

Bounded Horizons

A study of upper secondary school choice for newly arrived students

Brendan Munhall



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Abstract

Graduating primary school students in Sweden choose their upper secondary school within a unique quasi-market school system. The students may choose specialized programs but must also be accepted based on grade rankings by the schools. Despite equity arguments for the school choice model, opportunities are not equally available for all students. Newly arrived students in particular may face challenges in their school selection process, leading to limited availability, especially within metropolitan areas. However, there is a lack of research exploring newly arrived students' own experiences and attitudes towards school choice in this setting. The aim of this study is to investigate newly arrived students' own experiences and their understanding of the upper-secondary school choice process.

In this study, twenty-two newly arrived year-nine students in the metropolitan Stockholm area were interviewed about their experiences during the school choice process. Semi-structured interviews conducted in the students' mother tongues explored their educational backgrounds, social interactions, school experiences and academic aspirations during the 2019/2020 school year. In addition, eight of their teachers and guidance counsellors were interviewed. The student responses were analysed through thematic analysis using a combination of concepts including horizon for action, cultural and social capital, the grapevine and structural and symbolic boundaries.

In the results, the newly arrived students were shown to be a diverse group with varying languages and levels of preparedness for the Swedish education system. They shared similar experiences in the upper secondary school process, marked by subtle differences due to their available resources and the different actors that they interacted with. Marketing strategies used by the upper secondary schools themselves had a substantial influence on the students although many of the students found this information hard to navigate. Guidance from the school, in both a formal sense from guidance counsellors and informally by other educators had a positive effect but was dependent on the engagement of the educators. The students' parents had a limited influence on their childrens' choice process, largely due to their own recent arrival in Sweden. Finally, due to the structure of schools, the newly arrived students interacted with other newly arrived students more than with Swedish students, giving them limited peer information about upper secondary schools.

These findings shed light on the experiences of an often overlooked group of students, offering a fresh perspective on the Swedish education system. Many of these students faced challenges in choosing upper secondary schools based on the grades they achieved during their relatively brief time in Sweden and the neighborhoods they resided in. Their school preferences were further shaped by the limited support from both their social circles and the educational institutions themselves. Consequently, these students were vulnerable to the influence of targeted marketing and unsubstantiated rumors. However, this phenomenon wasn't universal. Dedicated educators, particularly those who shared a common language or cultural background with the students, provided meaningful guidance. These findings are significant for identifying limited opportunities for an under researched group within the Swedish education system and giving insight into how they may be better supported.

Keywords: *newly arrived students, school choice, horizon for action, boundaries, upper secondary school, educational policy, educational marketization.*

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To Orla and Maeve

Thou citest so many witnesses and proofs, Sancho, that I have no choice but to say thou must be telling the truth

Don Quixote - Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

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Stockholm, March 2024
Brendan Munhall

Chapter One: Introduction

The concept of educational choosing has become common across national education systems in recent decades. In these school systems, students and families may choose the educational institutions that meet their needs and desires. At the same time, educational institutions position themselves within a marketplace, intending to match the preferences of potential students. As opposed to fully centralized national education systems, this creates a competitive environment where schools compete against each other. The Swedish education system provides a compelling example of this phenomenon, with a unique decentralized, market structure for upper secondary schools.¹ With a modest degree of national steering, municipalities have high autonomy to shape the schools in their regions. The operation of these upper secondary schools is funded by enrolment numbers and thus they are motivated to position themselves to attract students. This choice system has produced a number of challenges for students including concerns about equity. A significant amount of research strongly suggests that educational opportunities are stratified by this market system which disproportionately affects marginalized populations (Ball, Reay, et al., 2002; Beach & Dovemark, 2019; Bunar, 2010a; Fjellman et al., 2019). This is particularly true for recent migrants who face a number of boundaries while navigating the choice process leading to segregation within schools.

This study examines the experiences of newly arrived students² when they are choosing upper secondary schools in Sweden. The topic is significant for a number of reasons. A focus on increased migration into Europe has been ubiquitous in media and national policy in recent years. Rather than the migrant experience and perspective being put at the forefront, disproportionate attention has been given to the burden that migrants place on their host countries and their inability to integrate (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017). Within schools, policy balances children's 'best interests' with so called 'durable solutions' and many of the policies depict the educational challenges of migrants within a deficit framework which require intervention (Allsopp & Chase, 2019; Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017). A number of researchers argue that there is a

¹ Swedish: *Gymnasium*. Throughout this dissertation terminology about the Swedish school system was guided by Skolverket's (2023d) list of school terms translated to English.

² The specific meaning of the term 'newly arrived' will be described in *Chapter Two: Context and previous research*.

great need to highlight the migrant experience in educational research with particular attention given to children as asylum-seekers (Bunar, 2010b; Nils-son Folke, 2017; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Pinson & Arnot, 2007). Additionally, the group is often mischaracterized as a homogenous population with the same preferences and challenges (Bunar, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2019; Wernesjö, 2012). The assumption of homogeneity within recent migrants necessitates further exploration of their experiences. By understanding the variation across the newly arrived students' experiences of upper secondary school choice, the challenges that they face can be identified, leading to the opportunity of addressing shortcomings in the Swedish education system. Focusing on the newly arrived experience provides the opportunity to 'identify and voice the stressors they personally find most difficult to face' (O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015, p 3). These arguments, among other research referred to throughout this dissertation, motivate this study.

This study uses the concept of horizon for action, introduced by Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997), as an initial point of departure. Within this perspective, the process of school choice is examined with school systems that act as a market. A core tenet of this theory is that decision makers do not consider all options simultaneously. As such, decisions are made pragmatically within the realm of what they view as possible. Resources, framed as capital in this study, determine what opportunities students are able to pursue. Cultural capital represents a person's situational familiarity that can improve or maintain social status (Bourdieu, 1986). For educational choosing, the possession of cultural capital can allow for greater opportunities. Social capital plays a large role in what information can be gained by the students (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Information is essential to the upper secondary school choice process where the sources and quality of information can influence students' understanding and formation of aspirations (Ball & Vincent, 1998). Finally, when students begin the process of choosing an upper secondary school, they face boundaries which impact what types of choices are made. This study explores the experiences of newly arrived students during their process of choosing an upper secondary school within their bounded horizons.

The empirical data in this study involves semi-structured interviews of twenty-two newly arrived year-nine students. Two interviews, conducted near the beginning and end of the students' final year of compulsory school addressed their understanding of the upper secondary school choice process, influences and preferences for the coming year. Interviews of eight educators were also included to provide supplementary information about the different local schools. Analysis was conducted using thematic analysis.

This book is organized into ten chapters. Chapter one gives an overview of the study and positions the research in relation to the study's aims and research questions. Chapter two presents the context of the study which includes previous research on migration, the Swedish education and its system of educational choosing. Chapter three presents the theoretical perspectives taken in

this study, grounded in the concept of horizon for action but extended through other related theory. Chapter four lays out the methodology used to collect data and conduct thematic analysis. In chapter five the newly arrived students who participated in the study are introduced. Building on the Swedish school context presented in chapter two, chapter six presents the students' own interactions with the marketized schools during their upper secondary school choice process. Chapter seven presents the support that the students received from the school institution itself through both formal and informal channels. Chapter eight presents the social interactions that the students had, which informed their choice of upper secondary school including their family and peers. Chapter nine presents the boundaries that the students faced during their choice during the upper secondary school process, largely influenced by factors introduced through chapters five through eight. In chapter ten, the findings of this study are discussed in the larger context of the Swedish education system and theoretical positions. Finally, a condensed summary of the study is presented in Swedish.

Aims and Research Questions

This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of newly arrived students' interactions with the school-choice process in the Swedish education system. More specifically, horizon for action is of particular interest considering the newly arrived students' backgrounds and experiences after migrating to Sweden.

Research questions

- 1) How are newly arrived students influenced by marketization in the upper secondary school choice process?
- 2) How do the possession and acquisition of cultural and social capital influence how newly arrived students interact with the process of choosing an upper secondary school?
- 3) How do boundaries influence newly arrived students' horizons for action?

Chapter Two: Context and Previous Research

From the Swedish Model to a Quasi-market

A shared experience

Like any public institution, the Swedish education system has evolved over time. Changing power structures, political movements and societal expectations have each contributed to its growth into the complex school structure which exists today (I. Andersson & Nilsson, 2000). The modern education system looks very different than it did 50 years ago but, in many ways, previous reforms continue to influence today's policies. A series of social reforms were implemented in the 1960s that established what is often referred to as the 'Swedish model'. These broad-sweeping reforms encompassed a development of the comprehensive welfare-state in the 1960s when there was an increased interest in expanding social programs administered by a central government. Professor of Education Torsten Husén (1916-2009), who contributed to the implementation of the educational reforms, describes them to be a product of the labour movement and that they prioritized

increased equality by providing equal access to further education irrespective of social class and place of residence. The inequalities existed not only between social classes but also, and to an even greater extent, between rural and urban areas (Husén, 1986, p. 155).

The school act of 1962 changed the education system dramatically, introducing the first comprehensive and shared national curriculum (I. Andersson & Nilsson, 2000; Berhanu, 2011). This reform is credited with eliminating previous school tracks, which were criticized for promoting separate and unequal schooling experiences, in exchange for a singular and shared compulsory school track. Most importantly though, it brought a perspective towards education that prioritized social justice through schooling that promoted social cohesion, was of high quality and was equally accessible regardless of a student's background (Lundahl, 2016). This national welfare model, or institutional redistributive model, was unique for its universal welfare approach in

which the entire population had the right to state support, as opposed to a selective welfare model where only the most marginalized had access (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012; Cars & Edgren-Schori, 2000).

A quasi-market

In the following decade, optimism around the Swedish model began to subside. Perhaps spurred by a worsening economic situation, there was dissatisfaction with the status quo (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012; Lundahl, 2002b). Criticism described a public sector that was too centralized and restricted by inflexible bureaucracy (Premfors, 1991). These critiques extended to the education system. There was evidence that the reforms had been somewhat successful at increasing equality but the reforms were criticized for leading to worsening classroom discipline, an insufficient rise in student achievement and parental background remained a predictor of a student's academic trajectory (Heidenheimer, 1974; Lundahl, 1990). Ingrid Nilsson (1989) described the education reforms of the Swedish model as such: 'As to its most important aim, that of equality, the social injustices and documented inequality of the school point to an absolute failure.' (p. 362).

Parliamentary decisions towards the end of the 1980s set the stage for a new approach, the decentralization of the education system. The government, led by the Social Democrats, began promoting decentralization as a means of better promoting democracy than the previous centralized model (Daun, 2003). In 1989, municipalities were given authority over school funding and local school oversight (E. Forsberg & Lundgren, 2010; Lundahl, 2002b). In 1990, an influential study, *The Study of Power and Democracy in Sweden*, argued that the Swedish Model was in decline (Petersson, 1991). Rather than dismantling the welfare state, it was suggested that it should be adapted to reflect the modern era 'characterized by individualization and internationalization' (Petersson, 1991, p. 190). At the same time, Sweden was experiencing an economic recession and free-market policies including decentralization and laissez-faire capitalism were gaining prominence. An election in 1991 brought a new government into power, led by the centre right Moderates, who introduced new public management policies in state social services based on the work of Milton Friedman (Bunar, 2010a; Daun, 2003). The free-choice of schools was argued to increase multiculturalism, not acting counter to the democratic goals of the Swedish welfare state but in fact, better embodying them (Englund, 2010). A key feature of these reforms was that parents were given the right to choose their children's school, opening the field beyond their local school (Imsen et al., 2017). Legislation in 1992 established a 'voucher' model of funding and allowed for the establishment of independent schools³

³ Swedish: *friskola*

which could be privately owned⁴ (Lundahl, 2002b). This reform had some noticeable immediate effects, namely that schools would begin to compete for student enrollment and their connected funding. Students could also choose schools outside of their immediate vicinity, changing where many students would go to school, particularly in urban centres (Ofstedal Telhaug et al., 2006; Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016).

This mix of state and independent schools and voucher-funded structure sets the country apart from many other national education systems, and the use of the term *quasi-market* has been used to describe the marketization of the tax-financed Swedish education system (Le Grand, 1991; Lubienski, 2009). Lundahl (2002b) frames the Swedish quasi-market as having diminished regulation, decentralization and having led to increased social differences. The quasi-market that exists has a number of features that differentiates it from a pure market system (Lindblad & Lundahl, 2015, p. 8). In a quasi-market, not all participants aim to make a profit, students cannot determine the service (in this case the curriculum), and market entry is determined by a state authority (the School Inspectorate).

More recently, criticism of these reforms has pointed to how they diverge from the core values of the Swedish model. Daun (2003) and Englund (1994) see these policy shifts toward decentralization and school choice as a reinterpretation of the role of education, where education moved from a societal right to an individual one. A 1990 government document that states '*the aim of education is to make it possible for the pupils to successively find their comparative advantages and their own direction of interest*' can be related more to human capital theory than promoting democracy (Daun, 2003, p. 94). However, the immediate public response to these reforms was more positive, with public polls in the early 1990s showing a majority of the country in support (Carnoy, 1998).

The current Swedish education system structure reflects these previous reforms. At the upper secondary school level between 40 and 55% of upper secondary students attend an independent school in urban centres (Lundahl, 2016, p. 5). Independent schools, as opposed to municipal schools, are privately owned, are able to earn profit and operate with different regulations to those of municipal schools, despite directly competing against them for student enrolment (Arreman & Holm, 2011). Like the municipal schools, independent schools are tuition free and operate with public funding. In recent years, ownership of upper secondary schools by large conglomerates has become pervasive, the ownership of which can be opaque and the governing boards being a revolving door for politicians (Erixon Arreman & Dovemark, 2018; Rönnerberg, 2017). A report for the Ministry of Education has also identified a high

⁴ This type of education reform, when privately owned and profit-driven schools enter the public sector, can be called exogenous privatization (Ball & Youdell, 2009).

degree of foreign investment as a vulnerability when little oversight is conducted on school ownership and their preparedness for running a school with student needs in mind (Legge et al., 2023).

Educational choosing

In recent decades, the prevalence of education choice has grown internationally (Apple, 2001; Whitty & Power, 2000). School choice as an education model has been employed to counteract inequality but the effectiveness of this system has been repeatedly questioned. The effectiveness of school choice, being a primary argument behind the privatization of education, has limits based on the possession of resources (which will be framed as capital and presented in *Chapter 3: Theoretical Framing*) and can disadvantage marginalized populations (Ball et al., 1995, 1996; Ball, Reay, et al., 2002). In fact, numerous studies have suggested that the current structure of the school choice system in Sweden has reproduced inequalities for marginalized groups (Beach & Dovemark, 2019; Bunar, 2010a; Fjellman, 2019; Jonsson & Rudolphi, 2011; Lundahl, 2002b; Skowronski, 2013).

Typically, education choosers value information from different sources unevenly (Ball & Vincent, 1998). The connection between sources of information and the influences they have on educational choosers can be understood through the work of Stephen Ball and Carol Vincent's⁵ (1998) study of the privatization of education systems, which discusses the connection between social class and educational opportunity. In this approach, social capital is deployed 'as a tool or heuristic device for exploring processes and practices that are related to the acquisition of other forms of capital' (Morrow, 1999 as cited in Ball, 2003, p. 81).

To understand the information that educational choosers interact with in the *landscape of choice* (Bowe et al., 1994), Ball and Vincent (1998) introduced the concept of *the grapevine*. The grapevine, also called hot knowledge, refers to the influence of informal social networks of peers and family members, or others with a high level of trust, on choice-making as a way to understand symbolic capital (Ball & Vincent, 1998). Hot knowledge is the product of a collective process of making sense of a particular problem based on direct experience that can be in the form of word-of-mouth, hearsay and rumour as 'a way of filling in missing information or explaining the inexplicable' and a 'response to ambiguity' (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p. 380). Alternatively, cold knowledge originates from formal channels and official sources, such as 'examination results, lists of school activities, outlines of school policies, etc.', is designed to be disseminated and is intended to be more standardized (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p. 380). There is evidence that many students prefer hot

⁵ (Ball, 2003; Ball, Davies, et al., 2002, 2002; Ball et al., 1995, See also 2001; Ball, Reay, et al., 2002; Reay et al., 2001; Reay & Ball, 1998; van Zanten & Kosunen, 2013)

knowledge to cold knowledge but in its absence, cold knowledge is accepted (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Greenbank, 2011). It is too simplistic to consider the grapevine as an organized network, as it is neither permanent nor independent.

The differences between hot and cold knowledge cannot always be split cleanly between official and unofficial information (Slack et al., 2014; Tah, 2020). School officials may draw on official sources while simultaneously relying on their own opinions, experience and preferences for which their interpretations of student experiences are constructed from their own specific frames of reference. Warm knowledge provides an additional concept which can explain information that comes from strangers where ‘perceived synergy’ allows a connection to be made between the two parties (Slack et al., 2014). For warm knowledge, sources leverage trust to build a relationship with the recipient to pass on information. Trust can also be established by being welcoming, approachable or occupying a respected position. Warm knowledge has a relation to hot knowledge, also being built on trust, but where hot knowledge involves a person being embedded in a social network, with warm knowledge the source is more distant (Slack et al., 2014). Information from warm knowledge comes from trusted people with an association with the institution of interest giving the person a degree of authority. A benefit of this practice is that it allows institutional information to be disseminated from trusted sources, which is especially important for students with few resources such as recent migrants (Baker et al., 2018). An example of warm knowledge in action could be a school employing staff with characteristics amicable to students. In the context of newly arrived students, research has shown that educators with a shared culture, language and background are positive influences (Dávila, 2017; O’Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Turtiainen, 2012). When successfully structured, warm knowledge can provide the benefits of the trusted relationship of hot knowledge and the standardized information of cold knowledge (Slack et al., 2014). However, success is encouraged by investment from the institution, in the form of training and recognition of the student’s background. From another perspective, this ‘synergy’ could be leveraged to serve interests other than the students’, who could receive information that is biased or counter to their aspirations.

The distribution of information is unequal in an urban setting and among social groups, which contributes to further segregation during the process of school choice (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016). Decision makers can be categorized as either embedded choosers or contingent choosers. Embedded choosers are the children of parents who have first-hand knowledge of the education system and whose own academic trajectory is expected to follow a similar path as their parents (Ball, Reay, et al., 2002). As a result, their choice strategies are aimed toward long term, specific goals and the process is actively guided by their parents. When Ball (1997) observed privileged families choosing high-status private schools, they maintained state schools as backup option. Families with higher resources are able to take ‘risky opportunities’, knowing that

‘fallbacks’ are available and in fact, they ‘are playing a game they expect to win’ (Ball, 1997; Bunar & Kallstenius, 2007; Reay & Ball, 1997, p. 96). Contingent choosers are generally recent migrants and thus, their parents have not gone through the local education system themselves (Ball, Reay, et al., 2002). Choice paths are less defined than that of embedded choosers and parents’ guidance can be passive, being more encouraging than having practical use, and being easily dismissed. Consequently, choices are made towards short-term goals and are based on aspirational but undefined goals.

While research regarding *the grapevine* originates in the British context, similar framings of educational choosing have been applied elsewhere giving researchers connective tissue for combining the fields of sociology and education research (van Zanten & Kosunen, 2013). In the Swedish setting, Nihad Bunar’s (2010a, 2010c, 2010b, 2011, 2018, 2021) research has highlighted the challenges of integrating newly arrived students in the marketized Swedish education system. Due to its decentralized nature, the local education market sets the scene beyond that of national policy (Bunar, 2010a). In Stockholm, with its varying neighbourhood segregation, hot knowledge is distributed unequally which further exacerbates school segregation (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016). A consequence is that marginalized students in these settings choose from a smaller subset of the city’s schools, losing some benefit of the choice process (Bunar, 2010c). Newly arrived families in particular can lack information about the Swedish education system, limiting the opportunities for the students. (Trondman & Bouakaz, 2021). The segregating effects of the school choice model has been observed in the Swedish education system (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Östh et al., 2013; Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016).

The Swedish market school system

When students complete year nine, they face a transition from compulsory primary school to upper secondary school. This transition involves the choice of a specialized study program. While upper secondary school is not obligatory in Sweden, it is nearly universally attended, and required for many employment fields. Upper secondary schools rank students based on their grades, the highest being invited to enrol. In the Swedish school system, grades go from ‘A-F’ with ‘E’ being the lowest passing grade. Grades in the different subjects are given a point value, an A representing ‘20 points’, an E ‘10 points’ and an F ‘0 points’. The highest possible grade at the end of year nine is 340 points.⁶ Having earned grades in their different courses, year-nine students are able to choose among upper secondary school programmes for the upcoming year.

⁶ Includes the mother tongue language subject. Without this, 320 points is the highest possible score.

There are different types of upper secondary school programs that students can apply to (Skolverket, 2023b). First, the most common is the national program⁷ which most students are enrolled in. Students may specialize in different academic subjects which are either aimed towards university or vocational studies. Second, various specialized programs allow students to study different niche subjects or through alternative curricular approaches, an example being the International Baccalaureate program. Finally, introduction programs⁸ are intended for students who have not yet earned the required grades for a national program. The language introduction program⁹, which many newly arrived students attend, focuses mainly on language, enabling students to apply to a national program upon completion. Students who do not complete the language introduction program before they turn 20, have the right to attend an alternative adult education stream¹⁰ rather than upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2023a).

The field of upper secondary schools in Sweden has been called a ‘super-imposed market’ in which schools are producers and the students are customers (H. Forsberg, 2018). Within such a market, the reputation of a school has a persuasive power that make students want to attend it. School leaders are motivated by student enrolment, and the connected funding, so a high reputation is important to be able to draw students (Voyer, 2019). School leaders can respond in different ways to this type of incentive, either by addressing school quality or by turning to marketing techniques to attract students (Jabbar, 2015). The reputation of a school interacts with a societal belief that there are schools to be avoided and, in a choice-based system, it is essential to choose the right school (S. Lund, 2015). This is particularly true in the competitive urban landscape, such as Stockholm, where high status inner-city schools have a positive reputation and are highly desirable for students (Larsson, 2019). At the other extreme, schools that have a high proportion of foreign students have been called ‘Immigrant schools’ and are viewed as chaotic and not able to support serious students (Kallstenius, 2010). In this context, reputation and image play a strong role and schools want to portray themselves as safe and having strong pedagogical methods. A school’s identity also can attract or repel students so a substantial portion of the school budget can be allocated to marketing costs to shape this image (Lundahl et al., 2013). The positive reputation of inner-city schools gives them symbolic value, making them more desirable for students while the reputation of suburban schools can be weaker (Kallstenius, 2010; Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018).

⁷ Swedish: *Nationella program*

⁸ Swedish: *Introduktionsprogram*

⁹ Swedish: *Språkintröduktion*

¹⁰ Swedish: *Komvux*

Schools manage a visible profile which includes features such as their location, architecture, academic program design and student body that accumulate as reputation (H. Forsberg, 2018). In the highly competitive Stockholm school market, this contributes to a school's reputation and desirability for student enrollment. However, awareness and recognition of this reputation draws from a family's resources. In other words, this could be described as knowing what to look for and where to look. When Stockholm schools position their didactics towards different student needs it does not always translate into a better reputation (H. Forsberg, 2018). A school that has proficiency in supporting students with special needs is not strategically benefited by marketing themselves as such. To do so risks being overwhelmed by high-need students and diminishing their resources while simultaneously lowering their reputation. A high-status school can position themselves as competitive and academic, framing themselves as only appropriate for the most academically-minded students. At the other end of the spectrum, a school that gains the reputation of being an 'immigrant school' can suffer a reputational drop, without measuring the actual quality of the school.

In the Stockholm school system, elite inner-city upper secondary schools generally enroll students with more resources than upper secondary schools in the suburbs (H. Forsberg et al., 2020). Yet, the line between high and low reputed schools is not so easily drawn. The reputational benefit for schools that are established near transportation hubs incentivizes a congregation of upper secondary schools in the city centre. Competition is segmented with established non-profit independent and prestigious municipal inner-city upper secondary schools largely competing for students with high resources, and suburban and newly established independent upper secondary schools competing for those with few resources (H. Forsberg et al., 2020). Upper secondary schools can be comparing by their 'thresholds' for acceptance (S. Lund, 2015). High-threshold upper secondary schools have more competitive acceptance requirements, while low-threshold schools have lower which effects the socio-economic makeup of the student bodies.

Marketing as a school strategy

The decentralization of national education systems and introduction of school choice models have fostered an increasingly competitive environment (Whitty & Power, 2000). Internationally, education has faced an increase of marketization at all levels. That school segregation has been exacerbated by school choice systems has been recognized as a global trend across countries with different types of choice mechanisms and different sociodemographic characteristics (D. Wilson & Bridge, 2019).

In French higher education, insufficient state funding has left a vacuum filled by private interests creating a risk that 'first-generation students with little knowledge of higher education, are ideal targets for private providers and

agencies’ (van Zanten, 2019, p. 358). The British higher education market has become increasingly driven by competition in recent years and differentiating between informative material and advertising is harder because of ‘deceptive openness’ (Gibbs, 2001; Knight, 2019).

Market competition in American public schools has an effect on marginalized students. School information is not always accessible for recently migrated families when shared through open-houses or through brochures (Delale-O’Connor, 2019). Open-houses require a time commitment not possible for all families and language barriers limit the accessibility of information in brochures. Furthermore, school marketing can target certain types of students while excluding others, which disproportionately hinders marginalized students (Jabbar, 2016). While this creates inequalities in how families use information, they make pragmatic choices with the limited information that they have (Delale-O’Connor, 2017). In such a competitive environment, school leaders are incentivized to attract the enrollment of lower-need students rather than build a supportive structure for higher-need students (Lubienski, 2007).

In this competitive setting, American schools have begun to spend a considerable amount of money on marketing and establishing and maintaining branding (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). This practice is most common in charter schools, which can be partially attributed to their recent formation and need to establish themselves in the school market. Charter schools have been found to outspend public schools in Google Adword spending (Childs & Taylor, 2022a, 2022b). This service allows customers to buy the most common search terms, which then gives them the first results in searches. Schools that use this service to advertise themselves are able to prioritize their own schools’ websites in search results over others.¹¹

Many of these phenomena can also be seen in Sweden. Newly arrived students join a market-driven education system where the chosen path can lead to different career possibilities (Lundahl et al., 2013, 2017). To enroll in upper secondary school, students must navigate a complex web of information sources from different individuals in their life and from different actors in the school market (Tah & Knutes-Nyqvist, 2021). When upper secondary schools target students for recruitment, they use advertising techniques and brand themselves so as to align the school culture with particular elite or academic characteristics rather than specific school practices (Alexiadou et al., 2016). Students can also be seen choosing upper secondary schools rather than the academic program (Lidström et al., 2014; S. Lund, 2015). A focus on a school’s reputation and the need to market to potential students encourages

¹¹ This short exploration of international educational marketization research is not intended to be exhaustive in any sense. Related phenomena have been discussed in many different countries but have been omitted for the sake of space. Due to the Swedish focus of this study the majority of attention will be given to the local context.

‘glossification’ where a school’s attempt to improve their image is prioritized over improving the quality within (Gewirtz et al., 1995). In Swedish schools this has manifested in schools improving the front of the physical building with few other internal changes to give an appearance of a more academic and professional school (H. Forsberg & Palme, 2019).

A public desire for the comparison of schools creates an opening for a platform for this comparison (Harling, 2019). Comparison websites, school fairs and open-houses fill this function. These sources of information are a manifestation of the marketization of the school system where the lines between the advertisement of schools as brands and information are blurred (Arreman & Holm, 2011; Harling, 2019; Harling & Dahlstedt, 2017). Websites such as the popular *Gymnasium.se*,¹² paint themselves as comprehensive sources of information about the upper secondary school choice process. Yet, comparison websites such as this allow schools to pay for their own link to be prioritized, skewing the search results (Curtis, 2020).

The school fair is often presented to students as a resource to assist their choice of upper secondary school (Curtis, 2020; Harling, 2019). Counsellors encourage student participation in these fairs and use them to supplement their own role of information provision to the students. School fairs are reminiscent of trade fairs, where each school has a booth from which they employ marketing techniques and school representatives interact with students in recruiting efforts. The Stockholm school fair is a product of the many municipalities in the Stockholm region working together and includes hundreds of schools (Harling, 2019). The stated purpose of school fairs is that they ‘should be a place for neutral and comparable information’ – in reality they act as a marketing opportunity where the school’s best face is shown (Harling, 2019, p. 180). Additionally, schools target groups of students with differing vigor pointing to a ‘reverse school choice’ where schools in fact choose students (Harling, 2019). Students that attended upper secondary school fairs have described receiving more advertising than information from upper secondary schools. Sales tactics such as the use of goody bags containing candy and gifts, as well as marketing materials are used to catch students’ attention (Dahlstedt & Harling, 2017). Open-houses give students the opportunity to visit a school to see the facilities and interact with teachers and other students. Rather than the entire student body being present, a smaller number of students act as *ambassadors* by demonstrating enthusiasm and giving tours to prospective students (Larsson, 2019). Upper secondary schools have also begun to include student ambassadors at the school fair, (Harling & Dahlstedt, 2017). Many students find information in this market setting difficult to navigate while the information itself may target specific students over others (Holm, 2013; Tah & Knutes-Nyqvist, 2021). Considering the difficulty students have in evalu-

¹² Gymnasium meaning upper secondary school in Swedish

ating information, guidance through this process can be beneficial. A challenge for counsellors is guiding students while they are simultaneously being informed by direct marketing (Johnsson & Lindgren, 2010).

Different categories of students have begun to be targeted by schools with recruitment messaging and branding that align the school culture with particular elite or academic characteristics rather than specific school practices (Alexiadou et al., 2016). Advertisements towards students in their final year of compulsory schooling are the most prominent, creating a flood of information that is difficult to navigate (Holm, 2013). Students have found that advertising was too misleading and untrustworthy, however they were unwilling (or unable) to examine the influences on their choices. Schools build a marketing strategy where schools strengthen a *school identity* that is pushed towards potential students through various marketing channels to encourage enrolment (Gustrén, 2021). This school identity is meant to connect emotionally with students in a way that they can recognize themselves and be associated with the *right kind of students*. School leaders have described symbolic values, such as school location, reputation and ethnic composition as having considerable importance for those choosing their schools, making marketing these aspects essential (Kallstenius, 2010).

Despite suggestions that competition in the school market promotes spending on student recruitment (Antelius, 2007; Lindbom, 2010) and the prevalence of research about the school market in general, no research regarding spending on marketing was found in the Swedish context.¹³ Swedish school principals have described their schools advertising as tying image to quality, where ‘Swedish’ appearances and manners are prioritized (Voyer, 2019). Thus, upper secondary schools market their image with a constructed pedagogical identity that forms an exclusionary climate (Dovemark & Holm, 2017). Feelings of belonging encourages students to ‘self-sort’ based on what they learn from this messaging.

Upper Secondary School Choice for Newly Arrived Students

Over the past half century, Sweden has been characterized by a high rate of migration, while demonstrating a strong support and acceptance of refugees. Steady immigration in previous decades has been followed by a recent immi-

¹³ No peer reviewed research about marketing budgets could be found but a number of media reports suggest that the amount of money being spent is considerable (Jelmini, 2014; P. A. Rosén, 2021; Skolvärlden, 2010). A look at the competitive school markets in the United States, as was previously discussed, gives a possible way to understand the Swedish school advertising practice.

gration spike, many from conflicts, and has drastically changed national demographics. As a result of both forced and voluntary migration, a large proportion of Sweden's residents are now foreign born, today making up approximately 20% of the population (SCB, 2023). Most recently, refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war in 2016 along with other conflicts¹⁴ have brought a large number of people to Sweden, who are then incorporated into the national welfare system. The discourse around national stability has been polarizing, making the inclusion of migrants a highly politicized issue (Brysk, 2009; Eastmond, 2011; Hagelund, 2020). Within this context, there has been substantial research on the interaction of school-choice and newly arrived students. In the following sections, the integration of newly arrived students into Swedish society will be discussed.

The right to an equal education

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children should have an equal right to fair treatment, protection and quality education (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). For refugee children and recent migrants, who have a proportionally high history of unfair treatment and damaging experiences, the onus of care is higher (O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Skolverket, 2023e). The current Education Act in Sweden states the need for equity in education but acts as a 'soft regulation' towards a vague goal of an 'inclusive society' (Erixon Arreman & Dovemark, 2018, p 573). The role that schools play in a democratic society is to 'provide pedagogical rights for individual, social and political participation (and inclusion) in society' (Erixon Arreman & Dovemark, 2018, p 574). Newly arrived migrants are an extreme example of individuals who need proportionately higher support. Students who migrate to Sweden after the age of nine have more trouble in school (Böhlmark, 2008). Schooling has the opportunity to address these types of inequalities and as will be discussed, is an aim of Swedish education policy. Effective and proactive support allows students to enter and participate in the Swedish education system in a way that promotes their future success (Svensson & Eastmond, 2013; Turtiainen, 2012). Yet, the effectiveness of Sweden's school system in supporting these students is grounded in its unique educational structure and the living conditions where the students' families settle.

The definition of an immigrant can be difficult to express across different contexts (Anderson & Blinder, 2017; Scheel & Tazzioli, 2022). In most cases, immigrants are considered those that were born abroad and currently reside in

¹⁴ Recent policy changes make certain Ukrainians refugees ineligible for much of the same social and educational support as previous migrants (Skolverket, 2023f). Children have the right to attend primary and upper secondary school but those older than 18 do not have the same legal right to education. This research does not claim to represent the Ukrainian experience in Sweden in 2023.

the nation being discussed. However, the definition can also be imprecise considering how different countries or even institutions understand the concept. Additionally, mobility, temporality and stigmatization all add complexity to how these persons are labeled and what rights they have. In Sweden there is an institutional categorization of recent migrants that is used nationally and is present in the school law (SFS 2010:800, K 3, 12a§). A *newly arrived student* is defined as having lived abroad, is now living in Sweden and that they entered the Swedish school system after they turned seven years old. After four years of schooling in Sweden, these students are no longer considered newly arrived. In this study, this definition was used for the selection of interview respondents and in reference to previous research when relevant. At other times, the term migrant may be used to refer to comparable international research.

Research on migrant students shows that they can be a heterogeneous group. Students come from a wide variety of cultures, have different educational backgrounds as well as preparedness for learning in new education systems. In many cases, asylum-seeking students come from a history of traumatic experiences, interrupted schooling and different schooling traditions making their needs higher than conventional students (Dryden-Peterson, 2016, 2022; Eide & Hjern, 2013; Hek, 2005b; Shakya et al., 2010; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). However, at other times the challenges of migrants are less defined or identifiable. Challenges such as the difficulty of fitting into a new culture, non-recognition of past education and language barriers remain (Devine, 2009; Shakya et al., 2010; Skowronski, 2013). When Sharif (2017) discusses a group of Iraqi students coming from different regions, having different backgrounds and having different migration experiences he is showing considerable heterogeneity within the group. This type of intragroup diversity has been called super-diversity by Vertovec (2007, 2019). A non-exhaustive list of conditions - *country of origin, migration channel, legal status and educational background* – all contribute to opportunities and constraints for migrants in their new country (Vertovec, 2007; 2019).

Newly arrived students have had a range of diverse experiences that influence the educational choices they make in Sweden. In the most traumatic cases severe physical and psychological challenges prevent an unassisted entry into school. However, in most cases students enter the school system in some form. Within schools, isolation and marginalization can cause complete or partial exclusion or lead to truancy and stigmatization that can manifest as self-destructive behaviours (Eide & Hjern, 2013; Jahanmahan & Bunar, 2018; Shakya et al., 2010). Other experiences, occurring after migration, can also have a profound effect on newly arrived students' ability to actively participate in society. A long and complicated asylum process and lack of guidance and social support can build upon their previous challenges (O' Toole Thommessen et al., 2015). Newly arrived students often attend a small number of the urban schools available and are further socially isolated within them

(Bunar, 2017). There is also a trend that newly arrived students are treated as a homogenous group, despite their diverse set of backgrounds, needs and desires. This is indicative of a system where choice is not equally available and the process further segregates along socio-economic lines (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016). Students of immigrant background face disadvantages in choosing schools (Jonsson & Rudolphi, 2011). Furthermore, a higher rate of incomplete grades limits the choices available to them which closes academic tracks and pushes many to drop out of school (A. Lund & Trondman, 2017).

When newly arrived students enter the Swedish education system, they must adapt in a number of ways. Life in a new country has uncountable differences from one's previous life. Students must simultaneously learn the language and cultural norms and expectations while they enter new social spheres to make friends. In school, student expectations and the school's inclusionary practices can differ from the students' previous schooling, requiring students to not only learn subject content but also a potential new form of schooling at the same time. This is made more challenging when students also face transition from primary to upper secondary school in the years after migration. The competitive school market is difficult for any year-nine to navigate, the difficulties being amplified for those who are new to the country. The following sections explore previous research about how newly arrived students enter the Swedish school system and navigate towards different upper secondary school paths.

The preparatory class

When newly arrived students first enrol at the compulsory school level, many schools place them in a preparatory class¹⁵ designed to meet their particular needs. The preparatory class is a transitional program intended to bridge the gap between newly arrived students' previous education and the expectations for the Swedish education (Skolverket, 2022b). While providing a preparatory class for newly arrived students is neither mandatory nor the only method for inclusion of newly arrived students, it is used widely across the country (Crul et al., 2019). The main focus of the preparatory class is on the Swedish language, the proficiency of which is assessed regularly to determine the student's readiness to move to subject classes taught in Swedish. Readiness is determined by the preparatory class teacher and can take two years, however, due to the decentralized nature of the Swedish education system, organization can vary greatly (Crul et al., 2019). To reduce stagnation in the preparatory class, legislation was introduced in 2016 to encourage transitioning newly arrived students into mainstream classes within two years (Brännström, 2021). Classrooms can be in constant flux, with students constantly entering and transitioning from the classroom (Björnberg, 2011).

¹⁵ Swedish: *förberedelseklass*

The preparatory class is a space where newly arrived students have the opportunity to build friendships with peers who have had similar experiences before arriving in Sweden (Björnberg, 2011; Nilsson Folke, 2017; Skowronski, 2013). These interactions are often limited to other students in the preparatory classroom who are themselves newly arrived and speak a multitude of languages. Consequently, instances of newly arrived students feeling isolated in this setting are well documented (Candappa, 2000; Hek, 2005b; Obondo et al., 2016; Rutter, 2006; Sharif, 2017). This can be attributed to preparatory classrooms being separated from the rest of the school, segregating newly arrived students from other students while being given symbolic labels such as ‘the international class’ (J. Nilsson & Bunar, 2016; Obondo et al., 2016). Preparatory class students have described feeling simultaneously excluded from the rest of the school while also being uncomfortable leaving this safe space (Lindgren & Lundahl, 2023; Nilsson Folke, 2017). Furthermore, when students have transitioned from the preparatory class with hopes of being socially included in the mainstream class, they continued to feel isolated (Lindgren & Lundahl, 2023; J. Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013).

Academically, the pace at which the preparatory class moves may not match the particular needs of all students, where some students have felt that they had strong support but unchallenging tasks (Nilsson Folke, 2017). More generally, students have described frustration and a feeling as if they are in a waiting room, which many did not see the benefit of (Nilsson Folke, 2017; Sharif, 2017; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). For many schools, Swedish language is the immediate priority for students, effectively deprioritizing other considerations (Hertzberg, 2017). This can result in students feeling that they are stagnating in the preparatory class and that their subject knowledge begins to wane (Gustafsson et al., 2012). When students’ previous school successes in their home countries are not acknowledged, it can feel like a step backwards. Rather than spending too long in the preparatory class, early immersion of the students into mainstream classes has been argued to benefit students socially and in their learning (Skowronski, 2013). Interaction between newly arrived students and their peers fosters an inclusive atmosphere that benefits students by improving their school results and building bridges across groups (Dovemark & Holm, 2015).

The language introduction program

When students lack the required grades for upper secondary school national programs, they are eligible for introductory programs (Skolverket, 2023c). Introductory Programs are designed to have individualized study plans for each student’s specific needs. Municipalities are required to provide introductory programs but there are few regulations on how they should be organized or the time that students should spend in them before being able to transition to a national program (Rosvall, 2023b). Students in introductory programs are

generally of higher and more varied need for support than those in national programs (Rosvall, 2023a).

When students are missing required compulsory school grades, which for newly arrived students are most often those taught in the Swedish language, language is the main area of study. For newly arrived students, the language introductory program is the most common route into the education system at the upper secondary school level. When successfully implemented, the language introductory program has a profoundly positive impact and provides learning, mental wellbeing and social opportunities (Erixon Arreman & Dovemark, 2018; Jahanmahan & Bunar, 2018; Nilsson Folke, 2017; Sharif, 2017; Skowronski, 2013). To a large degree, the success of language introductory programs depends on the relationships built within them (Rosvall, 2023a). In building trust, a recognition of the student's background (note: later, this will be discussed in the terms of cultural capital), proactive coaching and interactions with school authorities of shared cultural background have been successful (O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Turtiainen, 2012). Some introductory programs allow a certain amount of interaction with mainstream programs while others are more characterised by within school segregation and education delays (Dovemark & Holm, 2017; Erixon Arreman & Dovemark, 2018; Shakya et al., 2010; Skowronski, 2013).

Many newly arrived students hope to enter a comparable grade to where they left schooling previously but, in many cases, their previous grades are not recognized (J. Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013). This lack of recognition leaves them behind where they believe they should be in their academic careers. Students have described feelings of being in a *waiting room* for their academic aspirations and that they did not in fact choose the language introduction program (Lindgren & Lundahl, 2023; Nilsson Folke, 2017; Rosvall, 2023a; Sharif, 2017; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). This has led to students entering the language introduction program feeling as if they had failed, negatively affecting their motivation (Rosvall, 2023a).

Within Sweden's decentralized education model, each municipality structures their introductory programs differently. A lack of clear policy guidelines is argued to cause variations in school quality and competition to be incentivized (Erixon Arreman & Dovemark, 2018). The language introductory programs that have been the most successful are flexible to diverse needs, provide Swedish language study concurrently with other subjects, allow space for students' preferences and treat the entire migration experience holistically (Erixon Arreman & Dovemark, 2018; Hertzberg, 2017; Nilsson Folke, 2017; Sharif, 2017; Skowronski, 2013).

Career guidance

Navigating the school market is recognized as a challenging task, for which career guidance counselling is an important supportive process for students (Skolverket, 2022c). Within schools, career guidance counsellors provide information and guidance for students to better understand the process, the implications of different choices and how to work towards their educational aspirations. These professionals play an important role within the Swedish school system where guidance is intended to foster competence in making educational and career choices (Myslek & Zelmerlöw, 2022). There is a long history of guidance as a profession but in the twenty-first century, societal changes have led guidance to focus on the individual life course (Savickas & Savickas, 2019). Working life has become more variable where unstable careers and migration have become more common. Guidance in this context encourages individualism, for which the students write their own stories of their career path and transitions (Savickas & Savickas, 2019). While out of the purview of this study, guidance theories emphasize self-efficacy, the building of academic aspirations and adaptability during uncertain career development (Juntunen et al., 2019). Among the theories underpinning career guidance counselling, there is a shared idea; individuals possess characteristics that are particularly suited to different work (Juntunen et al., 2019). Encouraging familiarity with different careers increases the likelihood of satisfaction in these vocations later in life, a goal towards which guidance counsellors act.

