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All Aboard the Good Ship *Schooling*?
Marginalisation in an Era of School Accountability

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Mag. phil. Bernadette Hörmann

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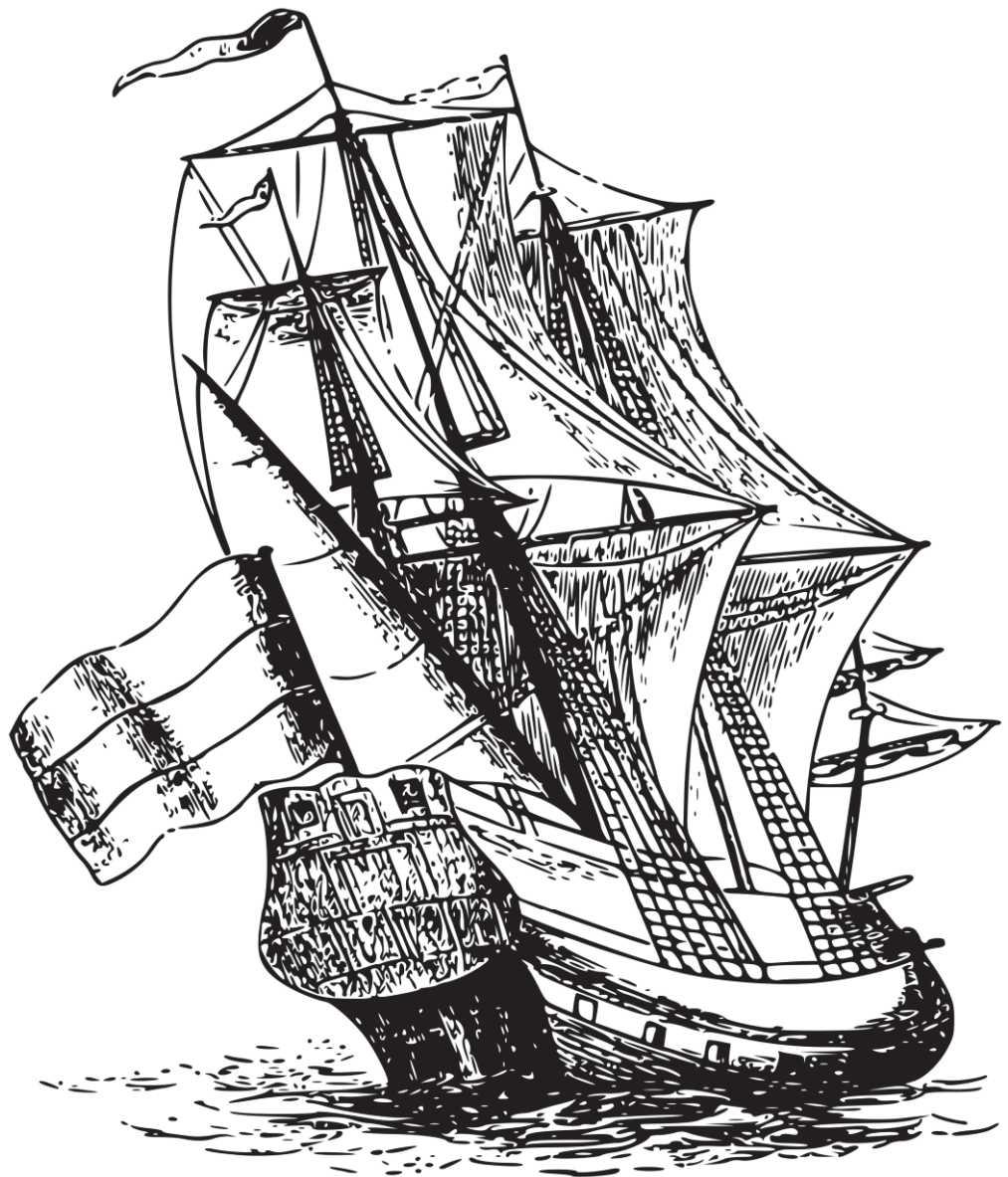


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Preface

The title of the thesis: “All aboard the Good Ship Schooling?” does not necessarily refer to the song “On the Good Ship Lollipop” from a famous U.S. movie from 1934, in which a young girl enthuses about becoming a pilot and flying with an airplane to sweet Candyland. Although the song is about dreams of the future, to which this thesis also refers, I prefer to draw on the metaphor of a good, old, and solid ship. To my mind, this fairly old vessel has a very long tradition that is based on reliable and solid pedagogical concepts. For a student, attending school means to leave the secure world of the family behind for a while and to go on a journey, together with peers and teachers, exploring new areas and fields in our world. Aboard the ship, students are offered reliable relationships, and a democratically based, free space for interacting with content matter together with other human beings. The destination of this good ship (unfortunately) is not Candyland, but its purpose is to find different appropriate places for the students to be able to go ashore safely, i.e. to places where they can live a “good human life” (Nussbaum, 1999), work, and participate in society as independent, autonomous human beings and citizens. The “Good Ship Schooling” has probably seen many storms in terms of trends and challenges come and go during its life time, but due to its solid and sound construction it may have been strong enough to face the challenges and help our tomorrow’s generation in finding its pathways. The relevant questions in the context of this thesis are, however, what is it that makes the ship resilient, and what concepts does it offer to make all students come and stay aboard?

Although I am convinced that even old traditions and concepts, to a certain extent, have to be adapted to the needs of today, the aim of this thesis is to support and contribute to the metaphor of the “Good Ship Schooling” and strengthen its pedagogical credibility.

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This thesis has been inspired and improved by the exchange of ideas and discussions with an untold number of people. I am thankful to all my colleagues and “critical friends” not only at the Department of Education at the University of Vienna, but also from various institutions all over the world. Gjert Langfeldt has accompanied and contributed to my research with constructive feedback from the very beginning, and Neda Forghani-Arani has been a very inspiring research partner from whom I learned a lot. Finally, I would like to give a very warm and wholehearted thank-you to my family and friends, who have contributed to this thesis in immeasurably many different ways and respects.

1 Introduction

What started in the late 1990s and early 2000s with studies like TIMSS¹ or PISA² has become a determinant trend that has taken over all of the modern Western world in the form of outcome-oriented school policies (“school accountability”). Since then, Austria as one country among many others, has implemented national achievement standards regularly tested by national tests, has participated in recurrent international assessment tests, and has introduced a standardised graduation exam at the end of 12th grade. This has been accompanied by public debates and an enormous echo in the media, which has put schools at the centre of public attention and political discourse (e.g. Hopmann, Brinek, & Retzl, 2007). More precisely, it is not the schools that are the centre of attention, but the student performance which now serves as an indicator for a school’s or even a whole school system’s quality. Reports of assessment tests show that the tests are intended to be in the interest of the students and to prepare and support them for future challenges and the process of life-long learning. The assessment studies and various in-depth analyses concerning equity issues, gender differences, and the performance of immigrant students are based on an implicit assumption that the key to social equity is to support each single student as best as possible and prevent low-achieving students from being left behind (e.g. Schwantner & Schreiner, 2013; Schreiner, Salchegger, & Suchań, 2014; Herzog-Punzenberger, 2012; Suchań, Wallner-Paschon, Bergmüller, & Schreiner, 2012; and esp. Stamm, 2008).

Drawing on critical analyses by Biesta (2009) and Young (2010), the present thesis is based on the argument that the current discourse on school accountability unpacks a “paradigm of individualisation” that highlights each student’s individual performance and renders increasing that performance the main task of education. In so doing, accountability measures can make the situation of disadvantaged students even worse by narrowing the curricula, focusing on qualifying aspects in education, blaming individuals for their failure (Biesta, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Ladwig, 2010; Young, 2010), and by referring to a dispositional concept of learning processes in which learning is regarded as a mechanical act that only takes place within the individual (Otto & Schrödter,

¹ Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, operated by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)

² Programme for International Student Assessment, operated by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

2010). In the case of students with disabilities, it has already been documented that they often are excluded from the tests by unofficial means (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Hörmann, 2007a; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1993). Obviously, they “irritate” the testing system with a non-compliant set of skills and practices, which makes proponents and organisers of the tests react in an ignorant or helpless way (Hörmann, 2007a). As for the daily life of schooling, a focus on individual performance can mean that some students struggle with being left to their own devices, the devaluation of cultivating functions of schooling (and, at the same time, a strong emphasis on the qualification function), furthermore, due to a narrower curriculum, they struggle with content matters that cannot be reconciled with their stock of previous experience. From this perspective, there is reason to assume that once again in school reforms the accountability trend fosters the Matthew principle: “those who have will be given more” and at the same time it can marginalise those students whose set of previous experience, skills, opportunities, etc. differs for manifold and complex reasons from what is expected at school (see also Hopmann, 2008a; Stamm, 2008).

Based on these assumptions, the thesis aims at discussing possible side effects of school accountability measures against the backdrop of a school reform that has been implemented in Austria in the aftermath of Austria’s average (and unexpectedly low) results at the PISA test. While the Austrian Ministry of Education developed a reform for a comprehensive school system at the lower secondary level, the state of Lower Austria decided on its own concept for a similar reform. The reform is called *Neue Niederösterreichische Mittelschule*³ (NÖMS), and was implemented in 2009 and is still in progress. In fact, it supports former *Hauptschulen* (general secondary school, equivalent to Lower Secondary Modern Schools), which cover the lower secondary level, together with the *Gymnasium* (a more academically oriented school type with a generally higher prestige than the *Hauptschule*). The general goal of the reform is to limit marginalising processes and to improve the students’ transitions and trajectories within an inclusive school setting and under current conditions of school accountability. On the one hand, all schools have to participate in the national standards project and, of course, in international assessment tests. On the other hand, they receive additional money and resources in order to support all students in developing a perspective for their future. The school reform therefore offers “room to move” for schools so as to be able to concentrate

³ “New Lower-Austrian Middle School”

not only on an increase in the students' test performance, but also on their further careers and opportunities. This can be theoretically underlined by Sen and Nussbaum's capability approach, which points to the fact that people in different life situations can realise their potential and aspirations to different extents. In order to give every human being the opportunity to live a "good human life", society has to create conditions under which people can make use of their freedom (Nussbaum, 1999). From this perspective, our schools' task can be defined as an effort to make students capable of mastering their lives, under their given circumstances and within their local context. The Lower Austrian school reform of the "New Middle School" has been evaluated by the research project "NOESIS"⁴, based on the theoretical assumption derived from the capability approach as mentioned above. It is a longitudinal study that evaluates if and how students experience successful transitions to other schools or into their work life after attending a New Middle School in Lower Austria. In addition, the research project also covers cross-sectional projects that investigate by mostly qualitative means selected aspects of school life. My dissertation is one of these subprojects and draws on a phenomenologically oriented investigation of students' lived experience of schooling in Lower Austrian New Middle Schools. These narrative interviews provide the basis for discussing possible side effects of current measures like achievement standards and standardised testing in terms of a "paradigm of individualisation". Thus, the research question is:

"How can a paradigm of individualisation, created by a school accountability framework, be marginalising for students affected by a mismatch between the home characteristics of their personal world and the expectations given at school?" This question is discussed and analysed by using the example of the Lower Austrian school reform which tries to account for both the standardisation requirements and the demand for providing a place where all students can develop perspectives for their future.

Since student assessment tests and national standards claim to serve especially the interest of students, research in education has also put the student at the centre of its efforts. However, as stated by Erickson et al (2008, p. 199f.) and as has already been indicated by a number of researchers (see e.g. Cook-Sather, 2002; Feichter, 2014; Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001), these well-intended efforts and assertions often have a dark side: They usually deal with students unintentionally from an adult's understanding of students, and

⁴ *Niederösterreichische Schule in der Schulentwicklung* – Lower Austrian schools in school development, formerly: *Niederösterreichisches Schulmodell im Schulversuch* – Lower Austrian school model in school trials

not from actual student perceptions. Therefore, this thesis tries to develop a more genuine understanding of the students' experience of schooling in times of school accountability by using Max van Manen's phenomenologically oriented approach (1990). In drawing also on Schütz's theory of the life-world (Schütz, 2003b, 2010), the approach allows me to develop an understanding of students' natural attitudes concerning their daily life at school. Since student performance in tests has become the main indicator of school quality, i.e. it decides whether a school system, a school or a class is considered to be successful, the students are loaded with a considerable amount of responsibility. Hence, I think it is legitimate and highly necessary to take their way of experiencing schooling into account and use it as a basis for any further discussions on school accountability tools.

Langeveld, the most important source for my school theoretical approach as presented in Chapter 4, posed an important question in his book about the anthropology of schooling: "what is our conception of the human being that is underlying the process of intellectualisation at our schools?" (*"Im Rahmen welchen Menschenbildes wird intellektualisiert?"*) (Langeveld, 1960, p. 121). The process of intellectualisation or mere qualification is an essential part of a school's task. However, this thesis argues that very narrow concepts of qualification as presented by current accountability tools lack a general, qualitative picture of the student as a human being who is supposed to grow into our society. As the following chapters reveal, the absence of this picture contributes to the further marginalisation of students who are disadvantaged in education. Therefore, the thesis contributes aspects which might fill this picture with some genuine, lived experience of schooling of a number of students.

2 Schooling in an age of “school accountability”: unpacking a paradigm of individualisation⁵

This chapter describes and discusses current reforms and trends in the Austrian school system in the course of establishing a school accountability framework. After a short introduction on the genesis and development of current school accountability trends, I give some general information on the Austrian school system and the school accountability measures implemented. By drawing on classical didactical theories and international studies, I discuss opportunities and boundaries of school accountability tools and describe the current understanding of instruction in this context. Based on these critical analyses, I finally argue that reforms in the context of school accountability have created a paradigm of individualisation which might have marginalising side effects on certain students.

Since schools fulfil important tasks in society and therefore are linked closely to ongoing developments in society and policy, they also have to adapt themselves to current trends that, at the same time, shape the understanding of schooling. Nowadays, the trends are about to cause a fundamental change in the governing of schools and it is evident that the new steering strategies are leaving their mark on schools in Western democracies (Hopmann, 2008b, p. 423). Since the 1990s, European governments have been changing their strategies in governing public institutions like schools by moving towards evaluative investigation, and relying on standardised student achievement tests. They realised that the former way of “management by placement” will reveal itself as financially unfeasible from a long-term perspective and therefore tried to formulate their expectations of public institutions. These expectations are evaluated by standardised tools that serve to provide data on the efficiency of the institution (ibid.). From this perspective, the term “school accountability” means that schools are held accountable for the way they use their resources provided by society by means of standardised assessment tools which are based on student performance (e.g. Linn, 2005). In Austria, the new way of governing is based on international comparative student assessment tests like PISA, TIMSS or PIRLS (which play a very important role in public and policy discourse) and achievement standards

⁵ Parts of this chapter are based on the following publications: Hörmann, 2011a, 2011b.

which accompany national standardised testing. In the wake of these measures, some reforms such as a school reform project, language projects, standardised graduation exams, etc. have been implemented. These measures correspond to international trends as indicated by Michael Young. According to his analysis, current education policies in most European countries can be characterised by the introduction of national qualification frameworks, a shift to learning outcomes and the move from subject-specific to generic curriculum criteria (Young, 2010, p. 1). In fact, this means that national and international comparative student assessment tests, achievement standards and competence models, as well as curricular reforms that focus on students' free choice, are currently the most popular ways of governing and reforming school systems.

2.1 The Austrian school system (primary and lower secondary level)

Students in Austria begin primary school at the age of six years; after they have attended kindergarten which is compulsory only the last year. Primary school lasts for four years and is under the responsibility of the Federal States. After four years of primary education, the students and their parents have to decide whether they want to attend a *Hauptschule* (general secondary school, equivalent to Lower Secondary Modern School), or a *Gymnasium* (academic secondary lower school). While the *Hauptschule* is attended by more or less than double the number of students, the *Gymnasium* has in general a higher prestige, at least in rural areas. It is traditionally oriented towards an academic education, in contrast to the *Hauptschule* which rather tries to prepare the students for an early job decision. Nevertheless, the system is quite permeable, because the curriculum in the first of the three ability tracks at the *Hauptschule* and the curriculum of the *Gymnasium* are identical, and students can still attend a *Gymnasium* after the four years of *Hauptschule* (see fig.1). And vice versa, students who drop out from the *Gymnasium* change to a *Hauptschule*.

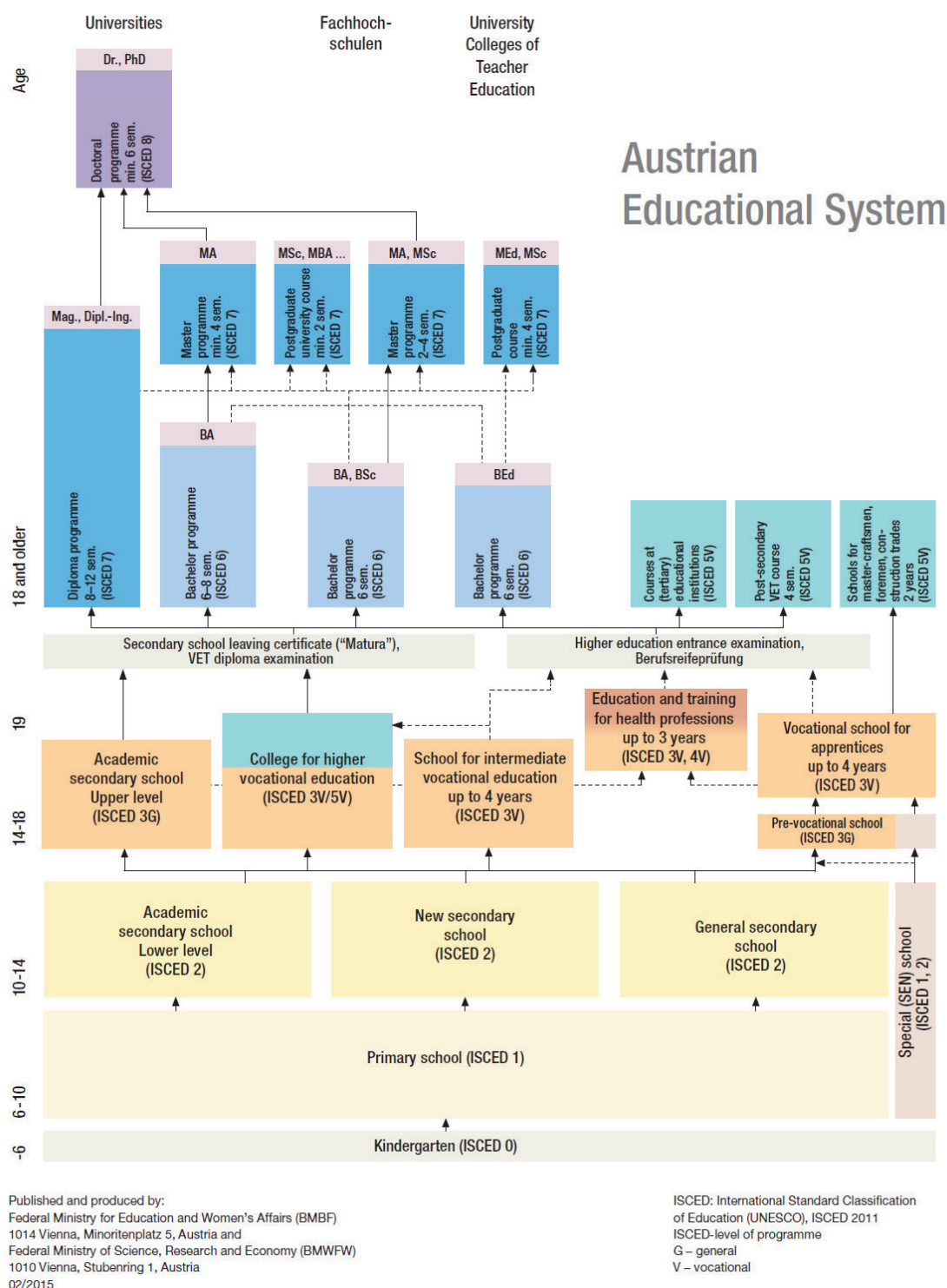


Figure 1: Scheme of the Austrian school system

(https://www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/bw/ueberblick/bildungssystemgrafik_2015e.pdf?51jiic; 25/9/2015; the graphic is used with the permission of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs)

Apart from the *Hauptschule* and *Gymnasium* there are schools for students with special needs (special school, see fig. 1), which are attended by about two percent of the number of students in primary or lower secondary schools. Apart from special needs schools, students can also be integrated into regular classes with special support in some certified schools.

In the course of a school reform process, a new kind of school for the lower secondary level has been established: the so-called *Neue Mittelschule* (New Middle School, in fig. 1: “New Secondary School”), which at the same time has been the framework for the New Lower-Austrian Middle School in the State of Lower Austria. The idea was to create a prototype of a school for a comprehensive school system, but in fact, the schools co-exist with the previous schools. More precisely, the New Middle School became a reform process for some *Hauptschulen*, and by the school year 2015/2016, all Austrian *Hauptschulen* will become New Middle Schools.

After graduating from *Hauptschule*, *Neue Mittelschule*, *Gymnasium*, or the school for special needs students, students have a variety of options. They can choose between vocational schools, schools which offer both vocational and academically oriented education, and the *Gymnasium* for the upper secondary level.

2.2 The Austrian school accountability framework

Since Austria is a republic with nine federal states, the agendas of schooling are distributed between the Ministry of Education (which has the most influence on school politics and administration) and the departments for education in the nine states. Hitherto, all standardised accountability measures have been implemented and carried out by the Ministry of Education, and, more precisely, by the federal institute “BIFIE”⁶, whereas the traditional, unstandardised supervision of primary schools and the *Hauptschule* lies in the responsibility of the nine States. The supervision of federal schools like the *Gymnasium* and some further schools at the upper secondary level is also under the control of the Ministry of Education.

⁶ *Bundesinstitut für Bildungsforschung, Innovation und Entwicklung des österreichischen Schulwesens*; Federal Institute for Research in Education, Innovation, and the Development of the Austrian school system

In general, the Austrian standardised accountability framework consists of international student assessment tests, achievement standards, a standardised graduation exam at the end of 12th grade (“*Matura*”), and a triannual national report on school education, which provides an overview and new compilations of all data that have been collected in Austria. All these measures are carried out and organised by BIFIE and are of low-stakes quality, except for the graduation exam. This means that the results of the national or international tests do not have any immediate consequences for any of the proponents, and they have only an informative character. As promoted by BIFIE, the performance tests should generally contribute to a sustainable development of the school system.

It is not clear when Austria participated in an international assessment test for the first time. However, it is documented that it participated in several studies that are not relevant anymore these days (The Computers in Education Study, The Language Education Study, 1987 until 1996) (Hörmann, 2007a, p. 15). Apart from the CIVED study (1994-2002), Austria participated in TIMSS in the year 1995, but the study did not gain any public attention, therefore it was decided to discontinue it. It was not before the year 2000 that Austria took a chance and participated in PISA, which can be regarded as the beginning of Austria’s accountability history. In the following years, the country participated in all rounds of PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study). As a consequence of Austria’s disappointing results in PISA 2003, a compulsory reading test has been implemented in the third and fifth grade. The results of the *Salzburger Lese-Screening*, as the test is called, are supposed to stay in the teacher’s or in the school’s hands.

An important milestone in Austria’s history of school accountability was the implementation of achievement standards. As the *Salzburger Lese-Screening*, the standards have been implemented as a direct consequence of the results in international assessment tests. The legal basis was defined in the year 2008, and the tests started with the school year 2011/2012.

The standardised graduation exam, which is called *Zentralmatura* in German, is a reform of an already existing exam (*Matura*), which gives the students the right to attend a higher education institute. Its purpose is to “increase the quality in education” and make the exam more transparent and comparable (www.bifie.at).

The triannual report *Nationaler Bildungsbericht* (National Report on Education) is also edited by BIFIE and aims to give detailed information on the national school system, and is intended to serve as a basis for decisions in politics and school administration. It sees itself as part of the tradition of evidence-based policy making (www.bifie.at).

The following sections will give a more detailed analysis of the accountability tools.

2.2.1 International comparative student assessment tests

Not only in Austria have results of assessment studies like PISA, TIMSS or PIRLS triggered an impressive amount of reaction in the media and public discussion and have become one of the most important factors in policy decision-making processes (Bozkurt, Brinek, & Retzl, 2007b). In many European countries, international comparisons have caused profound transformations of national policy-making traditions, which have in turn lead to extensive reform projects. The studies evaluate a certain kind of content from a representative sample of students and use the results as an indicator of the school system's quality. Interestingly enough, those contents do not necessarily reflect what students have learned at school but represent a sample of items which have been developed just for these tests, as in the case of PISA. Neither are the contents reflected when test results are interpreted, nor are they connected to the actual learning and teaching situation (Wiliam, 2010, p. 256). For instance, the concept of "mathematical literacy" has hardly anything to do with the traditional Austrian curricula (*Lehrpläne*), which focus on subject-related competences and abilities. The aim of mathematical literacy, however, is that students can apply mathematical procedures in real-life situations (OECD, 2003, p. 24ff). The TIMSS study comprises an intersection of all curricula of the participating countries from which test items were constructed. Nevertheless, the problem is that Austria's curricula are frameworks that provide teachers with optional and some compulsory content matters. Furthermore, the implementation of curricular contents represents theoretically a process determined by the situation where the actual "result" depends to a large extent on the prior experiences and social interactions of all involved. Therefore, what actually happens in the classroom is generally difficult to define by those contents written in the curriculum. By isolating the tested contents from that which was effectively discussed in class and transforming them into testable items, students often cannot connect the items to their learning experience in class (Hopmann, 2007, p. 115).

The validity of large-scale assessment tests has been criticised by a growing number of researchers, who do not tire of pointing to the fact that the tests have limits and that they can only explain a very small aspect of schooling, because student performance data for the greater part reflect extra-curricular factors (e.g. Biesta, 2009; Cohen, Raudenbush, & Loewenberg Ball, 2003; Hopmann et al., 2007; Jahnke & Meyerhöfer, 2006). Apart from this, this thesis intends to discuss the student's role in the new mechanisms critically. On the one hand, the assessment studies present themselves as melioristic tools that serve the interests of students by ensuring that they attain basic competences for their future life (Schwantner & Schreiner, 2013, p. 17f.) and reveal discriminating processes in education (Herzog-Punzenberger, 2012). On the other hand, through these assessment tests, the schools' quality actually lies in the hands of the students, which is a responsibility on which the students do not really have any influence. An investigation conducted in Germany in 2000 demonstrates that PISA participants were very much aware of the expectations involved and the consequences of their participation. They felt that they represented the nation and wanted to prove Germany's competitiveness (Krohne, 2000). Considering that their performance is primarily the result of coincidences (anything that was learned in school is recognisable in the test items), as well as features outside the tested person's influence (so-called social environment), the students' range of influence is very constrained. In fact, the participating students do not even represent the population adequately, since there are disqualifying criteria for pupils with disabilities or a migration background (Schwantner & Schreiner, 2013, p. 33f.) and unofficial exclusion practices which ensure that, for the most part, only "testable" students participate in the studies. In order to avoid bad results or problems on the day of testing children with learning disorders or special educational needs are moved into another classroom or sent on an outing (Hörmann, 2007a). Of course, in order to generate such an amount of comparable data, the tests must necessarily be based on a very specific, idealised perception of schooling and teaching (Kiener & Rosenmund, 2008, p. 183ff). Children who live under different conditions because of a different native language, a disability, or other kinds of challenging life situations become "problem cases" in the context of standardised testing because the tests are not designed for such special cases. In Austria, an investigation among stakeholders and further persons in charge revealed that they perceive this problem as statistically irrelevant and negligible. However, considering the enormous societal and political impact of the study results, the legitimacy of an exclusive orientation to the "norm" is to be questioned. Education policies appear to be primarily oriented on the

“average performer” and that causes children with special needs and the disadvantaged to become hidden (Hörmann, 2007a, 2007b; Kronig, 2008; Pfahl & Powell, 2005).

The latest results from PIRLS and TIMSS are from the year 2011 and in Austria they are generally perceived as to be lower than expected. According to the report, Austria’s students in fourth grade perform at an average level in reading and Maths, but they are in the first third in science (Suchań et al., 2012, pp. 13, 25, and 37). The report on Austria’s latest PISA results from 2012 shows that the students in ninth grade perform in the upper midfield in Maths, on an average level in science, and below average in reading (Schwantner, Toferer, & Schreiner, 2013, pp. 17, 31, and 37).

2.2.2 Achievement standards and competence curricula

In the years 2008 and 2009, the Austrian government implemented achievement standards which are tested at the end of fourth and eighth grade in the subjects German, English, and Maths. At that point of time, there was a broad public discussion about Austria’s unexpectedly low results in the PISA studies in 2006 and 2003 (Bozkurt, Brinek, & Retzl, 2007a) and as a consequence and like in many other European countries, the Minister of Education suggested to implement achievement standards in order to evaluate schools’ performance on a regular basis.

The underlying idea consists of formulating prior social expectations in order to measure the degree of their realisation. Education content or competences are defined for each grade and described in such a manner that they can be evaluated with standardised tests. Usually the wording of competences is “students can . . .” and always reflects partial performance in an area of competence. For instance, the Austrian eighth-grade competences for the German language subject in the field “writing texts” read as follows:

- in writing their own texts, students are able to utilise basic narration techniques (orientation, conflict composition, conflict solution)
- students can formulate facts and content comprehensibly, logically correct and coherently
- students can formulate subject-relevant and age-appropriate arguments and counter arguments, linguistically tying them together or contrasting them

- students can author formalised linear/non-linear texts (i.e. curriculum vitae, job application, complete questionnaires)
- by adhering to important rules of communication, students can participate in age-appropriate medial communication (i.e. e-mail, letter to the editor, . . .)
- students can utilise writing as an aid for their own studies (synopsis, notes)

(BIFIE, 2009)

German-language competency areas in this grade cover the following:

- Listening and speaking (understand age-appropriate verbal texts communicated through direct personal contact or via media; conduct conversations; present content orally)
- Reading (develop a general understanding of the text; identify specific information; develop text-related interpretations; reflect the textual content)
- Writing (planning texts, composing texts, reviewing and editing texts)
- Language awareness (knowledge and use of text and sentence structures; command of a nuanced vocabulary and applying linguistic means of expression appropriate to the situation; have orthography awareness)

(BIFIE, 2009)

In contrast to the descriptions of the achievement standards, the equivalent for the traditional curriculum for German in the 8th grade is expressed in very general terms and is not explicitly indicated under “writing texts”. The creation of texts is dealt with in different ways in the following four areas “language as the basis of relationships”, “language as the means of factual information in a variety of areas”, “language as the means to create”, and “language observation and spelling”. Hence, teaching is supposed to convey how experiences, knowledge and thoughts can be appropriately transmitted in speech and writing, how personal relationships and information can be expressed for specific purposes in texts, how arguments in response to opinions can be summarised, and how language can be used in creative and literary ways (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen, 2000). Therefore, in the case of curricula, the use and application of skills (enunciating relationships, arguing, commenting, disseminating information) is already being assumed, while in the case of standards the purpose of the skills is not enunciated until they have been described with examples (students can compose formalised texts, i.e. curriculum vitae, forms, etc.) Beyond that, achievement standards appear to provide only a narrow definition regarding the presence of skills. In the

curriculum example, the ability to communicate knowledge and experiences in writing is sufficient as the teaching objective. Here it has not been determined to which extent this skill is considered to be present; thus there is sufficient latitude to set a variety of levels.

