

School withdrawal in Norwegian upper secondary
school: the role of students' affective bond to school



Master's thesis in pedagogy

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Summary

The aim of this project has been to gain insight into subjective student experiences in upper secondary school. The background of the project has been an increased concern for school completion in the Norwegian government's development of education policies. Several studies show that Norwegian school children report relatively high school contentment compared to other countries, yet drop-out rates in upper secondary school have been stable at relatively high rates the last ten years. The eventual impact of school well-being to school withdrawal is the basis of the project.

The methodological approach to the topic has been a semi-structured interview of six students in vocational upper secondary school. The interviews were conducted in autumn, 2012. The subsequent analysis was done through phenomenological method. Through these means we attempted to broaden our conception of factors which impact school experience in general and the participants' expressive stances towards different modes of activity, such as tangible and abstract subject matter.

Diverse theoretical approaches, such as motivation, critical pedagogy and well-being were seen to be useful in the discussion of the participants' accounts of school experience, which in turn gave a multi-layered insight into different constituents of school life, and the different components' importance for successful school outcomes. Among the most significant findings was that the participants all found upper secondary school to be preferable compared to previous school experiences, as well as how the participants' stances towards teachers and the general social climate changed from lower to upper secondary school.

The deductive approach to the problem of school experience is evident in the discussion of the findings. Increased political awareness of drop-outs led to the inquiry about school experience, which in turn led to highlight of the importance of students' bond to school, which subsequently has led to a review of the distinct aims of education in Norway. Whether schools should foremost create future workers to strengthen the Norwegian economy or to ensure a healthy mental development of its students seems to be two perspectives which should be considered further in relation to one another. A comprehensive look on what school participation ultimately should lead to seems warranted, and can be a problem for further study.

Sammendrag

Formålet med denne oppgaven har vært å få innsikt i videregående elevers subjektive erfaringer fra skolen. Bakgrunnen for prosjektet har vært en økt interesse for frafall i utviklingen av norsk utdanningspolitikk. Flere studier peker mot at norske elever i gjennomgående fremviser høy trivsel i skolen sammenlignet med andre land, likevel har frafallet i videregående skole vært stabilt høyt de siste ti årene. Eventuelle sammenhenger mellom trivsel og frafall er grunnlaget for prosjektet.

Den metodiske tilnærmingen til emnet har vært et semistrukturert intervju av seks elever på yrkesfaglig videregående skole. Intervjuene ble gjennomført høsten 2012 og intervju-data ble analysert gjennom en fenomenologisk tilnærming. Ved bruk av disse midlene har målet vært å få innsyn i faktorer som påvirker skoleerfaringer generelt, samt deltakernes uttalte forhold til ulike aktivitetsformer, som for eksempel teoretisk og praktisk arbeid i skolen.

Ulike teoretiske tilnærminger som motivasjon, kritisk pedagogikk og well-being viste seg å være relevante i diskusjonen av deltakernes uttalelser om skoleerfaringer, som også gav et mangfoldig uttrykk for ulike bestanddeler av livet på skolen, og de ulike bestanddelenes viktighet for vellykket gjennomføring av skolen. De mest fremtredende funnene var blant annet at deltagerne foretrakk videregående langt mer enn ungdomsskolen, og at deltakernes oppfatning av skolemiljøet og lærerne endret seg i overgangen til videregående skole.

Den deduktive tilnærmingen til skoleerfaring er fremtredende i diskusjonen av funn. Økt politisk oppmerksomhet ledet til en undersøkelse av skoleerfaringer, som igjen ledet til undersøkelse av elevers bånd til skolen, som til slutt ledet til en diskusjon omkring de generelle mål for norsk utdanning. To perspektiver som er fremtredende her, er at skolen enten i hovedsak kan søke å tilfredsstille krav fra arbeidsmarkedet for å styrke norsk økonomi, eller sikre en robust mental utvikling hos norske elever. Disse to perspektivene i sammenheng kan undersøkes videre i nye prosjekter.

Foreword

At the outset of the thesis, credit where credit's due

A sincere thank you to

Steinar Bøyum, my supervisor at UiB. For sushi and excellent counseling.

Students who agreed to participate in the project. I learned a lot about shuttering!

My father. For patiently arguing the problem of repeating certain words two hundred times.

Finally, fellow students in the study hall. It has been a blast!

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Introduction

School experience and school withdrawal can be considered to be two parts of a greater whole: what students actually think about school. There are several different grounds for discussing this topic at length, for instance:

- An economic standpoint, to create a better school for children who are the future work-force and the foundation of future economic growth.
- An educational standpoint, for instance to examine which didactical approach most effectively enhances skill appropriation.
- Finally, a normative standpoint concerned with the value of school as an institution marked by solidarity and humanistic, which ensures members who are functional members of democracy.

School attendance up to and including lower secondary is compulsory in Norway. As Dewey (n.d.) highlights how learning or rearing is a vital tool for reproduction and development of society, it follows that an institution compulsory for all children should be function as optimally as possible, both as a place for acquisition of skills and the development of body and mind (Dewey, 1907). This can be said to be a logical stance both because good education makes for well-educated adults, but also a moral and normative obligation society can *choose* to pursue: That the school students have no choice, but to attend should not be a damaging experience. Norwegian law concerning school education also emphasize all students' rights to have a safe and secure "psychosocial" environment in school in §9 (Opplæringsloven, 1998). Additionally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child's article 29 state education should aim to achieve "the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" (United Nations General Assembly, 1989, p. 9). Generally, some of the Convention's affective educational goals have been met by some skepticism because of the difficulty of objective evaluation and thus the reality of implementation (Helgeland, 2012), the Norwegian Government are obligated to follow the Children's convention. Upper secondary school is not compulsory in Norway, but more students are expected to complete it. Within this context it becomes more relevant to examine the different things with which they strive. Also, as we shall explore, preceding school experiences can have relevance for which perceptions students have of concurrent circumstances.

Overview of the thesis

The thesis is divided into chapters and subsections primarily based on a chronological and what is aimed to be a logical succession grounded on the subject matter and problem for discussion.

1. Background. The background chapter discusses the basis on which the inquiry is based, which also entails some overview of our interpreted *reality*, in the sense of the conditions which we work within. Finally, we present what can be said to be a relevant problem based on the background.
2. Theory. The theory chapter attempts to present different phenomena which are relevant to use in conjunction with the problem for discussion, and thus enable us to understand and subsequently discuss empirical data and implications.
3. Method. The background and theory chapters intend to make the methodological approach seem relevant and logical. The method chapter is a discussion on the different methodological choices and priorities taken during the course of the project, as well as presenting the methods themselves.
4. Results. The results chapter is an attempt to present the collected data in a way which seems reasonable based on the data analysis.
5. Discussion. Finally, the discussion chapter attempts to address the problem for discussion as well as the subsequent research questions. The discussion chapter is aimed to be a logical consequence of the background, theory and results chapters.
6. Conclusion. The conclusion is a summary and highlights of what can be argued to be important and insightful points that have arisen during the course of the project in general and the discussion specifically.

1. Background and problem for discussion

In the following chapter the background for the research problem will be discussed. The concept of student experience in school contains several different factors which can have varying subjective importance for every student. One concrete issue connected with *disruptive* school experience is the ever-present issue of school-leaving and the issues connected with ascertaining the catalyst for the phenomenon, as well as possible ways to alleviate it. The following background aims to, among other things, demonstrate that there are several surveys on school leaving and some on relationship to school. The different surveys are sometimes difficult to put together into a coherent message concerning school experience. There also seems to be some issues in distinguishing significant factors which constitute an affective school experience. These points are to some degree recurring during the course of this thesis.

1.1 Discussion on the Norwegian context

Much of the available research which has relevance when describing the Norwegian context, are different surveys. In the following, different research which seeks to represent different parts of school life in Norway is presented. Most of the presented research is focused on the students' survey response of their own well-being in school. Also, much of the available data is gained through the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (UDIR) who generate regular surveys about different factors of student contentment and achievements.

1.1.1 School withdrawal

As well as school experience, an easily identifiable symptom of students' stance to school can be said to be affective school withdrawal and drop-outs. This is evident in that studies about school drop-outs seem to invariably touch upon facets of the students' school experience, for instance affective, psychological or academic constituents of this experience (Finn, 1989; Goulding, Chien, & Compton, 2010; Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1991). The Norwegian government has stated drop-outs in upper secondary school¹ as one of its main challenges in educational policymaking, and has established the project NyGiv as a response to the stalemate of the current situation (The Norwegian Government, 2010; The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2012). The NyGiv project's aim is to aid students who struggle in lower-secondary school by providing extra teachers and adapted education to those who are eligible. These students are aimed to be among the 10% students with the lowest grades or who show signs of

¹ In Norway called «videregående skole».

being increasingly disinterested towards school life. The selection of students is done in the individual school. A Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) report (Bakken, Sletten, & Haakestad, 2011) asserts that surveys of the effects have shown that participants and school institutions are positive to the measure, and that it has had some effect, especially in mathematics. Also, it seems that more than the intended 10% of students have joined NyGiv, the reason for this seems to be ambiguous and the report does not ascertain the reasons for this, other than that the schools and counties are free to make some autonomous decisions concerning the project's implementation, and therefore the numbers of students involved (Bakken et al., 2011).

The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training (UDIR) states that the latest drop-out rates are currently at a slow descent at approximately 30%, but remains between 30-35%, where the rates have been stable during the last ten years (UDIR, 2011). The rates are measured by whether the students have completed their apprenticeship or acquired eligibility for university studies within five years after enrollment to upper secondary school. There are some significant differences between vocational and study-preparatory (general) courses; almost 20 % fewer students finish their first year in vocational education compared to general upper secondary education (UDIR, 2011). The government's increased concern for school leavers seem to be rooted in studies that show increased chance of success for all who have completed upper secondary school, as well as the concrete lack of a sufficiently skilled vocational workforce in due to increased demand of educated employees in the Norwegian economy (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2013). Conversely, one United States study showed that early school-leaving was connected with increased alcohol consumption and sociocultural factors such as lower voting attendance, but also argued that early school leaving was not quite as disastrous as one might be led to believe (McCaul, Gordon, Coladarci, & Davis, 1992), as income was not significantly lower for this group, underlining the variation of motives for early school-leaving, further indicating that some left school because monetary profit was not a sufficient motive for staying. Liljeberg, Eklund, Fritz and af Klinteberg's study of Swedish adolescents (2011) show that poor school bonding is also connected with increased delinquency, but importantly that this trend was prominent throughout different factors which are relevant for school bond, such as teacher relationship and school work coping. However, for girls, only disruptive teacher relationship seemed to correlate with delinquent behavior.

1.1.2 School well-being

The student well-being in Norwegian schools seems to be comparatively high: UDIR reports that students in upper secondary school rate their social well-being as 4.3, where 5 is highest social well-being. Student relationship to teachers are also high, though slightly lower at 3.9, the latter has increased slightly from 2007 to 2011 (UDIR, 2012a). Further, international studies show that Norwegian students are among the very top tier in contentment in school compared to most European countries (Bradshaw, Keung, Rees, & Goswami, 2011; Currie et al., 2004). Johansen and Schanke's study (2009) found that 70% of Norwegian upper secondary school students report a high degree of contentment ("trivsel"), while only 3% report a low degree of contentment. It should be noted that Johansen and Schanke's study is from Buskerud County, one of the counties in Norway which has the lowest school-leaving in Norway (UDIR, 2011). However, the difference between counties is not big enough to off-set the considerable number of students reporting high contentment in school.

So, in a Norwegian context, the well-being in school seems to be relatively high, though some students *do* report low or medium well-being in secondary school. Therefore, there seems to be some sort of discrepancy between Finn's (1989) model of school leaving due to affective strains, and the Norwegian completion rate because the drop-out rate is as high as 30 %, while contentment, at a glance, seems to be much higher. It is also important to underline that while secondary school completion after five years is much lower in vocational education compared to study preparatory (general) upper secondary education by respectively 57 and 83 percent (UDIR, 2011), the students in vocational education still report high (4,1/5) in social well-being (UDIR, 2012a). Additionally, the Norwegian context may be different from what the findings such as Finn's (1989) and Hascher and Hagenauer's (2010) are based in, these studies are mainly based on findings from the United States and Austria. Lamb et al.'s (2011) comprehensive book on comparative drop-out policy shows that there are several differences between nations, such as the surveyed students' age, this may in turn result in somewhat distorted comparative results because the difference between fourteen and sixteen year olds may be significant. In Norway, the main emphasis for research is on secondary school students, while other countries may include lower grades (or other age groups) for drop-out research.