As per the school law, in all forms of school, it is the school principal's responsibility to ensure that all students receive study guidance (Riksdagen, 2018). From this leadership, the responsibility of guiding students is spread across the entire school staff, happening in a broad and narrow sense within schools (Lindh, 1997). Broad counselling refers to the schoolwide familiarization with occupational opportunities and paths which can include giving information about working life and organizing work experience. Within this whole school approach, all educators who interact with the students give guidance. According to Skolverket, career guidance is the responsibility of the entire school but most of the responsibility falls on the career guidance counselor (Olofsson et al., 2017). The direct guidance that occurs between students and counsellors represents narrow counselling (Lindh, 1997).

The professional practices, training and resources of school counsellors represent a national standardization of the process (S. Nilsson & Hertzberg, 2022). Saying this, the actual guidance that students receive may be more informal. A lack of a strict guidance policy in Sweden leads to high variation in the practices and effectiveness of counsellors (Lundahl & Nilsson, 2009). The persons acting as counsellors have their own experiences and opinions about what students should do in different situations which will undoubtedly influence how they frame their guidance. In practice, this role can be heavily influenced by the counsellor's own views and opinions of the 'correct' way through

the education system and how ‘success’ can be defined (Hertzberg, 2017). Counselling in this context is built on trust between the counsellors and students and recognition of the students’ desires and needs (Hertzberg & Sundelin, 2014). To provide effective guidance, whether counsellors are able to connect with students likely depends on their ability to build a trusting relationship with the students (Mara & Mara, 2010; Slack et al., 2014; Turtiainen, 2012). Trust between both of the two parties is central to the recognition process and studies show that authorities using practices that prioritize building trust and proactive coaching have been successful in supporting the newly arrived (O’Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Turtiainen, 2012). In a practical sense, recognition refers to the ‘unique identities of each individual, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity’ and their ‘activities, practices and ways of viewing the world’ (Gutmann, 1993, p. 8). Guidance that subscribes to these values has been called ‘multicultural counselling’ (Launikari & Puukari, 2005). Additionally, for students with an acknowledged higher dependence on counsellors, proactive practices and the need for delimiting the breadth of information can make guidance more appropriate (Sheikhi, 2013). Newly arrived students in particular benefit from support to navigate the choice process within an education system they are not familiar with (Sundelin, 2015).

Counsellors can also utilize outside resources as a way to address the mass of information. In the last two decades, the number of internet-based guidance resources has grown. Online career self-assessment, such as school choice websites, provide the opportunity for counsellors to support students more effectively (Gati & Asulin-Peretz, 2011). These resources can be customized to student needs and provide deeper understandings of the process. In some cases, internet-based guidance information is preferable because of its uninterrupted availability and breadth of information (Ranerup, 2004). Website management practices can vary greatly depending on the motivations of the institution but provide an opportunity for schools to communicate their messaging to potential students (Álvarez Álvarez & Inés-García, 2017). However, as a resource they are most effective as a complementary tool to support the career guidance process in combination with the experienced advice of the career guidance counsellor (Gati & Asulin-Peretz, 2011). In isolation, the information on these websites can be unappealing and the quality, difficult to evaluate (Johnsson & Lindgren, 2010; Tah & Knutes-Nyqvist, 2021).

The availability of counsellors has an effect on students’ preparedness for school choice. Even if counsellors make themselves available, it doesn’t guarantee that the students attend these meetings. The availability of guidance does not always translate to students receiving it (Bengtsson, 2018; Thomsen, 2014). The offer of guidance has no benefit if the recipients don’t show up to scheduled appointments or insist that they don’t need the support. Schools can facilitate distribution of school-choice information to parents but its availability does not guarantee that families make use of it. They must also be aware that the information exists and have a willingness to ‘opt-in’ for it to have an

effect (Delale-O'Connor, 2019). However, student capacity and propensity for seeking guidance is not independent from gender or social background, suggesting the benefits are received unequally across school populations (Gruffman & Schedin, 2010).

When guidance focuses only on the transition from primary school to upper secondary school, it misses introducing a larger career perspective that students need, deviating from immediate curricular goals (Sundelin & Hertzberg, 2022). From this position, guidance is intended to be introduced throughout a student's academic career, not just immediately before upper secondary school choice in year 9. This can include the presentation of different types of careers at an early age or discussions about how to make career discussions according to one's aspirations at different time periods. Even if a lack of grades or insufficient Swedish ability may make the language introduction program the only upper secondary school program available for the students, the Swedish education system has an emphasis on 'second-chances' to return to academic study (Baysu & de Valk, 2012). That newly arrived students are made aware of the multiple routes back to academic study in Sweden, and that programs such as the language introduction program have long-term benefits is essential to their engagement with the education system.

Counsellors face a number of challenges when working with newly arrived students (Sundelin & Hertzberg, 2022). The migration experience may have led to trauma and disruption of the students' career ambitions which can steer their ambitions and choices. The options open to the students can also be limited by a lack of recognition of their previous education in other countries. Career ambitions may have been formed in a different national or social context than they are now in, which may not have the same processes. Language can be a factor if the students do not have a strong grasp of Swedish or lack any familiarity with the language at all. Students may not be familiar with the role of counsellors in Sweden, what it entails or how guidance is meant to aid the student. Additionally, the conceptualization of students being 'at risk' presupposes in them low-skills, poor educational backgrounds and a lack of learning capacity which then disempowers their autonomy and fails to treat students with high expectations (Damber, 2010).

Finally, immigrant students with academic upper secondary school aspirations can lack the resources to act, leading many to substitute their plans for academic tracks with vocational education that lacks any long-term goals (Varjo et al., 2020). To work with newly arrived student, three areas of competence are effective for counsellors working with newly arrived students (Sundelin & Hertzberg, 2022). First, the guidance conversation is strengthened by the counsellors having competence in intercultural communication that recognizes students' emotional conditions as a result of migration and varying language abilities. Second, a familiarity with migration as a phenomenon and the transnational existence of newly arrived students allows guid-

ance to match students' experiences and ambitions that are shaped by influences outside and within Sweden. Finally, cognizance of how newly arrived students' previous education and working conditions can interact with the Swedish milieu can bridge the gap between what is unknown for newly arrived students and what they should be taught to encourage participation in the education system.

Educators

Of all the education professionals, students most often interact with their teachers in their day-to-day school lives. These educators, in different roles, have the potential to influence students in a number of ways. A strong relationship between teacher and student can be emotionally beneficial and give students guidance through the bureaucratic processes of schooling (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). When teachers provide support beyond academics, a trusting relationship is established that contributes positively to students' education (A. Osman et al., 2021).

A study by the Swedish School Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen, 2014) stresses the importance for schools to adapt to student needs. Teachers have responded to students' needs being unmet and made efforts to better accommodate and support the students. (see also A. Osman et al., 2020). In terms of upper secondary school choice, preparatory class teachers have helped support students when they have seen counsellors being spread too thin with insufficient resources (Sundelin & Lundahl, 2023). Teachers have also felt unequipped to guide students in their transitions, largely because of a lack of knowledge about the students' lives outside the school and a lack of collaboration with parents who were not seen as equal partners and did not effectively communicate (Cuconato et al., 2015; Pananaki, 2021). When teachers see the school system failing students, they can feel an obligation to help them, a responsibility which they never have enough time for (Hargreaves, 1994; Kelchtermans et al., 2009). This obligation stems from teachers' commitment to student care and the open-ended nature of the teaching profession (Hargreaves, 1994). However, high workload and personal investment in students leads many teachers to have high levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion, limiting the sustainability of efforts outside normal responsibilities (Arvidsson et al., 2019; Boström et al., 2019; Näring et al., 2012).

In Swedish schools, all core teaching (with the exception of English class and Modern Languages classes) is generally conducted in Swedish¹⁶, making Swedish proficiency essential to fully participating in the education system (Gareis et al., 2020). Consequently, language in the mainstream classes is a

¹⁶ Schools are expected to maintain that at least 50% of instruction time is conducted in Swedish, a requirement that independent school companies such as the *Internationella Engelska Skolan* have struggled to meet (I. Andersson, 2023; Skolverket, 2018).

challenge for students who are still learning Swedish. Newly arrived students have varying levels of proficiency in their languages, ranging from a low literacy level in their mother tongue to being highly fluent in English, which is commonly spoken in Sweden (Lindberg, 2009). Students that transitioned into mainstream classes have felt that the work was too difficult and they did not feel that they had sufficient language support (Nilsson Folke, 2017). Subject-specific vocabulary is a challenge for newly arrived students so support that recognizes that they are language learners is essential to helping them succeed (Reath Warren, 2016). This type of support involves *translanguaging* which refers to the spontaneous multilingual forms of speech used for meaning-making and during social interactions or to intentionally plan instructional strategies that make use of several languages in a systematic way (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Fuster, 2022; García & Wei, 2014). Regardless of the definition, a central tenet of translanguaging is that languages need not be completely isolated from each other in school and that the student's whole language repertoire can be a resource to enhance the learning of languages and of content matter.

Study tutors have a unique role in Swedish education involving providing newly arrived students with subject tutoring through the use of the mother tongue language. Study tutors meet students up to a few hours a week to review subject vocabulary and go through activities together, using the students' mother tongue to introduce concepts and connect previous knowledge with the Swedish curriculum. Study tutoring creates a temporary space for translanguaging that encourages student subject learning in both Swedish and the student's mother tongue (Reath Warren, 2017). To support the expectation that newly arrived students simultaneously learn subject content and the Swedish language, study tutors coordinate activities with subject teachers. In practice, this means that study tutors reinforce subject content from the different classes by discussing the material in the student's mother tongue to further develop both subject knowledge and Swedish fluency. The school law doesn't put any specific limits on the length of time that students receive study tutoring but the structure, determined at a local level, can be aimed towards making students independent within a few years (J. Rosén et al., 2019; Skolverket, 2020b). When the students reach the Swedish level to move from the preparatory class to subject classes, which Avery (2015) warns is the removal of a 'safe space', study guidance often reduces. Research has shown a connection between the language support that students receive and their success in the mainstream classes (J. Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013). Students benefit when social and pedagogical support is spread beyond the introductory class to the mainstream classes.

Outside of their academic tasks, study tutors act as role models to students in a different way than other teachers in the school (Dávila, 2018). This can be connected to them having a shared culture and shared migration experiences with the students that allows them to build trust with the students as well as their parents. Study tutors take an unofficial role as native-language and

cultural brokers who could interpret not only the language but cultural differences when giving advice (Dávila, 2018; Orellana, 2009). This relationship allows them to act as confidants and be a source of information and guidance.

The family unit

Children's parents are one of the strongest predictors of the opportunities that are available to them and of the preparedness they have towards navigating the school choice process (S. Forsberg, 2022; Reay, 2004a). Despite the intention of having an education system where background does not determine educational outcomes, in Sweden parental background remains a strong predictor of student trajectories (Böhlmark et al., 2016; Holmlund, 2016; Lüdemann & Schwerdt, 2013; von Otter & Stenberg, 2015). The resources that parents have can determine the degree that they engage directly with the school (Bowe et al., 1994; Pananaki, 2021). Parents with higher resources can more effectively navigate the education market. Parents' educational background also plays a considerable role towards student achievement (Tan et al., 2019). Parents with post-secondary education are more active information seekers and more directly engaged in school choice (Assefa & Stansbury, 2018). This leads to the reproduction of societal inequality, with families with more resources having more education success than those with poor resources (Beach & Dovemark, 2009). Yet, a supportive family combined with strong student-teacher relationship and academically minded peers can contribute to student success regardless of student background (Jonsson & Erikson, 2000; A. Osman et al., 2020; Pananaki, 2021). A study of newly arrived families found that the students acculturated faster than the parents, altering the family dynamic (F. Osman et al., 2021). Like parents, older siblings can act as role models who influence students. Students are influenced by the educational experiences of their older siblings (Altmejd et al., 2021; Rosvall et al., 2018). When older siblings have positive experiences, the younger siblings are likely to follow them while the reverse is true when experiences are negative.

Unaccompanied youth

Unaccompanied youth face a number of additional challenges as compared to other newly arrived students. Among unaccompanied newly arrived students high rates of mental health problems have been identified and many have had difficulty completing their schooling (Çelikaksoy & Wadensjö, 2019; Eide & Hjern, 2013). Age of migration is also a factor as many unaccompanied youth come at older ages, which makes succeeding in school more challenging (Çelikaksoy & Wadensjö, 2019). Those under 18 years of age are assigned a foster parent¹⁷ who acts as their legal guardian. For fostering to be successful,

¹⁷ Swedish: *God man*

it is important that foster parents are assigned quickly upon the child's arrival and that trust is built between the two (Jahanmahan & Bunar, 2018).

Peers

Another aspect influencing the schooling of newly arrived students is that the peers they interact with, who influence decision-making and the formation of identity (Andersen & Hjortskov, 2019; Baysu & de Valk, 2012; Devine, 2009; S. Lund, 2015; A. Osman et al., 2021). Peers play an outsized role in educational choosing, even when the student doesn't realize it (Andersen & Hjortskov, 2019; Ball & Vincent, 1998). Students who have friends in the majority group increase their likelihood of transitioning to post-secondary school and post-secondary education. Thus, it is important for migrant students to integrate within their schools and interact with a wide variety of students (Baysu & de Valk, 2012). Yet, recent migrant students are more likely to draw on their own ethnic communities for navigating the school activities. This is particularly true for the newly arrived who didn't have the social support or resources (such as speaking Swedish or English) required to develop a social network.

The choice of differentiated vocational and academic programs encourages students to self-sort based on their school preferences among programs that attract students of their 'own kind', creating more homogenous schools and further segregation (Dovemark & Holm, 2017, p. 528; Jansson et al., 2020). Enrolment at a high-status upper secondary school programs doesn't necessarily correspond to social inclusion either (Wiltgren, 2020). Despite acceptance to a school with high reputation, students may feel that they don't belong, indicating a formal inclusion in the education system but also a more informal social exclusion. Outside of the school environment, sports and other leisure activities are important for introducing children into a new society. When organized in an inclusive way children can find a forum for meeting and interacting with peers outside of their social network (Hertting & Karlefors, 2013, 2016).

Neighbourhood

Between the 1960s and 1970s, ambitious national policies drastically transformed the Swedish welfare state. Along with the increase of other social programs, the 'million dwelling program'¹⁸ spearheaded an expansion of housing construction beginning in the late 1960's (Hårsman, 2006). At the same time, a boom in migration contributed to major demographic changes and neighbourhood segregation that corresponded with economic and ethnic lines (Malmberg & Clark, 2020). In the following years immigrants congregated in

¹⁸ Swedish: *Miljonprogrammet*

the affordable, municipally owned housing, contributing to the creation of ethnic pockets across the city (R. Andersson & Kährik, 2016). One legacy of the million-dwelling program is that immigrants, many with low income, are proportionately more likely to reside in migrant-dense neighbourhoods where they are able to find housing (Kadarik, 2019; Malmberg & Clark, 2020; Tyrcha, 2020). These neighbourhoods provide residents with a shared cultural and ethnic background and the advantage of established social-networks (Johansson & Olofsson, 2011). However, neighbourhoods have also become increasingly socioeconomically segregated (R. Andersson & Kährik, 2016; Malmberg et al., 2018). In response, some Swedes have begun to avoid neighbourhoods that are seen to have become more multicultural (Bråmås, 2006). The flight or avoidance of certain neighbourhoods has been seen to exacerbate neighbourhood segregation in urban Swedish settings. For these reasons, segregation cannot be separated from migration, particularly in the Stockholm context.

In previous decades, segregation in schools has also increased along the lines of parental background and ethnicity (Böhlmark et al., 2015; Brandén & Bygren, 2022; A. Osman & Lund, 2022; Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016). As has previously been discussed, the ethnicity of a school's population is not mutually exclusive from the reputation that the school has (Bunar & Sernhede, 2013; H. Forsberg, 2018; Kallstenius, 2010). As a result, school choice preferences have an influence on what school students aspire to attend. When a new school does not successfully build a profile or a negative reputation develops, students may begin to avoid it, choosing a school that fits the profile they desire. As a school begins to establish a reputation of having non-Swedish speakers and having low educational quality, students with the local knowledge and ability to do so seek alternative schooling options.

Residential segregation has led to similar inequality in the marketized school system, where upper secondary schools are congregated in transportation hubs (Fjellman, 2019; H. Forsberg, 2018). Neighbourhoods with good public transportation have a high number of independent upper secondary schools that aim to portray themselves as desirable as possible for students (Forsberg, 2015). Thus, the mapped lines of neighbourhoods have a connection to educational opportunity (Fjellman, 2019). Upper secondary schools are not evenly distributed across the city, the inner-city having a much higher number and so are more competitive in nature (H. Forsberg, 2018; Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018). These parallel phenomena make the Stockholm city-centre a 'hot-spot' for education (Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018). Elite upper secondary schools have high reputations, making them desirable for informed school choosers who possess the grades to compete for enrolment (Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018). These prestigious schools may not directly market to students, rather relying on word-of-mouth (Larsson, 2019). At the same time, many schools in Stockholm are seen as having a lower status and quality, some being labelled as 'immigrant schools' which have a lower reputation (Voyer,

2019). The lines between these two extremes are not as clear in central Stockholm considering how schools try to influence their public facing image. Larsson and Hultqvist's (2018) description of the hierarchal positions between 'inner-city schools' and schools in the inner city, could be considered similar to the concept of high- and low-threshold schools described by Lund (2015).

Many newly arrived and migrant students, living in segregated suburbs, apply to prestigious schools with a high reputation in the city centre but the reverse is not true for the so called, immigrant schools located in the suburbs (Holm & Dovemark, 2020). Engagement with school choice can be connected to the benefits derived by living in desirable areas (E. Andersson et al., 2012). Families with fewer resources, such as those who are newly arrived, select schools close to their homes, reducing the number of schools available to them. Resourceful parents have an advantage over those with fewer resources, particularly newly arrived families, in choosing schools (Trumberg & Urban, 2020).

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

This study takes the position that individuals' process of choosing in a school system occurs within socially structured conditions. This is understood by drawing on three theoretical concepts that make sense of the formation and navigation of boundaries in the upper secondary school choice process. First, horizon for action, derived from the concept of careership, is used as an overarching theory regarding how upper secondary schools are chosen (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Horizon for action represents what students see as possible for them to choose, and the choices they make as a result. From this theoretical perspective choices are guided by the individual's disposition and influenced by their local environments. Second, cultural and social capital represent the resources that students possess (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Possessing greater resources gives educational choosers more power to follow through on their educational ambitions. Information, that comes as a result of the possession of capital, is explored through the concept of the grapevine (Ball & Vincent, 1998). Structural and symbolic boundaries represent the different types of boundaries that students face while choosing among the spectrum of schools in the Swedish school market (Barmark & Lund, 2016; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). In the following chapter, these theories will be developed and it will be explained how they are used analytically.

Careership and Horizon for Action

Careership is taken as a point of departure for understanding the confluence of influences on the school choice process, exploring individuals' social interactions and local conditions for career decision-making and dispositions (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Social experiences *contribute to* but do not exclusively control social action (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). As a response to career guidance theories that were focused on the individual's ability to choose, careership provides a framework for understanding educational choosing that considers the world surrounding an individual (Hodkinson, 2009; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The position taken in this study is that newly arrived students' upper secondary school choices are influenced by the local context of their lives and social interactions. As such, an individual's career decisions take place within 'social, political, economic, cultural,

geographical and historic dimensions' (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 41). Within this context, the individual is influenced by those around them and the interactions that make up their relationships. Viewing the decision-making process from this perspective allows for a broad, holistic perspective on individuals' choices within the national context.

This study looks at the upper secondary choice process as part of a larger educational and career trajectory which has two main characteristics (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).¹⁹ First, decision-making is not necessarily rational. When rational decision making occurs, it is done for the person's own benefit; their wants have consistency and are based on perfect information (Daoud & Puaca, 2011). Hodkinson (2009) relates this to Habermas' (2007) *instrumental rationality*; decisions are made towards specific goals and the actions taken are coherent with meeting these ends. Within this vein, it is assumed that educational trajectory can be predicted by the chooser through a rational choice of actions (Hodkinson et al., 2013). However, a consistent hierarchy of wants can be absent for upper secondary school choosers (Daoud & Puaca, 2011). Decision making with uncertainty is done with *personal epistemological opaqueness* where what 'I really want and care about' (ends)' meet 'the resources I have at my disposal (means)' (Daoud & Puaca, 2011, p. 618).

As a consequence, career decision making is pragmatically rational, constructed though partial information and situated in experiences (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Decisions come from incomplete information, familiarity, embeddedness in social contexts, opportunism and binary options suggesting that choices are made pragmatically rather than systematically (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). In this way, educational choice is done through pragmatically rational decision-making within the purview of what is considered possible by the individual. The possible, which Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) call the *horizon for action*, is the 'arena within which actions can be taken and decisions made' (p 34).

Horizon for action is used throughout the empirical chapters to explain the aspirational choice paths that the students give their attention to. New information is contextualized and filtered into an individual's disposition and drives decision-making (Bourdieu, 1977a; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Put another way, a person's horizon for action is influenced by their perspectives and social connections in a specific context defined by time and space (Ball et al., 2001). Each of these elements contribute, not independently, as they are inherently intertwined, to broaden or narrow one's horizon for action.

Yet, the spectrum of all choice options is not considered simultaneously by educational choosers. Horizons for action are segmented because of the opportunities available in the labour market and the norms in different social settings (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). These segmentations can have differ-

¹⁹ See also Hodkinson et al. (2013) and Hodkinson (1998, 2009).

ent roots. In high and low-threshold schools, which have corresponding reputations, a high proportion of students with an immigrant background prefer the later because of feelings of belonging and self-segregation (S. Lund, 2015). In another example, gender norms contribute to the belief that 'men' and 'women's' jobs exist, segmenting what careers are seen as possible or acceptable for young people (Edgerton et al., 2014). Both of these examples exemplify segmentation in the horizon for action. In a coming section in this chapter, segmentation of the horizon for action will be framed as symbolic boundaries since not all educational paths can be considered simultaneously.

However, segmentation does not mean that students' horizons for action are mutually-exclusive (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). In fact, there is significant overlap relating to shared values, experiences, influences and opportunities. Interactions with the students' peers influence each other, encouraging them to share choice preferences (Andersen & Hjortskov, 2019; Dovemark & Holm, 2017; Jansson et al., 2020). Horizon for action is not fixed either. It can change when an individual makes a decision along their career trajectory, or a *turning-point* (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Career decisions are made at turning-points which involve a significant transformation of identity (p. 39). Turning points can have different forms. Forced turning-points, such as the need to flee a country are initiated by external events. On the other hand, self-initiated turning points are driven by the individual. The final turning-point in Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) framing is structural, which is determined by institutional structures. Structural turning-points are the most relevant to this study, representing the upper secondary school choice decision which is imposed on year nine students at the end of primary school.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) frame an individual's disposition for social action or socially ingrained habits relative to the specific field of educational choosing as *habitus* (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The concept of *habitus*, from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, refers to the internalization of experiences that form dispositions, preferences and preferred actions in relation to specific settings and capital (Bourdieu, 2002; Wacquant, 2011). *Habitus* exists 'inside the heads of actors', through their practices and interactions and in physical embodiment as perceived by the individuals (Jenkins, 1992, p. 46). This study takes the position of Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) that disposition to choose changes through the accumulation of capital and the acquisition of new information.

Beyond segmentation, horizon for action can be limited when there are few choices available. This can happen for a number of reasons. In urban settings, such as Stockholm, students choose from hundreds of different academic programs which are spread across the city and have different academic profiles. When choosers have little information, more emphasis is given to the familiar (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). However, when lacking the tools to assess quality and value neutrality in competitive school marketing, an excess of information can be disadvantageous (Holm, 2013). Urban

segregation limits which schools are known to students or are available within reasonable commuting times (D. Wilson & Bridge, 2019) and institutional requirements, such as minimum entrance grades can eliminate many schools from students' consideration (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; S. Lund, 2015). In a Swedish context, external influences such as neighbourhood segregation, gender and peer group have been seen to have limiting effects on students' horizons for action (Holm, 2013). Limitations of the horizon for action will be framed as structural boundaries in the coming section later in this chapter.

Segmentation and limitation are related but not synonymous when discussing horizon for action. Segmentation should be considered the attention towards a set of academic aspirations at the expense of other options while limitations relate more to the breadth of choice available within the horizon for action. Segmentation and limitation of the students' horizons for action will be a focus of this study's analysis but are reliant on additional theories. Cultural and social capital explore how the possession and acquisition of resources influences the students' horizons for action in the creation of opportunity.

Capital

Within the field of educational choosing, or the *landscape of choice*, the degree of ease choosers has towards the process is dependent on the capital that they possess (Bowe et al., 1994). Educational choosing favours those with greater resources, and *economic, social and cultural* capital can be leveraged toward opportunities to progress through the education system and pursue desirable choice paths. Symbolic capital is a socially determined 'profit of distinction' where economic, social or cultural capital is converted into 'recognized distinctions' and is commonly known as prestige, authority or lifestyle (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013, p. 297). As a social construction, symbolic capital is held unequally, being capital that is known and recognized (Bourdieu, 1990). In this study, symbolic capital will not be used explicitly to a great extent. Rather, cultural and social capital will be the main concepts used for analysis in this study. Cultural capital relates to the acquired knowledge and behaviours that act as social assets (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital relates to the benefits derived from being part of a social network (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). There are likely a number of intangible economic influences on the students' experiences but due to the structure of the Swedish education system²⁰ these were not part of the study's inquiry.

²⁰ See Chapter 3: Context and previous research.

Cultural capital

In this study, cultural capital is used to understand how the students' resources help them navigate the upper secondary school choice process. Cultural capital refers to the recognition of a person's learnings or familiarity with knowledge that puts them in an advantageous state to achieve social mobility or maintain an elevated social status (Bourdieu, 1986). These resources consist of a set of symbolic elements such as behaviours, tastes and achievements that when acknowledged by society and institutions, encourage social mobility. In the Swedish education system, framed as a meritocratic institution, unequal opportunities persist (Bunar, 2010a; Fjellman, 2019; Lundahl, 2002b; Skowronski, 2013; Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016). In part, this can be explained by the examining the possession of cultural capital among education choosers (Hultqvist & Lidegran, 2021; Palme, 2008).

A textual interpretation of Bourdieu's cultural capital is limited to French high-culture of the 1960s (Prieur & Savage, 2013). This specific type of knowledge has less relevance today and considering the topic of this study, little to do with students choosing upper secondary school in Sweden. Yet the underlying concept of cultural capital has resonance which can explain how educational choosers engage with the process of choice. For this reason, this study follows the position of Prieur and Savage (2013) whose use of cultural capital is intended to 'float free' from specific traditional conceptualizations of elitist culture. Within this framing, the importance of the local context for cultural capital is emphasized. In the Swedish context, familiarity with the local educational market, different neighbourhoods and specific upper secondary schools are an advantage for those making upper secondary school choices.

Cultural capital is particularly relevant to the school choice process when it is embodied and institutionalized which are emphasized in this study. Embodied cultural capital refers to long-lasting, non-transferable values such as perspectives, academic competencies and language abilities (Bourdieu, 1986). Speaking more languages, or those that are commonly spoken²¹, can provide a number of benefits such as being able to build an extensive social network, (Devine, 2009; Shakya et al., 2010). Those who can only speak one language, speak an uncommon language or have low-literacy levels in their mother tongue will be more isolated. Institutionalized cultural capital, or educational capital, refers to the formal recognition of status such as academic credentials (Bourdieu, 1986). When academic credentials, such as the grades students receive before migration, are recognized, it opens more upper secondary school programs to them during their choice process (J. Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013). Alternatively, the unequal possession of cultural capital

²¹ Swedish has clear benefits in Sweden as does a *lingua franca* such as English.

across society influences the process of school choice, exacerbating segregation between schools (Reay, 2004b; Yoon, 2020). This study follows these conceptualizations of cultural capital to explore how resources lead to opportunity in the upper secondary school choice process and influence the students' horizons for action.

Social capital

Social capital also plays a significant role in upper secondary school choice. Career decision-making is dependent on the relationships that students have with others around them (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). These relationships may be with other students, family members or school employees and the impact that they have cannot be separated from the students' own backgrounds, experiences or social interactions (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Social capital involves the interpersonal relationships that one possesses and the familiarity of social norms to utilize these relationships (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Tzanakis, 2013). It is an 'investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace' (Lin, 2001, p. 19). The benefits of being embedded in a social network include the acquisition of new information, influence on persons of authority and reinforcement of one's own identity (Lin, 1999).

This study primarily draws from social capital as framed by Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000) but Bourdieu (2002) will also be discussed to explore the variations. For Bourdieu (2002), social capital represents the accumulated resources determined by the size of a social network and social capital of other group members. Social capital is an individual possession coming from social position within a group or network that provides access to resources, increasing with the size and breadth of network connections (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Wall et al., 1998). In this tradition, social capital has the possibility of being converted into economic capital for the purpose of climbing a hierarchical social structure into different social positions.

Coleman (1988) agrees with Bourdieu that social capital exists in relationships between people but differs by seeing social capital as a bonding mechanism within a group (Tzanakis, 2013). In this framing, social capital empowers individuals to perform actions within a social field. In this sense, social capital is a public good and interactions between two people benefit both. A community, or social network, grows in strength by strengthening its bonds in contrast to Bourdieu's conceptualization that social capital is a scarce resource (Leonard, 2004). Additionally, when families have close ties social capital is built within the family unit which has a strong influence on schooling expectations (Ball, 2003; Behtoui et al., 2018). The social capital that exists within a family can manifest itself as support that is useful for students. Ideational support involves familiarizing children with pro-academic norms and practical information on schools, the choice process and different academic paths (Coleman, 1988; A. Osman & Månsson, 2015). In the school

environment, a strong relationship with teachers can also provide the benefits of social capital (Phillippo & Stone, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011). When teachers support students, they draw on their own resources, imparting their own situational knowledge (cultural capital) and utilizing their social networks (social capital).

The concepts of bridging and bonding social capital are useful for exploring the different types of relationships students have with those around them, in particular their peers. Bonding social capital is derived from networks such as family and friends, only benefiting those within the social group (Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital can provide the resources and confidence to extend one's own social reach, especially for children who are in a new environment (Holland et al., 2007). However, the benefits of bonding social capital can be limited. Embodied cultural capital, in this context low language ability, can limit the degree that information can permeate into migrant groups and there is a risk that groups with strong bonding social capital can become isolated from other groups (Ramsden & Taket, 2011). Significant social benefit is also gained from *weak ties* or cross-group relationships (Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 1999). Bridging social capital refers to the benefits of having connections outside one's own immediate social group in the form of a loose, heterogeneous network (Putnam, 2000). Connecting to individuals outside one's own immediate social group allows new and more diverse information to be interacted with. While both bridging and bonding social capital socially benefit individuals, Putnam (2000) frames bonding social capital as 'getting by' while bridging social capital is framed as 'getting ahead' (p. 20). However, there is no guarantee that migrants possess bonding social capital (Ryan, 2011). In terms of schooling, bridging social capital can positively affect a family's sense of agency and provide a strong understanding of the local education system (Ramsden & Taket, 2011).

The Grapevine

To further emphasize the importance of social capital, the concept of the *grapevine*²² is used to understand the influence of information obtained from social networks. As previously mentioned, social and cultural capital have an influence on horizon for action and are interrelated. For upper secondary school choice, this is most apparent in the knowledge students accumulate about the school choice process. For a person inclined to make an educational choice, their capacity for doing so is influenced by the capital that they have and the information that comes as a result (Ball et al., 1996). In particular, a person's relationship with information is embedded in the social networks that they interact with and the knowledge shared within that group

²² Ball and Vincent (1998) relate the term grapevine to the spreading of gossip. The theoretical meaning of this concept will be expanded upon later in this section.

(Ball & Vincent, 1998). The possession of information is at the core of educational choosing but not all information is created equal. As previously discussed, pragmatically-rational decision making is done with partial information (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Thus, the sources and content of information has an effect on what educational choosers do. In this sense, cultural and social capital play a role in how newly arrived students can acquire information. The students' cultural capital allows them to reach a wider group of peers expanding their bridging social capital. Who the students speak with has an influence on what type of information they receive, having an effect on their horizon for action.

Communication through the grapevine is tied to uncertainty (Ball & Vincent, 1998). When individuals feel that they have partial information, they seek out more through their social networks. Social connections in the grapevine are interrelated, in constant flux and dependent on complex social networks (Ball & Vincent, 1998). To understand how choice differs among students, the concepts of embedded and contingent choosers are used (Ball, Reay, et al., 2002). Embedded choosers have extensive and diverse social capital, providing broad and comprehensive information. This can be connected to those that benefit from both bonding and bridging social capital. On the other hand, contingent choosers have smaller social networks, providing bonding social capital, and with those who may not have relevant educational experiences to guide them. For the purposes of this study, contingent choosers will be the focus.

Few less-privileged families participate in the type of risk-based choosing that privileged families do, opting rather for pragmatic choices (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Reay and Lucey (2003) attribute this to families viewing certain schooling trajectories as unavailable to them and as a result, choosing among limited options and with limited information. Yet, this too represents a degree of familiarity with the education system and an appreciation of what they don't know. Recent migrants don't have this type of local knowledge, thus not knowing what they don't know in the local context (Kristen, 2008; Sattin-Bajaj, 2014, 2015; Windle, 2009). A limited horizon of action bounds future academic aspirations and creates an inability to feel control over one's own future for marginalized young persons (Moensted, 2020).

In this study, the grapevine provides a framework for examining the information that the students receive. The students receive information from different sources, which informs their preferences for different upper secondary school alternatives. Extending the concept of the grapevine, warm knowledge (Slack et al., 2014) provides a way to understand interactions with institutional representatives who don't fall neatly into those described as providing hot knowledge. Furthermore, 'hot,' 'cold' and 'warm' can also be framed as support to identify the sources of this information (Baker et al., 2018). The choice process involves a large number of information sources,

too many for any person to review even if they were all available. This reiterates that choices are made pragmatically within segmented horizons for action.

Boundaries

Students' possession of capital contributes to the formation of aspirations and opportunities available in their horizon for action. The process of choosing an upper secondary school does not happen in a vacuum. Conditions in the local context shape opportunities for choosing that exist within the horizon for action. To understand how students interact with the landscape of choice, the concept of boundaries contributes to the previously discussed theoretical concepts by explaining the availability of different academic trajectories for educational choosers and their upper secondary school preferences. Bureaucratic organizations are reliant on standardized processes and comparable credentials that act as boundaries for choosers. Taking Barmark and Lund's (2016) use of *structural boundaries* as a point of departure, the accumulation of grades determines what upper secondary schools are available to year-nine students. However, students do not simply complete courses and earn grades. A complex interaction of the students' backgrounds and the support that they receive from school and home contribute to how easily or possible it is for them to earn grades. In addition, neighbourhood lines can act as physical boundaries which enable or limit choice opportunities. Beyond structural boundaries, students have varying academic aspirations. When individuals interact with information, it encourages the evaluation of different choice paths. In the social sphere, this involves the comparison between individuals and groups that attend different schools, which inevitably draws lines of 'us' and 'them' demarcated by boundaries (Ball & Vincent, 1998). The study of *symbolic boundaries* provide an understanding of how social processes affect groups across society (Lamont & Molnár, 2002).

Structural and symbolic boundaries have been found to limit school choice and reinforce segregation within Swedish upper secondary schools (Barmark & Lund, 2016; S. Lund, 2015). In this study, structural and symbolic boundaries will be used to understand how the choice process can lead to varying opportunities to choose and the different upper secondary schools students enroll at. Applied to the concept of horizon for action, boundaries shape what upper secondary schools newly arrived students are able and aspire to choose. In particular, structural and symbolic boundaries are framed as limitation and segmentation of the horizon for action, respectively.

Structural boundaries

The choice process demands that students act within an organizational structure that has its own rules and demands (Giddens, 1984). Organizational

structures are grounded in a specific setting, defined by time and space and act as structural boundaries. Structural boundaries are defined by two characteristics, grades and neighbourhood of residence. The Swedish education system does not allow upper secondary schools to select students but rather relies on a seemingly 'blind' ranking of students according to their final year-nine grades. These grades determine which upper secondary school programs year-nine students can apply to. Intended as an 'objective' and 'meritocratic' structure, the final year-nine grades of newly arrived students are in fact also influenced by a number of factors, related to social position and identity. In this context, grades are a form of structural boundary (Barmark & Lund, 2016). To develop this position further, a cursory examination of influences follows but is not intended to be comprehensive.

The possibility for students to complete classes and earn grades has a number of influences. The age a student migrates to a country has a profound effect on their schooling, older students having much more difficulty in succeeding academically (Böhlmark, 2008; Lundahl & Lindblad, 2018). In 2015, over 50% of students who migrated to Sweden after the age of seven did not have the grades required at the end of year nine, a number skewed by newly arrived students (Lundahl & Lindblad, 2018). These students' parents' background is a strong predictor of their school achievement (Böhlmark et al., 2016; Lüdemann & Schwerdt, 2013). Due to the effects of funding differences and homogenous school populations, neighbourhood segregation also has a negative effect on student grades (Lundahl & Lindblad, 2018).

The residential area where the students live and the location of different upper secondary schools are relevant for their upper secondary school choice. Stockholm has been described as a segregated city (Malmberg et al., 2018). Migration waves over the previous decades have led to the segregation of ethnic enclaves that have a high proportion of marginalized populations. Where students live influences what opportunities are available to them as capital is not held uniformly across a city such as Stockholm (Ambrose, 2016; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016).

A growing number of researchers have begun to frame the benefits of one's residential neighbourhood as a consequence of the possession of capital (E. Andersson et al., 2012; Barthón & Monfroy, 2010; Yoon, 2020; Yoon & Lubienski, 2017; Yoon et al., 2018). The neighbourhoods across an urban setting carry different advantages and accesses to resources and those with more capital provide the ability to choose more desirable schools (Barthón & Monfroy, 2010). The act of commuting has strategic value for students when choosing schools (Fjellman, 2019). Neighbourhoods with more schools can be more attractive to students and the ability to choose widely increases one's opportunities. A neighbourhood may also suffer a lack of upper secondary schools, limiting the number of options or making the commute to a desired school more difficult (H. Forsberg, 2018). The neighbourhoods themselves can have concentrations of ethnic groups, limiting opportunities

for social mixing, a phenomenon observed in urban Stockholm (Kadarik, 2019; Malmberg & Clark, 2020; Tyrcha, 2020).

Neighbourhood of residence has a strong effect on the availability of upper secondary schools. Where you live is not independent from the social and cultural capital that a person possesses but also further contributes to their capacity for accessing all choice options. Horizon for action can be limited when living in an area far away or without easily accessible to other neighbourhoods (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The structural boundaries that students face affect how they can act during the upper secondary school choice process. When structural boundaries constrain the opportunities for students to choose upper secondary school programs they are limited from the entirety of available academic programs.

Symbolic boundaries

The restriction of grades as a structural boundary does not completely explain student choice patterns however. Symbolic boundaries also provide an explanation of segregation of choice and discrepancies between expectations for student choice and the reality (Barmark & Lund, 2016). Symbolic boundaries are divisions that connote belonging and exclusion for social actors (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). The act of choosing assumes hierarchy among the choices, be they in quality or preference. The choosers make a choice that they view as best for themselves creating a boundary of positive attributes on one side while dis-identifying with the other. However, these boundaries are intangible, creating segmentation of the horizon for action by framing what is considered as desirable or undesirable. Emotional connections, feelings of alienation and identity all manifest as ‘push’ or ‘pull’ factors when an individual is faced with a choice. The rules of society are the symbolic boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable. In a competitive society this inevitably leads to the formation of groups to protect scarce resources. The privilege of being in-group is matched by discrimination of being outside, creating social inequity (Lamont et al., 2015). In this sense, symbolic boundaries are the lines that differentiate belonging on one side or the other.

Within a school choice context, the constructed identity that a school portrays outward or that grows organically in the form of reputation can act as a symbolic boundary. The most desirable upper secondary schools are behind symbolic boundaries (Barmark & Lund, 2016). Students navigate these boundaries by drawing on their capital. What they know is defined by who they know. A study by Barmark and Lund (2016) found that science programs at high-threshold schools were seen as more ‘Swedish’ and ‘white’ and not a place many students with immigrant backgrounds felt that they could fit in. As a consequence, the students congregated at low-threshold schools. This alignment with ethnic characteristics creates a feeling of ‘we-ness’ and act as a structuring social force (Alexander, 2013). Students voluntarily segregate themselves from upper secondary schools where they don’t

feel that they belong and many high-performing immigrant students choose lower threshold upper secondary schools. In this sense, the higher ranked schools feel less accessible to students who did not feel like they belong in them. In a broader sense, students of foreign backgrounds can worry that they won't belong in a prospective school where they don't fit in and thus, avoid it (Ambrose, 2020; Bunar & Kallstenius, 2007). Additionally, students are guided and restricted by emotions situated in belonging. Students avoid upper secondary schools where they fear being alone or characterised as an outsider. While the number of immigrant students within the high-status science program has increased, segregation across the different programs still exists and is attributed to the segregating effects of school choice (Barmark & Lund, 2016).

Ball et al. (1995) attribute choice preferences to the unique settings in which they occur, building on Giddens definition of a locale as a 'physical region involved as part of the setting of interaction, having definite boundaries which help to concentrate interaction in one way or another' (Giddens as cited in Ball et al., 1995, p. 54). The distribution of hot knowledge is unequal in urban Stockholm (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016). When families wanting to avoid what they imply are 'immigrant' schools for the inability to provide the right social opportunities, they are acting on the information that they have. Preferences, influenced by this hot knowledge, create symbolic boundaries of which schools are suitable and which are undesirable.

Moral rejections of behaviour and work ethics cause individuals to draw symbolic boundaries of what is unacceptable (Lamont, 1992). The concept of dis-identification works in opposition to feelings of belonging. When individuals dis-identify from a label, they reject and act to avoid situations where the label would be applied to themselves (Skeggs, 2002). The concept of dis-identification is useful when applied to this study's context and how students choose schools. Many migrant youths have rejected ethicized portrayals of their peers, dis-identifying from those they perceived as disreputable (Hagverdian, 2010; Krivonos, 2019; Lundström, 2006; Morris-Roberts, 2002).

In this study, symbolic boundaries will be used to understand how belonging drives the choice process and influences student preferences for upper secondary schools. Students discuss how they see themselves in relation to other students, the characteristics they wish to foster within themselves and peers they wish to interact with. The reputation and profile of different upper secondary schools interact with what students perceive as acceptable, desirable and what matches with their self-identity. Because of the nature of a competitive school market and the effects of a segregated urban setting, ethnicity cannot be removed from this conversation. Belonging is intertwined with the students' background in this process, defined by how capital is distributed across the student population. Dis-identification acts in parallel to the positive characteristics of belonging when the students' feelings of self-identification do not match experiences or the options available to them.