In Austria, the standards are designed as “common core standards” (*Regelstandards*, in contrast to minimum standards implemented in many other countries). This means that the defined requirement level corresponds to the normal distribution of competencies that are in the end correlated with student performance. Thus there will always be students below the standard, as well as some above it, which makes it impossible to define what low-achieving students should at least know and which skills they should have in order to succeed in the school system (Klieme et al., 2007, p. 27f.). Furthermore, achievement standards can once again place more emphasis on the differentiation between disabled and non-disabled students, since a diagnosed and certified impairment is one reason for exclusion from the standards tests (Kronig, 2008, p. 235f.; Pfahl & Powell, 2005). The term “standards” already points to the core problem: the attempt to standardise a situation in which human beings with various and manifold interests, abilities, skills, strengths, weaknesses, etc. are involved necessarily will be thwarted when persons who do not meet the defined norm are concerned. Again, as already mentioned above in the context of international assessment studies, students with special needs or with a migration background can be marginalised, because they are cut out of a momentous mainstream discourse (Hörmann, 2007a, 2007b; Biewer, 2012; Kronig, 2008; Pfahl & Powell, 2005). Moreover, critical research in German subject-matter didactics indicates that current standards and competence descriptions tempt practitioners to draw on traditional, timeworn teaching concepts for grammar issues rather than to use new models which take new challenges like multilingualism in the classroom into account (Hörmann, 2015).

Apart from the critical aspects already mentioned above in the context of international student assessment tests which also apply in the context of achievement standards, the case of the standards reveals especially the problem of causality. Heid points to the fact that in Education Science there is still no answer to the question how student performance is connected to the teacher’s performance, the quality of schooling, or the quality of a school. Similar to the case of PISA, tested competences cannot give any information on the conditions under which they have been acquired, because standards only define or operationalise required and testable results of organised learning processes (Heid, 2007b, pp. 32-38). From this perspective, the implementation of standards cannot be justified by

the argument that they can evaluate or improve the quality of a school or a school system. And, finally, standards cannot give any information on what should be done in case somebody does not fulfil the demands (Heid, 2007b, p. 42), but they can only give information on the extent to which the student is able to solve given tasks at a certain point in time. As shown by Stamm (2008), schools are confronted with a difficult situation when some of their students do not meet the minimum standards. Compared to average performers, it takes a great deal of time and resources to help low-achieving students or students at risk to reach the minimum level. Usually, schools do not have the time and resources to provide this support. Therefore, there might be a tendency for them to focus on supporting average performers and trying to advise low-achieving students to go elsewhere, which means that the students are confronted with processes of labeling, emotional distress, and the experience of failing once again (ibid., pp. 488f. and 484).

2.2.3 The “Zentralmatura” (standardised graduation exam at the end of 12th grade)

The *Zentralmatura* is the most recently implemented accountability tool. It has been carried out for the first time in the school year 2014/2015 and replaces the former exam called “*Matura*”. It comprises three or four nation-wide standardised written exams in language subjects and Maths and two or three oral exams in subjects to be chosen by students (non-standardised). In addition, the students have to write an essay about a topic which they can choose themselves.

Unlike the international student assessment tests and achievement standards, the new graduation exam is a high-stakes exam. The results have immediate consequences for the students, who gain admission to higher education if they pass the exam. It is argued that the reform will contribute to a more transparent, fair, and comparable exam which will lead to an increase in school quality. As also shown in the sections above, there is no reason from a scientific point of view to assume that a standardised exam can improve the quality of a school or a school system (Heid, 2007b).

2.2.4 The National Report on Education

The triannual report proves that large-scale data collection allows for impressive insights and relevant statistical correlations in the context of schooling. However, the problem is that it is mainly based on student assessment data, without reflecting the boundaries of such a data base. As already presented in the sections above and as pointed out by Kiener

and Rosenmund (2008), such descriptions of a school system's effort tend to forget that they can only give a picture of one reality out of those which are imaginable, or, to put it another way, that they are contingent and have a fictional character (ibid., p. 184f.). Consequently, reports like the National Report can only be justified as a basis for policy and administrative decisions when they clearly reflect the limits of their data and their conclusions.

2.3 International research on the opportunities and boundaries of school accountability

Austria's accountability system is fairly in line with the general trend of standardising schooling in countries of the Western world. In the course of the past two decades, almost all European countries tried to follow the US-American trend of implementing monitoring systems that are based on student performance data. The tools like international assessment studies and achievement standards can be seen as a new configuration for governing the education system. They are intended to replace the former evaluation methods which were seen to be too subjective and able to be influenced, and are expected to provide an objective, reliable and valid impression of a school's or a school system's quality on the basis of statistical performance data. Former evaluation methods comprised analysis reports by visiting inspectors which easily could be influenced by personal likes or dislikes towards certain parties involved and only contain "subjective opinions" based on the visiting person's impressions (Biesta, 2009, p. 35). Beyond that, external evaluation as an explicit authority did not exist; the school authority only intervened in the case of conflicts and problems and provided no guidelines as to what constituted good teaching. School accountability measures now formulate what is to be understood as successful teaching in the form of "expectations" and address them to the schools as verifiable requirements (Hopmann, 2008b, p. 424). Undoubtedly, the new governing tools constitute innovative, promising and practical ways of gathering information for politicians, administrative officials and further stakeholders in the education system. The problem is, however, that the descriptions are considered as comprehensive and "real" descriptions of a school's efforts and therefore are used as the only foundation for weighty policy decisions such as reform projects, the distribution of resources, personnel decisions, etc. (Biesta, 2009; Hopmann, 2008b; Linn, 2008). As

already pointed out, standardised achievement tests can only cover a small part of the multifaceted reality at school and in the classroom and, from a technical point of view, no matter how sophisticated they are conceptualised, such tests are not able to deliver reliable data on the quality of teaching or learning (Linn, 2008). Apart from that, even if these studies describe the actual “is-situation”, one cannot conclude what should be (“is-ought-problem”, David Hume), as Biesta (2009) states (see also Heid, 2007b, p. 42). Therefore, according to Biesta, the problem of what should be has to be reconnected to values, otherwise the only parameter for good education might be those items that can be tested easily. Biesta’s question, “valuing what we measure or measuring what we value?” explains that we need to define what we regard as good education (Biesta, 2009, pp. 33 and 35; and also Heid, 2007a). Consequently, the evaluation system represents political categories which can be legitimised from a societal perspective, but people have to be aware that the tests do not deliver a comprehensive picture of what is done at schools and what students learn in the classroom. Drawing again on Kiener and Rosenmund’s argument about the fictional character of school system descriptions based on tests (Kiener & Rosenmund, 2008, p.183ff), we can ask why vocational knowledge does not play any role in PISA, why national tests do not cover the item “language awareness” or why items which refer to the cultivation (Midtsundstad & Hopmann, 2010) or socialisation (Biesta, 2009) function of schools are not included.

In the US, monitoring systems have already been implemented for decades and experience reveals a sketchy picture of their outcome. There has been no increase in student performance nor in the quality of instruction, but rather a decrease shortly after the implementation of the national monitoring system (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Mintrop and Trujillo found that the perceived quality in US-American schools has not changed since the implementation of national tests (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007), apart from the fact that instruction has been adapted to those matters tested by the monitoring tools, that the curriculum has been narrowed and that the performance of each single student is now at the centre of attention (Au, 2007). Besides, national monitoring systems have led to test-polluting practices like the exclusion or retention of low-achieving students and helping students who are expected to fail in the test (Koretz & Barton, 2004). Even worse, statistics show a convincing increase in diagnoses of disabilities and retention grades (Darling-Hammond, 2004; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1993, p. 21; Stamm, 2008, p. 484), as well as lower achievement of disadvantaged students and higher drop-out rates (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Since the monitoring system in the US is a high-stakes

system, schools have to face severe consequences if they fail at the tests. If they fail over a certain period of time, they are penalised by receiving fewer resources, which can lead to a downwards spiral and finally to the closure of the school. Of course, it is not the elite schools that are concerned by the problem, but schools serving students from low-income families, students with disabilities or with a multicultural background (Novak & Fuller, 2004).

A meta-analysis of studies on the curricular effects of standardisation and monitoring in the United States revealed three major effects: firstly, the majority of the studies concluded that the curriculum had become narrower since national tests and standards were implemented because teachers concentrated on content that is tested within these measurements. Secondly, most of the studies confirm a fragmentation of the knowledge taught in schools, which means that content is split up into small portions and taught individually, without any connection to a greater picture of the discipline. Thirdly, teacher-centred activities are shown to predominate in class since the main goal of education is to reach certain competence levels (Au, 2007).

The core problem of school accountability measures is that they can at best be seen as an incomplete descriptive collection of information about schools, which has been collected without any theoretical connection to education science. The data are derived from an interest, based on knowledge that is neither scientifically, nor practically oriented, but rather from a school organisational perspective seeking to discover how one can make that which schools do measurable. According to Linn, these data can at best serve to create hypotheses about the schools, but additional studies are needed for their validation (Linn, 2008, p. 709; and also Hopmann, 2007). It is believed that the models used in the studies represent an accurate picture of the real world, and questions of validity are often avoided (Rutkowski, Rutkowski, & Langfeldt, 2011, p. 181; Wiliam, 2010, p. 255ff.). Therefore, the potential danger of these new trends is not their attempt to gather large-scale data about instruction, but the conclusions that are drawn from the data and the demands that are based on it (Hopmann, 2008b). The following sections build on these boundaries and indicate a possible marginalizing impact of competence-oriented teaching and learning, and standardized testing.

2.4 Instruction in times of school accountability

When investigating the side effects of a school accountability framework, the manners in which such a framework has changed traditional understandings of teaching and learning is of interest. In general, schooling is now regarded as an aggregate of individual test performances (Sivesind, 2014). Instead of a manifold and interactive picture of the student learning, the process is reduced to a mechanical notion that seems only to take place within the individual. It is assumed that the content proscribed in the standards can be mediated via instruction to the individuals who prove their mastering in tests in which they reproduce what they have been instructed. Teaching from this perspective is nothing but training and coaching, with the purpose of leading students to a required goal (Hopmann, 2007; Spinner, 2005). This also becomes evident in the public reaction to the test results. People usually demand special support for failing students and instruction that tries to account for the diverse needs of each single student. Implicitly, this means that each single student should be trained towards the given bar of formulated standards with the goal being to increase each student's test scores. From such a perspective, the question of how to succeed in education is not a matter of learning conditions, school facilities, or teacher quality, but one of attributing success at school to the individual (Biesta, 2009, p. 38; Young, 2010). A student's characteristics, such as being a foreigner, having a certain kind of disability or parents who are unwilling or unable to engage with their child's learning, become explanatory factors for failing or succeeding and a starting point for interventions like language courses, reading training, intercultural projects, etc. The descriptions of the standards represent a kind of benchmark or "bar" against which the students' performances are now compared. Consequently, all performance below this bar is defined as deficient and implies the need for "correction". From this point of view, instruction could then be regarded as a way to compensate and remediate the students' deficiencies (Gutierrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009). In so doing, socially constructed otherness is transformed into an individual liability and is not made a pedagogical question.

Within this logic, individualised teaching is considered as the most promising way to account for students' heterogeneous needs and it is expected to be able to lead each student to the defined goals, proceeding from his or her special needs, characteristics and skills. For instance, in Austria, individualised teaching is one of the core reform measures in the "New Middle School", as it is also promoted in discourse on special needs and

multicultural education (e.g. Biewer, 2001, 298; Prengel, 1993; and see also Schratz & Westfall-Greiter, 2010). Individualised teaching means that each task and learning step has to be accommodated to each single student's needs. It is essential to start from a profound diagnosis of the student's situation which becomes the base line for decisions regarding teaching methods and settings. This means that each student is given his or her personal work sheets, topics, tasks, etc. on which he or she works during the lesson. According to Markowetz, this idea reflects a desire for unlimited pedagogical care which is an unrealisable demand and would ultimately lead to the isolation of each learner (Markowetz, 2004, p. 170f.).

The previous arguments should demonstrate that school accountability measures have led to a new understanding of instructional processes and created a new paradigm of learning and teaching. Within this paradigm, the individual student is at the centre of attention and becomes the main point of interest in education (Biesta, 2009, p. 38f; Hopmann, 2008b, p. 444; Young, 2010). The title of the US American Act of 2001 called "No Child Left Behind" expresses this matter very clearly and even reveals the ambivalent meaning of the focus on the individual: On the one hand, it is argued that each individual has the right to an adequate education and should be supported despite or because of all his or her special needs. On the other hand, the actual meaning behind this philanthropic attitude is pressure to increase accountability performance. Either way, if teaching has to accommodate itself effectively to the logic of school accountability and standardisation, it will become restricted to processes that, on the one hand, promote only those competences which are tested in national assessments and, on the other hand, as a systemic effect, support only those whose performance can contribute to an increase in test scores. Students who cannot reach the given level will face discouraging and marginalising conditions that negatively affect their self-concepts. In sum, all these developments express what I consider a new framework for approaching education questions: the individual learner as the main point of interest in education.

2.5 The possible marginalising impact of a “paradigm of individualisation”

The concept of competences is a construction based on dispositions and it proceeds from the assumption that each individual's disposition can be increased by education (Otto & Schrödter, 2010, pp. 165 and 169). However, increasing an individual's disposition demands not only adequate instructional structures and individually accorded learning tasks, but also a setting in which the student is invited to participate using all his or her previous experience. This setting has to take into account the learning biography, the social environment, the socio-economic circumstances and especially the social situation in the classroom where the learning takes place (“specific and accidental conditions of attainment” (Otto & Schrödter, 2010, p. 174). Similarly, Schwab defines four commonplaces of education: teacher, student, what is taught and the milieus of teaching-learning. The latter are the surroundings in which teaching and learning emerge, the social situation and the common history of the learning group (Schwab, 1983, p. 241). From this perspective, it does not seem very convincing to declare the increasing of dispositions as the main goal of education. If education were about the full development of an individual, it would mean that it cannot be reduced to a mechanistic and solely cognitive concept leaving behind those conditions under which human beings usually develop their personality. In fact, this model can be compared to an omnipotent concept of education that is able to make everything of every human being (Schleiermacher, 1826/ 2000, p. 19ff). From such a deterministic perspective, education and learning is understood as an activity that forms people and makes them into everything one desires (ibid., p. 17). The individual is seen as a person already equipped with certain characteristics, abilities and potential (ibid., p. 18), which only need adequate training and instruction to be developed. According to Schleiermacher's education theory, the shortcomings of the omnipotent concept of education lies within its denial of the individual's self-activity and autonomy on which their development is based (ibid., p. 21; and also Willbergh, 2015). The task of education and instruction is to elicit and guide the self-activity of the individual thus creating an appropriate relationship between that which is expected of the individual and that which she or he is able to perform. Some students do well in achievement tests, some students perform better in other areas of knowledge or agency. If schooling were regarded as an effort to qualify and cultivate the younger generation (Midtsundstad & Hopmann, 2010), it would mean that standardised achievement testing only covers the qualification part in a very restricted sense. It does not cover the way in which students are prepared

for their future lives as members of society. Schleiermacher defines the goal of education as a dialectic interplay between the promotion of individual aspects and the student's inclusion in society. In the quotation below he describes the purpose of education as developing the individual characteristics of each human being while at the same time, he sees education as forming the individual in a likeness of the larger moral whole to which she or he belongs:

“Das Ende der Erziehung ist die Darstellung einer persönlichen Eigentümlichkeit des einzelnen. (...) Die Erziehung soll den einzelnen ausbilden in der Ähnlichkeit mit dem größeren moralischen Ganzen, dem er angehört.” (Schleiermacher, 1826/ 2000, p. 38)

Qualification can be a matter of both the individual and the societal level (or, in Schleiermacher's words, of “individual” and “universal” education, *ibid.*, p. 37). Standardised testing, however, focuses on individual learning processes of discovering and acquiring the world and is detached from the social experience of learning in the classroom community, which represents a microcosm of society. As also argued by Egger in a slightly different context and approach, current trends in education hinder students from learning how to participate in society and developing solidarity (cf. Egger, 2006, p. 8).

Most of the students whose parents and home environment are conform with the traditionally middle-class conception of schooling will be able to keep up with the qualification demands. However, students who usually perform below average and who live in different worlds to their peers especially can benefit from the socialising or cultivating efforts of a school. Through interacting and learning with their classroom peers, they experience different approaches for understanding the world and therefore can negotiate meanings and find their place within the social structure. In focusing on the individual's increase in performance, the interactive moments in education become less important, which has a negative impact for students who need such interactions as a “specific condition of attainment” (Otto & Schrödter, 2010, p. 174).

The lack of opportunities to create meanings together with peers and interact with them in class is a further marginalising effect of an individualised perspective of learning. Since achievement tests combine a given matter with a certain meaning, there is only one “correct” approach to make a specific content accessible. According to classical education theory, a common, interactive instructional setting is the most important foundation for students to develop their meanings and interpretations of the subjects at hand. It also

allows teachers to connect the content to be taught to a given situation within the classroom, depending on recent joint history and experience, and the social interaction between students and their personal circumstances (Hopmann, 2007). Instructional settings, which are based on an individual understanding of learning, neglect these important processes of creating meanings and leave each student to his or her own devices. In such a setting, both the teacher's and the students' scope of action is restricted: Teaching becomes a mechanical act of training the students towards a defined goal, and learning becomes a lonesome act of acquiring "pre-thought knowledge" (Spinner, 2005; and see also Willbergh, 2015). For instance, standard no. 27 for eighth grade in German requires the competence to be able to reflect characteristics, behaviour and motives of figures in literary texts. The test item presents a literary text in which a football player recounts how he is happy about his success and how his sister and her boyfriend are proud of him (BIFIE, 2008). The task is to find out who the narrator is in the text, a tricky task because the narrator tells of his relationship to the names mentioned in a complicated way. Therefore, the challenge of this item lies within a close reading and trying to think logically about the relationship between the storyteller and his friends and relatives. Apart from the fact that this item actually tests the reading ability and concentration level of the student, it evaluates a very mechanical and pragmatic operationalisation of the competence "reflecting on characteristics, behaviour and motives of figures in literary texts". This small excerpt of a story has the potential to invite students to discuss the characters' intentions, feelings, how they articulate themselves and what the purpose of a narrative perspective could be. The way this item tests the competence mentioned above is a narrow understanding of the educative substance of this task, which would be appropriate if it were not to serve as a defined goal in instruction. By this means, the scope of action for both teacher and students is narrowed because students cannot benefit from creating diverse meanings that help them understand the content and teachers cannot make use of the students' life-world and experiences in order to offer them various combinations of matter and meanings (Hopmann, 2007).

Furthermore, research points to the fact that so-called "unidimensional instruction" (Kelly & Turner, 2009), i.e. instruction based only on imparting "correct" knowledge (i.e. where students are constantly evaluated based on their correct responses), is not only undemocratic, but also strongly demoralises underachieving students and reduces their participation in the instruction discourse to a minimum. The fragmentation of knowledge and adaptation of instruction to the test logic and competence catalogues threatens the

“multidimensional” kind of instruction which does not simply ask for correct responses but rather opens horizons when a problem is discussed, analysed by all and can be related to the personal world of experience (Kelly & Turner, 2009; Midtsundstad, 2015; Willbergh, 2015), or, as stated by Michael Young, can give “epistemic access” to the students (Young, 2010, pp. 4 and 9).

According to Otto and Schrödter (2010), who refer to Martha Nussbaum’s theory of justice (1999), the school’s task is to make students capable of mastering their lives. Hence, good education in this sense tries to open up content for students in accordance with their life-world, which means that within the classroom, each student is considered as an expert on his life-world. This expertise becomes the starting point for learning processes, and it serves as a fruitful basis for the whole learning group (Hopmann, 2007; Langfeldt & Hörmann, 2011). This kind of instruction, however, needs a certain amount of scope in which the teacher is allowed to choose subjects and goals according to the needs of his or her students and the current situation. For instance, a child who learns to calculate, usually learns the mechanical process of adding several figures, but it also learns that you can approach the world in a mathematical way by calculating objects, be they real or imagined ones (Hopmann, 2007, p. 116). The latter has an impact on how the young learner will handle his or her daily life: If Pauline pays in a grocery store one day and wonders about the sum she has to pay, she will calculate and tell the shopkeeper that she or he has miscalculated. Due to her education in mathematics, Pauline will be able to talk about her concern in a mathematical way, and it is very likely that the shopkeeper will understand her and discuss the matter with her. Within current standardised accountability measures, this kind of educational purpose is restricted to a fixed interpretation of calculation methods. The teacher’s effort to develop an understanding of his or her students’ access to reality and how they create their meanings of the content taught is of no use anymore, since the standards define in which context the calculation method is applied. Teaching is no longer an educative support for the student on her or his way of becoming an adult in society, but a training competition of each individual’s disposition towards predefined goals. Both approaches become problematic when followed through, but currently the focus is too much on training competences, which means that low-achieving and disadvantaged students are exposed to a hopeless situation.

The previous analyses are intended to reveal certain problems with an individualised perspective on student learning. The paradigm of individualisation has been created by

school accountability measures that focus on student achievement and therefore have triggered a process of redefining learning and instructional processes and even theoretical understandings of what learning and teaching is about. An evaluation of our schools' work which relies solely on student achievement data will necessarily force teachers to concentrate on each student's progress according to their mastering of the test items. As long as schools are not evaluated for their integrative, cohesive efforts in enabling students to take part in society, students with special needs will be marginalised in the context of such an individualised paradigm.

3 The New Lower-Austrian Middle School - a school reform between standardisation and capacity building on behalf of all students

The previous chapter has presented the current conditions and a core problem of schooling both in general and in Austria in particular. The problematic aspects of a paradigm of individualisation shall be investigated through the example of a recently implemented school reform in Austria, which tries to follow the standardisation trend and at the same time limit processes of marginalisation. This requires an explanation and a description of the factual and theoretical background of the new, Lower-Austrian Middle School and its evaluation project “NOESIS”, which is presented in this chapter.

Due to the unexpectedly modest PISA results of Austrian schools a major public discussion arose as to whether inclusive, comprehensive school systems were “better” than stratified systems. Basically, the argumentation has been that countries that had been successful at PISA predominantly have a comprehensive school system and therefore this would also be a promising solution for the “misery” in Austrian education (Bozkurt et al., 2007b). Following long political discussions a school reform model was conceptualised, tested in 320 Austrian schools (almost exclusively at former secondary schools) and will be implemented throughout the whole country within the coming years. Core issues of the pedagogical innovations in the so called “New Middle School” (*Neue Mittelschule*, NMS) are individualised and differentiated instruction, social learning, all-day care offerings, art and cultural projects, sports activities, e-learning, gender fairness and the inclusion of experts from various social domains. Individualised teaching primarily means that teachers focus on individual support to their students according to their needs. Team-teaching is intended to ensure that instruction meets the diverse needs of the students and supports especially underachieving students. Furthermore, it should allow for more flexible ways of teaching in terms of interdisciplinary, project-oriented and self-regulated learning and the cooperation between the NMS and the *Gymnasium* (BMUKK, undated). The strong emphasis on individual performance and support can be regarded as a consequence of the school accountability logic: as long as success in the classroom is measured by results produced by the students in standardised performance testing, any schooling must strive for increased test scores and at the same time offer the best possible

support for every individual student (see e.g. the momentous 2001 US Act with the distinctive name “No Child Left Behind”).

This thesis refers to a reform project that has been implemented in the course of the New Middle School, but still stands on its own. In the school year 2009/2010, the State of Lower Austria decided to implement its own version of a comprehensive school which is now called the “New Lower-Austrian Middle School” (*Neue Niederösterreichische Mittelschule*, NÖMS). The most important difference to the general NMS is that only grades 5 and 6 are organised as a classical comprehensive school. Grades 7 and 8, although still NÖMS, are divided into two tracks: a general track with an academic orientation and a track that is focused on vocational education. The aim of the Lower-Austrian Middle School is to broaden the educational base of all students so that they may have access to more educational opportunities, while at the same time decreasing the number of students with insufficient skills. The pedagogical credo of the school reform project is, again, individualised (or individualising) teaching (Wimmer, n.y.). According to the pedagogical concept, the NÖMS should become a place where the student as a learning individual is in the centre of attention. Students should actively participate in the learning processes which should take place only at school instead of in the students’ home or institutions for extra tutoring. A further essential part of the reform is that schools have to focus on their interfaces with other schools, which means that the teachers cooperate and teach together with teachers at primary school and from the *Gymnasium*. Further cornerstones of the reform are:

- Enlarged autonomy for the schools, which have to develop and publish their own pedagogical concepts
- Student-centred approaches in instruction
- Project-oriented instruction
- The offer of many choices and different courses
- Additional support and special tutoring for students in need
- Team-teaching, especially in classrooms with a large number of students and in classes with important tests like German and English language and Maths

- “KEL-talks”⁷ (student-parents-teacher-meetings) twice a year: individual meetings of the student, her or his parents, and the teacher(s) with the purpose of discussing the student’s performance, needs, strengths and weaknesses
- Feedback about the student’s performance should be given on an individual level (as far as possible), the learning goals for each student should be defined in accordance with the national achievement standards
- In general, the pedagogical concept promotes the development of a positive and encouraging learning atmosphere at schools (Wimmer, n.y.).

The Lower-Austrian model of the New Middle School tries to meet both demands: providing a place where all students can develop a perspective for their futures, regardless of their performance level or identified skills, and participating in the national achievement standards test system. In a sense this means that the state of Lower Austria tries to square the circle because of the opposing premises of the two demands (as has been discussed in the previous chapters). Indeed, this fact makes the school reform project especially interesting and promising for the further development of school governance practice. The Lower-Austrian Government decided on a two-year comprehensive school model instead of the usual four-year model, which is a compromise that, on the one hand, attempts to solve a political problem, but, on the other hand, probably allows the school to keep open as many windows of opportunity as possible for the students. Important decisions do not need to be taken already after grade 4 (as in the previous system), but are postponed to 6th grade. At the same time, the New Lower-Austrian Middle School enables responding to the various needs of students in grade 7, where they are at the very sensitive age of 13 years. In doing so, the schools can focus their work on creating successful transitions for and with the students to further educational institutions or their working life (Bauer & Werkl, 2011).

⁷ “Kind-Eltern-Lehrer-Gespräche”

3.1 NOESIS – a research project that evaluates the New Lower-Austrian Middle School

The school reform's focus on successful transitions has become the centre of attention in the evaluation project "NOESIS" (*Niederösterreichische Schule in der Schulentwicklung* – Lower Austrian schools in school development, formerly: *Niederösterreichisches Schulmodell im Schulversuch* – Lower Austrian school model in school trials). It is a research project that was launched in 2010 to evaluate the Lower Austrian school reform model and it is a large- and low-scale, longitudinal, cross-sectional, and mixed methods study with four sections: transitions, school settings, capacity building, and instructional patterns. The following figure presents the four sections with their general research questions:

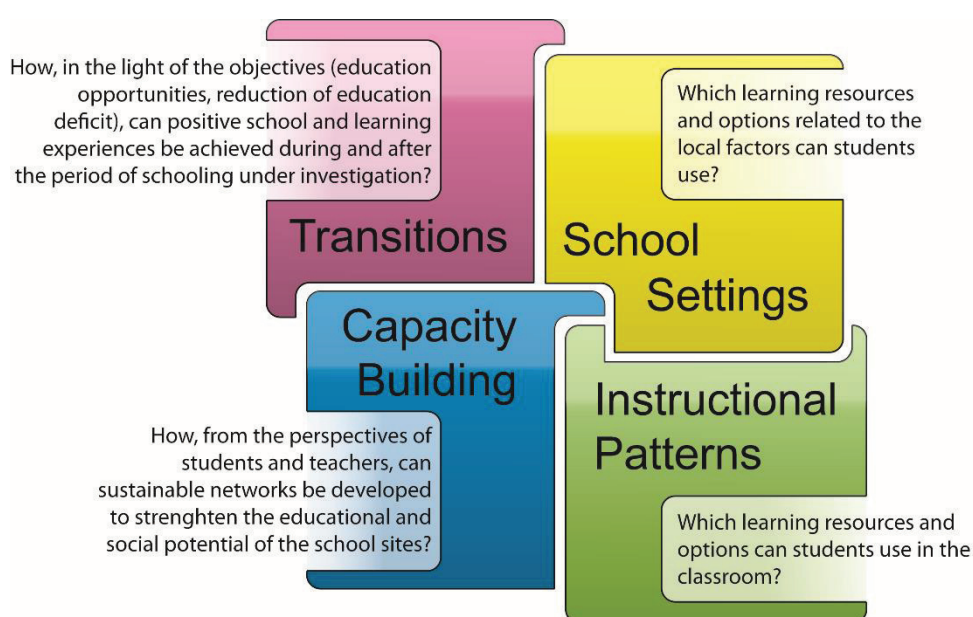


Figure 2: The four sections of the research project "NOESIS" and their general research questions (source: NOESIS-project).

The transitions group investigates conditions for the students' successful transitions from one school to another (or into the working life) by means of a large-scale investigation that follows the students from their last year of primary school until at least ninth grade. The investigation is based on questionnaires for students, teachers, and parents that are distributed on a regular basis (once per year) (see e.g. Geppert, 2015; Geppert, Katschnig, & Kilian, 2012; Geppert, Kilian, & Katschnig, 2013; Katschnig, Geppert, & Kilian, 2011;

Kilian & Katschnig, 2015). The other three research groups are cross-sectional studies that try to capture snapshots from all people involved in the daily school life. “School settings” is a mixed methods project that describes how some, selected schools process and try to solve their problems under the new conditions of the school reform (e.g. Retzl, 2013; Retzl & Ernst, 2011, 2012). The capacity-building project tries to develop networks that are both viable and capable of reinforcing the pedagogical and social potential of schools by means of a peer-review investigation (e.g. Feichter, 2012; Feichter, 2014; Feichter & Krainz, 2014; Feichter & Krainz, 2012). Finally, the instructional patterns section, of which the present thesis is a part, addresses the question, how students and teachers experience their daily lives at the New Middle School. It is a qualitative, phenomenologically oriented project carried out by my colleague Neda Forghani-Arani and myself and comprises interviews with students and teachers about their everyday life experience in instruction (Hörmann, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Hörmann & Forghani-Arani, 2012). This thesis is based on the main part of the students’ interview data and it follows a more specified research question than the investigation in the evaluation project. The specification is that it puts the school reform into a wider frame and discusses the data in the context of the school reform as a part and a product of the school accountability trend.

4 A concept of schooling as a world “in between” against the didactical premises of accountability tools⁸

As shown in the previous chapters, schooling has changed in the course of the school accountability trend. In order to conceptualise my understanding of processes of marginalisation in an age of school accountability, I found it necessary to investigate the implicit theoretical, didactical understanding of schooling nowadays. For this purpose, I present a school theory which takes its departure from the student’s point of view and use this as a tool for analysing the theoretical presuppositions of the accountability tools.