However, even if some surveys report high well-being, a recent study on apprentice-based education shows a marked increase of motivation to learn in practice at work than at school

(Nyen, Næss, Skålholt, & Tønder, 2011). The Norwegian Ministry of Education (2009) has also noticed that Norwegian youths generally report higher rates of well-being than other comparable countries, but seem unsure about the strength of this relationship to school withdrawal. Here, the Ministry of Education also highlight how there is some downward-spiral tendency in the relationship between bad grades, well-being and school withdrawal, but the Ministry also note that the available research is too limited to make any conclusions (2009).

1.1.3 Summary

So, in essence the drop-out rates and well-being measures seems to give the impression that students are both content at school, yet still drop-out of upper secondary school. The reason behind (emotional) school withdrawal and eventual school leaving thus seems unclear. For a closer look at the different factors at work in Norwegian school withdrawal we can examine Markussen, Frøseth and Sandberg's study (2011) which argues that the transition between primary and secondary school may be an important reason for school withdrawal in Norway. This shows that there may be several independent factors that sway students toward school withdrawal. Education choice, well-being, grades and family relations are all factors which may play a significant role in the phenomenon of school withdrawal (Markussen et al., 2011). Furthermore, the severed bond as Finn (1989) describes, or alienation as described by Hascher and Hagenauer (2010) may not sufficiently aid us in understanding the situation of students who have a strong bond to school both academically and socially, but withdraw from school due to entirely different reasons. It seems increasingly difficult to formulate a general response to the phenomenon of school withdrawal. As Hascher (2007) also underlines, the available data on well-being in schools often gives little information on exactly *why* students have high well-being or what this *means* to them. In order to somewhat remedy this, it will be necessary to delve deeper into the students' own description of their experiences in school.

Finally in this section, the considerable gender differences in Norwegian schools should be noted, different courses which can be said to be traditionally gender related, such as carpentering or health and education are heavily biased towards gender: 96,7% of students are males in carpentering and construction, while in design and crafts there are 89,7% females (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 107). Further gender differences are evident in school-leaving, with up to 10% as demonstrated in the graph below. The compulsory school points are the accumulation of grades in different school subjects; this also shows that

nearly twice as many girls achieve high grades compared to boys. Other than that, the graph gives an overview of the school completion rate in Norway. The graph shows the percentage of secondary school completion within five years.

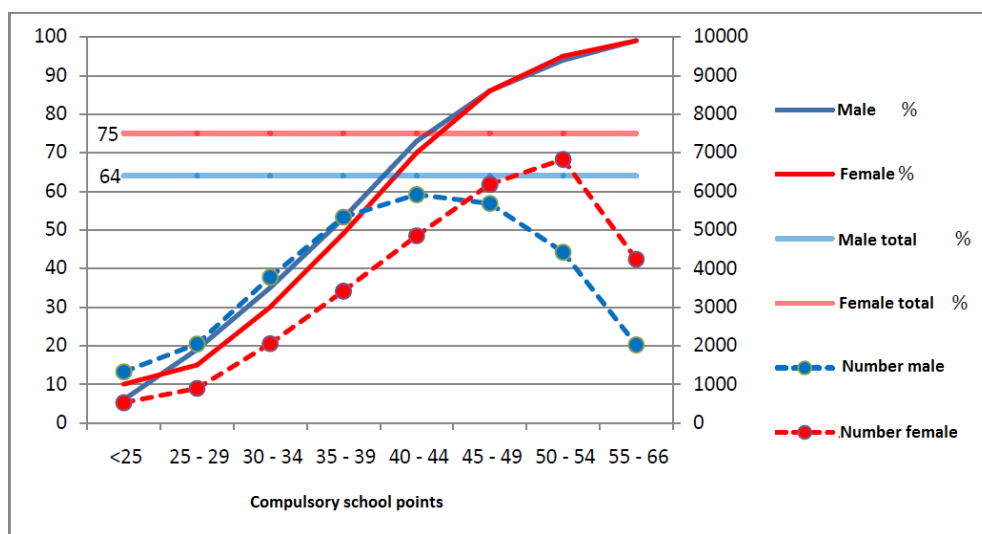


Figure 1: Gender differences and school completion (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2012)

1.2 Norwegian vocational education and Reform94

When discussing personal experiences of drop-outs in Norway it is relevant to give a short overview of the current system in Norwegian upper secondary school. This is because drop-outs are generally measured from secondary school in Norway. Norwegian upper secondary school is the first non-obligatory step of education, normally started at fifteen to sixteen years of age. Students who have successfully completed primary school are able to choose between study-preparatory, sometimes called general education, and vocational education. In the period 2006-2010, 96-97% of all students have transferred directly from lower to upper secondary school (UDIR, 2011, p. 28). Vocational education normally has a two-year duration in school-based education and ends with an apprenticeship, depending on the course it is usually between one to two and a half years.

Reform94 was a reform instigated in 1994 by Minister of Education, Gudmund Hernes; the reform made upper secondary school a right for all Norwegians to attend. This, among other things, sought to reduce the divide between vocational and general education and assert the right for all students to attend upper secondary education (Mjelde, 2008). The vocational education courses now contain more of what can be considered abstract subject matter, such as mathematics, than before the reform. Additionally, students in vocational education can now replace their apprenticeship with an additional year of general education, making them

eligible for university studies. This reform harvested some critique, for instance for making the vocational education more theory-heavy and for not yielding more students who actually completed vocational education with apprenticeship and subsequently instigated a vocational-related career (Lindbekk, 2012; Payne, 2002).

The discussion about vocational education can also be said to be a part of a discussion about the aims of education. This is because if theoretical and narrow prerequisites denote the completion of upper secondary education, the notion that all students should complete secondary education might be too ambitious. Considering that vocational education is a decidedly practical education (see chapter 2. *Theory* for further insight into what can constitute a practical activity), to expect the students to also master increased theoretical curriculum can be argued to be unrealistic, this is also reflected by Markussen et al. in surveys of Norwegian school students for whom lack of theory was a prime motivator for choosing vocational education (2011). The Norwegian Ministry of Education has responded to this in the 2011 white-paper *Motivasjon – Mestring – Muligheter*, wherein the practical and theoretical components of Norwegian education policy is discussed (2011). Some of the sentiments we might draw from the report is an increased highlight of the importance of creating space for development for all students, also for those who view theoretical education as a part of school in which they are repeatedly unsuccessful. This means an increased use of practical pedagogical methods in schools. In the white paper *På rett vei - Kvalitet og mangfold i fellesskolen* (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2013) there is further emphasis on occupation and skills directly related to future careers:

Even though the public education system cannot be perfectly adapted to the short-sighted competence-demands of the labor-market, there is, by the ministry's assessment, enough documentation to support the assertion that several of the education provisions do not provide sufficient skill-sets for the demand of the labor-market (p. 111, own translation).

In essence, the Ministry of Education can be said to be unsatisfied by the current status of vocational upper secondary education. However, it also seems the issue is primarily raised through increased collaboration with the labor-market. The ministry does not mention any feedback from the students or school-institutions, but rather the labor-market's disapproval of

the workers that graduate from upper secondary vocational education, their current skill is seen as unequal to the general demand.

1.3 Problem for discussion

Based on the above background of the project, we see that student relationship to school may be important for how students perform, and have consequences for school-withdrawal. However, a multitude of different factors may influence school withdrawal besides well-being or a bond to school. Firstly, the experiences which lead to low affective bond to school seem to be manifold, and should be discussed further. Therefore, it is necessary do more in-depth research to discover how upper secondary school students describe personal experiences in school and their relationship to the school institution, as well as the subjective importance of these factors. Secondly, well-being in school has value in itself; therefore, the matter should be researched further. Based on this background, the project will discuss this problem:

How do upper secondary school students describe their own experiences of the Norwegian school system?

Based on the background we judge these research questions to serve as reasonable points of departure:

- How do the students describe important subjective factors for well-being?
- How do the students describe the importance of their bonds to the school?
- How do the students describe the bond to school in upper secondary school relatively to previous school experience?

2. Theory

When considering school withdrawal and the students' relationship to school there are a myriad of approaches available. Some examples can be the objective circumstances such as social class, school transitions and so on which seems to be the focus of much contemporary research (Lamb et al., 2011; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Markussen et al., 2011). This project, however, will approach the phenomenon through the students' subjective experiences in a context of an affective relationship to school. This is because there are some discrepancies, or unclear boundaries concerning both the impact and the individual student's definition of what might *be* an emotionally significant factor (Hascher, 2008), this is also argued in *1. Background*. The overview will also show that much of the theory is based on quantitative psychological research, and thus ontologically based on data aimed to be objective. As the difference between the phenomena described through objective and subjective knowledge is a part of the background for the project, it is important to underline that going forward, the project's goals are to use the empiric-based theories as foundation for further inquiry (also see *3. Method*).

The theoretical approaches which will be presented can be said to largely have a basis in *social learning* (Illeris, 2006), wherein the fundamental processes which drive mental development are socially conditioned and thereby the environmental influences upon the individual are the most interesting point to discuss. Although researchers within a critical pedagogical perspective (e.g. Freire, 2000; Giroux, 2007; Martin, 2008) approach human developmental processes in a different way than psychologists (Vygostky 1973; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Bandura & Locke, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000), the theories can be said to attempt to describe different parts of human functioning which depend on coalition between people to develop optimally.

As will be argued, some of the theories have similarities which can enable an increased understanding of the phenomenon when examined in concert. However, the scope of the presentation on distinct theories can be said to be limited, but this is done in order to allow room for a broader theoretical overview. The aim of the diversity of the theoretical presentation is to provide a nuanced and comprehensive outline; however, it is important to note that even though the theories shed light on different aspects of similar topics, some of the depth of the theories will not be pursued to their full extent. Since the students' affective bond

to school seems to be an ever-changing concept, this approach can be fruitful when going forward with describing the phenomena based on empirical findings. First, we will go into more detail about relevant theoretical approaches which can describe students' affective relationship to school. Through this presentation, theories concerned with specific modes of learning or development that can shed further light on the project's goals are also touched somewhat. The relationship between learning and affective bond to school is also presented.

2.1 Use of terms

As mentioned, the theories concerned with students' relationship to school use several distinct approaches and therefore terms, which are sometimes concurrent or describe different spheres of an individual's affective life in school. Norwegian studies often use the term *trivsel* when discussing topics such as students' general well-being, comfort, social life, (physical or mental) health or happiness in school (Danielsen, 2012; Johansen & Schanke, 2009; UDIR, 2012a). There is no single English term that can be directly translated to *trivsel*; all of the previously mentioned phenomena are in the same vein, but not accurate. In this project, the term *affective bond* is used generally to also encompass *trivsel*; both to denote the student's bond or relationship to school and well-being. Though *trivsel* is a positive term, similar to *well-being*, low *trivsel* can be compared to lack of happiness, low contentment or low well-being. The terms well-being, school-withdrawal, bond to school and affective bond to school will be explored further in the following sections. Finally, *academic* school withdrawal is primarily meant to denote inefficient coping with set curricular demands of school, this *might* have consequences for a general affective bond to school, but the term is not directly transferable as it is defined in this thesis.

2.2. Alienation

Going into more detail about students' affective relationship to school can, like school leaving as a general concept, also be done by using terminology which aimed to describe the *lack* of bond to school. Within a context of affective school life and an increased awareness of school withdrawal in Norwegian policy-making, alienation might be relevant to examine. Alienation is a contextual term, in the sense that it is used through different approaches, for instance by Marxists, sociologists and psychologists. Williamson and Cullingford (1997) argue that alienation can be interpreted in a divisive way, underlining the importance of a clear-cut approach:

To be alienated is, from the point of view of the society from which one is excluded, a terrible fate or a social problem. But from the point of view of the alienated individual, it has an almost heroic stature. There might be a dispossession of one society, but this almost inevitably suggests the creation of an alternative. Such powerful metaphors may move people, but this does not necessarily mean that they are useful or precise tools in the hands of theorists and researchers. (p. 271)

Thus, it seems that alienation is not a simple phenomenon to use in inquiry without context because it might entail several confusing implications which are hard to avoid without precise boundaries. In this project, we shall look at alienation at the individual rather than the systemic level, in terms of the individual's subjective judgment about what has been alienating experiences. To define this in more detail, we can look at Seeman's (1959) comprising of sociological definitions which argue that being socially ostracized from different parts of community can be broadly defined as alienation. Seeman dubs the 1950s contemporary definition to be an expression of "powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement" (1959, p. 783); several complex affective processes which in different ways might be said to sever the individual's sense of belonging to a specific group. Seeman's overview can further be said to argue that alienation develops through an increased sense of apathy or carelessness to the community. For instance, this is demonstrated through a lack of influence and as a lack of belonging to a group.

