopt the 'concentric circles' approach, whereby the participants will be asked to place contacts within different rings on a sheet of paper, the closest contact they have with a particular is placed in the center circle. This task will be followed by a structured interview with the students. The purpose of the interview is to elicit demographic data of the individuals they identified. Their work status and profession. How long have known the person. How often they met? Who they *went to* for such information for advice on school related activities? The analysis will give us an idea which individuals are significant in their life and which individuals they seek advice on issues related to their schooling etc. This mapping in other words will allow us to highlight the intensity of the relationship, but also the significant person(s) they sought advise on school and school related issues.

Expected outcomes/results

The paper will provide examples of data collection situations, in terms of good examples and hurdles in the research process. Which are the pitfalls to avoid and what seems to be a reasonable way to approaching, selecting upper secondary students and mapping their social network and their social resources?

Intent of publication

We intend to develop the paper into a peer reviewed journal manuscript and are positive to contribute in a joint publication (special issue) from the conference (if there is a common interest)

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