Symbolic boundaries in this case frame how the world is viewed and understood, which informs the horizon for action. When students engage with the choice-making process, their influences from cultural and social capital plays a large role, which then meets the structural boundaries of the school institution.

The symbolic boundaries that students construct determine where they turn their attention and the upper secondary school programs they aspire to or dismiss. As students do not consider all academic routes simultaneously, an internal process of self-selection differentiates those that they prefer from those that they wish to avoid. In this study, symbolic boundaries are related to segmentations of the students' horizon for action.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

The Swedish education system is driven by an individual choice system allowing students to choose the institution that they perceive as best suiting their needs. In this study, analysis of newly arrived students' upper secondary school choice uses *horizon for action* as a point of departure. This approach aims to emphasize the social dimension, the surrounding environment and the individuals' preferences as contributing to newly arrived students' upper secondary school choice. From this perspective, educational paths that students see as possible and desirable are called their horizon for action, dependent on their dispositions and environmental conditions. An individual's horizon for action is influenced by capital. Cultural capital, largely in the form of language and education capital, has a strong influence on the students' capacity for engaging with others dependent on institutional recognition. On the other hand, social capital relates to the breadth and depth of social connections, providing guidance and information. The students' possession of both cultural and social capital leads to their accumulation of information which in this study is understood using the concept of the grapevine. The quality and quantity of information that students receive is related to their possession of these different forms of capital. As a result, the information that any person has is incomplete. Educational choices are based on this partial information, being pragmatically rational, differing from so called 'rational decision-making' due to uncertainty in the results. When students face the opportunity to make upper secondary school choices, they also engage with boundaries. Symbolic boundaries relate to how feelings of belonging create push and pull forces towards different choice paths. Structural boundaries are used to describe grades as credentials that give opportunities to pursue different academic paths and the effects of neighbourhood of residence. Each of these phenomena contribute to the shaping of students' horizons for action. When segmentation of the horizon of action occurs, a smaller number of choice paths are considered acceptable, bounded by symbolic boundaries. On the other hand, a limited horizon for action refers to

limited opportunities determined by the external factors of structural boundaries.

Chapter Four: Methodology

In this chapter the methodological considerations and design used in this study are discussed. First, a section about the importance of interviewing children presents the epistemological position of the study and emphasizes the importance of studying the phenomenon of educational choosing through the eyes of the children who are affected. Second, the study design will be described. This includes discussion regarding data collection, the analytical process and analytical framework. Third, the ethical considerations are discussed, focussing on voluntary consent, representation and the limitations and delimitations of the study. To conclude, a short description of how the methodological position is applied to the empirical chapters is presented.

Interviewing Children

Conducting interviews can be particularly challenging with children, especially with reticent teenagers. Children's language abilities and the interviewer's ability to establish trust can be obstacles for collecting detailed responses (Shi, 2011). However, by giving attention to the student's perspective and structure in study design, these challenges can be overcome. It is important to explore the child perspective because of their absence in much of the research that exists (Kostenius, 2007; Qvortrup, 1997; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). Parents are often the subject of school choice research as when children are young, choices are made for them. Teenagers are a different matter, having more autonomy and being asked to prioritize academic trajectories that they aspire to. This line is difficult to draw because of the nature of family dynamics. Reay and Lucey (2003) address this challenge by pointing to an imbalance of research toward parental choice. As with Reay and Lucey (2000, 2003), this study aims to contribute to highlighting the under-researched actor of the child within the family unit during the school choice process.

Children generally have substantially less power and subsequently less voice in the public sphere than adults do (Wringe, 2020). In recent years, however, the child's perspective has been promoted more in society and research (Hill et al., 2004; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). This can partially be linked to

the prominence of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which in article 12 states that the child's views should be heard on any matter which affects them (OHCHR, 2020). Children are too often seen as dependents without sufficient autonomy because their perspectives are not heard (Qvortrup, 1997). An essential element of a sustainable world is giving children an equitable chance at life, which requires their meaningful participation (UNICEF, 2020). Despite an increased prioritization of the child, the child perspective remains underappreciated and children do not have the same ability as adults to change their circumstances (Kostenius, 2007). A child-centric perspective, as a larger idea, includes two characteristics: the adult's *child perspective* – on the best interests of the child, and the *child's perspective* – concerning their perspective and desires (Söderbäck et al., 2011).

Simply amplifying children's voices is not enough for giving children a chance for participation, as space, audience and influence are also needed (Lundy, 2007). Combine this with the experience of being a recent migrant or refugee and the possibility of disenfranchisement raises. The experiences of refugees exist in a 'black box' that is poorly understood (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). In recent years, a number of other researchers have called for greater study of recently migrated children through a deeper exploration of their experiences, particularly during their time in school (Bunar, 2010a; Devine, 2009; Hek, 2005a; Nilsson Folke, 2017; Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013).

As has been previously discussed, the umbrella term of newly arrived covers a wide spectrum of experiences pertaining to different residency statuses or educational backgrounds (Jahanmahan & Bunar, 2018; Sharif, 2017; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). Even when education policy attempts to differentiate for a specific categorization, it too may not successfully recognize students. Since, the 'loss of home is the only condition that all refugees share, not trauma' (Papadopoulos, 2018, p. 18), the wider categorization of being newly arrived used in this study can hold an even broader diversity of experiences. As a result, educational policies may not address the specific needs of the students with limited literacy in their first language if their categorization as newly arrived does not differentiate them from those simply learning the host countries language (Sidhu & Taylor, 2007). Marginalized recently migrated students, refugees in particular, are often made invisible and their particular needs may not be acknowledged within policy (Hek et al., 2005; Sidhu & Taylor, 2007). These unheard voices fail to be present in debate and policy making, making students even more invisible (Nieto, 1994). When mainstream culture is prioritized, alternative stories enable those on the periphery to 'challenge cultural homogenisation and assimilation' (Friere, 1970 in Dewilde & Skrefsrud, 2016, p. 1032). Within this reasoning, to understand the experiences of newly arrived students and examine their own reflections of their experiences, the students themselves act as experts of their own experiences (Nilsson Folke, 2017; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Qvortrup,

1997). It can be challenging to study experiences with the group used in this study but it is not a reason for the study to not be conducted. In fact, it is of particular importance when studying children (Kostenius, 2007; Qvortrup, 1997) and marginalized migrants (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Hek, 2005a; Sidhu & Taylor, 2007) who are often unheard. It is however important to have a well thought out methodology that considers trustworthiness and ethics (Shi, 2011)

A platform for voice alone is not sufficient to have an impact on society but research provides the opportunity to increase influence and audience (Lundy, 2007). In fact, 'it is the moral responsibility of educators to find out more about students' experiences of phenomena in order to facilitate and better support their learning and development' (van Manen, 1997 as quoted in Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009, p. 75). As mentioned above, the nuances of the newly arrived experience have had insufficient academic study. This in itself describes a position that is not value neutral in that it is believed that these experiences should be studied more and that the students are insufficiently supported, recognizing the students' experience. The voices of these persons can be highlighted through recognition, however there is not agreement on the exact meaning of the term (Fitzgerald et al., 2009). In this study, the students are recognized by highlighting their interactions with the school choice process from their perspective. The student perspectives are derived from semi-structured interviews. To make sense of these responses, thematic analysis is used to identify emergent themes. Passages from individual students that highlight these themes are presented and interlaid with analysis and references to the local schooling environment.

Study Design

To address the aforementioned aim and RQs, this study centres around empirical data. The particular data in this case comes from semi-structured interviews that exists as such:

- 1) Two interviews with 22 students, transcribed
- 2) Interview with eight school officials, summarized

The following section will explore the process and reasoning behind the procedures for data collection. First, the process of data collection is explained. Following this, the analytical process and use of thematic analysis is described. Finally, the analytical framework is presented.

Data collection

Before data collection could begin, an approved ethical proposal was submitted to and approved by the Swedish Ethics Review Authority.²³ Details included storage of private information, anonymization and informed consent and were confirmed to be satisfactory.

The stage following ethical approval involved finding subjects to speak to. To begin with, ‘newly arrived students’ as a defined category was selected as the topic of study. The initial strategy was to find these students through community groups, religious centres and social media but the results were insufficient. The following attempt involved emailing every primary school principal and vice-principal in four large cities in Sweden.²⁴ Some responses were received from each of the cities but the majority were based in Stockholm so attention turned exclusively to this city. After reviewing the appropriateness of each response, ten schools were initially selected in eight different Stockholm suburbs that matched the study’s focus.

Correspondence with the ten school gatekeepers included an explanation of the study, measures to protect anonymity and data integrity, and receiving assent from the students and consent from their guardians with an intent to ‘respect the autonomy of those being studied’ (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012, p. 76) – see *Appendix A for gatekeeper email* –. Twenty-eight students were initially selected by the school contacts who acted as gatekeepers. The number of students used in the study was later reduced to 22²⁵ after six were removed because of their not graduating or a lack of a second interview. The students had ten different mother tongues so an information and consent form was translated to each of these languages (see *Appendix B for consent form*). Before any interview could begin the consent form, signed by both student and guardian, was required. The next stage was to book the interviews. This involved correspondence with the school gatekeepers to find an acceptable time and private space within the school. The use of gatekeepers was guided by Carrol-Lind et al. (2006) and Wanat (2008). To supplement the main student interviews, eight of these teachers were also interviewed for the purpose of giving local school context and understanding the different school structures.

Interviews

Once arranged, the first interview with the students occurred, which focused on learning about the student’s background and their initial understanding of the Swedish education system. The gatekeeper for each school selected students to meet and arranged the interview at the school. Each interview was

²³ Swedish: *Etikprovningsmyndigheten*

²⁴ Stockholm, Göteborg, Malmö and Uppsala

²⁵ At eight different schools

done in a private room with only the interviewer, the student and an interpreter present. The semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview template (See *Appendix C* and *D*). Interview two followed the same format as interview one but focused more on the information that the students had, their aspirations and their understanding of the upper secondary choice process as they experienced it. Additionally, the gatekeepers at the schools were interviewed. The gatekeeper at each school was also an educator but in different roles. Of the nine gatekeepers, it was possible to interview eight. The focus of the interviews with these educators was to supplement information found in the student interviews and understand some of the organization outside of the students' vantage points.

An adjustment was made during the interview process to adjust for a previously unforeseen circumstance in the students' responses. Prior to the second data collection period, it was assumed that students would be well aware of their grades and would be anxiously waiting for their application results when they were posted on April 15th. However, during the first interview conducted on April 22nd, one student explained that he did not know the decision made for his application or his current grades with certainty. For this reason, the interview was concluded prematurely to allow the student to speak with his counsellor before continuing. After speaking with his counsellor, this student learned that he in fact had not been accepted to any of the schools he applied to, surprising him. In reviewing the results of this study, it should be noted that the rest of the students were prompted to review their results and grades before their second interviews were conducted. There is the potential that a number of these students were not actively tracking their grades and acceptances but due to the limited access for interviews, it was determined that the responses would be more informative if they were based on an awareness of the acceptance results. Considering this, the students were asked to review their upper secondary options and grades before the interview in a way that may not be an accurate representation of their engagement with this information. It is possible that many of the students were passive in their engagement with their trajectory but the opposite may also be true, in that students were actively following this information throughout the school year. This study is unable to directly comment on this specific phenomenon. Given additional time and resources, a wider collection of experiences and more longitudinal outlook may allow for this phenomenon to be pursued with less interference by the researcher. An attempt was made to address this concern in subsequent interviews by adding an additional line of questioning regarding self-monitoring of their acceptance status.

Analytical process

Analysis in this study is inspired by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021b, 2021a; Riessman, 2008). There is a narrative element to the interviews

as the respondents discussed how multiple influences contributed to their interaction with the school choice process. At the same time, relying exclusively on a narrative portrayal of their experiences would give too much weight to a sequential perspective. Looking at these narratives thematically combines these methods, giving most attention to ‘what’ is said rather than ‘how’ it is said (Riessman, 2008). The narrative perspective in this study, refers to the ‘biography as a whole’, focusing specifically on the story related to the phenomenon studied, upper secondary school choice. Each interview transcript was reviewed and relevant themes isolated as codes. Common themes responses were grouped and general patterns were compared. The themes that represent the findings of this study are grounded in the quotations, dispersed between interpretations by the author and related to previous research and the theoretical perspective. The thematic analysis framework used in this study can be broken down into three stages.

- 1) The first stage involved gaining a familiarity with the data. This involved reading and re-reading of the transcriptions. Since the author was also the interviewer, there was already a degree of familiarity with the data but further readings gave a greater degree of familiarity.
- 2) The second stage involved the search for meanings and themes within the data. Previous research and the text were both reviewed when considering which themes are relevant and interesting. Once themes were identified, examples were found using NVivo software.
- 3) The third stage was the organization of themes to make sense of the data and telling a story that allowed the most meaningful findings to be presented.

Analytical framework

The organization of the analytical chapters was a subjective choice of the author that was determined to fit the argumentation of the study. The phenomena being discussed in this study are complex and involve many different elements. The themes were organized in different categories such as the school market or peers which was strongly influenced by previous research in the field. As was seen in the previous chapters, there are many contributing factors to the upper secondary school choice process. An exhaustive list of influences was impossible to include so the selection involved a mixture of responding to the themes identified across the interviews and previous research. Due to the unique choice process of the Swedish education system, challenges of working with children, and lack of information about the migrant experience, a novel approach was necessary. A comprehensive presentation of the entire phenomenon does not currently exist. It was determined that the selected elements are the most important for an understanding of upper secondary school choice which was based on the prominence of themes in the student responses

and previous research. As has been mentioned previously, there is a recognized need for additional research on different elements of newly arrived students' experiences in upper secondary school choice. However, this study builds upon the existing discourse, drawing on the findings of some works and aims to extend others.

The chapters are organized in a way to tell a story of newly arrived students coming to Sweden, choosing an upper secondary school and the experiences that influenced their decisions. However, the chapters are not intended to be chronological as the experiences were overlapping and often occurred simultaneously. Instead, they are organized by relevance to the student responses and previous research on the Swedish education system. The students' ability and propensity for upper secondary school choice, horizon for action, is taken as product of the capital that they possessed and boundaries that they faced. Each empirical chapter will draw on the theoretical concepts to varying degrees, equating their experiences with the different types of capital. These chapters build upon each other towards the final empirical chapter that explores boundaries.

As each of the chapters explore different phenomena within the students' upper secondary school choice process, the different theories are not uniformly applied across the chapters. Horizon for action is the overarching perspective taken in this study that the other concepts contribute towards. It is first introduced empirically in *Chapter Six: Student experiences with the market* as a demonstration of the influence of the marketized Swedish education system. After this, it remains in the background in the following chapters but returns to the forefront in *Chapter Nine: Capital, boundaries and choosing* when the students' horizons for action are examined.

Capital is used throughout *Chapter Seven: Guidance from the school* and *Chapter Eight: The influence of the social network* but in different ways. Embodied cultural capital appears throughout the chapters, showing the benefit of speaking different languages for the students. In chapter seven, institutionalized cultural capital demonstrates how the recognition of the students' grades, and previous studies lead to opportunities in school. Social capital is utilized in chapter Eight where the benefits of the family unit and social networks are understood through bonding and bridging social capital. More specifically, the benefit of these social connections involves the sharing of information towards upper secondary school choice which is understood through the concept of the grapevine. In *Chapter Nine: Capital, boundaries and choosing*, each of these concepts are returned to, to discuss how they influence boundaries. Boundaries are positioned as the accumulation of the influences on the students' horizons for action. Structural boundaries are equated with limited horizons for action while symbolic boundaries are likened to segmented horizons for action. As such, the entirety of the theoretical perspective is present, tying each aspect to the horizon for action. This chapter builds a story of choosing an upper secondary school told through the experiences of

nine of the 22 students, the relevance being interpreted through the theoretical perspective described in chapter three and developed throughout the empirical chapters.

Ethical Considerations

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is not independent or without impact on the subjects being studied. The exploitation of vulnerable people in scientific study has been justified in many actions that have dehumanized people to the benefit of others (Gray et al., 2017). Reflection on these previous studies and methods have led to the development of stringent requirements such as a clear and focused methodology, the need for consent and attention given to vulnerability (Gray et al., 2017, p 24). A study of high quality recognizes the vulnerabilities of participants while protecting them from any harm that may come from participation. This concern for integrity is the basis for the design of this study. The first stage was seeking ethical approval, which was received from The Swedish Ethics Review Authority. Beyond protecting the identities of the subjects of this study, many of the choices made in the research design were to increase validity. This is seen as an ethical consideration and two factors are identified as potential limitations to address: voluntary consent and representation. Following these sections, the limitations and delimitations of the study are discussed.

Voluntary consent

The selection of respondents relied heavily on the voluntary nature of both the student interview subjects and the school gatekeepers. The term gatekeeper is used to describe the individuals who responded to emails and provided access to the students at their schools. In this situation, gatekeepers likely wanted their school to be seen in a favourable light and because of this, it can be assumed that the ones who self-selected themselves by responding to the email felt that their schools are operating in an appropriate way. The interviews with the school gatekeepers confirmed this and each of them were passionate and engaged educators who wanted the best for their students.

The terms access and cooperation have been used synonymously in research when in reality they describe vastly different situations (Wanat, 2008). In the case of this study, access does not necessarily ensure cooperation. The gatekeepers' opening of the door did not guarantee full participation from the participants. The students generally professed an interest in sharing their stories and volunteered a great deal of detail about their lives. However, a minority were less forthcoming during the interviews and it is unclear how much their 'volunteering' was in fact voluntary. The decision to participate is not made in a vacuum (Gray et al., 2017). In this case, the position of power (the

gatekeeper) had the possibility of exploiting the less powerful (the student) influencing their decisions based on their relationship of trust (and by extension myself, the researcher). Yet, the school gatekeepers were able to bridge the relationship between the author and the students in way that would not have been possible without them. Each gatekeeper had a trusted relationship with the students, who looked to this authority figure for support in their new educational environment. During this process, every effort was made to be clear with the purpose of the study, how the interviews would be used and how the students' personal information would be shielded.

Representation

Representation of the students' perspectives can be understood as the ability for the perspectives to be collected in a manner that is representative of how the students actually think about the phenomena being studied. No person speaks in the form of written text so it is necessary to reconstruct an interview in the form of transcription (Ehn, 1995). In its simplest form, this involves the removal of pauses or filler words and can extend to adjusting text to maintain the core meaning of the responses. In the reconstruction of text in this study, the aim was to improve readability while maintaining the respondents' intended meanings. This relates to the insertion of minimal context when a response was not understandable outside of the quote, translation when translanguaging occurred and the removal of filler words and sentence fragments. Additionally, the students' responses do not appear in exactly the same form as was spoken in every case. The use of ellipsis (...) indicate when a portion of a conversation was not included. This was the case when the interviewer asked the students to give more information, sentences were repeated or the students corrected themselves. In these cases, the substance of the response is maintained. The quotations presented in the following analysis are either direct quotes or near approximations to preserve the intended meaning without displaying identifiable information. Thus, the conversations have been condensed to improve readability. Quotations are presented in both long and short passages, interwoven with analysis.

Many of the respondents did not speak Swedish or English fluently. While the students may have wanted to demonstrate their language abilities, they also may not have been able to articulate in a fluent way. For this reason, they were encouraged to speak in their mother tongue. This necessitated the use of interpreters in the study. However, this created a dilemma about the accuracy of the interpretations. The use of interpreters can lead to miscommunications and silencing of parts of the conversation (Kosny et al., 2014). Despite these challenges, the use of interpreters provides the opportunity to interview a normally difficult to reach population, resulting in a net positive as long as the practices of successful previous studies are followed (Björk Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2013; Farooq & Fear, 2003; Kosny et al., 2014). Pugh and Vetare

(2009), Farooq and Fear (2003) and Kosny et al. (2014) informed the use of interpreters in this study.

In describing their understanding of upper secondary school choice, many of the students made choices that would not bring the result that they thought, had inconsistent answers across different questions and had little understanding about how the Swedish education system works. In one way, these answers reaffirm previous research saying that these students are not prepared for the choice process and that the guidance that they receive does not match their needs (Erixon Arreman & Dovemark, 2018; Hertzberg, 2017). On the other hand, it represents the difficulty of representing the experiences of those who do not always understand the context of their experiences. To contextualize the student experiences, it was necessary to supplement them with some additional information from educators at their schools or publicly available information. Information such as school structure, teacher roles or the names of local institutions are examples of additions to the student responses. However, this additional information was only used when necessary and primacy was given to the student responses.

In order to portray coherent narratives, the presentation of the student experiences in each chapter at times group multiple passages that cover numerous coded themes. This allows the reader to see the multifaceted nature of the students' experiences within each chapter categorization. As an example, Fatemeh's interaction with the school market is presented at the start of chapter seven as a series of responses. Fatemeh spoke in depth about her interactions with the market of upper secondary schools, allowing her descriptions to provide an illuminating picture which was of value for exploring those of the other students. Yet, her experiences with each theme were not necessarily separate, and even feed into each other, such as when her experiences at the upper secondary school fair influenced how she enters the upper secondary school open-houses. As a solution, in each chapter the variety of the students' experiences with each phenomenon are explored in a narrative fashion, followed by summarizing distinct thematic findings.

Limitations and delimitations in data collection

Many of the respondents spoke in their first language requiring translation. The use of an interpreter added a filter to their responses, likely affecting the exact wording of their responses. Twinn (1997) and Esposito (2001) question the efficacy of research when used with interpreters and argue that there is great risk for miscommunication between interviewer and respondent. There is the danger that during analysis, themes can be interpreted in different ways because of cultural differences, due to languages not having direct translations and miscommunication. However, in an increasingly multicultural world, it is important that research does not avoid these challenges and thus the use of interpreters was central in the design of this study.

When interpreters were used, a number of considerations can improve validity. Kosny et al. (2014), Farooq and Fear (2003) and Esposito (2001) suggest the use of experienced interpreters, who have clear instructions and an understanding of the goals of the study, allowing for effective interpretation to occur. Using simplified language, repetition when meaning is unclear and time limited interviews are also recommended (Farooq & Fear, 2003; Kosny et al., 2014). Finally, interpreters who share a cultural background with the interviewee allow for effective contextualization of the questions and responses (Pugh & Vetere, 2009). These strategies were taken into consideration when arranging interpreters and two types of individuals were selected by fit and availability within the available resources. First professional interpreters were hired who have professional standing in Sweden. Second, education researchers at Stockholm University acted as interpreters in a few cases. While not professional interpreters themselves, these individuals were fluent in the language spoken and had knowledge of the study and the Swedish context, which was helpful to the process.

From another perspective, with this limitation however comes a strength. The opportunity for the respondents to speak in their own language allowed them to speak in greater depth and detail which would not have been possible than in limited Swedish or English. In this study, this is seen as both a positive and a negative. The limitations of using an interpreter are recognized but the positive aspects of the subjects speaking in their own language is of enormous value for a number of reasons that adds value to the students' contribution to the field. There is a recognised need for research of newly arrived in Sweden, particularly focusing on their perspectives (Bunar, 2010a; Nilsson Folke, 2017; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). When conducted in a thoughtful and organized way, the risks of interpretation can be minimized (Esposito, 2001; Kosny et al., 2014). Finally, it is hard to conceptualize this study being conducted in a different way, particularly when considering the funding limitations inherent to a doctoral study. Newly arrived students are a difficult group to reach in an unfiltered way and the approach taken in this study is simply the best of the available options. A study with more substantial resources, such as a team of interviewers who speak the subject's languages, would be preferable but considering the resources available it is believed that the benefits of this design greatly outweigh the negatives. If the topic is pursued further following the conclusion of this doctoral study this limitation could be addressed.

Summary of Methodological Approach

Analysis in the empirical chapters in this study is conducted through the theoretical lens described in *Chapter Three: Theoretical Perspectives* to explore how a group of newly arrived students engage with the process of choosing an upper secondary school. Careership is taken as an overarching

perspective which builds on the idea that the education system acts as a market, within which students are treated and expected to act as customers (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Students make pragmatically rational decisions, informed by partial information and their own predilections and within the students' horizons for action. In the forthcoming empirical chapters, the influence of various actors on the newly arrived students' possession and acquisition of capital will be explored, which are understood at different times through the work of Bourdieu (1977a), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000). Finally, when the students begin to move towards the process of choosing an upper secondary school, they face a number of symbolic and structural boundaries, which ultimately shape their trajectories.

The following chapters explore these concepts through the theoretical framework and are organized within thematic categories. *Chapter Five: Student Background* is descriptive and presents the students' backgrounds which includes their migration experience and previous schooling before coming to Sweden. In *Chapter Six: Student Experiences with the School Market*, the students describe their initial interactions with the marketized Swedish education system, the conditions of which set the stage for their processes of choosing. The influence of information coming from these market sources on students' horizons for action is considered. In *Chapter Seven: Guidance from the School*, the students describe their interactions with different educators in the school who give guidance and support for upper secondary school choice. In *Chapter Eight: The Influence of the Social Network*, the influence of the students' families and peers are explored. The degree that guidance and support from both the school and the social networks are able to influence the students' horizons for action is examined through the concepts of cultural and social capital. Finally, *Chapter Nine: Capital, Boundaries and Choosing* explores how the students face various boundaries for choosing, arguing that the previously described conditions influence both their process and opportunities for choosing an upper secondary school. Following the empirical chapters, in *Chapter Ten: Concluding discussion*, implications of these findings within the specific context of the Swedish Education system are explored, relating the findings to previous research.

Chapter Five: Student Educational Background

In the Swedish education system, the categorization of being a newly arrived student provides the right to additional school support (SFS 2010:800, K 3). However, the label also portrays newly arrived as a homogenous group, approaching their education in a uniform way (Bunar, 2017). This chapter portrays the heterogeneity of the newly arrived students in this study. To begin with, some purely descriptive details such as their mother tongue and years in Sweden are included in the table below. Following this, qualitative analysis of the students' responses explores variations across their educational backgrounds.

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Languages spoken fluently. Interview language bolded ²⁶	Time in Sweden	Country of Origin
Amena	F	16	Arabic	4 years	Syria
Ahmed	M	15	Arabic	3 years	Egypt
Ali	M	16	Farsi, English	10 months	Iran
Omar	M	15	English	14 months	Born in Sweden but raised in UK
Rifat	M	15	Arabic	2.5 years	Syria
Fatemeh	F	15	Farsi, English	9 months	Iranian citizen, born in Dubai, previous 10 years in Malaysia
Emmanuel	M	15	English	3 months	Nigerian citizen, born in Italy, previous 5 years in Nigeria
Maen	M	16	Arabic	1 year	Syria
Mohammed	M	15	Arabic	1 year	Syria
Rafa	M	16	Dari	4 years	Afghan citizen, born and lived in Iran

²⁶ Students had varying Swedish abilities but it was difficult to define their exact proficiency.

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Languages spoken fluently. Interview language bolded	Time in Sweden	Country of Origin
Manahil	F	16	Urdu, English ²⁷	2 years	Pakistan
Gloria	F	16	English	1 year	Congolese citizen, previous 7 years in Uganda
Laiba	F	15	Urdu, English	10 months	Pakistan
Khadija	F	16	Urdu, English	10 months	Pakistan
Aziz	M	15	Arabic	4 years	Tunisia
Thi	F	16	Arabic	1 year	Syria
Uri	F	17	Arabic	1.5 years	Syria
Alex	M	15	Kurdish Arabic	4 years	Syria
Kostas	M	15	Greek, English ²⁸	2 years	Greece
Giannis	M	15	Greek , English, Albanian	4 years	Greece
Diego	M	15	Spanish	2 years	El Salvador
Brian	M	16	English	2 years	Congolese citizen, grew up in Uganda

The students in this study had a wide variety of backgrounds, originating from a number of different countries. As can be seen in the above chart, the origin of the students can be complex. There are cases when the students had a clear identity with their nation of origin. However, in other cases, their citizenship or how they identified did not match the country they were born in. A number of the students moved to another country, spending years of their childhood there. Some students came directly to Sweden from their home country²⁹ while others spent years in transition, in some cases within refugee camps. Rafa identified as Afghan yet had never been to the country and had spent his entire life in Iran where he does not have citizenship. Omar was born in Sweden, moved to the United Kingdom at a young age and had returned to Sweden with the hope of learning Swedish in a Swedish school.³⁰

These variations are further demonstrated in the students' own responses which give nuance to the diversity among them and extend to their educational experiences. Maen, for example, is from Syria and described interrupted school schedules from the war.

²⁷ Interview was conducted in a mixture of English and Swedish.

²⁸ The first interview was conducted in Greek and the second in English

²⁹ Or stayed little more than a few weeks in another country for bureaucratic reasons such as was the case for Maen.

³⁰ Because of Omar's extensive time away from Sweden, he would be considered as being newly arrived under the criteria described in *Chapter Three: Theoretical framework*.

***Maen:** There are some good schools in Syria but the problem is you don't know what will happen if you go to school. Maybe you go one day and a bomb goes off. Because of the war there can be guns... So, it looks like there is no future there because we cannot go to school. There is bombing near us. We are used to bombing and all of the guns.*

But this experience was likely dependent on the region of Syria that the student came from. In contrast, Mohammed described his school experiences in Syria as being more stable.

***Mohammed:** I used to go to school almost every day. It's no problem. There was no interruption. Only if I was sick or something.*

The students' schooling experiences varied across the different countries they lived in as well. Fatemeh described her school in Malaysia as being academically focused and of high quality.

***Fatemeh:** It was an international school and we spoke English there. And of course, we had to have a second language. I took French. There were students from all over the world.*

Fatemeh's experiences at this type of international school were different than Uri who felt that there were unequal opportunities within his previous school.

***Uri:** I was in school in Syria for two years, two years in Lebanon and it was all just in Arabic. Not other languages.*

***BM:** What was the school like in Lebanon?*

***Uri:** Not good. In Lebanon they take care of the real Lebanese students more than others. In school, they are not good to Syrians.*

Aziz was similarly critical of his school in Tunisia. He didn't observe different treatment within his classes but thought that students were treated with too heavy of a hand, which he found demoralizing.

***Aziz:** Teachers were hard. They could hit children and things like that.*

Ahmed directly compared previous teachers to those in Sweden. He thought that the environment and teaching was much better at his current school.

***Ahmed:** The school in Egypt was not that good so that's why our father brought us to Sweden. I'm kind of a good student so it's better for me to be here.*

Finally, the students didn't always have access to school because of barriers such as financial costs.

Rafa: In Iran, we had to buy our books and other stuff. But here in Sweden, they give them to us for free. We had to pay for school in Iran but here it's free. ... Children have to work instead of going to school. ... In Iran I went to school for five years and during the summers I used to work.

While compulsory schooling is free in Sweden, this is not the case in many other countries. Rafa is of Afghan origin but was born and raised in Iran in a refugee camp, many of the years without his parents. His opportunities were extremely limited and the cost of going to school was substantial.

Student background and horizon for action

The students described contrasting school experiences in their previous schooling, which suggests varying preparedness for learning in the Swedish education system. For some students, their capacity for entering the Swedish school system at their grade level was uncertain. These students lacked basic primary education and had attended few complete years of schooling. At times, they described the transitional period of migration as the cause of their disrupted education. Others had received a complete primary education but described it as insufficient for various reasons such as low teaching quality. What is clear, however, is that the practices and local conditions in their previous schools were not always conducive to learning and their interrupted schooling would be disadvantageous to their progress. However, this was not universal. Some students came from stable backgrounds and attended schools they described as being reputable and exclusive institutions. In fact, some students even described their previous schools as being of better quality than their current Swedish schools. Across the 22 students included in this study there was no clear pattern in background or educational experiences before Sweden. What was clear from comparing the responses of the different students is that they represented a diverse group. In fact, this group exemplifies super-diversity as described by Vertovec (2019).

The legal definition of being newly arrived gives these students the right to specific support beyond what other students receive (SFS 2010:800, K 3, 2a§; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). This support is intended to respond to the needs of newly arrived students in language and subject content support. However, the newly arrived label itself does not differentiate among the diverse experiences and backgrounds of students arriving to Sweden. Newly arrived students are often portrayed as a homogenous group, but this doesn't recognize the different preparedness for school of students stemming from vastly different

backgrounds (Bunar, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2019; Wernesjö, 2012). This aligns with Dryden-Peterson's (2016) concept of the 'black box' of refugee experience, wherein much of newly settled students' previous experiences are unknown. In this case, the students were not all refugees either, as some came as the dependents of parents who had work visas. For the students in this study, there was not a singular experience before arriving in Sweden. The students brought their own knowledge and expectations to the school arena. Considering the variety of educational backgrounds that these newly arrived students had, the experiences in school and their interactions with others are of considerable interest. Relating to the focus of this study, the varied student backgrounds suggest that they will have horizons for action that mirror this diversity, particularly in terms of segmentation. This in particular is motivation for this study, relating back to the study's aim. The following analytical chapters explore how the individual experiences of the newly arrived students contribute to their horizons for action.

Chapter Six: Student Experiences with the School Market

A consequence of the quasi-market school system is that upper secondary schools are incentivized to compete amongst themselves for student enrolment (Varjo et al., 2018). This creates a need for upper secondary schools to market themselves to attract year-nine students to choose their own academics programs. In this chapter, the students' experiences and interactions with the marketized Swedish education system as expressed by the students themselves are explored. The students described their interactions with the market that had different forms and functions. However, each source shared a purpose of informing students about the different academic paths that they could take and introduced them to different specific upper secondary schools that they could apply to. One such source of information was the upper secondary school fair.

Meeting the market

The upper secondary school fair is a space to introduce upper secondary school programs to students in the form of a physical marketplace. Rather than creating information itself, the school fair acts as a portal through which schools, educational companies and other educational entities can disseminate information. In November 2019, the school fair occurred in a large convention hall in Stockholm and allowed every upper secondary school in the greater Stockholm region to present themselves to students. The career guidance counsellor at a number of schools in this study organized a visit for the students to learn more about their different options directly from the upper secondary schools. At the time of publication, this school fair was the last to occur in-person before it was forced online by the COVID pandemic.

One student, Fatemeh, spoke in detail about how the school fair and other marketing techniques influenced her decision making and her responses gave insight toward how the other students in this study experienced the event. Despite her short time in Sweden, Fatemeh had managed to succeed in the Swedish school system which can be partially attributed to her previous education at a prestigious private school in Malaysia and her fluency in English. Unlike many of the other students in this study, she had managed to earn high grades

in her current subjects, giving her considerably more options for choosing upper secondary schools. Fatemeh's first impression upon arriving at the upper secondary school fair was of being overwhelmed.

Fatemeh: *It was really stressful. There were lots of upper secondary schools, lots of people and I had no idea which one to go to or what questions to ask. So yeah, it was confusing.*

BM: *Did (counsellor) tell you about that, before you went?*

Fatemeh: *Yeah. She gave us a few questions to ask. How's the food? How many points do you need to get in or just stuff like that. Just general stuff. I was just confused. I think I just went to the ones where it looked the best*

BM: *What kinds of things looked good?*

Fatemeh: *The logo or where I saw a lot of people go or schools where I had seen advertisements about them or when I heard that other people had talked a lot about them.*

BM: *What was your strategy going in?*

Fatemeh: *I was really confused. I had no idea.*

Fatemeh painted a chaotic picture of entering the school fair and a feeling of confusion as she was inundated by the number of upper secondary schools. The fair provided an introduction to the scale of the number of upper secondary school programs in a single setting. While the fair could be understood to be intimidatingly large, it connected the students directly with upper secondary schools for the first time. When asked about how the school counsellor prepared her, Fatemeh explained that she was given a few surface-level questions to ask but not about the process of reducing the number of potential upper secondary schools. Fatemeh was a confident, self-assured student and felt comfortable following her instincts, however, she did not feel in control while at the school fair. She lacked a strategy for selecting upper secondary schools so instead was drawn to crowds of students or attractive school logos. This aligns with Holm's (2013) framing of how students struggle to navigate a 'sea of options' leading them to make pragmatic decisions from limited information. Lacking other tools for navigating the school fair, Fatemeh relied on the information that the schools gave her in a pragmatic sense.

Furthermore, school fairs give the 'appearance of choice' but allow schools to present a self-serving image and to give incentives for student attention (Harling, 2019). Exemplifying this, one particular upper secondary school provided printed material that caught Fatemeh's attention.

Fatemeh: *They had this magazine and I thought that it was really fine because I never saw any other school do that. It was really high quality and it was golden and navy and it looked really fine. So basically, the magazine drew me there. ... Just from the magazine you can tell how much they care about their school and how invested they are to advertise their own school so you want to learn to advertise in economics. I want to learn to do marketing and personal branding and all that. If this school is doing this for their own selves, then they can teach you to do it too.*

Fatemeh appreciated the care put into the production of the magazine and the quality of the product. She emphasized that the polished nature of this material was a representation of school quality and an institution that put this much effort into their communication would have the same quality in its organization. In this case, the upper secondary school that Fatemeh described provided information that emphasizes the institution's strengths, with no duty to balance this with less positive elements of the institution. Schools can make claims in their literature without any evidential basis, such as the school having high academic rigor. The schools use the medium of their recruitment literature for marketing rather than informing purposes (Delale-O'Connor, 2019). It can be difficult for students to compare schools using information derived from brochures because of the vague descriptors used to describe the 'beautiful surroundings and 'capable employees' and messaging that focuses on aesthetics and location (Johnsson & Lindgren, 2010, p. 183).

Fatemeh seems to treat the material as authoritative, where the upper secondary school's presentation of their learning environment and practices were objective. Reflecting on her visit to the school fair later in the interview, Fatemeh felt that it was a positive experience and that it had influenced what upper secondary school she would choose.

Fatemeh: *I think that the school fair was a big help to me because I got a basic idea when I went there. I got to ask questions about how the school was and how the environment was. That helped a lot. And then after that I could say, OK, I like this school a bit so why don't I search more about it. Or I saw an advertisement about it and I'm like, Oh yeah! I went there.*

This is contrary to Fatemeh's earlier statement about being overwhelmed by the number of upper secondary schools at the school fair. In this response Fatemeh grounded her interest in one particular upper secondary school on an advertisement that she saw. Her interaction with this school at the school fair shaped how she would proceed to interact with it. Later, when Fatemeh encountered recruitment events and advertisements online, the descriptions of the school further reinforced her expectations.

***Fatemeh:** (Upper secondary school) had a lot of live videos and youtube videos and all that. I think that helped me get more of an idea of what principles they had and what the school did.*

When Fatemeh encountered the upper secondary school's advertising, she saw the messaging as a reminder of the institution's positive attributes. By this point, Fatemeh was predisposed to this upper secondary school which she clearly connected to the marketing information that the school provided. However, in an act of due diligence, Fatemeh began exploring alternate upper secondary school choice paths more broadly. The most common website that Fatemeh and the others students mentioned using was *Gymnasium.se*. This is a privately-owned website that provides a short description of every school program, school statistics, user reviews and a calculator that allows students to see which programs are available with their current grades (Curtis, 2020). For Fatemeh, the reputation of *gymnasium.se* established its credibility.

***Fatemeh:** Because it was really famous, I guess. It seemed trustworthy.*

***BM:** How did you find that website?*

***Fatemeh:** I don't know how I found it. I just searched 'upper secondary school Sweden' and it came up.*

***BM:** And what do you think of it?*

***Fatemeh:** I think it's trustworthy.*

Fatemeh engaged *gymnasium.se* in a seemingly uncritical way. It should be noted that this approach cannot be differentiated from that of other teenagers in Swedish society with the data available to this study.³¹ However, as Ball et al. (2002) contends, newly arrived students, as contingent choosers, rely heavily on what they see as cold sources of information. Fatemeh's trust in *gymnasium.se* and objectivity of the information it provided suggests that the website's influence on her was high.

While this study does not explore the neutrality of *Gymnasium.se* and other platforms, previous research has questioned how they are used as tools for school marketing. For one, competitive school markets have been argued to incentivize schools to promote themselves through different types of platforms (Childs & Taylor, 2022a; Harling, 2019; Lubienski, 2007). Portals such as Google or *Gymnasium.se* allow for the possibility for schools to pay for their name to be promoted in search results reducing their neutrality and rewarding the use of aggressive marketing tools (Childs & Taylor, 2022a; Curtis, 2020). An example of this can be seen in a recent article by the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* investigating a prominent school choice platform that is

³¹ See (Enochsson, 2019; OECD, 2020). The students' proficiency in source criticism cannot be evaluated or compared to other teenagers in Sweden and is not the focus of this study.

owned by *Academedia*, Sweden's largest school company (Letmark, 2023). It was discovered that the platform showed only the company's schools in the top results, which is a significant conflict of interest.

In this study, a number of students discussed the importance of the upper secondary schools' open-houses and Fatemeh and the other students continued to learn about individual schools by visiting them. Open-houses provide an opportunity for students to visit upper secondary schools, meet the teachers and speak with current students (Holm, 2013). During these open-houses, students can be offered incentives for enrolment in the school such as 'free driving licenses, laptops, journeys abroad and opportunities to win an iPod' (Arreman & Holm, 2011, p. 231). Due to the pandemic, some school visits were cancelled in the spring of 2020, while others still occurred. When an open-house wasn't available, the upper secondary schools had to come up with creative solutions such as providing virtual open-houses or question-and-answer sessions on social media. At these open-houses students acting as school representatives spoke to potential new students about their experiences at their schools, which Fatemeh describes.

***Fatemeh:** I talked a bit with the students and they were completely satisfied. They said it was really fun on Fridays because they had parties and they also went to courtrooms, for kind of like study visits. So that was cool too. And (**upper secondary school**), it had many resources. They had a really big library and they said that they invited a Nobel Prize winner so that was cool too. But the other schools, there wasn't anything interesting about them. They were just like basic schools.*

These types of school representatives have been called *student ambassadors* and are students that have been selected to be representatives as part of the schools' sales tactics (Dahlstedt & Harling, 2017). The interaction between the student ambassadors and potential enrollees has the potential to provide credibility and relevant knowledge (Dahlstedt & Harling, 2017). This encourages a personal connection to develop, allowing for 'warm knowledge' to be shared (Slack et al., 2014). Fatemeh had no previous relationship with the student ambassadors at the open-house. Fatemeh's reliance on this type of warm knowledge is relevant to understanding her horizon for action in the absence of other sources of information, which will be explored in the forthcoming chapters.

Elements of Fatemeh's experience can be seen in how other students describe their impressions of school marketing. However, their experiences were not identical. Another student, Giannis, described his experience going to the school fair and how this led him through the process of discovering a school. His process began with how he viewed the schools' strategies for attracting students at the school fair.