Referring to Schleiermacher’s theory of education, students can be seen as representatives of the younger generation that has to be prepared by the older generation for participation in society. Both the family and the school share this task of preparation with varying intensity: in the first period of a child’s life, the family is the main educator. Gradually, the family will need help in some respects, which rings in the second period, the period in which school plays a major role in education (Schleiermacher, 1826/ 2000, p. 67). In the family, the child’s relationship to its parents is built on love and emotional bonding, and whatever a child is doing happens in the context of this relationship and remains in this protected area. The parents acknowledge and appreciate the child as a person and its efforts unconditionally, give her or him shelter and ensure her or his safety. The child can “simply be”, and all tasks that the child has to fulfil are connected to and preserved in this caring shelter (Langeveld, 1960, p. 38; Jackson, 1968, 29). However, parental education is unable to prepare children appropriately enough for their participation in a society defined by professional relationships among people of all ages and through a working life in which the main motive is not love but efficiency. It also means that the child has to get used to fulfilling tasks and duties without feedback and appreciation from the parents (Langeveld, 1960, p. 38; Jackson, 1968, p. 17). In contrast to the family, the school can be seen as a public place where the child has to learn different ways of behaving and articulating, which means that the child has to learn how to play a “public” role. It has to get along with a teacher and classmates, who are all strangers to the child and who do not belong to the inner circle of family members. The relationships with classmates and the

⁸ Parts of this chapter have also been published in the following articles: Hörmann, 2012c, 2013.

teacher are of another less intimate quality than those between family members; therefore the child has to learn new ways of behaving, articulating and interpreting, which means that it has to learn how to behave in public situations. For instance, in German-speaking countries it is a big step for children to learn to use the formal way of saying “you” to an adult person. At some point during primary education, students have to switch to the formal version and therefore they learn that there are different kinds of relationships within our society. Another example is breaking into tears. While this appears to the child as a natural mechanism within the family, the child might experience it differently and may be embarrassed at school. Also, the process of comforting will look different at home from what it is at school, due to a lack of intimacy (Langeveld, 1960, p. 60).

Over a long period, children become students and gradually learn how to play a certain role into which they are pushed by society (Breidenstein, 2006; Kirova, 2011; Menck, 2006, pp. 65 and 69; Muth, 1966). Living in a modern society means that you need to pursue a profession, be able to deal with institutions, and administrative establishments, and be able to stand up for your own needs and interests. Schools provide a playing field in which children can practise getting along with people not part of their family by finding interests and abilities and by acting as citizens of society. According to Langeveld, schools can be regarded as a transitioning bridge to adulthood that provides a path for the child and creates circumstances under which the child can find its way. By its nature, schools cannot be family, but at the same time, they have to protect the child from, and prepare it for the world of adults. Langeveld compares this ambivalent task to a permanent fight in which schools have to act in the child’s and the world’s interests (Langeveld, 1960, p. 22f.). At school, the societal community answers the question of what people need in order to be human beings in society namely, the knowledge, abilities and attitudes that are necessary to survive in society. The school is the switchboard of continuity and the creation of a new generation, between reproduction and production, and its task is to prepare and introduce the child to a certain society and culture. It can be seen as a mediator between parents, society, and the child. It has to intervene when society demands something that is unacceptable for parents, when parents do not understand the needs of their child, and it has to reject societal developments that counteract the interests of children (Langeveld, 1960, p. 15f).

If we regard schools as a world “in between”, we can, referring to a life-world phenomenological theory, assume that there are worlds of the family, the in between world of schooling and the world of adults, which are all representations of the outer world that can lie within an individual’s actual or potential reach. Referring to Alfred Schütz, these worlds can be called sectors of the outer world that can become part of the world of actual reach for various human beings. Within these sectors, people have subjects of common interest and relevance and they participate in the life-course of their fellow beings. Relationships are defined as we-relation, in which all proponents share more or less a common vivid present in which their biographical individuality becomes partly apparent and accessible (Schütz, 2010, p. 346ff.). In experiencing these three sectors during their life-course, people develop a scheme of reference that proceeds and always refers to their personal biographical situation and life circumstances. In the following chapters, the characteristics of each of the sectors are delineated. The purpose is to develop a theoretical description of schooling from a student’s perspective.

4.1 The family sector

Although the “family” as we understand it nowadays is a relatively new concept, it has become an influential and meaningful aspect of a child’s life today. According to Schweizer, the present concept of “family” was created between the 16th and 18th centuries because of the “inner logic” of the modernisation process, which aimed at promoting people to become resilient and loyal subjects who were fit for work. The idea was to bind children more exclusively to legitimately related persons (in most cases the natural parents) in order to keep them off the streets where, as gangs, they were disruptive during the late Middle Ages (Schweizer, 2007, p. 95). Of course, who and what is included in the term “family” is always subject to change; this has changed throughout history and depends on cultural circumstances. Nevertheless, it can hardly be denied that in modern Western societies parents are regarded as the traditional entity of a unit into which a child is born. The family is therefore a legitimate starting point for investigating how people develop their natural attitude and how they can even create and participate in a life-world. If the family is the first entity into which children are born, it can also be defined as the first area in which the child participates in the daily life-world. Günther Bittner even calls the maternal uterus the first “world” into which the child is put and describes the process of giving birth as a literal process of “coming into the world” (“*zur Welt kommen*”). Without mystifying the birth of a child, the author argues that coming

into the world already starts in the maternal uterus, since parents are able to interact and communicate with their child during pregnancy (Bittner, 1996, pp. 140-142). Even as an unborn child, it already creates meaning of what its parents are saying and doing and how they are feeling, which means that it already acts on the world and the world already influences and shapes its personality. In so doing, the child starts to create a “stock of experience” that serves as a fruitful basis for its further experience. The term “stock of experience” refers to Alfred Schütz’s theory of the life-world:

“Each step of my explication and understanding of the world is based at any given time on a stock of previous experience, my own immediate experiences as well as such experiences as are transmitted to me from my fellow-men and above all from my parents, teachers, and so on.” (Schütz, Luckmann, & Zaner, 1980, p. 7)

In interacting with people and encountering the world, the stock of experience is extended gradually during the whole life of a human being. Education and relationships of all kind convey a culture-related, socially derived, common scheme of interpretation of the common world, which allows a child to perceive the world around it as self-evident and unquestionable (Schütz, 2003b, p. 330). Parents in a sense open up the life-world for their child and set an example for moving, acting and reacting according to their natural attitude. At home, children experience what counts as valid and what they can expect as being valid for the future (the ideality of the “and so forth”, *ibid.*, p. 327). Both their immediately surrounding social world and the social world of their contemporaries (“*Mitwelt*”) allow them to develop a natural attitude that is also determined and influenced by socially conditioned schemes of interpretation and expressions (*ibid.*, p. 329f).

Although all people share their immediately surrounding social world and the social world of their contemporaries, they nevertheless approach this world from different angles. According to Schütz, their situation is biographically determined (Schütz, 2010, p. 338), which means that due to their biography, family history, location and further personal characteristics, they interpret things slightly differently and develop different connotations of what they regard as right or wrong, as desirable or worth avoiding, etc. For instance, a family which is well-established, with both parents having jobs of a high prestige and being academically educated, living in their own house provides a slightly different environment for interpreting the world and having experiences to that of a family which is living in a small city apartment, with both parents having uncertain jobs. The stock of experience that a child builds in a family that lives in a crisis region is of a

different kind to that of a child living in the countryside of Austria, and the kind of experiences of a child born into a family that has migrated from one country to another is of another nature to the one of a child who is born into a broken family. It also will make a difference if a child lives with a single parent, if it has siblings, and so on (see e.g. the impressive students' descriptions of their world in chapter one in Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001; as well as Hughes, Greenhough, Yee, & Andrews, 2010, p. 23ff.; Jünger, 2010). When the child attends school later on, its stock of previous experience and its personal way of interpreting reality will be the most important resource for learning and getting along at school. At the same time, children's different approaches to the life-world will also turn out to be more or less compatible with what is expected of them in class.

In his education theory, Schleiermacher also characterises the first period of a child's life as a preparative relationship between the child and its parents. He differentiates between three periods in education, which are located at the continuum between the amount of family and public influence. At the beginning, family influence is at a maximum level and public influence at a minimum. During the third period, the relation between both poles should be vice-versa (Schleiermacher, 1826/ 2000, p. 166f.). Within the first period, the life of the child is governed by the free interaction with life in general, which means that all pedagogical acts follow the needs and challenges of everyday-life situations. Education tends to be more instinctive than deliberate and it is not as organised as it is in school. In living together with the child, the parents help and support their child in learning how to live, which at the same time builds the premise for a more organised, deliberate education in the second period (Schleiermacher, 1826/ 2000, p. 183f.). Familial education, therefore, can lay the ground work for the child's further development within an ideally safe, protected area in which the main motive for acting is love, at least in an ideal and theorised sense. According to Schleiermacher, it is possible and necessary to promote the ethical (and religious) awareness of a child within this environment, which is an important foundation for the child's further life (Schleiermacher, 1849/1999, p. 49). In a very similar way, Langeveld argues that this safe environment of the immediate family provides an area to which the child can retire, which will become relevant especially as soon as the child attends school. More precisely, it is the "secret places" where the child can simply "be itself", where it can realise its own, imagined world and experience a period of time that is not determined by the rules of the adult world and not regulated by a time schedule. According to Langeveld, the "secret place" is where a

child's personality matures; it educates itself and develops itself through "creative tranquillity and loneliness" (Langeveld, 1960, pp. 77ff and 91). However, finding such secret places is a matter of how much space is available for a child. Similarly to the different life situations as mentioned above, there are different possibilities for children to find a place to be alone. It depends on how much room is available in the family's apartment or house and how much scope of action is conceded the child.

Putting all these perspectives together, the family can be regarded as a protective area in which the child is able and allowed to have its first experience in the art of living. During the first years, it collects a stock of experience that will serve as a resource for all its further experience. However, due to their family backgrounds, living situations, biographical and personal characteristics, children experience very different sectors of the life-world in their childhood, which leads them to interpret and understand daily phenomena from slightly different perspectives and angles.

4.2. The schooling sector

Most of today's children are prepared for their school life through kindergarten education in which they already have their first experience with being away from the family and playing together with children unfamiliar to them. Nevertheless, the first day at school is an important turning point for most children. According to Schleiermacher, it is the time when the family's influence becomes smaller, while the influence of public life becomes bigger (Schleiermacher, 1826/ 2000, p. 165). The education of the child reaches new dimensions that were unable to be provided within a family setting. This not only means that parents do not provide enough knowledge, but also, for instance, that a child has to learn how to get along with people it hardly knows, how to act and behave in non-family relationships, how to cope with performance-related feedback and evaluation, and the child also has to get used to a time schedule that perhaps does not really fit its needs and desires (Jackson, 1968, p. 17 and 29; Langeveld, 1960, p. 51ff.).

According to Langeveld, the world of schooling is a world "in between", or as he calls it, an "amphibian". It can be seen as the transition from childhood to adulthood, and the task

of the school is to prepare and introduce the child to a certain society and culture (Langeveld, 1960, p. 13 and 16; also Spranger, 1958⁹) (see figure 3).



Figure 3: The three overlapping and influencing areas in which students experience, develop, and adapt their scheme of reference (Schütz 2003b; Langeveld 1960; Spranger 1958; and also Bittner 1996). (The graphics were taken from Winword Clipart)

This means, that the world of schooling provides completely new challenges and tasks for the child that has just left the exclusive education monopoly of its parents. Referring to the theory of the life-world, one can formulate that the child, who is now a student, can experience irritating moments in which its former way of interpreting the world no longer has the same consequences. In terms of Schütz this means that the attitude of “I can always do it again” comes to a point at which the individual has to question her or his action and thinking. Expectations, built on the belief in constant structures of the world “explode” and render the valid doubtful (Schütz, 2003b, p. 327). For instance, a student will painfully experience that his or her strategies or asserting something will not work with the teacher or the classmates. In fact, the students face many new challenges and experience a gap between the world they have been used to and the world with which they are now confronted.

Firstly, they are confronted with a diminished amount of privacy and scope of action. The child’s “secret place” becomes metaphorically smaller and less meaningful since daily school life takes much of the student’s time and attention. However, Langeveld argues that both school and family must provide time and spaces in which the student can seek out his or her secret place that is not characterised by pedagogical interventions (Langeveld, 1960, pp. 74-102). Secondly, students are confronted with learning processes that are not self-regulated and do not originate from their own interests or needs, but are

⁹ Spranger’s theory refers to primary school (*Volksschule*) which might lead to the conclusion that it is restricted to primary education. However, there is reason to assume that Spranger’s notion of *Volksschule* covered both primary and lower secondary education (p. 22 and 24), not least because of the fact that the former *Volksschule* (the book was originally written in 1955) often covered both education levels.

pedagogically organised and planned subject to later aims and purposes. Thomas Heinze's research project started from the assumption that, in contrast to parental education, schools injure the situated character of learning processes and do not depart from each single student's personal needs and life situation anymore (Heinze, 1976, p. 16). According to Langeveld, schools represent a task-related world in which the student has to dare to do something unknown with, for the time being, unknown consequences. In accomplishing tasks, the student is confronted with the reality and elements of the adult world under the teacher's professional pedagogical guidance and a final evaluation of the student's results (Langeveld, 1960, p. 51ff.). Thirdly, the student experiences new rules and codes in interacting with classmates and teachers. For instance, students have to learn that they have to put their hands up when they want to say something, that they must not interrupt other students while talking, that they have to remain seated during lesson, etc (Jackson, 1968, p. 6ff.). Within their new identity, students have to internalise new routines, gestures and symbols (standing up at the beginning of the lesson, the meaning of grades, the bell, waiting for other students, etc.). With reference to Breidenstein, it is even a real job that a student has to learn: it is a highly routinised, internalised, pragmatic activity (Breidenstein, 2006) and often as a rigid, inescapable duty. Jackson summarises a student's job as an activity, in which he or she has to enhance the likelihood of praise and reduce the likelihood of punishment, publicise good evaluations and conceal negative ones, and try to win the approval of two audiences at the same time (becoming a good student while remaining a "good guy") (Jackson, 1968, p. 26). He characterises students' daily life at school as a "daily grind" (ibid.) in which they meet obligations and adapt to the conditions prevailing at school.

Within the family, a child experiences and discovers the world unsystematically, immediately and unpreparedly. Usually, the parents and the family help the child in understanding life-world situations and in developing typical strategies for typical problems. In contrast to instructional learning situations at school, real-life learning situations usually happen accidentally and unexpectedly. For instance, when the noise of a passing train makes a child cry, because it has never seen a train before, his mother or father will try to comfort the child and explain to him that the noise is not dangerous, that trains are fascinating and practical things, that it can be nice to sit and watch trains that are passing by and wave to the people who are sitting in the train, and so on. This might be a learning experience for the child and it will remember this experience probably a life

time. Learning how to knot shoe laces is usually also induced by an occasion, but it requires systematically guided and prepared teaching. Nevertheless, it does not follow a curriculum or a prepared, socially accepted syllabus of content as provided at school. At school, students learn socially accepted categories, languages, and symbols that help them in approaching and understanding the world and that represent the current state of interpreting the world. These categories, languages and symbols can be regarded as a socially derived and accepted stock of knowledge that stands for typical constructs which make it easier for people to understand and deal with the daily life-world (Schütz, 2010, p. 343). While parents and all fellow human beings convey these constructs within their daily acting and thinking, teachers try to teach them systematically and professionally. They make students reflect on phenomena within the classroom. For this purpose, they use pictures, replicas, and other materials in order to discuss the characteristics, structure, and meaning of socially meaningful objects, symbols and processes. More or less vivid representations of objects from the “real”, empirical world serve as an “as if” imagination, which invites students to activate “memories of prior personal experiences” (Menck, 2006, p. 116f.; Willbergh, 2011, p. 159). According to Willbergh’s mimetic concept of teaching, the student’s intuitive or immediate perception (Willbergh, 2008) in which she or he draws on the previous stock of experience allows a process of meaning making (Willbergh, 2011, p. 159). Drawing on Dewey’s theory of learning as an experience this process can also be described as an experience in which the student connects to previous experiences and combines both of them (Dewey, 2000). From these perspectives, the teacher prepares and provides an environment in which students are able to experience and give meaning to the matter taught. The teacher chooses the matter from a variety of subjects given in the syllabus which is a socially accepted compromise of what future citizens in a society ought to know. According to Dewey, these subjects and content are also an experience themselves. It is what human beings have experienced so far during their life-course from the beginning of humankind until today. Of course, it can only be a selection of experience and it is systematised, ordered and culturally defined (ibid., p. 12 and 22), or, as Peter Menck puts it, they are “symbolic representations of societal practice” (Menck, 1986, p. 33). Nevertheless, the selected, systematised, ordered and defined aspects of the world serve as an environment in which students can develop their personalities, measure their strengths, expand their body of knowledge and experience and in this way prepare themselves for their future lives. However, these aspects of the world (content, matter) do not have an educative meaning *per se*, but need to be edited,

interpreted and analysed in pedagogical settings (Hopmann, 2007, p. 115f; Menck, 1986, p. 37). This means that, on the one hand, the teacher needs to select matter and decide what aspect she or he wants to put forward for discussion. On the other hand, students are confronted with and challenged by the teacher's reading of the matter and they need to process and interpret the teacher's input. In drawing on previous experience, they try to include and weave the teacher's input into their own experience with the aim of maintaining their coherent and rational picture of the world. The different angles from which students experience their life-world (see Chapter 4.2) influences the student's capability of interpreting and integrating the subject of discussion at school (Schütz, 2010, p. 340). Schütz explains the different distribution of knowledge with the individual's different systems of relevance, which ultimately arise from different biographical situations. Consequently, it differs from student to student which topics, facts and subjects challenge and question her or his natural attitude and lead to extensive interest in gathering more information and learning more about so-called imposed relevances (Schütz, 2003a). For instance, learning about the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s might awaken different associations in autochthon Austrian students and students from families that have migrated from former Yugoslav countries. A student whose parents run their own business might understand the need for calculation abilities differently to a student whose family never talks about finances or accounting. And a student who is used to discussing literature at home with her or his parents, uncles and aunts, grandparents and friends might find it easier to understand complex novels than would a student who is accustomed to other subjects of conversation at the dinner table, etc.

Nevertheless, schools demand from students that they possess a defined stock of knowledge and abilities as described in official documents (syllabus, curriculum). These documents represent society's expectations of the students and contain those matters that society regards as the most important and crucial knowledge for becoming and being a future citizen of society. For this reason, evaluation and testing of the students' progress is an indispensable part of schooling. Students prove to what extent they fulfil these expectations and position themselves in comparison with their peers. In fact, a test can show how far the students' personal, autonomous learning efforts and their interpretations of contents fit the interpretations as given in the tests. Although tests cannot show the students' actual knowledge and abilities, they can at least give information on the state of each student in relation to her or his peers subject to the expected and tested knowledge.

Therefore, from a student's perspective, the world of schooling has two dimensions: On the one hand, it is about figuring out who you are, what abilities you have, and becoming a part of the world. On the other hand, students see themselves confronted with comparative, evaluative settings that show them to what extent they fulfil the expectations as given by the curricula, or, how they fit in with the specific and clearly defined kind of knowledge as represented by schools and their teachers. This distinction corresponds and refers to Schleiermacher's concept of the "individual" and the "universal" function of education (Schleiermacher, 1826/ 2000, p. 37), which reveals that both functions are sides of the same coin and are inseparably connected to each other. Similarly, Spranger points out that the "cultural world" with which students are confronted at school and the student's personal, original world are inseparable and constitute the humanity of human beings (Spranger, 1958, p. 13). While schools introduce the students to the universal, cultural world, they also need to cultivate and promote their personal strengths which will be essential for the students' further lives. Spranger defines primary education as the pedagogical bridge between students' individually constituted worlds and the one determining cultural reality (ibid.). This relation might hold true for all stages of schooling with divergent emphasis on the two poles and it is echoed in school theories that describe the task of schooling as balancing the demands for qualification and cultivation (Hopmann, 2007), which are defined differently according to the systemic, legal, political, regional, personal circumstances under which schools operate (Midtsundstad & Hopmann, 2010). Under current circumstances of standardised testing, schools have an incentive to concentrate on the qualification task because the tests are used as an evaluative tool for the schools' work (see the Norwegian research project "KLARA" in Midtsundstad, 2015; Willbergh, 2015). The reform measures of the Lower-Austrian New Middle School, however, try to compensate for this development by providing schools with more pedagogical scope of action and support so that they may promote their cultivating efforts.

4.3 The after-school sector

Although we are living in times of the popular term "Life-long learning" there comes a point where almost every individual is finished with the core, formal education at school and becomes a fully accepted member of society. Nevertheless, this point comes at totally

different ages. Some leave school at the age of 15 and start an apprenticeship (in which they are still half in a professional, and half in an educational relationship), some drop out of school without any graduation and work as semi- or unskilled labourers, some stay in education until their late twenties and pursue an academic education, and many students find their way somewhere between these cornerstones. The point at which they decide to leave school is of fateful quality, since it more or less defines the life situation in which the young adult will live. However, it is a great accomplishment of modern societies that these decisions are becoming more and more flexible and educational institutions are, at least in parts and at first sight, permeable. People who dropped out of school at an early stage can catch up on graduation, young adults who did not pass the graduation exam in 12th or 13th grade (*Matura*) can be accepted at university by passing a university matriculation exam (*Studienberechtigungsprüfung*), while students who passed the graduation exam in 12th or 13th grade can also enter the labour market without enrolling at university. Nevertheless, it is not only one's education that defines one's job and life opportunities, but also one's personal network, the current labour market, the economic situation, one's family situation and one's personality (Labaree, 2010; Egger, 2006). Therefore, two individuals having the same educational qualifications will not necessarily have the same life situations and living conditions. The places where they live, their family histories, their financial situation, the economic and labour market situation, their plans for their future and many other components can have an influence on what an individual will achieve in life and how her or his life plan looks. For instance, for the case of Lower Austria, this means that students who live in the north will have different possibilities to students who live in the suburbs of Vienna¹⁰. Living in the north of Lower Austria means that there is a relatively poor infrastructure, an aging population and few jobs, but quite a homogeneous student population and more or less inclusive schools with less competition. The students' future prospects depend on their willingness to commute or to accept traditional jobs in small local businesses. Living in the suburbs of Vienna means that students can easily reach a variety of educational institutions and have a wider choice of possibilities, either in the city of Vienna or in its surrounding suburbs. At the same time, those schools are in competition which usually means that they are highly selective, and supply is highly diversified. A recent survey among businesses in Lower Austria revealed that there was a very high demand for technical qualifications. Business

¹⁰ Vienna is located in the middle of the Federal State of Lower Austria, but the city is a separate Federal State. Hence, the suburbs surrounding Vienna are part of Lower Austria.

owners and managers report shortages in (qualified) apprentices, but also in graduates from “HTL¹¹” or technical colleges and universities. Furthermore, there was a lack of commercial qualifications but not to the same extent as for technical qualifications (Schneeberger, Petanovitsch, & Nowak, 2011, p. 1). According to the micro-census of 2011 and further analyses, 35 per cent of all employed people in Lower Austria finished an apprenticeship, which characterises the landscape of the job market. At the same time, 12.5 per cent had an academic degree, whereas in Vienna, about 23 per cent of people with jobs had graduated from university (Statistik Austria, 2012). Since there are many small business companies (so-called “KMU”¹²) in Lower Austria, academic education only plays an important role in industrial regions where large, international companies are established, such as in the southeast of the Federal State of Lower Austria. Another important result from the survey is that the recruitment of young employees is very difficult due to very poor qualifications. Employers point to the fact that even in jobs for semi-skilled workers, it has become necessary to have elementary knowledge of computing, to be highly literate and to be skilled in social communication. This means that increasing demands when recruiting for semi-skilled jobs and apprenticeships might be the reason for problems in finding appropriate employees (Schneeberger et al., 2011, p. 2).

Assuming that schools prepare students for their future lives, the Lower Austrian survey of Schneeberger et al. characterises some of the conditions under which today’s students are trying to find their way. If they decide to do an apprenticeship they might be able to find a job somewhere close to the place where they live, but if they decide to take up studies, in most cases they have to accept that they will have to move to a city in order to find a job. Students are educated for a specific community that is around them, in their world of actual, potential and attainable reach (Schütz, 2003b). This can also be underlined by the capability theory as formulated by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. According to Otto and Schrödter, they argue that achieving an autonomous, self-determined life cannot only be reduced to the individual, but depends on the social context in which the individual becomes capable of doing and knowing something. This means that realising an ability or an ambition depends on accidental and specific conditions that have a crucial influence on the individual’s effort (Otto & Schrödter, 2010, p. 173f.).

¹¹ Höhere Technische Lehranstalt – Upper Secondary School with a focus on technics/engineering

¹² Small and medium-sized businesses

Schools cannot control these conditions, but since they are themselves part of these societal conditions, they need to account for them and keep them in mind when they prepare their students for their future lives (Bauer & Werkl, 2011; Geppert, 2012; Kalisch, 2011; NOESIS, 2012; Nuart, 2012). Therefore, schools cannot prepare students for a certain job or a certain future (as it is generically assumed in the competence concept, (Willbergh, 2015)), but they can contribute and help them to discover and develop abilities that allow them to pursue their ambitions. The “as-if duality” as a didactical characteristic of schooling allows students to imagine and dream about their future (ibid., p.12). Referring to Langeveld, this means that it is necessary to have a picture of the “final student” in mind, but remembering that the path the student ultimately takes will be her or his own, corresponding to her or his personality (Langeveld, 1960, p. 117). It is, however, a preliminary picture (p. 116) and will be subject to change over a whole lifetime. Langeveld points out that children appeal to the educator to help them achieve possibilities that satisfy their commitment to their own inner values:

“Aber ‘reverentia’ bedeutet hier Ehrfurcht vor dem Appell des Kindes an uns, ihm zu helfen, auf eine Weise in den Besitz seiner Möglichkeiten zu geraten, die seine Hingabe an eine innere Wertbestimmtheit erleichtert.” (Langeveld, 1960, p. 116).

The world after school provides possibilities and challenges for the students. If students want to act and work in this world and create it, they need to leave school as mature persons who are aware of their abilities and interests. Schleiermacher defines the endpoint of education as the time when an individual is responsible (*“mündig”*), which means when the younger generation can autonomously contribute to the “moral task” at hand and is on an equal level with the older generation. Both generations simply concur, collaborate and interact with each other – despite the educational influence only gradually disappearing and sometimes being still present in certain contexts (Schleiermacher, 1826/2000, p. 16).

4.4 The student from the perspective of the accountability framework

Chapter 2 has already discussed the possible marginalising impact of accountability systems and the paradigm of individualisation that they create. Within this paradigm, the students’ test results become the focus of attention and are regarded as information on their achieved competence levels and on their schools’ and teachers’ efficiency and quality. Hence, the idea of a “good” or successful education can be defined as the

successful mastery of standardised test items in comparison to a large number of student performance data. The schools' and teachers' task therefore is to train the students towards the defined competence levels and qualify them in terms of the defined education concept. Related to school theory as described above, we could say that successful schools under the accountability logic would concentrate on the qualification function so as to allow students to perform well in standardised tests. From the perspective of the students this means that they have to demonstrate their knowledge in tests which are not synchronised with what they actually have learned in class. They take on a considerable amount of responsibility, although their influence on the test results is very limited.

Standardised assessment tests are usually based on competence concepts which technically are constructs that describe levels of knowledge and skills usually referring to a defined notion of education (Otto & Schrödter, 2010, p. 165). These descriptions of learning goals focus on the single individual by nature and presuppose that students can apply competences in various fields as intended by the competence concept, and that they basically are motivated and want to do their best in order to achieve these goals. In their analysis of the competence construct, Otto and Schrödter point to the problem that competences are regarded as a teachable, increasable, context-specific and cognitive disposition of individuals, although these characteristics have not yet been proven theoretically or empirically in education research. Several reasons reveal the marginalising potential of these constructs:

- **Teachable competences:** Competence constructs implicitly proceed from the assumption that a teacher can teach every matter to a student, and every student can absorb this matter exactly in the way the teacher has intended. For instance, the information on the website of BIFIE on achievement standards states that the standards should ensure that students reach basic competences and should create a more binding commitment between teachers, students and society. They provide teachers with information about what students should know at certain levels of schooling and offer orientation to the students (cf. <https://www.bifie.at/bildungsstandards>, 22.05.2012). Didactical theories would counter that learning is ultimately also an individual, autonomous process and cannot be controlled entirely by the teacher. As already shown above, the different connotations in the teachers' and students' life-world allow them to create different meanings of a given content. What the teacher

intended to convey is not necessarily the same as that which arrives in the students' minds (see Chapter 2.4) (Hopmann, 2007; Willbergh, 2015). Nevertheless, within our shared life-world, learning and discussing a defined subject is, of course, possible, and testing competences is a legitimate and necessary way to evaluate a student's learning progress. However, the assumption that teachers can theoretically teach every content with a fixed meaning to students who in turn can reproduce the fixed combination in tests corresponds with Schleiermacher's critical concept of the omnipotence of education (Schleiermacher 1826/2000, p. 19ff). Within an omnipotent notion of education, educators would feel almighty and try to make the student "into everything one desires" (ibid., p.17). Forming human beings as desired and leading them towards a specific objective is definitely not a democratic understanding of education and ignores the autonomy and self-consciousness of human beings (Hopmann, 2007; Willbergh, 2015). According to Schleiermacher, the task of education and instruction is to elicit and guide the self-activity of the individual by creating an appropriate relationship between that which is expected of the individual and that which she or he is able to perform (Schleiermacher, 1826/ 2000, p. 60).

- **Increasable disposition:** Dispositions are constructed concepts of an individual's characteristics, and it is assumed that an individual's dispositions can be increased through education and that education is supposed to increase these dispositions. Otto and Schrödter argue that the ability to advance depends to a large extent on the conditions in the individual's environment that not only relate to a situation at school or the individualised focus on content, but the entire learning biography, the social setting, the economic conditions and finally the social situation within which the content is enacted ("specific and accidental external conditions of attainment"; *wesentliche und akzidentelle Verwirklichungsbedingungen*; Otto & Schrödter, 2010, p. 174). Seen from this perspective, a mere effort to improve an individual disposition falls short in its attempt to actually encourage a progression towards full development. Only an education enabling the individual to assimilate content in a way in which it fits into the personal world of the individual and is thereby "realisable", in the sense of learnable, can contribute to sustainable human learning development. Assuming that the individual's disposition can be

increased implicitly means that it is only the individual who is responsible for her or his learning progress, provided she or he receives adequate instruction. The liability therefore lies in the hands of the teacher and the student, but not in the conditions under which these people interact with each other (cf. Otto & Schrödter, 2010).