Hascher and Hagenauer denote an affective and an academic withdrawal from school life as alienation. Influenced by Finn's (1989) description of school withdrawal mediated by a student's bond to school (see 2.3), Hascher and Hagenauer defines alienation from school as a continuous deterioration of a student's affective bond to school, where even external pressure to perform in school does not turn about a downward spiral toward a complete inconsequential stance towards both school content and its social aspects. So, the lack of a connection and influence to a particular group seems to be the predominant characterization of alienation, Hascher and Hagenauer's conception of alienation distinctly as a school phenomenon reveals that the term might be one approach to describe some cases of affective (and in some cases, academic) school withdrawal, especially when considering bonds between student and groups within the school, such as teachers and peers.

2.3 Origins of affective and academic school withdrawal

Moving further to describe the affective bonds the students have to school, we can examine the factors which impact the subjective emotional state. The theoretical approach is again varied; when we say *subjective emotional* we seek to encompass several theoretical approaches which have been and will be explored in the present chapter. However, in order to approximate some distinctions in the perceptions of students' emotional bond we will use the terms *well-being* on one hand, and *alienation* on the other. By using these terms we indicate that we seek to explore the students' emotions connected to school, learning and the consequences of these feelings. Alienation is here a term defined by the subject's (student) different emotional states which impacts school-affiliation. Well-being can generally be identified as the absence of severe negative subjective emotions. Both terms will be further described below.

2.3.1 Bond to school

The mentioned phenomenon of alienation is by several researchers highlighted as an explanatory model for students who come at-risk for school withdrawal, both in academic and emotional terms (Dillon & Grout, 1976; Hascher & Hagenauer, 2010; Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1991; Tuominen-Soini, Salmela-Aro, & Niemivirta, 2012). This can also be said to be consistent with alienation which leads to a lack of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Going forward in this vein, Finn (1989) bases his findings on school withdrawal on a comprehensive discussion based on analysis of several student surveys from the United States and the United Kingdom. Finn implies that, although there are several surveys which show correlations between drop-out and affective school withdrawal, there is a lack of a comprehensive analysis of the process which leads to eventual physical and mental withdrawal from school, of which an ultimate symptom is school-leaving. Further, Finn describes the students' bond to school as imperative, a bond which can erode to the point where the student stops going to school altogether. The bond to school can be said to be strongly governed both by social and academic self-efficacy:

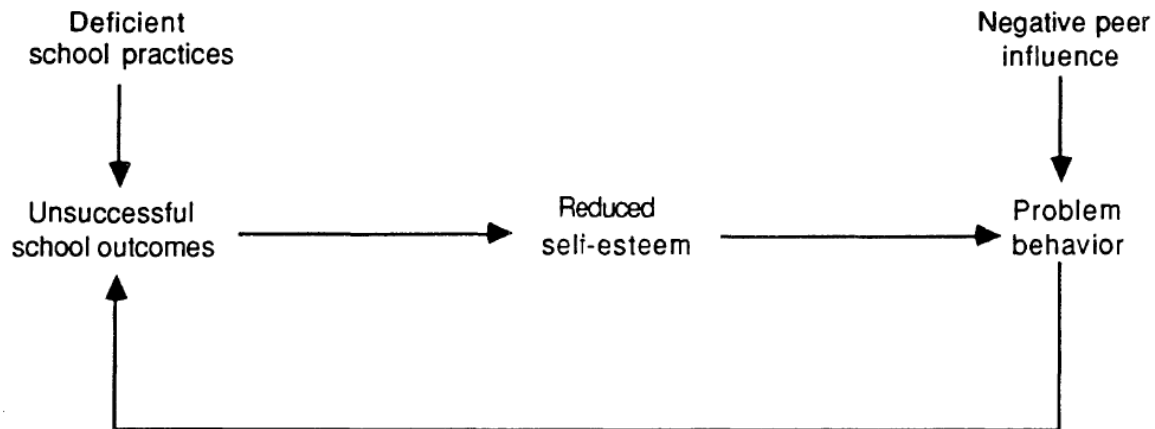


Figure 2: Frustration-self-esteem model (Finn, 1989).

What we might call the two sources of reduced self-esteem, which subsequently might lead to a severed bond to school, is here governed both by a social and an academic side. The deficient school practices and negative peer influences may certainly influence both, but lead to different results: Ryan, Stiller and Lynch (1994) suggests that severed affective connections with peers can influence learning in a detrimental way, and that there are several social relationships (friends, class-mates, parents) which are related and that secluded individuals refrain from accessing potential aid from others when experiencing academic and affective difficulties. Interestingly, the study shows that school outcomes and number of friendly relations do not correlate. Thus, if we use Finn's model as a premise, we might suggest that successful school outcomes might alleviate the strain of low affective closeness to peers in regards to school completion.

2.3.2 Critical theory

Critical pedagogical perspectives is distinguished through a reflexive epistemology and an emancipatory stance towards the aims of education (Mason, 2010). These stances can be interpreted towards a conception of education as conflict of control or direction, which can be resolved through cooperation and adjustment towards equal worth (Mason, 2010). The perspective seems relevant due to the underlying lack of empowerment which can function as a process of alienation in schools (Hascher & Hagenauer, 2010), wherein students at risk for affective school withdrawal inhibits a subjective judgment of insufficient sense of fulfillment and influence of present circumstances in school. Martin (2008) shows that an affective discord between students and schools in the United States can be seen, for instance by an increasing tendency for students to view school as a method unto an material end – a well-

paying job, rather than a place in which personal growth and betterment is the prime reason to go to school. The social estrangement can be linked both to a phenomena of school alienation, as Martin do, but also to a general discontentment with school practice and authority. The systemic causes for estrangement to school can be seen as a result of the way in which society is organized, as Marx and critical theorists might view it (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 2007; Martin, 2008): a failure of the class-divided, authoritarian system in which schools reside and are an instrument. Alienation, as previously discussed, can also be seen as a fundamental symptom of this macro-system critique. Even though Zygmantas (2009) does not explicitly discuss the students' affective bonds to school, her description of an authoritarian school-system also reveals an increased lack of subjective empowerment, the student is an object which functions more as a knowledge-repository rather than an active participant, thus rendering the students passive and uncaring.

Although there may be statistical correlations between family background and drop-outs (see for instance Lamb et al., 2011), this in itself does not constitute a reason for determining the distinct factors the individual base a decision to leave a free public school. The subjective conception of school experience is the aim for the present inquiry; hence the socioeconomic background is not the focus of the theory. Beyond social background, the perception of in-depth struggle for control of school direction can rather be interpreted more as primarily an issue of pedagogical methodology, this is how several school-withdrawal and drop-out researchers have approached the problem (Lamb et al., 2011; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Markussen et al., 2011). Here, such factors as the curriculum, transitions between school-levels or the teacher's method of *applying* the curriculum can be viewed as the primary cause for students' affective discord with school, and eventual school-leaving. The *origin* of the phenomenon might be said to be the dividing line between this and a critical pedagogical approach. This is noteworthy because although the different theorists might agree about different systemic causes to school withdrawal, the place in which you begin to examine the problem also can affect where the issues are identified to be most dire, for instance the student's curriculum itself or the overall ideology which *impacts* school curriculum.

2.4 School experience and well-being in school contexts

In the following, we will look closer at how the phenomenon of well-being, and ultimately how the students' affective state can be approached in a school context. The following demonstration will attempt to exemplify the way in which students' experience can be

described by using terms connected with well-being in order to subsequently understand the affective school experience more comprehensively.

2.4.1 Well-being

Well-being in school can be said to be a broad term when researching emotional life in school, as we shall see the term is used in a broad sense in different areas of human functioning. Diener can be said to be the protagonist of *subjective well-being* (SWB), which can be defined as the absence of negative emotions and the presence of enjoyment and a positive affective life, not in select instances but as a general subjective conception of condition (Diener, 2000; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Within this thesis, the difference between single instances and general view is important to note, because we thereby condition well-being not on one single instance but the subjective conception which has gathered over time. So, single instances would primarily serve as illustrations of general trends in regards to impacts to subjective well-being. The *subjective* component of SWB points to the individual's own judgment on personal well-being.

Diener has operationalized the phenomenon in a number of ways, specifically in regards to cultural contexts, and the constituents of well-being. It seems that repeated joyful experiences, and a disproportion between joyful and unpleasant experiences, favoring the former, are crucial to establish a high SWB (Diener et al., 2010). Park (2004) highlights that subjective conceptions of SWB can be termed as *life satisfaction*, and that the absence of negative and the presence of positive affect are conditions beyond subjective judgment. Thereby, some factors can be considered to be distinctively descriptive (i.e. psychological symptomatic) while others are subjective. For instance, joyful experience can have varying subjective worth for the establishment of high SWB for different individuals. Hascher (2008) operationalizes Diener's conception of well-being specifically in a school context, she implies both that the absence of well-being in school is detrimental to school affiliation (Hascher & Hagenauer, 2010), and also affects the ability to accommodate new subject matter, by reducing available faculties directed towards appropriating new content (curriculum) due to reduced interest and sense of coping in school activity. Thereby, we can say that the well-being of the individual student may have relevance for school withdrawal, and academic ability (see 2.4).

2.4.2 Well-being model

Where the former section gave a short overview of well-being, we shall now look further at how the subjective side of well-being can be understood. Thus, in order to nuance the phenomena we will look closer at certain aspects of it, namely by identifying the subject which incurs affect and has affective relationships and therefore is influenced by the affect. That is affective consequences of competence, motivation and efficacy. These points are warranted by the fact that this seems to be the less general and more individual factor in school life, and therefore relevant in order to create a broader understanding of their effect. If we accept Ryan and Deci's "intrinsic motivation" phenomenon we may be able to ascertain that social environment is only one aspect of the well-being of the student in school (2000). We might argue that without motivation the student will not be able to have an optimal experience of school because there are assumed to be instances which disrupt the student's well-being through a lack of motivation, but which are of an unknown importance.

Well-being can be approached both through discussing an individual's mental health or its societal constituents. That is, the individual subject or the group. An important reason to look at the former is displayed in Konu and Rimpelä's discussion about school well-being (2002). In other words, a school-contextualized well-being phenomenon, which is also created based on Finnish data, and therefore perhaps more precise when eventually discussing contemporary Norwegian circumstances as opposed to theories from other parts of the world. Konu and Rimpelä builds on "welfare" criteria which are theorized by Allardt (1976), in which an important addition to physical needs (water/housing etc.) is *being*. In which Allardt argues that the individual requires some sort of recognition and a sense of self in order to achieve well-being in addition to fulfilling basic materialistic needs (i.e. housing, food). Thus, we might understand well-being as conditioned by *adequate* social function because fulfilling of social needs are a method in which to achieve a feeling of self. To elaborate the point, we can look at Konu and Rimpelä's model (2002), which is made to demonstrate school well-being (also see Konu, Lintonen, & Autio, 2002):

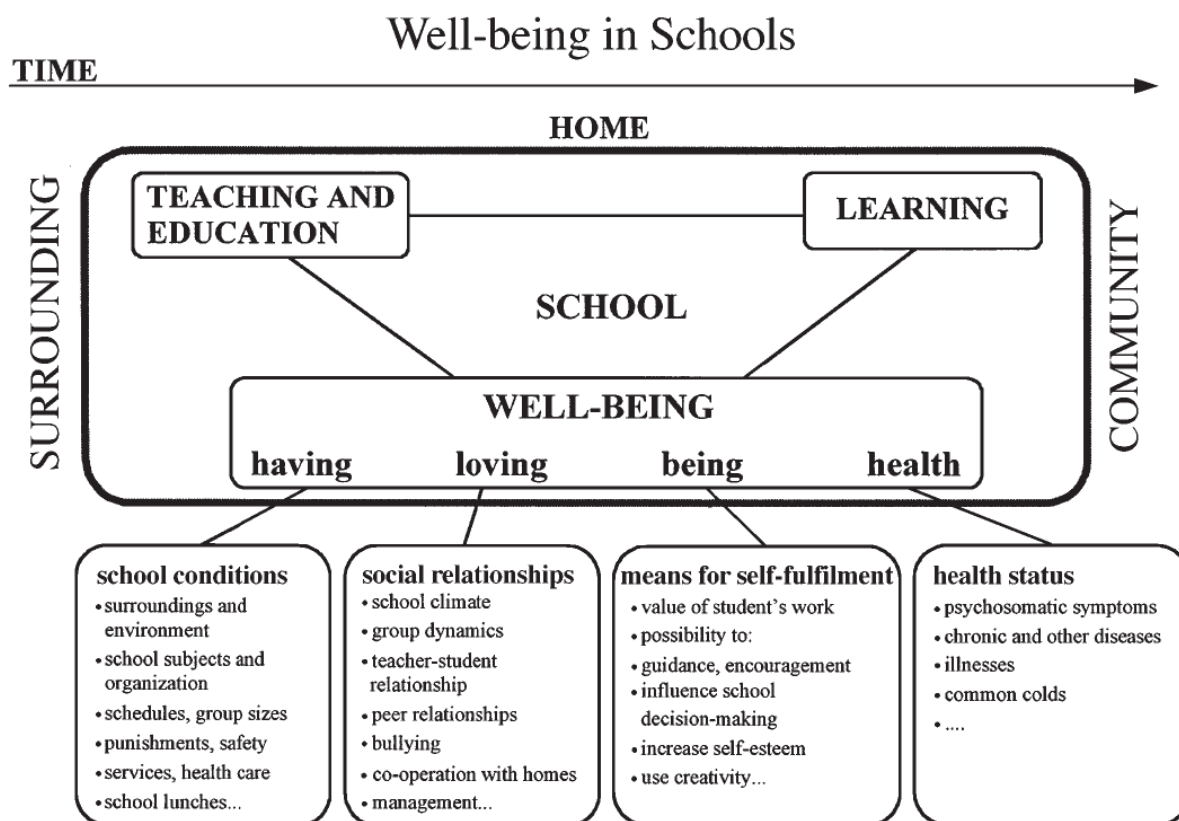


Figure 3: Well-being in Schools (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002)