Giannis: *Some of them gave water, other ones give papers or a sandwich. If they just sat and just gave papers, I thought that the upper secondary school was not that good. ... We saw (**upper secondary school**). We went there and took some papers. I liked that it is near. It is close to the football field so I can go by train. ... After, I take the paper and find out what time there was an open-house.*

Giannis differed from Fatemeh by seeing the recruitment strategies used at the upper secondary school fair booths as dissuading. In his view, such communication from the upper secondary school was only marketing and made him want to avoid them, similar to what has been seen in previous research (Holm, 2013; Lidström et al., 2014). Giannis also received brochures which described the different upper secondary schools at the school fair. Yet, despite his dislike of recruitment strategies, he found this information more palatable. Giannis' reaction to the marketing from the two upper secondary schools is similar to that described by Lidström et al. (2014) where students argue that they themselves were not affected by school marketing but their later preferences suggest that they had been influenced. In Giannis's case, when multiple forms of marketing were used, only one had to connect with its target to be effective.

Navigating the reputations of different upper secondary schools inevitably brought the students to the possibility of choosing between public and independent upper secondary schools, a priority for Giannis.

Giannis: *I think that this upper secondary school is good because it is private.*

BM: *Why is that good?*

Giannis: *They don't have anything to do with the (**municipal school**).*

BM: *Is the (**municipal school**) bad?*

Giannis: *I don't know but I think a private school is better.*

BM: *Why?*

Giannis: *Because if it is a private school, it is hard and they give you more extra help*

BM: *Where did you get that information?*

Giannis: *I read the paper that they gave me.*

BM: *Did you do any more research about upper secondary schools?*

Giannis: *No.*

Initially, Giannis entered the school fair and identified the upper secondary schools he thought were interesting. However, he already had a preference for an independent school, so directed much of his attention towards these.³² One particular school's brochures described a school environment that Giannis was

³² The reputation of independent schools will be described further in *Chapter Nine: Capital, Boundaries and Choosing*

attracted to and it was near his football³³ training field. He determined that the school was of good quality because it was an independent school, which in his mind positioned it higher in quality than municipal schools. Giannis acknowledged that the brochure from this particular upper secondary school was the origin of this belief.

Giannis also interacted with student ambassadors of the upper secondary schools whom he felt were peers who shared informal and reliable information.

***Giannis:** There were students from the upper secondary school there. They described everything, like from the time waking up to how the teachers are there.*

Giannis described getting all of the information he needed to make a decision from the student ambassadors, framing it as comprehensive view of how the upper secondary schools functioned. Essentially, Giannis is demonstrating that at this moment he stopped searching for information about upper secondary schools and his choice decision was complete.

Tools for evaluation

Another student, Gloria, felt that her counsellor did not give her a useful strategy and she lacked direction at the school fair. Like Fatemeh, Gloria felt that her counsellor had recommended that she ask about the school food or what grades were required to be accepted. As this was just ‘general stuff’, Gloria felt that the school fair was bewildering and like Fatemeh, felt lost.

***Gloria:** It was difficult to find the information I needed because I needed full information about the school just to know where I would be going to and there was not that much information that was given... I didn't know what I wanted to ask but I visited two to three upper secondary schools and there were almost 200 more upper secondary schools there. I didn't know what I was doing. I was just asking how is your school, how many kids are there, do you eat food? Yes, OK. Bye.*

Gloria goes on to say that she didn't have a strategy in the fair but was full of questions. In her case, guidance didn't necessarily translate to a greater understanding of her options. She wished that her counsellor had prepared her for the school fair and if she went again, she would have asked more detailed questions. Gloria continued on to the upper secondary schools' open-houses but still felt that she was in over her head.

³³ North American: *Soccer*

Gloria: *I just feel like, maybe the teachers would be good but if you go to their open-house maybe you find out more about the schools. They may not say that this is our school and the teachers are like this but you just feel the way when they're talking. There is a way that you feel things.*

Gloria is describing the importance of belonging to her process of choosing a school, to which she believed the open-house would give insight. She began by skeptically describing how the student ambassadors describe their schools, putting more importance on how they speak or what is being unsaid. Gloria is alluding to a distrust of efforts to recruit her and her own attempts to understand what the schools are really like, which involved visiting their open-houses.

Gloria: *There were not very many kids but it still felt like something was missing. I was like no. This is not where I belong.*

Gloria: *The one I liked was just because of the way their classes were. The way they interacted with kids. That's the only thing I liked. I liked that the teacher came inside and you could see another student coming. The teacher is making jokes with the kids. That's kind of good.*

These two responses show Gloria's reactions to two different upper secondary schools' open-houses. In the first, Gloria felt that something was missing in the social atmosphere, while in the second the teachers built a positive and pedagogical environment. Between the two, Gloria emphasized how belonging, or *we-ness* as described by Alexander (2013), was her main priority when choosing an upper secondary school. Despite the importance that Gloria gave to the social arena, food also played a large role in her reasoning. The lack of other strategies led Gloria to rely on the importance of the food that the cafeteria provided

Gloria: *I'm vegan so that means that my food preferences are very, very difficult. In many schools, they have things that I don't eat and the food that they made that day was it just kind of showed me. Even the kids could not go in to eat. They were like no, we're going outside to eat.*

Like many of the students, to find this type of information Gloria used a search engine to discover upper secondary schools or learn more about the ones she visited.

Gloria: *Did I use websites? No, I just Googled. I just wrote upper secondary school and many came. You can just go in and read and check how far the schools are and see the pictures of them.*

Gloria was also very influenced by the upper secondary school's website. She was impressed by how one upper secondary school was portrayed visually, which she identified with.

***Gloria:** It's about the feeling. The name can only tell you what it's all about. Go to the website. Look through because the upper secondary school will determine your future actually. It will become your future but good upper secondary school you will have good friends... This sounds good or the name sounds like this. That was the way I chose.*

Absent of information from elsewhere, Gloria relied on how the upper secondary school presented itself, which included the website's portrayal of what she perceived as a socially accepting atmosphere. She based her preference for this school on an emotional connection derived from this webpage which ultimately gave her a sense of belonging. What Gloria describes can be related to the symbolic barriers and will be the topic of *Chapter 9: Capital, Boundaries and Choosing*.

In sharp contrast to Fatemeh, Emmanuel was struggling in school. He had not been able to take many of the courses required for application to upper secondary school programs. Emmanuel had not attended the school fair so his relationship with school marketing was limited to printed materials that he had received and what he encountered on the internet. He had received some brochures in the mail from upper secondary schools but he did not think the material was very useful.

***Emmanuel:** It's written in Swedish and I can't understand anything.*

This material was difficult for Emmanuel to comprehend and he did not have the support at home or from the school to understand it. In Emmanuel's case, his English ability didn't give him an advantage when encountering Swedish materials. A reliance on printed material can marginalize those with low reading ability, putting the information out of reach for those that don't understand the written language (Delale-O'Connor, 2019). As will be expanded upon further in *Chapter 9: Capital, Boundaries and Choosing*, in some cases proficiency in English was advantageous for the students, the higher language capital giving them more access to learning materials, support and the ability to attend more subject classes in their current primary school. However, the advantages of English were not boundless. Much of the instruction and support at Swedish schools are of course, given in Swedish and in social settings, Swedish children will speak Swedish. When upper secondary schools market themselves to students, unless they intentionally position themselves as an English school, they use Swedish.

Emmanuel found it difficult to find information that he understood and did not have the searching techniques to collect varied sources to compare and evaluate what he encountered. Using his limited Swedish vocabulary, he would use search queries such as ‘Flip upper secondary school’ to try to find a program that specialized in acrobatics but was unsuccessful in his search. Emmanuel reflected on his own search for information, believing that the information that he encountered online wasn’t always reliable.

Emmanuel: *Sometimes you see crap. Sometimes you don’t see something nice.*

BM: *So how do you know what is crap and what’s good?*

Emmanuel: *When I search upper secondary school, I kind of see an ad. The last time I searched I saw an ad, advertising a private upper secondary school. It was kind of a business, economics school. I was interested in that.*

Emmanuel shared Giannis’s skepticism of the marketing that he interacted with. In fact, he felt some of the upper secondary schools didn’t feel welcoming to him and he didn’t trust their claims. On the other hand, in the next sentence, Emmanuel showed his interest in one of the advertisements that he saw. He wasn’t able to articulate what he liked about the advertisement but something about the school’s profile appealed to him.

Trust and neutrality

The students’ searches led them in various directions but a common destination was the website Gymnasium.se, which was also recommended by the counsellors in many cases. Manahil used Gymnasium.se to start learning about upper secondary schools.

Manahil: *Gymnasium.se. There were a lot of programs and alternatives we can study. They showed me a lot of programs and I searched more about science programs. It had a lot of information like what subjects I could study in science programs. It asks you a lot of questions about what you want to be in the future and which subjects you will study.*

For Manahil, Gymnasium.se provided a way to reduce the number of upper secondary schools to a number that seemed more manageable. She presented the website as an impartial source of information for learning about the different schools and academic programs.

Ali’s interaction with the website also framed it as an authoritative source.

Ali: The Swedish government says that you should go to this site and choose your upper secondary school. It is their website.

BM: Did you get an email from the government or did a teacher tell you?

Ali: They sent as a letter. It said that if you want to choose your upper secondary school, you should go to that website and then choose it.

BM: And that came from the government?

Ali: Yes

Ali described Gymnasium.se as an official resource provided by the Swedish government, despite it actually being a private company. Like Manahil, he used it as an information repository and frames it as reliable because of its reputation, recommendation from educators at his school and as a top search result. It is likely that Ali's trust in the Gymnasium.se led him to trust the information that the website provided. Ali's description alluded to Gymnasium.se being an objective source, giving it a sense of providing cold knowledge and having reliability. Like the previous student responses, Ali's relationship with information from marketing resembles Ball et al.'s, (2002) description of a contingent chooser. For these newly arrived students, the appeal of such a website is clear, a place where seemingly objective facts are presented plainly and in a way that is openly comparable. Students who lack other sources of information can be drawn to those with clear answers or pragmatically rely on them in the absence of other information (Ball, Reay, et al., 2002; Hodgkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Ali gave another example of how an upper secondary school website presented itself.

Ali: I looked at the website to see which school has immigrant people, how many immigrants go there, how many successful people are there, how many students there are, how good are the teachers... You can see that there are immigrant people. I'm an immigrant but they don't act really good. They just fight for no reason. They are not the way that I want to study. They don't care about the teachers. They don't care about the studies so you can understand. Maybe they don't grow up. I don't think that all of the immigrants are like that but there are people who act like that.

Essentially, Ali is tying his understanding of a school profile with previously held prejudices about a group of students. For Ali, the quality of a school is based on the students who attend it and that immigrants are often bad students who distract other more focused students. While he recognized that not all immigrants are like this, he disassociated himself from this type of categorization. Ali's reflection aligns with research showing that school websites make use of existing discourses relating to race and don't intend to include all students as their targets (Voyer, 2019; T. Wilson & Carlsen, 2016). School

principals have described building a public profile for their schools that emphasized high quality education that frame a 'good' school as being 'Swedish' and not having too many immigrants (Voyer, 2019). Attempting to establish these types of profiles and attract specific types of students has led to a homogenization of upper secondary schools (Dovemark & Holm, 2017).

Like the other students, Ali continued on to open-houses of upper secondary schools that he found attractive. These upper secondary schools were not always successful in presenting themselves in a positive way and recruiting the students.

Ali: I think that some of them were lying to you. You can easily understand how they were lying to get the students.

BM: Tell me more about that.

Ali: For example, they said that 97% of our students go to university so easily but when they check their history or when you ask the students, they were like, no. That's not true.

BM: Why are they doing that then?

Ali: Because there is a thing, when a student goes to a school, there is money that the municipality gives to that school. If a school has more students, they are going to get more money so they have more money, they're going to pay less for students and have more money for themselves.

In Ali's criticism, he differentiates between municipal and independent upper secondary schools. His cynicism towards municipal schools is a reflection of the information that he interacted with. The fact that the same criticism about money could be pointed towards independent schools was not something he mentioned. Ali's skepticism shows why the open-houses alone were not always successful in recruiting students, creating an opportunity for websites to provide another source of comparison. Gymnasium.se also provided referrals similar to the student ambassadors with reviews of individual upper secondary schools. Alongside descriptive and comparable information about each upper secondary school were informal testimonials that anonymous users could post. These testimonials allowed students to read reviews of many of the upper secondary schools. Like the student ambassadors, this information was informal and anecdotal, aligned with the idea of warm knowledge. However, unlike the student ambassadors, the online reviews were not necessarily positive.

The influence of this type of information can be seen through Omar's interpretation of the website.

Omar: The website gymnasium.se says the names of schools. Some of them, they have reviews from people and I read the reviews and checked where they are. I checked how many kilometers they are from me and how many trains I should take.

These user written reviews give anyone the ability to rate and comment on different schools which prospective students can then read. This serves the purpose of complementing statistical information, with ‘direct knowledge’ and ‘impressions’ which are reminiscent of how in the *grapevine* information is shared and warm knowledge involves a trusted representative (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Slack et al., 2014). Omar thought these reviews were useful but did not clearly differentiate the reviews from other information that he had found on the website.

Amena also found reviews online but could not recall the particular website that she used.

***BM:** How did you learn about this school?*

***Amena:** Well, I read about it. Somebody wrote about it and I read about it. This is where I know it from.*

Amena and Omar’s responses illustrate how the students may use reviews as a source of information, guiding their decision making. These reviews have the appearance of testimonials and replicate hot knowledge from a trusted individual which the students felt was reliable. Yet, as the students don’t know the authors of these reviews, there is no relationship or social connection to ground this trust. This creates a risk that the students were influenced by anonymous online sources whose motives and backgrounds are unknown.

The market as a source of information

During the searching process students were flooded with marketing. Many students engaged with material and websites through a portal or directly from an upper secondary source yet also said that they did not encounter any advertisements. This suggests that the students were engaging with advertising without realizing its purposes. The school websites portray an idealized picture of the school and the open-house has the benefit of letting students see the school and interact with teachers and students but within a controlled setting which resembles a sales pitch more than a snapshot of the school experience.

Upper secondary schools’ marketing used different mediums and as has been discussed, ultimately reached its targets. As a result, this information had a sizable influence on the students. Being asked of the breadth of influences on his upper secondary school decisions, ultimately Ahmed pointed to the school website being the most important.

BM: *If you think about the people around you that are giving you some information, your friends at school, the teachers, the website, is there any other place that you got information from?*

Ahmed: *No*

BM: *And what's the most important of those do you think?*

Ahmed: *The website.*

For Ahmed, the school website was the main source of information from which the students were able to receive information directly from the upper secondary schools. Ahmed attributed his understanding of his preferred upper secondary school to what he had learned from its website.

Mohammed had a similar experience at an open-house.

Mohammed: *When you go to an upper secondary school, you like to ask questions and see it. You have one hour to check out the school, talk to the teachers, students and you can see the whole thing there. There you will get the whole idea about how it works in that school between teachers and students and between students. ... The things that I like about those schools are that when you ask them for information, you get the full information and details.*

Mohammed felt that visiting an open-house was very useful for him. He went with the goal of learning about a particular upper secondary school and reflected that the visit provided that information. During an open-house, upper secondary schools present the best version of themselves and any specialty programs or features that they have. Once connected with individual schools, students interact with their messaging. The students that described engaging with the upper secondary schools described them as being informative and useful for learning about the school environment.

Experiences with the school market and horizon for action

When the newly arrived students started to consider what they would do after year nine, they were often unaware what types of upper secondary schools they could attend or what kinds of academic programs they could study. Many of the students began by seeking out information on their own, which involved interacting with the marketplace of information presented here as the school market. The students described upper secondary schools that disseminated information about themselves through different mediums and methods. First, information was shared through intermediary actors, private entities that pro-

vided a platform for identification and comparison of different upper secondary school programs. Platforms such as school fairs, search engines and comparison websites are examples of services that aim to fill a perceived need for navigating the immense number of upper secondary school programs. Second, the upper secondary schools also disseminated information directly to students through printed literature, websites and open-houses. In this chapter, the interaction between the school market and the students' process of upper secondary school choosing was investigated, showing how market mechanisms and advertising can fill gaps of understanding. Notably, this interaction was often the first contact that the students had with information about the different upper secondary schools, laying a foundation for how they understood what paths were available.

Building on the findings of the previous chapter, a diverse group of students described their interactions with the school market. Despite their disparate backgrounds there was a similarity in their experiences. The students described feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information that they encountered and skepticism of the intentions of what was being shared. However, they lacked strategies for counteracting their frustration, leaving them to navigate the abundance of information on their own. The newly arrived students professed doubts and hesitations about the information being given to them but when information was obtained through alternate channels, it could be persuasive. In these examples the multi-pronged approach of marketing and incentives ensured that students could be reached by sheer force. Other students described the information that they received from the school market uncritically, deeming it as having objective qualities and being valuable for their upper secondary school choice process. In these cases, the students did not differentiate between the sources of information, despite considerable differences in the incentives of each of the sources.

As described by Holm (2013), students have a preference for objective information, rejecting what they see as 'flashy, misleading, and sometimes even fabricated marketing' (p. 294). The newly arrived students had difficulty navigating the amount of information that they were presented with, describing information as both overwhelming or untrustworthy. While dismissing some information, the same students simultaneously described other forms of marketing as trustworthy and reliable. In Slack et al. (2014), many students prioritized rankings over the 'warm information' from the student ambassadors, the exception came from recently-migrated students who were more influenced by the 'warm information' from the student ambassadors. When the newly arrived students in this study described trusting what they had been told, they demonstrated a similar preference. The school fair was another setting where students were bombarded with information and while they were initially overwhelmed, they eventually found an upper secondary school that they liked. However, the incentive for upper secondary schools to present their

best selves, diminishes the reliability of information shared in this setting, encouraging ‘glossification’ (Dahlstedt & Harling, 2017; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Harling, 2019). So too, the brochures that students receive portray schools as school leaders intend them to be seen. They aim to maintain a reputation and recruit students rather than informing (Lidström et al., 2014; Voyer, 2019). In isolation, information through each of these mediums can be evaluated but in combination become a wave of information that overwhelmed the students.

The student responses demonstrate the effectiveness of the marketing, through different forms, and how it guided the newly arrived students’ decision making. Drawing from the student responses, school marketing had significant influence on their understandings of the different upper secondary schools. The marketing influenced their preferences of where they would like to attend, considerably affecting the students’ horizons for action. Upper secondary schools were effective at convincing students of the importance of certain school provisions, which conveniently enough were provided by these same schools. Marketing tools such as brochures, and the use of social media allowed for blurring of the line between organically built reputations and those manufactured for the purpose of enrolment. Additionally, peer-trust could be leveraged to recruit students with student ambassadors or the existence of anonymous online reviews.

These experiences are not necessarily different from the experiences of students in general in the Swedish education system and in fact, the newly arrived students’ interactions with the school market may closely mirror those of the average student in Sweden. The difference lies in how the students receive and process this information and the different choice paths that come as a result. It is possible, and perhaps likely, that newly arrived students’ recent arrival to Sweden makes their capability for navigating information and the process of choosing more challenging. Framing the newly arrived students as contingent choosers can explain a reliance on seemingly cold sources of knowledge, which in this case is marketing from the upper secondary schools. While difficulties in choosing upper secondary school are experienced by students nationwide to some degree, the remaining chapters of analysis will explore what tools, support and capacities these newly arrived students have and how these are grounded in their migration experience. This differentiates the newly arrived students from students born and raised in Sweden but will also show a variety of experiences, demonstrating the individuality of their experiences and opportunities unique to the individuals.

The findings of this chapter suggest that this group had a strong reliance on marketized sources of information. Yet, to understand the horizons for action of newly arrived students, this chapter gives an incomplete picture. The influence of the school market, as with other influences, does not exist in isolation. Towards choosing an upper secondary school, students are guided by their school, their families and peers (Andersen & Hjortskov, 2019; S. Forsberg, 2022; Myslek & Zelmerlöw, 2022). In this way, the students’ horizons for

action are only partially explored in the current chapter and in the coming chapters the support structure around the students will be investigated, giving insight into how the individual students differed in their evaluation of this information. Yet their short time in Sweden and their status as being newly arrived bounded what opportunities were available to them. After exploring these other dimensions, the degree of influence of the school market on students' horizons for action can be more clearly seen.

Chapter Seven: Guidance from the School

In the preceding chapter, the students' interaction with the school market was explored. What was clear in these findings was that the students struggled to navigate the school market and that the marketing of upper secondary schools had an observable influence on their horizons for action. However, it was also clear that the newly arrived students' experiences differed from each other and their experiences were not necessarily differentiated from other students in the Swedish education system. In this and the following chapters the support and the information that the students received will be explored and it will be possible to see how this group of newly arrived students have unique, individual experiences. At the same time, these students as a group shared both experiences and opportunities during the school choice process that differentiated them from students who had spent more time in Sweden.

When students embark on the process of choosing an upper secondary school, ultimately the responsibility to choose falls on themselves. Yet, Swedish schools as institutions have a role preparing students by providing them with a basic understanding of the Swedish school system that fosters independence for choosing an upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2022a). Nationally, there is a degree of standardization in this guidance following policy goals and praxis in the professional field. Within schools, guidance can be both provided formally from the school guidance counsellor and informally, from other educators acting within a whole-school perspective of guidance. In this chapter these sources of guidance and their influence on the students' horizons for action will be explored.

Counsellors

To explore the students' interaction with counsellors, this section draws from two data sources, the interviews with educators who worked in different roles in the schools and the student interviews. The former is included to give details of the local school conditions relating to career guidance counselling when relevant. This approach is taken because of the decentralized nature of the Swedish school system, wherein individual schools and municipalities vary greatly in structure (Lundahl, 2002b). Additionally, counsellors have their own interpretations of their role that influence how they conduct guidance

(Hertzberg, 2015). As a consequence, guidance can differ by region, school and individual counsellor. Thus, the student's own experience may be influenced by very different school contexts. However, the main focus of the analysis will be on the student responses where they describe their experiences with counsellors. This chapter will largely examine how the counsellors influenced the students' horizons for action.

In a general sense, the career counselling policies in the eight schools were organized with a common structure. The schools' educators explained that the counsellors at each of their schools met class groups in year eight or early in year nine to give general information about the school choice process and then again for an individual consultation before students submitted their upper secondary school selections. The discussions in the class meetings involved explanations of the Swedish choice system, the varying types of upper secondary school programs and how different online platforms functioned. Later, the counsellors met the students individually. These individual meetings focused mainly on what programs were interesting for the students and which were available with their current grade points. Many of the counsellors organized a visit to an upper secondary school fair that was described in the previous chapter to introduce students to the different schools and programs in the Stockholm area. None of the counsellors at the schools spoke a language outside of Swedish or English but at times, they used an interpreter with the students. The educators portrayed their schools as doing what they interpreted as a balanced approach to guidance that included providing an introduction to the Swedish education system and leading the students through the upper secondary school choice process while also encouraging student independence.

Meeting the counsellor

Twelve of the twenty-two students met a school counsellor individually and received guidance about the structure of the school system, the different program lines and process of choosing an upper secondary school. These students met a counsellor at least once, during which they had conversations for different purposes. The following responses by Rafa demonstrate a series of conversations that he had with his counsellor.

***Rafa:** She used to come to our classroom to talk to us and give us information. We talked to her and asked her a lot of questions. ... Sometimes she used to come to us and gave information to all of us. Sometimes we used to go to her individually. ... We talked about upper secondary schools and how to apply ... She recommended that I should not apply to schools that are far away from my home. She recommended that I choose schools close to my home so I did that. ... She recommended programs that need only 8 grades because I have only 8 grades. She found some programs and suggested them to me and said that these are the only programs I can study right now.*

These responses represent a number of different meetings between Rafa and his counsellor. The meetings began with the counsellor giving general information about the upper secondary school process to the entire class which included the opportunity to ask questions. Later, the counsellor moved to individual meetings with the students where Rafa was able to discuss specific upper secondary schools and the process of choosing. Rafa's experience shows a counsellor that appeared to be proactive with their guidance, present when he needed advice and gave recommendations about what programs might be best for Rafa. The counsellor gave pragmatic guidance that emphasized upper secondary schools near Rafa's home and those that were attainable with his current grades. Rafa was somewhat passive in monitoring his own grades.

***BM:** Can you tell me a little bit about your courses. If you've taken them and the grade you have right now.*

***Rafa:** I don't remember it very good right now but the counsellor has all the information.*

Rafa didn't know very much about his grades in each of his courses and relied on his counsellor to the point of giving her authority over his coming transition to upper secondary school. In the second interview, he admitted not knowing what would happen in the coming year and had to ask the counsellor what upper secondary school he would attend. Rafa's experience aligns closely with Sundelin's (2015) research showing that many newly arrived students have a higher need of guidance in Sweden due to their unfamiliarity with the administrative process of choosing a school and the available study programmes. The guidance that Rafa described has the effect of turning his attention towards attainable upper secondary school programs. This segmentation of his horizon for action is a recognition by his counsellor that not all programs would be available to Rafa, largely because of his grades. Additionally, by recognizing the challenge of commuting from his neighbourhood, Rafa's counsellor suggested the upper secondary schools in close proximity.

Like Rafa, Rifat saw practical advice in the support he received from his counsellor.

Rifat: *The counsellor, she is good. She helped me and they accepted me at (upper secondary school).*

Rifat appreciated that his counsellor helped him register in an upper secondary school program he wanted to attend. Yet, he also felt like they had met too late in the process and he had already made up his mind. Counsellors have observed that the amount of time they have with students limits how they are able to provide guidance and establish trust (Lovén, 2015). In this case, trust between Rifat and his counsellor was not sufficient, being limited by when the counselor was able to meet him. While guidance would benefit Rifat in the future, it came too late to have any practical use for his current upper secondary school choice.

Mohammed stated that his counsellor was the most important person helping him.

Mohammed: *With schools, it was just the counsellor that helped us with upper secondary school. Nobody else... Our first meeting was about the grades and the schools that I applied to. The second meeting, that was two weeks ago. It's how to choose the school, when you see the grades and which ones are good to apply to.*

Mohammed recognized the importance of grades to the upper secondary school choice process (grades will be discussed further in *Chapter Nine: Capital, Boundaries and Choosing*). However, what grades are needed, how they are counted and how they are used to apply to different upper secondary schools is complicated and the students depended on their counsellor to understand the process. Counsellors' work may involve presenting students with alternatives that are a balance between the students' aspirations and what is possible with their grades (Lovén, 2015). Conversations between the students and their counsellors often revolved around a compromised decision and what was needed to be eligible for different upper secondary school programs.

Ahmed: *You need like an 'E' in Swedish, English and Math. If you want to go to a better upper secondary school, with Science, Technology and other things, you need like 11 'E's in the core subjects. If you want to go to a vocational program like the electricity and energy program, you only need the core subjects.*

In the Swedish education system, students qualify for upper secondary school by earning grades in their year-nine courses (Skolverket, 2023a). Ahmed succinctly described how these grades can lead to different upper secondary school programs, his knowledge coming from his guidance counsellor. For

students to be adequately prepared for the choice process they need to have an understanding of what is required to be eligible for each academic program.

Among the students, the counsellors were generally described as being an important source of information and support for the students' transition to upper secondary school. The students described counselling that gave them information about the school choice process, education system in Sweden and different upper secondary school programs. Counselling in this sense has dual functions: giving a base of knowledge to understand the choice process and enabling the students to see possibility among the upper secondary school programs. Thus, the counsellors could affect the students' horizons for action by identifying limitations for the students in the form of grades and segmenting the upper secondary schools to reduce the number of possible programs to a more approachable number that the students could choose from.

Presentation of the language introduction program

According to the educators, many of the students were not eligible for national programs because their Swedish language skills were insufficient for many core subjects. So, these students would have to complete the language introduction program before being able to take additional courses and achieving the required grades. For these types of students, the schools had different counselling policies and the counsellors had different practices. At two schools the counsellor claimed to never go to the preparatory class because the students didn't have the grades to choose a national program. In contrast to this, two other educators pointed to this lack of choice as a reason for additional counselling to be given to the newly arrived students. One of these educators, an assistant principal, emphasized that the higher academic needs of the newly arrived were a responsibility of the school which necessitated coordinated support across the entire staff in order to give students an understanding of the school system that they had entered. The other educator, a counsellor, encouraged students to take the language introduction program. She explained that 'this is for now' but it would be beneficial for their future. She spent time explaining what upper secondary school opportunities the students would have in the future once they had fluent Swedish. The students had different opinions about the conversations they had with their counsellors about the language introduction program:

Emmanuel: She said to me that I have to go to this school. Three years, not even two. Three damn years.

Emmanuel demonstrated a common feeling among students, that going to the language introduction program was a waste of time and it was delaying their real education. Emmanuel was frustrated with his lack of options but a lack of

agency left him without any recourse. Emmanuel's counsellor stated that the newly arrived students at the school 'don't need to choose', so didn't need numerous meetings or information about the Swedish education system. According to Emmanuel, his only interaction with the counsellor was when she registered him for the language introduction program.

***Emmanuel:** She called me and we applied for a gymnasium. She said that she was going to fix everything. I don't have to think about it. She's in charge.*

In this situation, Emmanuel offloaded responsibility for the coming year to the counsellor because he felt dejected about not being able to pursue the upper secondary schools that he was interested in.

On the other hand, students had conversations with their counsellor about the language introduction program that created more positive feelings. When they realized that their preferred programs were not possible for the coming year, students such as Manahil felt that the language introduction program would be valuable.

***Manahil:** When I said to her that I didn't study physics then she said that I can't go to a science program. You have to choose another program but I don't want another program. That's why I chose the language introduction program.*

The differences between these students show the benefit of guidance beyond simply steering them through the school choice process. A conversation about the benefits of attending the language introduction program and the future opportunities allowed Manahil to frame her current trajectory as positive. On the other hand, Emmanuel appeared bitter and will likely enter the language introduction program without appreciating its immediate benefits or understanding how he can get back to the academic path he wishes to be on.

Guiding students toward the language introduction program demonstrates a recognition of the limited programs available to the newly arrived students. The language education program is beneficial for newly arrived students for a number of reasons but its negative perception among newly arrived students raises the risk of students being unmotivated or dropping out (Nilsson Folke, 2017; Rosvall, 2023a; Sharif, 2017; Skowronski, 2013). The counsellors that promoted the language introduction program to their students did so by emphasizing its utility for their future studies. In this context, the counsellors take a longer-term perspective on the students' horizons for action, reassuring them of the possibility of enrolling in a national program later. However, students such as Emmanuel do not see the language introduction program in a positive light. By meeting Emmanuel, the counsellor could have presented the program's value but her choice to not meet him deprived him of this information.

By not giving time to counsel Emmanuel, she left him without the guidance that could have addressed his frustrations and lack of agency.

Missing guidance

Counter to the claims of the educators, it was not guaranteed that the students would meet a school counsellor and the responses of the remaining ten of twenty-two students suggest that they did not meet the counsellor at all. It is possible that there had been more contact than reported since some of the previous twelve had met an ‘unknown person’ that was later determined to be the counsellor but for this second group of students, there were no memorable meetings to discuss how the upper secondary school choice process worked, the importance of grades in the process or the different program lines. In fact, these students didn’t even describe a passing encounter with the counsellor. Rather than discussions of the role of counsellor, it was the absence of knowledge around the role that was more telling. When asked if he had a passing grade in one of his courses, Aziz was unsure.

Aziz: I don’t know now but I will know it at the end of the year.

This type of information can be facilitated by the counsellor. However, without contact, this information would be missing. The following exchange shows Laiba’s awareness of the counsellor role.

BM: Do you know who the counsellor is?

Laiba: No.

BM: Was there one teacher, someone at the school, who talked to you about what gymnasium to look at, what things to focus on?

Laiba: Yes. We had a meeting with (assistant principal’s name).

BM: Is there a teacher named (counsellor’s name) as well?

Laiba: No.

Laiba’s confusion not only strongly suggests that she did not meet the counsellor but that she didn’t even know who they were. The consequences of not having met the counsellor is apparent with Reem, who previously worked in healthcare in a refugee camp in Turkey. She acted as an interpreter between refugees and healthcare workers giving her an interest in working as a nurse. She did not know where to find information about this profession in Sweden but had asked a woman at the library for some nursing vocabulary. Beyond this, she had incomplete information about what kind of academic trajectory would lead to this field of work.

Reem: *I like medicine the most, everything to do with medicine. My problem is that I never studied math and it's hard for me. That will be my biggest problem. ... I know that there are three big lines in upper secondary school. There is something called mechanic and there is science and there is another thing.*

BM: *Earlier, you said that you were interested in being a pharmacist or a nurse. Do you know what you need to study to have those kinds of careers?*

Reem: *I have no idea*

It's difficult to predict how guidance would specifically have aided Reem. Her ambition to study a science-based upper secondary school national program was not possible until she could achieve a Swedish grade in the preparatory class. She was also required to complete other mandatory subjects such as math. Yet, Reem didn't know this. The implications for her horizon for action are clearer. Reem was not aware of the upper secondary school programs that aligned with her interests or the steps required to eventually enroll in this program. Even if she would go to the language introduction program in the coming year, she needed to earn grades in a number of subjects to be eligible for a science-based upper secondary school program. Her lack of understanding of her current options or strategy towards earning the required grades makes the risk of her leaving school early significantly higher.

Reem showed a clear need for support to navigate the school system. She had an aspirational goal but lacked the grades to qualify for her preferred programs or the information to understand this fact. She was also ignorant of what types of study were available or the specific path that would lead her to a nursing career. Reem's lack of knowledge about the Swedish education system, or low cultural capital, affects how she is able to advocate for herself in the upper secondary school choice process. Reem was given the option for a 'drop-in' time for guidance but didn't see the value even though her responses simultaneously demonstrated her need for it. She had a very limited understanding of different program lines or information that the counsellor could have given her. In these cases, trust between the counsellor and the students had not been established. Without building trust, as with these cases, a counsellor does not have the opportunity to give students support in ways that would aid them (Hertzberg & Sundelin, 2014). Without this information, the students lacked an understanding of their place within the school and future possible academic paths.

The importance of language during counselling can be seen with Diego's experiences. He relied on his study tutor to translate during his lessons and act as an interpreter when speaking with school staff. After his study tutor was put on an extended sick leave, the support was not replaced. Diego described how this affected his ability to communicate with the counsellor.

Diego: *I feel like I would need more help because if (study tutor's name) was here, I could speak to (counsellor's name) and ask her what school I was going to.*

BM: *What do you want to know and what do you want to talk about?*

Diego: *I would just like to ask (counsellor's name), what school I will go to. I find it difficult to speak in Swedish.*

Diego's meeting clearly did not meet his needs. He understood some of what the counsellor said but was unable to articulate his own worries to her. He had a specific question that he wanted to discuss but was unable to so because of the language gap. Diego's experience is a result of having sporadic time with study tutors, which has a detrimental effect on students who need this support (Dávila, 2018; Jahanmahan & Trondman, 2019). Diego's own low language capital and lack of support from the school limited his ability to engage with the school choice process. Diego's experience highlights the disparity between occurrences of guidance and guidance that is effective.

A strategy that some of the counsellors described using was allocating blocks of open time, available to the students who visited their office, to ensure that students had an opportunity to meet. The counsellor at Ali's school budgeted one hour of individual advice about upper secondary school for the majority of students or two hours if they were in the language introduction program. The counsellor relied on students to 'drop in', making their own initiative the catalyst for support. The opportunity for these meetings was not presented directly to Ali but rather posted on the school's learning platform, which Ali had not seen.

BM: *Do you know what a counsellor is?*

Ali: *No*

BM: *Is there any teacher that comes specifically to the classes and says, this is how you choose?*

Ali: *No*

Similarly, Amena's school also had 'drop-in' times for students.

Amena: *I didn't go to her because you have to go to her to meet her.*

BM: *Why didn't you go to meet her?*

Amena: *I know everything and I don't feel like having something to ask her about.*

BM: *Why did you not want to meet (counsellor's name)?*

Amena: *It's no problem. I just didn't go to see her. I have nothing to tell her.*

BM: *Is there information you don't have that you want to have?*

Amena: *No. For me all the information I need, I know it.*

Neither of the students benefited from having the option of a drop-in time but for different reasons. Ali was unaware of the existence of a drop-in time or the counsellor while Amena felt confident in her own abilities despite making a number of erroneous statements about the choice process and what gymnasium options she had in the coming year. This practice was common, as half of the schools in this study had a counsellor that relied on a drop-in, open-door policy. This resembles research by Delale-O'Connor (2019) that emphasizes the importance for students to opt in to support. However, one of the students' counsellors in this study dismissed this approach. In her experience, she found that merely having times available for students to drop-in was not sufficient. This counsellor's solution was to book meetings with the students and coordinate with their teachers to ensure attendance. She acknowledged that this policy required a substantial amount of her time but it had been prioritized by the school leadership, a reality not always possible for counsellors. Also, these educators emphasized that funding and work hours were prioritized for working with newly arrived students in her school, acknowledging that the needs were higher than the average student. In her experience students couldn't be relied on to initiate contact. This practice was not necessarily a choice based on best practices but could happen as a result of high workload and insufficient resources.

Counsellors and horizon for action

The newly arrived students had varying understandings of upper secondary choice in Sweden and the difference can be partially attributed to having met a counsellor. The students who met their counsellors describe different types of meetings. Some students found the encounter informative, giving them a greater understanding of the process of choosing and of the upper secondary schools available, allowing them to pursue their own preferred education paths. Alternatively, when the students were less engaged or lacked the capacity for independent choice, counsellors took a more directed role. Yet, this was not always the case and a number of students had guidance that didn't meet their particular needs or desires. This could be partially attributed to the workload that the counsellors had and the training to work with newly arrived students (S. Nilsson & Hertzberg, 2022). Another explanation can be related to the trust that the counsellors were able to build with their students, encouraging the students to listen. Additionally, for counsellors who work with newly arrived students, an appreciation of different language abilities is an essential competence (Sundelin & Hertzberg, 2022). The balance between these factors speaks to the importance of having a trained and experienced educator focused specifically on the school choice process in Sweden. This further emphasizes the importance of the support that newly arrived students receive from educators such as their study tutors that facilitates guidance. The absence of this

support negatively effects the students' understanding of the upper secondary school choice process and their long-term educational career.

Students who did not meet their counsellor had at least one of the following two characteristics that could describe their lack of support; they did not have sufficient grades to apply to a upper secondary school program or they were passive in seeking support. As described previously, one counsellor described meeting the newly arrived as unnecessary but this can't be generalized to all the different schools. Workload is likely a contributing factor to how counsellors prioritize the different students, an obvious consequence of how schools fund their activities. These findings correspond with those of Lundahl and Nilsson (2009) and Nilsson and Hertzberg (2022) who found that there were wide variations in how different guidance tasks were prioritized and funding for the counselor role differed between municipalities. Yet, the result was that students didn't receive guidance and struggled to understand the upper secondary school choice process or what programs were available to them. The examples above show students who didn't understand the upper secondary school-choice process or how to proceed towards vaguely formed academic aspirations.

The students' reception of counselling had an impact for their horizons for action. By giving students information about the school choice process and the upper secondary school programs that they qualify for, counsellors give students a path towards transition through the education system. This extends to students that will attend the language introduction program, albeit with a longer-term focus. Balanced guidance that considers students' ambitions and the attainability of these routes provides segmentation of the students' horizons for action. Students that were deprived of effective guidance from their counsellors, looked instead to other sources of information.

Educators

The counsellors were not alone in guiding students and discussing the process of choosing an upper secondary school. Primary schools as a whole are encouraged to take a holistic approach where all educators in a school contribute to guidance in a broad sense (Lindh, 1997; Olofsson et al., 2017). When teachers have broad interpretations of their roles and provide institutional and emotional support, this type of support is viewed as a form of social capital (Phillippo & Stone, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). This support can also occur in the form of warm knowledge which leverages their shared language and culture with the students (Slack et al., 2014). As in the previous section about counsellors, the guidance that educators provide influences the students' horizons for action.

While differentiating between the various educators' roles in each school was not a focus of this study, the interviewed educators discussed interactions

with the students that gives insight into the students' own experiences. To give needed context to the students' responses, references to the interviews with these educators are also included in this section when appropriate. Other than the school counsellors, different educators discussed in this study had also spoken to the students about school choice in some capacity. These educators had a variety of different roles, such as preparatory class teacher, assistant principal and social pedagogue, so they had different responsibilities and types of interactions with the newly arrived students. This section is based on these two sources, the interviews of the newly arrived students and the supplementary interviews of educators.

Educators as a cultural bridge

The preparatory class teacher was the students' main teacher when they began at primary school. Instruction in the preparatory classes focused predominantly on the Swedish language. For the majority of students, the preparatory class teacher was described as being indispensable and had an outsized role in their education. They were described as passionate, supportive and spent a considerable amount of time with the students. However, it is not clear exactly what is required of the position and where the lines of responsibility should be drawn. As has been previously discussed, workload and school structure can differ greatly across the decentralized Swedish education system (Lundahl, 2002a).

As a consequence, the work of each preparatory teacher differed. This was most evident in the degree that their spoken languages could be central to their work. One teacher spoke Farsi, German and Arabic while another spoke Arabic.³⁴ For both, this was argued to be instrumental to being able to communicate with and teach the students effectively. This corresponds with research arguing for the value of teachers from diverse backgrounds, in particular those shared with students (Cerna et al., 2019; A. Osman & Månsson, 2015). Being immigrants themselves, these two preparatory class teachers grounded their lessons in their own experiences which they argued made their lessons more understandable for their students. It should be noted that the language support mentioned above by these teachers was only available to students who spoke one of the teachers' spoken languages which the first teacher believed led to many other students not getting the help they needed.

Maen described how his preparatory class teacher supported him in a general way.

³⁴ in addition to Swedish and English for both.

Maen: *I have the girl here, (Preparatory class teacher's name). She helps me with whatever I want. ... She helps me to do the right things, understand the world, translations and interpretations. She shows me YouTube. She even shows me the method and how to understand the words and understand the theme. So, she helps me a lot. She is like a mom in here.*

To put Maen's experience in context, his preparatory class teacher described spending a considerable amount of time helping the families of her students with different non-school related challenges. This support extended beyond the students' learning and in many cases covered upper secondary school choice. The teacher also helped Maen beyond his education needs. Her passionate work to build a cultural bridge for the students between their background and Swedish society involved more than just support in the school. She also built trust in the community by being a resource for families who needed help, making her a valuable source of warm knowledge (Slack et al., 2014). She made calls to social services and the migration ministry and spent time advising his parents in different ways. The preparatory class teacher felt that she had built trust with the students in her class and their parents through their shared language. As a language and cultural broker, the teacher acted as a bridge between the families and various institutions that they interacted with. She felt obligated to do this work because of the additional need for support she has observed among newly arrived students.

These efforts could continue beyond the formal relationship of student and teacher. The relationship between Ali and his preparatory class teacher didn't end when he moved to the subject classes. The teacher continued giving advice, particularly about school choice, after he transitioned out of the preparatory class.