- **Context specific:** achievement standards as well as the theoretical foundation of PISA indicate that the tested knowledge refers to real-life situations and that only competences are tested that are relevant to the students' further lives (<https://www.bifie.at/bildungsstandards> 23.5.2012). In the case of PISA, the concept of "mathematical literacy" claims to define "an individual's capacity to identify and understand the role that mathematics play in the world, to make well-founded judgements and to use and engage with mathematics in ways that meet the needs of that individual's life as a constructive, concerned and reflective citizen." (OECD, 2009, p.14). These didactical concepts have been criticised because they only refer to real life situations in an application-oriented and superficial sense. Critics say that the test items are obviously artificially adapted to the possible real life situations of students (Dolin, 2007, p. 101; Meyerhöfer, 2007; Sjøberg, 2007), but there has been no empirical evidence that students who master the PISA test items are effectively successful in their further careers and more satisfied and happy with their lives. The actual problem of the competence constructs as used by PISA or the Austrian achievement standards is that they lack a normative conceptualisation of the purpose and application of the competences (Biesta, 2009, p. 33 and 35; Heid, 2007a). Traditional concepts exclusively refer to personal dispositions, but not to the contexts in which the competence should be realised. For instance, being able to do interest calculation does not necessarily protect you from finance agents selling pyramid deals and wanting to sell you profitless solutions and so jeopardise your savings by dubious means.
- **Cognitive disposition:** Of course, learning is partly a cognitive activity and much research has already investigated these processes. However, if learning were simply and exclusively regarded as a cognitive process, it would not necessarily have to take place in schools, in classrooms and within a group of peers (see also Willbergh, 2015). A computer-based instruction program

would be sufficient to induce cognitive activities that should finally lead to correct test results. Furthermore, the cognitive conceptualisation of learning ignores the fact that there might be legitimate reasons for students not to show their full competence in a test or to refuse to participate in learning processes. For instance, the social dynamics in a classroom very often influence a student's engagement in class, and students who do not see a perspective for themselves and do not feel accepted in class often tend to "switch off" (Freire, Carvalho, Freire, Azevedo, & Oliveira, 2009). A purely cognitive concept of students' learning is a reductionist understanding of a social phenomenon that is based on the same implicit assumption as already discussed above under "teachable competences".

The picture of a student that evolves from the competence framework is that of a mechanical learner whose performance is evaluated regularly and compared to a description of what she or he should be capable. Deficits of students become very clear within this comparison, and the students have to make efforts in overcoming these deficits. This perspective reduces learning to a training situation in which the teacher becomes a mentor who has to train the students towards the defined goal and remediate their deficits (Biesta, 2012). The liability for increasing competence is attributed to the student and the teacher, and gives the student the impression that all she or he can do is to put more effort into learning. Technically speaking, the process of learning is treated as a simple causal model in which teaching and learning are regarded as "black boxes" and in which the teacher is the only "treatment" within the process (see Raudenbush, 2008, and figure 4). Furthermore, such a theoretical model regards the process of learning and teaching detached from the social context in which they happen (instruction "occurs in classrooms nested within schools", *ibid.*, p. 207) and from their anchorage within the society (learning in schools and the classroom fulfils several societal demands and needs and is closely connected to and embedded in society, see Otto and Schrödter (2010).

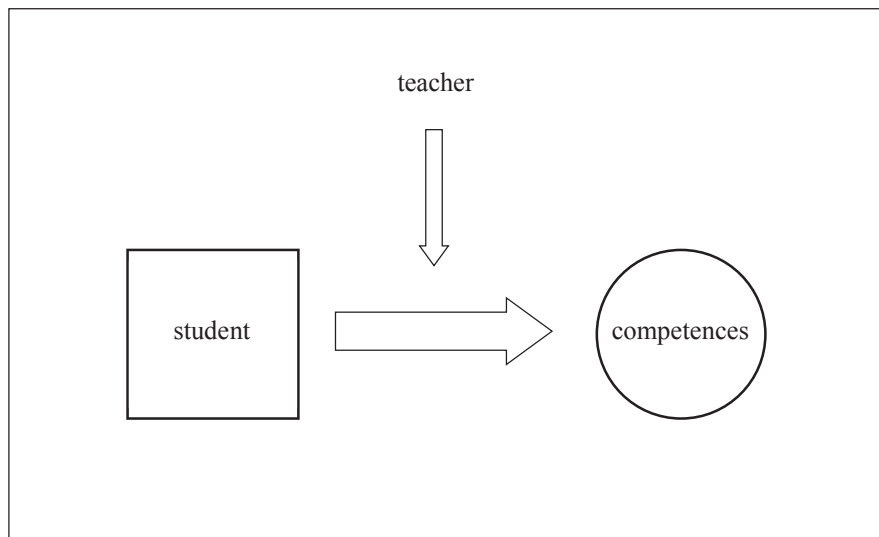


Figure 4: Learning and teaching as a simple causal model (Raudenbush 2008; cf. Otto & Schrödter 2010)

Compared to the theoretical comments as presented above, the focus of the competence framework is on the qualification of students, lacking a definitive idea of what they should be qualified for. Standardised tests can give helpful information about where students are right now in comparison to their peers, but they neglect the important social task of schooling. Helping the students in becoming formative members of society contributes to a nation's or a community's cohesion and is not only an important influence on a country's economic development, but also a presupposition for a more or less peaceful, democratic life. Especially students who cannot fulfil the qualification expectations to a sufficient degree depend on education in basic principles of citizenship, civic rules and traditions in order to find a job. In the course of the accountability framework, it is important to find a normative notion of “good” education for every kind of human being, be she or he academically successful or not. For instance, Martha Nussbaum formulated core central human capabilities that every individual should achieve. These skills refer to an imagined “good life” which in fact is a right of every human being. For example, she demands that every human being should be “able to use the senses to imagine, think and reason in a way that is informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy, and basic mathematical and scientific training”. Everybody should be “able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice”... and be “able to live with and toward others”, “to engage in various forms of social interaction” and “be[ing] able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life”, etc

(Nussbaum, 2009, p. 23f.). This approach allows for a more situated and interactive understanding of teaching and learning that is dedicated to a holistic concept of education. Holistic in this context means that education takes into account the societal conditions under which students develop and apply their competences, and it proceeds from the picture of a student as an autonomous individual who needs support, intellectual challenges, goals and evaluation, but nevertheless goes her or his own way, matched to her or his personal biographical situation and personality. Achievement standards, however, cannot ensure that students will be able to master the challenges of their future lives in society, since they cannot be oriented towards the students' social situations and their possible options in their "world of actual and potential reach" (Schütz, 1945, p. 546f.). Especially low-achieving students and students with disabilities need increased support in finding their way into society. Of course, there are schools which can easily perform well in standardised tests, but there will always be schools for which achievement standards are an unfulfillable demand. Their students attend school under different conditions, which are to the disadvantage of the students and which require different approaches than a mechanistic training for competence levels. Schools in deprived areas and schools with a large number of students with special needs could do a wonderful job if their students leave with realistic chances for a certain workplace, with a good self-concept, and with a considerable amount of experience in mastering social situations.

5 A perspective on marginalisation from “below”¹³

Within a paradigm of individualisation, students are marginalised when they cannot reach high competence levels which might qualify them for higher education. However, a situated appreciation of the students’ performance and goals as presented in the previous chapter leads to a different understanding of marginalisation, i.e. a definition that follows the idea of Sen and Nussbaum’s capability approach and understands marginalisation as a mismatch between the students’ resources and the school’s expectations instead of reducing it to an individual deficit problem. This chapter presents popular concepts of social equity and discusses their limits, which leads to a new concept based on Nussbaum’s theory about social justice (1999) and Schütz’s “The Stranger” (1944).

Research on discrimination in education has become a very popular field in education science. Never before have we known so much about marginalisation and discrimination in education. Students with disabilities, with a migration background, students from socially underprivileged families, girls or boys and matters of race or ethnicity have become intensively investigated subjects of research, which usually reveals structural and institutional mechanisms that declare these students as not fitting into the traditional school’s frame. Not least because of international student assessment studies like PISA, TIMSS or PIRLS, is there a growing awareness of and interest in equity issues and the discrimination of students who are considered as being “different” in certain respects, and it has become state of the art that the equity parameter is an important indicator for the quality of a nation’s education system.

Research on marginalisation is closely connected to the question of how an equitable society might look. Every investigation has an implicit picture of the just and ideal shape of society, and this has an important impact on the theoretical arguments presented in the studies. The basis for all research studies on marginalisation seems to be the idea that every child has a right to the best possible education. This normative assumption can be attributed to widely accepted human rights declarations and political conventions and supposedly to a general, traditional pedagogical creed or commitment to the best possible

¹³ Some arguments in this chapter have been published in Hörmann, 2012c.

developmental support for every child. However, different approaches interpret this idea differently, not least because of varying definitions of what is considered to be “fair” and “equitable”. According to Jordan, the definition is dependent on the cultural context and can vary from one group to another (Jordan, 2010, p. 147). He differentiates between two approaches in defining equity: On the one hand, there are approaches that demand equality of opportunity, and on the other hand, there are approaches that consider equality of outcomes a desirable goal in education (ibid.). I selected some studies from different areas and time periods as examples for discussing and illustrating these two approaches.

5.1 Equality of opportunity

The demand for equality of opportunity means that justice is defined as an opportunity provided for individuals, but this opportunity leads to a final distribution that, in the end, is not equal. A very famous and ground-breaking example is the US study, “Equality of Educational Opportunity”, which was published in 1966 by James Coleman et al. The predominant topic of the study was the different distribution of educational opportunities between African-American and white students and it examined how far students had access to a wide range of different resources. The study presents the omnipresent influence of the biblical, so-called Matthew-Principle: “For those who have will be given more” (Mt 13,12). According to Coleman et al., this effect can be seen, for example, in the fact that African-American students and students from minorities usually were taught by poorly educated teachers, in badly equipped schools and with less access to science laboratories and libraries, etc. Furthermore, 80 per cent of the white students attended schools which were attended by 90 to 100 per cent of white students (the same applied to teachers). In heterogeneous schools, mainly white teachers instructed the white and African-American students, whereas it was never the case that African-American teachers taught in heterogeneous schools (Coleman et al., 1966, pp. 3-34). Coleman’s study nicely illustrates the idea of justice as an equal distribution of opportunities. Implicitly, the study means that if African-American students were taught in better equipped schools, by well-educated teachers and in equally heterogeneous schools, they would be on equal terms with their white peers and would enjoy the same opportunities as them. However, having an opportunity does not necessarily mean that students can take and realise that opportunity. Due to their personal and social backgrounds, students have different possibilities of realisation at their disposal, which make it easier or more difficult to grasp an opportunity.

Research on structural discrimination also reveals systemic effects that deprive students of their opportunities. Gomolla, for example, pointed to the fact that although obvious acts of discrimination have been almost banned, the mechanisms are still working on another level. From a system-theoretical perspective, she reveals that whenever schools are confronted with existential questions (such as, e.g., can the class be continued any longer, can all teachers be employed next year, will the funds be prolonged, etc.), students with a migration background serve as a compensating valve: in case the school needs more students in order to keep teachers and resources, they are kept within the system. In case the school has too many students, immigrant students are the most likely ones to be edged out of the system and assigned to special education schools (Gomolla, 2007; Kronig, 2007). The innovative aspect of the equal opportunity approach is that it is no longer exclusively the individual whose characteristics are defined as deficient and problematic, but it is the structure and systemic processes that cause the student's failure. Nevertheless, the approach proceeds from the assumption that every student can be the architect of his or her own fortune and destiny. However, having the same opportunity does not mean that every student has a fair opportunity to succeed in education. Furthermore, this picture implies either a society that is entirely equal – which does not and cannot hold true in reality – or a differentiated society, in which places are distributed by chance (since everybody has had an equal opportunity). The fact that students who “already have” usually can benefit from their opportunity much faster than their peers with any kind of special need therefore reduces the principle to absurdity; people hardly would be satisfied if simply luck decided where they would be, despite how much effort they may have put into grasping their opportunities at school and studying. A further problem with this approach is that it does not define the goal towards which the opportunity should lead the student. The question of how a successful education career looks is often not addressed or, in some cases, is normatively defined as achieving the highest grades possible in a school system (such as in Austria, the *Matura* exam, or even better, a university degree). Basically, people assume that intelligence is normally distributed, and so too should be the individual trajectories after graduating from school (Schlögl, 2009, p. 162).

5.2 Equality of outcomes

The idea of „equality of outcomes“ is related to the increased popularity of standardised assessment tests and the accountability framework in general. Behind the standardisation

movement lies the argument that the way students have been graded was subjective and unfair, since teachers' decisions were influenced by their perceptions of the students' personalities, with grades usually varying from teacher to teacher. Assessment test results were expected to be "culture fair", which means that they do not consider the students' social and cultural background, and provide "real" and "objective" performance related results. However, the most important finding on student assessment tests is that students with a low socio-economic background and immigrant students usually perform more poorly than their peers, which illustrates a dilemma that obviously cannot be avoided. One can presume that there is no such thing as an "objective" or "just" measurement of students' performance which can serve as a more performance-related parameter for the social distribution process.

Since generous school reform programs within the welfare state era have been unable to solve the equity problem (e.g. Lindblad, 2008), modern societies hoped that the new standardised measurements might contribute to a better social balance (cf. Hopmann, 2006). As already shown in Chapter 2 and as argued by a number of scholars, standardised assessment tests cannot lead to social equity (Jordan, 2010). The implicit assumption is that each student should achieve a predefined level of performance ("competence") which also serves as the ideal goal for society. Therefore, the implicit picture of an ideal society would be that every individual has reached the given competence level, irrespective of current societal and professional requirements and demands (ibid., p. 151 and 155). Besides, the standardised testing paradigm creates a borderline between what is accepted and what is not. Students who do not reach the required level are regarded as being deficient and "not yet there". In order to compensate these deficits, additional tutoring and support are the most popular interventions that are supposed to ensure that these deficits are compensated (ibid., p. 150 and Chapter 2).

In comparing both equity approaches, it becomes evident that the popular research field lacks an illustration of how an equitable society might look and to what normative category the term "equity" relates. Jordan, for instance, defines the task of education for gaining social equity as giving students the knowledge, skills and worldviews that allow for social mobility. From his point of view, the term "equity" depends on cultural and societal values and especially on the given situation under which an individual acts (Jordan, 2010, p. 148). Social mobility, however, is a very vague concept of equity, since it dissolves the problem into the idea of "everything should be possible for everyone". It

presupposes that there are different social levels, and people can move between them in both directions, neglecting the fact that people who have achieved something valuable in their lives will almost always try to pass it on to their children and try to push them even more forward (Labaree, 2010). Therefore, social mobility would only mean that those from the lower levels move up to the higher levels and not the opposite. According to the “equity paradox”, this tendency only enlarges the difference between the social groups, because the more people push forward, the more effort people from the upper sector put into promoting their offsprings’ careers (Bauer-Hofmann & Hopmann, 2013).

In the following table, I summarise both approaches as described above.

	Equality of opportunity	Equality of outcomes
The “ideal” society	Everybody had her/his opportunity and has grasped it to a different extent. Differentiated distribution of jobs/social positions.	Everybody should achieve the defined performance level. The actual performance result of each student decides her or his future life situation.
The picture of the individual student	Student is responsible for taking advantage of her or his opportunities.	Student is responsible for her/his learning progress
The picture of schooling, education, and instruction	Schools provide opportunities. Teachers try to do their best to qualify their students.	Schools guide their students to the performance levels and train them to the given bar.
Limits	Whether somebody can take advantage of an opportunity at school still depends on her or his social, biographical, familial,... resources.	Defines what is within the norm and what is outside it. Leads to a deficit oriented pedagogical understanding (see also Chapter 2)

Table 1: Comparison of the “Equality of Opportunity” and the “Equality of outcomes” approaches

In Austria, current discourse on equity can be characterised by a mixture of both approaches. On the one hand, researchers and politicians use results from standardised

tests as a basis for addressing the equity problem. Assessment tests like PISA show that students with a migration background usually achieve lower test results than their autochthonous peers, and that the students' performance generally depends on the social status of their parents (Schwantner & Schreiner, 2010). Referring to these results, politicians and researchers demand individualised learning support intended to help the students work on their deficiencies so as to reach the expected learning goals. In addition, comprehensive school reform measures (as, for instance, the New Middle School) in terms of "one size fits all" are intended to ensure more justice and equality of opportunities (Eder, 2008; Hopmann, Bauer, & Geppert, 2010; www.neuemittelschule.at; Wimmer, n.y.). The common goal of reform measures is to increase the number of students who enrol in academic education which has become the parameter for a successful school career (Hörmann, 2012c). People point to each student's right to the best possible education and development of her or his personality and, as presented by Thonhauser and Pointinger, people frighteningly claim that academic education can protect against unemployment, reduce health problems, increase students' willingness to participate in democratic processes and prevent them from becoming delinquent (Thonhauser & Pointinger, 2008). Also at the international level, the OECD presents calculations showing that an academically educated citizen pays more taxes and social insurance contributions and therefore adds more value to a nation's further development than people who have been educated at a lower level (OECD, 2012). All these debatable arguments correspond to a general international trend for upgrading in education. The enormous expansion of education during the 1960s and 70s (a consequence of the "equality of opportunity" approach) tried to replace former elitist mechanisms in the distribution of education access by opening school access to a broad mass of students. As important as these reforms have been, the story of success also had its price. As a side effect, the expansion has caused a pressure to permanently reach a higher level of education than before: families who have already reached a certain level always try to make a difference and long for higher goals. In doing so, society pushes the level of what counts as a desirable education level upward and therefore ensures that social differences persist and increase (Krenn, 2012; Lindblad, 2008; and, for the context of "lifelong learning" see also Egger, 2006). As argued by Labaree (2010), schools are not isolated institutions that simply deliver a "product", but they have to be seen as institutions that are closely connected to society and therefore are influenced by interests from parents, politics and economy, and they have to assimilate themselves into the power game and

find their own position. According to the “equity paradox” (Bauer-Hofmann & Hopmann, 2013), all efforts in reducing social differences by expanding and promoting academic education paradoxically lead to an increase in such differences. Both approaches presented above are limited by their notion of societal dynamics, which ignores that social upward mobility is easier for people who are already well-equipped with social, cultural and financial capital. This fact functions as an exponential driving force that quickly leaves less well equipped families behind and leads to maintaining differences, both in the equality of opportunity and the quality of outcomes approach. Apart from this interesting dynamic, the anthropological standpoint behind the notion that academically educated people are better human beings is questionable. It implies that the task of education is to train every human being towards a traditional bourgeois idea of education, which again can be regarded as an omnipotent aspiration, according to Schleiermacher (Schleiermacher, 1826/ 2000, p. 19ff). An omnipotent education proclaims that it is able to make everything of every human being (see Chapter 2.5) and therefore ignores and violates a human being’s autonomy. Furthermore, it overestimates our schools’ power, since they only can stimulate an individual’s self-activity and create an environment in which students can develop meanings of what they have learned in class (Hopmann, 2007), but they are not able to indoctrinate students with any content in terms of a simple input-output process of schooling. Besides, assuming that people who have not attended a *Gymnasium* or university are more likely to be delinquent, are less interested in democracy and have a bad work morale is not only alarming from an anthropological perspective, but also a very biased perception of our reality.

According to the approaches presented above, marginalisation means that certain students cannot fulfil societal, normative demands and expectations. In Austria, for instance, marginalisation means that students do not attend a *Gymnasium* or do not have the aspiration to take the *Matura* exam. Consequently, all supporting measures and reform ideas refer to a deficit-oriented perspective that suggests working on these deficiencies and training students towards the defined goal. However, societal norms and expectations usually are defined in a too narrow and standardised manner. They can never meet the manifold life situations of human beings and do not account for their different needs and sorrows. People live under a variety of imaginable and unimaginable conditions that allow some professional paths and make others impossible. Economic and political structures and the job market set further conditions which are indispensable for the preservation and continued existence of a society. They demand different abilities and

competences, and constrain and allow different ways of professional development both at the same time. Therefore, regarded from a societal perspective, the problem becomes visible in the question of how a society can maintain its structures in the case of its citizens being mainly academically educated – a scenario that is not only undesirable but also unrealistic, since the upgrading process will always motivate parents to seek more (see above).

5.3 A perspective on marginalisation from “below”: Nussbaum’s theory of justice

If the “equity paradox“ (Bauer-Hofmann & Hopmann, 2013) holds true, it seems that any measures that aim to reduce inequality are doomed to fail. As shown above, aspirations from parents are an inevitable dynamic within societies that cannot be held back. Therefore, it might be fruitful to refer to a different approach of social justice and develop another understanding of marginalisation. The presupposition for this new approach is that it keeps this social dynamics in mind and concedes that every human being pursues her or his happiness, without defining a norm that is characterised by the ideas and values of a certain social group.

Martha Nussbaum has developed a theory of justice that refers to Aristotle’s concept of the good human life as presented in *Politeia*. Together with Amartya Sen, she created the theory of capabilities, which has already been presented in Chapters 2 and 3. According to Nussbaum’s theory of justice, discrimination or marginalisation can be understood as a withholding of *conditions* that enable us to exercise freedom and participation in society (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 45). In modern Western societies it has become a general principle that every citizen is equal to each other and should be able to live in freedom. In the context of schooling, this means that every child should be able to participate in institutionalised education processes and gain support in order to be able to graduate. Unlike approaches that simply promote the provision of equal opportunities (Nussbaum: “liberal approaches”) or that advocate the redistribution of resources for the benefit of those who are in need (Nussbaum: e.g. Rawl’s theory), Nussbaum assumes that it is first of all necessary to create conditions under which a human being can make use of her or his freedom. A just social order can be made possible if we try to find out what each single person needs in her or his specific life situation in order to be able to use her or his

resources and devices for living a life that is human in its full sense, as far as natural possibilities allow (ibid.). This concept takes into account that people in different life situations realise their potentials and aspirations to different extents. As already discussed, it is easier for well-established families that already have internalised the specific kind of education and knowledge that is demanded at school to keep up with the upgrading process and realise the lives of which they dream.

According to Nussbaum's theory, the benchmark for living a good life is not a life that corresponds to a certain conception of "goodness" which is biased towards a certain social group, but it is what people themselves define and imagine as their own good lives. This means that self-defined aims and styles of life that have been chosen under free and autonomous conditions have to be acknowledged and esteemed by everyone and, in the context of education, by institutions. However, Nussbaum goes one step further and defines a concept of a good life, based on the most important issues of human rights. She has developed a list of basic components of a humane, free (independent and autonomous) life which can be regarded as an approach from "below". In the context of education, this means again that marginalisation is not about students being held back from "higher education" or other norms defined by society, but it is about making it impossible for students to develop the kind of skills and knowledge that are necessary to live a self-determined, autonomous life according to the principles of a good human life, relative to their personal life situations and their environment. The school's task therefore can be defined as making students capable of living their lives and finding future prospects that correspond to the principles of a good human life. The capability approach (Nussbaum, 2009; Otto & Schrödter, 2010) necessarily requires the inclusion of students' societal, political, economic and personal environments during their education towards a life in society. If we looked at our schools without having their local context in mind, we would find almighty and isolated institutions that indoctrinate students with normatively defined content. Yet, how can students prepare themselves for their lives as citizens in a certain region when schools do not regard themselves as a part of this region, including all its networks, characteristics and possibilities? The education process within school therefore has to be understood as preparing students for a life under actual possibilities of participation, occupational possibilities, social dynamics and political conditions.

5.4 Students as “strangers” in the social community at school

From the perspective of Nussbaum’s theory of justice, marginalisation can be understood as a lack of perspectives for those students who cannot make use of education by themselves due to the differing characteristics of their sectors of the personal life-world and expectations at school. Especially the upgrading process makes it difficult for students with underprivileged backgrounds to find their place at school, develop a perspective and realise their dreams. As already elaborated in the Chapters 2 and 4, schools represent social communities with defined norms, traditions and expectations towards their students. With reference to Schütz, students will develop their own natural attitudes within the safe and trustful environment of the family which is the first and most intimate sector of the life-world. It can also be regarded as a social group that shares a particular history and has developed cultural patterns, simplifying social life and interactions within the group (Schütz, 1944). Similarly, the social community at school can also be defined as a social group that also has cultural patterns and traditions, albeit these structures and habits are especially influenced by a societal, institutional understanding of a school’s tasks and duties. Nevertheless, all people who work at schools interpret these given tasks and duties in their own ways and constitute a social group that also has a common history and a vivid present (*ibid.*).

According to Schütz’s theory, students can be regarded as individuals who approach the social group of the school, or, more specifically, they try to become members of society by approaching the social group of school, which provides a more or less safe and transitional field for training and practice. Consequently, the individual student is a stranger who has to learn and integrate the new cultural patterns of the group he or she is approaching into her or his life-world (*ibid.*). Usually, the cultural patterns at school are irritating, unclear and shocking for every single student at the beginning of her or his school career because they question her or his “thinking as usual” (*ibid.*, p. 502). A student’s current system of relevances has been developed within the family, the circle of friends, and former educational institutions like kindergarten, etc. and therefore has its own history and cultural patterns (“recipes”). When entering school, students experience that their “thinking as usual” becomes unworkable, at least in certain situations. Their recipes do not help them in interpreting social situations and structures in the new environment, which can cause a severe crisis for the students since it questions their own natural attitudes. In general, every single student experiences this crisis and has to find

ways to deal with it. However, in particular students whose system of relevances differs to a greater extent from the expectations at school suffer from this crisis more severely because the bigger the discrepancy, the more difficult is the process of gaining explicit knowledge of the elements of the school's cultural patterns (ibid., p. 506; and, similarly, Petillon's concept of "discontinuity", 1987, p. 30). While students with "consonant resources" (Hughes et al., 2010, p. 19) usually master the transition from being a stranger to being a member of the new social group rather quickly and easily, students with "dissonant resources" often struggle with their lives between two worlds which seem to be irreconcilable (ibid., p. 28). This hybrid position can be a burden for the students and often leads them to problematic situations at school and in class. Whenever their "thinking as usual" and their scheme of references does not help them in interpreting and decoding the social situations at school, they might be confronted with a feeling of insecurity, of being misunderstood and of being incapable. They might even feel that their personal background is being devalued and questioned, a humiliating experience for human beings in general. Furthermore, cultural "hybrids" are often confronted with the accusation of being ungrateful because they refuse the approached group's recipes. The stranger is experienced as somebody who cannot see the good in learning of the cultural patterns of the approached group and therefore is unwilling and not fitting (Schütz, 1944, p. 507). Developing acts of resistance and being demotivated can then be reasonable consequences from the students' perspectives (Freire et al., 2009; Kirova, Mohamed, & Emme, 2006).

Marginalisation in this sense is not about students who do not fit into the current system of schooling, but about educational expectations that are unable to respond to the students' various ways of interpreting and living in the world ("mismatch-problem", Kramer, 2002). A focus on competence-oriented teaching and learning approaches might impede the schools' efforts to give their students opportunities in which their two worlds can get in touch with each other and in which their resources can turn into a fruitful stock for learning experiences (Hopmann, 2007; Dewey 1994, p. 458). For instance, Claesson's concept of teaching as "seeing-as" draws on lived intersubjective dimensions between teacher and students that allow for the unplanned and spontaneous experience of seeing a thing (or a content) in a certain way. It is a lived agreement between the teacher and the students, and therefore a result of a productive interaction between the different approaches of the students (or their "systems of relevances", Schütz, 2010 and 1944) (Claesson, 2011, p. 183ff.). Core didactical elements like "seeing-as" or also van Manen's

“pedagogical tact” (Van Manen, 2003) fall short in a competence-driven understanding of learning and teaching. Opportunities for considering and connecting the students’ various approaches can therefore become rare in the new era of accountability. An individualised and competence oriented perspective on learning proceeds from equally distributed conditions of learning and therefore regards students with dissonant resources as deficient and “not yet there”.

Attributing the deficiency to the individual and trying to adapt it to the cultural “norm” is neither a promising nor a humane way of dealing with the problem (Gutierrez et al., 2009). It is not only from a general human, but also from a societal perspective, an important task to create conditions under which every single student can pursue her or his images of a good life. With an eye on issues like the maintenance of the pension system, the social security system and, above all, social peace, it becomes clear that keeping individuals back from participating in society should be avoided. Both costs and moral standards should ensure that human beings do not have to be dependent on national structures, but can live autonomously and self-determinedly, participating in the job market and in social networks, as long as they consider this as a desirable goal and as a good life. This aspect becomes even more important considering Berliner’s argument that the effect of school reforms on social equity is generally overestimated. Educational efforts in gaining equity, at the most, can be effective if they are combined with job market, economic and social reforms (Berliner, 2014).

6 Methodology

In order to process the research question, I decided to gather empirical data from students based on Max van Manen's "Researching lived experience" (1990). In this chapter I elaborate on the question why I decided for a phenomenologically oriented framework and how I conceptualised my empirical investigation.

6.1 A phenomenological way of seeing

The purpose of this thesis is to discover how a paradigm of individualisation can be marginalising for students whose characteristics in terms of their personal worlds from their homes differ from expectations at school. In the preceding chapters I have argued that current research and public discourse in the context of standardised testing and competence frameworks tend to draw on a very superficial picture of students and their learning at school. In contrast to those approaches, this thesis refers to theories that regard the student as an autonomous individual who is part of a social situation in the classroom in which students collectively create meaning of content. Learning is not regarded as a simple "treatment" with an easily detectable outcome as in a clinical effectiveness study, but as a process in which students build on their biographically determined, previous stock of knowledge and expand it by experiencing, and being confronted by, new questions and tasks. Schooling from this perspective follows the purposes of both imparting certain typical instances of knowledge and preparing students for their lives as citizens, participants in the job market, family members, or however their students' concepts for their lives might be. In order to clarify possible marginalising side-effects of an accountability framework for a certain group of students, I consider it necessary to draw on a genuine picture of schooling from a student perspective. A phenomenological way of seeing allows me not only to regard learning as a social process, but also allows me to gain insights into this process through the lived experience of the students. By investigating how students experience schooling, I aim to develop a basic understanding of the nature of schooling, which will be used in a second step to identify possible collateral damage of the accountability trend.

As stated by Erickson et al (2008, p. 200), there is, in fact, a growing interest in the student perception of schooling, but very often the data are interpreted from an adult's

perspective. Furthermore, they point to the problem that student-centred approaches often do not go any further than investigating the students' subjective experience (the internal conditions), although the external conditions, under which the students make their experience, are easier to change (ibid.). As stated by Egger, current approaches are often blind to the actual conditions of the learners' biographies, which means that especially low-qualified people are often judged as being unwilling and lazy (Egger, 2006, p. 7). This is one further reason why I decided to take a phenomenological approach. It provides a framework that covers both the conditions and contexts of schooling and the students' personal perspectives by investigating the phenomenon of schooling through the students' experiences. It is obviously a common creed that all efforts in education should be in the students' interest for succeeding in life, and since students represent nothing less than our society's future, I am convinced that a genuine student-centred approach can help and contribute to understanding schooling from a new and fruitful perspective (Erickson et al., 2008; Feichter, 2011; 2013; Leitch et al., 2007; Schratz, Schwarz, & Westfall-Greiter, 2011; Smyth & Hattam, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2002; Petillon, 1987).

Structural approaches that help explain institutional processes and effects cannot contribute to answering my research question, because they are not able to go into the students' thinking and acting in their daily lives at school. Theories like pragmatism or symbolic interactionism are able to explain interactive moments in learning between students and teachers, but they cannot explicitly refer to the individual's perspective. Social constructivist theories, however, proceed from the assumption that we can try to understand the social reality of schooling just by understanding how the students construct this reality. In contrast to this approach, phenomenological theory based on Alfred Schütz offers the concept of the every-day life-world, which is open to the idea of reality. By investigating the students' experience in terms of their "natural attitude", I have the opportunity to understand the essence or the nature of the phenomenon of schooling, which is indeed the reality.

