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*Teacher dictums on conditions, opportunities, and trajectories
for children in the German secondary school tracking-system*

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study is to investigate young people's conditions, opportunities, and trajectories in the secondary school track system of Germany, Berlin. This with a focus on the two main tracks: Gymnasium and integrated secondary school, in which students are divided into after the sixth grade. Semi-structured interviews with teachers have been used a method in the research, and the dictums have been thematically analyzed. The theoretical frame is based on Bourdieu's work, which aims to reveal the relations that perpetuate social inequality, with a focus on what role education plays in social reproduction. In this key theoretical concept used are habitus, fields, and the different forms of capital. The results show that there are social and cultural distinctions between, and within the tracks, and in the descriptions of students in the different tracks. These are further analyzed to be related to social class, which seemingly further create distinctions between students' conditions for school success, school track trajectory and unequal conditions and opportunities for students in the system.

Preface

From a sunny balcony in Neukölln I would like to thank the teachers participating in this study, for taking the time, for passing on your experiences, and for being there for the kids and young people, in what Hildegard Knef would call “the eternally young city” of Berlin.

I would also like to thank my own tutors, mentors, and professors in the department of Education, Communication and Learning at Gothenburg University, for guiding me during these years in the field of Child and Youth studies. With the steady focus on children and young people’s bettering life conditions you have together participated in the growth of my mind and my heart, professionally and personally.

Vielen Dank.

Berlin, 23rd of May 2025

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Introduction

In a broad sense, education is an aspect of socialization, this because it involves the acquisition of knowledge and the learning of skills. It could be seen as crucial for ensuring social coherence and integration (Durkheim 1961 in Watters, 2008, p. 122). Education is a human right (Art. 26, UN, 1948) but it's also been shown that the equality of education differs, and this in many parts of the world. First of all, students in the richer countries of the world have been shown to have an unequal start in life as they near the end of compulsory schooling. Secondly, research indicates that the occupation of a child's parents still predicts how well the child will perform in secondary school. Thirdly, it has been shown that the segregation of students along social and economic lines is shown to contribute to the perseverance of inequalities due to family background. Further, children whose parents work in lower-status occupations are also less likely to express expectations on themselves to complete tertiary education, even if they academically perform as their peers with high-status occupation parents (UNICEF, 2018. p. 38). Bourdieu has further analyzed the role that education plays in, what he calls, the *social reproduction*, this by perpetuating and reinforcing differences in class and social status. As a result, school often becomes a (sometimes unconscious) site of social reproduction (Watters, 2008, pp. 122-123).

In Germany, the school system for secondary school is tracked. This means that after primary school, students are separated into different school tracks. This parting is based on the students' grades and, in ambiguous cases, on the teacher's general assessment of the child's academic potential (Dumont, 2019, p. 205). The traditional multi-tiered schooling model of Germany dates to the 19th century, with the basic idea to differentiate between a "lower" education system, focused on practical work, craftsmanship and manual labor, and a "higher" track oriented towards academic professions (Becker et al. 2016, p. 13).

This school system has been criticized in waves, both in research and in the media because it is said to contribute to reproducing social inequalities, and to curb social mobility (Jackson, 2022). One of the biggest and most frequent findings in research on the topic of educational inequality over the past 50 years is that children who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have less chance of succeeding in education than children who come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. But what we know less about is whether, and *how* different school systems contribute to these social inequalities (Dumont, 2019, p. 93).

Therefore, it is my belief that it is a subject of importance and relevance to further study. The new knowledge that could come with a study of this topic are bringing to the surface the complex nuances of the children's conditions, opportunities, and trajectories in the different tracks, which could shine a light on a possible *how* school system contributes to social inequalities.

One of the groups holding experience and knowledge in this topic are teachers. Teachers meet a great number of children during their professional lives, they meet them before, during and/or after the children are separated into the tracks. Thus, it is my belief that they could contribute to parts of these nuances, this, guided by the research questions heading below.

Purpose

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers talk about the different school tracks?
2. What are teachers' observations on the conditions of children's different school trajectories?
3. How do teachers describe an eventual relationship between the tracks and young peoples' opportunities in life?

Background

In this part I will present relevant background information and history relevant to the chosen theme of the study.

The German school system

Germany has a state school policy, meaning that the specific ways differ between individual states (Dumont, 2019, p. 205). Generally, when German children enter their final year of secondary school at the age of 10 or 12, they are sorted into different schools with different tracks. Traditionally, Germany has a three-tier system: Hauptschule, Realschule, and Gymnasium. Traditionally the Hauptschule prepared students for “blue-collar” occupations and vocational training, lasting five more school years. Realschule offered students a “white-collar” vocational training, such as work in banks. Finally, the academic school track Gymnasium, prepared students for academic professions and offered access to all tiers of tertiary education (Bittmann, 2024, p. 157). In recent years, several reforms have been introduced to develop new school forms without tracks (Dumont, 2019, p. 204). So, the system has in many places also slightly changed, as the two lower tracks have been merged, and some federal states have introduced comprehensive schools, Gemeinschaftschulen, as a fourth track (Bittmann, 2024, p. 157). In Berlin the merged Hauptschule and Realschule are now referred to as “Integrated secondary school” or in short ISS, and the second track remains as Gymnasium. Berlin also offers Gemeinschaftschulen (Berlin Senatverwaltung, n.d.).

In practicality, during the last year of primary school, teachers recommend each student for a specific secondary school track. This recommendation is not based on any standardized test of the students' competencies, but is based on the students' grades at the end of primary school and, in ambiguous cases, on the teacher's general assessment of the child's academic potential. The teacher's recommendation is then followed by most parents, who then send their children to the recommended school track (Dumont, 2019, p. 205). Based on the student's prior academic performance and the recommendation of the class teacher in primary school, the students are sorted. The parents have the opportunity to decide on a lower track for their child, but not a higher one since the teacher recommendation is in most federal states binding (Bittmann, 2024, p. 157). In the state of Berlin, the transition to upper secondary school takes place after grade 6. However, with “appropriate performance and talent”, a transition to a basic upper secondary school is also possible after grade 4 (Berlin Senatverwaltung, n.d.). See figure below for a further account on the track system...

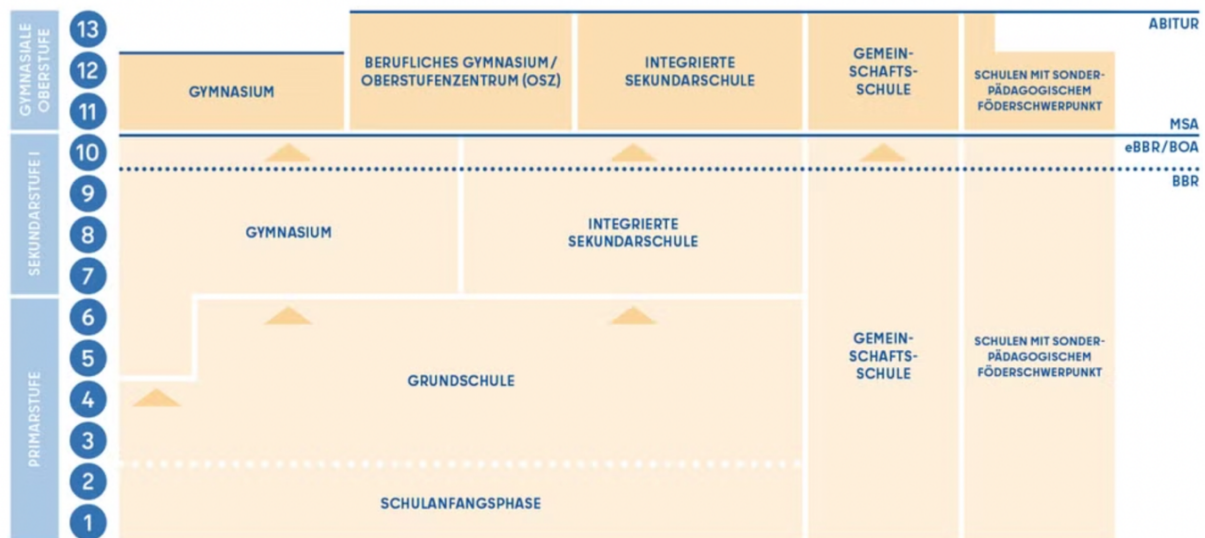


Figure 1: Berlin school system. <https://www.berlin.de/sen/bildung/schule/bildungswege/berliner-schulsystem/>

The school system and its history

The traditional multi-tiered schooling model of Germany dates to the 19th century, with the basic idea to differentiate between a “lower” education system, focused on practical work, craftsmanship and manual labour, and a “higher” track oriented towards academic professions (Becker et al. 2016, p. 13). The tier-schooling system was after Second World War in contrast to many other nations, kept. This meant that students would do four years of joint schooling, and after that they would be referred to distinct educational tracks; Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium (Nikolai, 2021, p. 374). These school tracks traditionally also corresponded with different school-leaving certificates, the Hauptschulabschluss (the lowest school-leaving certificate, received after 9th grade), the Mittlerer Schulabschluss (the intermediate school-leaving certificate, received after 10th grade) and the Abitur (the highest school-leaving certificate, received after 12th or 13th grade) (Beker et al., 2016, p. 13). These different certificates also had and still have large determination of a person’s future options in occupation. In particular, the different certificates are prerequisites for certain professions, where the Abitur holds the broadest range of opportunities, and allows for university enrollment. And the Hauptschulabschluss would be the narrowest range, which mainly qualified students for manual labor (Becker et al., 2016, p. 13). As an example, in West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s, around 80% of students attended the low-track school and about 10–15% attended the academic-track school. Yet, enrollment in the intermediate track varied substantially across states, ranging from 4% to 24% of students (Baumert et al., 2008).

In the 1970s some German states established a comprehensive Gesamtschule as an additional track, this track coexisted with the other main three tracks. After decades of continuity of the three-tier system, the vast majority of German states, 11 out of 16, started shifting towards a two-tier system (Nikolai, 2021, p. 374). Then comes the reunification of Germany, which is described as “the window of opportunity” for changes in school structure. But during this period in the state of Berlin, the absence of clear political support for structural reforms meant that the comprehensive school structure of East Berlin was simply replaced by the school system of West Berlin, with its three-tier model (Nikolai, 2021, p. 389). This model was then kept. Then came a rapidly declining enrolment in the Hauptschule in the 2000s. This

decrease was largely affected by the students' massive difficulties in finding training places in vocational education, hence a loss of legitimacy. In 2009 for example, only 29% of students with a certificate from the Hauptschule could enter the vocational sector in Berlin. A policy reform in Berlin was long needed, but only possible since education policymakers from different political camps. And in 2008 a reform to integrate the Hauptschule and the Realschule was proposed, and in 2010 it was implemented, making the tiers into a two way rather than three-way system (Nikolai, 2021, p. 391).

German children in the system

There are fewer and fewer children in Germany, and their life trajectory is still being strongly influenced by their social background. Children's educational chances in Germany depend strongly on the educational level of their parents, meaning that the family background still is a major factor in the choice of school in Germany. This in number is seen for example in statistics from 2017, where it was shown that the parents of a vast majority of Gymnasium school pupils (65%) had a higher education entrance qualification (Abitur). In contrast, only few Gymnasium school pupils lived with parents who had a Hauptschule / general secondary school certificate (7%) or no general school certificate at all (2%). And for children that attended Hauptschule / general secondary school, only 16% of their parents had a higher education entrance qualification (Abitur). More than half of the secondary general school (Hauptschule) pupils lived with parents who had a secondary general school certificate (42%) or no general school certificate at all (14%) (DeStatis, 2018).

It has also been shown that academic performance and well-being in school can be reinforced by social and emotional resilience. Student resilience is considered not only in terms of academic performance (as in previous PISA reports) but also in terms of students social and emotional well-being. And this well-being is further positively related to academic performance. Meaning that both dimensions are mutually reinforcing a successful school experience. Germany, among other countries, holds a share of socially and emotionally resilient students that is among the largest (30% or more) found across all countries (OECD, 2018, p. 36). It is also shown that disadvantaged students who have this social and emotional resilience also tend to do better academically. This implies that helping disadvantaged students develop positive attitudes and behaviours towards themselves and their education can also benefit these students' academic development. Academic resilience can also promote social and emotional resilience, creating a cycle of positive reinforcement (OECD, 2018, p. 37).