BM: *Who has helped you at school? Who has helped you the most at school of the teachers?*

Ali: *(Preparatory class teacher's name)*

BM: *So, you're not in her class anymore?*

Ali: *Yeah, but if I have a question, I'm going to ask her. She can give me information. She's a really nice teacher. She helps as she can... She talks in Farsi and she just told me if you want to go to an upper secondary school to study it's like this. Study the whole year.*

Ali's preparatory class teacher empathized with the families' experience in a new country and related it to her own migration to Sweden in 2007. She reflected that she would have appreciated the help she tries to give now. Furthermore, this teacher felt that a stable home life was conducive to her students doing well in school and the efforts she made with parents was an extension of the responsibility she felt in the school environment. This teacher felt that

she could help students who speak Farsi, Arabic and English very well but struggles with other languages. She gave an example of a student who spoke Tigrinya who she had difficulty with and relied on the little English that the student spoke. Recounting another example, the teacher described a student from Albania being a challenge for her because they had no way to communicate. She relied on the study tutor who met with the student one hour a week. This preparatory class teacher gave the study tutor exercises and explained what was important for the student to know. The preparatory class teacher reflected that it wasn't that useful but was better than nothing. She was not able to provide more thorough support because of the little time that the study tutor was available. Students such as these would not be able to attend subjects such as science or social science because of Swedish being the instructional language. The students who shared a language with their preparatory teacher each benefited from the possession of cultural capital. While not proficient in Swedish, the existence of a teacher that spoke their mother tongue was a resource that other students could not benefit from.

Ali thought his study tutor was also a valuable source of information because of the time he had lived in Sweden and experience he had working in the education system. For Ali, his study tutor was one of the people he trusted the most.

***BM:** Who has talked to you about gymnasium?*

***Ali:** Mostly that was my Farsi teacher. He has worked for like 40 or 30 years as a teacher in Sweden*

***BM:** If you need to know something, who is the first person that you go to?*

***Ali:** My Farsi teacher.*

However, Ali's study tutor's advice about schools didn't always focus on positive attributes.

***Ali:** He told me that he goes to all of the schools and knows the schools. For example, how they look, how they are and he can ask about the teachers. ... If you have E in every subject, you can go there. It doesn't matter. They just accept you. But there is a school that says no. Not every person there gets an E.*

Ali's experience showed the other side of the guidance that a student receives from an educator. His study tutor criticized one specific local school, which had the municipality's only language introductory program. In their conversations, the study tutor explained that his knowledge came from his own experiences. His warning implied that going to this upper secondary school would be detrimental to Ali's future, which Ali took to heart, describ-

ing that going to this upper secondary school would be disastrous. Ali's relationship with his study tutor was encouraged by trust in their relationship. A shared language and culture allowed the study tutor to guide Ali.

However, a conversation with Ali's preparatory class teacher painted another picture of this upper secondary school. She described it as a good school with attentive teachers. For many students who lacked a Swedish grade, it would be the only option but she argued that the introductory program was a positive path for the students. She reflected that many students had a negative opinion about the local upper secondary school. Many students aspired to go to an upper secondary school in the city-centre, seeing them as being higher status and better quality. The preparatory class teacher and the other school staff tried to shift the students' thinking to promote the local upper secondary school as a positive option, especially for the newly arrived students who would be attending the language introductory program there. For Ali, his preparatory teacher and his study tutor were giving him advice that was in conflict.

It was common for the students to describe their study tutor as their teacher, the one who teaches Swedish or as the teacher that speaks their mother tongue but they often didn't understand how they fit into the school. However, students emphasized that the support they received from their study tutor was very important for their learning. This was most apparent once the students had transitioned from the preparatory class to the subject classes. Kostas discussed his feelings about how he felt lost in many of his classes.

***Kostas:** When my teachers don't respond in English, then I'm using the best Swedish that I can.*

Kostas said that he was sometimes helped by using English, which he spoke fluently, but most times, instruction was given in Swedish, which he did not understand. He felt that he didn't get the help he needed and was just sitting in his subject classes without understanding what was being said. The exception to this was when his study tutor was present. His study tutor would translate the lesson in real time and any written tasks he was to do. Kostas reflected that this support allowed him to understand the lessons and even participate. Unfortunately, his study tutor was only present for two hours a week which Kostas felt was far less than what he needed to engage with the subject material.

In this section, the students described an important relationship with their educators. They were benefited by a cultural bridge, that gave the students support and guidance. This support was reliant on the students' cultural capital and recognition of their mother tongue. Preparatory class teachers and study tutors who shared a language with the students enabled them to build a relationship, thus acting as a source of social capital.

The possibility for the educators to do this work relied on their working conditions. As can be seen with Kostas and previously with Diego, when the amount of time with their study tutors was limited, they were left in need. Additionally, the informal nature of this type of work makes the practice reliant on the individual educators who had to portion out their limited time. The fact that this guidance occurs outside of formal school planning suggests that educators such as study tutors can give guidance that isn't in line with the rest of the school.

Pragmatic support for choice

At times, the educators made efforts to ensure that students got the information they needed, whether the task was their responsibility or not. One reason was to fill gaps where others in the school weren't living up to their own responsibilities. Omar was unaware of the upper secondary school fair, which had been posted on the school's online platform by the counsellor. Despite no longer being in the preparatory class, his preparatory class teacher made sure that he was aware of this.

***Omar:** They posted in (**online platform**). You had to go somewhere.*

***BM:** And who told you about this?*

***Omar:** (**Preparatory class teacher's name**) told me to check (**online platform**) and I checked it. ... She is the teacher that if I need help, helps me. She is the first to help me with everything when I came to the school.*

Omar's preparatory class teacher intervened when she saw that the counsellor was not reaching out to students and they were not receiving guidance. This counsellor relied on having drop-in times for the students, which Omar was not aware of. The preparatory class teacher helped Omar by giving him pragmatic support, telling him what to do and where to look for specific information. She continued to support Omar despite him transitioning from the preparatory class and no longer being one of her students.

Diego, who felt that his study tutor was his main source of information, gave an example of how his study tutor was crucial to how he understood the way the Swedish system works:

***Diego:** They help me a lot by talking about grades and what I need to learn in order to go to upper secondary school.*

Diego's study tutor explained the importance of grades in the different subject classes and knowledge needed for upper secondary school. Because of the language barrier between Diego and the rest of the educators at the school, he was unable to get this information from anyone else. For Diego, his study tutor was the only educator that he could communicate directly with. This allowed

him to ask for explanations about the education system, empowering him to make an active choice. However, the limited time he had with his study tutor constrained the amount of guidance he was able to receive.

The study tutors also gave more specific advice. Alex's study tutor recommended specific upper secondary schools.

***BM:** After your father, who can you go to for advice?*

***Alex:** My study tutor.*

***BM:** And what did they tell you?*

***Alex:** She talked about school. How it is to go to that school and how difficult it is in that particular school.*

Alex's study tutor related her own observations and critiques drawn from her work at an upper secondary school. This guidance had an effect on Alex, who trusted his study tutor. Manahil trusted her assistant principal, referring to the status of the leadership position. When the assistant principal explained how the upper secondary school choice process worked, Manahil listened.

***BM:** Has anyone at this school talked about upper secondary school and what you can do next year?*

***Manahil:** Yes, (**Assistant principal's name**). She said that first of all, I need grades, then I can go to upper secondary school.*

The advice Manahil received was pragmatic, related to the administrative process of applying to upper secondary schools. In this sense, the assistant principal influenced Manahil by addressing her lack of understanding of the bureaucratic process of upper secondary school choice.

Generally, the educators observed that newly arrived students were not getting sufficient support and reacted by helping them. Yet, as previously mentioned, this guidance was extra work for the educators. The students had to rely on the luck of having such a teacher that had a shared culture and language as well as the drive to spend extra time supporting them.

Relinquishing control

The line for what educators should do could be unclear for students. When asked who decides what he would do next year, Brian responded that it was not him.

BM: So, you said that there are two paths. You might go to an upper secondary school or you might stay in the language introduction program and work on Swedish. How do we know which one is going to happen? Who makes that decision?

Brian: I think it's my teachers.

BM: How do they make the decision?

Brian: They'll see a focus in the lesson and if I'm focusing on their lessons, they will say you're good. If you're not focusing and getting nothing done, they will send you to intro.

Brian framed his teachers as gatekeepers. For him, his teachers were the ones who determined which upper secondary school he would go to, determined largely as a reflection on the quality of his work in class. By setting grades they were making a determination of his suitability for upper secondary school. In Brian's framing, the subject teachers determined the limitation of his horizon for action by deciding what programs would be available to him.

Laiba looked to her assistant principal in a similar way.

BM: Who would you say was the most helpful for you to know how the Swedish system works and to know how to choose a school?

Laiba: (Assistant principal's name)

BM: So, what kind of questions will you ask?

Laiba: What they suggest for me, where to go.

In this response, Laiba demonstrated her trust in the assistant principal. This extended to the point of believing that the assistant principal could guide her on the best academic path. Laiba also described conversations with her study tutor in which she was given advice on specific schools.

BM: Who picked those schools?

Laiba: We were getting guidance from our Urdu teacher. He was helping us.

BM: Was it his idea to look at these schools?

Laiba: Yeah. He suggested two or three other schools.

Laiba relied heavily on both educators for advice. She admitted that despite knowing little about the Swedish education system ultimately the decision was her own, albeit influenced by the assistant principal and the study tutor. Laiba and her sister Khadija had a strong educational background but had not made much progress in the Swedish language. Their assistant principal thought they would be well-served by going to an English International Baccalaureate school and made their enrolment a personal project. The cultural capital derived from Laiba's fluent English opened the door to the International Baccalaureate program, which would not have been available otherwise. She and

other school staff spent considerable time in meetings strategizing for these students, guiding them and their parents through the different upper secondary school options and rearranging the students' schedules to give extra tutoring in the subjects that would be part of the International Baccalaureate school entrance exam, while reducing the number of Swedish classes. Swedish was deprioritized because it was argued that the students would no longer need it. This type of course load prioritization is permitted for newly arrived students but the extra time spent arranging it is not required. This was not part of the assistant principal's job description but she felt strongly that the families should have help, the reception of it being described by Laiba's sister Khadija.

***Khadija:** My mother and my father are also new to the country so they also ask advice from (Assistant principal's name).*

Khadija also received advice from her study tutor. This involved discussing specific schools and some general strategy about choosing upper secondary schools. Khadija gave an example of her study tutor guiding her.

***Khadija:** He helped me to apply to the different schools. We sat for a few hours and looked for some international schools. He also did that for his son last year so he knew what to do... He showed me the options, which were the English upper secondary schools available and then I should also apply for some Swedish upper secondary schools.*

Khadija's interaction with her study tutor showed considerable time being spent on the application process for specific schools. Khadija described her study tutor as drawing from his own experiences with his son and then making recommendations based on his own opinions. This advisory process included an explanation of the choice process and introducing different school options but the advice was weighted more to suggesting English language schools with an international profile with additional Swedish schools as a backup.

Each of these different educators were described as the main source of information for the students and someone they saw as an expert. However, more than a demonstration of knowledge, the teachers seem to have established trust between the students and themselves which encouraged conversation between the two. This relationship was strengthened by teachers having similar backgrounds and a shared language with the students as with sources of warm knowledge described by Slack et al. (2014). Cerna et al. (2019) have also observed this phenomenon and suggested that it be developed further in Sweden. However, the educators' own initiative to help the students was the basis for relationship building. A trusting relationship enabled the educators to give advice that had two different purposes which could be differentiated by the different roles that the educators had. The educators employed directly by the school (preparatory class teachers and assistant principals) often gave general

advice that was related to the school choice process or the functioning of the education system. The study tutors, who were somewhat separated from the school, spoke about their own experiences.

The absence of teacher support

Emmanuel described not receiving additional support from his educators and the absence was notable. He lacked a strong relationship with his teachers and described not having trust in them. Even if the support had been offered, he hadn't accepted it.

***Emmanuel:** I don't trust any teacher. They might come after me some day and I'm always prepared.*

Emmanuel had a combative relationship with nearly everyone he interacted with. He had difficulty connecting with the other students and the educators at his school. The effect of this extended to his understandings of the upper secondary school choice process, for which he was ill-informed. In previous examples, the guidance from educators was described. This didn't occur with Emmanuel.

***BM:** Can you tell me about the people here at the school that help you. Who helps you here at this school?*

***Emmanuel:** No one*

***BM:** Do you think you're on your own?*

***Emmanuel:** Yeah.*

Emmanuel felt that the school had not helped him understand the upper secondary choice process. For all the reasons the previous students felt supported, Emmanuel did not. No teacher was willing, or successful in building a successful relationship with him and Emmanuel felt that he wasn't getting information about upper secondary school from anywhere. This didn't stop him from having strong preferences and aspirations. However, his strategies for learning about schools and choosing among schools were unsystematic and independent from anyone at the school. This left him susceptible to simplistic messaging that prioritized image and status, something that school marketing provided as was previously discussed.

Educators and horizon for action

Educators work on the front line with students, being the individuals who have the most face-to-face contact. This creates the possibility for bonds to form and students to have significant trust in their teachers. The support that the educators gave in this study was encouraged by the culture and language that

they shared with the newly arrived students. This allowed them to act as cultural bridges to help introduce the newly arrived students to the Swedish education system. Other educators, may not have shared a culture or language with the students but gave extra time to guide the students during the school choice process.

What was shared across the educators was what was described as a necessity for extra-work to allow the newly arrived students to succeed. The educators' revelation that extra work was a necessity for supporting the students gives the impression that the structure of support for the students is insufficient. The educators feeling of obligation demonstrated the importance of dedicated teachers and the value of their support as social capital built on the trust developed between student and educator.

When the students spoke of the support that they received from their educators, it was grounded in their possession of cultural capital. The educators were able to help the students that they shared a language with. The social capital that came as a result provided the students with information about the upper secondary school choice process, often as pragmatic guidance through the process of choosing an upper secondary school. Yet, it was not guaranteed that the advice that the students received would be the same from each source. The example from Ali demonstrated how the informal advice from his study tutor could differ from the preparatory teacher. The preparatory teachers' placement within the school and contribution to whole school planning differs from that of the study tutors, who work more independently outside of the schools' coordinated efforts.

Chapter Eight: The Influence of the Social Network

In the previous chapters descriptions of the students and their different forms of interactions with the school have been discussed. In this chapter, the students own social networks will be explored, examining how it can provide information that influences the students' horizons for action. Information, obtained through the grapevine, is highly valued and influences the process of choice (Ball, Reay, et al., 2002; Ball & Vincent, 1998; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016). In this chapter, the influence of the grapevine on the newly arrived students' horizons for action will be examined. Different concepts such as social and cultural capital are seen as resources that allow for information to be shared through the grapevine and influence the students' horizons for action.

Family

In this section, the students discuss how their parents supported them during the process of upper secondary school choice. The parents relied on their own assets to support and advise their children. The *social and cultural capital* that the parents possess in relation to how they acquire information through the grapevine is touched upon in this section but is not explored deeply because the parents themselves were not interviewed. There were many things that the students were unable to articulate about their parents such as the specific details about their education, details of their work histories or the intricacies of their social networks. Furthermore, the parents' social network existed largely outside of the view of the students and so the students simply may not have known who their parents interacted with. For this reason, the various capitals that the parents possessed will only be discussed from the perspective of their children. At other times, the relationship between siblings is explored, demonstrating an alternative family dynamic. To understand how families influenced the students' horizons for action, information and guidance for the choice process was the main point of analysis. In this context, this is framed as ideational support, aligned with Coleman's (1988) and Putnam's (2000) conceptualization of social capital, which influenced the students' horizons for action.

A lack of pragmatic support

The students described their parents as having a range of language proficiencies including varying levels of Swedish and English. As *embodied cultural capital*, this has been shown to influence the degree that parents can advocate for their children's schooling needs and provide relevant information about school-choice (Bourdieu, 1977b; A. Osman & Månsson, 2015). As a group, the lower language abilities were described as limiting their capacity to connect with teachers or grow a large social network. However, this was true to different degrees. For example, some of the non-Swedish speakers had limited abilities in their mother tongue or were illiterate. The connection between the education background and profession of the parents was less clear, likely due to the challenges of finding a job in a new country. The father of Laiba and Khadija had a work visa for his high-status economy job in a major Swedish company. On the other hand, Ali's father, who was trained as an engineer, was working in a flower shop. In these examples, the possession of educational capital did not necessarily translate to employment in Sweden but without interviewing the parents, their experiences could not be analyzed further. What could be seen in the student responses was the heterogeneity of the parents' backgrounds, and in particular their educational backgrounds which ranged from incomplete primary school to post-secondary education. Yet, despite the parents' diverse backgrounds, their advice regarding upper secondary school choice was similar across the student group. A common response from the students was that they lacked guidance from their parents, as described by Ahmed and Fatemeh.

BM: *Have you talked to your parents about the different schools that you can go to?*

Ahmed: *No. Because they don't know about them. They don't know what I want to be.*

Fatemeh: *I don't know the system here. It's really new to me. My dad didn't go to gymnasium here so I don't really get a lot of advice.*

Ahmed and Fatemeh didn't see their parents as sources of information that could help them understand the Swedish school system. These accounts highlight the students' lack of trust in their parents' ability to give effective guidance for the school choice process. The reasons for the students' misgivings were variously blamed on the parents' unfamiliarity with the Swedish school system or language barriers but in general, the students were of the opinion that their parents did not know enough to help them.

To illustrate this relationship between parent and child, Ali's experience shows how the way he spoke with his father about his upper secondary school choice changed over the year-nine school year. Ali was born in Iran and

moved to Sweden ten months before the first interview. He lived with his mother and father, his father being the one who he spoke to most about schooling. At the start of year-nine Ali had a great deal of faith in his father's knowledge about schools:

***BM:** How are you going to decide which ones are good?*

***Ali:** I think I go to my father. He can choose. He has a lot of friends here and he just understands all of the rules from his friends. I think he know more than me.*

Ali believed that his father, described in deference as an engineer and successful businessman, had the social network and ability to actively search for school information and subsequently entrusted his future aspirations to his father rather than other members of his family. When Ali described his father's extensive social network, and the subsequent hot knowledge, it was framed as an extension of his own social capital due to the close ties within his family unit. This did not extend to the other members of his family.

***BM:** Do you talk to your mother or your sister very much about schools and the future?*

***Ali:** Not with my mother. Not my sister either because she is far from here. She doesn't know. She doesn't have any information about Sweden.*

Ali's relationship with his father differed from that with his mother and sister. His sister had remained in Iran so it was clear that she didn't understand the Swedish education system. However, his mother had travelled along with Ali and his father, undoubtedly having many of the same experiences. Ali differentiated between the two by describing his father's knowledge of higher-education and calling attention to his social network as a way of finding information.

***Ali:** My father is an engineer and he has lots of friends that are engineers in different subjects, like building or computer engineers. He told me that there is a subject at university that is like extracting oil. I think you can do that. And I'm like, oh yeah. That's good.*

Furthermore, Ali explained that his father had demonstrated an understanding of the norms around higher education through conversations about his own academic trajectory. His father had studied at university and spoke, in a general sense, about what kind of academic paths lead to different professions. At this time, Ali viewed his father's familiarity of post-secondary education and professional life as valuable cultural capital. The accumulation of this support and guidance contributed to Ali's belief that his father was a valuable source

of information about school choice. This relationship is evocative of the ideational support that comes from social capital and this information shaped what Ali saw as possible, or his horizon for action. As a source of knowledge, Ali saw value in hearing about his father's own experiences in school and the anecdotal and experiential evidence his father conveyed from his friends. Ali's description suggests that he felt that conversations with his father contributed to his horizon of action at this stage considerably.

However, after having his own experiences in school, in the second interview Ali described feeling differently about his parents:

Ali: They don't have that much information about upper secondary school so it's just me. I'm just alone.

It was not entirely clear what happened between the two interviews but Ali had a noticeable change in demeanor. He was optimistic in the first interview and spoke of grand aspirations for his future, such as pursuing a PhD. The tone in the second interview was noticeably different. He spoke more about the obstructions he faced progressing to his preferred upper secondary school program and complained about not understanding why the school worked the way it did. By this time, Ali had shifted his opinion of whether his father could navigate the school-choice process. In Ali's view, his father did not have any knowledge about the choice process or the different local school options. Furthermore, Ali's belief that his father was able to provide *ideational support* collapsed, leaving him to navigate the choice process independently. The father's knowledge was no longer considered relevant to the unique Swedish choice system and Ali had begun to dismiss his father as a productive source of knowledge that aided his upper secondary school choice process. Ali's father's social network that had previously been lauded, no longer seemed valuable.

Ali's description of his evolving relationship with his father captures a phenomenon that is shared across the students in this study. The students recognized that their parents were limited by language barriers. Furthermore, being newly arrived themselves, the parents knew little about the bureaucratic processes of applying to upper secondary schools or about the upper secondary schools in their neighbourhood. Cultural capital, such as that derived from their own experiences of post-secondary education that may have had more utility in their home country had less relevance in Sweden. The parents' social capital was seen as low because of the parents' language barriers. As a result, the students did not look to their parents for advice on the practical matters of upper secondary school choice.

Vague support

Conversations about students' academic aspirations did occur, meaning that ideational support was not non-existent. However, the parents gave vague advice that focused on the students following their interests and making strong efforts in their studies. Rifat described the support that her parents gave her.

***Rifat:** If you want to succeed you have to work hard.*

When asked for details about how her parents had advised her, she instead dismissed them for not having the Swedish language abilities to support her. Rather, it was she who helped them in many instances.

***Rifat:** My parents don't understand Swedish so I help them when it comes to Swedish. When it comes to English, they are not good at English.*

Similar to what was mentioned in the previous section, Rifat connected her parents' inability to support her with the practical aspects of upper secondary school choice to their lack of Swedish and English. A consequence was that her parents gave supportive advice that lacked specifics and didn't refer to practicalities in the upper secondary school choice process as Amena and Mohammed further described.

***Amena:** Well, my mom, she doesn't try to have an effect on my future life. She told me, that's your life and you choose it your way.*

***Mohammed:** They told me that you know better what is good for you. Choose the things that you feel are good for you.*

Like the guidance that Rifat received, Amena and Mohammeds' parents' guidance was passive but encouraging, entrusting their children to make appropriate decisions for themselves. The advice that the students received was not specific to the procedure of choosing a school or particular upper secondary school programs and the students felt that their parents trusted them to make the right decisions. Guidance focused more on the students' own efforts than practical steps. When the students spoke of professional careers, such as being a doctor, lawyer or architect, their parents were encouraging and supported the students to follow these dreams. Similarly, Maen received the following advice from his parents.

***Maen:** They told me that you have to choose the things that you like. When you feel like you like something, you choose it.*

In these responses the students describe support that has a different purpose than the pragmatic support that they missed. The parents gave emotional support, encouraging the students to pursue their interests and aspirations. This type of unconditional emotional support is built on a shared ideology of discipline and independence (A. Osman et al., 2020). The parents influenced the students where they had the capacity to do so by giving them support but ceding control to their children.

Siblings' own experiences as guidance

Maen's parents were not the only ones guiding Maen in his family however. His older siblings also shared their own knowledge and experiences about the school choice process.

***Maen:** They told me that it's good if I learn Swedish and they say if I need help with something, they would show me how to do it and then I do it myself.*

Maen, looked to his brothers and sisters for advice and received information about the local upper secondary school and strategic advice for doing well in school. Similarly, Aziz looked up to his older sisters who gave him information about schools. Aziz trusted his sisters' opinions and accepted their guidance.

***Aziz:** She told me I have to work hard because in upper secondary school they study all day, 24 hours.*

This advice is redolent of the *ideational support* students received from their parents, that hard work will be rewarded with opportunity. Unlike his parents, Aziz's sisters were able to give more practical information but it was limited to their experiences in the upper secondary school that they currently attend.

***Aziz:** She's the one that has experience. She is at upper secondary school so she is the one I can talk with. ... If I take a look or I talk with her about the classes she goes to now, I see that I can't understand anything so that means I have to work hard.*

These conversations had an effect on Aziz, not by broadening his knowledge of the intricacies of the school choice process but by preparing him for a change in attitude that was needed to succeed at upper secondary school. Essentially, his sisters were saying that it was time to grow up and work harder. His siblings also promoted the school that they were enrolled in.

Aziz: This area. It's a good location because my sisters chose there so it's good.

Like the conversations with parents, the students' siblings only gave vague advice. However, the advice from siblings differed in one way from the parents. When siblings gave advice, it stemmed from their own experience within the education system. They were able to discuss the process of making a school choice and knowledge about some particular schools. Yet, their experiences appeared to be limited to their own experiences. The siblings had the possibility of aiding the students in this study but also, risked a reproduction of the siblings' own limited horizons for action.

This was only applicable to the students whose siblings were older but young enough to still have studied upper secondary school in Sweden. This was most apparent for Omar whose father had lived in Sweden for many years, while the rest of the family lived in England. Each child would move to Sweden in their teenage years to attend upper secondary school to prepare for Swedish university. Omar was the youngest of six and is the final child to do this. Education was valued in the family and each child followed their own preferred educational path.

Omar: In my family, everyone gets to choose what they want to do. My older brother just now finished software engineering, my sister does nursing, my other brother right now is about to start university in one year, medicine and I want to do business. All of my family, some of them are doctors, some of them work with computers, so I want to do business.

BM: You think in your family everyone has their passions?

Omar: Yeah, everyone has their own opinion of what they want to learn or what they like.

Whether it was because Omar's parents had always taken a hands-off approach or that by their sixth child they trusted their children's independence, Omar mainly spoke to his siblings about upper secondary school.

BM: What's the way to choose a school?

Omar: I will ask my older brother that goes to (upper secondary school). I will ask him which one is good. He used to go to one in (nearby neighbourhood) and he changed because it was too far for him. He changed to this one in (local neighbourhood). So, I asked him which one is good. He told me that it's harder than this school and basically you have to work harder than this school.

Omar's older siblings were able to provide guidance in a way that his parents could not. Grounding their advice in their own experiences, the siblings were

able to talk about the process of upper secondary school choice and the particular schools that they were familiar with. At the same time, they were constrained by these experiences in the same way as the students who are presented in this study. Later, in *Chapter 9: Capital, boundaries and choosing*, the limitations and segmentations of the students will be described which can give an idea of the likely experiences of the older siblings. To a degree, the siblings' advice replicates their own experiences while also being able to talk about what they learned along the way.

The absence of family support

While not prevalent in this study, unaccompanied children have made up a large proportion of the newly arrived coming to Sweden, who often arrive between the age of 15 and 17 (Çelikaksoy & Wadensjö, 2015). In this study, two students, Rafa and Gloria, had situations that resembled that of unaccompanied youth. Gloria was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and grew up in Uganda where her childhood was unstable. She was orphaned at a young age and had survived without the direct care of an adult for many years. Through the support of a charity Gloria was reunited with an uncle in Sweden, so she was not technically unaccompanied. However, her home conditions quickly deteriorated after her arrival and she needed to move, entering the fostership system.

Gloria: I have no family. When I came, I came with my uncle because my mom and my dad passed away when I was still in Congo but last year when I came, I came with my uncle and his two kids. But after some time, when I feel that the situation that I was living in wasn't so good, I asked the municipality to get me a family that I can be in and the municipality did and now I'm living with a foster family.

These two students described supportive foster parents who had knowledge of the Swedish system. Both students described having conversations with their foster parents about their academic aspirations. The foster parents were believed to have knowledge about the Swedish system, however, the level of trust normally present within a family was not there. Both parties seemed to keep the other at a distance so detailed guidance didn't occur. Additionally, the students' placement in these homes was not permanent. Rafa had already changed foster homes once and Gloria explained that she would be moving to another city after her first year of upper secondary school for an unspecified reason. These two students saw their foster parents as a source of *hot knowledge* but did not have deep conversations with them. The foster parents had the local knowledge to be able to describe the bureaucratic process of upper secondary school choice but did not have more abstract conversations about the students' dreams and the future. In this way, the lack of trust between

the students and their foster parents inhibited the ideational support that the other students described.

Family and horizon for action

In this section, the school-choice guidance and support that the students received from their families was examined. The parents had a variety of education backgrounds and it could be conceived that this would play a large role in the type and degree of support the parents were able to give their children as has been discussed in previous research (Assefa & Stansbury, 2018; Tan et al., 2019). Yet, from the students' perspective, the guidance that they received did not differ to a great degree. An analogous experience across the group bound the students despite the parents' varied educational backgrounds, language abilities and employment. Rather, the most significant factor identified by the students was that their parents had moved to Sweden recently and thus had little knowledge about the intricacies of the Swedish school system. Furthermore, from the students' responses, it can be seen that language and the lack of an established social network played a role in the parents' inability to acquire information about the school system. Across the student responses, the students described a similar experience with their parents' upper secondary school choice guidance. In terms of practical support and advice for their children, such as which specific upper secondary schools to choose or strategies for navigating the choice process, the parents had little to say. The students recognized their parents' inability to help them in a pragmatic way, thus, did not believe in their parents' ability to provide useful information about the choice of upper secondary school. However, the parents encouraged the students, empowering them to follow their interests.

The students' older siblings provided supplementary information to their parents' guidance. Two patterns emerged from the discussions with the siblings. First, the siblings were able to give the students some information about the school choice process that was rooted in their own experiences. If the siblings were currently in upper secondary school, the students treated this as a window into a potential upper secondary school but their reactions were mixed. Some students liked what they saw and decided that they would like to attend the same school as their siblings. The others hoped to learn from their siblings' mistakes and aimed to go somewhere else. The siblings could give ideational support but this was limited to the knowledge they had acquired in the few years that they had attended school in Sweden. They were not able to discuss higher education or provide general knowledge of the labour market. For this reason, the guidance that the siblings could provide the students was also limited but in a different way than their parents. The students were also introduced to the particular school that the sibling had enrolled in. When students prioritized the same school as their sibling, it may have been the choice of the familiar rather than of preference, the siblings having 'paved the way'

(Rosvall et al., 2018). The students wanted to go to a school where they felt comfortable and where they knew people. The choice of familiar schools is a further result of choosing with partial information (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

From this guidance, another influence on the students' horizons for action can be seen. The siblings had the potential to discuss the strategies within the school choice process, yet this was not a topic of conversation that was identified in the interviews. It's not clear what the reason for this was but considering the findings that are demonstrated throughout this study, they likely faced a number of challenges to choosing themselves. The second pattern was that the older siblings grew the students' social connections giving the opportunity to speak with the siblings' peers about specific schools and the choice process. Mapping out the different friendship constellations was not a focus of this study so the students' siblings' friends were not differentiated from their own close friendships. The influence of peers is discussed in the next section.

Peers

In this section, a number of theoretical concepts are relevant to explore the influence of newly arrived students' peers on their horizons for action. The students gained information about school-choice through their peer network. The particular peers that the students connected with was influenced by their embodied cultural capital, i.e. language, and their possession of bonding and bridging social capital. The information that students obtained from their peers came from the grapevine. Boundaries will also be discussed briefly in relation to the students' ability to make friends. Ultimately, students' interactions with their peers shape their horizons for action, strongly influencing the upper secondary school that they see as possible and desirable to attend.

Connecting with peers

The students put a lot of weight in their friendships which for many of the students was the most important part of their school experience. Ali portrayed himself as social and got along with all the students that he interacted with.

Ali: I am friends with all of the students in my classes but no person outside of my classes. Some people are like, 'hey', 'hi'. Like that and just say hey.

In this response, Ali described his preparatory class where he had close relationships with those that he interacted with daily. Similarly, Omar had close friends within his preparatory class.

Omar: *Basically, my whole class is friendly. The first day I came, it was not just 'Oh, how are you?'. They welcomed me. Even when it was lunch time, they said come sit with me.*

The fact that the students spent the whole day with the same group of students, gave the potential for strong bonds to develop as Omar described. In the preparatory class a social network formed among the students who shared experiences and together built bonding social capital. Omar discussed friendly relationships with other students in the introductory class, using English to communicate.

Omar: *My friend you were interviewing before me, we're good friends and two other friends. The one is from Somalia and the other one comes from Spain. Basically, they are good friends. They are the first people that talked to me when I came to school and showed me how school works and taught me everything.*

Omar's experience resembled that of the other students who were proficient in English, which represents substantial embodied cultural capital. English is broadly spoken in Sweden and it enabled the students to communicate more broadly than using other languages. Rafa also met peers within his introduction class, which was limited by language.

BM: *Who are you friends with here at the school?*

Rafa: *It's mostly Afghans. Dari speakers.*

BM: *Do you have Swedish friends or other languages, Arabic, Somali, etc?*

Rafa: *There are people from Sweden, Arabs and Uzbeks but they are not my friends. We just know each other and we talk sometimes.*

Rafa is describing heterogeneity in the introductory class and the importance of language for building relationships. Rather than having similarities that allow them to connect with each other, building bonding social capital, the students had different cultural touchstones and languages, siloing the students from each other. Within this group of Dari speakers, the students shared information about how the Swedish education system worked.

Rafa: *They told me that if you have good grades or grades from eight subjects, you can start at the electricity program and that it's a good program. You can earn money but there was a guy in my school who told me that it's difficult. It's not that easy.*

Friendships with Swedes were seen as giving the benefits of bridging social capital. Yet the students were limited by the boundaries of the school structure. Being placed in the preparatory class gave students few opportunities to interact with Swedish students. As a consequence, the students looked predominantly to students in their preparatory classes or their own social groups. Maen also described close relationships with his fellow students, many of which were in his preparatory class.

***Maen:** I'm friends with everybody. I'm very social. I have friends from Morocco, Syria, Sweden. It's no problem at all.*

Maen spent a lot of time with friends, especially the ones he viewed as positive influences. Like Maen, Reem felt that she was only able to interact with other newly arrived students, who were confined to the preparatory class.

***Reem:** All of them are immigrants or foreigners. Nobody is Swedish.*

***BM:** Why is that?*

***Reem:** Because nobody is a Swede in our class.*

Reem was discouraged because she didn't have the opportunity to mix with Swedish students. Despite these different perspectives on the other students in the preparatory class, Reem felt alone. Reflecting upon this, Reem attributed her new school's more rigid preparatory class structure to her inability to mix with Swedish students. The structure of Reem's previous school allowed her to mix more widely with students and thus be able to practice her Swedish with Swedish students. Yet, the structure of her new school didn't allow for these types of interactions. The preparatory class structure made it a school within a school that was separated from the rest of the students. Reem felt that this had an effect on her Swedish language progression

***Reem:** In my old school, my friends were Swedes so after 6 months, I already learned so much Swedish that I could talk in a subject and I even wrote whatever I wanted to.*

In this way, the organization of the preparatory class acted as a structural boundary, limiting the opportunities for Reem to interact with Swedish students and improve her Swedish.

Mohammed was placed in a similar preparatory class. He felt like he currently had close friends which he attributed to the community of the preparatory class and the friendships that he had made there.

***Mohammed:** I don't have friends outside of school. All of my friends, I meet them at school.*

For advice, Mohammed looked to students that he had met in the preparatory class that had since moved on to upper secondary schools.

***Mohammed:** I have some friends that have been to these schools. They are one year older than me. They have been in different schools so I have talked to them and they tell me things about upper secondary school. ... When I asked questions, I ask general questions. How it looks, the way lessons and teaching was. Those are the most important things I'm interested in. When they answered me, I understood that it was this way.*

The advice that Mohammed received largely related to the atmosphere of the upper secondary schools that his peers were attending. They were able to tell him about the daily routines at this particular upper secondary school, which was what Mohammed prioritized.

Friends were a central part of the students' school experience. In the preparatory class, the students shared experiences that drew them together. However, language was a barrier in the preparatory class. The preparatory class was made up of students who spoke different languages and were often unable to speak to one another. Coming from different backgrounds, the students did not always speak the same language, making it difficult to communicate together. Their opportunities for building bonding social capital were limited and bridging social capital was nonexistent. English allowed students to speak to each other and the opportunity for bonding social capital to build. A strong ability to speak English also allowed the students to more easily cross the boundary of their preparatory class since more subject classes were available to students who spoke English. Being in these additional classes allowed the students to interact with more of their fellow students and build a larger social network. Additionally, the ability to speak with many other students gave these students the chance to grow their network of peers, thus, building their bridging social capital and allow more information to be provided by the grapevine.

Isolation from peers

In addition to the descriptions of connecting with their peers, the students also discussed situations where they were excluded. Emmanuel, who did not speak Swedish, described acquaintances in his subject classes but no one that he felt particularly close to.

***Emmanuel:** Not really friends. The kind of people that I know and see and say 'hi', talk and we leave.*

Fatemeh could speak Swedish but still felt isolated from her peers. She had transitioned out of the preparatory class to the subject classes.

BM: *Do you have close friends here?*

Fatemeh: *Not here. I don't really like it because I want to be close to someone but I don't want to be close to someone just to be close to someone. I want to have a connection.*

Fatemeh felt lonely in her classes and aspired to have more friends at upper secondary school. Her social aspirations led her to explore upper secondary schools that she believed she would feel more welcome at. Imagining her future life, Fatemeh emphasized that bonding with her peers were a priority.

The students described a prevailing experience of isolation that repeated itself throughout their school experiences. Isolation in their preparatory classrooms did not disappear when they transitioned to the mainstream classes. In fact, the establishment of a small group of friends often made this move more difficult once they had transitioned from the preparatory class. This did not necessarily diminish isolation as described by Brian.

Brian: *I haven't got friends. My friends are all in the intro.*

Brian felt that when he progressed into the subject classes from the introductory classes, which is the goal for students, he regressed socially. He no longer had a close connection with the students around him and due to the school structure, he had limited opportunities to interact with his old friends. Essentially, the door had closed as he passed through it, creating a new boundary behind him. This move cut Brian off from his old friends, limiting the bonding social capital that they provided, without any new connections being established.

Gloria imagined how she would be benefited if she was able to interact with peers who were currently ostracizing her.

Gloria: *I would like to be friends with a white person here. Obviously, I would want that because I don't know how it feels to have a white friend. It's a bit weird for me but I think it's because of our communication with each other ... It's kind of hard for me because when you are sitting inside a class and a kid just comes out of nowhere and says n-----.*

In Gloria's description of hypothetical friends, she differentiated between white students, who are Swedes and herself, who is black and an outsider. She desired the opportunity to enter Swedish society but a memorable interaction that she had with a Swedish student involved their use of a racial slur. This left her feeling isolated and discouraged her from making further efforts. This isolation influenced Gloria's social aspirations. She emphasized her desire for having good friends in the future, which influenced the type of schools she prioritized. Gloria's desire for close friends alluded to her unhappiness with

her current situation and a desire for a better social situation. Uri had similar experiences of discrimination from her peers in Sweden.

Uri: Some days I feel like there are some students that are kind of racist against me. Sometimes I can see in their looks because I'm a Muslim girl and I have a hijab. When I saw that at this school there was two girls mad at me and I cried.

It's clear why this situation was upsetting for Uri, who felt singled out and discriminated against. In response to the exclusion, she sought out others that she described as more 'like me' when she visited a potential upper secondary school.

Uri: I have been there and checked it out. I liked it. There are other students that are just like me so it's not like here.

BM: What do you mean just like you? What is someone who is just like you?

Uri: Most of them are not good at Swedish so we are all at the same level.

In contrast to Reem's preference to meet Swedish peers described in the previous section, Uri rejected the Swedish students. She described feeling rejected by those that didn't accept her and would rather find peers that were similar to herself. If the students were not able to find 'like-minded' students, even this source of information would be unavailable. Exemplifying this, Amena spoke of not having any friends

Amena: I have no friends.

Amena didn't feel like she had any strong connections in the larger school setting. However, in a different context Amena described her social situation differently.

Amena: I have good friends. They help me with everything.

Context is what differed between these two exchanges. Initially, Amena complained that she felt alone and isolated, while later describing the friends that she had. She felt comfortable with her preparatory class peers but also felt lonely. She differentiated between the students in her preparatory class and Arabic speakers she knew from elsewhere.

There were descriptions of loneliness among the students that influenced how they approached the process of upper secondary school choice. The students clearly felt that having close friends was important, both to have an emotional connection as well the information that they could provide on topics

such as upper secondary school choice. The students differentiated among their peers, portraying them as being Swedes or foreigners. When they spoke of the other foreign students in the preparatory class, the benefits of bonding social capital can be seen. The students could connect through shared culture and language but most importantly through the shared experience of being newly arrived. However, language could cause isolation when students from different countries didn't have a way to communicate with each other. This was mitigated when students spoke English allowing them to not only speak to other students in the preparatory class but also Swedish students in the rest of the school.

When the students felt discriminated against, they looked to upper secondary school as an escape from their current conditions. Upper secondary school was described as an improvement and an opportunity to avoid undesirable students. By choosing an upper secondary school that encompassed their values, the students hoped to associate with students who would accept them and act as positive influences.

Aspirations for friends at upper secondary school

The students' conversations with their peers included discussions about upper secondary schools. Many of the conversations Omar had with his peers revolved around trying to determine what the students attending upper secondary schools would be like. The reputation of different upper secondary schools exuded an image of students as ideal types with which Omar identified. Some of his preferences were aspirational, relating to the type of students he wanted to interact with.

***Omar:** He said more people are friendly. Every person is concentrating on what they are doing. Everyone is thinking about what they want to do. They don't think things like fighting. Nothing like that happens he told me. Everyone comes to school and goes to their classes. They just talk a little bit and they leave.*

As Omar continued to speak about the advice from his peers, he also described his skepticism in what he was being told.

***Omar:** Mostly we talk about, which one are you going to? I'm going to that one or this one.... Most of them don't have good advice. I have already gotten advice from my siblings that they are saying. I know the information. Most of them are not going to study the same subject. Some of them are going to study to be a car-mechanic, some of them are going to science, most of them are not going to an economy program.*

When Omar dismissed the information from his peers, he related it to the information that he had already received from his siblings. He didn't think that these peers would help him with the practical aspects of choosing an upper secondary school. Yet, Omar did look to them for information about the environment of potential upper secondary schools.

***Omar:** I'll ask how is the upper secondary school? Is it good? Is it bad? How are the teachers? Are teachers good? I'll ask them a lot of questions.*

Omar preferred to look to older peers who were already in upper secondary school, wanting to know about their experiences. Omar felt comfortable with the images of these upper secondary schools and student bodies that he was familiar with. This corresponds with the advice that Omar received from his siblings, which was based primarily on their own experiences. On the other hand, Omar also heard gossip about upper secondary schools, dissuading him from considering them.

***Omar:** I heard rumours that the school is not that good and people fight there, stuff like that.*

Omar's understanding of this particular upper secondary school is based on what he learned from his peers, which he admits are rumours. This emphasizes the importance of peers in this context.

When discussing her own social ambitions, Maen clearly differentiated between foreign and Swedish students, prioritizing wanting to interact with Swedes more than those in his preparatory class.

***Maen:** It's not stereotyping or anything but they have something that I like. I like Swedes more than foreigners. I'm in Sweden and I have to feel that I'm in Sweden so I have to see that everybody is a Swede.*

Maen portrayed Swedish students as being different than him and the students he was meeting every day. Maen longed for Swedish friends but had no opportunity to meet with them. He wished to have a social connection with people that could encourage his own integration. The boundary of the preparatory class limited his opportunities to interact with Swedish students but he looked to upper secondary schools as an opportunity to change that.