Alfred Schütz's phenomenological sociology focuses on the everyday life of human beings, in which people find themselves in a natural attitude. Within this natural attitude, people do not question their actions, their expectations, or any incidents that are happening in the context of an everyday life routine. For instance, for students it is common sense that there is a teacher in their classroom who gives tasks and asks questions, that they have to do homework, and that their performance is assessed in class

from time to time. According to Schütz, this is our life-world, and, apart from its social interactions it is characterised by the idealisations of “and so on” and “I can do it again”. This means that human beings proceed from the assumption that what has been proven valid according to their experience will continue to be valid (*“was sich bisher in unserer Erfahrung als gültig erwiesen hat, wird auch weiterhin gültig bleiben”*) and that people can repeat their actions in the future (*“dass ich, was ich bisher in dieser Welt und auf sie wirkend vollbringen konnte, in Hinkunft wieder und immer wieder vollbringen kann”*) (Schütz, 2003b, p. 327). I have already discussed the implications of the case when the students’ natural attitude is suddenly challenged by irritating expectations in class, which make them see that their previous strategies no longer work and that they *cannot* “do it again” (see Chapter 5.4). An important question in this chapter is how a researcher is able to investigate this human life-world, considering the fact that she or he is always a part of it as well. Schütz turned this question into the question of how subjective meaning can be scientifically grasped (Schütz, 2010, p. 366). One important presupposition for investigating subjective meaning is that the researcher leaves the natural attitude behind and tries to attain a condition of reflexive experience, which means that common sense and things taken for granted suddenly become questionable and are not self-evident anymore. The researcher is now a “disinterested observer”, who leaves the biographically determined situation and follows the rules and logic of scientific social research, which means that she or he is searching for truth, under the acceptance of what has already been accepted as “corpus of science” by other researchers (ibid., p. 368f.). Within the scientific attitude (in contrast to the natural attitude), the researcher observes human patterns of interaction or their results and interprets them regarding their subjective meaning. This procedure is similar to processes in everyday life, but the scientific researcher is guided by a different system of relevances (ibid., p. 370f.). Thus, the core task of a phenomenological researcher is to investigate the world as it appears to her or him in a pre-reflective manner. The subject becomes a part of the investigation, and it is of interest how it experiences the world. Following Schütz’s theory, investigating the subject’s way of experiencing the world can shed light on the objects (phenomena) in the reality.

The preceding lines reveal that I draw on phenomenologically oriented approaches that can be regarded as sources for qualitative, sociological research methods and methodologies (Knoblauch, 2009, pp. 299 and 317). Since Schütz’s theory transcends classical phenomenological theory and combines it with sociology, I decided to call my research methodology “phenomenologically oriented”. It is not a phenomenological

enquiry in, for instance, Husserl's proper tradition, but it refers to theories that have developed basic phenomenological ideas further and reconciled them with social research and the discipline of sociology. Schütz's theory of social research remains imprecise regarding the process of investigation and interpretation. He offers terms and concepts for interpreting human actions and thinking, but he does not refer to any tools or methods of investigation. With his approach called "Lived Experience" (1990), Max van Manen found a way to apply the basic Husserlian concepts of "epoché" and eidetic variation to empirical research (see also Knoblauch, 2009, p. 317). It can be based on narratives or anecdotes from individuals (next to some further sources like diaries, art, or literature), which allow the gathering of empirical data that reflect the natural attitude of individual human beings. At the same time, narratives and anecdotes help the researcher leave the natural attitude and take on the attitude of a reflexive, disinterested researcher (Schütz, 2010, p. 368f.) and pursue the process of eidetic variation. Similarly to Schütz, van Manen assumes that human beings are inseparably linked to the world (the "principle of intentionality"). In doing empirical research, the researcher asks human beings questions that are constitutive of the world (Van Manen, 1990, p. 5), which means that reality is reflected in the person's experience. In van Manen's application of phenomenological theory, human beings recount actually experienced situations which show an extract of their reality that is called "lived experience". They describe their reality in the way it appears to them. The people's stories and anecdotes are characterised by the way the person experiences her or his world and can therefore shed light on the world as it is immediately experienced by the person, i.e. pre-reflectively (ibid., p. 9). Within this immediate, natural attitude the researcher can find structures of the life-world, in contrast to the reflected world as it is presented at school, for instance. It is an uncategorised and non-systematised experience of the world, and it is not of interest if the incident did really happen. The lived experience approach tries to reveal and uncover internal meaning structures of the person's lived experience, which means that the researcher wants to understand what meaning the person who is investigated gives to the experienced incident and what she or he derives from this meaning (ibid., pp. 10, 14, and 23).

Therefore, the idea of this thesis is to investigate students' lived experience of schooling in five different schools that participate in the school reform project. It will be interesting to see the ways in which the students' experience(s) differ from one school to another, and the ways in which the school reform is present in their descriptions of daily life. Thus, I try to account for the variations between two external conditions, namely the different

schools and the school reform itself. The students' experience of schooling in the five different schools allows me to understand how they approach their daily life at school and in the ways in which the school reform and aspects of accountability mechanisms are present in their descriptions. The thesis' argument is not about finding out if the reform measures have "worked" or not, nor if the students have fulfilled certain standards or if some schools marginalise students and others do not. It is about exploring the perceived impact of the reform measures as they manifest themselves in the students' experience. Their lived experience of situations and incidents can reflect characteristics of structures and relationships of which the daily life-world consists. It shows how people approach reality and how they construct different phenomena that are part of their experience (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9), such as, for instance, marginalising processes. In the students' case, their experience can show their typical relationship to their teacher, which implicit expectations they have towards schooling and learning, or how they see their classmates. It can be revealed in which situations and under which conditions they experience being supported in their learning processes and in which situations they experience breaks and irritations in their natural attitude. In combination with my school theoretical approach, I also expect insights into the interaction between the family and school sector of the students' life-world (see Chapter 4).

6.2 The student perspective

Taking the students' voice into account has currently become very popular in education research and its related areas of practice. Not least in the course of the great success of student assessment tests like PISA, students became the centre of attention and their learning processes are the main focus in reform discourse¹⁴. Schools and their teachers try to include the students' opinions and suggestions under the term of democratic participation, research projects are dedicated to investigating schooling and learning with

¹⁴ Nevertheless, it is difficult to say if the increasing interest in the student perspective is really something new and outstanding. There have always been waves of increased interest in students or children, for instance during the reform pedagogy movement, the late 1960s (i.e. Heinze, 1980; P. Jackson, 1968; Langeveld, 1960; Muth, 1966), or more recent attempts (Breidenstein, 2006). Indeed, real first-person attempts have been rare but apart from that it is surprising how invisible well-accepted works about studentship are in educational research discourse. It seems as if these theories and studies are difficult to integrate to current research approaches and researchers cannot find a way to deal with these insights. As also argued by Smyth and Hattam (2001, p. 403), the reason is again perhaps that the student perspective does not always comply with traditional pedagogical and "adultomorph" perspectives and therefore is often perceived as irritating and incompatible.

the students' active participation, and politicians do not get tired of stressing the importance of the students' perspective and promoting their learning efforts. According to Feichter 2013, student participation discourse can be systematised by the three categories: research, politics, and pedagogy. Pedagogues promote the inclusion of their students' voice usually because they think that it improves the students' learning, enriches their knowledge and abilities, and allows for democratic participation and citizenship education. From a political point of view, student participation also contributes to democratic participation and citizenship education, and it supports the idea of students as actively involved consumers at school. Besides, it can be regarded as a human right for students to be actively involved in school (Feichter, 2013, p. 40). Apart from these arguments, it is the research perspective that is of primordial interest for this thesis. Accounting for the students' perspective does not only increase the credibility of research, but points out new perspectives on schooling and learning which can contribute to new ideas of school development and school theory (ibid.). However, the most important challenge is not to design well-intended research projects or investigations that turn out to be tokenistic in their realisation. As stated by a number of scholars, many research projects that account for the student perspective simply serve to affirm or confound the adults' interpretation of the issue (Erickson et al., 2008, p. 200; Feichter, 2011, p. 8f.; 2013; Leitch et al., 2007, p. 460). As, for instance, in student assessment tests, students play the role of passive informants whose data should reveal the quality of schooling. Studies based on questionnaires for students, observations in classrooms or interviews with parents or teachers *about* the students are only scans of an implicit picture of a pedagogical reality which does not necessarily correspond to the students' notions of their reality at school. Questions about wellbeing, climate in the classroom, learning atmosphere, etc. represent indeed the most important parts of the students' daily life, but nevertheless arise from an adult perspective on schooling which is in addition pedagogically biased. As also argued by the research team of Schratz, Schwartz, and Westfall-Greiter, these approaches are blind to any perspective that cannot be envisaged from the adult one. In collecting the students' lived learning experiences, the research team intends to gain insight into personal education processes that cannot be investigated by conventional means. The investigation reveals complexities and ambivalences in schooling and deeply embedded, unconscious assumptions, which are also of interest for this thesis (Schratz, Schwarz, & Westfall-Greiter, 2011, p. 27).

Smyth & Hattam argue that there are a great deal of statistics and data about students who drop out of secondary education, but in the media, politics and policy discourse all these data have led to a blaming attitude towards a so-called disaffected youth. According to the authors, the problem is that there is no theory of dropping out that arises from the students' experiences. The authors stress that it is of no use to ask students why they drop out of education, but that research has to develop an understanding of how these students construct their subjective, lived experience of the dropping-out process (Freire et al., 2009; Smyth & Hattam, 2001, p. 403; and also Egger, 2006).

The intention of my investigation is therefore to develop an understanding of the nature of schooling which is not biased by a pedagogical, adultomorph perspective but which only stems from the students' experience. As stated by Petillon (1987, p. VII), we have to take on the student perspective if we really intend to understand our schools. I do not assume that this approach is more true or relevant than any other perspective, but it is an important and often neglected part of the reality at school. As long as the students' needs and attitudes are included in school reform and change processes only as what adults consider to be their needs and attitudes, the efforts not only miss the reality but also disregard the needs of those who are anyhow underprivileged in the hierarchy of schooling (cf. Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). Such approaches present an "incomplete picture of life in classrooms and schools" (ibid.).

6.3 Narrative interviews as a basis for investigation

It is often argued that qualitative, narrative approaches are more adequate for investigating learning and schooling because they can delve into complex relationships within those social processes. It is argued that they can serve as a fruitful supplement to broad quantitative investigations because they are able to make subjective reasoning and experience visible (cf. e.g. Erickson et al., 2008; Lang, Lansheim, & Ohlsson, 2012) and can give contextual information (Slayton & Llosa, 2005). From my point of view, the narrative approach is a simple way to capture the students' life-world. Within the narratives, the structural component is included indirectly, as well as the acting and interaction of other human beings at school, although they only appear through the students' lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). Furthermore, the narrative approach avoids the typical pitfall of asking human beings straightforwardly the reasons for their acting and thinking. As also pointed out by Smyth and Hattam, it is not rewarding to ask

students e.g. why they drop out of school because they might not even be able to name the reasons or they only reproduce what they have heard about dropping out of school. It is more fruitful to use an approach that reveals unconscious aspects of daily life experience and leads to an understanding of a subjective experience of a phenomenon (Smyth & Hattam, 2001, p. 402; Van Manen, 1990). According to Van Manen, we cannot observe our own consciousness because it changes as soon as we are observing it. For instance, when I reflect on my anger, I have already changed in that very moment. Therefore, the narrative approach provides an opportunity to make my anger visible, but in a retrospective and unreflected way by telling a story about an experienced incident (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10). This manner of collecting data allows for a deep understanding of an individual's natural attitude and deeply embedded expectations, constructions and interpretations of the world. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the analysis of these data always has to be bound to its investigation process and its presuppositions. This means that the results can only be described as results according to the interviewee's experience and, even more importantly, they also depend on the researcher's capability to put her or his natural attitude in brackets and take over an impartial, reflective attitude. Combining these data with quantitative data within the research project therefore can be possible and can be fruitful, but according to my reading of phenomenological research the combination is only possible as long as the different results are bound to their methodological framework. This basically means that the results can neither verify nor falsify each other but deliver more or less matching, coherent, and sense-making statements that can be put together to form an inclusive picture, even when there are ambivalent results.

Apart from methodological reasons, I consider the narrative approach as very useful when working with students. Firstly, it makes the data investigation process easier for the students because they are used to telling stories about their lives at school. Secondly, it is an approach that has very high ethical standards and is based on a genuine, honest and serious interest in the human being who is interviewed. The students are regarded as experts for the life-world and their experience is appreciated as one that is unique and individual. And thirdly, it is practicable to conduct narrative interviews at schools because not much equipment is needed and there are not so many provisions to make with regard to legal issues (as in the case of videotaping, for instance).

6.4 Technical details

6.4.1 Data basis

For the purpose of this thesis, data have been collected at five different schools. These schools face a variety of challenges such as their geographical location, the cultural characteristics of their region, the location factors in relation to other schools within the same area, student population, etc. Thus, the schools want to master the challenges by participating in the school reform project.

Usually there were six students per school who gave interviews on a voluntary basis. In sum, I conducted 14 interviews of a duration of approximately 20 minutes each¹⁵. The students were about twelve years old and attended sixth grade, which means the second year of the “*Neue Niederösterreichische Mittelschule*”. I invited them to take the interview together in pairs, in order to make them feel more comfortable. The following table gives an overview of the interviews and schools:

	Number of interviews	Number of students	Duration of interviews (ca.)
Maple Tree School	3	6	13 min; 13 min; 15 min
Oak Tree School	3	6	13 min; 14 min; 8 min
Beech Tree School	2	5	20 min; 22 min
Lime Tree School	2	5	19 min; 17 min
Birch Tree School	4	9	9 min; 13 min; 13 min; 6 min
Total	14	31	

Table 2: Overview of the interviews and schools

All mentioned names have been anonymised. The interviews have been translated from German (and, of course, vernacular and colloquial language) into English, which carries the risk of an inexact reproduction of content. In those rare cases in which it was impossible to formulate the same meaning in English, I went back to the audio file and tried to reconstruct what the student meant in a wider sense. In so doing, I was able to easily find a way to translate it into English.

¹⁵ This thesis contains only an extract of the data which have been collected for the NOESIS project. For the project, I have conducted about 21 interviews in seven different schools.

6.4.2 Investigation process

I spoke to the students immediately following a lesson (usually it was the subject “German language”). At the beginning, after explaining the details and clarifying the anonymity issue, I asked them to tell me what they experienced in the preceding lesson and what had happened during class. I also invited them to tell me more stories, regardless whether they had happened in the preceding lesson or at another point of time or place.

Since the narrative approach provides a large amount of freedom, it allows the interviewee to choose the situation which she or he finds worthwhile to talk about. This is already important information for the analysis, as well as the way in which she or he tells recounts it. As an interviewer, I tried not to interrupt in the digressions and embellishments because they might provide interesting information as to how the interviewee interprets her or his experience. However, I have to point out that one cannot expect the same lengthy, rich, and dense stories from twelve-year-old students as from adults. My interviews prove that almost all my interview partners had something to tell and liked participating in the conversation with me, but the scope of the stories varied and very much depended on each student’s personality and expressive powers. Consequently, I also included short passages in the analysis and accepted them as stories of full value.

The interview examples I give in the next chapter are original, but translated quotations from the interview recordings with the students. In order to facilitate the reading, in some cases texts were carefully edited, but always respecting the integrity of their meaning.

6.4.3 Method of analysis

Within his methodological framework, Max van Manen also provides impulses for the process of data reading and the analysis. His thematic analysis makes use of hermeneutic pedagogical reflection, which aims at finding essential themes within the interviewees’ stories. The process of finding themes in the narratives is different from traditional forms of content analysis since it is not based on counting, coding or summarising themes of a text. It is the effort to uncover the structures of the experience, which means that the researcher reflects on the particular subject and tries to connect it to universal issues (Van Manen, 1990, p. 78f). The leading question therefore is, of what is this experience an example? The idea is to develop an understanding of what the single case of the narrative tells about the structure of the phenomenon that is to be investigated. In this thesis’ case, for instance, the main purpose is to investigate the lived experience of schooling from the

students' perspective. Therefore, each student's narrative can be regarded as one example of the lived experience of schooling. The themes within these examples have to be isolated by different ways of reading: a holistic reading procedure allows to discovering and isolating a summarising phrase of the text. The selective reading process aims at finding and marking phrases that tell something about the phenomenon, and which are finally analysed in detail (ibid., p. 92). For the process of analysis, the researcher has to leave her or his natural attitude and slip into a reflective attitude. This means that she or he has to question every single aspect in the narratives and explore its qualities and characteristics. It is not only of interest how the interviewee experiences the phenomenon, but also what her or his experience tells about the phenomenon in general. The methodological framework therefore offers concepts that help the research in this reflective thinking process. For instance, the variation process ("eidetic variation") helps to discover the unique aspects of a phenomenon, which make it what it is. The variation process is an imaginative one in which the researcher plays through several possible variations of the issue in order to find out if the phenomenon is still the same when one of the themes is changed. Van Manen's example is about the lived experience of parenting. If we presume that having children is essential to the notion of parenting, we can ask if there is any situation that does not include children but still is an example of parenting. He gives the example of a mother whose son has died but who lives with the real presence of an absent child. Therefore, being a parent can mean to be in a "mothering or fathering relation to a child" (ibid., p. 107). In so doing, the researcher can differentiate between incidental and essential, and also recurring themes within the narratives. Another way of structuring the phenomenological reflective thinking process are the four life-world existentials, which served as the most important basis for my analysis because they are closely connected to Schütz's life-world theory. This structure helps the researcher put her- or himself in the position of the interviewee and better understand her or his lived experience of the phenomenon. It is a scheme with four dimensions that represent basic ways of human experience and serve as an orientation guide in the reflective process. The first existential is called "lived space" and refers to an individual's relation to the room and space around her or him (e.g. the size of the classroom, the dark hallway, the closed teachers' room, etc.) and also to the space in a figurative sense (the individual's scope of action). The dimension of time ("lived time") builds on the individual perception of the progression of time, which can be totally contrary to and detached from the actual "real" mechanical time that is displayed on our clocks. The third existential called "lived other"

refers to the person's relationship to other people. The experienced encounters and interactions reveal structures of the relationship and characteristics of the people involved. The last dimension is called "lived body" and is based on the fact that human beings also perceive themselves as being a body in the world that gives and leaves signs and marks (through moving, giving glances, gestures, etc.). The interviews in this thesis do not contain much information for this latter dimension and therefore the analysis focuses on the three existentials "lived other", "lived time", and "lived space". Van Manen's existentials constitute the unity of a person's life-world (ibid., p. 101) and therefore are a perfect bridge between the methodological concept of "lived experience" and Schütz's theory of the life-world, which constitutes my theoretical framework.

In the following chapter, the analysis of the data is presented in the form of case studies. In the interpretation of the interviews I found that the data show interesting variations among the different schools and their students' lived experience, which are of high relevance for the NOESIS research project. It is not an attempt to describe the present state of a certain school by using examples of some selected perceptions and making judgements on them, but it is a more universal attempt to understand how students experience their daily life at a given school. This experience can be regarded as being influenced by conditions and characteristics of the specific school, which themselves can only be approached indirectly by the students' narratives. When I present the analysis of my data in the following chapter, I therefore intend to focus on the students' experience of schooling and at the same time understand such experience as an expression of a school's specific conditions. I do not regard these conditions or case descriptions as empirically derived knowledge in inductive terms, but as a description of how daily life at a certain school appears to me according to the students' lived experience. This is a pragmatic compromise on Van Manen's methodological framework (cf. Van Manen, 1990, p. 22) that seems to be rewarding, because it allows my colleagues within the research project NOESIS to draw on my results and include them, connect them to their research, and develop them further in terms of an integrative, mixed methods approach.

7 The students' lived experience of schooling¹⁶

In this chapter I present my empirical data and the analysis according to Van Manen's framework of „Researching lived experience“ (1990). My data consists of 14 narrative interviews with 31 students. The main research goal was to find out how the students at each school experience their everyday lives at their school and what schooling means to them. The students' construction of schooling is presented as case studies, whereby each school represents one case. Since Lower Austria is a region with beautiful landscapes and nature, I named the schools after tree species.

7.1 Maple Tree School

Maple tree school is situated in a very rural area with a comparatively long distance to the next city and no local competing school. I conducted the interviews after a German-language lesson.

Understanding content as the students' core task

A main theme within the students' narratives is about catching up in class and how the students expect their teachers to be supportive and helpful. It is very important for them to really understand everything they learn and to be able to follow the lesson:

Example 1:

Interview person 2 (IP2): Umm, this was the case in Maths once, well, the teacher always explains something and so, and sometimes she does it very fast, well, she writes on the blackboard and, well, sometimes it's simply too fast for me, and when I want to put my hand up, then we're already somewhere else... and thank God that there's the study afternoon, which is every Thursday.

Interviewer (I): Hmm.

IP2: You can go there for Maths, English, and German, and there you can also, there's a teacher who can explain to you everything again very slowly. That's very helpful. (SI-16)

¹⁶ The cases studies and some interview examples have also been published in the following book sections and reports: Hörmann, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013; Hörmann & Forghani-Arani, 2012.

Ex. 2:

IPI: It was in Maths, it was actually today, because, well, in the first lesson we had Maths today and, at the beginning of the lesson it was like this, that we, well, we talked about physics first. And then we started to draw a sort of square, not a square, but a rectangle, and then, something with a point, and somewhere we had to draw something, and I didn't understand a thing, and, then I tried to put my hand up, but I have the feeling that somehow, the teacher doesn't really notice me. And, then, we did something like free work, something where you don't do anything at the blackboard with the teacher but in the exercise book, for her, well in the book or, what we did, and there was, well, we drew something and then I asked my desk neighbour what we had to do, and she hadn't really understood either, and then, we both didn't get it. Then we sat there with our hands up until the teacher finally came. And when we told her, umm, when we asked her, she said, yes, do it quickly, and then in the meantime she went to somebody else. (SI-16)

In both examples the lived time plays an important role. Within the students' experience, everything goes very fast and they cannot follow the teachers' deliberations. The high speed makes it impossible for them to catch up, and this expresses their very need to understand things, follow the class and have things explained in "peace". The role of the teacher, the lived other, can be defined as somebody who helps the students to understand and supports them in their learning process. It seems to be very important for the students that the teacher is available for them and explains everything they did not understand. The lived space is not mentioned very often, but the students name some places that seem to be of main interest. They mention the blackboard and their desk (neighbour), which are surely both the most important spots in the classroom. Their perceived scope of action is restricted to putting their hands up, waiting for the teacher and asking questions, asking their desk neighbours and attending the "study afternoon". Concerning the lived body existential, students seem to experience the sign of putting their hands up as a core means of expressing their needs and giving the teacher a sign. It is the act of expressing the need for help and their way of approaching the teacher, at least in the way they are supposed to approach the teacher.

A very important theme in these two examples is the students' disappointment because their teachers do not have time for them and do not help them. They seem to be left alone and somewhat lost, especially when even their classmates cannot help them. This seems to be particularly the case while doing "free work" in open learning sessions, which is one of the reform measures:

Ex.3:

IP1: I'm really struggling, especially in the free work sessions, well, not totally struggling, I'm not a candidate for failing, but I have to work a lot at home. We have a free work session once a week, that's always two hours; there's a big cupboard, everybody gets a folder, and there are different topics. For example terms, you know, a , b , $3a$, b . Equations are easy, but the terms...

IP2: They're tough.

IP1: They're difficult. There's a folder, and we get it explained from the beginning, we often have foam-rubber stuff, oops, triangles of foam rubber and so, for example, a , a to the power of b , and then it was less than, well, it was again c and so on, and in the folder there's always a short explanation, for example: When there are more, you're only allowed to combine similar terms, and very often there are very difficult calculations, with minus a , b and then there is a bracket, then there is a minus again and I keep asking what I have to do then, and the teacher doesn't explain it to me.

IP2: That's terrible.

IP1: Yes, that's the worst thing, she just says.... It's all there in the folder

IP2: There's nothing there at all.

IP1: Yes, it's only explained, and for difficult calculations nothing is explained and it's just assumed that we already know everything about it, and the same goes for all the tests in biology, physics and everything, it's all just some knowledge for the moment, for the test, it's often not consolidated, not even any exercises in Maths. (SI-17)

In this example, the lived other (i.e. the teacher) is of particular interest, because she or he has a special role in the setting of "free work" (open learning). In the students' lived experience, the teacher only appears as a person who can be asked in case they cannot understand the instructions. In the example above, the teacher appears as somebody who

does not help the students but wants them to find out how to do things themselves. The students experience this as refusing their needs for support and they have the feeling that they cannot really understand anything in class. Also as a consequence, the students' lived space can be figuratively described as having a very narrow scope of action in which their hands are tied. They have to learn as it is described in the folder, and in case they do not understand what they should do the teacher's advice is to stick to the manual. Concerning the lived-time and lived-space perspective, there is nothing visible in this example.

Schooling is doing something actively together

In contrast to the other cases presented in this thesis, students at Maple Tree School describe their classes in a very active and committed way. The descriptions are not about what the students had to do but what they have experienced, talked about and done together:

Ex.4:

IP1: Yes, well, today in German we talked about crime stories and also, umm, wrote down terms, and actually we have never done that before, not to my knowledge, about crime stories and murder and things like that, and then we also had a song from, what was his name again, eh, I cannot remember the name right now, but a song about a crook, and I found this very funny, and, yes, it actually was a very pleasant lesson.

I: Was there anything that was especially pleasant, well, can you describe what was so enjoyable in this lesson?

IP1: Yes, well, we didn't write really fast, and just a few terms that we know about, umm, detectives and everything, and we wrote some down, and, umm, in the middle, we stuck a piece of paper with such a detective and the like. Yes, and normally, well I'm used to writing really fast in German, and in tests and texts, too, so was nice to go slowly, well, take our time, have more time... (SI-15).

Time is a very important theme in this example. The student usually experiences a lot of time pressure in other lessons, especially when the students have to write something in their exercise books. But in this one lesson, they did not have to write as much as usual, and this was very special for the student. It was a relief for him not to write anything but

just listen, talk and sing about crime stories, so therefore the students seem to construct schooling in general as a stressful and demanding time. He appreciates breaks within this fast, daily business in which one can think about the topics “in peace” (see also ex. 1). The lived other does not really appear in this example, but the use of “we” is very salient in this example, compared to other case studies. In fact, it is not only the use of “we” but the students’ general description of the experience as a common experience, together with the classmates and the teacher (“we talked about crime stories” implies an interactive notion of the act, “we didn’t write really fast” gives the impression that there is a common “we” that usually suffers together while writing at high speed). The lived-space existential is also very interesting in this example. The phrases “I found this very funny” and “we have never done that before, not to my knowledge” can carefully be interpreted as a space between the student and his experience at school. His reflections about the lesson reveal a scope that allows the student to critically think about and judge what he has experienced from a distant perspective. Therefore, the student experiences himself as an autonomous individual who slips into the role of a critical consumer and expects something from schooling. The “lived space” can therefore possibly be figuratively interpreted as a scope of action subject to the student’s role as an active participant in the institutionalised setting of learning.

A further, comparable example underlines the students’ role as an accepted participant in schooling.

Ex.5:

IPI: Well, that was the first lesson in cooking, that was, well, because I actually like cooking a lot, and I was happy that we had it in the first lesson, and the teacher explained everything to us, how it all works and so on, from the oven to, ah, I don’t know, the tea spoon. (Laughs.)

I: Mhm mhm.

IPI: And it actually was a lot of fun, and we started to cook then and, yes, that was the situation which I really liked. And, mhm, it was fun, yes.

I: And what did you do then? You told me, the teacher had explained everything, how it all works and everything, and what kind of tools there are, ehm, how did she do this?

IPI: Umm, we were, well, we were in our kitchen, there are three booths, and we were in the third one. And, well, she showed us all the drawers, what was written on them, and what should be in them, and sometimes she took some appliances and explained them to us in detail. For example the mixer, that you have to plug it in somewhere and where you can turn it on and so on, I cannot remember anymore where (laughs).

I: Mhm, yes.

IPI: And at the oven, she showed us, well, she turned it on and then, ah, she showed us how to turn it on and off. (...) And then she showed us the pots, for which, or, which one is for soups and what kind of pot you use for making “Schnitzel”, or crepes, or whatever. And yes, the typical appliances for the kitchen, that you usually use a cooking spoon for cooking (laughs). (...).

Yes, well, we went through the kitchen and, ehm, we were allowed to ask questions, although there was not really anything to ask, because everything is all very logical.

I: Mhm, hmm.

IPI: And yes. Well, and actually, well, I actually felt very comfortable in the kitchen, and, with all the students when we were going there, with the teacher, and.

I: Mhm, hmm.

IPI: It was very interesting.

I: And do you have an idea why you liked the lesson so much, well, what was the reason why you felt so well there?

IPI: Well, I learned more about cooking and we started to cook ourselves afterwards, because I’ve never cooked before at home, except for instant meals, and yes, now we have our own, well, the ingredients and everything, we did everything and so, and I was very happy that we did this. (SI-16)

The lived experience of space is a very important aspect in example no. 5. The student describes the room in detail and talks about the equipment, how everything works and how everything is organised. The room and its equipment seems to be very vivid in the student’s memory, as well as the common experience of being there together with the classmates and the teacher (“with all the students when we were going there, with the teacher”). The teacher as experienced by the student as the lived other is ever present and

explains everything. Since “there was not really anything to ask”, because everything was “very logical”, the student seemed to be satisfied with the teacher’s explanations and she was able to follow the instructions easily. The sentence about the classmates and the teacher can again be interpreted in a sense that the student experienced this lesson as a common experience together with the classmates and the teacher, where a common “we” was cooking together and learned about the kitchen and its devices. Once again, there is no single phrase saying anything about what the students were supposed to do and what tasks they had to fulfil. Concerning the lived-time perspective, there seems to be no time pressure at all. Unlike the preceding example, the student does not seem to experience any hurry but a relaxed and agreeable atmosphere. Finally, there is nothing to say about the lived body perspective. Referring also to the daily-life theory, this extract is a vivid example of positive learning experience in which more was happening than just a passive reception of content. The student’s deliberations seem to be determined by the experience that she can master the tasks and content of the subject and has a high sense of self-efficacy. The student says that everything was “logical” anyhow, which shows how self-evident everything was to her. The matters that arose within the cooking lesson seem to be easily compatible with the student’s previous stock of experience. She can easily connect everything with her experience and this also allows her to give a reason why she is looking forward to learning how to cook. The experience at home of being unable to cook properly and getting to know more about ingredients is a motivation for her to learn how to cook.

Final interpretation

For the students at Maple Tree School, schooling is mainly about trying to understand content with the help and supervision of their teacher. They hope and expect their teacher to be there when they do not know what to do and when they have any problems. In general, they take it for granted that schooling is a common experience among their classmates and the teacher, in which they actively work, talk, and do things together.