What is fundamental to understand educational performance in a school system is to also understand the between schools and the between classroom segregation of students with difference in ability and difference in socioeconomic status. School systems that have the best results (high and equitable student performance, have (with very few exceptions) low levels of between school segregation. If students are segregated as they process their schooling, the gap increases, and the overall level of performance worsens. This is seen in comparisons of PIRLS and PISA results for Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, and the Russian Federation, which all have highly selective school systems after age 10. And comparing to the results for Canada, New Zealand, and Sweden, that all have more inclusive systems through to the end of secondary school (Williams, 2006, p. 50).

Survey of earlier research

In this segment I will present relevant earlier research on the topic chosen in the study. This will start with research on school and equality and will continue narrow down to research on the German system and socioeconomic factors, research on the system and family background, and comparative international research on school systems and effects. Lastly follows a summation of the survey.

School & equality

One of the biggest and most frequent findings in research on the topic of school and equality over the past 50 years is that children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have a lower chance of succeeding in education than children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. However, whether and, if so, how different school systems contribute to these social inequalities, Dumont (2019, p. 93) we know less about.

In critical school research, it becomes important to distinguish whether schools *reproduce* inequality or *intensify* it. Reproducing inequality would mean for example that the inequalities a child has at the first years of schooling are largely unchanged as they move through the school system. Whereas intensifying inequality is articulated as an even more destructive exacerbatory role of school (Downey et al., 2016, p. 208). School could also reduce inequality, and in this framework of what the role of school could be you would have: (1) neutral, with no change to inequality, (2) exacerbatory, making inequality worse) or (3) compensatory, meaning it reduces inequality (Downey et al. 2016, p. 210).

An international comparative research on school segregation across the world, focuses on if any progress has been made in reducing separations between rich and poor the last 15 years (Gutiérrez et al. (2020, p. 171) The study raises that in research on this topic it has been found that countries that separate students into different school tracks at an early age, like Germany, also tend to be more socially-segregated (Jenkins et al. 2008 in Gutiérrez et al. 2020, p. 171). Further Gutiérrez study shows a key conclusion is that the level of between-school segregation has remained stable within almost every OECD country. This they state is a striking and perhaps surprising finding, because of how much the world has changed in this period, and how there's been plenty of school-system reforms across the world. Even through this the segregation of students from different backgrounds into different schools has hardly altered at all.

The German school system and its effects

Internationally, debates about tracking school system prominently features Germany as it is said to have very rigid form of explicit school tracking (Becker et al., 2016, p. 9). In research on recent developments in the school-tracking system it is also claimed that even though students in Germany are divided into secondary school tracks in all German states, this prototype of a “three-tier track system” no longer exists in its that form in any German state and is by some called a picture that is no longer up to date (Becker et al. 2016, p. 9). Research looking into the effects on different kinds of school track systems in Germany though, claim that the German implementation of tracking creates distinct populations by school track (Traini et al. 2021 in Bittmann, 2024, p. 157).

It is also lifted how research exploring the demographic implications of German school systems has mostly been quantitative (Ogden et al., 2025, p. 119). And research on effects of structural reforms changing from three to two-tiered school systems, reveal that immigrant students were initially

overrepresented at the lowerlevel school types (Hauptschulen and Realschulen) and then, after the reforms, at the integrated secondary schools, ethnic segregation between school types decreased (in Berlin and Bremen, in Hamburg, no significant change was observed) (Lenz et al., 2021, p. 60). Such quantitative research has shown, for example, that the amount of young people completing their Abitur has risen since the chance of reform, but that ethnic and social segregation persists between the school types. This is further presumed to be driven by the ways socially privileged parents choose school, in the continuous preferred choice of Gymnasium for their children (Lenz et al. 2021).

The school system and socioeconomic status

However, after differences in performance and socioeconomic status are accounted for, the results show that immigrant students attend Gymnasium more often than non-immigrant students. In Berlin and Bremen, this tendency was observed only in the two-tiered systems, and it's concluded that this change in system may have contributed to the decrease in segregation (Lenz et al., 2021, p. 60).

In contrast to the criticism, and with a similar reformed two-track school system as Berlin, researchers focused on Hamburg argue that their findings, in following Ghanian newcomers whom want to obtain the Abitur, show that the two-pillar-model creates space for newcomers in their educational trajectories and in reaching their goals (Ogden et al., 2025, p. 117).

Other research raises a concept of “immigrant optimism”, regarding migrants’ ambitious educational choices, which they mean at first glance could be seen as ‘positive’, however resulting in a narrow focus on the university track. They point out that in stratified education systems like the German one, with vocational options, immigrant optimism may lead students with a minority background to have significantly higher dropout rates, or leading to a long path to university which the researchers point out comes at a much higher opportunity-cost than in other countries. This is described as an ‘optimism trap’ (Tjaden et al., 2017, p. 224).

This trap could be interpreted also in other studies, which identify differences in the development of students’ occupational aspirations during secondary education, this also depending on their social background and their attended school type. The results show that while students from less privileged social backgrounds aspirations in academic track decrease, attending a school with several courses of education has a positive effect on the individual development. In contrast, the occupational aspirations of students from privileged social background remained stable, regardless of the attended school type (Zeddies et al., 2025, p. 126).

The school system and family background

Other research analyzes the subtle mechanisms in the interaction between families and schools that underlie social inequalities at the transition to secondary-school tracks in Berlin, Germany. The results show that students from high–socioeconomic status (SES) families were more likely to enter the academic track than students from low-socioeconomic status -families (Dumont et al., 2019, p. 199). Even if they performed equally well on a standardized achievement test, and/or had the same grades in school, and received the same track recommendation from their teachers. Further, the qualitative analyses illustrate the many ways in which parents intervene during the transition process, with high-

socioeconomic-status parents, showing the parents having particularly effective ways of getting what they want for their children (Dumont et al., 2019, p. 199).

One key topic that the research showed was also how high-educated parents had a deep knowledge of the school system. More specific, they had knowledge on the process of enrolling in secondary school and carried information on specific schools' academic profiles. Some parents gained this knowledge through their own professional backgrounds, for example, some were teachers themselves or some worked in law and had read up on the official regulations for secondary-school enrolment. Many high-educated parents also described how they had gained this knowledge through their social networks.

In contrast, the results also showed how parents from a low-educated background were much less confident in dealing with the process of transition. They also perceived their children's competencies as being more so fixed and did not have the same sort of confidence as high-educated parents in thinking that their children would succeed in the academic track. This often led low-educated parents to make pragmatic decisions or decisions, mainly motivated by risk avoidance. Sometimes, this meant deciding against the academic-track school even if a child received an academic-track recommendation (Dumont et al., 2019, p. 219)

Comparative international research

Research has been done on varying European educational systems, ranging from comprehensive to highly differentiated school systems (Baysu & de Valk, 2012). And in multiple comparative research on this topic, Sweden and Germany are often used as examples of the different types of school systems (Engzell & Raabe, 2023; Baysu & de Valk, 2012; Baysu et al. 2018).

Characteristics of educational systems are argued to be relevant for educational outcomes. Some argue that that early tracking systems improves performance in school, whereas critiques of tracking argue that comprehensive school systems, where the first parting of students is postponed, reduce educational inequality (Baysu & de Valk, 2012, p. 779). Additionally, as more comprehensive school systems are also less rigid, they are said to allow for more opportunities of 'second chances'. A recent study using PISA data also supports these statements, whereas it finds that non-comprehensive school systems enhance inequality between students based on their socioeconomic and immigrant background (Entorf & Lauk, 2008 in Baysu & de Valk, 2012, p. 779). Therefore, early tracking is stated to restrict the school careers of those students who start school with an initial disadvantage (like family-based assets or language skill) such as children of immigrant workers in Europe (Baysu & de Valk, 2012, p. 779).

In Sweden, all children attend comprehensive school for ten years, between the ages of 6 and 16, with pre-school being incorporated into the educational system. Upper secondary school, after the age of 16, students are divided, by personal choice, into programs with different educational focus, that could be programs with focus on academia, or different kinds of vocational programs that still have basic academic focus. All programs give basic qualification to attend university. And adult education outside of upper secondary system is also provided (Baysu & de Valk, 2012, p. 778). Whereas in Germany, compulsory schooling is nine years, from the age of 6 to 15, and selection into different tracks is generally at age 10 (Baysu & de Valk, 2012, p. 779).

And separating students by ability has also been shown to create schools that vary widely in their level of achievement (Engzell & Raabe, 2023, p. 331). With Sweden's system in focus, results indicated that friendships in comprehensive school systems are more diverse in terms of achievement and comprehensive systems are said to do a better job at exposing students to peers with different abilities (Engzell & Raabe, 2023, p. 334).

Early selection is an important characteristic of school systems, tracking students at an early age is related to higher degree of stratification. In Germany, for example, that is known for a more so highly stratified school system, students are sorted into different tracks at the age of 10 after 4 years of education, while students in Sweden's comprehensive system, are sorted into different programs at the age of 16, after 9 years of schooling. Thus, school systems that assign students to different educational tracks at an early age is stated to intensify social inequalities, because tracking magnifies the impact of socio-economic status on school outcomes (Baysu et al. 2018, p. 453) Several studies show that regarding stratification of school systems, the ranking of the five Western European countries systems (Germany & Austria > Netherlands & Belgium > Sweden) is roughly corresponding to the size of ethnic gaps in both early achievement and final attainment levels. Thus, it's stated that there is more school disadvantage in Germany than in Sweden (Baysu et al. 2018, p. 454).

Summation of survey

Research on this topic highlights the distinction of whether schools *reduce*, *reproduce* or *intensify* inequality (Downey et al., 2016, p. 208). And countries that separate students into different school tracks at an early age, like Germany, tend to be more socially segregated (Jenkins et al. 2008 in Gutiérrez et al. 2020, p. 171). It's also stated that Germany's implementation of tracking creates distinct populations by school track (Traini et al. 2021 in Bittmann, 2024, p. 157).

However, more young people get the higher certificate (Abitur) since reforms from three-to-two track systems, but ethnic and social segregation persists between the school types. This is further presumed to be driven by the ways socially privileged parents choose school, preferring Gymnasium for their children (Lenz et al. 2021).

In parts of Germany with two-track system, immigrant students attend Gymnasium more often than non-immigrant students (Lenz et al., 2021, p. 60). And other research following two-track countries show that the two-track-model creates space for newcomers, who want to obtain the Abitur, in their educational trajectories and in reaching their goals (Ogden et al., 2025, p. 117). However, research also raise an "optimism trap" regarding migrants' ambitious educational choices (Tjaden et al., 2017, p. 224).

Parents with high SES are shown to have particularly effective ways of getting what they want for their children. Because they have a deep knowledge of the school system. Many high-educated parents also gain this knowledge through their social networks. (Dumont et al., 2019, p. 199). Parents with lower SES show, in contrast, less confidence in dealing with the process of transition to secondary school tracks and viewed their children's competencies as being more so fixed (Dumont et al., 2019, p. 219)

School systems that assign students to different educational tracks, like Germany, at an early age is stated to intensify social inequalities, because tracking magnifies the impact of socio-economic status on school outcomes (Baysu et al. 2018, p. 453) There is more school disadvantage in Germany than in Sweden (Baysu et al. 2018, p. 454). And friendships in comprehensive school systems, like Sweden, are

more diverse in terms of achievement, and the comprehensive system does a better job at exposing students to peers with different abilities (Engzell & Raabe, 2023, p. 334).

Method

In this part of the study, I will describe the methods used in the research. This includes methodological approach, participants, and implementation of data collection and analysis. Finishing off with a section on methodological ethical discussion and reflections.