***Maen:** In those schools there are a lot of students that succeed in their study there. They will be doctors or architects or whatever, nice jobs from those schools.*

Maen was alluding to a benefit of bridging social capital. Not only would it provide information but what he viewed as the students' academic trajectories could also benefit him. Maen hoped that by being associated with these types of students, he too would have similar opportunities. Consequently, Maen describing wanting to avoid schools with students who were bad influences.

Maen: When it comes to bad schools, the first thing is if there is some noisy students who disturb others, it is because there is no adult that can tell them to stop and that makes a bad school. They have to care about the school and the outside of the school because there were many when I was in (different neighbourhood) who passed by. Students there are smoking and doing bad things. That makes a school bad.... If you go to a school and you see that there are students who are gathering there and they do things bad, you will not like that school.

Maen had heard description of different upper secondary schools and their students from the grapevine. Hot knowledge informed his image of the upper secondary school, the negative attributes making him want to avoid them. These students were portrayed as disruptive and bad influences who he wanted to avoid. His dis-identification with their personas made him want to avoid the type of upper secondary schools that they attended. Maen's conception of school quality was closely connected to his aspirations for future friends. In terms of discussions about the upcoming school choice, details were limited. Not all of Maen's conversations with peers focused on the social environments of the school. A conversation with one peer focused on the upper secondary school that they were attending themselves.

Maen: It's a good school. That's what pushes me to apply there ... He is an old friend so I know him. He is an immigrant like me. He is a kind of asylum seeker for six years in Sweden.

Here, Maen is connecting his own experience with that of his friend. A shared language, background and status as an asylum seeker resonated with Maen making the advice that this friend gave particularly relevant to his own needs.

When Uri differentiated the prospective upper secondary school from her current school, she observed that there were more students who felt similar to her, namely in their Swedish abilities. To find this particular upper secondary school, Uri listened to students that she knew were already enrolled there.

Uri: Last year they started at the upper secondary school and I asked them and they said it's OK. ... She is an Arab friend who is studying in that school and I asked her and she told me it's fine. It's a good school.

Uri is demonstrating a reproduction of the knowledge that her peers had. Students who identify together, often congregate in the same schools (Dovemark & Holm, 2017). The students described the upper secondary school as a site for inclusion. With this, the students dis-identified from the type of students that have the behaviours that they want to avoid. They wanted a different type of school than they were currently attending, and the opportunity to choose gave them aspirations for inclusion. The students desired relationships that provide bridging social capital as well as the emotional connection of belonging.

Football as a meeting place

Outside of the school setting, a number of students mentioned being part of a football team. Emmanuel felt that this activity gave him more of an opportunity to make friends than his school did.

***Emmanuel:** I don't have a friend here. I just look at the other kids but I don't really work with them. They do a lot of rubbish. ... I have friends on the football team. On my football team, I talk with everyone. They go in different schools but most of them are in (**nearby school**). They all go there. So, when I go there, I talk very well.*

Being part of a football team gave Emmanuel the chance to interact with Swedish peers that he would not have otherwise had the chance to meet. These interactions often occurred in Swedish.

***BM:** Where are you practicing Swedish?*

***Emmanuel:** My football pitch.*

***BM:** So, it's all in Swedish?*

***Emmanuel:** Yeah.*

Emmanuel felt that these interactions in sports were supporting his Swedish language learning and gave him the opportunity to practice in a safe environment.

Being part of a football team also provided Brian with an outlet which allowed relationships to build with his teammates.

***Brian:** We talked about, if you want to go to upper secondary school, what do you want to study. First, I asked him how long have you been here in Sweden but he was born in Sweden. He asked me, how my school was? I said that it's 50-50. He said, you only have to study. I asked how is in upper secondary school, is it hard? He told me you have to study and stop playing games.*

Football also provided Brian with an opportunity to build his bridging social capital. Interaction with peers that he would not otherwise have had the opportunity to meet gave him new information and chances for socialization not available in the preparatory class or his ordinary life. Khadija further reinforced the value of football when discussing how she made friends at her school.

***Khadija:** I think we all like outdoor activities. They're kind of nice but they are sometimes hesitant to speak English. We mostly play football together and go outside.*

***BM:** Do you think that football was an important part of making friends?*

***Khadija:** Yeah.*

Leisure activities, in this case exemplified by football, provide students with an opportunity to meet peers beyond their school or community. These types of activities enable students to enlarge their social networks beyond their immediate social group, encouraging the building of bridging social capital (Hertting & Karlefors, 2016; Putnam, 2000). The students were benefited by being part of football teams where they met peers and were able to improve their Swedish. Additionally, they had the opportunity to discuss the upper secondary school choice process, expanding their horizons for action with new information.

Peers and horizon for action

In this section, the interaction between students and their peers is examined. Peers have been found to greatly influence upper secondary school choice (Andersen & Hjortskov, 2019; Ball, Reay, et al., 2002; Ball & Vincent, 1998). The students interacted with other students in different ways. Their opportunities for these interactions varied but this wasn't only due to chance. Different social positions created opportunities for friendships to grow, building social capital. With a larger and wider net of peers, more varied information can be obtained (Putnam, 2000). Accordingly, the students' horizons for action shifted to include new academic trajectories and opportunities that reflected who they were friends with and the advice they were given.

The students looked to their peers for companionship, diversion and to provide information about life in Sweden. Social connections brought different types of benefits which served many purposes, including understanding upper secondary school choice. The importance of belonging was emphasized and they connected their identity to who they associated with. However, these associations were not always easy for the students to establish. The building of friendships could be constrained by school structure. The organizational

boundaries of the school structure itself defining where students would have the opportunity to meet other students.

As with the results presented in the previous section describing students' interaction with their parents, the students did not receive practical advice regarding the process of school choice in Sweden from their peers. However, unlike the results in the parent's section, the interactions with peers did provide information about specific upper secondary schools. Peers shared their own experiences, which gave students an understanding of some of the school options available to them. These descriptions of upper secondary schools were filtered through the peers' own perspectives and included the use of stereotypes and hearsay. Information from peers was often limited to what fellow newly arrived students knew about the Swedish school system, which in this case was minimal. The students who benefited from the linguistic capital of being able to speak English could communicate with a wider group of peers, gaining information outside their social bubble. However, many students had low linguistic capital, not even being able to communicate with the students in their preparatory class effectively. Finally, playing football gave students the opportunity to interact with peers outside their social circle, giving them new insight into different upper secondary schools.

The importance of having close friends was emphasized by the students. This importance was reaffirmed when the students discussed strong feelings of isolation when peers were absent. The students also articulated that having a larger and more diverse social network was a priority for them in the future. In some instances, the opportunity for the students to interact with peers outside of the school setting occurred as part of their participation on football teams.

Peers are an important influence for young students and their impact or absence can be quite large. Students felt like they had few or no friends and were either frustrated by this or had dismissed the need for friends until they got to upper secondary school, similar to the coping strategy described by Wiltgren (2020). Some other students described friendly relationships with their classmates but were not comfortable sharing their personal lives with them. At other times, students described better social situations at their school and had many friends. These friends could be both fellow newly arrived students or those who had grown up in Sweden.

Viewing the students' social positions through the lens of bridging and bonding social capital, bonding existed within the introductory class group, but in this case the group was often ill-defined or fragmented and lacking a shared language. English speaking students were able to draw on their linguistic capital to broaden their social reach. However, many of students simply felt like outsiders and that they did not have the ability or opportunity to connect with other students outside the introductory class. In fact, of the twenty-two students only six had any meaningful relationship with Swedish speaking students, the rest speaking only English or their mother-tongue with friends

felt isolated. An interesting phenomenon that students described was simultaneously having friends inside the introductory class but also feeling that they were alone. The students are describing a dichotomy between how they see themselves and their social networks. Many of the students aspired to have Swedish friends. However, there were also students who felt completely alone, isolated from the students inside the introductory class and those outside it. The impact of this is that the bridging social capital was also low due to the inability to meet other students and the existence of a language barrier with Swedish students.

The degree that the students' need for companionship influenced their preference of school is difficult to determine given their responses. However, the fact that they so closely related friendship with the quality of their education shows the importance they put on these relationships. When students discussed upper secondary schools with their fellow students, the information that they described, and that they prioritized, is closely connected to their preferences. Whether positive or negative, they often referenced a peer's opinion in the same sentence as their aspirations. This hot knowledge contributes to the collective process of making sense of partial information that Ball and Vincent (1998) attribute to the grapevine. And while this contributes to their building of a greater understanding of the choice process, it simultaneously represents a segmented horizon for action, restricted to what fellow students, with their own restricted knowledge, know themselves. Throughout the interviews, it was rare for peers to have provided information about how choice worked in Sweden. When opportunities to speak with peers outside their normal experiences were available to the students, they received a number of benefits.

By being part of a football club, the students had the opportunity to interact with students outside their normal social groups. The information that these peers contributed about upper secondary schools, is the benefit of the bridging social capital that came from group membership on the team. Further information about the different upper secondary school options represents an expansion of the students' horizons for action and the social benefits of participation in a leisure club.

Chapter Nine: Capital, Boundaries and Choosing

In this chapter, analysis of the various influences on the students shows how capital and boundaries shape the upper secondary school choice process. Building on the findings of previous chapters, information, guidance and boundaries are not independent from each other. In fact, boundaries shaped how the students were able to choose and led them to form upper secondary school preferences. These boundaries existed in different forms, relating to the opportunities the students had to attend different upper secondary schools, and their interactions with others. The process of choosing an upper secondary school led the students to interact with both structural and symbolic boundaries. The students drew on their resources, in the forms of social and cultural capital and information, in this process. Their possession of resources and consequent 'meeting' of boundaries ultimately shaped what educational paths they saw as possible. The following chapter explores what types of upper secondary school experiences the students aspired to and felt were possible within the framework of their horizons for action.

Nine of the 22 students are highlighted in this chapter. These students were selected to represent six different themes of which they spoke in detail. First, *A clash between the structural boundaries of grades and the symbolic boundary of belonging* explores the interconnectedness of boundaries on the students' horizons for action. Second, *Linguistic capital as a means to bypass structural boundaries* shows how language can be a resource that provides educational opportunities. Third, *Siblings that take an advisory role* looks at siblings that took over the advisory role from parents. Fourth, *The insidious influence of marketing* discusses how upper secondary school marketing has considerable influence on students' horizons for action in the absence of other information. Fifth, *Yearning for what is out of reach* explores the desire to attend upper secondary schools that stand behind structural boundaries. Sixth, *Counselling and the local school* examines how the presence of guidance contributes to students' engagement with the local upper secondary school. To conclude, a final section explores the phenomenon of boundaries and their relationship with horizon for action.

A clash between the structural boundaries of grades and the symbolic boundary of belonging

For year-nine students who face the choice of upper secondary school in Sweden, grades act as a structural boundary (Barmark & Lund, 2016). Newly arrived students' recent enrolment in the Swedish school system makes it difficult for them to complete the subject classes before they begin the upper secondary school choice process (Böhlmark, 2008; Lundahl & Lindblad, 2018). The consequence is that grades can limit the students' horizons for actions. Simultaneously, students also interact with information obtained from the people around them and directly from upper secondary schools. This information, in the forms of guidance, hot knowledge and marketing, influences their horizons for action, creating upper secondary school preferences. This segmentation can clash with limitations of the horizon for action resulting in the students developing unattainable upper secondary school preferences and dissatisfaction with the options available to them.

Gloria's responses gave significant insight into how the possession of capital contributed to the formation of boundaries that ultimately shaped her horizon for action. Gloria was originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. When she was eight, she moved to Uganda because of conflict and as part of a refugee resettlement program she was sent to Sweden one year before being interviewed. Her parents died when she was young and she largely raised herself in Uganda, with intermittent schooling. She came to Sweden to live with an uncle but was removed from the home by social services. She currently lives with a foster family near her primary school.

Previous research and earlier discussed findings in this study suggest that smoothly entering the Swedish education system would be challenging for Gloria. Refugees generally have interrupted education histories, which makes their needs considerably higher for achieving school success in their new country (Eide & Hjern, 2013; Hek, 2005b; Shakya et al., 2010; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). Moving to a new country presents additional challenges such as learning a new language and working with an unfamiliar education system (Devine, 2009; Shakya et al., 2010; Skowronski, 2013). Gloria's own experiences match these trends, having had intermittent schooling and beginning to learn Swedish in a new and unfamiliar education system. Furthermore, Gloria described her relationship with her foster parents as cordial but that they did not have deep conversations about her educational aspirations. Gloria's challenges earning the grades required to transition to upper secondary school reaffirm these arguments.

Gloria described a mismatch between her self-identified abilities and her capability to acquire grades, thus acting as a structural boundary to her transition to upper secondary school. Gloria was an English speaker but did not have

strong writing abilities. She was dismayed by her teacher's assessment priorities that she felt the Swedish students, who couldn't speak as well as her, benefited from.

Gloria: *When we do a test in English, it catches you by surprise. I have a D in English and the one who does not speak English has an A.*

BM: *What do you think about that? Why is that do you think?*

Gloria: *I don't get it! It hurts me so much. You don't know English. I get D and you get A!*

Gloria felt that these assessments were not testing the other students' true English proficiency and insinuated that her Swedish peers were able to satisfy the course expectations in a way that she could not. In this sense, her language ability wasn't being recognized by the school system to the level that she thought it deserved.

The grading expectations were not the only challenge Gloria faced with finishing her courses. Because of her short time in Sweden, she had few opportunities to earn grades and each high-stakes assessment might be her only chance to earn credit. This was magnified by the COVID pandemic that disrupted the 2020 spring term, limiting her opportunities to earn grades further. The number of tests were stressful for Gloria. Not only because she felt like she had a lot at one time but also because of the pressure to do well. Gloria felt that the high-stakes assessments would determine whether she would be able to complete a subject and determine her future. The students often had one chance to pass a course with the first grading opportunity happening at the end of the year and for Gloria this created significant anxiety.

Gloria: *It's stressful. So, stressful... Now we are getting a lot of assignments we have to finish. In every lesson, we have assignment and maybe it's not one or two. It's more. You have to finish them in a week's time and then send them in so the teacher can go through them and you can get your grades.*

The structure of the courses at her school did not allow Gloria to take all of the courses within her short time that she was enrolled there. This affected what upper secondary school programs she was able to apply to. Gloria aspired to high-status upper secondary school programs, such as the technology program, but was informed by her counsellor and preparatory class teacher that her grades would be too low to be accepted and that she was missing a number of required courses. The organization of her school meant that she was unable to take physics that year, thus would miss a grade in that subject. The courses that she had taken had limited assessments, meaning that she had only been able to demonstrate a passing grade. This had a direct impact on the upper secondary schools she was considering.

***Gloria:** You cannot go to the Stockholm upper secondary schools with 'E'... The truth is that most of the schools I chose, you have to have high grades, good grades. If I want to get into these schools, I have to improve my grades.*

Gloria's description of her grades shows them acting as a structural boundary to her application to upper secondary school. Gloria's grades alone did not completely explain her upper secondary school preferences or where she would eventually enroll. When Gloria spoke of what was important to her, she first mentioned the location of the upper secondary schools.

***Gloria:** I'm looking at a school, where the school is. I'm looking at how long it takes for me. Will I be able to wake up and be able to reach in time?*

The upper secondary schools across the city felt too far for Gloria to commute to each day. The neighbourhood that she lived in was far from the city centre and required a number of connections on public transit. Gloria balanced the location and the quality of upper secondary schools in her determination of which were best for her, dismissing some that seemed too far away. This functionally eliminated a large number of upper secondary schools from her considerations. For students who live in neighbourhoods that are isolated from city centres, obstacles to their ability to commute can limit the number of upper secondary schools that are possible to choose from (Fjellman, 2019; Hodgkinson & Sparkes, 1997). After eliminating upper secondary schools by distance, Gloria further honed her list by focusing on how the schools presented themselves.

***Gloria:** I was just like, OK this sounds good or the name sounds like this. That was the way I was choosing. I didn't know exactly what I was choosing at that time so it was kind of like, OK. Maybe this one, maybe this one. I was not sure.*

Gloria looked at inner-city upper secondary schools in awe.

***Gloria:** They say that kids that go to school in Stockholm, they tell you good stuff. Stockholm is the capital city. If you tell someone that you study in Stockholm, they would be like wow. You have money because they know.*

Gloria framed enrolment at these upper secondary schools as achieving a higher-status position and was something to be commended. She was impressed by people who attended these schools and she assumed that if she was

able to enroll, people would be impressed by her too. In this sense, the upper secondary schools were behind symbolic boundaries that demonstrated the quality of the institutions. Alternatively, Gloria used the same rationale to dismiss upper secondary schools near where her compulsory school was.

***Gloria:** They do drugs. It's not about the school but maybe about the friends they deal with but still, it's in the school.*

Gloria's information evaluation strategies were improvised and not necessarily fitted to her situation. While Gloria found it difficult to find information, ultimately, she relied on her 'gut feeling' about what was presented to her. When she visited two upper secondary schools' open-houses, Gloria differentiated between them. The first upper secondary school was missing some intangible characteristic while she described the second as being more attractive. She felt that she belonged at an upper secondary school with these characteristics and dis-identified from the first. When Gloria then came to the upper secondary school websites, she described taking what was presented at face value.

Gloria did not have substantial support from the school or family, leaving her to navigate this information independently. Gloria's foster parents were able to give her some vague guidance but did not have deeper discussions about her aspirations or goals. The school had little impact on Gloria's choice of upper secondary school, providing few strategies for how to parse information. The specific example of her being confused and overwhelmed at the upper secondary school fair, shows how guidance would have aided her. An absence of guidance grounded in the family unit or the organizational structure of the school left her with the information she needed to acquire from elsewhere.

Gloria's understanding of the upper secondary school choice process was largely influenced by information that came from school marketing. As previously discussed, she attended the school fair not having been given strategies by the school counselor to evaluate information. Previous research has shown that high need students, such as the newly arrived, require guidance to be able to effectively navigate these types of information sources (Gati & Asulin-Peretz, 2011; Holm, 2013; Johnsson & Lindgren, 2010; Sheikhi, 2013; Tah & Knutes-Nyqvist, 2021).

As previously mentioned, Gloria felt that she was not interacting with Swedish students at her school, her friends consisting of those that she had met in the preparatory class. This did not change when she transitioned into the subject classes, giving an example of a student who used a racial slur in her presence. When Gloria discussed her conversations with her peers in the preparatory class, it had the form of gossip. Gloria's peers related the quality of upper secondary schools to the types of students that attended them. This involved characterising the students as being 'good' or 'bad' which was aligned with

being Swedish or an immigrant respectively. Gloria felt that ‘bad students’ were to be avoided because of the damage they do to the school and the negative influence that they could have on her. Gloria gave an example of how the influence of what she had been told formed a symbolic boundary.

***Gloria:** The kids go in and destroy the school. They destroy the name of the school ...People do drugs most of the time there. It’s almost like a ghetto place.*

Gloria also saw immigrant students as negative influences, a perspective influenced by what she had heard from her peers. Gloria worried that the immigrant student’s delinquency would be distracting and dangerous.

***Gloria:** 50% of the kids there are from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, you know? It’s almost like 75% are immigrants and the other 25% are Swedish? Not even Swedish kind of related, Swedish, Finland, Denmark, those connected countries... I have friends that go there but I wouldn’t like to go to that school. Every kid that goes to that school is new in Sweden. I would say that that is a school for immigrants. I’m an immigrant but there is a way they see us as immigrants. That’s why I wouldn’t want to go there.*

When asked how she would feel going to the language introduction program at the local upper secondary school to improve her grades, Gloria responded that she would not be happy.

***Gloria:** It’s not the type of upper secondary school that I want to go to... It’s not bad but it doesn’t vibe with me. It’s almost 1500 kids in the school and I don’t deal with a lot of kids in school like that. I couldn’t concentrate. It would be too much. Already here in my school, it’s not a lot of kids but I feel like it’s too much so if I go to another school that has twice as much than we have here, I’d go crazy.*

Gloria conflated a high proportion of immigrants with drug use in the school. She wanted to distance herself from this type of behaviour and since it was attributed to immigrants, wanted to avoid the schools that are known to have a high proportion of these students. This is consistent with previous research that discusses students rejecting certain schools that are symbolically portraying as ‘bad schools’ that are full of immigrants (Kallstenius, 2010; S. Lund, 2020).

In regard to how these preferences formed, it is difficult to isolate any specific source or event. There are, however, a number of phenomena that suggest it can be attributed to the symbolic boundary of belonging. First, Gloria’s re-

cent arrival to Sweden left her without a deep understanding of how the education system works. Gloria attended the school fair and felt confused. Gloria met her counsellor many times and spoke of conversations that covered the process of choosing upper secondary schools, different academic programs and specific upper secondary schools. Many of the conversations involved making a pragmatic choice of the upper secondary schools available but Gloria was not enthusiastic about these options. She thought that the counsellor did not give her the tools to evaluate the information that she was given. They talked about superficial things but Gloria had questions that she wasn't able to answer herself. However, ultimately, she relied on her evaluations of the school food and how the atmosphere of the school made her feel. Coupled with the fact that Gloria's relationship with her foster family was not close enough to encourage meaningful guidance, this left her to navigate the process of choosing an upper secondary school independently.

As previous research has shown, the motivation of school marketing is to build a school identity, disseminated through different mediums (Gustrén, 2021). A school reputation can be built by utilizing symbolic values such as location or the ethnic composition of students (Kallstenius, 2010). Marketing messaging that explicitly shows positive values aligned with 'Swedishness', implicitly paints competing schools as having the opposite characteristics (Voyer, 2019). Gloria's responses suggest that she was heavily influenced by this type of upper secondary school marketing. Gloria's dismissal of certain types of upper secondary school students also has an ethnic element. She mentioned specific ethnicities when discussing problem schools and dis-identified from the perceived behaviour that she viewed these ethnicities as exhibiting. In doing this she drew ethnic boundaries, alluding to a perspective of 'us' and 'them'. Grounded in the view that these upper secondary schools were unacceptable, Gloria steered away from them. This strongly influenced which upper secondary schools she would eventually go to. Gloria would choose an independent school with low grade requirements, with the opinion that this option would be better than going to the language introduction program at her local upper secondary school.

The path of least resistance for Gloria would be to attend the local upper secondary school and was in fact what her counsellor had suggested that she do. Yet, as Gloria explained, she did not want to go to the upper secondary school that hosted the language introduction program. Gloria expanded on this reasoning, framing 'good' and 'bad schools' which are also connected to being 'Swedish' and 'immigrant' respectively. She clearly articulated that she felt that she belongs at the inner-city upper secondary schools, where she felt a sense of 'we-ness', forming a symbolic boundary. In many ways, Gloria felt isolated at her current school. She was friends with some other students in her preparatory class but lacked close relationships with her Swedish peers. The bonding capital that Gloria gained from her network of fellow preparatory class peers had limited utility, as they lacked information in the same way as

Gloria did. Her lack of bridging social capital deprived her of local knowledge and experience about the Swedish education system. As a contingent chooser, lacking substantial support from the school, family or peers, Gloria relied on what she viewed as objective information. She described the information in the school market as trustworthy and much of what she learned came from that source. Gloria demonstrated a trust in the information that she received directly from upper secondary schools or searching without acknowledging the sources of the information that she found. This strongly suggests the undue influence of marketing into Gloria's decision making.

Language as a means to bypass structural boundaries

Cultural capital plays a large role in students' interaction with the school choice process (Bourdieu, 1986; Reay, 2004b; Yoon, 2020). Language in particular gives a number of advantages that translate to opportunities during the upper secondary school choice process. Students who have quickly learned Swedish or have proficiency in English are able to move to subject classes earlier (Nilsson Folke, 2017; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). Additionally, the existence of specialized upper secondary school programs such as the International Baccalaureate, allow English speaking students to seek an alternate route to upper secondary school. However, this option is only available to students whose grades that were received before their arrival in Sweden are recognized.

In some ways, Ali's experiences resembled Gloria's but variations led him on his own individual path. Ali was from Iran and had been in Sweden for ten months. Farsi is his mother tongue but he felt very comfortable speaking in English, having studied it at an international school in Tehran. Ali felt that he was friendly with all of the students at his primary school but was closest friends with other English-speaking students in his preparatory class. Ali's missing Swedish grade barred him from applying to some upper secondary school programs, which was a point of frustration for him.

Ali: I study really hard because I need my Swedish as a second language grade from here. I need to get an E or higher. I can't get F because if I get an F, I will go to another school

For Ali, earning grades represented opportunity. He believed that his abilities in math were stronger than many of his peers which he attributed to a stronger focus on that subject in Iran. Ali described his school in Tehran as being high quality, demanding more of him and giving him a strong knowledge base. He had no doubt in his own ability, but felt that his grades were the only obstacle to him pursuing the academic path he desired in Sweden. The inability to earn grades was a point of frustration that Ali spoke of in great detail. Like other

students, he felt that his abilities were not recognized in the assessment process, leaving him with few options and disappointment.

Ali: If I get a grade, I'm going to go to normal upper secondary school. I'm going to go there for three years. If I can't, then my upper secondary school is going to be like four years.

Ali blamed his inability to acquire the required grades on an education system that was too rigid and he was frustrated by the narrowing of his options, which in his opinion was not fair. In one response, he pleaded directly to the interviewer:

Ali: In your PhD, can you write that if you go to upper secondary school and you don't reach your grade, you can study your upper secondary school but in Swedish or the grades you didn't reach, you could go to special class. You shouldn't waste one of your whole years for just one subject. It's not fair.

Like Gloria, Ali also wanted to avoid the language introduction program, which influenced his choice of upper secondary school. As Ali had not met his counsellor, they were not able to present the positive attributes of the language introduction program to him. In his ambitions for upper secondary school, Ali described the pull of inner-city schools which he viewed as more desirable.

Ali: When you go to Stockholm city, like in the centre of the city, everyone is OK with everyone.

Ali portrayed inner-city schools as multicultural places where he believed that he would feel welcome. Ali attributed this perspective to two sources above others, his educators and his peers. Ali's preparatory class teacher made considerable efforts to help Ali, largely outside of what is expected of her role. Ali's study tutor gave him guidance, sharing experiences and opinions about upper secondary schools that he was familiar with. Additionally, Ali spoke with his peers about upper secondary schools, who gave their opinion about the local upper secondary school. However, a third source, school marketing, had the potential for influencing Ali despite his insistence that it didn't influence his decision-making. He attended open-houses with a critical eye, viewing what was presented to him as only a cynical attempt at recruitment. At the same time, the language he used reinforced the reputations of upper secondary schools as portrayed in their marketing.

Like many of the students, Ali described schools outside his neighbourhood, particularly in the inner city, as being better in quality, prestigious and

hard to get into. He felt that by attending an upper secondary school with a good reputation, he would have more opportunities later in life.

Ali: Every person, they tell me that if you want to go to good university, you should just go to the schools that are in the city. They speak Swedish. They learn everything.

The exclusivity of the particular upper secondary school that Ali was interested in didn't dissuade him from continuing to aspire to attend it. In fact, the exclusivity was a draw for him. In Ali's description, this represented a symbolic boundary for which only the best students were accepted, and that with enrollment he would be rewarded by acceptance to a university that matched his ambitions.

As previously discussed, Ali began by following his father's advice about education but lost faith in his knowledge of the Swedish system. Ali mentioned the importance of his study tutor and preparatory class teacher who helped him in a variety of ways, namely their ability to speak Farsi with him.

Ali: If there is a person that is speaking your mother language, you are going to think that he or she is safe for you. Because of that I just have a question and I think, OK. Here is a really good idea. I go to her and just ask her. She then just explained to me.

The following responses by Ali illustrate how his interactions with peers contributed to his opinions of their suburban upper secondary school.

*Ali: Actually, I hear from my friends that there is a school here that is not really good and I really try my best to not go to the school. Any other school except that one but I don't have a specific goal of an upper secondary school that I want to go to. I don't want to go there.... They just told me that there aren't any good person that are there. I hear that there are student that smoke, do drugs, this stuff. It make the others a little bit stressed. It's not good. ... I've heard so many bad things about (**local upper secondary school**). It just takes the students for their money, nothing more. When you get there, you are not going to learn anything. There are days when there are no teachers at the school.*

Grounded in the view that these upper secondary schools are unacceptable, Ali began to steer away from them. When something is viewed as unacceptable, any alternative seems better. Thus, Ali described enrollment at these schools as an impossibility

Ali: There isn't any way I can go there.

In the end, Ali opted to enroll in an International Baccalaureate upper secondary school across the city from where he lived. This school operated outside of the conventional Swedish education system having its own process of application and enrollment but was still available through upper secondary school choice. His primary reasoning for doing so was that they did not require a Swedish grade and he would study in English, which he was proficient in. The opportunity for Ali to sidestep the language introduction program came from his possession of cultural capital that he was able to utilize to his advantage. His strong English ability allowed him to earn a number of grades in his current compulsory school, an opportunity not available to students who did not speak English. More importantly, however, his previous schooling at a recognized international school in Iran enabled him to apply with a record of the subject classes that he had passed. Ali's experience shows the benefit of cultural capital towards upper secondary school choice (Bourdieu, 1986). Furthermore, the support that Ali received from his preparatory class teacher allowed him to more easily navigate his current school and better understand the upper secondary school choice process. While the Swedish education system did not recognize his previous grades, the International Baccalaureate school did due to the expansive network of international schools that don't follow the same processes as the Swedish system.

In choosing an upper secondary school, one of Ali's main motivations was to avoid the language introduction program which he framed as being a failure, a waste of time and delaying his real education. While once reliant on his father for guidance, a realization that he would not be helpful drove Ali to search for information by himself. He did not find that guidance from the school counsellor who made no contact with Ali, who was not even aware that the role of counsellor existed. Two educators intervened to support Ali, both utilizing Farsi to discuss upper secondary school with him. His preparatory class teacher continued to guide Ali even after he transitioned from her class which was extra work for her. Ali's study tutor also advised him, drawing on his own interactions with upper secondary schools. However, this guidance was given outside the school's planning, potentially even being contradictory to it. When Ali's study tutor discussed the negative opinion of the local upper secondary school, it was likely in contrast with the school's guidance position. However, as the school counsellor did not reach out to Ali, he was not introduced to the potential benefits of the language introductory program.

Peers and the hot knowledge acquired from them had a large influence on Ali. He mainly socialized with students that he had met in his preparatory class. As a result, he lacked the bridging social capital that could give him a better understanding of the education system. Like his study tutor, Ali's peers criticized the students at the local upper secondary school, leading Ali to dis-identify from this upper secondary school. Finally, it is not clear the degree to which school marketing influenced Ali. From his perspective, he saw through

the marketing directed towards him. At the same time, he didn't identify marketing that he interacted with online. There is the potential that this further pushed him away from the local upper secondary school.

Structural and symbolic boundaries had a significant influence on Ali's horizon for action and preference of upper secondary school. Ali described a limited horizon for action, where the only options left to him in the conventional school choice route were undesirable. Given the opportunity to exit this path, Ali did so. As the structural boundary limited which options Ali had, the cultural capital that he possessed expanded them.

Aspects of Kostas's experience can be compared with that of Ali. Kostas came from Greece and also had strong English ability. Like Ali, Kostas was unable to earn a grade in Swedish in addition to some other subjects. Language was the main challenge for Kostas, for which his study tutor provided valuable support. However, the amount he received was not always sufficient and the effect was notable.

***Kostas:** I have a Greek teacher that comes two times every week. The first time she teaches Greek but the second time we have two hours with every Wednesday. She helps us with everything. She's been a real big help with me and my partners that are also Greek. Other than that, I don't get that much help. If teachers don't speak English, I don't get the end support.*

Kostas' limited time with his study tutor meant that he was alone the rest of the week. The result was that he would simply sit there, not understanding what the teacher said and copying down undecipherable Swedish that was written on the board. When he received worksheets, he asked for help but the teacher didn't have time to help him to the degree he needed. As a result, he had to try to understand the work on his own.

***Kostas:** It's all in Swedish. I have to do my own searches for the English versions.*

***BM:** Do you do that in class or after class?*

***Kostas:** After class but sometimes in class. Instead of doing extra homework, I just find everything in English.*

Kostas felt that the language support he received from his study tutor was very useful. In fact, he wanted more and he blamed the shortage for his challenges in his subject classes. In this case, Kostas lacked the support, thus, the social capital to meet the requirements of his subject classes. Like Ali, Kostas was destined for the language introduction program but unlike Ali, he wouldn't bypass this route. Kostas also wanted to attend an International Baccalaureate program where he could study in English. Yet, having attended a state school in Greece, Kostas' grades were not recognized in Sweden and he could not

transfer his grades as Ali did. Kostas didn't receive the support in Sweden that he needed and lacked the credentials of a high-status school in Greece. For these reasons, Kostas' strong English abilities were not enough for him to be able to attend the International Baccalaureate program, limited as he was by his low institutionalized cultural capital.

Siblings that take an advisory role

Generally, parents have a large influence on student academic success and their engagement with educational choosing (S. Forsberg, 2022; Reay, 2004a). However, in this study many of the parents lacked the cultural and social capital to be able to support the students with specific advice about the school choice process. This was largely grounded in their own status of being newly arrived (Bowe et al., 1994; F. Osman et al., 2021). The parents did not have their own school experiences in Sweden and could not talk about what they had learned themselves. Instead, the parents gave emotional support not tied to any specific upper secondary school paths.

Omar's perspective on both the local upper secondary school and the language introduction program differed from the other students. Omar was born in Sweden to Nigerian parents but moved to the UK at a young age with his mother while his father stayed behind to work. Omar had a number of older siblings who had each moved back to Sweden to attend upper secondary school and then university. Academics were a priority in the family and each of the siblings were studying or had begun working in high status fields. Omar, who could not speak Swedish, had returned to Sweden to enter the Swedish education system and study Swedish. In terms of upper secondary school advice, Omar described being influenced by his peers and school marketing but the majority of advice came from his family. Rather than his parents, Omar referred to the support from his siblings who had already been through the upper secondary school choice process.

In contrast to the previously mentioned students, Omar preferred the upper secondary school in his local neighbourhood, which he attributed to the advice of his siblings.

***Omar:** He says it's good because he can communicate with a lot of people and has a lot of friends. He doesn't feel left out in this upper secondary school. ... When you first start, you need some people to talk to.*

Omar described feeling safe with people he knows in an environment that he is familiar with. His siblings recommended the upper secondary school that they attended themselves. In contrast to the first students who dis-identified with their peers at the their local upper secondary, Omar predicted that he

would feel more at home there. Omar argued that starting upper secondary school surrounded by friends was important to feel comfortable.

As previously discussed, missing grades limited the options for students, which was also explained by Omar.

***Omar:** I need to improve my Swedish. That's the only thing holding me back*

Grades were a concern for Omar as well but he did not frame the situation as a zero-sum situation to the degree that other students did. The local upper secondary school had the language introduction program, so after earning a Swedish grade, he would be able to transition to a national program without the administrative burden of changing schools. However, losing time was a concern for Omar, who wished to progress through upper secondary school in a timely manner.

Omar brought an optimistic perspective to the coming year, which may have differed from the others because of the narrower distance between his aspirations and alternative plans.

***Omar:** It's actually doing good. I'm about to finish. I have like six weeks left. I think I'm going to do one year in the language introduction program and then I'm going to start my upper secondary school for three years. ... Everything is good. I have friends, the teachers are good with me, I'm good with them. Everything is good.*

Omar saw the value in attending the language introduction program before being able to study his program of interest. His understanding of this seems to be grounded in the guidance from his siblings and peers who explained the education system and could talk about their own navigation through upper secondary school. Yet, their familiarity was limited to their own experiences.

Students such as Omar can lack pragmatic guidance from their parents, receiving instead vague but unconditional emotional support (A. Osman et al., 2020). This leaves the students to navigate the choice process independently. An exception, highlighted by Omar's experiences, is when older siblings have already gone through the upper secondary school choice process themselves which can be influential for the younger siblings (Altmejd et al., 2021; Rosvall et al., 2018).

However, when these older siblings base their guidance on their own experiences, they rely on their own resources. Being newly arrived themselves, the older siblings will have faced boundaries in a similar way to those described throughout this study. Structural boundaries related to grades and neighbourhood may have limited what upper secondary schools they were able to choose and symbolic boundaries can have a strong influence on what students aspire

towards (Ambrose, 2020; Barmark & Lund, 2016; Fjellman, 2019). This creates the possibility that when older siblings are influential, their limited and segmented horizons for action can be replicated for the younger siblings.

The insidious influence of marketing

Students have different backgrounds and preparedness for succeeding in the Swedish education system (Bunar, 2010; Trondman & Bouakaz, 2021). However, because of their shared experience of being new to the country, they can have little understanding of the upper secondary school choice process. Across varying levels of cultural and social capital and guidance from schools and social networks, information directly from the upper secondary schools gives the appearance of neutrality. Considering students as contingent choosers, this type of information can be enticing, giving clear answers to students who are trying to make sense of a new and confusing choice (Ball et al., 2002). However, upper secondary schools have no incentive to provide information beyond what encourages enrollment (Jabbar, 2016; Voyer, 2019). For this reason, the prevalence of marketing as source of information has the potential for influencing newly arrived students' horizons for action

Fatemeh attended a high-status school before moving to Sweden. The advantages attained from this experience combined with other assets, gave her a better opportunity to choose upper secondary schools. Fatemeh has Iranian citizenship, was born in Dubai and has lived for the last ten years in Malaysia. At home she speaks Farsi, speaks English fluently as well as some French. She lived with her father, who had taken an IT job in Stockholm nine months earlier and did not speak Swedish. Fatemeh described her father as being supportive but lacking familiarity with the Swedish education system. As such, he lacked the cultural capital to be able to give her any sort of practical advice during the upper secondary school choice process. In Malaysia, Fatemeh attended an international school that she characterized as being challenging and prestigious. This primary school was on Fatemeh's mind when she reflected on her current feelings of ostracization.

Many of the other students at Fatemeh's school only spoke English at a basic level making it difficult for her to interact with them. When she did talk to the other students, it was mainly about schoolwork. As a result, Fatemeh had difficulty integrating with her peers at her current school, which she attributed to their long-established friendships.

***Fatemeh:** Here it's more like they grew up with each other from primary school and I never had that feeling. Ever since they were basically babies, they knew each other and I come here in their last years. So, it's kind of hard to get in.*

In the conversations that Fatemeh had with her peers about upper secondary school choice, she thought they were limited by gender stereotypes, speaking of subject areas that were more suited to girls than boys.

***Fatemeh:** They were talking about stereotypes. People who go to the aesthetics program, fashion and all that are mostly girls. There are no guys there.*

She predicted that discussion at the inner-city upper secondary schools would be more elevated and ultimately provide more opportunities. She dis-identified from her primary school peers, calling them too ‘local’, insinuating a lower-class status and lack of ambition. For Fatemeh, attending an inner-city upper secondary school was an escape from what she saw as unimpressive educational trajectories and what she thought of as a nightmare situation

***Fatemeh:** I think I'll freak out.*

Fatemeh completely rejected the local upper secondary school in exchange for one further away in central Stockholm. The upper secondary school that she chose was a recently established independent school. It is appropriate to categorize this upper secondary school as a school in the inner city, rather than an established high-status ‘inner-city’ school as described by Larsson and Hultqvist (2018). As previously mentioned, Fatemeh was the rare case among the interviewed students who had managed to acquire sufficient grades to be eligible for many of the upper secondary programs across the city. The school marketing at the school fair, and in particular from one independent upper secondary school, seems to have had considerable influence on Fatemeh and in the end, she selected this school. Her isolation from other students, lack of extensive support from the school or her father left her to navigate the process by herself. Lacking other information, it is unsurprising that she so strongly valued the information that came from the upper secondary schools.

Many, but not all, of the upper secondary schools in Stockholm were available for Fatemeh to choose from because of her high grades. In this sense, grades did not limit Fatemeh as a structural boundary. Fatemeh emphasized the importance of the school fair as a source of information, influencing her process of making a choice. When she encountered school marketing at the school fair, online and at the open-house, she could see herself as a part of these particular upper secondary schools. Fatemeh spoke about a sense of weness at a particular upper secondary school, relying entirely on its own portrayal of itself. Yet, the neutrality of this information can be questioned when considering the incentives that school leaders have (Voyer, 2019) and the accuracy in what is portrayed in marketing (Gewirtz et al., 1995). In a sense, a symbolic boundary formed and her aspiration to attend this school can be attributed to a feeling of belonging. At the same time, Fatemeh’s strong dis-

identification with the local upper secondary school drove her to choose away from it.

Yearning for what is out of reach

Despite newly arrived students' immediate upper secondary school aspirations, some find that they have limited opportunities to choose (Lindgren & Lundahl, 2023; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). Structural boundaries determine what upper secondary schools are available for students and are largely outside of the students control. Grades and residential neighbourhood made certain upper secondary schools difficult or impossible for the students to until they had completed the language introduction program (Barmark & Lund, 2016; Fjellman, 2019). Yet, students' ambitions have no such limitations and can be in conflict with what upper secondary school options they actually had. This could lead students to have negative feelings about their limited horizon for action and reject the upper secondary school that they were destined for in the coming year (Nilsson Folke, 2017; Rosvall, 2023a). Recognition that the students are choosing within an unfamiliar education system and delimitation of choices can be an effective means to supporting these types of students (Sheikhi, 2013; Sundelin, 2015).

Emmanuel's experience stands in stark contrast to Fatemeh's. Emmanuel is of Nigerian heritage and was born in Italy. He lived there until he was five and then moved back to Nigeria where he lived until he moved to Sweden three months prior to the first interview. He lived with his mother, a brother and sister while his father lived in Germany. His mother had completed primary school and had not studied further. Emmanuel struggled in school. He had problems focusing in class and after being able to start in physical education class, was removed because of clashes with other students. He spoke of confrontations with other students and teachers, none of whom he had established a close relationship with. In terms of isolation, the opportunity to meet students through his football club allowed Emmanuel to broaden his social network and practice his Swedish. At times, he spoke to these peers about upper secondary schools.

When Emmanuel spoke about upper secondary schools, he framed himself as acting independently, without the support of peers, family or educators at the school. Emmanuel put inner-city schools on a pedestal.

Emmanuel: *I think that rich people in Stockholm go to (upper secondary school) because it's in (inner-city neighbourhood)*

BM: *What does a good upper secondary school look like?*

Emmanuel: *It has modern facilities. It has a big football pitch in the front. It looks like an American high school. It looks very great.*

BM: *And that's what you like?*

Emmanuel: *Yeah. It looks good. I think the upper secondary school was built in the '90s. It has this solid structure.*

Emmanuel connected the school's location in a wealthy neighbourhood to the wealth of students who attended it and thus, a sign of status. Emmanuel also connected the architecture of an upper secondary school to its quality as an institution. The manner in which the upper secondary schools presented themselves had an influence on where Emmanuel aspired to go. Primarily, Emmanuel complained that he was unable to read the brochures he received in the mail. While Emmanuel criticized the accuracy of marketing claims, he also demonstrated poor strategies for navigating this information. In Emmanuel's case, school marketing made up the majority of his incoming information. Emmanuel and his mother often fought and she wanted him to make practical schooling decisions but he didn't really consider her opinion, following his own interests and opinions. Whether the school was not providing him sufficient support or his confrontational demeanor diminished its impact is immaterial; he wasn't getting the support he needed. This extended to his academic needs.