With respect to the school reform program and its aim of reducing marginalising processes, it is important to indicate the disappointment the students experience in lessons of “free work”. They have the impression that their teacher does not have enough time to be there for them (or tries to avoid helping them on purpose for pedagogical reasons), which leaves them to their own devices. Drawing on the school theory as presented in Chapter 4, one can say that this situation has a marginalising impact on those students

who do not have a repertoire at their disposal that helps them in solving their problems. With “repertoire” I mean a stock of experience that already contains pre-knowledge for solving the problem and experience in how to face challenging situations in the social institution of school. Students who live in families where educational content as it is conveyed at school is also present in daily life can face challenging learning situations more easily than their classmates whose repertoire does not fit the schools’ understanding of education content. For instance, algebra in Maths will induce different associations and motivations in students from different families. Students whose parents have knowledge of mathematical terms or who have generally an interest in higher mathematics might find it a compelling challenge to work on this topic, even if it is in a session of “free work”. They will not hesitate to insist that the teacher should come and help, and they can always be sure that in the worst case the solution to the problem can be found at home. Students who have never heard about algebraic terms before might have the impression that this is something important and difficult and that they actually should have a clue about what it is. But actually, this only induces an experience that this is just one more thing they do not know, but actually should know about. These students’ motivation will be totally different from the previous ones: they might have concerns about actually asking for help and racking their brains over something that they will not understand anyway – in their perceived self-efficacy. However, aspects of these two fictional vignettes can also be the opposite. Students of a very educated family can have scruples about asking for help because they feel that they are expected to be able to do things on their own, whereas students without this background might find everything so interesting that they develop a very pronounced learning motivation. In any case, the marginalising potential of a learning situation in which – according to the students’ experience - the teacher figuratively “is not there” or not available becomes clear from this perspective. This does not mean that “free work” is not an adequate teaching method. As also shown in another investigation of our research project, the students’ longing for structures persists also within open learning formats, because only the prudent combination of both elements allows for a sustainable learning experience for every student (Feichter & Krainz, 2012, p. 214). Open learning sessions still need to ensure that students can find help anytime they need it. Although students should learn how to learn on their own, a great deal of learning progress and autonomy becomes apparent when they are able to formulate questions. Being able to ask for specific help means that the student already knows what he needs to know in order to solve a task. Teachers who simply give students the feeling

that they should do it on their own do not act in the sense of enabling the students to develop capabilities. The core question in such a situation would be: how can I help the student so that she or he can develop the abilities or knowledge needed for pursuing the attained goal? Example 5 nicely illustrates a coincidence of a – in a didactical sense - meaningful learning experience (see Chapters 2.5 and 4.2) for the student and a learning situation that has obviously conveyed a sense of a motivating and empowering atmosphere.

7.2 Oak Tree School

Oak Tree School is in a small city in a rural area with some competing schools. It has more students and teachers than Maple Tree School. The interviews were given after an English lesson.

Schooling is about understanding content

Like in Maple Tree School, the students at Oak Tree School focus very much on understanding content in class and how the teacher helps them in their learning process:

Ex.6:

IPI: In Maths we had Mr. K. in first and second grade and now it is that the A and B classes both have their Maths classes at the same time, and 3B now has Mr. L and Mr K., and we have Mrs. C and Mrs. D, and Mrs. D literally explains a whole chapter in one day and I can't follow her at all and I have a pretty hard time in Maths and yes it is simply... she explains way too fast for me and I can't understand it so quickly.

I: What do you do in class when it is like that?

IPI: Well, I raise my hand and ask her whether she can explain it to me again, but then one of the teachers is writing on the blackboard and the like and the other one's correcting homework and the like and then I can't really ask because the teachers are already doing something. And when I ask, she explains it to me again, but I still don't understand it and then I have to have a look at it at home together with my Mum and so on. (SI-13)

Again, time is experienced as moving very fast and the student seems to feel pressured by the speed. When reading the passage, I had the impression that the student feels as if she were in a vacuum with another speed of time and she sees everything passing by outside without having any idea about what is going on. The student seems to experience her teacher (lived other) as somebody who should be there for her, but who is not available. There is no information on the lived space and lived body, except for the first sentence in the last paragraph. She mentions that she raised her hand, indicating that she followed the rules and tried to get help in an appropriate way. A very important theme in this example is, again as in the preceding case, the experience of not being able to follow and that the teacher does not give the help expected. The student stresses that she complied with all the rules of good behaviour at school and yet the teacher did not help her. Even when the teacher explains things twice, she cannot follow, which seems to cause a terrible feeling of being overwhelmed. The student in example 7 experienced a similar situation:

Ex.7:

IPI: Yes, with Mrs. J., we were in the classroom and I didn't understand something I was reading and I asked her and she wouldn't say it in German and explained what it is, but she says it a thousand times in English and I still don't understand. (SI-12)

Again, the example illustrates the student's persisting attempts to understand and how desperate he becomes when he does not understand even when the teacher explains again and again. A good teacher in the students' eyes seems to be a teacher who is able to explain things in different and showing things in different ways and one whom the students can approach without hesitation. The simple phrase that the teacher should "be there" for the students (that is, especially more than in a physical sense) can be regarded as the core point in their lived experience. The next example shows how a student defines a good teacher:

Ex.8:

IP: She's down to earth. She doesn't talk in a complicated way, and about the content, she explains it better, so that we can understand and then do better in the tests (SI-12)

The students therefore connect positive learning experiences with the teachers' ability to explain. They especially appreciate a teacher's ability to create an encouraging learning atmosphere in which the students are motivated and convinced that they can do it. The student in the following example expresses this by saying "I can show what I can do":

Ex.9:

IP2: We're the New Middle School and we're the first ones who are trying this and so we're divided into separate groups in English. The best group, the ones who have to be encouraged¹⁷, the middle group and the very bad one, and at first we were in the best group and we didn't like it there at all and the teacher just said bad things at the KEL-talks¹⁸, that we're very nasty and things like that, and that's totally untrue, and that we can't read and so, and now we're in the middle group with Mrs. S and I like this more because I can show what I can do. Unfortunately, I didn't really like where I was before. (SI-13)

The phrase "I can show what I can do" represents a very active and lively understanding of the student's task in class. It shows that the student is motivated to be an active participant in the classroom and wants to give her best. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the teacher is able to create an encouraging learning atmosphere, which is obviously enjoyed and appreciated by the student. In many other interviews the students describe their tasks rather as an enactment of duties in which they are disinterestedly fulfilling tasks. In the example above, however, the student seems to experience a learning situation which is perhaps even fun and supports her self-efficacy. The example also points to another very important theme in this school's interviews. It is about categorisation and grading.

Performance categories

Example 9 also tells about the students' shifting from one performance group to another. In the students' language, there is a group for the best students, for the average, and one for the weak students. As in almost all interviews in this investigation, the students seem to have internalised a traditional concept of performance categories. These categories are

¹⁷ In German: *gefördert*. The term means to give special support to an individual, in order to strengthen or boost her or his abilities, interests, skills, etc. Other possible translations would be "nurtured", or "pushed".

¹⁸ *KEL-Gespräch* = *Kinder-Eltern-Lehrer Gespräch*; Meeting between the student, her or his parents, and the teacher. This meeting is one of the new measures in the framework of the school reform of the New Middle School.

a totally unquestioned part of their life-world and play a very important role. The phrase “the best group, the ones who have to be encouraged” indicates that these categories stem from a pedagogical language as it is spoken by teachers and parents. The student in example 9 had the experience of not being able to fulfil the teacher’s expectations and she received feedback that was not encouraging at all for her. This motivated her to initiate a shift to the “average” group, which means that she took charge of her problem by herself. She seems to experience herself as being capable of acting and being autonomous and that she has an influence on her situation. Similarly, the student in the following example experienced herself as being not good enough for the performance group:

Ex. 10:

IP2: Yes, recently, since I did a good test, Mrs. S. wanted to put me with the ones who were a little better but she only spoke English and so I wasn’t able to really keep up. We got a task and she didn’t really explain it and I don’t get it now either... (SI-14)

Again, it becomes clear that the student misses a teacher that is really willing to explain the task in a way that the student is able to understand it. Instead, she has the impression that she is failing and not good enough and therefore also changes back to her previous performance group (as it becomes clear in the further interview).

The theme of categorisation becomes especially weighty in the context of class tests (“*Schularbeiten*”). Oak Tree School has implemented a differentiated system of test items and grading with two levels: “*Könnner*” (satisfactory level) and “*Meister*” (masterly level, everything above average). In cases where students only do the test items at the satisfactory level (*Könnner*), they can only get average marks. When they also solve the tasks at the masterly level (*Meister*), they can get better grades. This is connected to some further rules which make the test a challenge also in a strategic sense. The students experience this system as unfair and cannot understand why this was implemented. However, in the following example it again becomes obvious that the students believe in the concept of being a “good” or a “weak” student:

Ex.11:

I: Can one manage to do all the “Könner” and “Meister” exercises during the test?

IP1: Yes

I: Is it possible, timewise?

IP1: Not always.

IP2: There are slow ones and fast ones, well, I actually belong to the slow ones but the thing with the „Meister“ is that I find it a bit unfair, because the “Meister”, the good ones from our class, get a better grade when there’s a test; if everybody had the same test, without calling them “Könner” and “Meister”, well, that would be fairer.

I: Aha

IP2: For everyone.

*IP1: Because normally in Maths we all did all the tasks and then, at the end, we had the “Meister” exercises and those who were finished could do these and now I don’t know why they did this “Meister” and “Könner” thing. It’s not really...
(SI-12)*

The lived time in example no. 11 has even become a category for this student. There are “slow” and “fast” students, which is a decisive criteria for mastering the test. Concerning the lived-other perspective, I find it interesting that student IP1 uses the anonymous pronoun “they” for the people who decided on the test system (“I don’t know why they did this”). In a way, this indicates that he experiences the organisational aspect of schooling as beyond his reach. For him, decisions seem to be made by people he does not know, which, of course, is true. Nevertheless, one has the impression that the student experiences himself as being at the mercy of an invisible, but determining power. This already describes how the student perceives the lived other. While he uses “we” in the sentences before, he suddenly changes to “they” who decide about the test system. Likewise, this also tells something about the student’s experienced space in the sense of his scope of action. It is very limited and he seems to give himself up to fate.

In sum, the interviews in Oak Tree School clearly reveal that belonging to a performance group is part of their unquestioned, natural attitude. They take different levels of

performance and abilities for granted and believe in the integrity of the categories to which they are assigned.

Final interpretation

At Oak Tree School, the students' experience of their teachers' support is differentiated. On the one hand, they tell stories in which they perceive some teachers as very supportive and encouraging, but on the other hand there are a lot of stories that deal with situations in which the students miss their teacher's support. According to the interviews, there is reason to assume that especially students in the so-called "advanced" performance groups miss the teachers' didactical guidance. Obviously, the focus on the students' independent work within the school reform gives some students the experience that they are left to their own device which leads to a negative impact on their self-confidence and self-efficacy. If the basic idea of the school reform was to promote independent learning and to support the students' autonomy in learning, it would be important to regard this as a process in which the students still need the feeling that somebody is there for them. This becomes especially relevant when schools try to prepare the students for the way to higher secondary education level schools. Drawing on the capability theory, it is not enough to simply define autonomous learning as a goal or a standard in class, but teachers should lead and enable the students towards autonomous learning (e.g. to make them capable of autonomous learning). To be more precise, this goal becomes relevant when the student aims at higher secondary education and it can be applied to different matters and situations (see Otto & Schrödter, 2010 and Chapter 4). The teachers at Oak Tree School might pursue the idea of helping their students to learn how they can learn autonomously, but this is not yet reflected in the students' experience and definitely a key factor in marginalising processes. Students who do not feel comfortable with the learning situation in "advanced" groups seem to tend to opt out and change to the "average groups". They experience a more encouraging and fortifying atmosphere, as one student pointed out clearly: "I can show what I can do" (see example no. 9).

As at Maple Tree School, students consider the process of trying to understand as their main task in class. They describe the way they eagerly try to keep up in class very similarly to a focus on time pressure and their desperate need for help when they do not understand something.

A very striking theme in the interviews at Oak Tree School is the students' unquestioned belief in performance levels and categories. This is remarkable, considering that the abolishment of the traditional ability tracks and performance groups is a core aspect of the school reform. Of course, schools have developed new ways of differentiation in class, but according to the interview data these new formats still carry old stigmatising meanings with them. Different categories – however they are called by the teachers – are obviously still internalised by the students and convince them that they belong to the “good ones” or the “weak ones”. Their concept of performance and talent is static and dispositional and the students believe that teachers and parents can objectively decide on their level of talent. Since the students are not aware of the fact that grades and performance levels are auxiliary constructs which underlie various influences, they only see a single way of getting better grades: they simply have to try harder. This means that the students have experienced the categories not as contingent, changeable and situation-related constructs but as an “ontologising description” of human characteristics (Sturm, 2012, p. 11), which actually stands in opposition to the goals of the school reform. Of course, categorising and grading play an important role in schooling and are a necessary part of it, but the current way of dealing with differentiation obviously fails in showing the students that everybody has a different blend of abilities which can be further developed to different extents in order to reach different personal goals in the future. This refers again to the capability approach, which suggests that finding good matches between external and internal conditions of a student's development and steering the student's interests, skills, abilities and motivation towards appropriate goals, e.g. to make her or him capable of those abilities and teach her or him the kind of knowledge that is needed in order to reach such personal goals (in the sense of Nussbaum's goal of a “good life”; see Otto & Schrödter, 2010, Nussbaum, 1999 and Chapter 5.3).

7.3 Beech Tree School

Beech Tree School is located in a small city and is one option among several schools in its close surroundings. The student population is culturally heterogeneous, and the interviews were conducted after a German-language lesson.

Schooling is about compliance and resistance

A very obvious fact about the interviews at Beech Tree School is that the students hardly tell any stories about learning in class, but about situations before or after class. The most important theme within those stories is that they experience themselves as deviating from what is expected of them at school. They seem to experience a number of disciplinary conflicts with their teachers and find themselves using warlike rhetoric and having such sentiments.

Ex. 12:

I: (...) Did something else happen in that lesson?

IP2: The teacher was suddenly nice.

IP3: Not just that she was nicer than usual but she told us to behave ourselves, because there were two ladies. And...

I: What does that mean “to behave ourselves”?

IP3: Sometimes we’re not really very good. Not as nice as a teacher might wish.

I: How do you behave when you are not nice? What does that mean?

IP2: We shout, some of us chat, although the teacher told us...

IP1: Some of us eat in class. (SI-4)

The example shows that the student constructs a “we” that is opposite to the teacher (lived other). She is of the opinion that students actually should behave well, but in this case the students offer resistance and do not listen to the teacher’s instructions, perhaps because they find the teacher to be “not nice” (“she was nicer than usual”).

The theme of “being different” becomes very obvious in conflicts which are connected to religious issues.

Ex.13:

I: That would be the worst thing for you, if she [the teacher] called your dad?
IPI: Mm, that would be bad, because my dad wants me to be nice. (unintelligible)
I am nice, but, I'm not that bad! And the teacher, the catholic teacher, she was also in the "Sporthauptschule" (Sports school), and I had to spend a week there during the sports camp and I didn't participate and I said "I'll stay for one week". And they had religious education and I had to go with them because I had a free lesson. Then I took my school bag, and then she said to me: "Wait, stay here, we won't hurt your religion. Have a look at our religion, how it is structured." And then I said: "But I have another religion, I have a free lesson now." Because, I wanted to have a free lesson. Then she said: "No, you come with us, we won't ruin your religion." And I had to stay in the class. (SI-4)

From a lived-time perspective, one can interpret the student's description of her "free lesson" as something that belongs to her, that is due to her, that strengthens her position and that is worth fighting for. It is not only about having no class, but also about being free and without any duties. Therefore, the student is about to fight for her scope of action (lived space) and she does this against the backdrop of the sensitive issue of religion. Furthermore, she seems to experience her father (lived other) as a very powerful person whose expectations ("he wants me to be nice") are important to her. Although the teacher plays a central role in this situation, she is hardly characterised in the student's description. Her words are all that count for the student, and she interprets those words as directives that undermine her own rights. The last sentence "Then I should stay in the class" does not even refer to the teacher, but is formulated in a general way as if there was an objective judge who decided what she had to do (she could also have said "Then the teacher said that I had to stay in the class"). Therefore, I interpret the students' descriptions in a way that schooling is constructed as a walk along the borders of compliance and resistance, or conformity and opposition (Forghani-Arani, Geppert, Katschnig, 2015; Kirova et al., 2006). The student makes the decision about the side on which she should go dependent on the directives that make the most powerful impression on her.

Schooling is a struggle for one's own integrity and for not losing one's face

This concept is very closely connected to the preceding one. The following example relates again to a situation before the lesson with the intervention of the religious education teacher:

Ex. 14:

IP3: ...We had physics, and everybody was behaving badly and then a teacher came and... (unintelligible)

IP1: I'll explain it to you. Once – yesterday, we actually have to line up, when we have physics, we have to line up to go into the physics room and so we lined up and many of us were yelling and the like. The teacher wasn't there yet, then she came (unintelligible). Then there was the religion teacher, the catholic teacher, she said: "Go to your class!" We all ran into the classroom. The teacher then said to Hatice: "Why are you being so rude? Just get into line, and wait here!" and she got into line and she had to stay there and then I did this with the door,...

IP2: ...opened it...

IP1: ...yes, and then the teacher looked into the class and thought that it was Emine, and she said to her: "What are you doing?" And I said, "Emine doesn't have...it wasn't her" and then she said: "Don't you want to wait outside too?" Then I said "I don't care", and she took my hand like this and said "You line up outside." And then I said "I don't care, even if I have to stand", and then she said "I'll give you some homework". Then I said again "I don't care" and then she said, "The three of you, go to the principal now with your teacher." Then we went downstairs with her, and I kept telling the teacher, "Mrs. D., it wasn't me". And then the director yelled at us, and said we had to behave ourselves and...well. But she said: "You stay with me, but the two of you, you go." Then Hatice and I went upstairs, and that was it. (SI-4)

Although the story seems to be very vivid in the student's memory and she is even able to reproduce the dialogue as if it were written down as minutes, it is still difficult to follow the plot. The wording is confusing and it seems as if everything happened really fast. The student made the experience that she and her classmates have been treated badly and unfairly, which made her react in a defiant way ("I don't care"). The student's confusing description might possibly be a picture for the way in which the student perceived the

situation. Perhaps she simply had no words for describing what had happened to her and how she felt about it.

Again, the story is about fighting for the student's own room (lived space). The door becomes an instrument within the conflict with an important meaning for both the teacher and the student. The student seems to use it as a protective shield for her room (in a symbolic sense), whereas in her experience the teacher uses the door for a controlling and supervising purpose. Like in example no. 13, the teachers and the principal are hardly characterised, although they play important roles in the interaction with the students. Nevertheless, in the student's description, the teachers appear as authoritarian persons who give a great deal of orders and do not concede the students a space in which to respond and react (lived other). The relationship between the teachers and the students seems to be confrontational and tense. After having obviously disobeyed a rule, the situation escalates although the student does not really understand what is going on and what is expected of her. The only thing she realises is that she or somebody else made a mistake, and now she is desperately trying to deny the accusations about her and her friends. "It wasn't me" becomes the core expression of her miserable situation, which I interpret as a longing for preserving her integrity and dignity. To her, it seems to be the only way to defend herself and it seems as if the students experience themselves like victims of unfair and untrue accusations. As for the time perspective, the student very often uses the word "then" in her narrative, which can be interpreted as her having a minutely detailed, vivid memory of the incidence and having experienced it as a quick sequence of acts.

Example number 15 also reveals the students' experience of schooling as a struggle for their autonomy and integrity:

Ex. 15:

IP1: In the afternoon, I'm not even allowed to talk to my friend anymore. She [the teacher] says, "you won't be able to finish your homework. You know, your mother and so." But I think that the afternoon means a little fun. No fun at school, no fun at afternoon care, what is this school for then? Yes, we're also meant to be learning, but it doesn't mean that we should get put down, and get criticised, or things like that... (SI-6)

Concerning the time perspective, the student makes a differentiation between the mornings and the afternoons. In the afternoons during the afternoon care she expects everything to be more fun and less restrictive and she seems to experience her expectations as thwarted by a rather strict regime that oppresses the students and in which people speak badly about the students. The student experiences the teacher (lived other) as an agent within this regime who clearly points out the student's vulnerable points (your Mum cannot help you with your homework) and shows little respect for her ("we (...) get put down, and get criticised"). It seems as if the student experiences her daily life at school as being exposed to demonstrations of power and as being under a rigid regime of control and oppression.

A self-referred concept of performance

Another very obvious theme in the student's stories is the way how they conceptualise performance. In their descriptions, they see their performance only related to themselves, which means that being successful at school depends, according to their attitude, only on one's own commitment, efforts and capability (and, in some cases, on the teacher's mercy). The students seem to be convinced that putting more effort into learning will save them from failing in class:

Ex. 16:

IP3: Well, if I'd been the teacher, I would have gone to Mesut, because he had eight mistakes. I would have gone to him and told him that he should do it better next time, that he should put more effort into it, but not tell him off in front of everybody, that's not... (SI-4)

In the lesson before the interview was conducted, the students received their test results and the teacher had read out aloud each one's results in front of the whole class. The students felt uneasy about this and therefore we talked about this situation in the interview. In the example above (no. 16), the student stresses that he would have gone to Mesut (and not talked to him from the front of the classroom) and would have told him to work harder in order to perform better in the test. In a similar way, the following extract reveals the individual-centred concept of performance:

Ex. 17:

IP3: ...I just think, I can make it if I read it through again with the difficult words...
(SI-4)

Final interpretation

The students at Beech Tree School have a rather negative attitude towards their school. The interviews convey the impression that the students do not perceive the school as *their* school, but as an institution that rules over them (i.e. “Then I should stay in the class”, ex. 13; “No fun at school, no fun at afternoon care, what is this school for then?”, ex. 15). Furthermore, it seems as if the students cannot give any meaning to the given structures, conditions and rules at school because they are somehow irritating to their scheme of reference (Schütz, 1944, 2003b; 2010, and chapters 4 and 5.4). Similar to Schütz’s stranger, students encounter new cultural patterns at school which are unclear and can sometimes even be shocking for them because they question their “thinking as usual” (Schütz, 1944, p. 502). At Beech Tree School, the school’s expectations seem to be very unclear and ambiguous for the students, and they do not know how to interpret and decode social situations at school. Therefore, they feel misunderstood and incapable of dealing with everyday situations. Like the “stranger”, they seem to be confronted with the accusation of being ungrateful and disinterested (Schütz, 1944, p. 507), which results in developing acts of resistance and being demotivated in return (Freire et al., 2009; Kirova et al., 2006). Kirova et al define this process explicitly for immigrant students in the following way: “we view immigrant children’s acts of resistance to the official school rules and routines as an expression of their agency in the process of negotiating their cultural identity and finding their place in the new school” (Kirova et al., 2006, p. 2f). At the same time, teachers demand compliance from the students in order to establish a “normal order” which they regard as a prerequisite for teaching and which can be interpreted as an expression of their pedagogical obligation towards the students in the process of negotiating their place in the school (Forghani-Arani, 2012; Hörmann & Forghani-Arani, 2012). Within this process of co-constituting what should be the students’ place and role at school, all participants seem to talk past each other and create fronts between them. Similarly to one example in a study conducted by Claesson (2011, p. 183), the teachers have few meeting points with their students, and there are few

opportunities for them to have common experiences in terms of lived agreements. The teachers' and the students' spheres are out of touch with each other, and there is no space for spontaneous, pedagogical interaction in which certain things, content, or experiences become part of the world of actual reach of all individuals (Claesson, 2011; Schütz, 2010). The interviews with the students give the impression that they see their daily lives as a "we" against a "he/she" or a "them" (the teachers and the headmaster). At the same time, they attribute their problems to their (different) religion, or sometimes their national background, which places the daily interaction for their teachers in a very precarious and sensitive place, a mine field, in which the conflicts have to be carried out (see also the anecdotes from the teacher's perspective in Forghani-Arani 2012). However, the data cannot give any information on the way this attribution has actually evolved. In general, one can say that at Beech Tree School both teachers and students have not been able to develop a language in which they can understand each other. The teachers seem to focus on their students' behaviour and regard the students' willingness to comply as the problem's solution. However, they seem to feel overwhelmed by the current situation at school, which might be a rupture or a "break" in their natural attitude in Schütz's terms. The teachers expect a different stage for their professional agency and they might be pressured by general expectations concerning their work and the students' learning outcomes. People and society expect from Beech Tree School the same outcomes as from any other school, although it operates under completely different conditions.

It would seem that the reform measures do not contribute to the school's efforts to solving its problems. The new ways of teaching do not play any role in the students' stories, and considering the school's demanding and challenging conditions, one should ask if mere reform measures really can have the potential to bring about any changes. The teachers obviously have to face problems which go beyond the traditional pedagogical-didactical relationship and they might be in need of more support than just some new ways of organising their teaching. By analysing the students' stories with the theories of Schütz, the problem can be defined, on the one hand, as a mismatch problem in which neither students, nor teachers can find a language to make their perceptions and way of thinking clear to each other, and, on the other hand, as a lack of the school's agency to adapt its expectations to the students' needs. Drawing on Chapter 5.3 in which I elaborated on Nussbaum's concept of a good life and the critique of a qualification oriented understanding of schooling as presented in Chapter 2, the case of Beech Tree School illustrates how schools can be under pressure by society's expectations when they have

to fulfil the same task with the same amount of resources as any other school that works under easier conditions. It would be a relief for the Beech Tree School if it were able to concentrate on creating an agreeable atmosphere for all concerned and if it could focus on teaching towards goals different from those that are given in the achievement standards. The academically oriented qualification framework of the achievement standards provide a discouraging directive for the students at Beech Tree School. The primary goal in teaching could be, for instance, to help the students become interested in a professional field and gain the skills, knowledge, and the motivation that are needed to find a job in that field. As soon as the students realise that there is an interesting perspective for them, they will be able to orient themselves more easily at school and the traditional qualification framework can possibly become a relevant goal again.

7.4 Lime Tree School

Lime Tree School is situated in a small city with good transport connections to some nearby cities and therefore is competing with other schools. The interviews were conducted after a German-language lesson.

Learning is a job

Students at Lime Tree School describe their classes in a very sober and factual way.

Ex.18:

IP2: Well, in the beginning, Mrs. D came into the room and then we got back our test, that means her group – we're divided in groups. The SPF kids¹⁹, the better ones,...

IP3: ...the NMS and the third performance group...

IP2: ..."Hauptschule". And Mrs. D's group got them back first. The "Hauptschule". And then ours and the SPF group didn't get them back at all, and then we got them back and we had to correct them.

I: What do you mean by 'correct them'? What did you do?

¹⁹ students with special needs

IP3: I just wrote the text again correctly. Without the grammar and spelling mistakes. (SI-7)

The lived other (the teacher) appears only in a very impersonal way. She is just an interchangeable person who gives back a test and tells the students to correct it. The example is a chronological description of what had happened, and it reveals a very orderly structure of time and space: Some got the test back first, some others had to wait, and some did not get it back at all. The classroom is separated in three different groups according to different ability levels (the special needs children (SPF), the “better ones” (NMS), and the lower performance group (*Hauptschule*)). In the following example, it becomes more obvious how the students regard their daily life as a structured way of doing their job:

Ex. 19:

IP2: There are sheets, they are always preprepared, and each one has a number, working sheet 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, And in the book there are exercises and there is a plan where we have to write down what we have to do. When we have done that, we can tick it off. And when we've finished everything, we have to go to Mrs. F or Mrs. R.

IP3: She does the grading.

IP2: That's what “free work” is about. (SI-7)

This description could also be from an adult who is describing what he has to do at work. The tasks are so clear, logical and self-evident to the students that they do not see any need to elaborate on them. Each step of the instructions seems to be taken for granted, and the students have become real experts in their jobs. Their way of talking about these tasks gives the impression that they regard themselves as people who are executing instructions that are given by the teacher (ex. 18: “then we got back our test”, “then we had to correct them”; ex.19: “we have to write down what we have to do”, “we can tick it off”, “we have to go to Mrs. F or Mrs. R”). According to Heinze (1980) and Zinnecker (1978), schools can be regarded as totalitarian systems, in which every situation is determined by rules and monitoring. The students' experience of schooling as a job in which they execute the teachers' instructions can be regarded as an expression of this

repressive system to a certain extent and has a consequence that is presented in the following section.

Schooling is relationship(s)

As a reaction to the restrictive framework of schooling, students usually create parallel worlds that serve as a compensating valve. They try to find a space in which they can enjoy freedom, escape from the given rules, or simply relax and get out of their professional role as students (Heinze, 1980; Zinnecker, 1978, 2008). The students at Lime Tree School have a very dire need to get into contact with their teachers on a personal level, which I interpret as a longing for relationships that help them digest the challenges at school.

Ex. 20:

IP2: Maths is more fun. With Mr. R.

I: Why is it more fun?

IP2: Because he always calls me Spongebob. And he's very funny. Once I told him that he didn't have to worry, because even later on he'd seem to look younger again, because he wears "Trachten"²⁰, my Mum told me to tell him that. Then he got mad and last time he showed me on the Internet that "Trachten" was very trendy now and that he missed me a lot during...

IP3: the holidays, the Easter holidays.

IP2: And that he bought a new "Tracht", just for the two of us. He usually is so funny. (SI-7)

The most interesting aspect in this example is the existential of the lived other. The student has a caring attitude towards the teacher, who obviously lets the students participate in some aspects of his private life. It seems to be very delightful and nice for the student to interact with the teacher and talk about things that are not part of the instruction. The statement that the teacher had missed the student during the holidays seems to give the student the experience of being very special. The following example also shows the students' longing for being in contact with their teacher, although the teacher in this case refuses to interact with the students at this level:

²⁰ traditional garb

Ex. 21:

IP2: ...and mostly when we ask questions. Most of the time she is rude and yells at us. When it's a silly question. For example, when we ask if she's cut her hair. Then she yells at us.

IP3: That doesn't belong in the lesson and so on.

IP2: And if we ask her during the break, she doesn't have time.

I: And why do you want to ask her that?

IP1: Because it looks as if she had cut her hair.

IP3: Yes, I think that's really interesting.

I: Yes, why?

IP3: I don't know.

I: Just like that?

IP3: Yes. (SI-7)

The students try to break down the official character of the lesson by posing personal questions that seem to be very important to them. Apparently, this kind of interaction with the teacher is a way for the students to have the experience that they are perceived and “at home” and it gives them back a certain scope of action. Drawing also on the idea of schooling as an in-between world as presented in Chapter 4, one can interpret the students' longing as a way of dealing and processing the transition from the private world within the family into the semi-public world of schooling (see Chapter 4, and Langeveld, 1960).

The characteristics of Lime Tree School can be compared to those of Beech Tree School. Both have a large number of immigrant students and are competing with other schools. In contrast to Beech Tree School, students at Lime Tree School have found a way to negotiate their role at school, although the way in which they do this is not always appreciated by every teacher.

Performance categories

Like in almost every other school, students at Lime Tree School use traditional categories in order to explain the different groups in the classroom and the differences between their classmates. They have internalised traditional ways of naming differences according to performance levels, such as students with special needs (*SPF* students), and students who

are weak, slow, or “good”. In the following episode the students told me that they thought it was unfair that students with special needs get easier exercises:

Ex.22:

I: What did the others do while you were correcting your tests?

IP2: The SPF group just had to read, I think that's unfair.

IP1: Yes, they're weaker. And the SPFs are fairly slow.

IP2: Special needs...

IP1: And there are two groups, the D group is not so good and the E group is also a bit...

IP2: NMS...