Methodological approach

The study has a qualitative approach, which usually refers to emphasizing words rather than quantities (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). Some main steps characterizing qualitative research are: generating research questions, selecting relevant site/subjects, collection of data, interpretation of data, theoretical work and writing up findings and conclusions, where the steps also often can work together recursively. The interpretation of data works together with the theory, which can also generate more specific research questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 384). Quality in qualitative research can further be described in multiple ways. Yardley (2000, in Bryman, 2012, p. 393) suggests thinking of the following; Firstly, to develop a sensitivity to context and the social setting in which the research is conducted, secondly commitment and rigor, as in having the necessary engagement and skills and a thorough data collection and analysis. Thirdly transparency and coherence, where the research methods are clearly specified, with clearly articulated argument, and a reflexivity. Reflexivity in research implies a certain sensitivity to the researcher themselves, this in terms of their cultural, political, and social context. As such, from a reflexive point of view 'knowledge' can always be seen as a reflection of location, time, and social space in where the researcher exists (Bryman, 2012, p. 393). Lastly, the importance of having an impact on and significance for theory, the community on which the research is conducted and for practitioners. This will be further tangled with in the later methodological discussion chapter.

Selection and participants

In the study 7 German teachers were interviewed. They were selected based on having experience with one or more than one track of secondary school and having experience working in Berlin specifically. The participants in the study covered a range of experience and had worked or currently worked with late primary school, early secondary school, secondary school, or upper secondary school. In German referred to as late primarstufe, sekundarstufe and oberstufe (see Figure 1 in Background). This selection was based on the research topic and questions, hence the selection of teachers with experience of being around children right before, during and/or after they are assorted into different school tracks. The participants were also different ages, with a range of qualifications, and different number of years in teaching experience. Because of my own limited skills in German, one factor in selecting participants was that they could partake in English language. Below is a more detailed table of the participants...

Name, age group, interview-length	Experience details
Armin, 30s 40 min	Experience with state Gymnasium-school, on secondary level.
Gisela, 50s 1h 15 min	Experience with state Gymnasium schools and private Gemeinschaftschule on secondary level.
Magdalena, 50s 1h	Experience with ISS on upper secondary level.
Adrian, 30s 45 min	Experience with state Gymnasiums, and state ISS schools. On primary and secondary level.
Heidi, 60s 40 min	Experience with state Gymnasiums and private Gemeinschaftschule. On secondary level.
Louise, 20s 35 min	Experience with state ISS and private Gemeinschaftschule. Primary and secondary level.
Anna, 40s 1h	Experience with private Gemeinschaftschule and state ISS. Primary and secondary level.

Implementation

Following the steps of a qualitative approach, I started out with forming somewhat broad research questions, which also included me reading up on the field I was interested in. While reading up on the field, it appeared as an idea to use Bourdieu's sociology as a theoretical frame. Once questions were made, with the focus group bring teachers' and the interest in their dictums on young people in the school system, the choice of method for data collection landed in interviews. The following step was contacting schools and teachers who would be interested in taking part, thereafter I booked 7 interviews, 4 were made in person, and 3 were conducted via Zoom. The interviewees were informed in e-mail what the theme of the study was, that the interview would be recorded in the purpose of transcribing, and that their name and place of work would be anonymized. They were also informed that the recordings and transcriptions would be held securely during the study, and that the recordings later would be deleted after the study. All interviewees gave verbal consent in the start of the interviews. The Zoom-interviews were also voice-recorded, not with video. Subsequently I started transcribing, and simultaneously I started a thematic analysis, using color coded overlines where themes appeared. In this I would recursively tweak the research questions, tweak theoretical key concepts, and start working on the results. Following is a more in-depth description of interviews as a method of data collection, and later a description of the thematic analysis, and how it was implemented in the study.

Interviews

This study has a qualitative approach and when doing qualitative research, one way to gather knowledge is through conversation with people. In this we can learn about the world they live in, their thoughts, ways, experiences, their views, and opinions (Kvale, 2007, p. 18). By interviewing people, the research interviewer, and the interviewed construct knowledge in the interaction between them (Kvale, 2007, p. 18). With the aim of this study being finding out what teachers say, have observed or have experienced, I chose interviews as a method for gathering data. More specifically, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews. This could mean that the researcher has a list of questions, or more so semi-specific topics

that are planned to be covered during the interview. It also means that questions that were not first included might be asked, and that the interviewer picks up on things said by interviews with follow up questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). Qualitative interviews also often leave space for a sort of “rambling” by the interviewee, as this could give important insights into what the person being interviewed sees as relevant or important (Bryman, 2012, p. 470). Therefore, I created a semi-structured interview guide prior to the interviews. A semi-structured interview guide is open and flexible; it could be a list of prompt areas to be covered, or more so formulated open questions. What is crucial is that the questioning allows interviewers to collect what and in what ways the research participants view the social world around them, and that there is flexibility in the way of conducting the interviews (Bryman, 2012, p. 473). When forming some areas to cover in the interview, or more so questions to maybe ask, it becomes important that the formulation of the research questions are not so specific that other interesting data is closed off, or in other words, to not approach the interview with too many preconceptions (Bryman, 2012, p. 473). Therefore, in creating the semi structured interview-guide, I tried to create a sort of funnel of questions or topics. The first part of the interviews were open questions, where the interviewees were left more space to “ramble”, in this I could pick up themes and ask them to either explain more about that topic. Where the “rambling” took different routes, I could use the question from the more funneled part of the interview guide. Therefore there was room for structure yet flexibility.

After the interviews had been conducted, I transcribed each interview right after, the same day or the day after. Kvale (2007, p. 103) writes that a transcription of a conversation (the interview) to written form also involves a second abstraction, wherein tone of the voice, intonations and breathing are lost. In short, transcripts are “impoverished decontextualized renderings of interview conversations”. In transcribing the conversations shortly after they had been done, I was aiming to not lose too much context.

Analytical method

One of the most common analytical methods in qualitative research is thematic analysis. Similarly with methods of analyzing data in grounded theory, where one search for “codes” some writers mean that there are similarities in looking for “themes” within the thematic analysis (Bryman, 2012, p. 578). “What is a theme” is also a big question within this analytical method (Bryman, 2021, p. 578) however in the last few years there have been attempts to clarify TA, which will be deepened hereafter.

Thematic analysis

To process and analyze the collected material in form of interview transcriptions, a thematic analysis is used. This is a common analysis method alongside qualitative data that involves coding and sorting the themes that arise in the data (Bryman, 2018, p. 702). For example, themes can be identified by the analyst from the data or themes can be created based on the research questions (Bryman, 2018, p. 702). In doing this, one can also look for: local typologies, similarities/differences, linguistic connections, missing data, and theory-related material in line with Ryan and Bernard's approach to theme searches (2003 in Bryman 2018, p. 705). In addition, one can search for repetitions in the analysis, which Bryman (2018, p. 705) believes is one of the main criteria for establishing a pattern.

In a further explained account of TA, the “reflexive thematic analysis” emphasizes the importance of the researcher’s subjectivity as analytic resource, and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and

interpretation. The flexibility of (reflexive) TA as a method, rather than a fully fixed methodology, means it can be undertaken with quite different guiding theories (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 330-331).

Furthermore, the authors explain the process of theme development in six phases; firstly, familiarizing oneself with the data and writing notes, secondly systematically coding data, thirdly generating initial themes from the coded and collected data and fourthly developing and reviewing one's themes. Fifthly the step is to refine, define and name the generated themes and lastly one writes the report. Because the analytical process can sometimes become recursive, these six phases can somewhat also blend together. It is underlined that the process of analysis involves one's immersion in the data, by reading, reflecting, question, imagine, wonder, write, retreat and return (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 332).

These steps were followed in the ways that, already during and after transcribing I would start familiarizing myself with the data, and make colored marks where interviewees brought up things especially relevant to the theme of the study. Which meant that the second step overlapped as the coding of the data had already begun. The colors would with time become more and more like codes, for example a quote about the Gymnasium track or a gymnasium-track student like below would have yellow code in the transcriptions:

...Gymnasium has a high level, most of the kids I think at the 8th or 9th grade, those who can't ... work with that knowledge, they leave the school.

And a quote about a student's background would first have perhaps a yellow mark if it was a Gymnasium context, and then a blue mark because of the theme about the family, background and/or parents. And dictums on integrated secondary school tracks and students that go there were green. When putting together the same-coloured dictums from all of the teachers, themes were developed. The next step was that I refined, defined, and named the themes. This was done in the ways that I looked for local typologies, similarities and differences, linguistic connections, and for missing data. Then lastly, I wrote them into the results. During the process of result-analysis I would 'immerse myself' in the data, this meant going back to reading theory, rereading transcriptions, reflecting on for example what was similar in the way they spoke about this, I would question: what were the differences, what are the teachers saying, what are some not saying, and then back to theory, imagining how the dictums and theory come together, and writing. And return. Until the results were presented.

Ethical reflection and discussion

In the research process Bryman (2012, p. 149) states that social research is never conducted in a 'moral vacuum' but rather who the researcher is will influence, through all of their presuppositions, the research conduct. From choice of research to the formulation of conclusions. Some point out how in social research in particular it becomes important to understand that there is often a 'conscious partiality' (Mies, 1993, p. 68 in Bryman, 2012, p. 150).

Reflexivity in research implies a certain sensitivity to the researcher themselves, this in terms of their cultural, political, and social context. As such, from a reflexive point of view 'knowledge' can always be seen as a reflection of location, time, and social space in where the researcher exists (Bryman, 2012, p. 393). Reflexivity became a theme throughout the research, from the preparation to the ways of conducting interviews, to the appearing data, to the *reflexive* thematic analysis-method, and to

Bourdieu's, sometimes mentioned as *reflexive* sociology. In this I find it important to reflect over my own cultural, political, and social context as a part of the methodological ethical reflections. This also for a transparency of a possible 'conscious partiality' and to show awareness that research is not conducted in a 'moral vacuum'.

As a pre-school teacher from Sweden, with multiple years of experience and studies in a global yet Swedish-focused context, conducting research in Berlin, Germany had its strengths and challenges. The strengths I would identify as being sort of an outsider in a context that for others were obvious. This meant in practice that I would ask "dumb" questions that the interviewees "didn't always think about", as someone mentioned. The "taken for granted" would need to be explicitly put into words. However, the same outsider-feeling also required a lot of reading up on the field, to even know what questions and themes to cover in interviews, what not to miss, and to even understand the answers during the interviews. However, this challenging aspect also made the research something unpredictable, and it became a matter of honest curiosity.

Another part of ethics that Bryman (2012, p. 151) talks about is gaining access, which he means is often mediated by gatekeepers who are concerned with the researchers' motives. Which in my case I didn't noticeably stumble upon. However, gaining access and reaching gatekeepers I found had a different nuance, this as the teachers stating interest in participating seemed to show interest, and some perhaps also more so a critical standpoint to the German secondary school system. Also, many of the participants had experience working in a so called "Gemeinschaftschule" which could be a school-track to be interpreted as an alternative to the traditional three/two-tracked system. The choice of working there could have motives important to bring into the light of ethics. One way of doing that is that in the study, is that I have included parts of critical statements in the results.

Another aspect I'd like to address is the fact that I'm still a teacher and introduced myself as such. Consequently, the interviewees and I occasionally naturally shared experiences, observations, feelings, and opinions even though we come from two different cultural contexts. This would dawn on me in the multiple occasions the teachers would add "...You know" to answers in the interviews, even though they knew, and I knew that I *didn't know*. This I reflect on could maybe be a sort of testimony of a hidden cultural-professional reliability, sort of "teacher to teacher", which I reflect may have consequentially created a safer space in participating in the study. And possibly was this a subconscious hopeful strategy when introducing myself and my profession. The choice of topic in the study also deserves a moment of personal reflection, as I specifically chose to become a teacher to work against inequality gaps, and so it's quite possibly the driving force of this whole study.

Ethics and interviews

Regarding interview as a method for data collection Kvale (2007, p. 40) means that an interview inquiry is a moral enterprise. And it is important to be aware that the human interaction in an interview affects the interviewees, and that therefor the knowledge produced by an interview inquiry affects our understanding of the human condition. Because of this Kvale (2007, p. 40) states that interview research is full of moral and ethical issues. And having ethics in consideration should be done from the start of research to the end report. Some of the stages mentioned by Kvale (2007, p. 41, 51) that should be taken into ethical consideration are the steps in a research. Some of these steps include: *thematizing* (choosing the theme of the study, the 'what' and 'why' should be clarified), *design* (making sure one has informed consent from the participant, and securing confidentiality), the interview situation (where ethical points considered are the interactions and interviewees needs or possible stress). Transcriptions are also a part

of the steps of interviewing (here the ethical parts include confidentiality and making sure the interviewees oral statements are transcribed into texts loyally) and analysis (where ethics brought into light are in regard to *how* the interviews are analyzed).