As mentioned, some of the conditions are somewhat self-explanatory (though not unimportant). However, the concept of “being” is interesting because it can be said to be less tangible than for instance “having” and “health” which are measured by factors which can be said to be straightforwardly observable. Although all conceptual factors are impacted by a subjective and an objective component (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002), “being” also seems to coincide with theories of motivation, alienation and the general theoretical focus of the project. Allardt (1976) also points out that welfare in the sense of materialistic fulfillment is observable, but that factors which influence personal happiness are subjective, and thus different from person to person. The factors connected to “being” seems to indicate that subjective affect is governed by peers’ and teachers’ ability to cooperate and strengthen one another’s competence. To elaborate on this point and to develop a nuanced description of “being”, we might look at Ryan and Deci’s (2000) intrinsic motivation and autonomy; they postulate that intrinsic motivation, which is motivation fueled subjectively from within, is born in a context where feelings of competence or self-efficacy is strong, which are processes that are instrumental to create robust well-being in distinct contexts, for instance in schools. However, it is also relevant to underline that there is a risk that the division in Konu and Rimpelä’s model can on some occasions separate factors which others might see as

intertwined, such as how “punishments, safety” might have a high impact on self-esteem and thus be more relevant for “means for self-fulfillment”. Further, if we view the need for exploration and to “exercise capacities” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 229) as a basic human function; in other words, to inhibit this free exploration can also be interpreted to inhibit means of self-fulfillment as described in the above model. This does not entail that achievement necessarily fuels motivation in itself, but that the actually *sense* of perceiving oneself to be able to cope with challenges enhances self-efficacy and thus motivation. Bandura (1982) argues that the perceived self-efficacy of the individual is affected by how well one determines one’s actions to be executed. In other words, repeated judgment of success in personal ability to cope with a particular activity can in turn enhance performance in similar activities. This is relevant because it seems that the individual (in this case a school student) not only needs to have several basic needs covered in school, but also feel some degree of success when actually executing the school work. We can argue that repeated dissatisfaction with subjective achievements undermine feelings of “being” as portrayed above. This might therefore be important when discussing academic and emotional school withdrawal because the previously described bond to school outlined by Finn (1989) has an important affective side which is heavily influenced by social bonds, for instance to peers and teachers, but importantly, also a sense of accomplishment or ability.

2.5 Affective bond to school’s impact on academic performance and learning

The former sections have attempted to give an overview into different factors which may influence a student’s affective bond to school. Although we have touched the importance of self-efficacy and motivation for well-being, and thereby affective impacts to engage in curricular activities, the following will explore this relationship further in terms of academic performance in school. However, the school is also an institution that not only seeks to create an environment where students thrive in an emotional sense, but also to educate and develop the students to achieve and learn new things. When we say *academic bond to school* we imply that the individual incurs a sense of ability and achievement in relation to school work. The relationship between learning and well-being is debated by Boekaerts (1993), who argue that the relationship is significant, mainly because the students who have a low well-being tend to be concerned with other functions than with the appropriation of knowledge – and may act as a disruptive element in the class environment. Therefore, the available faculties of the student are not necessarily the issue, but rather the surrounding elements which create low well-being. Kuperminc, Leadbeater and Blatt (2001) find that the relationship between bond to school and

academic achievements is a premise which only underlines the importance of placing students who struggle with emotional problems in a class with a positive school climate. This would in turn encourage bond to school and thus mitigate some of the remaining issues. Again, motivation can also be relevant in order to shed further light here; as mentioned, motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) as well as self-efficacy, since the students' *perceived* self-efficacy seems to mediate performance by students in school (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Bandura & Locke, 2003). Schunk and Pajares (2009) point out that the efficacy of a student might enhance the motivation, and thus the learning process, but that this does by no means mitigate that skills must be acquired for eventual efficacy to be put to use. Thereby, we might infer that skill appropriation should be accompanied by experiences which enhance self-efficacy, if we wish to achieve successful school outcomes. However, to nuance this point, Schunk and Pajares (2009) claim that even if the relationship between affective bond to school and the student's motivation and sense of self-efficacy might, in particular instances, be wholly separated from the student's affective life in school, because some students with limited friendly relations in school can also reach high academic achievements in school. In other words, a student might have no friends in school, yet perform very well in school subjects. So, even if Ryan and Deci (2000) highlight the importance of peer support, this does not thereby infer a parallel to successful school outcome. We can theorize that the subjective sense of ability would in the above example be strong, and thereby other factors can mitigate the disruptive lack of social cohesion in school. This example is an attempt to demonstrate the myriad of factors which may and may not influence affective bond to school, and subsequent academic achievement.

Danielsen (2012) highlights how the sense of well-being can be reflected in either weakening bonds to school, self-efficacy or motivational issues, some of these points also resonate with Konu and Rimpelä's (2002) definition of "being". Therefore, we can say that the different theoretical approaches to affective life in school are intertwined, in such a way as to allow us to more accurately describe phenomena which influence students. Well-being and bond to school are arguably phenomena which in different ways connect to motivation and self-efficacy. The phenomenon "being", as indicated in the previous model (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002), points out that students require guidance and encouragement, much in the same way that students, in order to gain increased self-efficacy must achieve a sense of self. Situated learning, the process of development through peer interaction, can be said to show that the availability to receive guidance not only ensures well-being, but also the ability to develop.

Vygotsky's demonstration of internalization as developed through mediation by tools and signs (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 54) are dependent on the instructive or cooperative influences of peers or others. By seeing learning as inherently social, the internalization of content can be said to be conditioned upon the surroundings' ability to adapt toward the student (Wertsch, 1991). Thus, we can argue that a strong affective bond to school also has an impact on students' efficaciousness in academic pursuit. Schunk and Pajeres' (2009) argument concerning school outcomes and peer relationships shows that peer interaction might not be *required*, but rather displays the importance of viewing the developmental process as fluid and as impacted through different intermediaries.

2.6 Tangible and theoretical learning

As will be discussed further in this project, the utilization of faculties and appropriation of knowledge in a practical or tangible context can be relevant when an affective bond to school. To properly discuss the phenomena, we might touch on some of the differences between what we might identify as tangible or practical knowledge on one side, and abstract or theoretical knowledge on the other. The participants interviewed in the project have all chosen a decidedly practical education: carpentering. The participants also discuss the relationship between theoretical and practical education at length, and name it as one source of discontentment from their experiences in school. Therefore, in order to further understand their sentiments it might be fruitful to elaborate the terminology which is used throughout the project. From an approach based in situated learning, Wenger (1998) highlights that practice as tangible human activity can be identified as holistic. This is argued through an approach to human activity which is rooted in both theoretical and tacit experience, but importantly that these activities are distinct because of their social nature, wherein the community of practice theoretical and tangible activity in a cohesive manner. The *practice* which Wenger discuss (1998) is therefore not entirely the same as the term we use in this text because it also consists of a theoretical component. However, it is useful to note because the definition of practice as social is relevant since the participants function in a social environment. Guzman (2009) highlights how practical knowledge is impacted by a cognitive (mental) and a tacit (activity) component which are closely intertwined, but discernible as practical knowledge because the practical functioning is conditioned upon bodily experience and execution. So, when we discern theoretical from practical learning in the thesis, we attempt to use what we identify as activity focused mainly on explicit bodily functions, such as painting or using a hammer, and what explicitly is not denoted by theoretical activity, such as writing an essay or reading the

teacher's blackboard in order to understand mathematical algorithms. However, although we denote only the strictly tangible work as practical, we can say that it is ultimately also conditioned upon mental activity because the knowledge connected with skill execution is mediated by mental faculties.

Dewey can be said to be one of the main theorists who are concerned with the dialectics between body and mind, what in extension can be identified as the dialectics between abstract and tangible human activity (Dewey, n.d.). Where the process of mental development is by Vygotsky (Bråten, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978) described as a social dialectical process, Dewey focuses somewhat more on the dual *mode* in which people learn. If the body and mind are regarded as separate entities, important abilities inherent in human beings are not being used to their potential extent. Vygotsky's theory is mentioned here because it can be helpful to have a framework of mental development when considering the abilities which can be expanded through peer or teacher assistance. For instance, the impact of learning and dialogic relationships when discussing school experience: Following this train of thought we might say that a secondary school student can more easily assimilate the procedural skills required to construct a house if done in concert with peers of different skill, a process which requires some sort of interaction. Therefore, the tangible learning process, which many of the participants mention, is not only inherently tangible, but also social. Lave and Wenger (1991) uses the activity of apprenticeship to learning a craft in order to shed light on learning in a social context, among other things because it transcends the traditional teacher-pupil relationship in schools, and therefore puts emphasis on peer interaction.

Several theoreticians underline the *importance* of practical education (Molander, 1996; Polanyi, 1966), in the sense of knowledge which is not readily appropriated through abstract written or verbal means, but has to be experienced first-hand in order to be fully understood by the participant. Whereas Dewey can be said to underline the importance of education through tangible experience, but also to warn about the dangers present in underestimating this sphere of human development:

Physically active children become restless and unruly; the more quiescent, so-called conscientious ones spend what energy they have in the negative task of keeping their instincts and active tendencies suppressed, instead of in a positive one of constructive planning and execution; they are thus

educated not into responsibility for the significant and graceful use of bodily powers, but into an enforced duty not to give them free play. (n.d., p. 109)

The foundation for this disruptive dualism between mind and body Dewey (n.d.) puts at the feet of the ancient Greek intellectuals for whom manual labor and tangible experience was largely neglected as a worthwhile educational pursuit . We might say that these sentiments have been adopted and resonate with education policy debate, arguably even unto modern times. One example is the discussion on increased use of practical pedagogy in education policy (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2011). Several researchers have also put Dewey's stance on the value of tangible knowledge into modern epistemological debate, where research not based on empery is criticized (e.g. Fenstermacher & Sanger, 1998; Llanera, 2009; Skjervheim, 1992). This debate will not be the focus of this project. However, it should be noted that the foundation of empiric knowledge is not the same as tangible education. For instance, if we postulate that the analysis process connected with quantitative data is decidedly abstract, qualitative researchers might thereby argue that the inductive mode of their approach is closer to tangibility than some quantitative works (Howe, 1992; Kleining & Witt, 2001; Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002). Dewey's prime interest seems to be on the tangible world and its tangible constituents in process with human interaction. In essence, that human beings develop and accumulate knowledge through action in the empirical world (Fenstermacher & Sanger, 1998).

3. Method

The process of gathering, compiling and utilizing knowledge connected with this project has been done through a series of conscious decisions. The following chapter will attempt to shed light on why some methods have been chosen over others. Through the course of the project, many unconscious priorities also must have been made, and are later difficult to identify. According to Paul and Marfo (2001), the different subjective epistemologies which influences the research process should be as transparent as possible, in order to allow other researchers to identify these point in retrospect. Therefore, the following section will first attempt to discuss the epistemological background which has been dominant through the course of the project. Further sections will attempt to display other processes of the project which has subsequently led to results, discussions and conclusions.

3.1 Epistemology

In the thesis we assume that a subjective conception of knowledge constitutes the foundation for the methodological approach. This can be argued by how, for instance, subjective conceptions of knowledge also have implications for the way we attempt to mediate our interpretation of data. Hatch (2002) holds that researchers should understand their own conceptions of the world, or ontology, before at all deciding what field of research to embark on. This section will discuss epistemological considerations influencing the direction of the project.