IP1: It's more NMS content and the other one is content from the Hauptschule. Yes, we simply always do more things. Well, more things – more difficult things than the others. (SI-8)

The students experience their classmates in terms of traditional, stigmatising labels like “special needs children”, or performance categories like “the good” or “weak ones”. Time becomes a decisive factor for differentiation in the sense that the interviewees have the impression that they are faster and therefore better than the “SPF” children, who are slower and weaker. The students have again a very self-referred concept of performance:

Ex. 23:

IP1: Ehm, what did I want to say? Maths, yes, I'm quite good in Maths, I got a “one”²¹ at the test. I was the only one who got all the answers. I'm proud of that, because Maths is easier for me than geography. Because when I have to ask a question there, it's always a little bit embarrassing. Because in Maths I'm really good, so I don't really dare to ask something. Because then the teachers will think I'm bad, that's at least what I think and that's why I don't dare to ask, even at home with my mother or father.

I: Why, what makes Maths easier? Or what's easier for you there?

IP1: Some say I'm a little bit logical and therefore I understand Maths, and I'm also very interested in geography. (SI-8)

²¹ The grading scale in Austria goes from one to five. One is the best achievable mark, whereas five means “not sufficient” or “failed”

The student seems to be very concerned about what the teachers might think of him. He does not want them to change their good opinion on his Maths performance, although it remains unclear if he is convinced about his Maths skills or if he has the impression that he probably is not as good as people may think. The last sentence indicates that he does not really have a concept about school performance and why and how somebody can be good in Maths or geography. He attributes the reasoning for his good performance to other people ("some say"), and it is again a self-referred explanation of performance. Good achievement at school seems to be a question of fate. Some subjects simply are easier for the students, but they cannot really say why.

Final interpretation

The students at Lime Tree School experience their tasks at school as a routine that is taken for granted and does not need any further explanation or description. However, they found a way of dealing with the rupture they experience between their needs and the expectations at school: they try to overcome any conflicting relationships with the teachers and the rigid "system" of schooling on a playful level by asking the teachers personal questions or teasing them. In so doing, the students try to leave the public sphere or the official character of schooling in order to become appreciated on a personal level. Drawing on the school theory as presented in Chapter 4, one of the school's purposes lies in teaching the students to play a public role in society, which means that they have to display professional behaviour and hold back their own, personal needs. This is an enormous challenge when the students enter primary education, and it is still a big challenge in the transition from primary to lower secondary level. At primary school, the students mainly have only one teacher who is close to them and who is more or less substituting for the family structure in a more professional context. At secondary school, there are different teachers for different subjects, which underlines the public, professional character even more and cuts the time for personal interaction back to a minimum. This demands tactful and reflective decisions and behaviour on the part of the teachers, who need to help the students to learn their role as students who are not dependent on emotional support anymore.

As in many other schools, the students' lived experience shows that they refer to traditional categories of performance and regard differences in performance as personal characteristics. This can be interpreted again in that the reform measures obviously have not yet been transformed into perceived measures of support and empowerment for the

students. The interviews that were conducted with the teachers at Lime Tree School also reveal that the teachers do not perceive a supportive impact through the reform measures (Hörmann & Forghani-Arani, 2012). While some of them experience their daily routine as very demanding, some try to offer the students a heightened commitment on a personal level. Therefore, the school reform seems to fail in offering helpful tools and is just based on the personal involvement of some teachers and their dedication to improve the situation.

7.5 Birch Tree School

Although it is located in a somewhat urban area, Birch Tree School can be characterised as a more rural and provincial school. There is no competing school in the immediate vicinity. Since the school generally pursues an open-door policy, the teachers and students were very open to our investigation. I finally conducted four interviews with two or three students each time.

Our teachers are there for us

The students at Lime Tree School spoke very openly and were very interested during the interviews. The main message in their stories is: our teachers are there for us, they support us when we have problems and their teaching takes our needs into account:

Ex. 24:

IP1: Yes, our teachers get us to do things, well yes, they help us, they don't leave us hanging if we don't understand, and then you get it on your own, because they help us so much.

IP2: There's an extra lesson, for an hour, for the whole school, and you can do your homework and the teachers help us, but we can also ...

IP1: You can do your homework once a week...

IP2: Yes, well, to complete it and to get some help, yes

I: Do all the students go there?

IP2: Yes, it's distributed throughout the whole school, with all the teachers (SI-18)

The two students experience their teachers (lived other) as somebody who stands by them and supports them in every respect. Especially the first statement is different from the majority of other interviews in this investigation: the students do not feel left to their own devices, but they can always be sure that the teacher is going to help them.

The following example also shows how a student experiences support of her teacher:

Ex. 25:

IP1: Yes, I noticed that, when I had the first test in Maths, German and English, I hadn't been downgraded yet, I was AHS. At that time, I had a five in all subjects, and the teachers always told me that they'd help me, but I had to participate, I had to show good will and contribute. For instance, I talked to my Mum afterwards, we got ourselves downgraded right away, and that was better, and for instance in Maths, Mrs. L, she lets us, for instance, she explains things to us as often as possible until we understand. (SI-18)

The student experiences her teachers not as someone on the “other side”, but as a person who creates a “we” in order to help the students with their grades. Some of the responsibility is therefore taken from the student and the teachers seem to show: we can handle it together, we see ourselves as a supportive part in solving the problem (however the problem came into being and whoever is responsible for it). An interesting aspect is that the teachers give some conditions for their help (“...they'd help me, but I had to participate, I had to show good will and contribute”), which are obviously acceptable and evident to the student. Furthermore, the student indicates that the teachers give them enough space to make decisions together with their parents and they seem to accept these decisions in the sense of members of a team trying to solve the problem together.

Another interesting aspect within the theme of “our teachers are there for us“ is the students' attitude towards conflicts at school. It is very natural for them to go and talk to their teachers about any problems they experience at school. They seem to consider it as their right to address matters they regard as unfair or wrong:

Ex. 26:

IP1: Well, for instance, we had problems with one teacher. Because, umm, we always overran our time and yes, we got a new teacher every year and we didn't have the same one every year (...). But now, after some talks it's got better now, we get along with our teacher way better now.

I: Can you remember one of these talks? What happened?

IP2: Well, we sat down together even with the principal and ah, we talked about, about what annoyed us about the teachers and the teachers were also sitting at the table. And ah, what the teachers didn't like about us, what we could do better, and then we wrote down some of the things we could improve in the English class. They also hang in the classroom.

I: Mhm.

IP1: And yes.

I: Can you remember what you wrote down or what was important for you?

IP1: Well, that we prepare our things before class, and not, that we start preparing everything when the teacher comes in, but that everything is already prepared when she comes in, and that we start right away. That we don't waste time and that we don't keep going to the cupboard to get our stuff.

IP2: And that we should be quiet during the class and ah, that we shouldn't chat too much and the teacher of course always says that it's because of our chatting that we always overrun our time. But in fact it is not that often that we chat so much.

I: Mhm

IP1: And overrunning the time, well, what we were talking about then, for me, nothing has changed, because we're still overrunning the lesson time and we don't know why. Then, the teacher only has the excuse that we were behaving badly or that we were loud or that we didn't prepare everything although that wasn't true and then we overran most of the time, but only because she planned too much for the lesson and it's impossible to finish on time. So we only manage to go to the toilet during the break and then the next lesson already starts. (SI-20)

The most interesting existential is of course the one of the lived other in this case. Although the talk with the teachers and the principal has not changed anything in the

students' perceptions, they still seem to have the impression that their teachers listen to them and regard them as dialogue partners on an equal level. The students in the interview example speak very objectively about the discussion and concentrate on the content of the arguments of both discussion partners instead of simply blaming the teachers. Nevertheless, it is surprising that the students only see solutions that solely concern their own behaviour which probably is a very common and practical way of solving problems at schools. In any case, it becomes very obvious from all interviews at Birch Tree School that the students perceive themselves as active members and participants in the daily school life (lived space). The way the students speak about situations in which they talked to teachers or the principal ("Well, we sat down together even with the principal and ah, we talked about, about what annoyed us...") shows that they take it for granted that they can go and talk to them, and also that the teachers listen to them. Last, but not least, these situations document an essential purpose of schooling: it is a moment of exercise for participating in a dialogue as a citizen, following the rules and the code of conduct of a modern society.

Schooling is about working on content matter

The students at Birch Tree School mostly do not talk about schooling in a sense that the teacher gives tasks and the students have to work on them, but they rather speak about situations in which they interacted with their classmates and the teachers on a certain content. In the following example, two students talk about their experience in class and it becomes obvious that they still have available the terms and the knowledge they have learnt. The example has been shortened and simplified, because it was a very interactive conversation among the students themselves and with me. It becomes clear that the students like the subject "art and creativity" very much, and therefore they had a lot to talk about:

Ex. 27:

IP1: Yes, first, we have to explain what it is. And um, that is with the Middle Ages and the present culture and, (...) umm, yes, and during the first half year it was pretty boring, but, that was pretty boring, we always had to write, and I didn't like that so much really, but now, in the second half year, which means now, we did some sewing, and (...) there out of a sort of cover, a pillow case, I made a pair of pants, overalls, well....

IP2: A pair of bib and brace overalls (laughs)

IP1: Yes, exactly, but, I only pulled it on up to here and Conny and Jessica and Eva died laughing and they looked like underpants.

IP2: Like underpants. (laughs)

IP1: And, yes, that was very funny really, and yes, that was it. Now we're doing something different again, yes, I made a sort of collage, with shreds from newspapers and...

IP2: ...it was very funny, we had to cut out things and

IP1: yes, and glue them in and I had, well, that's about...

IP1&2: there was the Venus and the...

IP1: well, there's the Venus by Botticelli, the Birth of Venus and, I did it but of course in a modern way. Eh, I have a sun umbrella instead of the shell

IP2: an umbrella (chuckling)

IP1: sun umbrella in the back, stuck the woman in it, then I have the head...

IP2: ...of the rooster...²²

IP1: ...no, no, I changed that, but it doesn't matter. Umm, first, I had, umm, the head of Dieter Bohlen and then I had... (unintelligible) (SI-19)

Obviously, the students experienced the class as inspiring and exciting. The rather confusing conversation shows their dedication and motivation, and it seems to be once again a learning experience that has been experienced in the form of a common “we” (lived other). This is even reflected in the interview situation, where the students speak together and with each other and therefore create again a situation of a “we”. They are so excited that they permanently interrupt each other and talk in a non-chronological way

²² Or maybe of J. Hahn, an Austrian politician

about the things they made, which makes the conversation hard to follow. The students also talked very fast, which also expresses their excitement. Even if the theoretical part of the class was "pretty boring", they still like the subject very much and seem to have undergone deep learning processes. They can easily navigate in the subject area and seem to have incorporated the subject matter in a way that they can talk about it naturally and self-confidently. The following example also demonstrates a learning experience of this kind:

Ex. 28:

IP1: It was fascinating really, because, umm, we had things like plates, you had to pull out parts, and with electricity of course and then you had two bits sticking out where you put the wire and when you plugged it in, then...

IP2: ... then the teacher turned on the electricity until it glowed and then it burst, like it is with fuses.

IP1: Yes, exactly.

IP2: That's what we learnt about fuses.

IP1: The fuse, because, it also permanently happens at our place, because, when we turn on about five things, the TV, radio, storage battery, eh...

IP2: TV and radio, that's very clever, then you can't listen to the TV anymore (both are laughing)

IP1:eh, and the oven and the computer, eh, this always blows our fuses

I: And you already know how to fix that?

IP1&2: Yes

IP2: No wonder, it happens so often (...)

IP1: (unintelligible) ... and when we turn on the computer then it always blows the fuse and then I always have the flashlight with me, because when it's in the evening then I always have to hold the light until my Dad has fixed it. (SI-19)

In contrast to other interviews, the students do not talk about what the teacher told them to do, but they simply describe what they did in the lesson. The "we" is again an important part of the sequence (lived other), and it is interesting how soon the student switches to her experience at home (lived space).

Performance categories

Students at Birch Tree School often express that the class tests (*“Schularbeiten”*) have a very complicated differentiation of levels of difficulty. Nevertheless, they seem to have accepted the system as it is and are able to deal with it. As in many cases, the students at Birch Tree School also experience this system as one that guarantees objectivity and one that is able to document their performance.

Ex. 29:

IP2: And, for example, Karoline, she was at the HS²³ level in Maths, and then, because she's not too good, she got fours²⁴ and the like, fives, and now she has a one in HS, and so she was upgraded to the AHS²⁵ level again.

I: Mhm, this means that you can change very often and easily, so to say, if that...

IP2: You have to show you really want it, you also have to try hard. Apart from this, if you are (unintelligible), there are 1, 2 and 3 ability groups, it's really easier then, you stay in that class, but it always gets more difficult if you don't keep trying hard. (SI-21)

This is just one of many examples that document how the students believe in the system of tracking and grading. Small sentences like “because she is not so good” can be regarded as a hint that students take the appraisal of their performance as self-evident and in accordance with reality.

Final interpretation

In some respect, the interviews at Birch Tree School are different from other cases that were investigated within the research project. The students' way of talking about schooling reveals that they see themselves as active participants who co-create the daily life at school. They perceive a certain amount of scope of action and feel invited and entitled to point out problems and have a discussion with teachers and the principal. This does not mean that every student makes actual use of this option, but it seems to be a general attitude that is part of the atmosphere at Birch Tree School. Furthermore, the

²³ HS = *Hauptschule* (School at the lower secondary level with a rather vocationally oriented education),

²⁴ Fours, fives, and ones: Grades of the Austrian grading system, which goes from one (top mark) until five (fail)

²⁵ AHS = *Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule* or *Gymnasium* (School at the lower secondary level with a rather academically oriented education)

students' stories show that they experience themselves as well integrated in the learning processes and accepted by their teachers. In contrast to some other schools, the students at Birch Tree School seem to experience their teachers as supportive and helpful in their learning processes and during the tasks which they have to solve. Nevertheless, the students have a very traditional concept of performance and believe in different categories of ability. The grades are regarded as a description of their personality instead of feedback in accordance with a small number of specifically defined and very limited abilities that underlie a variety of influences usually lying beyond an individual's reach.

Last, but not least, the students' experience also shows that even if they think that their school is very open and with little hierarchy, they are disappointed that some problems are not solved in the end. They do not have the impression that the situation has changed, which is sad on the one hand but on the other probably a realistic exercise for their future life in a democratic society. Discussing and solving conflicts can take a lot of time and needs to follow the pace of all discussion partners and the matter at hand.

7.6 Discussion

The purpose of the empirical investigation was to find out how students experience schooling and their daily lives at their school. Their conceptualisation of schooling can contribute to an extensive understanding of how school reform works and how schools are able to limit processes of marginalisation.

The empirical data from five schools reveal that the emerging themes are related to three different fields: firstly, students consider schooling as *working on content matter* and being actively involved in certain tasks. Secondly, the *relationship* between the students and their teachers and classmates plays an important role in students' daily life experience of schooling, and, thirdly, *performance categories* are a predominant topic in almost all interviews. The following illustration gives an overview of the different themes and how they can be subsumed in the three fields mentioned above. The core message of all the interviews is that learning is about doing something actively together in the classroom community and that the teachers are or should be there for the students. The themes of content matter, relationship and performance categories apply to different degrees and in different combinations in the five cases.

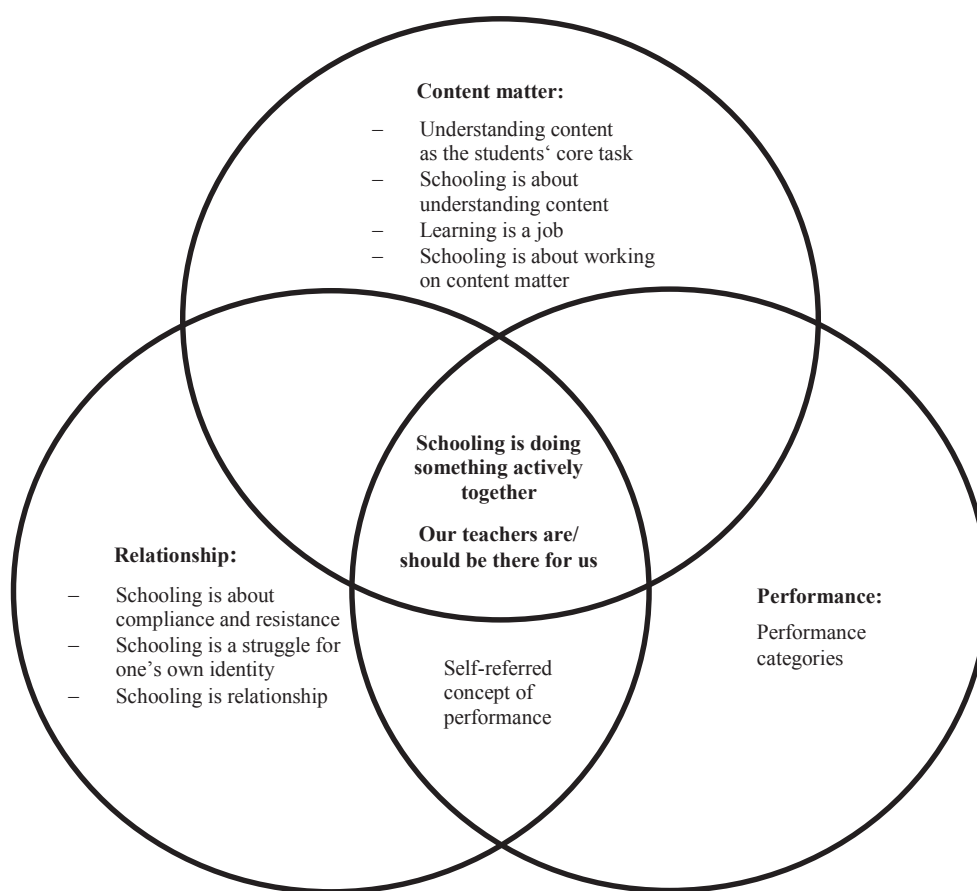


Figure 5: The main themes of the narrative interviews

As for the field of *working on content matter*, the interview data clearly reveal that the students take it for granted that it is their task to learn and work on content matter. Schooling means to them to work on specific tasks that are given and explained to them by the teacher and they put all their effort and attention into trying to understand and to be able to follow the instruction. As most of the interviews show, they experience schooling in a very everyday manner. They regard learning and participating in class as a routine, which they have internalised as an attitude. As also documented in research, students regard schooling as a job in which they have developed strategies and clever tactics in order to avoid unpleasant consequences and in which they have learned and again internalised rules like putting one's hand up when you want to say something, or how to address a teacher (e.g. Breidenstein, 2006; Erickson et al., 2008; Jackson, 1968; Muth, 1966). What happens in class is of minor importance in the students' experience, and they talk about it in a very sober way, as if learning were an automated process and

the interactions with students and the teacher were very structured and determined. As Jackson calls it, the students experience schooling as a “daily grind” (Jackson, 1968), which has become their unquestioned everyday life at school. For them, there are no other conceivable configurations of their daily lives as students at school and the interviews hardly indicate any discursive deliberation about content matter. However, some interview examples (Birch Tree School, Maple Tree School) deal with situations in which the students were totally inspired and excited about the class. Usually, these lessons were connected to the students’ prior experience and they could easily connect to the matter. In these situations, the students seem to have left the “daily grind” attitude behind and appear as active students who are involved in the plot.

In general, it becomes obvious from all interviews that the students expect from school and its teachers that they will learn something, and that they want to learn and work on content matter. They take it for granted that this is the purpose of schooling, and that working on tasks that have been given to them by the teacher is their core activity.

The *relationship(s)* between the teachers and the students is one further major theme in the interview data. The tenor of all interviews is the students’ dire need for a resilient relationship to the teacher, who should be available as soon as the students need help. The experienced relationship varies from utterly confused students who cannot interpret the teachers’ directives or understand their expectations (Beech Tree School) to students who experience their teachers as being there for them in every respect (Birch Tree School). The majority of interviews however lies between those extreme cases. They deal with situations in which the students needed help from their teachers but did not get the support they had expected. These situations illustrate how the different sectors as described in Chapter 4 are connected and interwoven: whenever students experience uncertainty, they have the need for establishing contact to the teacher on a personal level. They draw on strategies they have used in their families in order to process the challenges given at school, and which represent societal expectations (see Chapter 4).

The interviews make it clear that “teachers who are there for their students” is a crucial aspect in the endeavour of limiting marginalising processes at school. Of course, every teacher wants to be there for her or his students, and every teacher tries to be there. However, it is essential for the students to really perceive this effort. This depends again on the question of how the situation is reconcilable with the students’ prior experience and her or his patterns of approaching the world (according to Schütz, 2010, her or his

natural attitude). In case a student perceives her or his teachers as supportive, there is a perfect match between a teacher who has realised the students' needs, a situation that allows people to do what they intend, circumstances that support the efforts, and the student who is open to the teacher's help. Especially individualised learning settings tend to give the students the feeling that they cannot ask their teacher for help (see the section "final interpretation" in Chapter 7.1). If the main goal of the school reform was to reduce processes of marginalisation, it would be necessary to interpret the pedagogical idea of individualised learning in a different way. This does not mean that the teacher disappears from her or his role as a pedagogue, but as the main source of input. In any event, it is of enormous importance to stay beside the students during their learning processes and give them all the help they need for solving the tasks. In terms of the capability approach, the teachers' task is to enable students to reach a certain goal. From this perspective, the teacher has to be even more present in this kind of teaching method than in any other. In making themselves unavailable, teachers possibly convey the impression to students that they themselves have to take responsibility for their learning. In the end, this means that the responsibility of learning progress is given to the students, who have learnt to think that it is only themselves that matter and that they simply have to put more effort into learning if they want to make things change (see interview examples no. 6, 16, 17, and also 23). This *self-related concept of performance* is a further predominant theme in the interviews, and is connected to both areas of performance categories and relationship. This will be especially important in the context of standardisation and accountability, which will be discussed in the last chapter of this thesis.

The field of *performance categories* stands for the students' belief in traditional ways of systematising and labelling the performance of human beings. In the case of the New Lower-Austrian Middle School, these labels are the names of the ability groups (the *Gymnasium*-group, the HS-group, the NMS-group, the SPF-group) and of non-formal groups like "the better ones" and "the weak ones". The students understand these labels as an actual description of a person's characteristics and use them in an unquestioned, natural mode, which represents a biologic-deterministic concept of attainment, or, as Otto and Schrödter call it, a construct of dispositions (Otto & Schrödter, 2010). This construct is based on the belief that every human being has objective levels of attainment, which is at the same time the basic assumption for competence models and the standardisation movement and which attempts to conclude that the purpose of education is to increase each individual's disposition. As also discussed in Chapter 4.4, this argument ignores the

fact that learning processes depend on specific and accidental, external conditions for activating content matter in an individual's comprehension (Otto & Schrödter, 2010, p. 174). The goal of a supportive pedagogy that tries to avoid marginalisation processes could be to show that the students' performance is a product that is not carved into their personality, but a contingent phenomenon that depends on a number of factors and configurations.

I have summarised the common essence of all interviews with the phrases "schooling is doing something actively together" and "our teachers are/ should be there for us". Those two themes appear in almost every interview and can be analysed by classic didactical approaches. The two themes clearly stress the social component of schooling (and not the mere learning process as an individual) and show that learning happens within the student's relationship between the teacher and a content matter. This perfectly represents the didactical triangle, which illustrates the interplay between the student, the teacher, and the content matter. In contrast to performance-oriented learning approaches, the didactical triangle stands for a genuine pedagogical understanding of learning. It leaves the outcome of the learning process open because it accounts for the interplay between human beings and the content matter, and it attributes to all proponents autonomy and integrity in their agency and thinking (Hopmann, 2007). From this perspective, the students' ways of experiencing their daily lives at school set an important statement in the context of school accountability and standardisation. Firstly, it seems to be the case that students experience schooling mainly on a social level, no matter how much standardisation and testing has already permeated daily school life. Secondly, this insight can be regarded as a counter piece to a current understanding of learning and the role of the learner and as a warning sign against its implicit consequences as presented in Chapter 4.4.

The students' experience of schooling varies in some respects from school to school and is similar in other respects. As for the field of *content matter*, the continuum ranges from a very pragmatic and even mechanistic notion of what happens in class (Beech Tree School), to a rather disinterested attitude towards learning and working on content matter (Oak Tree School, Lime Tree School) and to quite active and inspired students (Birch Tree School, Maple Tree School (partly)).

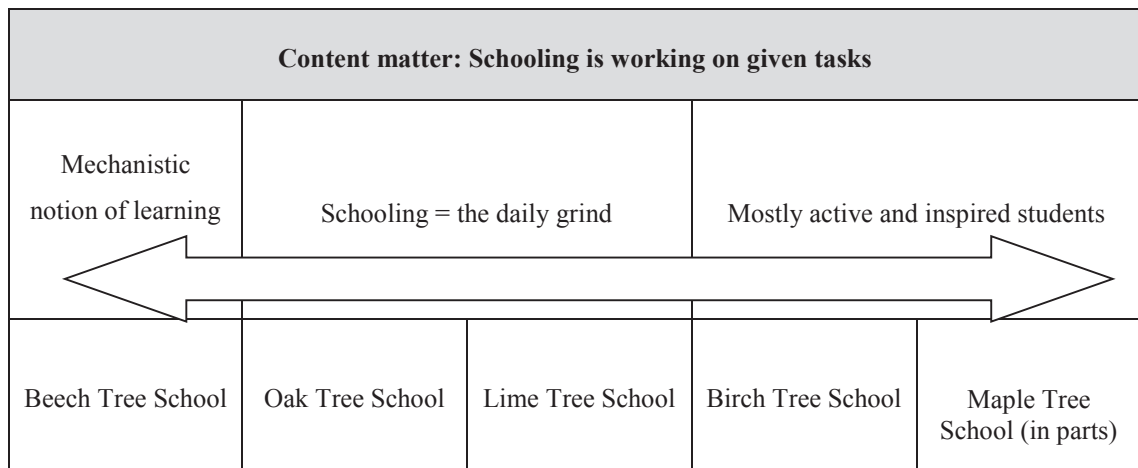


Figure 6: Continuum of the students' experience concerning the theme "Content matter"

The students' need for the teacher is a very important theme in the field of relationship(s). It appears in all interviews with two extremes: Students who have made the experience of being left behind by their teachers (Beech Tree School) and students who say that their teachers are there for them (Birch Tree School).

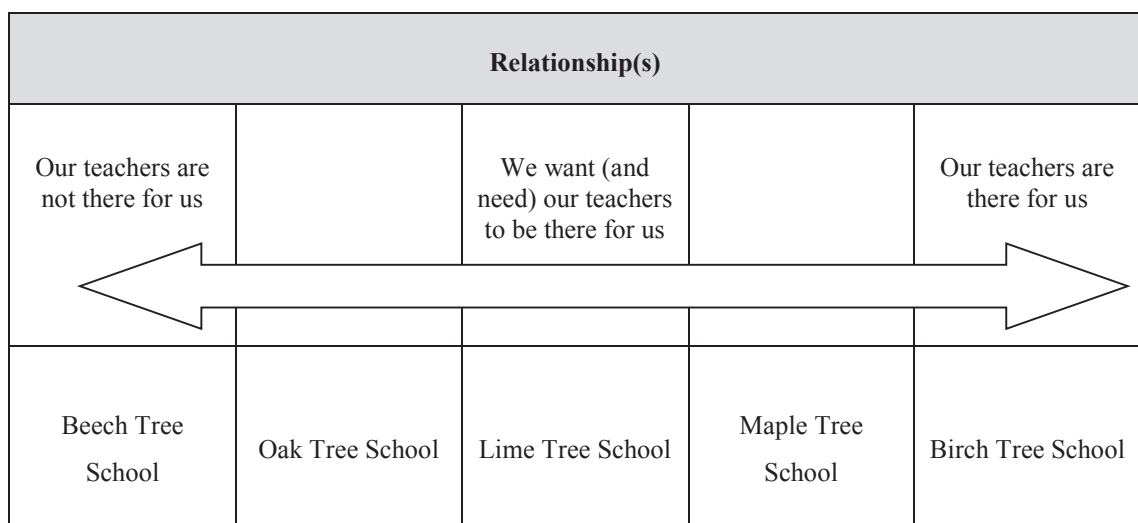


Figure 7: Continuum of the students' experience concerning the theme „Relationships“

What has been subsumed under the term “performance categories” applies to all schools to the same extent.

8 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to find out how the didactical implications of a school accountability framework can be marginalising for disadvantaged students. Its research question, “how can a paradigm of individualisation created by a school accountability framework be marginalising for students affected by a mismatch between the characteristics of their personal world at home and the expectations given at school?” presupposes the following reasoning and theories:

Firstly, the thesis is built upon the argument that the school accountability framework as it has been established in many European countries and, in general, in the Western world has caused a didactical paradigm to which I refer as the “paradigm of individualisation” and which can have a marginalising impact. As presented in Chapter 2, school accountability frameworks as those in Austria are based on achievement standards, as well as national and international standardised tests. All these tools try to evaluate national school systems by assessing student performance, which puts the focus of public and professional discourse on the learning progress of each single student. The individual student has become a pivotal element of learning: her or his performance in assessment tests serves as an indicator for school and teaching quality, whenever her or his performance is below the average, individual teaching and support is the solution. Furthermore, achievement standards have caused an individualised perspective on content matter, since they specify certain meanings which have to be acquired by the student. By this means, standards try to isolate content matter from the social situation in class in which meanings are unfolded and created in an interactive setting (Biesta, 2009; Heid, 2007a; Hopmann, 2007; Schleiermacher, 1826/ 2000). This argument has been presented in Chapter 2.

Secondly, the thesis refers to a definition of marginalisation which tries to counteract a popular attitude in Austrian discourse on schooling. In Austria, people usually think that students who reach higher education have succeeded in education. Attending a *Gymnasium* and a university confirms that the teachers have done a great job, that the schools have provided good conditions, and that the student has been hard working. However, this perception also implies that marginalisation is regarded as a deficit term in which students have not had the possibility to obtain higher education. This attitude can be traced back to current theories on equity, which either proclaim the equality of

opportunity or the equality of outcomes (Jordan, 2010). Both perspectives lack the connection to societal conditions, on the one hand, and to a more comprehensive notion of a school's task and theory, on the other. Under the premise that we understand schooling as a place where children find their way into their future lives as citizens in our society, marginalisation can also be defined as excluding students from opportunities to learn and experience skills and the knowledge necessary for living a good, human life (Nussbaum, 1999) in a certain local place in our society (Otto & Schrödter, 2010). With reference to Alfred Schütz's analysis of "The Stranger" (1944), this definition has been expanded by the aspect that marginalisation takes place when a student's way of living and interpreting the world (her or his "stock of previous experience" (Schütz et al., 1980, p. 7)) cannot be reconciled with what is expected of the student at school. Thus, the school is unable to develop a future perspective with and for the student because in the student's daily life the two sectors of her or his life-world cannot get in touch with each other. The theoretical basis for my understanding of the schools' task has been illustrated in Chapter 4, and my definition of marginalisation has been established in Chapter 5.

Thirdly, the thesis refers to a school reform which has an interesting position within the Austrian efforts to establish an accountability system. On the one hand, the school reform builds on conventional standardised testing in order to ensure and improve school quality, on the other hand, it tries to account for an education in terms of the capability approach, which means that schools should help their students in developing a plan for their future under their given circumstances. Therefore, the evaluation of the school reform, which is being done by the project "NOESIS", provides an interesting background for this thesis. It allows the use of the students' experience of their daily lives at their schools under the reform's condition as a means to understand how a focus on individual learning processes can possibly influence the students' school trajectories. Based on the students' experience of schooling at schools of the New Lower-Austrian Middle School, the thesis analyses and discusses potential hazards of a paradigm of individualisation. The basic background of the school reform and the evaluation project have been presented in Chapter 3, basic information about the school system in Austria and its accountability tools has been provided in Chapter 2.