These stages were in this study considered by the ways that: the theme was clarified for the participants, they gave informed consent and were secured confidentiality and pseudonymization (both their name and place of work), it was also considered that the interviewees felt comfortable in the interview situation, which, of course, can be hard to make sure of. But this was for example done by making sure we had enough time, to be able to start with small talk and warm up to each other in the situation, it also manifested itself by me the interviewer trying to listen carefully and show that I was interested in what they had to say. Transcriptions were made in exact translations to what the interviewees said, and if unclear I would write so in parentheses. The analysis was made with consideration of that the interviewees words were fairly interpreted, this was for example done by choosing larger quotes to make sure details and context from the interviewee was coming from them. This also for transparency and opening for other possible interpretations than mine.

Theoretical framework

In this part I will present the intended theoretical inputs to the study, Bourdieu's sociology of education, with chosen key concepts.

Bourdieu's sociology of education

To Bourdieu (1986, p. 15) the social world is accumulated history. This theoretical position can be described as essentially critical because it aims to reveal the social relations that perpetuate economic and social inequality (Watters 2008, p. 126). Bourdieu confers the role that education plays in social reproduction when it comes to perpetuating and reinforcing differences in class and social status, and as a result, school often becomes a (sometimes unconscious) place for social reproduction (Watters, 2008, pp. 123). In his works, Bourdieu untangles leading explanations of how middle-class parents provide schooling advantages to their children, and how these are advantages that are not provided by working-class parents (Farkas, 2018, p. 4). Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. X) sought through his works a model of the social processes and the mediations, which he means tend to ensure the transmission of cultural capital across generations. And this behind the back, sometimes against the will of agents engaged in the school system, like students, teachers, and parents. Following I will present some key concepts of Bourdieu's model of social processes and mediations. First, I will present 'habitus' and 'fields', then the different forms of capital; 'social capital', 'cultural capital', and inlying or related concepts within these such as 'linguistic capital' and 'autodidact'...

Habitus and fields

Bourdieu uses "habitus" to refer to the underlying dispositions embodied in an individual, which in turn lead to the cultural capital becoming visibly enacted by this individual, such as: skills, habits, and styles. This habitus is created, it exists, and it may also develop within a "field" or "social arena". An individual's position within the field can then help determine her habitus, which in turn supports to determine the cultural capital she can deploy within this field (Farkas, 2018, p. 9). A field, therefore, could be described as a structured system of social positions, held either by individuals or by institutions and a field is structured internally in terms of power relations (Jenkins, 1992 in Farkas 2018, p. 9). Further, these *social positions* are described as present at every moment of each society and can be seen as bound to a set of activities, like practicing golf or playing the piano, or of goods, like owning a second estate or an old painting, which are also in themselves characterized relationally (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 5).

And when entering a new social field, the volume and form of an agents' capital determines both chances of success within that field but also the extent to which they experience a sense of "fitting in". This sense of fitting in also heavily depends on an individual's habitus (Ivemark & Ambrose, 2021, p. 193). The habitus thus, derives a psychological stability and an adaptive fit by remaining in a social world where the rules and stakes of games are largely familiar and where "it's like a 'fish in the water'" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127).

So accordingly, the social class status of a student's family for example, could help determine her school related habitus, (and sense of "fitting in"), which in turn helps determine the cultural capital she can deploy within the field defined by her classroom, teacher, other students, school, and the larger structures of her education (Farkas, 2018, p. 9). Further accounts on capital and its different forms and ways will now follow...

Capital and its different forms

Capital is by Bourdieu (1986, p. 15) described as “accumulated labor”, which he explains could exist in a materialized form, or by its incorporated embodied form. When this “labor” is appropriated by different agents, or groups of agents, it can enable them to further appropriate social energy in the form of actualized or living labor. “It is what makes the game of society...something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle.” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 15). Capital in its embodied form, thus has potential capacity to produce profits, and can determine the chances of success for practices (Bourdieu 1986, p. 15).

Capital also, depending on the field it functions in, can present itself in three main forms. As economic capital, as cultural capital, and as social capital, and they all can move in and out of each other (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 16). For example, economic capital, like money, can be institutionalized in the form of property right. Cultural capital can be institutionalized in the form of an educational qualification. And social capital, or social “connections” can be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 15). Bourdieu (1984, p. 13) also writes that:

The more the competences measured are recognized by the school system, and the more 'academic' the techniques used to measure them, the stronger is the relation between performance and educational qualification. The latter, as a more or less adequate indicator of the number of years of scholastic inculcation, guarantees cultural capital more or less completely, depending on whether it is inherited from the family or acquired at school, and so it is an unequally adequate indicator of this capital.

A part of cultural capital is also linguistic capital. Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991, p. 18) means that in specific linguistic markets, some products are valued more highly than others. This means that some practical competences of the speakers are to “know how”, and to be able, to produce expressions that are considered highly valued on that specific market. This aspect of practical competence within speakers Bourdieu states is not equally distributed throughout a society in which the same language, such as English or French, is spoken. He says that:

...Different speakers possess different quantities of 'linguistic capital' - that is, the capacity to produce expressions apropos, for a particular market. Moreover, the distribution of linguistic capital is related in specific ways to the distribution of other forms of capital (economic capital, cultural capital, etc.) which define the location of an individual within the social space.... The more linguistic capital that speakers possess, the more they are able to exploit the system of differences to their advantage and thereby secure a profit of distinction (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991, p. 18).

And the linguistic habitus is a sub-set of the dispositions which involve the habitus, and these dispositions are acquired in the course of learning to speak in particular contexts, that is within the family, in the peer group, at the school, etc. These dispositions govern both the following linguistic practices of an agent, and the value that linguistic products will receive in other fields or markets, such as in the labour market or in the institutions of secondary or tertiary education (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991, p. 17).

Social capital is further described as the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accumulate to a group or an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable *network*. A network of institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Capital can take a variety of forms, which is indispensable to acknowledge to explain the structure and dynamic of differentiated societies (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119).

Sociologists Coleman and Hoffer (1987, p. 221 in Farkas 2018, p. 8) also extends Bourdieu's ideas of the concept of social capital, by looking at capital beyond the family, for example religious and other types of private schools, where the parents also often have a strong social relationship among each other, and with the institution itself. An important concept here is the *intergenerational*, in which meaningful social relationships exist, both between children and their friends' parents and also, among parents whose children are friends (Farkas 2018, p. 8).

Bourdieu writes that the idea of *cultural capital* is derived from process of research as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes (Bourdieu 1986, p. 17). Meaning that Bourdieu explicitly invented the cultural capital concept in order to explain social class reproduction (Farkas, 2018, p. 4). Cultural capital can, to a varying extend and depending on period, the society, and the social class be acquired, and is therefore quite unconsciously operative (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 18). Because of its generality, cultural capital could also be named *informational capital*, this Bourdieu means in itself also exists in three forms: *embodied*, *objectified* or *institutionalized* informational capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119).

Critique of cultural capital points out that Bourdieu was not clear or explicit about how to operationalize the theory (Farkas, 2018, p. 4). But in further developing Bourdieu's "dispositions" as to include skills, habits, and styles that children in different social classes are socialized into and learn from their families and peers around them. Other ways of seeing these dispositions could include informal "know-how", cultured capacities, practices, repertoires, practical knowledge etc. (Farkas, 2018, p. 5). So, for example, playing golf as a social position (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 5) could be seen as a certain "know how" or cultured capacity, a cultural capital, socialized and learnt by one's family and/or peers in the society one lives in.

A relating part of a cultural capital and education is the idea of an "*autodidact*". Bourdieu writes that this is based on the idea that possession of the highest educational qualifications is assumed to guarantee possessions of all the knowledge guaranteed by all the lower qualifications. And that there is a correspondence between the hierarchy of knowledge and the hierarchy of certificates. For example, looking at two individuals, that do the same job, equipped with the same set of useful competences, but however holding different qualifications, are likely to be separated by a status-and salary-difference. And what justifies this, he means, is that idea, that competence with "higher" certification is assumed to guarantee some sort of possession of "basic knowledge" that also causes practical "know-how". A sort of *autodidact* (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 328). So what Bourdieu means is that it presents no paradox to see the autodidact's relation to culture, and the autodidact themselves, as *products of the educational system* (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 328). The educational system is now to be looked into, this with a Bourdieuan lens of the teacher dictums in the study's result...

Results

Here follows the results, this based on the purpose questions of the study. The results are parted into two head sections. Firstly, I will present the teacher dictums of the different tracks: *The Gymnasium* and *the integrated secondary school (ISS)*, followed by a *summation* for the first section. Secondly, I will present the teacher dictums on the conditions for student's school track trajectory: *School trajectory and family* and *school trajectory, locality, and language*, followed by a *summation* for the section.

The different tracks

In this part I will present the teacher dictums on the different tracks: Gymnasium and (ISS) which is presented into a headline each. In this, dictums on students and their conditions within the tracks also appear. The dictums on the different tracks will lastly end with a summation.

The Gymnasium

All teachers express that Gymnasium is ("still") considered the "higher" track. With "higher" they seem to refer to different factors. Gymnasium was told to have higher *requirements* to get in, higher *expectation* on students academically, and the track itself had higher *social status*, and going in this track also gave students a higher social status. "Gymnasium still is the highest thing" says Anna, and Gisela expresses that:

Gymnasium they are also a bit more 'elite' you know, and they've got totally other sort of demands and requirements.

When asked if they agree with some colleagues that Gymnasium is "elite" Adrian says:

Yeah, for sure. A hundred percent. Yeah, no, it's very, very elite.

Magdalena further develops the ideas of Gymnasium as "elite":

... (In) Gymnasium, you know, socially, it's easier. Yeah. And so the idea is then they will learn much more because the teacher has much more time to put stuff into their heads, you know, to make it a bit short. But of course, it doesn't work like that, you know. And so I'm sure there are some students who have a great time at the Gymnasium and maybe, you know, and I also have friends who are teaching at the Gymnasium and who really of course want to, you know, help the kids and, you know, also educate them in social ways. But still, the people I know, the friends who work at Gymnasiums are all in Berlin areas where there's rather middle-class, wealthy middle-class kids who go there. Yeah. So that's of course still a special setting. And yeah, so I would say it is a big problem not spoken in the way that every Gymnasium, you know, is this elite, you know, temple, you know. But it's just more this label and the idea behind it. Yeah...

Another teacher, Louise says that "...Gymnasium is very strict and very focused on grades". And Gisela also expresses thoughts on higher requirements and expectations:

...Gymnasium has a high level, most of the kids I think at the 8th or 9th grade, those who can't ... work with that knowledge, they leave the school. I would just say that maybe half of the people of the kids, they will leave the school and go to other schools.

The higher requirements, expectations and social status could, with a Bordieuan lens, be seen as embodied dispositions within the students. That be: their academical skills, habits and styles could be seen as leading to a creation and development of their habitus. These skills could further be described as a certain cultural capital, that the Gymnasium-student can use within the field that is Gymnasium. This as they are prepared for, get accepted into and continue their education in the “higher” considered educational track. Leading them to develop and embody something “higher” within a habitus that is more so “elite”, leading the students to also embody higher and more so an elite social status.

In contrary to the “elite” view of Gymnasium, when being asked about if he agrees that Gymnasium is “elite” and for the higher academic kids Armin says that:

Yeah, that's true, of course. And we have really great gymnasiums with really good people... But I'm working at like the top level of the down... I think we have kind of one of the lowest gymnasium because of our different parameters and conditions surrounding our people. And therefore, I can say the level is quite low in general if I compare it to my school time. And also, I think maybe also international kind of, because there is not an exception that people who cannot really good write German still make the Abitur. And I think like this is not elite. It's definitely like they go to university and I was working for the university. So I was in contact with a lot of students, which was actually a main problem because there were students who were not ready for it, who were not like at the level that they could make a bachelor... It's elite gymnasium in general, but the elite doesn't count anymore.