As was previously described, the counsellor had limited contact with Emmanuel, not explaining the Swedish education system to him. This absence of support extended to his academic needs.

Emmanuel: *when I was back in Nigeria, I was pretty good at math. I stopped for a long period of time, for months. When I came back it was kind of difficult to do some steps but I'm learning every day... Math is so difficult for me right now because I stopped math a year ago but I continue right now. I do math in Swedish and English and I have to translate some questions and it's pretty difficult.*

BM: *How long did you not do math?*

Emmanuel: *I stopped in Nigeria for about two months. I've stopped math for about 10 months. I continued a few months ago and it has been really difficult for me to come back*

BM: *Why?*

Emmanuel: *When you stop math, you don't practice it. You forget some steps. I forgot some formulas, some steps and arithmetic.*

Emmanuel believed that his extended time in the preparatory class had limited his abilities in other subjects. He complained that by studying exclusively

Swedish, he was forgetting knowledge in his other subjects. This made him feel behind and that he would have to relearn things that he had studied before and that his ability to do math work was waning from disuse. Migration and time in the preparatory class had meant that he had not practiced what he felt that he needed to do to keep sharp. Combining this with having to learn the subjects in Swedish made him feel that he is falling behind. Unfortunately, the study tutor support specifically aimed to address this need was insufficient. One hour a week didn't allow him the time to focus on this one subject.

Emmanuel did not have the grades required to go to any gymnasium program, let alone a competitive one in a high-status school so the inner-city schools felt out of reach. He would be going to the language introduction program which the counsellor had told him would take time.

Emmanuel: She said I have to learn Swedish for three years. Three damn years. ...When I get my grades, then I can choose a better gymnasium in Stockholm

He was frustrated by this, feeling that the language introduction program was a waste of time and at a school with dangerous students. Despite his preferences, Emmanuel was bound for the language introduction program at his local upper secondary school as he had not completed all of the courses required for upper secondary school. This is promoted as a positive route for the students, allowing them to prioritize their language learning and earn grades to apply to a national program in the Swedish language. In the Swedish education system, there is always a route to returning to or continuing study, with the language introduction program being the route to get them 'back on track'. However, Emmanuel was disappointed when he learned that he would have to go to the language introduction program.

Emmanuel framed his enrolment in the language introduction program as a failure and a waste of time. Emmanuel felt that he would have to repeat what he had done before and that time in the language introduction program would be better served by also including additional upper secondary courses. As was previously discussed, in many cases the counsellors did not meet the students, at times motivated by the students' lack of grades which barred them from applying to national programs. In these cases, the students would be able to transition to the language introduction program, a program shown to have real benefits for the students. However, the importance of 'buying-in' should be recognized. If the students see this route as a positive step in their education, their participation would likely be more productive. Furthermore, reluctant attendance would not be conducive to their language learning.

Emmanuel grounded his dismissal of the local upper secondary school as other students had similarly, connecting ethnicity with the quality of the students.

***Emmanuel:** You see in (local neighbourhood), immigrants live there. They buy a big house. They live there with the kids and their kids just grow wayward. (Local neighbourhood) is not a good place. It's literally one of the most dangerous places to live in Stockholm. They bombed the bus station. They bombed a car. They just shoot people. It's crazy.*

In this description Emmanuel portrayed a warzone. While there have been incidents of violence in the region Emmanuel describes, it not a neighbourhood typically described this way and is perhaps an exaggeration of the violence in the region. This information came from what peers had told him having a large effect on his preferences. Yet, in this response Emmanuel can be seen equating immigrants with violence.

Yet, he continued to hope for a chance to go to a school that fit his dreams. Emmanuel liked to travel around the city and look at upper secondary schools that he thought looked prestigious.

***Emmanuel:** But when I see a school, I can take a picture.*

***BM:** What do these pictures mean to you?*

***Emmanuel:** I'm going to go here one day is what I say.*

Here, Emmanuel describes an aspiration to attend one of these desirable schools that he believed were prestigious, yet practically, his strategies don't appear to be likely to succeed. Emmanuel had a clear need for support.

Emmanuel is a student who struggled in school and with his peers. Emmanuel did not have close relationships at his school, meaning that he lacked both bonding and bridging social capital. However, he had some friends on his football team, meaning that bridging social capital existed to a small degree. The ability to speak English that had given opportunity to students such as Ali and Fatemeh didn't help Emmanuel to a great degree. His work habits limited his opportunities to move into the subject classes. No educator had successfully built a relationship with Emmanuel, meaning that he lacked the teacher support through the upper secondary school choice process that would have acted as social capital. Even if support is available to students, it doesn't mean that students feel that it is accessible or the advice useful (Bengtsson, 2018; Delale-O'Connor, 2019). Illustrating this, Emmanuel's counsellor informed him about his coming transition to the language introduction program but did not, or was not able to, effectively discuss the benefits of this program. As a result, Emmanuel was angry and disappointed to be wasting his time not pursuing his interests.

Counselling and the local school

Guidance is an important part of the Swedish education system. The immediate benefit that students can receive from guidance is an understanding of and coaching through the upper secondary school choice process (Skolverket, 2022c). However, they can also learn about alternate routes toward their academic ambitions and the benefits of short-term diversions that can lead them towards their academic goals (Sheikhi, 2013). Considering Emmanuel's reaction to his limited horizon for action described in the previous section, guidance can aid students make sense of their limited horizons for action. Because of the structural boundary of neighbourhood segregation, many of the students were constrained to their local upper secondary school, which guidance could prepare them for,

Rafa's background can be juxtaposed with Omar's. Rafa was born in a refugee camp in Iran but identified as Afghan despite never having been to Afghanistan. He had only sporadic schooling and when school was available, it cost money to attend. It was necessary for Rafa to work as a car mechanic starting at a young age which involved difficult manual labour. He arrived in Sweden as an unaccompanied refugee and was living with foster parents. These were the second guardians he had been placed with during his time in Sweden, with whom he did not speak about upper secondary school in much detail. His friends were limited to others in the preparatory class and only those that spoke Dari and they did not speak deeply about the upcoming school choice. He had few years of schooling before Sweden and no idea what to expect in this education system. He did not have all of his grades so had limited options for the coming year. Rafa was also satisfied with his path, albeit to a different result. In contrast to some of the previously discussed students, Rafa only considered local upper secondary schools, dismissing further schools because of long travel times:

***Rafa:** It's better if it's closer because you can be in school on time. It is very hard to travel longer distances.*

In a previous section Rafa explained how he was guided by his counsellor. She met him a number of times, explaining the process of choosing an upper secondary school and guided him to particular upper secondary school programs that she thought were appropriate. The local upper secondary school was her main suggestion. In fact, Rafa's counsellor took partial control over his coming transition as he wasn't aware of his grades. She also gave him a list of programs in local upper secondary schools that she believed would be beneficial for Rafa. However, Rafa was not completely led by his counsellor. After a discussion with his counsellor, Rafa said that the car mechanic program interested him the most, selected from the counsellor's list of suggested programs. His time in a refugee camp seems to have influenced this interest.

Rafa: *I used to work with repairing cars in Iran. I was a student worker. I learned a lot of things there. They used to open cars. There was something wrong with it and they repaired engines.*

BM: *How old were you when you were working there?*

Rafa: *11 or 12 years old.*

BM: *What did you think of working there?*

Rafa: *It was a difficult job. We had to open engines. We had to lift very heavy car parts and it was difficult.*

BM: *So why are you interested in working with it still?*

Rafa: *I am more interested now because I know about it. I learned a lot about cars then and I was eleven or twelve years old. It was difficult for me then but now I'm older.*

Rafa's preference for a mechanic program exemplifies a challenge of the guidance field, balancing the empowerment of students to be independent and supporting them through the process in a way that maximizes their opportunities (Sundelin & Hertzberg, 2022). Rafa exemplifies a student with limited grades and knowledge about the Swedish education system. His experiences before Sweden were difficult, and his situation here was surely an improvement. He had a semi-stable home life but lacked a close enough relationship with his foster parents to communicate freely. His friends were limited to those who had similar experiences to himself and who did not speak about their educational aspirations or the process of school choice. Prior to contact with the counsellor, he had little understanding of what would happen in the coming years. Rafa's descriptions of the meetings that he had with the counsellor suggests that she took a pragmatic approach of pre-selecting a list of upper secondary school programs and making suggestions based on her own experience with the different upper secondary schools and students she has worked with. This counsellor both approached students and provided a 'drop-in' space which the students were encouraged visit. It is difficult to evaluate the quality of guidance but the importance of recognizing student needs and the difficulty of navigating the Swedish education system suggests that it was appropriate for Rafa. Lacking a social network or close-knit family nit, Rafa's counsellor was the main source of information about school choice. His particular history had a clear influence on Rafa's *horizon for action*, where his familiarity with the work of being a car mechanic led to his pragmatically rational decision to pursue this path.

Unlike Rafa, Reem did not meet her counsellor, thus, had not received any guidance about the upper secondary school choice process. When she spoke of her academic ambitions, she was vague and didn't know how to reach her professional goals. Additionally, she gave conflicting statements, demonstrating considerable confusion, suggesting a strong need for guidance. Reem was from Syria, spoke Arabic and had been in Sweden for one year. She lived with

her mother, father and two brothers near her current primary school. Her parents speak neither English or Swedish and she feels like she is steering her schooling independently. The family had moved apartments three times and this was Reem's second primary school. The challenges of using public transit dissuaded Reem from choosing an upper secondary school too far from her home.

***Reem:** I'm not thinking about lose all my life just taking the commuter train and with train problems, I don't like it. I like to be near the place I live... It's far away and it's going to be dark. Also as a girl, it's not easy hard for to go far away in the dark.*

For Reem, time was a factor but also travelling far from her neighbourhood meant a loss of safety. In this sense, her neighbourhood of residence acted as a structural boundary and she was limited to the upper secondary schools within a smaller radius.

In the interview, Reem initially said that she had not spoken to her friends about the transition to gymnasium and was unaware of what they were doing next year. This could be somewhat explained by the fact that Reem was rejecting her fellow Arabic speakers, wanting to interact more with Swedes. Later in the interview, Reem showed that her views on gymnasium had clearly been influenced by conversations with a peer.

***Reem:** I will go to the international school that is in (Inner-city neighbourhood). I have a friend who was in that school and she learned English. Now she is very good at English. That's why I want to go there so I can be as good as her in English.*

Initially, Reem described her peers as not influencing her opinion. She said that they did not discuss different schools at all and that she was unaware of what her peers were doing. Yet, students can have influences that are unaccounted for (Andersen & Hjortskov, 2019). Reem felt like she wasn't getting the support she needed to succeed.

***Reem:** Everything that I studied in Syria, I have already forget about it. I forgot it so now, I'm almost zero in all subjects. Just mathematics, I have some idea about it but my other subjects, no.*

Because of her flight from Syria and the resulting disrupted education, Reem felt that she had started to forget subject knowledge. As her school would not recognize her previous grades, she would have to demonstrate her knowledge again. This was a challenge both because of the time spent away from school but also because of the limited time she had left in year nine. As with other

students, Reem felt that her time in the preparatory class was limiting her ability to study other courses. Due to her lack of grades, she would continue to the upper secondary school that had the language introduction program. Structural boundaries left only a school that Reem was not enthusiastic about.

***Reem:** Here in (current neighbourhood) many students speak Arabic and Arabic is a language I already speak. I need to be somewhere else where there are not so much Arabic students so I can speak more Swedish to learn the language*

***BM:** Can't you find a school here with more Swedish students?*

***Reem** There is nothing*

Reem had a poor understanding of what upper secondary schools were available and which she would be able to go to. The absence of meeting a counselor had a direct effect. Reem had an abstract ambition but was confused and misinformed about how to get there. When she compared her previous primary school to the one she currently attended, she emphasized how little she was able to interact with Swedish students. She would be going to the language introduction program but was disappointed by this.

Diego also struggled with getting support. While he had had the opportunity to meet his counselor, an important meeting happened without the help of his study tutor. Thus, he did not have the language support that he needed to ask questions about his local upper secondary schools.

Diego is from El Salvador, speaks Spanish and has been in Sweden for two years. He lives with his mother and younger brother in a neighbourhood across the city from his primary school. Unstable housing conditions have forced his family to move a number of times but he wished to continue at his current school until he moves to upper secondary school. His current commute is nearly two hours, a challenge leading him to prioritize more local upper secondary schools and dismiss further ones because of the travel time. However, uncertainty with the family's apartment contract made it hard for him to plan his future.

***Diego:** The apartment contract that we have is not permanent. It's only a six months contract so it could be that we move to somewhere closer or somewhere further away so I don't know.*

Changing neighbourhoods requires a complex set of registration and bureaucratic processes. As Diego previously mentioned, he had a number of questions for his counsellor but without the help of his study tutor as an interpreter, he remained silent. He wished to transfer to an upper secondary closer to his home but without the knowledge of how to do so, he only 'went with the flow'. The expectation for him to advocate for himself contradicts his expectation that he will be taken care of.

The language introduction program was located at an upper secondary school in the students' local neighbourhood. The students' opinions of this local upper secondary school could vary but many rejected it, describing it as being low quality, an 'immigrant school' and having worse teachers. These views are in line with previous research around the discourse surrounding suburban upper secondary schools in this way (Kallstenius, 2010; Voyer, 2019). The time given and recognition of Rafa's needs by the guidance counsellor stands in contrast with Diego and Reem's experiences. Rafa's guidance counsellor described trying to balance leading Rafa and giving passive support. Reem did not speak to her counsellor but did speak to her peers to some degree. Diego faced a language barrier during guidance that, while technically given, was not appropriate for his needs. However, when language support from study tutors is taken away, newly arrived students can struggle in school (J. Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013; J. Rosén et al., 2019). Guidance that recognizes newly arrived students is important for newly arrived students who don't speak Swedish or lack an understanding of the upper secondary school choice process (Sundelin & Hertzberg, 2022). This kind of guidance can help students see the language introduction program as productive for their long-term educational career. Framing a structural boundary as leading to a different education path for the students and not as a life sentence gives the potential for them to have hope when a lack of information or misguided hot knowledge and marketing may do the opposite.

Boundaries and horizon for action

When the students began to pursue different academic paths, they encountered boundaries that could determine what upper secondary schools were available to them. The procedures and organization of the Swedish school system made choosing certain upper secondary schools difficult or impossible for some students. Grades and neighbourhood acted as structural boundaries for the students.

The grades that students were able to earn in their different subject classes represented a structural boundary during their upper secondary school choice process. The academic support that students received directly contributed to finishing courses and earning grades. Educators going beyond their roles to help students had a positive influence, which aligns with previous research (Phillippo & Stone, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Support by teachers who shared cultural backgrounds and languages with the students, or for the students who spoke English, was impactful. Within the school, Phillippo and Stone (2013) frame the relationships students have with their teachers as an important source of social capital that helps students navigate bureaucracy such as the school choice process and the structural boundary of grades.

Cultural capital gave the students another advantage which allowed them to circumvent the structural boundary of grades. Because of an ability to communicate with their teachers in English, some students could transition from the preparatory class to the subject classes, thus more easily being able to get grades in their subject classes. A strong educational background encouraged easier transition into the subject classes and completing the course requirements. However, having previously learned the subject material did not directly translate to course credits as the students still needed to complete the Swedish course assessments to earn eligibility for upper secondary school programs. The exception to this was a student who bypassed the conventional Swedish route by going to an International Baccalaureate school, made possible by his previous attendance at a prestigious international school. As newly arrived students, the recency of their migration made it more difficult to complete the required assessments to earn grades in each of their subject classes. Any disruption, such as that occurred because of the COVID pandemic affected this group proportionally more than other students at the school. When they had so few chances to earn grades, any disruption was detrimental. These experiences demonstrated the vulnerability of newly arrived students within the Swedish system and how precarious their situation is.

Due to the residential patterns of settlement in Stockholm, all of the students interviewed in this study lived in suburban areas outside of the city centre, somewhat isolated by public transit. The distribution of upper secondary schools is not uniform in the greater Stockholm area, a higher number being concentrated in the centre (Fjellman, 2019; H. Forsberg, 2015). There was at least one local municipal upper secondary school located near where each of the students lived and these were a common topic during the interviews. This made commuting time an issue for the students when comparing local and inner-city schools which to them felt like a structural boundary.

In terms of symbolic boundaries, the students aspired to schools where they felt like they would belong. The location of upper secondary schools was an important issue for the students. Many of the students discussed their preferences for inner-city upper secondary schools largely as a matter of reputation. These kinds of upper secondary schools position themselves based on their location, which can convey an image of higher status when in the inner city (Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018). These symbolic boundaries were accompanied by strong feelings of belonging that shaped the upper secondary schools that the students wished to attend.

In this study, the students reflected on how where they lived affected the schools they aspired to. This differed from the structural boundary of what upper secondary schools felt like practical options. The majority of students had strong opinions about their local municipal upper secondary school, describing their reasons for not wanting to attend them. They dismissed these

upper secondary school as being chaotic, having disruptive students and differentiating between Swedish and foreign students, similar to descriptions seen in previous research (Kallstenius, 2010; Voyer, 2019).

Many of the students' opinions in this regard were based on unverifiable rumours, filling the absence of other information, and marketing. Rather than informing students of alternatives, information from the grapevine often described the unacceptability of upper secondary schools and drew on stereotypes. These stereotypes were connected to ethnicity, framing other newly arrived students or Swedes of foreign background as either so dangerous to have around that the students would not be able to learn themselves or as unwelcoming and discriminating. The students strongly dis-identified with these characterizations, arguing that they were not true for themselves while simultaneously characterizing others around them as possessing these characteristics. For the majority of students, a dis-identification with the stereotype of suburban students turned their attention away from their local schools. They felt that their self-identity as strong students better matched the school environment represented in the reputations of inner-city upper secondary schools. A smaller group felt the opposite, that they didn't belong in inner-city school and that 'Swedes' wouldn't accept them. The two groups shared a relationship to symbolic boundaries related to 'we-ness'. In doing so, the students formed symbolic barriers about different upper secondary schools.

The upper secondary school preferences of these students represent a segmented horizon for action. Rather than considering a wider number of schools, they eliminated entire categorizations of upper secondary schools. However, the students' aspirations often did not match their opportunities. When the students were not able to choose their preferred school, these symbolic boundaries remained, framing how they approached their actual educational paths and their attitudes in their next level of schooling.

Chapter Ten: Concluding Discussion

Once a model of central control, the Swedish education system has dramatically shifted during recent decades to a decentralized model that is driven by school choice. The current education system possesses characteristics of previous reforms, simultaneously aiming to encourage social equivalence and individual opportunity (I. Andersson & Nilsson, 2000; Daun, 2003; Englund, 1994). The result is an education system that is at times in conflict with itself, where the rights of the individual outweigh the public good, demonstrated by student background continuing to predict educational outcomes and opportunity (Böhlmark et al., 2016; Holmlund, 2016; Jonsson & Rudolph, 2011; Söderström & Uusitalo, 2010). The responses of the twenty-two respondents in this study show a diverse group of newly arrived students. They came from different countries, had varying migration experiences and had been in Sweden for different lengths of time. They also had varying capacities for entering the Swedish education system, ranging from having attended prestigious international schools to having incomplete and low-quality schooling. In this sense, the students can be described as being super-diverse, having different countries of origin, migration experiences, residency statuses and educational backgrounds (Vertovec, 2007, 2019). These types of students are of particular interest because of the history of a higher proportion of marginality and lack of study of their experiences (Bunar, 2010b; Eide & Hjern, 2013; Hek, 2005a; Nilsson Folke, 2017; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Shakya et al., 2010; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013).

Following this logic, the diverse backgrounds of the newly arrived students would suggest a wide variety of education paths for these students. This would materialise as diverse, in both breadth and direction, horizons for action. As has been discussed, the students' educational opportunities were within bounded horizons for action. Largely related to the students' position of being newly arrived, subtle differences from established students existed, which can be attributed to three sources: a) the information that the students interacted with b) the support that the school gave as an institution and c) the capital that the individual students possessed.

The aim of this study was to explore the newly arrived students' interactions with the school-choice process in the Swedish education system. This was investigated through the concept of horizon for action and approached through the following research questions.

- 1) How are newly arrived students influenced by marketization in the upper secondary school choice process?
- 2) How do the possession and acquisition of cultural and social capital influence how newly arrived students interact with the process of choosing an upper secondary school?
- 3) How do boundaries influence newly arrived students' horizons for action?

The following sections are related to the previous analytical chapters which were organized within four distinct empirical themes. Each section can be connected to a particular research question but phenomena related to each can be found across the sections. The first section discusses the school market, responding to research question one. Section two and three discuss support and guidance from the school and the students' social networks, relating to research question two. Finally, the section relating to boundaries relates to research question three. To conclude, sections relating to methodological reflection and theoretical framework, implications for further research and implications for practice and policy are included.

The influence of school marketization

The newly arrived students in this study spoke of upper secondary schools that were active marketers, which used the school fair, open-houses, printed literature and online advertising to reach students. The students' descriptions of the marketing information matched that of previous research. Open-houses and the school fair provided a look inside the schools as they functioned. Information was communicated through trusted student ambassadors while the students were also given incentives for their enrolment (see also Arreman & Holm, 2011; Dahlstedt & Harling, 2017; Harling, 2019; Holm, 2013; Larsson, 2019). The students also used upper secondary school comparison websites and the anonymous reviews that users could post there. Physical and online marketing material portrayed the upper secondary schools as academic and welcoming institutions through vague descriptors, such as challenging environments and capable teachers (see also Johnsson & Lindgren, 2010; Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018; Lidström et al., 2014). These upper secondary schools' communication relied on existing discourse that juxtaposed their serious academics with competing upper secondary schools that were portrayed as more chaotic and less serious (see also Voyer, 2019; T. Wilson & Carlsen, 2016). When the students connected directly with the upper secondary schools, they

were provided with further information that further reinforced the image that the upper secondary schools wished to convey.

Many of the most actively marketed upper secondary schools that the students mentioned in this study were newly established independent schools. The students equated their central location with quality and prestige, thus, conflating inner-city schools and schools in the inner city. Newly established inner-city upper secondary schools rely on the reputation of older, elite municipal upper secondary schools that have more established reputations and are located in the inner city (Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018). This can be connected to the concept of low-and high-threshold upper secondary schools that have corresponding grade requirements for acceptance (S. Lund, 2015). The elite inner-city upper secondary schools were rarely mentioned by the students in this study, suggesting that any marketing that might have been done was not reaching these newly arrived students. Elite Stockholm schools rely on their established reputations and do not market themselves through the school fair or other marketing tools as other upper secondary schools must do (Larsson, 2019; Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018).³⁵ They have a ‘stable position’ because they receive sufficient applications and they are not incentivized to recruit more students (Larsson, 2019). As a result, the marketing that the newly arrived students interacted with was a subset of the upper secondary schools in Stockholm, rather than the complete number.

The marketing information that the newly arrived students in this study described was overwhelmingly positive. Gewirtz et al. (1995) suggest that a ‘glossification’ occurs when schools attempt to recruit students and in competitive settings, the schools’ best faces are shown. The newly arrived students in this study’s descriptions align with this argument and they listed the positive attributes presented to them through marketing, such as agreeable schedules, good food and a fun environment. This information relied on self-descriptions and recruitment efforts. Upper secondary schools promote quality through the presentation of pedagogical identities, which has encouraged homogenization when students seek belonging among their ‘own kind’ as a ‘mutual process whereby students and schools try to find each other’ (Dovemark & Holm, 2017; Holm & Dovemark, 2020, p. 34). Students generally prefer information coming from experience (Ball et al., 1996) and in this study, the students reacted positively to reviews. The user reviews replicate the direct information from hot knowledge as described by Ball and Vincent (1998) but are not ‘*socially embedded in networks and localities*’ (p 377), a characteristic of the grapevine. Alternatively, warm knowledge is relied on when there is personal connection between two individuals, despite a lack of social network, encouraged, in this case, when students identify with the representatives (Slack et al., 2014). The user reviews that the students in this study identified

³⁵ See also (Jabbar, 2016)

perpetuated this type of informal information without the social-embeddedness of a social network, thus resembling warm more than hot knowledge. As Slack et al. (2014) suggest, there is a risk that students do not question sources or their motivations because warm knowledge can be misleading for students. The same is true for this study, where the students describe reviews more as an illuminating presentation of experiences in the school than testimonials that should be evaluated or critiqued.

The order of schools in search results on Google or upper secondary school comparison websites can be tied to higher advertising spending rather than a ranking of school quality (Childs & Taylor, 2022a, 2022b; Curtis, 2020). As was the case for Ball et al., (2002), the newly arrived students in this study looked for a universal ranking of schools, which is non-existent. While the search results and listings of schools conveyed an informal ranking, the students were unaware of the monetization of search results on comparison websites. These comparison websites presented a catalogue of the upper secondary school programs in the Stockholm region and each of them had an air of authority because of their reputation, recommendations from a school representative or because the source itself gave the opportunity for comparison. Yet, when the newly arrived students discussed these results, they equated them with neutral rankings, reminiscent of cold knowledge. Viewing this information as cold knowledge has consequences for how it was used by the newly arrived students. Cold knowledge coming from sources that *'do not have a personal interest in the recipient of the information'* (Hutchings, 2005, p. 106), has little relation to upper secondary schools that are highly invested in recruiting students. When upper secondary schools control the information about themselves, they also control the image of themselves presented publicly. School leaders are motivated by enrolment (Voyer, 2019) so when creating marketing plans, they are benefited by portraying their school favourably. Each of the newly arrived students in this study explained that the information that helped them decide which school they preferred came directly from the school themselves.

The students in this study could demonstrate skepticism about the information that they were given but the multi-pronged approach of the market meant that many times the students could be reached another way. When it came to evaluating the marketing information, the students described not having the tools to navigate marketing and feeling overwhelmed. As much of the material was printed in Swedish, the students struggled to understand it, thus, dismissing some upper secondary schools for which they could not understand the literature (see also Delale-O'Connor, 2019). At other times, the students didn't recognize the challenge of navigating marketing, suggesting that it could be taken as fact without weighing it critically. As in Holm's (2013) study, the students in this study desired information about the different school paths but felt that they were lost, as if they were in a 'sea of options' (see also Gibbs, 2001; Knight, 2019). They were aware that marketing obscured the

realities of the different schools but ultimately, they had no alternative tools to evaluate the information.

From this study's newly arrived students' responses, it is clear that advertising and the schools' marketing strategies had a large effect on their preferences of upper secondary schools. Navigation of the school fair, comparison websites and visiting individual schools was challenging and at times pushed the newly arrived students towards options that benefited the schools more than the students. At times, the students felt overwhelmed, while at other times they made pragmatic choices without reflecting on the process. In agreement with Harling (2017), this can be attributed to the fact that the boundary between advertisement and information is not well defined making it difficult for students to separate the two. Many of these marketing strategies appeared to be successful from the schools' perspectives. Certain upper secondary schools were able to successfully attract the attention of students, reinforcing Voyer's (2019) findings about the importance of enrolment efforts for school leaders. However, the benefits are less clear from the students' perspective. Thus, the students' partial information led to an 'illusion of choice' (see also Harling, 2019). In this sense, the market may be working more in the interest of the upper secondary schools than the students.

This study's students' horizons for action were segmented and when they began to choose schools, the breadth of what they considered had been shaped by the schools with the most successful marketing. Generally, when making educational choices students make pragmatically rational decisions bounded by their horizons for action (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The pragmatic decisions that the students in this study made were shaped by what the upper secondary schools chose to present about themselves. This is, however, limited to what the students saw as possible. For the students, the overflow of information could be disorienting without the tools to navigate. Considering the differences in incentives between upper secondary schools in market school structures (see also Lubienski, 2007; van Zanten, 2019; Voyer, 2019) and students in general, there is potential for marketing to have an undue influence on their horizons for action. However, the possibility of influence for newly arrived students is of more concern. As demonstrated in the previous chapters discussing possession of capital, the newly arrived students in this study had a vulnerability (due to their low degree of capital, not ability) to navigate a complex upper secondary school choice system.

This study's results show the influence that upper secondary school marketing can have on newly arrived students. The students could identify marketing in many instances but in others, had difficulty differentiating it from what they would consider to be a neutral source. In both cases, their preferences seemed to be influenced by the information that upper secondary school gave them. This result suggests that marketing has a substantial influence on how newly arrived students engage with the school choice process.

The influence of guidance and support from the school

Guidance within the school influenced the students in this study during the upper secondary school choice process. Guidance has a supportive role within the Swedish education system's larger compensatory mission, where support is individualized to the student's specific needs and aspirations (S. Nilsson & Hertzberg, 2022; Skolverket, 2022c). Transition is built into the Swedish education system as a turning point where there is an opportunity for vocational specialization. In the narrow sense of guidance, the career guidance counsellor works directly with students to create practical strategies and prepare attainable career goals (Lindh, 1997).

The newly arrived students in this study described different interactions with their counsellors, reaffirming the varied nature of counselling that has been observed across Sweden (see also Hertzberg, 2017; Lundahl & Nilsson, 2009). Counsellors discussed the upper secondary school choice at different levels, explaining both how the education system works and coaching the students' specific ambitions. In this sense, a proactive approach was taken that recognized the students' specific ambitions related to the capital they possessed and structural boundaries that they faced (see also Launikari & Puukari, 2005; Lovén, 2015; Sheikhi, 2013; Sundelin, 2015). The use of additional resources, such as the school fair and comparison websites, were utilized to extend the support that the counsellors were able to provide (see also Gati & Asulin-Peretz, 2011; Ranerup, 2004). As many of the students lacked the grades to transition to national programs, they instead would be only eligible for the language introduction program. Certain students described seeing the benefit of this route. They attributed this optimistic view to trusting relationships with their counsellors who spoke of the opportunity to improve their grades, making them eligible for a national program after a few years (see also Baysu & de Valk, 2012; Rosvall, 2023a).

The students in this study also described a lack of guidance towards understanding the upper secondary choice process. In some cases, the students met their counsellor but their meetings did not always help them understand the school choice process. When the language needs of one student were not considered, he could not ask his counsellor questions (see also Dávila, 2018; Jahanmahan & Trondman, 2019; Sundelin & Hertzberg, 2022). Counsellors pointed their students toward the school fair and comparison websites but the resources did not seem useful and were hard to navigate without the proper guidance (see also Johnsson & Lindgren, 2010; Tah & Knutes-Nyqvist, 2021). Meetings to register the student in the language introduction program without any sort of guidance provided only an administrative function. As a result, these students described the language introduction program as a waste of time and suggested that their attendance represented failure (see also Lindgren &

Lundahl, 2010; Nilsson Folke, 2017; Rosvall, 2023a; Sharif, 2017; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013).

However, for a large group of students guidance meetings did not occur at all. In fact, the number of students in this study who did not meet their guidance counsellors was a surprising result. Consequently, these students did not receive any information about the school choice process formally from the school. This result should be compared to the importance given to counselling for newly arrived students in policy documents and previous research (Myslek & Zelmerlöw, 2022; Olofsson et al., 2017; Riksdagen, 2018; Skolverket, 2022c; Sundelin & Hertzberg, 2022). Instead, the students in this study had to rely entirely on their own strategies and resources. As a consequence, these students described confusion about how their grades could lead to different academic programs, vague professional ambitions and a rejection of the language introduction program as being acceptable.

The supplementary interviews in this study and previous research shed some light on why counsellors did not meet their students. The educators' interviews revealed counsellors who believed that meeting the newly arrived students was not a productive use of their time, choosing to focus instead on those they saw as more active choosers. Others, described schools where the counsellor tried to maximize their time available, a consequence of working with limited resources. However, the use of open 'drop-in' times was ineffective for students who were unaware of the option or did not see its benefit (see also Bengtsson, 2018; Delale-O'Connor, 2019; Thomsen, 2014).

The educators interviewed in this study responded to what they perceived as a need for additional support in the newly arrived students (see also Lindh, 1997). This approach could surpass what could be expected in these roles but the line is difficult to draw. The students in this study described their preparatory class teachers and study tutors acting as a cultural bridge who helped them at school (see also Dávila, 2018; Orellana, 2009; F. Osman et al., 2020). These educators drew on their own language and cultural resources to connect with students and explain the choice process in a way that they understood (see also Cerna et al., 2019; A. Osman & Månsson, 2015). This involved work outside their normal duties, taking considerable extra time, which had a positive effect on the students (see also Hargreaves, 1994; Kelchtermans et al., 2009; F. Osman et al., 2020). There were even some educators who helped parents with the bureaucracy of social services in the belief that it would contribute to a stable homelife. The educators described these efforts as something they felt obligated to do because of their observations of the students not getting the help they needed in the school (see also Hargreaves, 1994; Sundelin & Lundahl, 2023). Their support was possible because of the trust that was built in their relationships (see also F. Osman et al., 2020; Slack et al., 2014). The educators' support often involved giving practical advice by explaining how this study's students' grades would lead to specific options or recom-

mending individual upper secondary schools. The students relinquished control when they felt that their educator would make better decisions and suggest specific upper secondary schools. One student gave an example of when trust was missing showing a poor understanding of the process of upper secondary school choice and a negative opinion of the language introduction program.

The educators interviewed in this study recognized that their students did not understand the school choice process and reported that they felt obligated to work to overcome that. The challenges they described were not always those that can be confined to the school and included family challenges with migration status or social care. This demonstrates an appreciation that education is only a part of the students' lives and outside influences strongly impact how well they are able to do in school. There is little previous research on the phenomena that teachers go beyond their teaching responsibilities to support students who they see as being underserved. However, the Swedish School Inspectorate (2014) has found evidence of teachers going beyond their normal duties to support newly arrived students. These professionals had knowledge about the types of challenges newly arrived students face and felt that the current education system structure was insufficiently addressing their students' needs. Thus, this situation necessitated interventions to give students a better chance at finishing school and following their aspirations. Teachers, who feel compelled to help students when they see them needing more support, have a considerable impact, which acts as a source of social capital (Cuconato et al., 2015; A. Osman et al., 2020; Phillippo & Stone, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Yet, considering the increased workload and stress of the teaching profession (Arvidsson et al., 2019; Boström et al., 2019; Näring et al., 2012), the fact that the livelihood of vulnerable students relies entirely on educators' goodwill and willingness to do extra work is unsustainable.

Generally, study tutors have a large presence in the school life of newly arrived students which creates the potential for them having substantial influence over the choice decisions that these newly arrived students make (Dávila, 2018). The familiarity that study tutors have with the newly arrived students' culture and mother tongue creates a bridge that can be an opportunity for better recognition of newly arrived experiences and academic aspirations (Dávila, 2018; J. Rosén et al., 2019). Despite their best intentions, the low level of advanced degrees among study tutors and the sparse opportunities for collaboration with school staff risks their efforts being in conflict with what is being recommended by counsellors or what is best for the students (Avery, 2017; Dávila, 2018; Kakos, 2022; Reath Warren, 2016; Skolverket, 2020a). For this reason, their influence in the school should be given serious consideration.

What can be seen in this study's findings is that guidance (both formally from the counsellors and informally from the educators) can have a substantial effect on the students' horizons for action which are grounded in the particular needs affiliated with being newly arrived. Yet, guidance was not necessarily

given according to need, which can be seen more broadly in this study's findings. Along with their parents, being new to the country meant that the students had little familiarity with the school choice process. Language was a challenge when they could not articulate questions to the counsellor. Many of the students lacked the opportunities to build bridging social capital. Thus, they relied instead on bonding social capital. As a consequence, the information that they received came largely from their peers in the same situation as them. The students demonstrated a need to be guided through the upper secondary school choice process and the information coming from marketing more actively (see also Gati & Asulin-Peretz, 2011; Johnsson & Lindgren, 2010; Tah & Knutes-Nyqvist, 2021).

This is a challenge for career guidance counselors that feel their roles are to be neutral arbiters of information (Sundelin & Hertzberg, 2022). Internal conflict between these two role responsibilities can be challenging for counsellors who require a great deal of training, experience and cultural familiarity with their students in order to be effective (Hertzberg, 2017; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Turtiainen, 2012). Sheikhi (2013) believes that in this way, counsellors are acting too cautiously and suggests that to be effective, career guidance need to take a more proactive approach. In some situations, providing suggestions and limited choices based on the counsellors' own experience can be more appropriate than trying to guide the newly arrived students to their own independent decision. This matches with research by Sundelin (2015, 2017) where counsellors described newly arrived students that they work with wanting specific, practical advice about the choice process and that the simplification of the process to binary options was necessary. The educators in this study also had positive contributions that gave the students a deeper understanding of the school choice process, likely broadening their horizons for action to include different education paths and options. However, as the support was only given sporadically, it does not currently represent an approach that can be replicated nationally.

The results of this study show newly arrived students that need additional support to build up a general understanding of the choice process and address the contrast between practical and impractical aspirations and strategies. Counsellors play an important role and their absence for many of these students was notable. The career guidance that the students received fell into two groups, students that met their counsellor and those that did not. This points to a mismatch between the written policy and local practice and how guidance varies across schools (see also S. Nilsson & Hertzberg, 2022). There was a discrepancy that existed for many of the students in this study; they need more support but they get less.

The influence of the social sphere

The people around the newly arrived students in this study had a large influence on their upper secondary school choice process. The advice and support from parents can be strong predictor of how children conduct school choice and succeed in school (Beach & Dovemark, 2009; Böhlmark et al., 2016; S. Forsberg, 2022; Holmlund, 2016; Reay, 2004a; Reay & Ball, 1998; von Otter & Stenberg, 2015). Furthermore, educational choosers value information from different sources unequally, with a preference for peers within social networks (Ball, Reay, et al., 2002; Ball & Vincent, 1998).

For the students in this study, their parents' advice was not noticeably different despite there being different education levels among the parents. All of the parents encouraged the students to work hard, avoid bad influences and follow their passions (see also Coleman, 1988; A. Osman et al., 2020; A. Osman & Månsson, 2015). This advice was given in a general sense at times not relevant to the specific structure of the Swedish education system. The similarity of the interactions across all of the students and their parents suggests that advice that the students received was much the same and, in this study, generally vague but supportive. Yet in terms of specific guidance relating to the bureaucratic process and discussion of specific upper secondary schools, the students felt that their parents had little to contribute. In explanation, the students pointed to their family's recent arrival and small social networks as limiting their parents understanding of the local education system. The understanding of and familiarity with the education system in their home country was not relevant in Sweden, a reflection on the contextual nature of cultural capital. When the student had older siblings, they filled the parent role by giving practical advice about the Swedish education system and sharing their own experiences at the upper secondary school that they had chosen (see also Altmejd et al., 2021; Rosvall et al., 2018). In the two cases with unaccompanied children, they relied on their foster parents for guidance but in both cases insufficient trust had been built for the students to speak about their personal ambitions (see also Jahanmahan & Bunar, 2018).

Family hierarchies and the shared home environment are relevant to how students interpret their parents' advice, but the results of this study were surprising considering previous research on this topic. Parents' resources have been shown to determine the degree that they engage with school (Bowe et al., 1994; Pananaki, 2021). Additionally, the presence of strong relationships between parents and teachers has been shown to encourage success in schooling. (Cuconato et al., 2015; Jonsson & Erikson, 2000; A. Osman et al., 2020; Pananaki, 2021). Neither of these phenomena were directly observed in this study. The student responses strongly suggested that the students were navigating their schooling by themselves which implies that their parents were not actively connecting with the school. Considering that parents' backgrounds

are normally seen as predictor of student opportunity and academic trajectory (Böhlmark et al., 2016; Holmlund, 2016; Lüdemann & Schwerdt, 2013; Tan et al., 2019; von Otter & Stenberg, 2015), the diverse educational backgrounds of the parents of the newly arrived students in this study would suggest a wide variety of advice and support.

The recent migration of the parents discussed in this study can explain their lack of knowledge more than an evaluation of their cultural capital does. The importance of this finding can be understood when framing these responses in the context of the horizon for action. Familiarity with the local language, characteristics of the local education system, such as how the choice process works and knowledge of individual schools, act as cultural capital that inform and aid the school choice process (Reay, 2004a; Yoon, 2020). Furthermore, recent migration gives little opportunity to establish a broad social network, limiting the amount of information that can be provided (Ball, Reay, et al., 2002). Considering this, it is a fair estimation that the newly arrived parents mentioned in this study have information from the *grapevine* and so are not privy to knowledge about the local school market or equipped to give specific guidance to their children. Another possible explanation is that parents see the teachers as the experts of their children's education (see also A. Osman & Månsson, 2015).

The students in this study questioned the utility of their parents' advice or the parents simply did not give advice in the first place. Conversations about the students' academic trajectories were shallow and lacked practical advice for navigating school choice. The parents were able to provide *ideational support* relating to work ethic and resilience but as a source of *hot knowledge* towards choosing an upper secondary school, the parents were dismissed by the students in this study. The few examples of foster parents show the opposite trend; they had local knowledge of the school choice process but little ideational support. In many ways, these findings indicate that the students are navigating the school choice process without a high level of support from their parents. Within their horizons for action, a pragmatic decision was made from the information possessed by the students. From the parents, a limited amount of information and ideational support were available. However, the older siblings were able to guide the students in this study in ways that their parents could not. The siblings had their own experiences and brought knowledge to the table. Yet their guidance was limited to their own horizons for actions. In this way, the siblings 'paved the way' for the students in this study to follow in their footsteps (see also Altmejd et al., 2021; Rosvall et al., 2018).

Beyond the family unit, the students in this study interacted with peers that shared their own knowledge about and experiences with the upper secondary school choice process. Friendship was important to the newly arrived students who described how their discussions with friends influenced their engagement with upper secondary school choice (see also Andersen & Hjortskov, 2019; Ball, Reay, et al., 2002; Ball & Vincent, 1998). The students spent much of

their time in the preparatory class where they built strong bonds with their fellow newly arrived students and were physically separated from the rest of the school (see also Björnberg, 2011; Nilsson Folke, 2017; Skowronski, 2013). The students in the preparatory class were diverse, coming from different countries and speaking different languages. However, their language abilities determined how much they could interact with the other preparatory class students. Those that had more common mother tongues or spoke English had more opportunities to interact with the other preparatory class students. The students with sufficient Swedish or who could speak English could transition to subject classes. However, this resulted in students feeling that they had left their friends behind (see also Lindgren & Lundahl, 2023; J. Nilsson & Axelson, 2013). In fact, loneliness and isolation were repeatedly mentioned and their experiences were attributed to the preparatory class's separation from the rest of the school and an inability to socialize with the Swedish students (see also Candappa, 2000; Hek, 2005b; J. Nilsson & Bunar, 2016; Obondo et al., 2016; Rutter, 2006; Sharif, 2017). In their discussions about the coming year, the students spoke of the types of friends they wished to have and those they wanted to avoid. In some cases, the students were part of a local football club, which gave them the opportunity to improve their Swedish and build a broader and more diverse social network than they could in the school setting (see also Hertting & Karlefors, 2013, 2016; Putnam, 2000).