3.1.1 Epistemological background

When researching affective bond to schools through a qualitative approach we can hold that the aim is not to generate a conclusion on the *importance* of students' affective bond to school, nor to single out the singular best methods with which to *achieve* high affective bond to school. Hascher (2008) argues that a qualitative approach is warranted by examining the underlying premises behind assumptions and the *meaning*, as in the hermeneutic foundations behind assumptions in a field rather than ascertaining or rendering improbable distinct factors of the field. The chosen mode of inquiry is inspired by Paul and Marfo's discussion of the aims of educational research; that researchers should look at education practices not only in order to construct objective principles, but discuss in depth how research can be "broadened to emphasize education about the nature of knowledge" (2001, p. 534) as well as the constituents of its social context. This approach is relevant for educational researchers since a

singular focus on a technical inquiry does not always give room for deliberation on political and societal implications of education practices (Paul & Marfo, 2001). These points illustrate how the epistemological assumptions govern the research method, and how this in turn affects our perception of data. For instance, the definite aims of the project were not distinct at the outset, as we did not know what factors the students would introduce during the data-collection. Since the thesis is primarily an inductive process this has also shaped the progress of epistemological output (also see 3.1.3).

So, the project has used a qualitative approach to the problem, and aim to critically review how and why students' affective bond to school has relevance to school withdrawal and how the students choose to describe their own school experiences. Since the project is qualitative there has not been an emphasis on working towards a general tendency, but conversely, there is room to argue and question problems which are relevant and should be deliberated, for instance during policy-making and when utilizing survey research in the field. Several phenomena are connected to the students' affective bond to school. As held by Stake (2010), qualitative researchers are generally aiming for a broader understanding of phenomena, rather than defining boundaries to them.

3.1.2 Brief overview of quantitative and qualitative methods

Since much of the background of the thesis is quantitative studies while we employ a qualitative approach, we should also briefly present the differences between the two approaches. Hatch (2002) defines the subjective conception of reality, or ontology, as the starting point for researchers' approach to inquiry. Through the researcher's ontology we find the subsequent choice of subject and method for inquiry and epistemology. For instance, a positivist ontology is one of the world as strictly observable, relevant knowledge gained through methods which are subsequently reproducible and therefore testable in order to ensure strong objectivity (Gilje & Grimen, 1993). A hermeneutic ontology primarily sees the world as subjective, in other words as defined through the individual minds of different people who all view the world through separate contextual circumstances (Gilje & Grimen, 1993). So, based on these premises we can hold that we use knowledge which seeks to be objective as a basis for an inquiry into subjective conceptions. Therefore, it is important to note that these modes of knowledge are distinct in the thesis, the data-material is the participants' own experiences of school, which may be used in turn to discuss the school

experience itself, on a background of increased awareness about school leaving in government policy and the available quantitative studies on the topic.

3.1.3 Inductive and deductive method

Running parallel to the difference between quantitative and qualitative inquiry, the majority of studies concerned with student bond to school presented in this project are, as mentioned, surveys, and as such approach the phenomenon deductively. It should therefore be noted that the present study seeks to approach the phenomenon inductively, but uses deductive knowledge as a basis for inquiry. In other words, the empirical knowledge gathered about school withdrawal and students' experience thus function as a sort of background for the more general and less definite qualitative approach of this project. Kleining (2001, p. 13) highlights how the inductive quantitative researcher might seek to demonstrate a trend through the survey of a fixed group, while the qualitative researcher might have a approximated idea about a phenomenon, but is never fully able to ascertain a boundary for the data acquired through his or her research. This seems to imply that the scope of a phenomenon can be increased and become increasingly relevant, as the survey ascertains particular knowledge within a certain field. Thus, we can argue that the data gathered in this project is less limited, in the sense that discussions can branch out in unpredictable patterns as opposed to a deductive approach. However, we correspondingly can find it difficult to ascertain the implications of particular results in a definite way. The analysis process arguably demonstrates this well, as we shall see, the inductive analysis of this project is clearly emphasized towards the individual and towards the general phenomenon which they convey utterances about (see: *3.8 Analysis*).

3.2 Ethics

Part of the goal of the project is to unearth circumstances which can be considered private and uncomfortable, both for the participants and any third party. By analyzing subjective perceptions, there is also a risk of encountering methodological and ethical issues, both of which have relevance for the legitimacy of the paper. These challenges haven been met, first and foremost, by adherence to general guidelines held by the Norwegian Committee for ethical research in humanities, who state that research should be clear cut, original and argumentative on behalf of different ontologies which may present themselves (Kalleberg et al., 2006). This indicates that the different subjective conceptions should not be suppressed in order to arrive at a predetermined conclusion. Following this assertion, it has been important

to adhere to the participants' wishes when discussing issues they find difficult, and somehow balance this with the role of a researcher in pursuit of knowledge. As Befring points out, the search for data should not override all other concerns (2010), this is definitely true if the research should somehow risk harming the participants. However, it is also important to be confident that the research has an independent value by increasing understanding and knowledge on an important issue, as pointed out by the ethical committee itself (Kalleberg et al., 2006). The project was cleared to handle personal data by Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) in July 2nd, 2012. Since no personal data has been stored and all transcriptions rendered anonymous, NSD found the project to be unobligated to report data handling.

The participants were all over sixteen years of age, therefore it was not necessary to have parents' permission to perform the interviews because the students are considered to be mature enough to make these choices themselves (Kalleberg et al., 2006). However, it has been important to make the students fully aware of the purpose of the investigation, and what sort of questions they would be subjected to. This was also done to make sure the students would give a genuine and well-informed assent, which the participants in retrospect should not feel is given on deceptive grounds which Befring warns about (2010). Also relevant here, is that the interviews were aiming for the mode of a dialogue between equals, not in the mode of an authoritarian researcher. This conduct is not only a pedagogical perspective (Zygmantas, 2009), but also an ethical obligation because we assume a posture of equal worth and dialogic conduct serves to increase the trustworthiness of the project to the participants.

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) claims that qualitative research does not have to solve ethical problems which arises, in the sense of arriving at one correct response, but be aware of them and discuss them as they occur. It is feasible that the interviews might somehow unintentionally lead to disclosure of personal information about other people such as teachers, family or other students. However, this can also be relevant information to discuss further in a research project. The names of the school and informants are confidential in the project, but as Silverman demonstrates (2011, p. 94) participants or third persons may still be able to identify the origins of the data, and find it erroneous or somehow damaging. For instance: The project might be published without people having a chance to defend against or correct allegations. Therefore, any data obtained from the informants have been carefully analyzed in order to avoid publication of traceable damaging content. Silverman's emphasis on the danger of

assuming the participants' wishes on both publication and the researcher's conduct during data-gathering can be applicable here (2011). Action has been taken to avoid this, for instance by outright inquiry of the participants' wishes and clear oral and written information about what the interviews were going to be used for. Also, the participants were orally informed at the outset of the interview about their right at any time stop the interview and to later make contact if they had second thoughts about their participation. This came in addition to the written information notice given before the interview.

Hatch's example of a child who is socially ostracized in class due to racism in a severe way (2002), can serve as an example of an instance where there might be basis for further research, but also for notifying the school's staff and thereby break assurances of anonymity. There are few detailed guidelines to a course of action in such a situation, but neither must one negate the other. Action can be taken without necessarily destroying the progress of research, though this may alter the *focus* of the research. These are challenges which, by lack of a direct response, require preparedness for unforeseen ethical dilemmas. Such dilemmas did not occur during the course of the data collection, but this is mentioned in order to make clear that some thoughts about potential issues were made.

3.3 Semi-structured interview

The data collection was done by way of a semi-structured interview. In the following, this method will be discussed and its relevance in accordance with the research goals will be touched.

3.3.1 About semi-structured interviews

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) describes the semi-structured interview as an open conversation with an explicit purpose determined by the researcher, which in this project, hopefully will make the informants able to express their experience of school. These experiences may be described in many diverse ways. Hascher's qualitative research on school well-being focuses on the reconstruction of events (2008), this is also highlighted by Hatch as a way to gain "explanations of past events and experiences" (2002, p. 91). However, the project's goals do not only entail an attempt to *describe* past events, but gain insight into *why* certain events are important to the students and how they explain how these events influence them. This can certainly be done through extended fill-outs, but this method also lacks the adaptability which an interview represents. Since there are several unique factors which have had unique

implications for every participants, it is advantageous to be able to pursue the different matters as they arise.

The purpose of interviewing the participants is not to gain close-ended answers, but the participants' own description, wording and emphasis. With the research questions as a point of departure, as well as implementing available research on well-being and Finn's bond to school (1989), an interview guide modeled after Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p. 145) based on the sub-questions of the project was used. Note that the interview guide does not include structuring, interpreting and elaborating questions. These were rehearsed with fellow students before the interviews took place. At the outset, the aim of the interviewer was to let the participants talk as freely as possible within the explicit goals of the project. Since student experience in school can entail widely different factors this was not a difficult boundary to adhere to. In order to allow the students to talk freely the interview was not strictly locked to the interview guide at the outset. Also see attachment: Interview guide.

3.3.2 Weaknesses with semi-structured interview

As mentioned, by interviewing the classroom students we gain insight into perceptions, especially about events and some important factors of school-life. However, these perceptions may sometimes be somewhat circumstantial; the questions can be revealing to some students and not others. And the interviewer can fail to pursue an important topic with the participant. By employing interviews we have chosen one mode of data-collection over another, and thus gained different results than what we could otherwise receive. Prominent alternative methodological approaches might have been field-work or observations (Hatch, 2002). This might have given data which is less distorted by what the participant remember and find important just at the time of the interview. However, the interview may also have provided the individual participant an opportunity to clearly ascertain how significant different factors of school life actually are because they could be asked to elaborate and talk in a private setting, and in a designated timeframe. Additionally, the interviewed participant were also able to deliberate on different factors of school life over time, and give data on a wider array of relevant factors rather than events which occurred just at the time of field work and observations.

3.4 Participants

The research goals are to discuss individual student experience, in the light of school withdrawal; as such it was reasonable to interview students in second grade in upper secondary school who have comprehensive and recent school experience. The participants were all male adolescents of 16 -17 years of age. Three have been a part of NyGiv (P1, P3 and P4). This age group are among the prime recipients for the Norwegian Ministry of Education's efforts to reduce school withdrawal (2012), the results published by the ministry also state that male-dominated vocational education are most heavily influenced by the phenomenon; which also indicate that this group is likely to have relevant school experiences to convey. All six participants have been rendered anonymous and are differentiated numerically: P1-P6.

3.4.1 Choice of participants

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) simply puts forth that the number of participants should be "as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know" (p. 113, own translation). This straightforward recipe may seem oversimplified, but looking at the goals for the project it can be argued that a large number of participants were not necessary; we seek the hands-on experience of students and their own recollection of school life. In order to properly process and analyze the findings we can argue that six participants are sufficient. Discussing the problem for the project did not require a representational quality or a large amount of different stories, but a subjective conveying of experience which served as the data material for an in-depth analysis and discussion.

The selection was made through e-mail contact with the public school owner, who further directed contact to a specific school in western Norway. The school officials set up contact to a teacher in carpentering who subsequently agreed to join. The class was given the information notice about the project and all were willing to join (see attachment: "Infoskriv", an information notice e-mailed to the school and county before the interviews started). The Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services approved of participation through verbal consent. The teacher made the selection among students who wanted to participate in the project interview. Thereby, the selection of students was seemingly random and at least without external influence except that all parties were informed about the nature of the project through the information notice and informal exposition by the interviewer. Since the teacher sent students to the interview, the teacher was also aware of those who participated in the project,

however all names are anonymous and scrambled. The teacher also made the initial send-out of the students, but was not aware of the students which actually *were* interviewed among the students who were sent to be interviewed. The students were made aware of this, and the subsequent analysis was made with a consciousness about any eventual critique of the contemporary peers or teachers. However, the participants' utterances were not interpreted to say anything damaging about current circumstances which in turn could be interpreted to be directed against a single person or group.

Although all participants attend the same class, they have gone to different primary and lower secondary schools; therefore they have some experiences from different school contexts. But perhaps more importantly, the different participants are different individuals and as such assumed to have different perceptions on school withdrawal and the school experience as a whole. As mentioned, the goals of the project are not to array a wide representative selection for data collection, but approach what we might call a core of subjective perceptions of school.

3.4.2 Alternatives

By interviewing officials, for instance the Directorate of Education and Training, the Ministry of Education or County officials on the policy background, reasoning and goal concerning school withdrawal and school experience we might have acquired more general knowledge about the direction of present day schools. The scope of project is the primary reason why this was not done. The priority was given to students' conceptions because so many studies focus on the students' welfare, but can be said to focus less on how these figures came to be (see 2. *Background*). Still, it is probable that focusing the project towards another group could also have yielded relevant results.

As noted above, the participants are all part of the same class as well as being of the same gender and age. Consequently, there is no emphasis on different geographical or gender contexts. Similarly, the one vocational education (carpentering) is the only one represented. Adding participants of different genders, locations, vocations or general (study-preparatory) upper secondary school might have given a more comprehensive collection of perceptions and relevant contrasts. Although the project has limited resources this could have been done, but perhaps more importantly, the discussion of individual experiences of the students are not necessarily enhanced by providing more contrast, we might argue that the approximation

towards similar contexts gives more room to focus on the personal and individual perceptions, rather than the contexts themselves. Conversely, it is probable that a broader contextual diversity could also have yielded interesting results, but this may also have driven the project in another direction. Whether this direction is more relevant or not is difficult to ascertain.