Here Armin seems to agree that there's a general idea in Germany that Gymnasium is “elite”, that there are great Gymnasium schools, but he also brings contrast as he says that some Gymnasium schools are also lower level, and even though they get the same qualification, the Abitur, he also says it doesn't necessarily give the knowledge needed for completing a university degree. Which in a Bordieuan lens could be seen as an auto-didactical thought that a possession of the highest educational qualifications is assumed to guarantee possessions of all the knowledge guaranteed by all the lower qualifications. Choosing a Gymnasium school is in this way seen as both the highest and the best education, even though teachers' dictums disagree.

Numerous teachers also point to the fact that the school system is made in the way that Abitur is faster acquired in Gymnasium:

...Most gymnasium, they have got 12 years and the others... they have got 13 years. You know, there's also a difference if you do your Abitur or exam in 12 years or 13 years, for example... (Gisela)

Well, it's just a faster track and... it's demanding, more demanding. But if somebody ... wants to be faster with the Abitur, they are 17 then when they do the Abitur. And they think, you know, it's better... And then a lot of them do a gap year... (Heidi)

This could again be seen as a skill enacted by the “Gymnastist” within the field and social arena of what it means to embody a higher track education. The “Gymnastist” from this perspective is someone who visibly enacts both high academic skills and simultaneously does so rapidly.

Another theme that came up regarding Gymnasium was that almost all teachers would express that going to the Gymnasium track gave the students a high social status. The “Gymnasium-student” was also further described. One teacher expressed that going to Gymnasium is for the students wanting to ‘become an academic-thinking human being’ - Louise. Anna said that the track was ‘for the strongest learners’. Anna also expressed that ‘If you say you’re in Gymnasium it’s always better...’. And some of the teachers also described the Gymnasium-students as a more homogenous group, which was described by the fact they were all on more similar academical level, like Adrian, and Heidi:

And then gymnasium, you know, it's more fast tracked. It's just more homogenous, the learning group and everything... (Adrian)

And if you have a class of, let's say, 20 students in a Gymnasium, I mean, I know it from the **** School, but that's a different school. It's a very high level, high academic school... So we probably had two or three students who are not on that level.... Yeah, more or less, they were on a quite good level, yeah. But not all of them... (Heidi)

Again, the Gymnasium-student could be seen position themselves within the field, that then can help determine her habitus. The social structures and skills could be seen to here be further expanded. The gymnast enacts not only high academical skills in a rapid pace, but also does so coherently with the vast majority of their peers.

However, Adrian also pointed out, regarding Gymnasium homogenous groups that:

I think it, I think it really depends. I think in Berlin, it really depends which Gymnasium, actually. That's what I also noticed... The new thing here in Berlin is that, like, it really depends where you go to school...

Louise also reflects about this when talking about different status to the school tracks saying that:

I think the schools and also all schools have different images... And so that also maybe plays a role in that.... Yeah... But I think in Berlin, it's better...

This could exemplify the nuances of how different Gymnasium-schools could also embody different fields, even though some of them still possibly could enact within a similar habitus.

One could look at the dictums of Gymnasium as a conception of its students as “autodidacts”. Having an education in, and Abitur from, a Gymnasium could be seen as a way to create “a correspondence between the hierarchy of knowledge and the hierarchy of certificates”. One could say that the dictums indicate a view of the highest educational qualification (Gymnasium) also assumes to guarantee of all the knowledge guaranteed by the lower qualifications (ISS). Thus, as teachers express “If you say you’re in Gymnasium, it’s always better” even though both tracks offer the same certificates.

Armin also talks about how it really depends on the school, not only the track itself, he says that:

It depends on the area and everything. You have kind of gymnasiums which are really, really good and of course they have a high standard. And then you have gymnasium, like, I'm working at one which is not, like, has a lot of, yeah, people who are not good at speaking German, for example. And therefore, like, we still do the Abitur at our school and everything and that's kind of comparable to everything else, everywhere else. But it's

kind of common knowledge that the area where the gymnasium is set could, like, affect the quality and also the standard of the school system, kind of. In other schools they can more focus on stuff which is not that easy possible at my school because we have such a language barrier at some point.

Which again could exemplify how different Gymnasium-schools could also embody different fields, even though some of them still possibly could enact within a similar habitus. Students at Armin's school seem to enact other social positions than those characterising "the Gymnasist" stated by other teachers.

He also mentions locality, which will be further analysed under the next main headline. Hereafter is initially the results of dictums on the integrated secondary school track. This followed by a summation of the first part of the results.

The integrated secondary school

The changed system from the three to two tracks, and with the possibility to get your Abitur at the end by not only Gymnasium, but also an ISS-education, was described by many teachers as something positive. In regard to Gymnasium being the "higher" track, ISS then becoming the "lower track" there were nuances in in what way it was "lower", and why and what kind of student that would go in the ISS track.

The track was also described by Louise who said that traditionally people think of Hauptschule, Realschule and therefor ISS as 'This is the school where all the kids go that have bad grades'. She then continues (using the term "middle school" for the traditional name of Hauptschule and Realschule) expressing that:

... after fourth grade, for example... when you get into this track of, like, middle school, then it's very unlikely that you get out of this one, because then you're there and then you're stuck, and nowadays there are more and more possibilities and options to get to your Abschluss, final exam, and also Abitur maybe, even if you were in middle school, even if you were not the most, the best student, but you can get there if you want to...

Anna described that:

It's a smart way to go to Abitur... if it's a little harder with the academic learning... ISS, its, it's much more open, you can still go into an academic field related to the school.

Here with a Bordieuan view, a different set of underlying dispositions could be seen embodied in the ISS-student. Their skills, habits, and styles could be described as quite different than the Gymnasist. The academic skills, or specifically the grades are described as lower. And the style or habits of learning are described as "harder". The students in this track however are also described as used to be "stuck" in the track, but now (in the newer system), even if you are not the best (most *skilled*) you can still get an Abitur.

Louise also reflected on her own experience as a student in the system, and compared to today (she here uses "middle school" again to refer to the traditional tracks Hauptschule and Realschule):

And middle school was really, oh, okay, this is the school for the dummies. And when I was in gymnasium, I was afraid of the kids in middle school because they were a bit loud and a bit edgy and a bit wild and rough. So, I had no social connections and no social touch with the middle school kids. We were very separate. We lived in our own bubbles. And I think in Berlin, it's a bit, it's also you live in the bubble. If you're in a gymnasium, then you have a different life, more or less. So, there are more individual paths. And then it's also likely that you have friends from other schools and also your football team and things like that. But if you go to gymnasium, you have a higher social status in the minds of the students and also in the mind of society. If you say, I go to gymnasium, they were like, they say like, cool. Like even today... If you say, I'm in gymnasium, it's always better. And if you say, I'm in integrated secondary school, it's also fine. And I think the schools and also all schools have different images. And so that also maybe plays a role in that. Yeah. But I think in Berlin, it's better.

Here another set of embodied dispositions could be identified, as the non-Gymnasium student is being described as loud, edgy, wild, and rough. A student's social position within the field can help determine their habitus, which in turn supports to determine the cultural capital she can deploy within this field. Being loud, edgy, wild, and rough could be seen as a style enacted by students within their habitus. It could also be seen as "opposites" to determine any skills, habits or styles that differ from those of the Gymnastist, even though, or maybe because social characteristics, or styles, were not explicit when talking about the Gymnastist, more so their skills and learning habits. Describing the students as "loud, edgy, wild and rough" could be seen as support to determine these "other" students and their cultural capital that they can deploy within the field. Or it could help determine their school related habitus, which in turn helps determine the cultural capital she can deploy within the field. The dispositions that the teachers describe could be seen to differ depending on what track of student that embodies them.

Another theme in comparison between the tracks was that in contrast to Gymnasiums homogenic student-groups, the teachers described ISS as much more heterogenic and diverse. Adrian described the school he currently works at like this:

...but it's more the thing that, yeah, the level of teaching or the level of understanding, it can be very, very different in one class, you know, because there's some kids that just came to Germany and then there's kids that are like super, super fluent and from a lot different nationalities and then kids with autism, kids with hearing disabilities, whatever. So, but the good thing is we are always, or most of the times we're two teachers per class and the classes are also quite small. Yeah.

Social capital, that is the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accumulate to a group or an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network (of institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition) It could be seen in the way Adrian talks about the diversity of students background, where some have just arrived to Germany, with a supposedly lower sum of accumulated network resources, in comparison to the kids that are "superfluent" in German, supposedly because they have been there longer or are born there, having more capacity to over time build and possess a durable network, holding a higher sum of resources and therefore higher social capital.

And about language-levels specifically, having a higher or "superfluent" level in German could also be seen to create a sense of "fitting in", and this sense also heavily depends on an individual's habitus. On

the other hand, when Adrian describes the diversity and internationality of the integrated school, it could be seen as that “diversity” is related to the school related habitus, leading to “diverse” students feeling a sense of fitting in “like a fish in the water” where the water is this diversity.

Adrian also explains how the classes are smaller, and that the staff working there also are more heterogenic, because teachers, social workers and special pedagogues work together, and make more individualised education and support for their students. Anna mentions similar thoughts:

How they develop it at the integrated schools... the teachers are more like social workers and have the mindset of social workers, which is pretty good for the students, but sometimes then the academic development gets a little bit out of sight so...

Having social workers more so than teachers in the ISS could perhaps be seen as a strategy to help students as a group to accumulate resources and social capital, however if that is done on the cost of their academic development the social arena or habitus at play seems to emphasise skills, habits and styles that differ from what is emphasised for a Gymnasist skills, habits, and styles.

Bourdieu also means that children are socialized with skills, habits, and styles that differ depending on the child’s social class. These dispositions could include informal “know-how”, cultured capacities, practices, repertoires, practical knowledge, and the way and what the teachers mention about the students in the different tracks, it could be seen as the students, depending on track are seen as being socialized differently. The Gymnasium student is mentioned more so socialized into high academic skills, and the ISS-student is mentioned more so socialized into a social style. The “Practical knowledge”, practices and repertoires could therefore be seen differ depending on track.

Louise would also underline the teacher’s social role working with kids in ISS:

... like this is the school where all those students go with bad grades, so they come and have very low self-esteem. You have a class full of kids who experience themselves as the four years in a row, like the worst students in the class, with the worst grades and everything, and then they come together in this middle school. So, I wanted to be there for them, and to give them a new fresh perspective, and give them experiences where they feel and build self-esteem... So, I became this middle school teacher... and I really enjoyed it there, because I felt I really can change something in this, I make a difference in the students' lives...

Again, the social role described by Louise and the “building self-esteem” could be seen as a socializing into a social style rather than into high academic skills. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as Louise also wants to “make a difference” by using the social style and “self-esteem” to also support the students’ academic skills.

In expressing that the students in the ISS have either ‘bad grades’ or and bad self-esteem, which by some was suggested to be connected. These teachers mentioned that students in this track needed certain characteristics, these would vary between teachers; ‘resilience’, ‘self-esteem’, ‘endurance’ ‘ambitious’ and ‘motivation’ were words used when talking about these students. Louise teacher says that:

So, I think if you really want to, you can actually achieve anything you want, but you need this inner calling and this inner motivation and this inner optimistic self-encouragement, which helps you to achieve your goals.

These “inner” characteristics could be seen as dispositions, certain “know-how” of cultured capacities.

Gisela that mentioned “endurance” is further asked how she thinks this is built and mentions social life and community:

...Maybe friendships, first of all. And second is very important to belong to a community, belong to a team, belong to a friend's team.... And ... most of the kids, they get a Nachhilfeunterricht (after school tutorial), tutorial in different kind of lessons... And because there are a lot of other public school and there are also kids there are been left alone on themselves. So, they go out and they do nonsense or whatever. And there are also a lot of kids, they do are in clubs, sport clubs, playing football or all the other sort of things... And ... also... it depends what kind of school it is... Actually, the most important point is for a school, they have to be seen.

Here it could be understood as Gisela is describing the networks and social capital, where she describes that it's important they have “strong social relationship among each other, and with the institution itself.” The “institution” being both afterschool tutorial-institutions, sportsclub-institutions, and school-institutions. It could also be seen as she is describing that in building student's scholastic “endurance” they need a certain institutionalized cultural capital and certain social positions, bound to certain activities like “being tutored after school”, “playing football with friends after school” and “being seen by teachers in the school”.