For many of these students in this study, bridging capital was nearly non-existent and bonding capital was limited by language barriers. This aligns with the findings of Skowronski (2013), stating that newly arrived students have a greater opportunity to make friends in the introduction class than elsewhere where they couldn't communicate or feel like they belong. However, the findings in this study differ from Skowronski (2013), in that in many cases language was a barrier to the students making strong friendships in the preparatory class. The preparatory class was comprised of students from different countries who had different backgrounds and spoke different languages. In fact, the only thing that some of the students might have shared was their status of being newly arrived. Yet, the students who knew English had more opportunities. English allowed them to cross the preparatory class boundary to join additional classes, therefore improving their opportunity to meet new peers. As a result, the potential for them to build a large and diverse network of peers was higher than the students who remained in the preparatory class. For these students, English was a valuable asset for building bridging social capital, contributing to the amount of diverse information they could receive.

For the newly arrived students in this study, embodied cultural capital influenced the social capital that they had. Stronger language abilities enabled the students to speak to more of their peers and gave them the opportunity to transition to subject classes, where more social interactions were possible. At one extreme, the students with low language abilities could not speak to many

students other than those in their preparatory class, and often there were language barriers even there. The students who could speak English and were quickly learning Swedish could speak with more students in the preparatory class and have other opportunities. Those with low language abilities had the opportunity to build their bonding social capital but this was higher when they could effectively communicate with the other preparatory class students. The students in this study who had higher language abilities had more opportunities to socialize, as bonding social capital within the preparatory class and as bridging social capital among those in the subject class. Finally, being part of a leisure club gave opportunities to build bridging social capital for any student who participated. The resulting effect on the grapevine relates to who is in their social networks and the breadth of information that they receive.

These findings point to a gap in the students' informal support network. Previous research demonstrates the large role that parents can play on the success students have in their school careers (Ball, 2003; Beach & Dovemark, 2009). The reverse is seen in this study; the students' parents did not have a large influence on their upper secondary school choice decisions. Similar to that presented by Osman and Månsson (2015), the students in this study did not see their parents as a useful source of information. However, unlike in that study, in this case the students had been in the country for less than four years. They had not yet accumulated their own understanding of the education system or established their own social networks. In this study, there was not an abundance of deep bonds among the newly arrived students who shared a lack of familiarity with the Swedish education system. This has a clear consequence of horizon for action. Combined with the lack of information coming from parents, peers were also not a source that could provide an abundance of information. This left the students with little information from the informal sources of the grapevine and their parents. The students did not receive information about the different types of study programs, specific schools or the administrative process about choosing to any great degree from their social network. When the students received information from their siblings or peers, it was often limited to their own experiences, encouraging the reproduction of the same challenges that their siblings or peers experienced. If in fact, information support and guidance is not coming from the family-unit or peer network, not only is significant support needed from the education system but also intervention to address an acute deficiency in preparedness.

The influence of boundaries

In the upper secondary school choice process, structural conditions and preferences act as boundaries that impact which paths can and are chosen (Barmark & Lund, 2016; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). In this study, structural boundaries could limit which upper secondary schools were available to the newly

arrived students while symbolic boundaries shaped how feelings of belonging could influence the upper secondary schools they aspired towards. However, the students' interactions with these boundaries were influenced by cultural and social capital, support from various individuals and information from people in their lives and from marketing. Consequently, the students' interactions with boundaries influenced their process of choosing an upper secondary school.

Structural boundaries appeared to have had a limiting effect on the newly arrived students' horizons for action in this study. The time that the students had spent in Sweden was a limiting factor for the students. Some students had only been in Sweden for a few months, and none more than four years. This left little time to demonstrate proficiency in the different subject classes, especially because they had to first transition from the preparatory class where many students felt as if they were in a waiting room (See also Çelikaksoy & Wadensjö, 2019; A. Lund & Trondman, 2017; Nilsson Folke, 2017; Sharif, 2017; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). However, the students' ability to earn grades in their subjects were most grounded in their embodied cultural capital, in particular language. Language enabled students to earn grades in different ways. Learning Swedish was the conventional route for the students. If they reached proficiency, they could then enter subject classes leading to a national program at the upper secondary school level. If they did not earn the grades, they could either continue on to the introductory program or adult education. English, as a *lingua franca*, allowed students to speak with teachers and, thus, skip ahead to enter the subject classes before they could understand Swedish. In fact, in some cases, English students who had not yet passed Swedish opted to go to an English-speaking International Baccalaureate upper secondary school rather than one in Swedish. This option was only available to the students who spoke English and had their grades recognized from high-status private schools in their home countries.

In this study, location also acted as a structural boundary for the newly arrived students. All of the students lived in suburbs outside the city centre (See also R. Andersson & Kährik, 2016; Kadarik, 2019; Malmberg & Clark, 2020; Tyrcha, 2020; Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016). These neighbourhoods had a limited number of upper secondary schools, a higher concentration being closer to the city centre, along transportation hubs (Fjellman, 2019; H. Forsberg, 2015, 2018; Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018). Students discussed commuting to different neighbourhoods as a strategy for finding better or higher status upper secondary schools (See also Fjellman, 2019; H. Forsberg, 2018; D. Wilson & Bridge, 2019). However, students also described long commutes as being too burdensome, not wanting to spend excessive time on public transit. The preparatory class's location in the school could also act as a structural boundary for the students. As previously discussed, school organization could vary across the different schools (see also J. Nilsson & Bunar, 2016; Obondo et al., 2016). Preparatory classes could be isolated from the rest of the

school, giving students in this study few opportunities to interaction with Swedish students. In these cases, location within the school and in the city of Stockholm acted as structural boundaries, limiting their horizon for action.

These structural boundaries existed at a systemic level and are largely out of the control of students in this study. The support available for students and the organization of the preparatory class are decisions made at the municipal or school level (Erixon Arreman & Dovemark, 2018; Lundahl, 2002b). The fact that newly arrived students begin with different preparedness for schooling cannot be changed but it can be reacted to. In this study, preparedness is most clearly an issue in relation to students' language abilities, with those with more embodied cultural capital more easily able to earn grades. Support that recognized the students' language ability had a substantial effect but relied on educators to work beyond their normal job responsibilities. However, the benefit of focusing entirely on Swedish in the language introductory program should not be dismissed. This gives importance to counselling that recognizes the particular needs of newly arrived students as language learners. Guidance that could convince students of the value of the language introduction program allowed students to find value in the program, encouraging them to buy-in. Finally, addressing neighbourhood segregation is outside of the purview of this study but its effect on student opportunity to choose upper secondary schools deserves further study (see also Barmark & Lund, 2016; Fjellman, 2019; Holm, 2013).

The effect of symbolic boundaries for the students in this study was more subtle than that of structural boundaries but had a significant influence on what upper secondary schools the students aspired to attend and eventually choose. The students described different upper secondary schools as destinations more than they referred to their academic programs (see also Lidström et al., 2014; S. Lund, 2015). When the students in this study spoke of upper secondary schools, they were framed in terms of the student body. Desirable schools were described as having hardworking and friendly students who were easy to socialize with, the type of peers that the newly arrived students in this study wanted to associate with. The students in this study described a feeling of belonging or 'we-ness' with their image of these student bodies that had two forms (see also Bunar & Kallstenius, 2007; Holm & Dovemark, 2020; S. Lund, 2015). First, the students described an aspiration for fitting in and being socially accepted at high status and quality inner-city schools. These student bodies were portrayed as being predominantly Swedish. When the students spoke of Swedish students, they insinuated a difference between those of Swedish background and those of foreign background. The quality of these upper secondary schools in the inner city were also discussed in a more abstract sense, with modern facilities and an accepting multicultural environment being desirable (see also H. Forsberg & Palme, 2019). However, in a few instances, the newly students preferred student bodies that they saw as similar to themselves, wanting to be around a familiar language and culture (see also

Barmark & Lund, 2016; Bunar & Kallstenius, 2007; Dovemark & Holm, 2017, p. 17; Jansson et al., 2020). For these students, the proximity of the local upper secondary school was also an advantage.

The students in this study also described upper secondary schools located in their local suburb neighbourhoods that they did not want to associate with (see also Krivonos, 2019; Lamont, 1992; Lundström, 2006; Morris-Roberts, 2002; Skeggs, 2002). These student bodies were portrayed as being disruptive, disrespectful and involved with drugs and violence. The students conflated these student bodies with being overly foreign but did not differentiate between those that were newly arrived and those of foreign background who were born in Sweden. Students in this study strongly dis-identified with these student bodies, thus, rejecting these upper secondary schools as viable paths. As a result, many of the students made efforts to choose away from their local upper secondary school, enrolling at low-threshold inner-city schools or alternative paths, such as the international baccalaureate if they had the option. However, other students had no option other than to attend the language introduction program but due to their negative opinion of it were angry or frustrated.

Discussions about upper secondary school choice between peers familiarized students with different perceptions of the schools, in the form of ‘horror stories’ or endorsements but also prioritized school characteristics such as break times or school food rather than academics (see also Reay & Ball, 1998; Reay & Lucey, 2000, 2003). In this way, the impact of peers can be both positive and negative when considering the best path for students. Bonding social capital is likely more linked to the predominance of the students’ mother tongues. Arabic for example, is spoken by many newly arrived students and the likelihood is that there would be multiple Arabic speakers in a class is high. A language such as Kurdish on the other hand, is less prevalent and it is less likely that a student who speaks the same language is in their preparatory class. This however, is not the whole story. Ethnic groups are not spread uniformly across the country or urban settings. In Stockholm, different groups are residentially clustered. This increases the likelihood that students can congregate and build strong social networks with high bonding social capital. However, it also means that the opportunities for building a more diverse social network, including Swedes, is lower. The effect is that the students relied more on bonding social capital that encouraged the same upper secondary schools.

The previously discussed influence of marketing suggests a worrying trend within the Swedish education system but combined with previous research (Voyer, 2019) suggests that schools prioritize attracting the ‘right kind’ of students, a strategy that implies an exclusion of the ‘wrong type’ of student. The prevalence of upper secondary schools marketing means that in subtle ways, they can discriminate, not through enrolment but by who they make feel as if they belong. As a result, newly arrived students may have significantly fewer

upper secondary schools that they view as acceptable to attend. This points to the high potential for cultural and social capital to influence what students know about their school choice options, forming of preferences for upper secondary schools and ultimately, which choice paths they pursue. However, a result of this study is that the students were ineffective at evaluating sources of information, at times attributing neutral qualities to strongly persuasive sources of information. This is most pronounced with the relationship between the students and information from the school market.

When the students lacked social capital and the resulting information from the grapevine, there was a higher need for institutional intervention. This corresponds with previous research (Sharif, 2017; Sheikhi, 2013; Varjo et al., 2020) that argues that newly arrived students are in a higher need of support, most effective when given proactively. In the case of students in this study, they required more support to understand a new education system, counteract language barriers and navigate a choice process within which they had limited choices. Counsellors had the opportunity to react to this but as has been shown, in a high number of cases, this did not occur. This is a missed opportunity for addressing student needs for specific practical advice for upper secondary school choice or potential future career alternatives (Sundelin, 2015, 2017; Sundelin & Hertzberg, 2022).

Reflections on method and theoretical framework

The methodological approach used in this study allowed for a normally unseen group of students to share their experiences during the upper secondary school choice process from their particular vantage point. The semi-structured interviews were not easily attained because of the language barrier of working with newly arrived students, making this study a unique contribution. The use of interpreters allowed the students to speak more freely and with a depth that would not have been possible if they had been limited to only Swedish and English. It is acknowledged that the use of interpreters obscured some details of the students' responses. Additionally, it may have been possible to explore the students' motivations for choosing if they could have spoken to the interviewer without a filter. However, if the alternative is not speaking to these students, then this is the better of the two. As previous research (Björk Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2013; Farooq & Fear, 2003; Kosny et al., 2014) has shown, these types of choices must be made in research, the benefits having the potential to outweigh the costs. In this case, the benefit was access, namely the ability to reach a group that is not usually reached.

The students' accessibility and the study's time constraints shaped the timeframe for the students' interviews. Consequently, the student interviews bookended their final year of compulsory school. Throughout this study, it is

repeatedly mentioned that the students had experiences previous to their arrival in Sweden that shaped their education experiences in Sweden. As well as this, the students will go on to pursue professional and personal aspirations after they make a choice of upper secondary school. Yet, these time periods are outside of the purview of this study. This is mitigated by looking to previous research for comparable experiences before (Dryden-Peterson, 2016) and after (Curtis, 2020; A. Osman et al., 2020). Given the resources, a longitudinal study of the student experiences would contribute to a better understanding of the contributors to and consequences of capital and boundaries in the upper secondary school choice process.

At times in the analytical chapters, the perspectives of educators were included but only to supplement the student responses. The perspectives of educators, families, peers, individuals involved in marketing and even other students were not comprehensively included in this study. The inclusion of the educators as a supplementary source of information was opportunistic and not systematic. In a doctoral study, every choice is an allocation of limited resources. For example, by adding the perspective of each of the newly arrived students' counsellors, a better understanding of the 'given' counselling could be compared to that which was 'received'. In regards to this study's design, the inclusion of different perspectives would have required a reduction in the space given to the newly arrived students. The choice to prominently highlight newly arrived students' experiences in this study was made to respond to the lack of research from their perspective (see Bunar, 2010a; Devine, 2009; Hek, 2005a; Nilsson Folke, 2017; Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). In this sense, the contribution of this study is that it highlights the individual newly arrived student perspective as a contribution to the larger conversation in the field. In combination with other research, a broader image can be formed to better understand the experiences of being newly arrived, the Swedish school choice system and both in combination. However, the research field would be benefited by further study of contributing actors both in isolation and in combination with each other as well as through alternative theoretical frameworks.

As a qualitative case-study, particular one with a set of diverse individuals, it is not directly generalizable. The experiences that the newly arrived students describe are unique to these individuals and to the specific context of Stockholm, Sweden. However, the themes discussed in analysis have more transferability. A number of findings can be seen in previous research, suggesting more robust patterns across Swedish society and even international settings. The phenomena introduced in this study have broad relevance that has the potential to be seen elsewhere and deserves further testing.

In this study, the use of horizon for action as a theoretical concept allowed for two contributing elements within the phenomenon of school choice to be explored. First, the national context sets the conditions for choice to occur. The Swedish education system, the Stockholm setting and the local school

environment frame how the students in this study engaged with choice. Second, the individual students had agency towards choosing an upper secondary school but were influenced by their environment and people around them, thus, influencing their horizons for action. These influences were understood through the concepts of cultural and social capital. As the students progressed towards making upper secondary school choices, they faced boundaries that shaped their opportunities and preferences for choosing. Each of these theoretical elements contributed to what the students in this study saw as possible to choose, i.e. their horizon for action.

Implications for further research, policy and practice

Considering the intertwined complexity of place and status in the Stockholm education context, the newly arrived students in this study faced challenges to choosing an upper secondary school. Three limitations were identified in the methodology section that suggest that further research could improve validity. First, the interviews were led by the author and relied on the use of interpreters. A more expansive research team, including researchers who spoke the students' languages, could allow for better representation of the students' experiences. Second, the students were asked to review their grades, based on the study's short timeframe. A more longitudinal study could perhaps interfere less and provide a truer representation of the students' engagement with their grades. Finally, the timeframe of the study provides only a snap shot of the students' experiences that lead up to their upper secondary school choice. A longitudinal study, that follows the students in the years before and after their upper secondary school choice, would allow for a deeper understanding of the contributing factors and effects.

The empirical results of this study were broad, pointing to a number of phenomena inherent to the newly arrived student experience, Swedish education system and upper secondary school choice process. To say that a lack of capital and the existence of boundaries limited and segmented the study's students' horizons for action would be accurate in a simplistic way but would miss a deeper message that this study can provide. While the students were defined by their newly arrived status, they did not have identical experiences. The unseen background of the students points to variations in their experiences that deserve further study. The students did not have identical preparedness for entering the Swedish education system and its rigidity, defined by school structure, may have hindered the students' opportunities more than helped them.

This can be applied to how counselors support students. The time constraints of school counsellors require them to make choices. If they choose to help students for whom they can see a more immediate impact, it can leave students, such as those in this study, without support. This can affect them

years into the future. Additionally, the challenges of working with students from unfamiliar cultures and languages point to the benefits of providing training that acknowledges these conditions. Furthermore, hiring practices that improve representation of these cultures within the profession can allow the needs of newly arrived students to be better met.

The findings of this study suggest that the influence of teachers working informally and beyond their job requirements has an influence on newly arrived students' education. However, certain characteristics of this work is unknown. Additionally, study tutors influenced the newly arrived educational experiences but there is little study of their work. It would serve the interests of newly arrived students to know what particular actions and competencies allow teachers to make an impact. If these characterizations could be identified, they could be replicated nationally through training and policy initiatives.

The students in this study pointed to their participation in a leisure club (in this case a football team) as giving them the opportunity to improve their Swedish and mix with students that they don't normally interact with. The dynamic of students in this setting was outside the purview of this study but further study would prove useful for understanding the social networks that newly arrived students have and the benefits of investing in multicultural leisure clubs that encourage social mixing.

This study relied on previous research to understand how upper secondary school choice is experienced more generally across Swedish society. It would be interesting to apply the same theoretical framework to students who grew up in Swedish society. A number of findings in this study are attributed to the students' status of being newly arrived (for example language and accumulation of grades). Others are likely more broadly relevant (for example: the influence of marketing, segregation and parent background) and it would be additive to the study of educational choosing to see how the influence differs across socio-economic groups.

Finally, the influence of marketing on the students' decision making and preferences of upper secondary schools was a shocking result of this study. The marketing that came from upper secondary schools was a significant source of information for the students in this study who often did not have the tools to navigate it. While the findings of this study can only highlight the phenomenon for newly arrived students, a wider question is alluded to which faces all students in Sweden. *What is the influence of marketing on upper secondary school choice?* Serious investigation of the ethical risks of allowing marketing to be so pointedly directed at children should be closely scrutinized.

Svensk sammanfattning

Titel: *Begränsade horisonter: En studie om nyanlända elevers gymnasieval*

Kapitel 1-2: Introduktion och tidigare forskning

Denna avhandling undersöker nyanlända elevers erfarenheter av gymnasievalet. Det svenska utbildningssystemet, med en unik decentraliserad marknadsstruktur för gymnasieskolor, bygger på att elever gör ett skolval. Omfattande forskning uppmärksammar att marknadssystemet skapar ojämlika utbildningsmöjligheter, som på ett oproportionerligt sätt påverkar marginaliserade befolkningsgrupper (Ball et al., 2002; Beach & Dovemark, 2019; Bunar, 2010).

Denna studie syftar till en djupare förståelse för nyanlända elevers upplevelser av gymnasievalsprocessen i det svenska utbildningssystemet. Den uppmärksammar särskilt eleverna "handlingshorisont" (eng. *horizon for action*), och fokuserar nyanlända elevers studiebakgrund och erfarenheter efter migrationen till Sverige. För att syftet ska uppnås, besvaras följande frågeställningar.

- 1) Hur påverkas nyanlända elever av marknadsföring i gymnasievalsprocessen?
- 2) Hur påverkar innehav och förvärv av kulturellt och socialt kapital hur nyanlända elever interagerar med processen att välja gymnasieskola?
- 3) Hur påverkar gränser nyanlända elevers *horizons for action*?

I kapitel två presenteras tidigare forskning om det svenska utbildningssystemets struktur, skolval och nyanlända elever. De utbildningsreformer som infördes på 1980- och 1990-talen försköt utbildningssystemet från en centralt administrerad modell till en modell som drivs på kommunal nivå (Lundahl, 2002). Dagens utbildningssystem har beskrivits som en kvasimarknad där friskolor konkurrerar med kommunala skolor om elever (Arreman & Holm, 2011; Lindblad & Lundahl, 2015). När elever väljer gymnasieskola tar de del av

information från personer i sin sociala omgivning och från skolors och utbildningsföretags marknadsföring (Tah & Knutes-Nyqvist, 2021). Gymnasiemässan, skolwebbplatser, öppet hus, skolambassadörer och jämförelsewebbplatser ger alla information som gymnasieskolor använder för att locka elever (Arreman & Holm, 2011; Harling, 2019; Harling & Dahlstedt, 2017; Larsson, 2019). Den marknadsföring som riktar sig till elever i grundskolans sista årskurs är omfattande till sin volym, och skapar ett informationsflöde som är svårt för eleverna att förstå och bearbeta (Holm, 2013).

Informationsspridningen är ojämnt fördelad inom kommuner och mellan sociala grupper, vilket bidrar till ytterligare segregering under skolvalsprocessen (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Östh et al., 2013). Samtidigt har segregationen inom skolorna ökat under de senaste åren. Familjer med mindre resurser, till exempel nyanlända, väljer skolor nära sina hem, vilket minskar antalet skolor som är tillgängliga för dem. Nyanlända elever går ofta i ett litet antal av de tillgängliga skolorna i städerna och är inte sällan socialt isolerade även inom dem (Bunar, 2017).

När elever gör skolval värderar de vanligtvis information från olika källor under högst olikartade villkor (Ball & Vincent, 1998). Skolkamrater kan spela en stor roll i valet av utbildning, eftersom möjligheterna ökar med en bredare och mer mångsidig skolkamratgrupp (Andersen & Hjortskov, 2019; Ball & Vincent, 1998). Familjer med mer resurser har större möjligheter till utbildning än de med mindre resurser (Forsberg, 2022; Reay, 2004).

Nyanlända elever möter flera olika utmaningar, till exempel svårigheten att passa in i en ny kultur, brist på erkännande av tidigare utbildning och språkbarriärer (Devine, 2009; Shakya et al., 2010; Skowronski, 2013). I många fall börjar nyanlända elever i förberedelseklass där fokus är att lära sig det svenska språket. Om eleverna inte får fullständiga betyg för ett nationellt program börjar de vanligen på språkintruktionsprogrammet (Skolverket, 2023). Tidigare studier visar att nyanlända elever upplever språkintruktionsprogrammet som ett väntrum för sina akademiska ambitioner (Nilsson Folke, 2017; Rosvall, 2023). Det har lett till att elever som börjar på språkintruktionsprogrammet kan känna att de har misslyckats, vilket påverkar deras motivation på ett negativt sätt.

Studie- och yrkesvägledarna fyller en viktig roll för elevernas förståelse av gymnasievalprocessen (Skolverket, 2022). Avsaknaden av en central vägledningspolicy i Sverige leder till stora variationer i vägledarnas praxis och effektivitet (Lundahl & Nilsson, 2009). Lärare har, liksom studie- och yrkesvägledare, en central betydelse för vägledningen av nyanlända elever. De kan ge emotionellt stöd, vägleda eleverna genom den byråkratiska valprocessen och fungera som kulturförmedlare om de delar en kultur och ett språk med eleverna (Dávila, 2018; Phillippo & Stone, 2013).

Kapitel 3-4: Teoretiskt ramverk och metod

I den här studien baseras analysen av nyanlända elevers gymnasieval på begreppet *horizon for action*. Därmed betonas på en och samma gång betydelsen av den sociala dimensionen, den omgivande miljön och individernas preferenser för nyanlända elevers gymnasieval (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). En individs *horizon for action* påverkas av dennes kapitalinnehav. Det kulturella kapitalet har ett starkt inflytande på elevernas förmåga att engagera sig, medan det sociala kapitalet handlar om sociala kontakter, (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Informationens betydelse uppmärksammas med hjälp av begreppet *the grapevine* (Ball & Vincent, 1998). Kvaliteten och kvantiteten på den information som eleverna får är relaterad till deras innehav av dessa olika former av kapital. Det innebär att deras tillgång till information varierar högst betänkligt, även om få, om ens några, har fullständig sådan. När elever gör gymnasieval förhåller de sig också till gränser. Symboliska gränser handlar om hur känslor av tillhörighet skapar push- och pullkrafter mot olika vägar (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Strukturella gränser används för att beskriva hur faktorer, såsom betyg, möjliggör för olika akademiska vägar (Barmark & Lund, 2016). Var och en av dessa företeelser bidrar till att forma studenternas *horizon for action*.

För att besvara ovannämnda syfte och frågeställningar är denna studie inriktad på empiriska data i form av semistrukturerade intervjuer. Den huvudsakliga uppsättningen data består av två intervjuer med tjugotvå nyanlända elever i årskurs nio som genomfördes i början och slutet av läsåret 2019/2020 i Stockholms län. Som kompletterande information intervjuades även åtta skoltjänstemän för att ge information om de enskilda grundskolorna. Analysen i denna studie är inspirerad av tematisk analys som involverade att få en förtrogenhet med data, identifiering av teman och organisering av teman som bygger på tidigare forskning och det teoretiska ramverket (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Kapitel 5-9: Resultat

I kapitel fem presenteras elevernas bakgrund, inklusive deras migrationserfarenhet och tidigare skolgång innan de kom till Sverige. Eleverna presenterar ett brett spektrum av olika utbildningserfarenheter, har olika bakgrund, förförståelse av det svenska utbildningssystemet och följaktligen olika behov för att lyckas.

I kapitel sex beskriver eleverna sina första möten med det marknadsanpassade svenska utbildningssystemet, vars villkor styr deras gymnasieval. Ele-

verna beskriver att de blev överväldigade av all information från gymnasieskolorna på Gymnasiemässan, och de har heller inte de verktygen som krävs för att hantera den. Gymnasieskolorna marknadsför sig genom Gymnasiemässan, Gymnasium.se, öppet hus och webbplatser. Den information som eleverna får genom dessa kanaler beskrivs ofta som informativ och trovärdig av dem, i synnerhet från de fall en personlig kontakt skapades (t.ex. elevambasadorer). Eleverna berättar att gymnasieskolornas information påverkade deras beslut. Informationen från dessa marknadskällor påverkade alltså elevernas *horizons for action*.

I kapitel sju redogör eleverna för sina möten med olika pedagoger på skolan som ger dem vägledning och stöd inför gymnasievalet. Studie- och yrkesvägledare ger eleverna information om skolvalsprocessen, betyg som krävs för olika gymnasieprogram och rekommenderar specifika skolor. För många av eleverna förekommer dock ingen vägledning alls. Som ett resultat av detta beskriver eleverna att de inte kan prata med sin studie- och yrkesvägledare på svenska, att de är missnöjda med sin inskrivning på språkin introduktionsprogrammet och att de inte riktigt förstår hur själva valprocessen går till. Andra lärare stöttar eleverna informellt och påverkar deras gymnasieval, framför allt de lärare och studiehandledare som delar kultur och språk med eleverna, och som fungerar som kulturella broar. Detta förutsätter dock att eleverna har en lärare som talar samma språk och att lärarna tar egna initiativ, vilket kräver extra arbete utöver deras ansvarsområden.

I kapitel åtta undersöks påverkan från familj och skolkamrater på gymnasievalet. Eleverna beskriver att deras föräldrar saknar kunskap om det svenska skolsystemet eller specifika gymnasieskolor, och de kan därför inte ge dem praktiskt stöd under processen. Därför gör många av eleverna gymnasievalet självständigt, men med känslomässigt stöd från sina föräldrar. Elever med äldre syskon får råd inför gymnasievalet, i första hand om olika gymnasieskolor, men dessa är helt baserade på syskonens egna erfarenheter. Eleverna talar också med sina kamrater om gymnasieskolor men på grund av sin placering i förberedelseklassen interagerar många elever bara med andra nyanlända elever. Andra elever, som snabbt lär sig svenska eller talar engelska, studerar i ordinarie klasser och träffar där fler svensktalande kamrater. Vidare tränar de elever som deltar i fritidsaktiviteter mer svenska och utökar sitt sociala nätverk, och lär sig möjligtvis mer om gymnasieskolor.

I kapitel nio beskrivs hur eleverna möter olika gränser för att genomföra sitt gymnasieval. Eleverna ställs inför strukturella gränser när de väljer gymnasieskola då de bara har en kort tid på sig att få fullständiga betyg för årskurs nio. Dessutom begränsar deras tid i förberedelseklass deras tillgång till ämnesklasser. Som ett resultat av detta har många av eleverna inte de betyg som krävs för att ansöka till många gymnasieskolor. Eftersom eleverna bor i förorter långt från centrala Stockholm begränsar pendlingen deras val av skola. Dessa strukturella gränser begränsar elevernas *horizons for action*. De nyan-

lända eleverna ställs också inför symboliska gränser, i relation till vilka gymnasieskolor de vill vara en del av. De utvecklar känslor av tillhörighet och utanförskap som de kopplar till egenskaper hos olika gymnasieskolor, och de elevgrupper som går där. Dessa känslor bygger på den information som de får från sina kamrater, familj, skola och marknadsföringsmaterial. Det är vanligt att de intervjuade eleverna väljer bort den geografiskt sett närmaste gymnasieskola till förmån för skolor i Stockholms innerstad. Dessa symboliska gränser fungerar som segmenteringar av elevernas *horizons for action*.

Kapitel 10: Avslutande diskussion

Denna avhandling ger en bild av nyanlända elevers erfarenheter under gymnasievalprocessen i Stockholm. Efter de empiriska kapitlen utforskas konsekvenserna av dessa resultat inom det specifika sammanhanget för det svenska utbildningssystemet i kapitel tio.

De nyanlända eleverna beskriver att skolornas egen marknadsföring hade starkt inflytande på dem. De bedömer Gymnasiemässan, Gymnasium.se och elevambassadörerna som neutral information, och uppmärksammar inte informationens marknadsförande egenskaper. Gymnasieskolor som marknadsför sig mot eleverna föredras ofta framför gymnasieskolan i deras närområde. I intervjuerna framkommer att eleverna inte anser sig ha fått verktygen för att hantera den här typen av information. Marknadsföringen har därmed ett stort inflytande på eleverna och formar deras preferenser av gymnasieskola.

De nyanlända elevernas interaktion med marknadsföring kan delvis tillskrivas den vägledning som de får från grundskolan. I många fall ger studie- och yrkesvägledare inte eleverna tillräcklig vägledning, vilket innebär att de inte har verktygen för att hantera marknadsföring och rykten från skolkamrater. I vissa fall ger lärare och studiehandledare eleverna extra stöd med gymnasievalet men detta sker endast när de talar samma språk. Detta resultat pekar på ett behov av att förbättra vägledningsstödet för nyanlända elever genom att bättre erkänna deras behov.

De nyanlända eleverna känner att deras föräldrar inte kan hjälpa till med skolvalsprocessen. Elevernas syskon och kamrater som ger eleverna information har ofta begränsad information själva. I en valstruktur som förlitar sig på att eleverna ska vara självständiga väljare antas deras sociala nätverk bidra till deras förmåga. Att nyanlända elever saknar detta stöd bör beaktas när grundskolor fördelar resurser efter elevernas behov.

Slutligen möter de nyanlända eleverna strukturella och symboliska gränser som avgör vilka gymnasieskolor de kan och vill gå på. De strukturella gränser som byggs upp av segregation och betygskrav ligger till stor del utanför elevernas kontroll, och det krävs politiska reformer för att minska deras påverkan och skapa bättre förutsättningar för inkludering. Erfarenheter av utanförskap

och önskemål om tillhörighet förstärker symboliska gränser, vilka i sin tur har en avgörande betydelse för vilka skolor som eleverna söker sig till.

När intervjupersonerna talar om möjliga och/eller önskade valalternativ, talar de oftare om vilka elever som går på en viss skola, snarare än själva programmen och deras innehåll. De beskriver skolor och elevgrupper med ett språkbruk som påminner om och är präglad av det sätt på vilket skolorna/utbildningsföretagen beskriver sig själva i sitt marknadsföringsmaterial – där det också kommer stereotyper baserade på etnicitet använder språk som främjas av marknadsföring och etnicitet. Effekten av de strukturella och symboliska gränserna är att de nyanlända eleverna väljer gymnasieprogram inom begränsade och segmenterade *horizons for action*.

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Appendix A: Gatekeeper email

Hej

Jag är doktorand på institutionen för pedagogik och didaktik på Stockholms universitet. Jag kontaktar dig angående min studie om nyanlända elevers erfarenhet kring det svenska skolväsendet. I min studie kommer jag att intervjua nyanlända elever i årskurs 9 (läsåret 2019/2020) om deras erfarenheter och tankar kring deras gymnasieval inför läsåret 2020/2021. Syftet med denna studie är att synliggöra de utmaningar som nyanlända elever står inför samt att bidra till hur skolans studie- och yrkesvägledning kan och bör utvecklas.

Jag kontaktar dig i förhoppning om att du som rektor kan stötta denna studie. Då jag är lärare i grunden har jag stor förståelse för den limiterade tiden inom skolans värld vilket har gjort att jag planerat min undersökning med detta i åtanke. Bifogat i detta mejl finns ett mer detaljerat dokument (på engelska) om studien och din roll i den. Hör av dig om du har några frågor eller om du har kontaktuppgifter till någon annan på skolan som du tror kan vara till intresse för mig.

Jag kommer att följa upp detta mejl med ett telefonsamtal den kommande veckan. Jag hoppas du tycker min studie är relevant och ser fram emot att höra från dig.

Vänliga hälsningar,

Brendan Munhall
PhD Student/ Doktorand

Stockholms universitet
Institutionen för pedagogik och didaktik
106 91 Stockholm

Appendix B: Respondent consent form



Research Study: ‘*Newly arrived students’ experiences during upper secondary school choice in Sweden*’

My name is Brendan Munhall and I am a doctoral student at the Department of Education, Stockholm University. I am conducting a research project on choosing upper secondary programs (*Gymnasium*). I am most interested in speaking with students who are new to the country and hearing about their experiences in the Swedish education system. My study aims to let these students speak for themselves to better understand their lives. I would like to speak directly to these students about their experiences in school and how these contribute to their choice of upper secondary school. Your participation in this research will contribute towards a publication as part of my dissertation required of my doctoral studies. Your experiences and thoughts about your experiences are important for developing knowledge in this research field.

I have been referred to you as I was told that you have an interest in participating in my study. I would like to interview you about your past experiences in schools, your current school life and your plans for the future. Two interviews are expected to take approximately 60 minutes each and planned for the beginning and ending of the 2019/2020 school year. There is a possibility of a third interview if available and needed. Interviews will be recorded and I will take notes.

This research is designed with stringent ethical considerations and has been approved by the Swedish Ethics Examination Authority. Anonymity will be maintained by hiding names and any identifiable information before publication. All recordings and transcripts will be kept in secure locations to ensure privacy. The content of interviews will remain confidential between the interviewer and yourself. Upon completion of these interviews, a written transcript can be provided for a review of accuracy upon request. In agreeing to participate in this research, it is understood that your participation is voluntary and that you may end your participation at any time. Consent from both you (the student) and your parent/guardian are required for participation in this study.

I hope that you choose to participate in this study. If you would like additional information please speak to me, Brendan Munhall, via email _____ or the study supervisor, _____ via email _____.

Principal responsible researcher: _____

‘By signing below, I agree to participate in this study and consent for my information to be used as described above.’

Student signature

Printed name

Date

Parent/Guardian signature

Printed name

Date

Appendix C: Interview One Guide

1) **Introductory questions and history**

a) *Personal info*

- Age? Years in Sweden? Country of origin? Language(s) spoken at home?
- How well do you speak Swedish? Where do you speak it?
- Who do you live with? Parents: Occupation, education background

b) *Residence*

- Where do you live now?
- How long does it take to travel to school?
- Have you lived somewhere else in Sweden?
- Have you attended a different school?
- Why did you choose to go to this school?

c) *Educational past*

- Can you tell me about your schools before Sweden? How many hours every day? Days a week? How many years? Any times out of school?

2) **Future**

a) *Hopes, ambitions and desires*

- Where do you see yourself in 10 years? What do you want to be doing? Where do you want to be? Career?
- What factor is most important to you when you are planning the future? (Career, personal interests, freedom/security, family)
- Do you have support from other people towards reaching your goals?

b) *Planning for the future*

- *What steps do you need to take to reach your goals? Have you taken these steps? Are you planning anything for the future? Do*

you think it is important to think about your future now or can you wait until you are older

3) Choices

a) School subjects

- In the coming years you get to choose more about what you are learning. What school subjects do you like? Why do you like them? Do you think these subjects can help you towards your goals in the future? What school subjects do you find easy/ hard?

b) Specific steps

- You said that _____ was a priority for you. What can you do in school to accomplish this? Courses? Grades? Specific upper secondary school? Post-secondary/university
- Do you think it is easy or hard to do what you want in Sweden?

c) Understanding of Swedish education system

- How would you compare the school in Sweden to your previous experiences? Comparisons (schedule, breaks between classes, long days, individual work, nice or mean teachers)
- What do you want to do after this year (year 9)? Optional: Can you describe what happens after year 9 in Sweden?
- Do you think which school you pick is important? Have you thought much about this? - Is it important?
- Do you know what school you will go to? Why? Location, specific school, friends, program, other preferences
- Is it hard to choose a school?
- Have you considered other upper secondary schools?

4) Relations

a) Who

- Tell me about the people in your life. Who is important to you?
- Local family Parents, Siblings: How do they support you? How do they help you make decisions? What do you do for them?
- Family Abroad: Do you speak often? How do they support you?

- Friends/peers: Describe them. What do you like to do together? Are they good at school? Where do they come from? What language do you speak together? Live near you?
- School authorities (ex: Counsellor, teacher, etc): Who are they? Tell me about what they do. Do you think they teach you things? What kinds of things to they tell you?
- Community: Are you involved in any social groups? What do they do for you? Have you discussed your education?

b) Influence on choice

- When you make decisions about school and the future, do other people influence you?
- What do they tell you?
- Does anyone choose for you?

5) Final reflections

a) Challenges

- What is challenging for you in school? Classes? Time out of school? Friends and classmates? Other things (ex. working)?
- Has School been easier or harder for you in Sweden?

b) Closing

- Based on our conversation is there anything else that you think I might find interesting that you want to tell me?
- I would like to speak to you again in the later this school year. Would you like to speak to me again?

Appendix D: Interview Two Guide

1) BASIC INFO QUESTIONS	PREVIOUS ANSWERS
	Time in Sweden
Language level now? English? Swedish?	
Living situation? - The same?	
	Number of schools in Sweden
	Schooling before Sweden
	Summary of goals
2) QUESTIONS FOR ALL	
<i>School year</i>	
Can you tell me about your school year? Friends? Classes? School life?	Friends Classes School life
What worked well this year?	
What did not work so well? <i>What is the hardest thing for you in school generally?</i> <i>Did you have any challenges this year?</i> <i>Has there been anything hard outside of school?</i>	
Tell me a bit about your effort this year. If you could give yourself a percentage, what would you give yourself in effort?	
What would have helped you do more?	

<i>Future</i>	
What will you do next year? → <i>Leading to section 3, 4 or 5</i>	First interview response
Why will you _____ ?	Preferences before
How do you feel about this? <i>Happy, not happy?</i>	
What do you want to do in 10 years (after school)? (Compare to 1 st inter- view	+10y from first interview
Who gets to go to upper secondary school?	
How is it decided what upper sec- ondary school?	
Who makes the choice?	
<i>Help/support</i>	
Who helps you at school? How do they help you? <i>Language?</i> <i>Social?</i> <i>Career planning?</i>	
Who is the guidance counsellor?	
When did you meet this year? <i>As a group?</i> <i>Alone with them?</i>	
Tell me about those meetings?	
Did you make the meetings or did the counsellor?	
Did someone help you with lan- guage?	
Did these meetings feel useful?	
Were there any problems with these meetings?	
<i>Grades</i>	
Tell me the grades that you have in each of your subjects	
<i>Social</i>	
Who are your friends? <i>What are they doing next year?</i> <i>Did you talk to them about gymna- sium?</i>	First interview

<i>Information</i>	
Did you look for information about gymnasiums?	
Who have you asked for help/information from?	
How did you look?	
What did you find?	
What could you not find?	
Have you searched online? How? Which websites? What did you search for	
<i>Changes in plan/perspective</i>	
You mentioned _____ before. Have you learned anything about _____ that?	Previous plans
What do you think now? <i>What did you learn about _____ (program/school)</i>	
How would you describe your relationship with other students now?	Social
<i>Information about the process of choosing</i>	
Who decides what you will do next year?	
How is that decision made?	
Is it the best decision for you?	
3) QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS GOING TO NATIONAL PROGRAMS (some relevant for all)	
Can you tell me about your experience choosing a gymnasium?	
<i>What was important?</i>	
<i>What was difficult? What made it easier?</i>	
What programmes/schools did you apply to?	
Why did you choose these schools/programs?	
Did you consider any others?	
How did you rank them?	
What schools said yes to you now?	
What will you do?	
How will you decide on the schools/reorder?	
What's your number one choice?	

How would you feel if you didn't get your first choice?
Where is _____ school?
<i>Did you consider programs in different parts of the city?</i>
So, you plan to study _____. Why not (examples) Plumbing, science, business, hairdressing, electricity, etc?
There are many schools with _____ program, why this one?
<i>Did you consider all the upper secondary schools and programs in Stockholm?</i>
<i>How did you narrow them down?</i>
<i>Examples: location, friends vs bad influences, reputation, program, recommendation, grades accepted, mix with Swedish students vs type of students, path of least resistance/ limited options, information, parents' wishes</i>
What's more important to you, the upper secondary school or the program?
Did you receive a lot of information from different sources.
<i>How do you balance this information?</i>
<i>What information guides you the most?</i>
<i>Ex: Parents vs counsellor?</i>
Can you tell me what you think your upper secondary school will be like next year?
Has anyone suggested you spend more time at this school or the language introduction program before upper secondary school?
<i>What were their reasons?</i>
<i>Parents</i>
How have your parents guided you?
Can you describe the conversations you have with them about upper secondary school?
Can you say what their main advice is?
How strong is their Swedish? English?
Do you know where they learned about Swedish schools?
What do they know a lot about?
Are there things that you know more about?
<i>Friends</i>
Where are they from?
What languages do you speak together?
When are all the times you are together?
Talk online?
What do you talk about the most?
Do you talk about next year?
What do you talk about?
Is what they say important?
Do they give you good advice?
<i>Others?</i>
<i>School authorities</i>

What language were your meetings in?
Did someone at the school talk to you about upper secondary school?
Did you get any information in _____ (language)?
Did you get any documents or website links in _____ (language)?
Who was the most helpful in your upper secondary school choice process? <i>Who has not helped you?</i> <i>What do you want to know more about?</i>
<i>Final thoughts</i>
What did you think about the process of school choice?
4) QUESTIONS FOR THOSE GOING TO THE LANGUAGE INTRODUCTION PROGRAM
Did you apply to any upper secondary schools? If yes , go back to upper secondary school questions .
Why are you going to a new school? <i>How do you feel about this?</i>
Did you choose this?
How do you feel about this?
Do you know anyone at this program/school?
What will it be like? Anyone told you?
Why are you going there?
Do you know anyone at this program/school?
Is that fair? Is this what you want to do?
Is it the best thing for your learning?
Can you describe the environment of an upper secondary school you want to go?
What kind of students do you want to have at your upper secondary school?
Has anyone suggested you spend more time at this school or the language introduction program before upper secondary school? <i>What were their reasons?</i>
<i>Final thoughts</i>
What did you think about the process of school choice?

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