3.5 Data collection

The following section will present the process of data-collection. The purpose of this demonstration is to give a context in which the results and subsequent discussion can be placed. Though some of the details have a more informative rather than a subjective meaningful nature, there are also conscious choices made during the interview which likely changed the data-output in a drastic way, for instance the abandonment of an interview guide (see below).

3.5.1 Overview

The data collection was done during two days in September 2012. The school provided an empty classroom where the students were sent in one at a time to do the interview. When one participant was finished, the next was notified. Three interviews were made each day. This might have been a bit too many interviews at a time, because the interview process was tiring and might have made the final interviews slightly less than optimal. However, this also let the interviews be finished within a short time and lessened the planning needed for the teachers to allow students to leave class to attend the interview.

3.5.2 Setting

The interview included only the interviewer and the student. The participants were provided with water and fruit. The students were informed at the outset of the interview about the reason to use recording equipment, as well as how the data would be deleted after the project was finished. The students were also made aware of the right to end the interview at any time and the right to subsequently make contact if there were any questions or second thoughts about participating.

The author (and interviewer) of this project can also be said to be a part of the setting the participants met, as the ability to reach a state of intersubjectivity can be said to be among the goals of the qualitative researcher (Granek, 2011). Thus, the interviewer attempted to reach a state in which both participants and interviewer were emphatically bonded in a way which

created an atmosphere of mutual understanding. Though both interviewer and all participants were from the same cultural group (western Norwegians), there were also some differences, for instance that the interviewer has chosen higher education and further studies, while many of the participants saw further school and theoretical work as something far removed from their available career choices. The mentioned emphatic bond came into play by how the researcher attempted to connect and give acknowledgment to the different activities the students undertook in school (Westrheim & Lillejord, 2007). The following excerpt from the interview between P1 and the interviewer (I) can be said to demonstrate this, P1 talks about his preference for more practical work in a theoretical school curriculum:

P1: Only, we can actually do something, something else than just sitting and thinking. Because not everyone think that is particularly fun.

I: Yes, I don't think anyone like to just sit and think.

P1: Philosophers do [laughs].

I: Yes, maybe philosophers. Yes I think even philosophers like to do something with their hands once in a while.

This example can be argued to show the intersubjective bond which the researcher consciously (and honestly) attempts to create. "I" actively acknowledges the value of practical work by saying that appreciating practical work is something which most people acknowledges (by the researcher's opinion). Of course, the interviewer's own stances also come into play here. This can distort or sway P1's own stances on the subjects touched. On the whole, the conscious decision to make some utterances about what the researcher thinks himself seemed to create a much freer dialogue, it was the interviewer's impression that this created an atmosphere which may have yielded increased amounts of meaningful utterances.

Diener (2000) points to the methodological problem of *normative well-being*: If the individual perceives that feeling good is expected in society at large, the individual will attempt to come across as happy and content, even if this is not the case. This was an issue which could have influenced the interview setting, but conversely, the participants might also have experienced a sense of normative *low* well-being. Even though the inquiries were formulated to be as descriptive as possible, there was undeniably a focus on school experiences which disrupted the affective school bond, thereby perhaps giving the impression that a more negative outlook on school experience was desired during the interviews. Apart from being aware of this

during the interview process, there was not much to contradict or unveil a normative setting imposed on the participants, be it low or high well-being, however, the participants were also willing to disagree at times. In other words, this is an issue which was noted during the process of analysis and which should be noted by the reader.

3.5.3 Interview

The interviews were originally planned to follow an interview guide (see attachment), but the interviews quickly left this set-up, and the interview guide was mostly used as a reference point to ensure that all subjects had been talked about. There were some difficulties in getting comprehensive and detailed answers from some of the participants, this might have been due to a number of reasons. For instance, because of ambiguous interview topics, as well as the unfamiliarity of the situation itself. Therefore, the interviews can leave an impression of domination of short, few-word answers. This may seem to be sub-optimal when researching the subjective perceptions of school and the *meaning* of them. Hatch (2002) states that interviews seek to delve into the participants experience, but are also conditioned upon the ability of the interviewer to achieve this. So, we might say that with increased awareness of the participants, time or planning the interviews would have functioned better. However, the interviews often also developed into a conversation which led to many interesting points. The participants talked about many similar topics which seemed to be of great subjective weight, and had large impact on both emotional and academic school life. Further, these results were achieved after a more close-ended conversation or after particular topics, which may have resonated somehow with the participants. Also, as the analysis can be said to demonstrate, what we might call the *sum* of the dialogue, can also give a comprehensive overview of the participant's thoughts on relevant topics. This because the different factors combine well in order to give a comprehensive picture of the school experience.

3.5.4 Close-ended questions

The interview setting lead to several close-ended or directing questions directed at the participant from the interviewer. This can distort the participant's true meaning in the sense that the interviewer's prejudiced conception of the matter moves the direction of conversation in ways which are not in line with the participants' actual thoughts. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) can be said to show that the interview does not thus automatically loose reliability, because the way in which the participants respond to directing questions is *also* information which can be discussed. However, in the interview setting the participants seemed to not be

afraid to contradict what may have come across as the interviewer's preconceptions. For instance, when the interviewer asks P1 about why there was little contact with his teachers:

I: So, right, so, this might be difficult to say, but do you think that it was, in a way that is was... Unsafe, that it was sort of scary even?

P1: It was not exactly scary to talk with them, it was sort of, it was rather so that it was they who did not have time to do it, at least so they felt.

Here P1 is asked a question which is not necessarily logical based on the preceding utterances. Thereby, we can argue that the interviewer attempted, perhaps unwittingly, to sway the conversation toward fear or insecurity in P1's relationship with his teachers. P1 does not agree with these sentiments and makes clear that it was rather an issue of time, and of being overlooked, which might have no direct relationship with the teachers being unable to follow up students because of a time schedule rather than personal relationships.

In some ways, asking direct questions with carried intent might also have led to less general and more explicit and relevant conceptions held by the participants. Stiles (1999) highlights the importance of disclosing the researcher's preconceptions on a distinct phenomenon, but also that the eventual analysis is more dependent on the researchers interpretation than the participant's exposition on their different stances or experience. In other words, this seems to indicate that since this qualitative research project is, in essence, an undertaking based largely on subjective conceptions, the preconceptions and choices made in the project are not something to shy away from, but needs to be transparent to create a reliable presentation for the reader. So, when the interview setting sometimes was influenced by the preconceptions the noting of these is paramount (also see 3.5.2 *Setting*).

3.6 Transcription

As noted, the interviews were recorded with recording equipment. After the interviews were complete, they were transcribed into text. This was done for several reasons, both to make the data material easier to review and to make the analysis process easier. As noted in 3.8 *Analysis*, the process of analysis was a written process; therefore the audio had to be rendered into writing. The transcription was done by using the recorder with headphones and writing as accurately as possible anything that was said. During the transcription there were several words that were difficult to catch and also utterances which were difficult to accurately

represent in written form. The acquisition of higher quality headphones greatly enhanced the transcription process, and made more subtle words easier to recognize. The transcribing of five to ten minutes of audio was done at approximately one hour, so the ratio was ten to sixty.

In the transcription every participant was marked numerically from P1-P6. Pause was marked with triple punctuations (...). The participants often quoted themselves or other people in the interviews, such as teachers or students, quotation-marks was used to signify this (P3: And then I thought, "I am going to like this"). Sometimes the participants mentioned names of schools, teachers and parents, this was removed or changed by use of square brackets (I went to [a western Norwegian] school), in order to make clear any content which was not actually uttered during the interview.

3.7 Translation

The data material for the project is Norwegian, while the discussions are conducted in English. The translation of data is therefore a consideration. Namely, that utterances made in a (western-) Norwegian context has a different meaning in an English context. Therefore, there is a potential threat of contextual information discrepancies: The translation will have a different meaning both culturally and linguistically from the source data text (Regmi, Naidoo, & Pilkington, 2010; Temple & Young, 2004). Minimizing incorrect or insufficient meanings behind translated utterances are important, though also a question of resources. Regmi, Naidoo and Pilkington (2010) seems to favor a method consisting of utilizing two independent bilingual translators, who are otherwise unaffiliated with the research project and who are able to collectively come to agreement on English contextual equivalents to the source language. Acquiring these assets is not within the resources accessible to this project. However, an attempt at an ad-hoc solution has been made: The translated data material has been reviewed by a bilingual American citizen. Notably, whether there was access to two independent bilingual translators or not, the meaning which is applied to the translated analysis texts should be read with the outlined translation-challenges in mind.

3.8 Analysis

3.8.1 Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenological method is generally held to be instigated by Edmund Husserl (Giorgi, 2008; Hein & Austin, 2001), and can be said to be founded upon the conception of subjective interpretation of *essence*, in the sense of the individual's subjective interpretation of the

world. In the project, the analysis was done through several consecutive steps based on Giorgi and Giorgi's understanding of phenomenological method (2003). The phenomenological approach used in this project can be identified as hermeneutic, in the sense of being primarily concerned with the underlying meaning and interpretation of phenomena (Gilje & Grimen, 1993). This explanatory approach can be said to be the basis of phenomenological method; the objective knowledge about certain phenomena, such as those that carry affective weight, are insufficient, but an inquiry into subjective meaning is one way to approach the phenomena in a comprehensively meaningful way (Hein & Austin, 2001). In the following sections the concrete process which has led to the results will be examined. As noted, Giorgi and Giorgi's examples functioned as a foundation for the process, they provide some explanatory examples in their article *Descriptive Phenomenological Method* (2003). The hermeneutic background is reflected in the way in which analysis distributes content into "meaning units", each assigned a specific subjective worth by the researcher. Thereby, emphasis is firmly placed on the individual and the individual's subjective conceptions. The further analysis process is, in essence, an attempt to divulge the essential meaning and implications which are inherent, but not spoken in the different utterances.

So, to approach a problem through a phenomenological method can be summarized to be conditioned upon the phenomenon as the individual subjectively perceives it. In the case of school experience we have chosen to focus on the students' affective bond to school, which might comprise emotional, academic and systemic components. Thereby, we can for instance say that participants' conception of these phenomena is the focus of our analysis. The distinctness of this method is the focus is on the phenomena's actual meaning within the utterances of the participants. The phenomena is described by data material which is processed through reduction which reveals the *meaning* relevant for the phenomenon which we seek to understand (Giorgi, 1997).

It is important to underline that the analysis process was not a direct copy of Giorgi and Giorgi's method (2003), but their detailed method overview has functioned as an inspiration. However, the hermeneutic essence of the method can be said to have been a preeminent focus. One significant difference between Giorgi and Giorgi's blueprint and the analysis process conducted in the project is that not *all* content has been processed into meaning units. This means that some of the transcript was not used in the extended analysis process (see below). Further, Hatch's inductive analysis model can be said to accurately describe the general

analysis process, the model shows how the data material is progressively rendered further into what the researcher deems to be significant “*domains*” (2002, p. 162). The concept of domain indicates that the participants’ different utterances collectively shed light on phenomena as perceived by different individuals. The hermeneutic background of the analysis is reflexively inductive because the data collection was invariably concerned with the items the individual was interpreted to put subjective weight on in relation to the problem for discussion.

3.8.2 Prioritizing

The first step of the analysis process was to discriminate the transcribed data material by highlighting parts of the text which appear to contain meaningful or transformative content. The terms transformative and meaningful are here used as subjective and relative to the research question, they are not subject to control by any concrete external mechanisms. However, the text was read with the goal and background of the project in mind. Therefore, the process of selection is arguable, but can be said to be a way to single out (to the researcher) *perceivable* subjective meaning which has had an impact for the individual participants. This can be said to conjoin with the significance of a researcher’s subjective perception as noted by Hatch (2002), which should be identified and used in a transparent manner. During analysis, however, it is possible to neglect to use significant content from the transcription. Though one might argue that the nearly all parts of the data material could have been used, it can also be argued that to determine distinct focal points within the text allows us to discuss certain phenomena more in depth, rather than a more shallow discussion on larger parts of text. This follows the formula outlined by Befring (2010), where consecutive steps focus the data material, in order to be more easily discussed in depth in later stages of the project.