Magdalena also mentioned a more social role of the track, and explains her view of its tradition:

So, in the 1970s, in West Germany, some länder (countries) introduced the so-called comprehensive school, which was also in Great Britain then coming in where the idea was where kids from different social backgrounds could learn together. So you would go there still after the four years of primary school, so very young, but it would offer all three types of exams to finish school... Now they're not called comprehensive schools any longer. Now they are called integrational secondary schools...(there's) this comprehensive school tradition. Yeah. They have this idea that it's also about mixing socially. Yeah. It's integrated, I guess...

Here Magdalena could be seen to imply that the idea about the “school type” in this track is to socialize children from different social backgrounds, a seemingly similar notion to Adrians “diverse” schoolkids that perhaps felt like “a fish in the water”.

Summation

Teacher dictums state that Gymnasium have higher requirements to get in, higher expectation on students academically, and the track itself has higher social status, and going in this track also give students a higher social status. The dictums on the Gymnastist are that she (needs to) enacts high academical skills in a rapid pace, and also do so coherently with the vast majority of their peers.

However, teacher dictums also state that some Gymnasium schools are lower level, and even though they get the same qualification, the Abitur, it's said it doesn't necessarily give the knowledge needed for completing a university degree. The content of the dictums could be interpreted as an auto-didactical thought that a possession of the highest educational qualifications is assumed to guarantee possessions

of all the knowledge guaranteed by all the lower qualifications. Choosing a school in the Gymnasium track could be seen as aiming/ for both the highest status and the best education, even though teachers' dictums disagree.

Regarding ISS, the changed system from the three to two tracks, was described by many teachers as something positive. However, in regard to Gymnasium being the "higher" track, ISS could then be seen as it became/remained the "lower track". The dictums on the ISS-student were that she (needs to) enacts a certain social *style*: resilience, self-esteem, and motivation, this to be able to outperform a track of bad grades and succeed in her education, and this also with more time and within a diverse group of peers.

The Gymnasium student is mentioned more so socialized into high academic skills, and the ISS-student is mentioned more so socialized into a social style. The dictums on German students' needs of "practical knowledge", their practices and repertoires could therefore be seen differ depending on if they take a Gymnasium-school-track or an integrated school-track. To follow is the next section and further results that look into the conditions of these different school trajectories...

Conditions to different school trajectories

When being asked the questions about what the teachers think decides what track a kid takes, all the teachers mentioned the child's parents and/or a child's family background. Teachers also mentioned location, neighbourhood, and proximity to school, which in cases also was connected to the family's background and/or socioeconomic status and, especially to language.

School trajectory and family

All teachers would talk about family, parents and/or family background when asked questions about what decides a child's school track and the conditions around it. Many teachers would refer to statistics and studies of family background and its relation to German education, also in comparison to other countries. Heidi for example says that:

So, parents who know the Gymnasium track and ... parents who have done the Abitur, they send their children much earlier and think about gymnasium than parents who haven't had a higher education... In Germany, there is a huge social gap. Yes... And it was amazing for me a couple of years ago when we had these tests, the PISA test and others. I never thought that in Germany, it's really an important...the background, the family background is the most important factor in managing the Abitur track. Yeah. That was, I thought it's in UK because I know the system in UK, it's absolute class system. But I was really surprised to hear this from Germany... And that's still the case. And that's still the case. But in the end, Germany has a good way. I like the German way that you have a good education for free. Yeah. When you go to good schools in UK or USA, you have to pay. A good education does cost a lot. In Germany, it's still the case that we offer free education for everybody.

The social class status of a student's family could help determine her school related habitus, (and sense of "fitting in"), which in turn helps determine the cultural capital she can deploy within the field defined by her classroom, teacher, other students, school, and the larger structures of her education. Which in Heidi's quote could be seen in the way the social class of the Gymnasium-students family/parents help

determine their school related habitus. Since Heidi explains that parents “who *know*” this track, could be seen with a higher cultural capital within this habitus. This could be seen further determine the student’s capital that she can deploy within the field of Gymnasium. This could be seen to help the student, in their development of the related habitus, their sense her social world, where rules, stakes of games feel largely familiar to her, and she might feel like “a fish in the water”.

Adrian similarly to Heidi mentions international studies when he’s asked what decides which track a kid takes, he answers:

...So, in I think in Germany, it's out of all the OECD states, you know, there's like studies that Germany is the most determined by the parents, you know, which is kind of crazy... So, and I think that's actually quite true... If you, if you're not from a like, academic background, you don't have the pressure inside of the family, for sure. And you don't have the language; you don't get help at home. And I think, yeah, it's, yeah, I think it's mostly, mostly the personal background of the family...

As with Heidis sayings, Adrian is mentioning the academic background of parents. Here, again, it could be seen how cultural capital is at play, and capital in its embodied form, can produce profits, and can determine the chances of success for practices. Such as, in this case, academic practices. Families having the “know-how”, the dispositions, that the parents could be seen socializing their child into. Students with parents without academic background are referred to as “not having the pressure inside the family” which perhaps could be interpreted as these parents lack a certain “know-how” and disposition within this field, which might in practice mean less pressure.

Anna also mentions Germany in an international context when asked about what decides what track a child takes, she says that:

Mmm... unfortunately, and also according to studies, Germany is a country where pretty much the socioeconomic status of the parents translates to the career of the kids, so it’s very... it’s unfortunately often it’s the, actually, the financial status of the parents or also the educational status which just translates one on one to the kids careers... So this is a huge factor, so knowing that at the age of 7 it’s pretty much set in which place the kids starts verbally, so if the kid has a good, a good you know “*wortschaft*” (vocabulary) at the age of 7 it goes the steps which go on top of that. Right so... If the parents sometimes have a language problem, with the German, that’s very hard to surpass. It’s pretty much defined how much the parents can also support the kids.... And it pretty much decides how much support the kids get from the families. Unfortunately, right...? So, actually school should be this place who brings pretty much everybody on the same level, but Germany is very famous for not being able to do that... compared to Netherlands, France, Scandinavia, Germany is pretty much below this, it doesn’t help the kids to surpass the parents’ economic status, for some reason.

What Heidi, Adrian and Anna have in common is that they are mentioning a social gap between the tracks. These social gaps could also be seen demonstrate the existence of social classes between the tracks. And from the results in the previous part, Gymnasium was also seen as “the higher track” even though it gives the same qualification as an ISS. Heidi, Adrian, and Anna also mention parents’ language level as a part of the social gap, what could possibly be seen as a certain “linguistic capital”. Which will be further investigated in ‘School track trajectory and locality’.

Heidi also says that:

I mean, in the end, when you have an abitur, the, the, whether there is a gymnasium at the stamp or integrated secondary school, if you have good grades, you can go to any university. There is no difference. So in the end it doesn't really matter... (Gymnasium) it has a higher social status when, when you look at the parents. Okay. You know, when you look at the parents and, and when you look at the, you know, the reputation. The reputation in general, when you say I'm on a Gymnasium, okay. Yeah. That means you have a higher, probably a higher level of education or what else. Yeah. But only among, ... the community of the parents ... But in general, you know, there are very, very good secondary schools and I've, I know they are doing a good job.

Which could again imply a certain “autodidact”-title to the Gymnasium and its students, and their Gymnasium-going-parents. As having an Abitur-certificate from Gymnasium according to the teachers seems to both be more likely if you know the specific dispositions thanks to your parents’ “know-how”, also there seems to be ‘a correspondence between the hierarchy of knowledge and the hierarchy of certificates’. Parents with Gymnasium-background wanting their child to have a Gymnasium-Abitur might be them thinking ‘the idea that competence with “higher” certification is assumed to guarantee some sort of possession of “basic knowledge”’.

Adrian would also talk about family/parents as “number one” deciding factor of a child’s school trajectory, he later mentions “underlying mechanics”, expectations and thoughts around choice of track:

Yeah, it's, I think the number one, the number one deciding factor actually, is the parents and the background of the child. And not only if the parents have like the time or the education to be able or also the language skills to help their own kid.

But then, yeah, so this determines it. But not only the one thing, but for sure also the expectations, you know, the underlying mechanics that it's not even in your thinking. Why would I go to Gymnasium? You don't even know the benefits or if there are any. I don't know if it's even better. But, you know, for a lot of people that are from when their parents didn't go to Gymnasium, why would their kids go to Gymnasium?... I think it really, really determines that.

Adrian seems to, like Heidi, express that a Gymnasium-Abitur might not necessarily be better, and so if a student’s parents didn’t go to Gymnasium, Adrian means that then why would the child. Again, this socializing could be seen, where parents’ expectations on children to follow and adapt to their social arena, with their own familiar skills, habits, and styles. Adrian also talks about the track system and parents, meaning that having the more so “traditional high track” Gymnasium as an option next to the newer “low track” ISS undermines the purpose of so called “integrated schools”:

The integrated secondary school is, in my opinion, also a very good idea. But not if there's a gymnasium next to it. You know, it kind of undermines the whole idea of learning together, growing together, and this whole thing. And if you have, if you then have the phenomenon that, you know, they did that to get rid of this whole three system school. Yeah, so, and now that you still have like gymnasiums next to it, like the parents who can kind of afford to help their kids and everything, they get their kids away from elementary school after the fourth grade, you know, put them in a gymnasium, and they

don't have to do anything with the other kids. And then integrated secondary school is just not as a high kind of level of education in the eyes of the parents for sure.

Magdalena raises the point of family choosing track for their child depending on who they want their child to “mingle with”:

Yeah, ... families who want to have a certain... or believe in a certain... or think there is a certain standard provided for their kids, and of course it's not only the teaching standard, it's also the company because kids with bad grades, kids who do not perform well at school already in primary school, they will not get there and so their kids will not have to mingle with these. It is a real classist idea. So you want your kids only to meet with gymnasium material.

Correspondingly with Armin, Louise, Heidi, Adrian, and Anna, that declared a social gap between the tracks, Magdalena raises a social gap. She raises the socialization and the idea of the divide of children as “classist”. These statements about social class could be seen as dictums that say that parents and children are going through a social process and mediation, in which the parents ensure the transmission of cultural capital across generations, reinforcing differences in class and social status depending on track, and as a result, the school becomes a (unconscious) place for social reproduction. Magdalena also mentions, what Heidi and Adrian were stating, that the educational quality/teaching standard is not necessarily the one on a higher standard, however, the children still get “higher status” by going there, which again could be seen as a social reproduction. But Magdalena seems to mean that it's *not* unconscious—on the contrary she seems to imply that the whole goal of parents choosing the Gymnasium-track is to keep intact the social network and the intergenerationally transmitted social capital (between the children and their friends, and the children and their parents, and also among parents whose children are friends) and so in this choosing this track they ensure they “only meet with gymnasium material”.

When Armin is being asked if he agrees with other teachers pointing out that family background is connected to what track a child takes, he says “totally”, and then family responsibilities, and material possessions/tools;

Totally. I would say there is some ... statistics say that it's related. So of course, people like... I think money is always a point, but still education in Germany is free. So the most kids can get something. We have a lot of libraries where they can take books and everything. But of course, if you have like family with low income and stuff and you have a lot of sisters and brothers and maybe just one computer for everybody or something like this, there are of course limitations which kind of force you somewhere.

... As somebody who is coming from a family where nobody did the Abitur, ... I could say there is a way of getting up and it's possible. It's not easy but it's possible... There are chances.

When I ask Armin what he thinks is the recipe for these chances if you are a person coming from a family background that didn't pursue an Abitur-education, he again raises parents, their involvement, and mentions family-specific practices:

Yeah, that's the thing I think.... As a child I read a lot. My parents had books at their home so I could read and they also read a lot for me. They read themselves so I saw them reading books so I also started taking books in my hand and was aware of it. But if you have a family who doesn't do it, who just like watch TV all the time or is playing with their cell phone, of course you will reproduce it ... But that's one part. So the parents have the main part of how you get involved in school. Of course they can also say learn more and learn more and you refuse to do it kind of in the back of rebellion and so you won't be able to make the gymnasium or like do the Abitur. But in general I think that the parents have the main key factor and then of course it's the teachers, yeah.. But I can say as a teacher myself that you don't have time to look at every pupil. If we would have smaller classes I would have more time and less hours especially as a German teacher.