8.1 The marginalising impact of a paradigm of individualisation

One of the results of the empirical investigation is that students conceptualise schooling as working on content matter. This ranges from a very mechanistic, a somewhat pragmatic and disinterested attitude to a quite inspired one towards learning. In every case, students have the expectation that they will learn something in class and that they receive tasks which they have to solve. One student made this point very clear in one of the interviews:

Ex. 30:

IPI: This isn't instruction, because we have presentations the whole year long, and in fact we don't know anything about the topic. And, she doesn't explain much, and, you know, if one says that we have this subject now, then all students look dumb and don't want to have the subject, because it isn't fun. (SI-11)

First of all, the students' attitude towards schooling and learning carries an important message: We students can and want to learn. In the case of those students who have developed a very mechanistic attitude to learning processes, the data show that the schools were not able to explain their expectations in a way that was understandable and meaningful to the students. Due to a mismatch situation between the school's expectations and the students' scheme of reference and their "dissonant resources" (Hughes et al., 2010, p. 19), the students have developed acts of resistance and an indifferent attitude towards learning and schooling (see especially the case of Beech Tree School). This example, as well as the examples in which the students conceptualise their daily lives at school as a "daily grind" (Jackson, 1968) show that the schools still do not have enough room to move in order to concentrate their work on the students' imaginings of their future lives. The schools are too much occupied with qualifying their students according to the given goals, and cannot use their resources to get in touch with the students' ways of interpreting their world (see also Willbergh, 2015). This argument does not exactly refer to the paradigm of individualisation, but to the pressure which is caused by school accountability frameworks in general. For instance, for the future lives of the students at Beech Tree School it is most important to find out what kind of resources, interests, and skills they have, what they expect from their future lives and under what conditions their families live. Only then can the teachers choose content matter that gives the students the opportunity to realise their potential, give meaning to what they have heard in class and make use of their resources. This aspect has been elaborated by Otto & Schrödter (2010, p. 173ff), who define capacity as the interplay between internal dispositions and external conditions of realisation (ibid.). If the schools' purpose is

defined from this perspective, it is fatal to hold them only accountable for their efforts by competence concepts and performance testing. It undermines the schools' potential to act in a real and honest interest of their students, with the purpose of opening them windows for an autonomous life in our society. Thus, a traditional understanding of school accountability can have a marginalising impact especially on students who attend schools in multicultural and social disadvantaged areas and, in other words, on schools which are attended by a large number of students with a background of, as it has been called, "dissonant resources".

The second result of the empirical investigation is that in the students' experience of schooling the relationship to their teacher (and also to their classmates) is a key topic. In particular, the students expect their teachers to "be there" for them and help and support them in their learning processes. Throughout the case studies, students experience their teachers to be there for them to different extents. However, two aspects have become very clear in the data: Firstly, it is very often the case in individual or "open" learning settings that the students miss their teachers, and, secondly, underprivileged students have more need to interact with their teachers. The first aspect points to a very important problem in the context of the paradigm of individualisation. In the course of the standardisation of education, individualised teaching has become important because it seems to be the most effective way to support students in achieving higher competence and qualification levels. Thought through to its end, this opinion is based on an omnipotent idea of learning and teaching, as has been expressed by Schleiermacher (1826/ 2000, p. 19ff.). Furthermore, it builds on a dispositional understanding of learning in which learning is regarded as a mechanical, automated act that only takes place within the individual (Otto & Schrödter 2010). Anyhow, the students' experience of schooling shows that they have a great need for attention and being perceived in class by their teacher, especially when they were not able to follow the teacher and when they have questions. Open learning settings or individualised teaching is often misunderstood as a design in which the student becomes responsible for her or his learning process and the teacher disappears from her or his original role. This setting can be an exciting challenge for highly achieving students, but it again marginalises those students whose stock of knowledge and scheme of reference (Schütz, 2003b) does not help them in mastering the tasks by themselves. They greatly depend on somebody who "translates" the task into their language (figuratively) and confirms to them in every single step when they have doubts in their way of solving the task. Individualised learning designs in which the teacher is not available for the students

can be disillusioning and discouraging for underachieving students, for students with a low degree of self-confidence (e.g. Lund, 2008), for students whose resources and scheme of reference is dissonant from what is expected at school, and for students with special needs in general. All these students not only depend on a mediating entity that tries to reconcile the immediate life-world of the student with the school's expectations, but also on the interaction with their classmates. Based on the idea that learning in class is a process in which students try to make meaning of content matter (Hopmann, 2007, p. 115f.), I regard the common process of meaning making as one of the most important learning resources for students because their different steps in creating meaning help and inspire each other. Apart from this, traditional didactical approaches provide relevant concepts for promoting the students' active citizenship (Luimes, 2011) and can therefore contribute to an inclusive character of schooling. Schratz and Westfall-Greiter argue that the concept of individualisation contributes to the (re)production of inequality ("doing difference"), because it requires that the students' progress is permanently assessed and observed, which leads to a number of small "diagnoses" (Schratz & Westfall-Greiter, 2010, pp. 20-22, 25). Furthermore, and even more importantly, they point to the fact that individualisation is mostly understood as a structural organisation of instruction in which the learners' autonomy is undermined. Thus, the students have no opportunity of making meaning in terms of education ("*sich bilden*") (ibid., pp. 20-22). The authors present an alternative approach which they call "personalised learning". With this approach, they argue that didactical settings should be approached from a learner's perspective ("lernseitig") and therefore account for the students' autonomy in their learning process. The concept of "personalised learning" gives a framework that allows for handling heterogeneous needs in a fruitful and competent way, since it does not mean that students work just for and with themselves, but proceeds from the students' personal activity of her or his own learning processes (ibid., p. 29). Although the concept refers to didactical tools (in contrast to the individualisation concept which is only based on structural settings), it still leaves the dimension of the content matter aside. Based on Alfred Schütz's terminology and theories, I complement the idea of personalisation with the dimension of content, as also shown in the "didactical triangle". Choosing dynamic forms of instruction like freewriting with peer conferences, learning diaries, learning portfolios, "authentic" writing and reading tasks, etc. (Schratz & Westfall-Greiter, 2010, p. 29) is one aspect, but choosing appropriate content wisely and making it meaningful to a diverse

population of students is a further aspect that enables getting the students “on board” the ship named *Schooling*.

The third result of the empirical investigation is that students have a self-related concept of performance and believe in traditional ways of systematising and labelling the performance of human beings. This attitude plays a crucial role within the question, how a paradigm of individualisation can be marginalising for disadvantaged students. According to the students’ lived experience, different levels of performance and different ability groups at school reflect the students’ actual characteristics and are therefore “real” to them. There is reason to assume that achievement standards and permanent assessment will even support this attitude because standards are based on hierarchical levels of knowledge and it is in the nature of standardised testing to judge the students’ performance level. Of course, evaluating the students’ learning progress is indeed a fundamental part of schooling and provides important opportunities to the students for their personal development. According to Langeveld, assessing a student’s performance means to confront her or him with the so-called “real life”, but the school definitely has to help the student get over her or his failure (Langeveld, 1960, p. 52). It requires tact on the part of the teacher in order to choose appropriate tasks for the evaluation and to react appropriately to the student’s performance. The key idea is to make the students capable of taking on a task, trying to solve it, and bearing its consequences (ibid., p. 53). Thus, the students get a sense of their own abilities and those of others. The purpose of tasks in general is to carry the standards and realities of matters and relationships of adults gradually into the life of the children (“*So trägt die Aufgabe die Maßstäbe und Realitäten der Sachen und Beziehungen der Erwachsenen allmählich ins kindliche Leben hinein*”, ibid., p. 54). In this sense, there is an important difference between standardised tests and traditional evaluation in class; the latter is tied to specific learning situations in class and therefore to the students’ experience in class. This is again an important security aspect for disadvantaged students, because it makes sure that the evaluation stems from the students’ world of experience which allows them to “recognise” tasks (and their solution). At the same time, the teacher can tactfully draw on this common world of experience when she or he chooses and evaluates the tasks. A didactical framework based on competence models and standardised assessment tests, however, places even more emphasis on defined levels of performance. It ignores not only that learning also depends on external conditions for activating content matter in an individual’s conception (Otto & Schrödter, 2010, p. 174), but also that the goal of schooling is not about reaching the

highest competence level, but about gaining those capabilities that allow the student a life under and with her or his specific circumstances. There are some evident reasons for standardised assessment tests, but the students' lived experience as it has been documented in this thesis shows that, firstly, they should be used to a minimum extent and, secondly, they should be carefully accompanied by teachers who are able to impart to their students that performance is not something that is written into our personality, but a contingent phenomenon that depends on a number of external factors and configurations. As the example of the Lower-Austrian school reform shows, the traditional understanding of performance is still deeply embedded in schools nowadays, even under the reform's new influences.

Based on the students' experience of schooling as a field in which they are working on content matter, which is mainly characterised by relationships and in which they have a self-related, dispositional concept of performance, this thesis argues that a paradigm of individualisation that has been established by a school accountability framework can have the following marginalising impact:

- If the content matter becomes too detached from the students' life-world and the school focuses its work too much on the qualification aspect in terms of competence levels, students with so-called dissonant resources are marginalised because their opportunities to negotiate meanings, to learn how schooling "works", and to use their personal stock of previous experience for making new learning experience decrease.
- Students have a very strong need for getting in touch with their teachers. Students whose background differs from the expectations given at school are especially dependent on the teachers' mediating support. In a traditional understanding of individualised teaching, students are left to their own devices, which means that disadvantaged students are at a disadvantage compared to students with so-called consonant resources.
- The students' very traditional concept of performance is marginalising in the sense that it makes the students believe that their only option is to work harder. Disadvantaged students are provided with a poor set of resources (at least in the context of schooling and the resources that count in this context), which will not allow them to recover by just working harder or putting more effort into learning.

The individualising paradigm puts even more emphasis on this traditional concept and therefore contributes to the marginalisation process.

To sum up, accountability tools promote an understanding of schooling and school quality that is only based on student performance, which undermines the idea of supporting each student in a way that she or he will be able to master her or his life under given, specific circumstances. Therefore, a rigid and pervasive accountability system can marginalise disadvantaged students because the focus on individual performance means that they are left with their comparatively poor resources (with respect to what is necessary at school) and therefore are at a disadvantage compared to other students. In other words: the case of the New Lower-Austrian Middle School shows that the reform works well in those schools that are able to make use of the new “room to move” in parallel to the demands of the accountability tools. In those schools where teachers are pressured to reach certain levels of qualification, the school reform does not go far enough to allow them to redefine their foci and put more effort into getting their students “into the boat”.

8.2 Some final thoughts about the impact of the New Lower-Austrian Middle School²⁶

In general, the case studies which have been conducted in Lower-Austrian Middle Schools illustrate once again the renowned “Matthew-effect”. The students of a school seem to perceive more structures of support and have already developed more perspectives on their future, the more the student population of the school stems from milieus that are represented by the traditional bourgeois expectations at schools in general. In other words, the school reform is especially helpful and inspiring for schools which already had done a good job, whereas schools who are in dire need of extra support and resources cannot make use of the reform to the same extent. The following illustrations will elaborate on this interpretation, but they are not based on actual numbers. It is merely an attempt to depict my arguments and make possible connections more clear, and it can serve as an impulse for further investigation.

²⁶ This section is based on the final interpretation of the NOESIS research report no. 12 (Hörmann, 2012a).

Each school's challenges can be illustrated on two axes. On the one hand there is the extent of the school's competitive situation, and on the other hand there is the extent of the divergence between the students' learning needs and the normative expectations. By this I mean different needs which result from the student's social, regional, and familial background. The following figure shows the different positions of the schools, based on a subjective estimate:

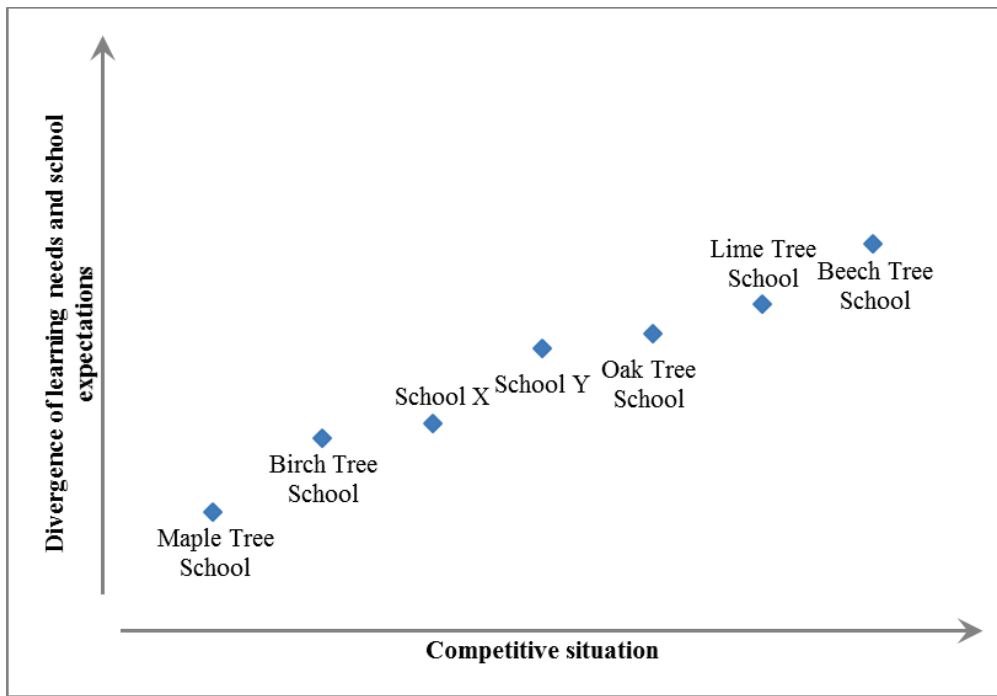


Figure 8: Illustration of the schools' challenges, based on a subjective estimate and **not** on quantitative data. Schools X and Y are not included in this thesis' analysis, but have also been part of the NOESIS evaluation study.

Maple Tree School, Birch Tree School, and School X are situated in a region without much competition, whereas School Y, Oak Tree, Lime Tree, and Beech Tree School have to compete with some other schools. This means that the schools find themselves under the influence of typical social choice mechanisms: especially Lime and Beech Tree School are attended by students with heterogeneous learning needs and increased needs for support.

Students at Lime Tree School perceive a rather small space of action, but they try to get in touch with their teachers on a personal level, which gives them the experience of being accepted. At Oak Tree School, the students' perception of their scope of action varies from teacher to teacher, and in Beech Tree School, the students experience hardly any opportunities to co-create their daily lives at school. This is not because of any failure of

individuals, but obviously the reform measures have met the schools' needs only to a very limited extent. Furthermore, the schools' problems seem to be on another level and require other solutions than what is possible with the reform's tools. In general, it has become obvious that especially Beech and Lime Tree School are in need of more resources and other means of support than provided by the reform.

The students at Maple and Birch Tree School have developed an attitude that can be compared to that of a consumer (in the sense of: 'the purpose of instruction is that we learn something'). Their stories reflect the students' proactive and self-confident attitude and behaviour. The students at school X also show attitudes of consumers, but they do not become active themselves. They complain about unsatisfying situations and conditions which show that they are unable to cope with the teaching methods being used by their teachers (especially open/individualised learning). It seems as if the school interprets the school reform rather as pressure in the direction of academic levels of qualification (like in the *Gymnasium*) and therefore puts strong emphasis on autonomous, self-regulated learning processes without any support by the teacher. Most of the students have problems in keeping up with these challenges and become disappointed and overwhelmed.

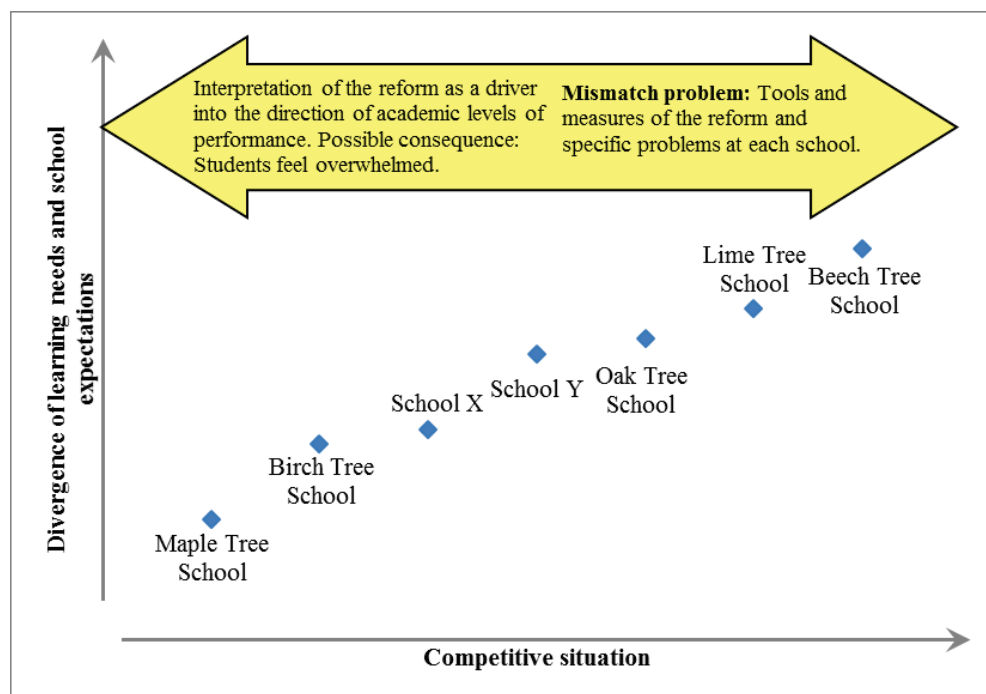


Figure 9: Illustrated interpretation of the impact of the school reform according to the students' lived experience of schooling; based on a subjective estimate and **not** on quantitative data.

All in all, the school reform provides useful tools and resources for those schools which have already been innovative or at least have tried to find innovative solutions to their specific problems. Besides, their students usually have comparatively few additional learning needs, which also facilitates the implementation of new didactical and structural settings. The crucial question is, however, whether the schools can avoid putting too much pressure on the students in order to reach higher qualification levels as they are tested in the context of standards tests and other comparative assessment tests. As the case of Maple Tree School shows, this can lead to a situation in which the students are overwhelmed.

In some other cases, the school reform does not provide an answer to the schools' actual problems, probably because it disregards the extremely difficult conditions and the challenging reality of these schools. In addition, some schools have not even found a way to express and define their problems and explain what kind of resources they would actually need. According to the interviews with the students, the schools need additional personnel, especially in the socio-pedagogical area, rooms that are more appropriate for schooling under multicultural and socially challenging conditions, more and better local networks, and, most importantly, the freedom to use other criteria for evaluating school quality. This means that standardised assessment tests and achievement standards should no longer define the goals for their students. Hence, a focus on the students' successful transitions to further educational institutions or into their work life (Geppert, 2015) could be an inspiring task for both the students and the teacher. This approach can ease the burden on these schools and gives them the capacity to act autonomously.

At some schools, the school reform seems to make no real difference. These schools seem to have everything under control, without any noticeable problems or peculiarities. As the student interviews at these schools show, it is very often just some individual teachers who try to make use of the school reform and who are actively engaged in its implementation, although other parts of the staff are not satisfied with the reform or have even concerns about it.

The most important aspects of the school reform which should be reconsidered (with respect to avoiding marginalisation) are: the way individualising teaching methods are used in class, the way ability groups are organised and labelled, the way to address a multicultural reality at school, and the role of schools which work under extremely challenging conditions. A new indicator of school quality called "successful transitions"

(with reference to Sen and Nussbaum's capability approach and the aim of a "good, human life", (Nussbaum, 1999) could provide a leading framework for addressing these aspects (see also Chapters 5.3 and 4.4).

8.3 Concluding remarks

The results from this thesis are intended to serve as a warning sign against a comprehensive, all-pervasive system of school accountability. The idea of making schools accountable for the resources provided by society is legitimate, and so is the use of standardised assessment tests and competence frameworks. Nevertheless, there are two aspects that are ignored in public and scientific discourse and in the political processes of decision making: firstly, these standardised accountability tools have made the factor of student performance the one and only indicator of school quality. As presented in this thesis, research clearly shows that this indicator is far too overrated and not suitable for reflecting the manifold aspects of what actually happens at school. I therefore would dearly welcome a discussion on further indicators of good and successful schooling (Geppert, 2015) and how students can gain not only access to education, but "epistemic access" under their specific, personal circumstances (Young, 2010). Secondly, any evaluation of school quality will have its blind spots and weak points, regardless of its definition of the term "school quality". Schools are social institutions in which human beings live and work together; the best evaluation study in the world will not be able to deliver a real, accurate picture of the school. For this reason, any political decision has to take the limits of the studies into account to which it refers, and be aware of the real message of these investigations. For instance, a student assessment test or a national test for achievement standards can only indicate the extent to which the students were able to solve the given tasks, according to the conceptual framework, at a certain time. This can provide interesting information to the teacher, the principal, or political and administrative institutions. In any case, the impact and consequences of this information have to be discussed and reflected upon very carefully.

This thesis has a very big advantage, which at the same time limits its own significance: it is more or less hypothetical. Since especially in Austria the process of implementing school accountability tools is still in the early stages, and since the implementation of tools is usually a long and difficult process, the perceived impact and side-effects can probably only be observed in a couple of years or perhaps even decades. Therefore, I

decided to go through my arguments drawing on the students' general experience of schooling and thus draw a picture of possible scenarios. At this point the big advantage becomes clear: the thesis can warn against dangerous and probably unintended side-effects which have not yet caused too much damage.

Furthermore, this thesis is not able to evaluate which of those people investigated are marginalised and which are not, and which schools have a marginalising impact and which do not. I use my student interviews as a basis that allows me to discuss and consolidate my thesis and understanding of marginalisation in the context of school accountability. Of course, this basis also has its limits: the students' experience of schooling is only one aspect of daily life at school, and interviews with 12-year-old students have some technical limits (see Chapter 6.4.2). Nevertheless, the attempt to gather data that contain the students' subjective structures of meaning and that do not stem from an adultomorph perspective is an innovative aspect of the NOESIS research project.

There is reason to assume that the current trend of standardisation will continue and lead to even more reforms in Austria. Over the years, teaching and learning will gradually become more focused on normative ideas of performance, which probably (and ironically) will even increase the differences in students' performance. It is a process of upgrading at the cost of those who cannot keep up with the demands through their own efforts. Politicians have a very high degree of responsibility in this case: it is nothing less than the students' future that is at stake. Data from standardised tests and the omnipresent concept of individual performance have an enormous impact and are highly respected by the public. If they have a marginalising impact on a certain group of students, politicians have a duty to intervene and perhaps make unpopular decisions in order to protect the weakest group of human beings in our society. A possible idea for avoiding further marginalising processes and getting the students "on board" the ship named *Schooling* is to define school trajectories from "below" and extend the definition of the term "school quality". No more system reforms, no new didactical settings, and no new tests would be the consequence. Schools would need more freedom in order to prepare their students for their future lives under their own specific conditions, with only one normative goal in mind: living a humane, autonomous and self-determined life (Bauer & Werkl, 2011; Nussbaum, 1999; Willbergh, 2015). The metaphor of the good, old, and solid ship *Schooling* invites schools to draw on their traditional, basic didactical approaches,

because these approaches allow them to find different appropriate places for their students, i.e. places where the students can go ashore safely and with the confidence that they will master the challenges of today's life. Of course, this normative goal is not unproblematic, since it still leaves room for elaboration. With regard to the cohesion of our society, I think it is worth the effort to make this question a permanent issue of societal discourse and negotiation.

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The graphic used at the beginning of the thesis is called “Dutch Ship” and was
downloaded from the website www.openclipart.org (accessed on 21/7/2015).

Abstract in English

The thesis investigates how school accountability measures like international student assessment tests, national standard testing and competence standards can be marginalising for students affected by a mismatch between the characteristics of their personal worlds from their homes and the expectations at school (students with “dissonant learning resources”, Hughes, Greenhough, Yee, & Andrews 2010). Drawing on critical analyses by Biesta (2009) and Young (2010), current discourse on school accountability trends unpacks a “paradigm of individualisation” that highlights each student’s individual performance and makes increasing that performance the main task of education. Such a reductionistic understanding of learning and teaching can have a marginalising impact on disadvantaged students, because it deprives students of the interaction with their classmates, which is in fact the most important learning resource for students (Hopmann 2007, Schütz 1953/2010, Otto & Schrödter 2010, Langeveld 1960). A current Austrian school reform tries to account for both the demand for standardised testing and the demand for an inclusive school culture where all students can develop a perspective for their futures, under their given, personal circumstances. In the context of the evaluation project “NOESIS” (Lower-Austrian schools in development) and by drawing on Van Manen’s concept of “Lived Experience” (1990), I investigate how the students in those schools conceptualise schooling and what their lived experience of schooling looks like. The analysis of the narrative interviews shows that marginalisation sets in when schools focus their work on the qualification aspect of schooling. Furthermore, students have a very strong need for getting in touch with their teachers, especially in individualised learning situations. If teachers misinterpret individualised learning and leave students to their own devices, students with dissonant learning resources are at a fatal disadvantage compared to those with consonant learning resources. Finally, the interviews show that students have internalised a very traditional concept of performance, which tells them that the only way they can deal with failure at school is to work harder. In a paradigm of individual performance, students are generally left to their own devices, which means that low-achieving students very soon develop attitudes of disillusion and frustration.

From this perspective, school accountability and its consequent focus on individual performance can have a negative impact on students who are already disadvantaged in

their schooling. In order to provide all students with opportunities for their future lives as human beings and citizens in our society, it is important to redefine the efforts and results for which we want to make our schools accountable (Biesta 2009). With reference to Sen and Nussbaum's capability approach, it would be one idea to assess if and how schools are able to create successful transitions for their students to the next school level or into their working lives (Geppert 2015, Bauer & Werkl 2011).

Abstract in German – Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch

Die Dissertation beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, auf welche Weise „School Accountability“-Maßnahmen wie international vergleichende Schulleistungsstudien, nationale Bildungsstandards und nationale, standardisierte Tests marginalisierende Folgen haben können für Schülerinnen und Schüler, deren mitgebrachte Ressourcen stark von dem abweichen, was an Schulen üblicherweise erwartet und wertgeschätzt wird („Schüler/innen mit dissonanten Lernressourcen“, Hughes, Greenhough, Yee, & Andrews 2010). Auf der Basis kritischer Analysen von Biesta (2009) und Young (2010) wird argumentiert, dass der gegenwärtige Bildungsdiskurs in einem „Paradigma der Individualisierung“ stattfindet, innerhalb dessen die individuelle Leistung der Schülerinnen und Schüler im Mittelpunkt steht. Die Steigerung dieser Leistung wird zur zentralen Aufgabe von schulischer Bildung, was als reduktionistisches Verständnis von Lernen und Lehren aufgefasst werden kann. Da insbesondere Schüler/innen mit dissonanten Lernressourcen von der Interaktion mit ihren Klassenkolleg/innen im klassischen didaktischen Verständnis profitieren (Hopmann 2007, Schütz 1953/2010, Otto & Schrödter 2010, Langeveld 1960), können stark individualisierte Lern- und Lehrprozesse marginalisierende Folgen für die betroffenen Schüler/innen haben.

Das niederösterreichische Reformprojekt „Niederösterreichische Neue Mittelschule“ versucht, sowohl der Forderung nach standardisierten Tests als auch dem Anspruch einer inklusiven Schulkultur, in der alle Schüler/innen eine Perspektive für ihre Zukunft entwickeln können, gerecht zu werden. Im Rahmen des Evaluationsprojekts „NOESIS“ (Niederösterreichische Schule in der Schulentwicklung) und anhand von Van Manens Konzept der „Gelebten Erfahrung“ („Lived Experience“, 1990) wird untersucht, wie Schüler/innen Unterricht konzeptualisieren und erfahren. Die Analyse zeigt, dass Marginalisierung geschehen kann, wenn sich der Unterricht zu stark auf den Qualifizierungsaspekt von Schule konzentriert. Schüler/innen haben darüber hinaus speziell bei individualisierenden Lernformen das Bedürfnis, mit ihren Lehrpersonen in Kontakt zu sein. Wenn Lehrer/innen diese Lernformen missinterpretieren und die Schüler/innen völlig auf sich allein gestellt sind, werden Schüler/innen mit dissonanten Bedürfnissen gegenüber ihren Kolleg/innen benachteiligt. Die Interviews zeigen auch, dass die Schüler/innen ein sehr traditionelles, selbstbezogenes Leistungs- und

Begabungskonzept übernommen haben, das speziell für benachteiligte Schüler/innen eine weitere Marginalisierung bedeuten kann.

Wenn sich Schule dem Ziel verpflichten möchte, alle Schüler/innen darin zu unterstützen, eine Perspektive für ihr zukünftiges Leben in unserer Gesellschaft zu entwickeln, in der sie als selbständiger, unabhängiger Mensch am gesellschaftlichen Leben teilhaben können, ist es notwendig, die Maßstäbe, anhand derer die Qualität von Schule gemessen werden soll, gründlich zu überdenken (Biesta 2009). Angeregt von Sen und Nussbaums „Capability approach“ wird vorgeschlagen, den Erfolg von Schule daran zu messen, wie sehr es ihr gelingt, den Schüler/innen erfolgreiche Übergänge in die anschließenden Ausbildungswege zu ermöglichen (Geppert 2015, Bauer & Werkl 2011).

Curriculum Vitae

Bernadette Hörmann

bernadette.hoermann@univie.ac.at

Academic Education:

Since 2007	PhD studies at the University of Vienna, Department of Education
2007	Graduation (Magistra), University of Vienna, Department of Education Title of diploma thesis: <i>“Die Unsichtbaren in PISA, TIMSS & Co. Kinder mit Lernbehinderungen in nationalen und internationalen Schulleistungsstudien“</i> (<i>“Disappearing Students in PISA, TIMSS, & Co. Students With Disabilities in National and International Student Assessment Tests“</i>)
2001 - 2007	Student at the University of Vienna, Department of Education (Focus: school education, psychoanalytical pedagogy)

Positions and Experience in Research and Academia

2011 - 2013	Team member in the research project <i>“Noesis“</i> (evaluation of the Lower Austrian school reform model, www.noesis-projekt.at), University of Vienna
2007 - 2011	Research assistant to Stefan T. Hopmann, Department of Education, University of Vienna
2007 - 2011	Teaching of seminars and proseminars at the University of Vienna, Department of Education
2011 - 2013	Contributing Editor, “International Education News. PK-12 News from Around the World“-Newsletter (Tom Hatch, Columbia University), http://internationalenews.com/
25.8. - 30.9. 2010	Guest researcher at the University of Agder, Kristiansand/ Norway
2010 -	Reviewer for the “Journal of Curriculum Studies” (JCS)
2009	Member of the local organising committee for ECER 2009 (<i>European Conference on Educational Research</i>) in Vienna (organisation of the pre-conference for doctoral students)