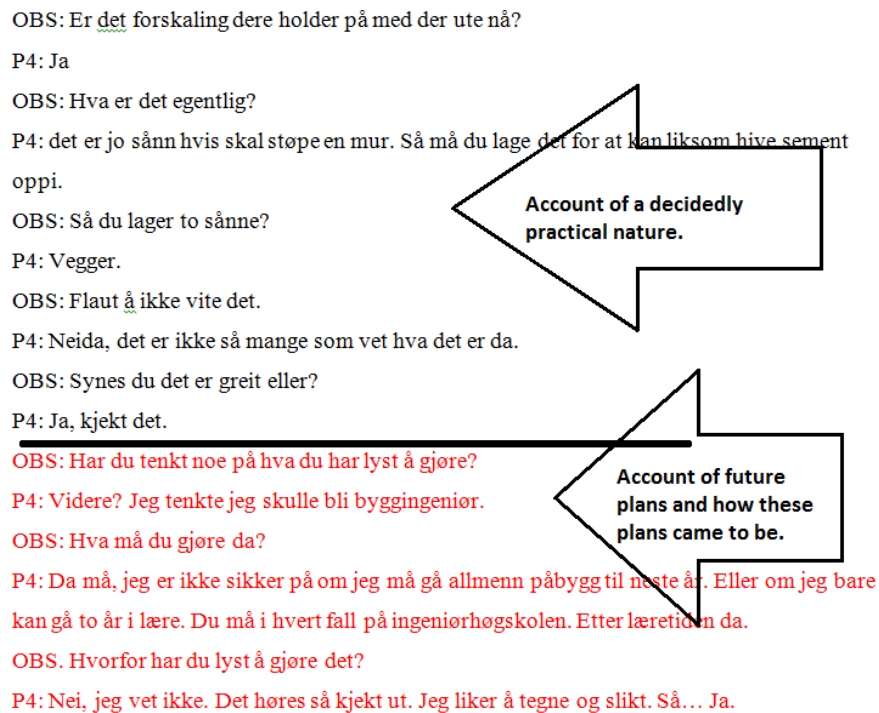


Figure 4: Analysis example

The above figure demonstrates a significant part of the process of analysis. As exemplified, discrimination of data is inherent in the method. The line dividing the red and black text also shows what part of the transcription which might carry more subjective meaningful. In this case, the lower parts of the text are included for meaning unit analysis (see below), but the above parts are not. Even though the above part carries some subjective weight, the lower was interpreted to have more personal importance to the participant (P4) in relation to the research goals. The above paragraph is an account of what P4 is working on at the moment, which might for instance say something about what school subjects P4 prefer. The lower is an account on further goals in P4's career; this account seems to carry more significant personal meaning than the lines about scaffolding, especially because P4 talks about school subject matter in other parts of the transcribed interview - and included there.

3.8.3 Meaning units table

The highlighted area of text was summarily moved into tables. Where coherent parts were placed and consequently projected into explicit meaningful units, this method is influenced by Samara's analysis of interviews of students and school officials (2002). In their dissertation, Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) accentuates the value of broadening the statements of participants to further delve into their personal meaning. The tables were divided into three columns divided

from left to right by the raw transcription, the focused significant meaning and highlights of significant emotions connected to school and learning. The meaning units were written in English.

<p>11 OBS: Er det også det med å bygge ting på en måte? P1: Ja, det er utrolig gøy det. <u>Altså jeg har gått ett år på VG1 nå, også, jeg må jeg har allerede lagd en terrasse på egen hånd. Så bare, wow, dette kunne jeg ikke gjort for et år siden.</u></p>	<p>P1 states that constructing a tangible object is satisfying. P1 indicates that it is easy to measure a skill development because he was sure that he would not be able to perform these feats a year prior.</p>	
<p>12 OBS: Men hvorfor tror du at du ikke er så glad i teori?</p>	<p>P1 says that he had theoretical courses in ten</p>	<p>Self-esteem weakened. Bond to school</p>

Figure 5: Excerpt from meaning unit analysis table

3.8.4 Categorization

The final component of analysis-process was to categorize the extended subjective meanings into meaning units. This was done through establishing eight general topics relevant to the research questions. Every participant had a specific row, and the subjective meaning of each was inserted into the appropriate topic. Again, there is a discrimination of content in this process. There are many meaning units which could be attached to the table. However, the categorization and selection of topics was completed after the units table, which gave an overview of the different participants and therefore made categorization a relevant next step, in order to further accentuate important or relevant content conveyed by the participants (see attachment: *Category table*).

3.9 Validity of research method

This section will discuss the validity of the research method in a general perspective. Although there is no authoritative entity which can definitely distinguish valid from invalid research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), the reason to review this is to make the thesis as transparent and the data collection as credible as possible. In general, we can say that the validity of a research project is dependent largely on the cohesion between topic, theory, terms and execution, as well as transparent and reliable data (Befring, 2010; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Firstly, it is important to note the entire method chapter is written to testament just this cohesion, and thus this method chapter is the primary argument, or lack thereof, supporting the project's validity. Secondly, the validity of a hermeneutic

phenomenological study can arguably only be vindicated by the singular verdict of subsequent critical review, thus it is difficult to respond fully preemptively.

There are some points which should be highlighted at the outset of this section, primarily how the researcher's personality comes into play. Silverman (2011) presents how qualitative researchers can attempt to use their personal integrity, viewpoint or political views as a grounds for the integrity of the research project. The relevancy of the project is not based on personal experience, but what is deemed to be actual need for knowledge in an important field of inquiry, which is prominent in the policy development debate in Norway. Thereby, although the researcher's personal integrity certainly has an impact of the mode of the inquiry, this is aimed to be explicit in 3.1 Epistemology.

Secondly, Silverman (2011) also argues the fallacies connected to define participants' accounts as "direct windows to their experience" (p. 354). As we have sought the subjective experiences of students in Norwegian schools, it is therefore necessary to accentuate that the data material which is acquired is the participants' *utterances*, not their experiences in and of itself. Therefore, the analyzed data only display the participants' choice of words and viewpoints in the circumstances of the interview. Thereby, when we say that the participants on the whole seemed to prefer upper secondary school to lower secondary school this is not certain other than that the interpretation of the utterances indicated this. The utterances are therefore expressed meaning which is interpreted, and not factually testable accounts of what the participants actually experienced.

3.9.1 Theoretical validity

In order to take a closer look at the validity through a more general approach, as opposed to the particular way of the preceding sections of this chapter, we can look at Befring's division of *theoretical* and *empirical validity* (2010, p. 114). According to Befring, high theoretical validity can be claimed if there is a relevant use of terms and theory in relation to the problem for discussion and approach. Thus, we might say that the theoretical validity of the project is primarily discussed in 2. *Theory*. There are different phenomena which could have been chosen over others when discussing student experience, the choice to focus on affective bond to school is argued to be primarily born out of the available research about school withdrawal, and a more comprehensive examination of its relevance to the school-withdrawal phenomenon. In regards to the cohesion between the execution of methodological approach

and theory there are also here different factors which the student utter views about, which could have been pursued to a larger degree, for instance the relationship to the teacher or the relationship between tangible and theoretical learning as a concept independent of an affective bond to school.

3.9.2 Reliability and empiric validity

Befring's (2010) definition of empiric validity puts it as more dependent on the transparency of method. This transparency should be argued in a way which should display relevancy and trustworthiness, and therefore the reliability of the approach. Because the data are difficult to reproduce, and thereby re-examine, the description of data in the text is the sole source of empiric validity. Therefore, the reliability of the project's findings is primarily argued through exposition of subjective priorities, rather than exposition of mechanism.

During the discussing of the different processes which has decided the project's methodology, there were also some attempts to describe some potential issues with the employment of these methods (i.e. see 3.3 *Semi-structured interview*), which is a way to make clear some of the weaknesses of the project. The reliability of the project is based on trustworthiness of the content, and by pointing out some deficiencies an attempt is made to approach misgivings about the genuineness of the data and subsequent analysis. By attempting to create a transparent overview of the process, readers are allowed to make up their individual minds about whether the results are trustworthy or not. As the research question may very well have been approached through different routes, the methodological process which has been used also gives some insight to this end, for instance by providing transcription excerpts and an epistemological outline of the conceptions which have impacted the obtaining of data and process of analysis during the project.

The 3.1 discussion on epistemology gives a context in which the exposition can be understood, in that essentially, the inquiry of the project is founded on subjective experience. However, the method and subsequent analysis has been a series of priorities which should also be evident throughout this method chapter, though the choices are also intended to be logical and retraceable.

4. Results

As outlined, the goals of the project do not necessarily entail a summary or generalization of the participants' subjective meaning as a group, but the participants' *individual* subjective meaning. Consequently, the following presentation of data will not focus on similarities between the different interviews. However, a few noteworthy exceptions should be highlighted. First, all participants are relatively clear in their preference of upper secondary school in contrast to lower secondary school. Secondly, all participants mention a *friendly atmosphere* ("god stemming") to be prominent in upper secondary school.

The analysis process revealed some topics to carry greater weight than others for the participants. Therefore, the subsequent sections will present the individual participant's experiences as interpreted and focused through analysis (see 3.8 Analysis). In order to make the presentation of the results more to the point, the sections are divided into different groupings defined by relevant or recurring content conveyed by the individual participants; the participants' descriptions of *4.1: External influence*; *4.2 Transformative school experiences*; *4.3 Academic and affective bond to school*; and *4.4 About school withdrawal*.

4.1 Excerpts syntax

The presentation will feature several excerpts from the interview transcription to better demonstrate the participants' stories. As mentioned in *3.6 Transcription*, the participants are numerically differentiated (P1-P6). The excerpts from the transcriptions are marked with quotation marks ("example"). When the participants themselves quote someone in the interview this is marked by single quotations ('example'). Clarifying, explanatory or anonymizing words not actually uttered during the interview are sometimes inserted into the quotes and marked by square brackets ([example]). Utterances made by the interviewer, which sometimes is relevant to include, are marked with (I). Example: "I: How are you? P6: Fine". All excerpts are translated.

4.2 External influences

This section will demonstrate the participants' utterances about what we can deem to be external factors. The importance of this topic is to determine what weight the participants are interpreted to put on surrounding influences for their school well-being. These influences are a collection of factors not immediately present in what we might call a traditional educational

school process, such as parents, school buildings and similar. The participants were only explicitly asked about parents and school maintenance during the interviews.

4.2.1 Parents

The participants seem to agree that their parents have some interest in their schooling, but in somewhat varying degrees. P6 has plans to become a shutter carpenter like his father, and eventually work in the same business. This seems to signify some important influences from his father. When P2 was asked about his parents and if they worry about school he said “Yes... A little. They usually do not ask so much”. P4 found that his parents are somewhat interested in school and generally desire information, P4 said that his parents generally “ask about what I have done and so on, and then I tell them what I have done”. Both P2 and P4 seem to indicate that their parents do not inquire very much about school, but are interested to have a general idea about how their children fare in school.

Although all participants talked about their parents, it is at times difficult to discern the parents’ significance for the individual participants’ school experience through analysis beyond the fact that the parents are there, and that they have varying degrees of oversight of the going-on in school. However, P1 noted that his parents have had an impact to his own perception of school because one of his parents has dyslexia: “They are very interested in that I have to learn something. My mother wants me to learn more than she did before, because she regrets that she did not get more education”. Here we might argue that there are indications of P1’s parents affecting P1’s perception of school in a normative way. Since P1’s mother did not acquire more education when she was young she wants her son to achieve more in school than she herself was able to when she was young.

P6 believes that his parents do not know enough about his school life, and that they perhaps could be provided with more information. For instance, with access to the digital learning platform of the school, when asked if this would be intrusive P6 answered “Yes, like we young people might think it is a little much, but... But it really is good, for us, if they do it”. On the whole, the participants did not seem to put much emphasis on their parents nor the physical surroundings for their individual school experience. When P4 mentioned that he simply informs his parents when there is need, this also signifies the increased distance between parents and children which is often associated with the approach to adulthood.

4.2.2 School maintenance

The general maintenance of the school is interpreted to be important to some of the participants. P6 underlined how the school is clean and tidy, and that this makes him feel better in school. While P2 said that his previous school “has not been fixed up since the war” and that the change to a much better maintained upper secondary school has made him feel more comfortable in school. P2’s sentiments were similar to P5’s; his former school was nicknamed “the prison” on account of its appearance. So, we might say that the participants *noticed* a change in the general maintenance of their school, both P2 and P5 talked about the bad maintenance of their lower secondary school, and that it appeared to be out of order. However, it seems that neither P2 nor P5 connected their affective bond to school with the school maintenance in a significant way. P6 on the other hand, brought up the topic by himself at the start of the interview.

So, though all participants either prefer high maintenance or are uninterested in the standards of the school, other aspects seem to be more important for the comprehensive school experience, P6 explicitly states that his “friendship and familiarity” with class-mates are more important to him than the appearance of the school, and he says that “I do not really think about the exterior of the school, but it is okay I guess”.