On the topic of parents Louise, similar to Armin, she also mentions parents involvement with school, like helping with homework, they both also explain the varying capacity to do so, where Armin lifts limitations in household as sibling-responsibility or few material tools like a computer, Louise talks about the parents involvement, and capacity for involvement based on their time, knowledge and language level in German, she says that:

I think in Berlin, if you have parents and you come from a privileged background, they send you to a Gymnasium... I think it's very, it depends on your family situation very much, especially in the early age, during primary school, do the parents have time or the knowledge to help you with your homework, or do they know the language and can help you, or if they don't know the language, then they cannot help you, or maybe they are busy with their jobs, and you just have to look out for yourself, or the younger siblings or something like that, and other parents, they really want you to have an academic career and something like that, and then they really are very invested, and this makes a huge difference in Germany.

Louise continues, seemingly also comparing the Berlin and Bavarian systems:

There is a huge difference in which track a student, a kid goes to, depending on their family situation, and this is strengthened by this parting system after fourth grade, but, yeah, because then when you're first, when you get into this track of, like, in Bavaria middle school, then it's very unlikely that you get out of this one, because then you're there and then you're stuck, and nowadays there are more and more possibilities and options to get to your Abschluss, final exam, and also Abitur maybe, even if you were in middle school, even if you were not the most, the best student, but you can get there if you want to, but it depends on your inner self-esteem and your motivation and resilience, and I think all of this is very connected to the social status of the family.

What Armin and Louise lift is, similarly to Heidi, Adrian and Anna that declared a social gap between the tracks. Where these social gaps could also be seen demonstrate the existence of social classes between the tracks. But Armin and Annas statements also lift specific practices, or skills, habits, and styles in where the parental groups differ and why. Armin also lifts possessions as a TV, a computer or books which could be seen as an objectified cultural capital, that he seems to men also is related to the habits of a family. And where the habits of the family could be seen differ depending on your family background and your family's social status/class.

And Gisela, like Louise and Armin, also mentions what kind of help a child needs, but here she also lifts that some children get after-school tutoring, she says that:

Interesting point is yesterday I just saw a statistic about those who go to the university and getting to a university, actually you need also nowadays often gymnasium surrounding which helps you as a kid to come forward. For example... they have got Nachhilfe (after-school-tutoring) tutorial in ... Deutsch or English or whatever and other subjects. And they taught from 100 students, for example, there were just more than 80% who went to the universities or those who have got academic background. That means the parents have studied and know a bit knowledge of different stuff...

Here is another angle on “help” where she points out that some children get extra tutoring after school. when this was mentioned by other teachers it seemed like a phenomenon in both tracks, however Louise states about Nachhilfe that:

If the money is there, and they (the parents) want or find it important to improve the performance of the kid, then they will invest something.

Which could be seen as an example of how the capitals move in and out of each other, as here a parent’s economic capital can help support a child’s educational capital, and this capital could be seen be institutionalized into an educational qualification, and perhaps even a title of nobility if the child later gets into a Gymnasium.

School trajectory, locality, and language

When being asked the questions about what the teachers think decides what track a kid takes, many teachers mentioned location, neighbourhood, and proximity to school, which in cases also was connected to the family’s background and/or socioeconomic status and language. Heidi explains how Berlin is “a special place” for education because of the district’s socioeconomic differences:

Berlin is a special place you know... in Berlin, there are many, many families who are socially... who are not wealthy, who are, you know... it's a completely different situation than in Munich or in some of the cities in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Berlin is a very special place for education... You have districts, Neukölln or part of Kreuzberg or Wedding, where the schools have 80 percent migrants, where the big problem, a huge problem is that the kids don't understand German enough. When you can't, I mean, we have a problem here as well sometimes, not as much. But I see it in my class... when, for example, with our Ukrainian students. Yeah. They don't speak German very well, despite the fact that they are here for four years now. They're really, if you can't follow the German language, you can't follow the subject teaching.

As lifted also by Heidi, Anna and Adrian in regard to school trajectory and family, “parents not knowing the language” is a part of these teacher’s dictums explaining the social gap and difference in school trajectory. In Heidi’s explanation above she explains how the city’s segregated neighbourhoods become

a problem because the children in some highly migration populated areas “don’t understand German enough” which affects their general possibilities to follow the general teaching. With a Bourdieuan lens this could be seen as a premise of linguistic capital, where the children having a lower linguistic capital could correlate with a lower educational capital.

When Heidi is further asked if these kids manage to get good grades enough to get into Gymnasium she replies:

No, not at all. No, no, no, no. All those migrants, I don't think they, or many of them, those families, no, they wouldn't go to the gymnasium. But, well, there are enough good schools in Berlin, secondary schools, the integrated schools. Yeah. Really, it depends on the districts here in Berlin... Yeah. It really depends. Some parents even move to another district because they want other schools for their children.

Here, it could be seen as in the habitus-related dispositions, in the field of school, certain linguistic “know how” that are considered highly valued. The fact that some parents move district because they want other schools for their children also sounds like a similar dictum to what Magdalena earlier described as parents wanting their kids to only mingle with a certain type of “material”. In regard to language this could be interpreted as a parental strategy to ensure of their child’s linguistic capital. And perhaps even here the social capital, these social networks and the intergenerationally transmitted social capital (between the children and their friends, and the children and their parents, and among parents whose children are friends) and so in this choosing another school in another district. It is unclear if Heidi is referring to “the parents in Neukölln, Kreuzberg or Wedding” that were said to have higher migration background and lower socioeconomic status, if that were the case, perhaps a strategy, if a parents have linguistic capital is low. In this Bourdieu seems to not only mean “being able to speak German” but something that could be interpreted as “being able to speak Gymnasium”. And a parent that does not have the social and linguistic dispositions, by not having an academic background herself, might hence consider moving for their child to gain those “know how’s” from peers in a more so Gymnasium social context and network.

Adrian also draws parallels between school locality and school trajectory, but also mentions that with the separate tracks it also depends on school to school, he says that:

I think it, I think it really depends. I think in Berlin, it really depends which Gymnasium, actually. That's what I also noticed... in Berlin, I have the experience that there's really schools and ... my seminar teacher, she's like at ***** Gymnasium. And we were there all the time. And you just see it. Yeah, it's like, like, people are very rich there in Pankow. And all the kids are very rich; their parents are rich. And of course, not as diverse. Yes. But and then there's other gymnasiums that are not that at all, let's say, like in *** or something. And ISS has a special problem for sure. But for me, the new thing here in Berlin is that, like, it really depends where you go to school.

Here it could be interpreted as Adrian, like Heidi is demonstrating how some parts of the city are richer, and some are poorer. How this relates to track trajectory is not explicit. But from the results presented in the different tracks-episode, and Heidi’s saying that “no no no the migrants don’t go to Gymnasium” and Armin’s explanations of working at a Gymnasium-school in one of the highly migrated areas of Berlin we could interpret that locality could have an impact on students school track trajectory, students with migration background living in the “poorer” parts of the city are stated going to Gymnasium. But

the reverse, students without migration background living in “richer” parts of the city are not as clearly stated going to ISS-tracked schools according to teacher dictums. However, the Gymnasiums located in the “poorer” parts of the city are also described by Adrian as “the area where the gymnasium is set could ... affect the quality and also the standard ... at my school because we have such a language barrier...”. So, locality in this example might not implicate students school track trajectory, however the quality and standard of the educational content could be understood as differing depending on locality of school. And again, it could be seen as, even with a stated language barrier, choosing the gymnasium track might give students a higher social status, a certain autodidact nobility, even if teachers state students lacking certain academic linguistic capital. Armin further explains that students in his Gymnasium in the highly migrated area with lower German skills:

So we had a lot higher rate of people who failed or even universities also reacting on this problem and also kind of, how do you say, giving it up and just saying, okay, we also need to kind of let them pass kind of going through. So we have a going through problem from first grade to bachelor or master in general, I guess. That's my point. And that's why I think our level or standard is much lower. I mean, there were some students which didn't read books. They said like, I never read a book and then they were there studying to get a teacher and they passed Abitur kind of.

So even if the students gain the “higher certificate”, and hence an autodidactical idea, that is: competence with “higher” certification is assumed to guarantee some sort of possession of “basic knowledge” that also causes practical “know-how” the students actually lack both the possession of “basic knowledge” and practical “know-how”, as Armin says, the students have perhaps a language barrier or have “never read a book” and endeavor a territory education, with their Abitur, to University, to become teachers. When, it could be interpreted that, the habitus related to university might require a certain type of skills, habits, and styles, such as linguistic skills and reading habits. And these could be seen related to the capital, perhaps not only by the students’ parents but by the social network the family has around them locally in the neighborhood that they socialize and relate in. In this way of thinking, locality and school track trajectory become highly correlative. This is a theme also interpretable in Magdalena’s dictums, that similarly draw on locality in Berlin, here she draws on traditional concepts of school tracks and school trajectory, she explains that:

So, the system is that you were supposed to go to the primary school in your neighbourhood, which is okay because young kids, the idea was that they could walk by themselves... which is a good thing. But then of course, if you look at a city and the certain areas, districts, then it is pretty obvious that you have many areas where there is a certain clientele and you have richer suburbs, you have poorer areas... So there was a big difference. And so of course, it also was obvious that then kids from certain primary schools, from certain areas, they were all sent, got all recommended to the gymnasium. And kids from poorer areas, maybe also with more migrational families, stuff, and poorer families, they would all be recommended for the Hauptschule... And that's still going on.

Children from “certain areas” would be referred to the higher track Gymnasium and children from poorer areas would be recommended to the lower traditional track Hauptschule. Even though Armin’s dictums speak against this, that children from migration areas do partake in Gymnasium school tracks, the concept of that “higher” education was/is something that occurs in “richer” parts of the city and “lower” education as something that occurs in “poorer” parts of the city. Perhaps this could explain

Heidi's account of how some parents want to move to other districts because they want other schools for their children. Bourdieu sought through his works a model of the social processes and the mediations, which he means tend to ensure the transmission of cultural capital across generations. And this behind the back, sometimes against the will of agents engaged in the school system, like students, teachers, and parents. It could be interpreted that both family locality and language, separate and together, either ensures or repudiates transmission of cultural capital across generation. That is if also the cultural capital is enough or deployable within the field or not. Hence, the social class status of a student's family could help determine her school related habitus, and in this, locality and language could be seen as capital factors that affect a child's school track trajectory.

Summation

According to teachers, students' family background and their school track trajectory relate, but so does locality and school track trajectory.

The social class status of a student's family seems to help determine the student's school related habitus and sense of "fitting in". And families that have the "know-how" and the dispositions could be seen be better able to socialize their child into the certain school related fields. There seem to be social gaps between the tracks, in which it could also be seen demonstrate a possible existence of social classes between the tracks. This, even though the educational quality and/or teaching standard in the Gymnasium-track is stated to not necessarily be on a higher standard, however, it's stated to be so in the eye of the parents. Hence the children still get "higher status" by taking this track, which could be seen as a social reproduction.

Bourdieu means that sometimes this reproduction happens unconsciously by the actors around. But Magdalena seems to mean that it's *not* unconscious- on the contrary she seems to imply that the whole goal of parents choosing the Gymnasium-track is to keep intact the social network and the intergenerationally transmitted social capital (between the children and their friends, and the children and their parents, and also among parents whose children are friends) and so in this choosing this track they ensure they "only meet with gymnasium material".

Factors that have an implication on the school track trajectory are parents' involvement with school, which vary depending on time, background, and linguistic capital. Not only in ways of "being able to speak German", but also in ways of "being able to speak Gymnasium". And a parent that does not have the social and linguistic dispositions, by not having an academic background herself, might hence consider moving for their child to gain those "know how's" from peers in a more so Gymnasium social context and network.

Locality seems to matter. This possibly because of the social network a student and their family have around them, locally in the neighborhood could be seen help to dictate what dispositions a child is being socialized into, hence also what skills, habits and styles that are being reproduced. In this way of thinking, locality and school track trajectory become highly correlative.

The bigger findings in these results will now further be discussed in the bigger context together with earlier research...

Conclusions and discussion

The ‘Gymnasium student’ is by teachers mentioned more so socialized into high academic skills, and a high ‘elite’ social status. While the ‘ISS-student’ is mentioned as having lower academic skills, and having a lower social status, and is in contrast socialized with “inner” characteristics like “resilience” and “motivation”, which also is described as essential for their chances of developing their academic skills. This could further be seen as a social and cultural distinctions.

This distinction could possibly be explained by still present traditional ideas of the purpose of a three-track model, as tracks were created for different career trajectories and societal fields. The idea of the school-tracks as responding to career trajectory, then and now, seems to differ, as the “higher” and “lower” tracks now don’t necessarily respond in career trajectory, as both tracks offer the same end-of-school-certificate. The character of distinction between tracks could instead be seen as more of a social and cultural one. These distinctions could further be seen correspond with, not just tracks, but more so with social class, as “the gymnasist” and the migrant-gymnasist are described also with social and cultural distinctions.

This could be seen to correspond with the earlier research stating that more and more young people are getting the higher certificate since change of reforms from three-to-two tracks, but ethnic and social segregation persists between the school types. Which is a theme raised also in earlier research, a segregation that is persisting due to the ways socially privileged parents choose school, preferring Gymnasium for their children (Lenz et al. 2021). Socially privileged parents choose Gymnasium for their children, and the students there could be seen to be socialized to “become an academic-thinking human beings” as Louise mentioned.

Research shows that parents with high socio-economic status have particularly effective ways of getting what they want for their children; because they have a deep knowledge of the school system and because many high-educated parents also gain this knowledge through their social networks (Dumont et al., 2019, p. 199). This correspond with the results of the teacher dictums, that families that have the “know-how” and the dispositions, are therefore better able to socialize their children into the certain school related fields. It is also stated that Germanys implementation of tracking creates distinct populations by school tracks (Traini et al. 2021 in Bittmann, 2024, p. 157) which could be seen in the social distinctions of the dictums regarding the different tracks.

And even though the educational quality and/or teaching standard in the Gymnasium-track is stated by teachers to not necessarily be of a higher standard, however, it is stated to be so in the eye of the parents. Hence the children still get “higher status” by taking this track, which could be seen as a social reproduction, and could also be seen as an “effective way”, a knowledge and use of social networks that Dumonts et al. (2019, p. 199) research mentions.

Parents with lower socio-economic status are said to show less confidence in dealing with the process of transition to secondary school tracks, and are also said to view their children’s competencies as being more so fixed (Dumont et al., 2019, p. 219). Which could also perhaps be seen in the way that Heidi for example states that “no no no the migrants don’t go to Gymnasium”. Which both Armin’s dictums and previous research contradict. Research says that parts of Germany with a two-track system have immigrant students attending Gymnasium *more often* than non-immigrant students (Lenz et al., 2021, p. 60). This is in itself contradicting to the German general statistics stating that children's educational

chances in Germany strongly depend on the educational level of their parents, where in 2017 it was shown that the parents of a vast majority of Gymnasium school pupils (65%) had a higher education entrance qualification (Abitur) (DeStatis, 2018). However, this was statistics from Germany as a whole, where also many countries still have a three-track-system, which could insinuate a huge difference between two and three-track-systems regarding family background factors for school trajectory. Perhaps this is also what teachers mean when they state that Berlin is a special place when it comes to education.

Armin points out that some Gymnasium schools are lower level, and even though they get the same qualification, the Abitur, doesn't necessarily give the knowledge needed for completing a university degree. The idea that Gymnasium is purely "better" because of its track/label could be interpreted as an auto-didactical thought, that is; that a possession of the highest educational qualifications is assumed to guarantee possessions of all the knowledge guaranteed by all the lower qualifications. This could further be interpreted together with what Tjaden et al (2017, p. 224) refers to as the "optimism trap" regarding migrants' ambitious educational choices. These choices are at first glance seen as 'positive', however resulting in a narrow focus on the university track. And the researchers mean that in a stratified education systems like the German one, with vocational options, immigrant optimism may lead students with a minority background to have significantly higher dropout rates, or leading to a long path to university which the researchers point out comes at a much higher opportunity-cost than in other countries (Tjaden et al., 2017, p. 224). The "lower level" gymnasium student was also described as such based on their lower linguistic, social and cultural capital. Choosing the higher considered track could possibly be a try to 'autodidact' oneself, but instead these students could be seen to fall into an 'optimism trap', as the needed knowledge to succeed at university isn't given by an Abitur-certificate per se. In contrast, the 'elite' gymnasist seems to be described as more so prepared for territory education. Possibly thanks to their higher accumulated social and cultural capital.

This theme was also brought up in research by Zeddies et al. (2025, p. 126) who identified differences in the development of students' occupational aspirations during secondary education, also depending on their social background and their attended school type. The results showed that while students from less privileged social backgrounds aspirations in academic track decrease, attending a school with several courses of education has a positive effect on the individual development. In contrast, the occupational aspirations of students from privileged social background remained stable, regardless of the attended school type (Zeddies et al., 2025, p. 126).

Even though the track trajectories lead to the same certificate, the teacher dictums show that children still get "higher status" by taking the Gymnasium track. Bourdieu means that sometimes social reproduction happens unconsciously by the actors around. Teacher dictums, however, testify that it's *not* necessarily unconscious. On the contrary it's stated that the goal of some parents choosing the Gymnasium track is to keep intact, what could be analyzed as, the social network and the intergenerationally transmitted social capital. This would mean to keep social networks intact, both between the children and their friends, and the children and their parents, and also among parents whose children are friends. This by choosing the Gymnasium track to ensure they "only meet with gymnasium material" according to Magdalena. This congruently to Baysu et al. (2018, p. 453) stating that school systems that assign students to different educational tracks, like Germany, at an early age is stated to intensify social inequalities, because tracking magnifies the impact of socio-economic status on school outcomes.

The German school-track system, specifically in Berlin and regarding teacher dictums could be examined with the lens of Downey et al. (2016, p. 208-210). Reproducing inequality would mean, for example, that the inequalities a child has at the first years of schooling are largely unchanged as they move through the school system. Whereas intensifying inequality is articulated as an even more destructive exacerbatory role of school.

The dictums seemingly speak for that the social class status of a *student's family* seems to help determine the student's school related habitus and sense of "fitting in". And families that have the "know-how" and the dispositions could be seen be better able to socialize their child into the certain school related fields. Factors that also have an implication on the school track trajectory are *parents' involvement* with the school, which vary depending on time, background, and linguistic capital. Not only in ways of "being able to speak German", but also in ways of "being able to speak Gymnasium". Locality also seems to matter, possibly because of the social network a student and *their family* have around them, locally in the neighborhood, and network-agents that could be seen help to dictate what dispositions a child is being socialized into.

Parents background within the school track system in Berlin do hold a critical weight in the choice of a school track trajectory for children. The system itself could therefore be seen as *reproducing* inequality, meaning that the inequalities a child has early on in school-life are largely unchanged as they move through the school system. But as the inequalities do seem to intensify with, during or perhaps by the parting of children in different tracks, it could be seen as the inequality is *intensified* for some children. Hence, children who do not have parents with the "know how" to "speak Gymnasium" and to "speak the system", or children whose parents do not have the possibility to attend a school where their social network could reproduce these "know how's" for them might experience an intensifying inequality by the parting system.

Similarly with the descriptions of the ISS-students, if you (or via your parents) cannot "speak Gymnasium" or socially disposition yourself as an academically skilled Gymnasist, you will need resilience, self-esteem and motivation to outperform your path of bad grades, seemingly because of poorer language capital. This responding with Lenz et al. (2021) that point out how ethnic and social segregation persists between the school types. And the tracks both reproduce and intensify inequality, like Adrian stated:

The integrated secondary school is, in my opinion, also a very good idea. But not if there's a gymnasium next to it. You know, it kind of undermines the whole idea of learning together, growing together, and this whole thing...

Which possibly boils down to the question of what education is for? Durkheim (1961 in Watters, 2008, p. 122) would say that education is an aspect of socialization, because it involves the acquisition of knowledge and the learning of skills and could be seen as crucial for ensuring social coherence and integration. Acquisition of knowledge, learning of skills, social coherence and integration seems, in the dictums on track-system to be like oil and water. Is social coherence and knowledge a Gymnasium-thing, whilst integration and socialization something for ISS?

School systems that assign students to different educational tracks, like in Germany, at an early age is stated to intensify social inequalities, because tracking magnifies the impact of socio-economic status

on school outcomes (Baysu et al. 2018, p. 453) There is also more school disadvantage in school-tracked Germany than in comprehensive schooled Sweden (Baysu et al. 2018, p. 454). But having a higher track next to a seemingly more so “comprehensive track” Adrian means undermines the whole idea. A vast majority of earlier research point out that Germany, and its school system, whether it be two or three track is less successful to bridge a social gap in school outcome and segregation instead persists (Jenkins et al. 2008 in Gutiérrez et al. 2020; Lenz et al. 2021; Dumont et al., 2019; Baysu et al. 2018; Engzell & Raabe, 2023; Zeddies et al., 2025). If this research is out there, and if there is less school disadvantage in comprehensive systems, whilst teacher dictums also bear witness for social and cultural distinctions between students in different tracks and the different opportunities given, the question that comes to mind is; why keep a tracking system?

In the field of child and youth studies a constant aspirational question is how we can contribute to the bettering life conditions for children and young people. And it is my belief that this is partially done by centering the persisting systems that contribute to inequalities, and by doing this, challenge the status quo. This study has, through teacher dictums, aimed to shine a light on *how* school systems contribute to social inequalities and has aimed to bring to the surface the nuances of children’s conditions and opportunities. Further research on this topic could possibly answer the question of why Germany is keeping a tracking system when it is contributing to inequality, but also to be able to establish new possible ways to organize education and systems that foster equality, and by this challenge the status quo.

Lastly, I would like to say a few last words about the study’s possible strengths and weaknesses. This by and leaning back on the ideas of reflexivity. As Bryman (2012, p. 393) highlights, reflexivity recognizes that ‘knowledge’ reflects location, time, and the social space in where the researcher exists. With this lens, the specific knowledge created in the study, in the specific context that it is created in, could be seen as the strength of the study. That is, the location of Berlin, the current time we are in and the social space in society, and further, in the current Berlin school tracks. These put together could be seen as specific study-factors, that contribute with new specific knowledge. However, this could also be seen as the weakness of the study. As it is bound to such specific time, location and social space, the possibility of transferability is challenged. That means, that the main results of the study may not necessarily be transferable to let’s say a Swedish context, or perhaps not even to a national German context, nor a Berlin context in the year 2009. This could further also be described as the study’s limitation. However, it is my belief that this is also the purpose and strength of qualitative research and in research within the field of children and young people. This to reach the *nuances* within specific locations, during specific times and in specific social context, wherein specific children and young people are in.

This study has aimed to find nuances within the German educational track system, via teachers’ dictums. Another way to approach examining nuances on this topic could be going to the children and young people in the system, or examining how parents navigate the system. However, my suggestions for further research would be combining qualitative and quantitative methods. This might include the specific location of current school systems of both Berlin *and* the other countries of Germany. It might also focus particularly on the education-political mechanisms that carry the traditional schooling systems and current status quo of educational tracks. And perhaps try to answer questions like why tracking systems persist, and what possible other educational systems, and their connecting structures, such as language learning, could better benefit *all* children and young people. All in all: research that help sort the terrain on what should stay, and what needs to go.

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Attachments

Interview guide

1. Introduction / background

- Could you give a short 2 min introduction of yourself, your age, your education, your work experience?
- What kind of schools have you worked in, with kids what ages, what background?

2. Initial questions (teachers' thoughts on the system):

- Could you tell me about the different tracks in the German secondary school system? (See where it goes)
- What is in your experience the positive aspects of the system?
- And what are the negative aspects?
- Could you tell me about your own experience with the different tracks?
- How does the process of recommendation/choice of track work?

3. Further questions (teachers' observations/thoughts about how the tracks relate to young people):

- What would you say decides which track a child will take?
- How do you think the different tracks could possibly impact young people's opportunities in life, in the present and future?
- How do you think the different tracks could relate with young people's career expectations?
- How do you view the relationship between a child's parents/family or family background and what track a child takes?
- How do you view the relationship between a child's social circle/friends and what track a child takes?
- Have you observed any differences in the different tracks and the children that go there? If so, what?
- Is there different status to the tracks? Is there different status to the young people that go there?

4. System and beliefs (teachers observations/experiences with the systems and how it impacts young people)

- What do you think about the track-system? (Why?)