4.3 Transformative school experiences

The following section will focus on the participants’ experience of significant contrasts and changes in school-life. As mentioned, all participants are relatively clear on their preference of upper secondary school compared to previous school experiences, but again the experiences *leading* to these changed perceptions of school are varied. The contents of the 4.2 and 4.3 sections are sometimes closely intertwined; as transformative experiences are often used by the participants to express their academic and affective bond to school. However, by attempting to divide the sections the resulting image will hopefully become a more focused representation of the participants’ experiences.

4.3.1 Classes

P1 and P3 mentioned the class size and atmosphere to lead to an important transformative experience compared to former school experiences. P1 mentioned that his lower secondary class consisted of twenty-four students, while his current upper secondary class is only thirteen to fourteen students large. P1 said that this allows the students «to get better

acquainted and to develop a friendlier atmosphere». P3 also emphasized how the smaller class allows the students to get acquainted more easily, but he also underlined how this gives the teacher time to aid students in class settings; “In lower secondary we were like thirty in class. And yes, we are only half of that now, so in the previous class half the students only sat and stared at their papers”. P4 seemed to agree with this, and highlights how a friendly atmosphere is closely related to the now far fewer students in class, when asked about why the class is better now, P4 answered that “I mean I knew who everybody was from beforehand. I mean it is nice to get acquainted with new people, but it is a lot easier if you know people from beforehand”.

The participants seemed so put great emphasis on the advantages of smaller classes, as this creates more space for the teacher to aid the students. When P3 said that he spent a lot of time staring at the paper this can be said to signify a distinct disruptive element to his motivation to learn, as being stuck on one task without receiving aid to overcome it makes time at school seem more ineffective and approach meaninglessness. This is also an easily observable difference between lower and upper secondary school for the participants. The participants’ responses also enforce the impression of how close social interactions play a supportive role in the establishment of bond to school.

4.3.2 Academic responsibility

The following section will present some of the sentiments the participants had about their own changing role and responsibility in acquiring skills through education. The participants generally received more responsibility through their progress towards higher class levels. This can also be connected with the participants’ relationship with their parents. As mentioned, most of the participants are relatively independent of their parents regarding school information. When talking about the freedom in the regular school-day P2 highlighted how he experiences a greater sense of freedom and responsibility in upper secondary school: “You are a lot freer here in a way.... Like, you can do nearly whatever you want. At lower secondary you will get a notice just for doing nothing [laughs]”.

Some of the participants also talked about their sense of responsibility for learning in school; many favor clear cut goals which can be completed in a straightforward way. P1 said this about a sense of responsibility: “we can work half the time of one class, and then we can sit the rest of the time and talk if we finish all our tasks until then”. In continuation of these

sentiments, P3 said he prefers to follow orders rather than making decisions, he explained these sentiments like this:

I do not want to say anything wrong, so they, so they will blame me. It is a little like that. I only go to finish it just so, in a way.

I: So you are conscious about not making mistakes?

P3: Because then it will be more work for me. That sucks.

P5 mentioned that a teacher should not only “come into class, say ‘sit down and go to work’, a little humor is important”. P5 stated that clear work goals are good, but requests should be done in a friendly or amiable way. Sentiments in favor of a strict teacher, which can enhance productivity was also put forward by P6. Similarly to P5, P6 wants a strict teacher to push him to work; he said that teachers have told him straight out that “you could have done this better. Then we try. It is good that [the teacher] says that this could be better”. P6 held that being told to improve is not necessarily detrimental for P6’s affective well-being in school.

There are several utterances here which create an impression that many of the participants are primarily motivated extrinsically, for instance that the value of finishing a task is to be awarded more leisure time. The increased freedom is not mentioned as a part of the freedom to prioritize school work according to the participants’ needs, but to do more leisurely activities in free-time at school. This might have implications for the participants’ conception of the school as conforming, but also gives an impression of the school as a task which must be completed in order to achieve other means, not a goal unto itself.

4.3.3 NyGiv

For P1, P3 and P4, NyGiv seemed to have a significant transformative impact on their school experience. As mentioned, NyGiv is a government-instigated program to respond to high drop-out rates in Norway. The program usually entails increased aid for students who struggle with different aspects of school, but usually grades and coping with curriculum demands (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2012). P1 gave an account on how his experiences were when answering questions in class at NyGiv sessions:

So if we answer the question wrongly, everybody starts laughing. So, like I am thinking ‘Oh damn’, so you don’t feel like answering because unless you

are certain that it is correct. But down there [NyGiv] there is no point in laughing because you had probably answered the same question wrong.

So, we can say that during regular class, answering a question wrongly led to ridicule in the class, which in turn can be said to have been a disruptive element for P1's relationship to school. However, in NyGiv he was able to attempt to answer plenary questions without ridicule, both because the teachers in NyGiv did not allow ridicule as there were more teachers and thus more able to cope with it, and because the other students would probably not be able to answer in a better way.

We might say that P1 felt that he was more useful and that his abilities were valued in a different way than prior NyGiv. P4 had similar sentiments about NyGiv, although he had some sentiments about the student make-up in NyGiv, the composition of the NyGiv class allowed the students to work together: "When we were at NyGiv then everybody who was not so good was gathered. I mean, everybody got better then. Because everybody knew different things and then you can teach it to the others. So then you learn it yourself». Therefore, P4 not only felt he was able to appropriate necessary knowledge in class, but also contribute to his fellow students' learning outcome. Both P1 and P3 emphasized how the teachers used divergent methods than what the students had previously experienced in order to ensure that the students understood different mathematical concepts. This was preferable to both participants. P3 described how the teachers used card and board games, while P1 said that teachers spent much more time on every subject, ensuring that all students understood. Therefore, we can summarize the participants' experiences in NyGiv to have been different than normal class-room situations in four distinct ways:

- Fewer students in class
- More teachers
- Different methods
- Students of similar ability

The participants who have attended NyGiv all gave accounts of this experience as a strengthening bond to school. Previous failures to follow the curriculum which peers are completing ahead of them are now allowed to be completed in a pace more in line with the

abilities the participants associates themselves with. The change of methodology seems to have been a new and can be called a break-through way for the participants to understand abstract curriculum. Also, an increased sense of worth seems to be connected with these experiences, thereby creating a marked difference from subject matter which was previously associated with repeated failings.

4.4 Academic and affective bond to school

The participants' affective and academic bond to school seems to have been altered in varying degrees up to, and including, upper secondary school. These experiences can be classified as transformative due to the difference of the participants' account of their experiences. Although different factors can all have emotional significance, the following will display what seems to be significant for the participants. This is important in order to approximate an understanding of what might constitute a strong or weak bond to school.

4.4.1 Tangible school work and school subjects

When presenting the participants' sentiments about tangible work, it is also relevant to present the participants' contrasting relationship to theoretical or abstract school work. It seems clear from the analysis that for most of the participants, tangible work in school was one of the primary reasons to prefer their current education over previous school experiences. Also, all participants agreed that tangible work is something they prefer over theoretical school work in general. These points will be demonstrated in the following section. However, there are some discrepancies in the participants' apparent perception of theoretical work. P5 said that he has always been interested in theoretical work but that practical work has been his preference. Therefore, upper secondary school is also seemed to be more preferable for P5, unlike the other participants who appeared to have no particular interest in theoretical work. P5 stated that he enjoys mathematics, his reasons for this is that "I could do it well. If you can do it well you feel... That you have a reason to be there, not only sitting chewing gum." Here we can say that P5 underlined that his confidence in his own abilities in the subject matter is the central reason for his preference. Again, the other participants seem to have highlighted mathematics as an example of the least preferable school subject.

P6 dislikes reading, and he also has dyslexia. For P6 these factors can be said to be fundamental for his preference of tangible work in school. How the two are connected became a topic during the interview when P6 was asked about why he chose an education to become a

carpenter. “I have dyslexia, so really other things would have been really difficult. So to... build, I have joined my father at work many times before I started upper secondary, so that seemed fun, so then I choose that.” As mentioned in 4.2.1, P6’s father is a carpenter. The sentiments indicate that P6 has identified some options to be beyond his abilities, but that the focus on tangible work in carpentering was both interesting and P6 believed it to be within his abilities, which made him choose that educational course.

P3 also prefers the tangible school subjects connected with carpentering. He also likes English, because “we talk English a lot. When we game or Skype”. So, the utilization of leisure-time skills and sense of ability in the subject can be said to have been highlighted. However, mathematics is also for P3 not a preferable subject; “there is something about numbers, it is like I don’t pay attention. I do not think it is that interesting. Or, I have to do it, to get certified for completed apprenticeship”. P3 believes mathematics is important, but the prime motivation appears to be the prerequisite it is in order to complete the education. But we might say that P3 talked about mathematics in way which resonates with low self-efficacy in the subject. When asked about when he cares most about school P3 replies “Probably when we have like outdoor tests, or tasks which I find interesting or yes. When I do something with classmates or similar”. Outdoor tests normally entail building a specific item; this is also a group venture. P3 seems to favor both the tangible and the social aspect of this work.

P4 find that theoretical work is more interesting when it is connected to tangible work; “when [the subject matter] has something to do with carpentering. So then you learn kind of”. Thus, when the theoretical work has some sort of easily identifiable practical component or parallel it is easier to do. P1 seems to agree with these sentiments, but also highlights how tangible work in itself is where he seems to learn the most: “So, I have gone to upper secondary one year now, and now I have already built a patio by myself. So I am like ‘wow, I could never have done this a year ago’”. This seems to indicate a clear sense of achievement; this achievement is also connected with a tangible group activity which creates something distinct (a patio). This sense of worth and ability when talking about tangible work is also present with other participants, P4 made a divide to exemplify: “I have really always been bad at school. So I am better practical than at theory. I: So you did not like theoretical subjects in primary school either? P4: No.” P4 indicated that he has not been able to meet demands in school in general, and that this points to better skills in practical work and not so good skills in theoretical school work. The divide between practical and theoretical work seems to be

very clear in this example. It is notable that the question P4 was presented is close ended, but is interpreted to still coincide with P4's sincere thoughts on the topic (see chapter 3).

P4 explained his own sentiments about teaching and sense of ability like this:

Yes, I mean there are some who are smarter than others, and then the teachers will teach in a harder way because they do not think that there is a majority of the smart ones. So then, like, we are taught in one way, instead of explaining thoroughly so everyone understands.

P4 seems to have identified himself as not one of the students in his previous class with a difficulty to cope with the subject matter. The repeated feeling of being overlooked due to his failure to grasp all the new content at the desired pace seems to have weakened his bond to school and has made own short-comings very clear. He appears to make clear that it made following class hard, and made him feel unable to meet the demands of school.

On the whole, the participants made utterances about tangible work in school in a preferable way. This seems to be one of the factors which make upper secondary school markedly better than previous school experiences. The sense of ability and competence is predominant for most of the participants when talking about carpentering, for instance the sense of achievement of actually constructing an object which was beyond their abilities before. However, many of the participants also seem to have a larger sense of accomplishment in other subjects which they previously struggled with, for instance mathematics. Both P1 and P5 foresee a further academic pursuit in order to become an engineer.

4.4.2 Social atmosphere

The participants all talked about a friendly atmosphere ("god stemming") in class and how their teacher contributes to this atmosphere with humor and a generally good relationships between students. However, apart from peers, many of the participants connect the social atmosphere with their relationship to their teacher. P1 said that he lost a lot of his school well-being in lower secondary because of his relationship with his teacher "I think that has destroyed a lot of my happiness with school. If we had, before I had [that teacher] I was good at the different subjects, then I was among the best. But [that teacher] only pushed me down." In current circumstances, however, the current teachers were described as someone who

actively contributes to an increasingly friendly atmosphere. Also, as mentioned, the size of the class seems important to P1 for establishing a friendlier atmosphere.

Even though P3 had enjoyed himself more in NyGiv than previous school settings, he also had problems with answering problems in public to the teacher in class: “There were so many in class then, so I have some performance anxiety. So I do not like to raise my hand in a way. There, they just got over to me and asked me what it was, so then I just had to say it.” Even though NyGiv consisted of a smaller class than normal, P3 still found it unnerving to ask about help or to draw attention to himself: “So they stare right at me. I am easily stressed so...” Despite this, P3 still held that he enjoys upper secondary school “there is always a friendly atmosphere. Always something to talk about and that.” As mentioned, these sentiments were shared by all participants. P5 described the atmosphere like this: “In class there is bloody great atmosphere. There is not like someone are downtrodden and some who are... [Stops talking]” Similar to P1, P5 also highlighted the teacher as an important contributing factor by being humorous:

I: Is there something special about the teacher?

P5: Yes, I mean before we got to know [the teacher] we thought [the teacher] was a sort of Hitler. Always the sour face. Then we got to know him so... Everything [the teacher] says are jokes. He is only kidding around.

I: So how the teacher is kidding around...

P5: It helps the mood a lot. So like only ‘dun dun dun’, ‘do that that and that’, that does not work. I do not work like that.

P5 finds it much easier to do school work when there is some humor on the teacher’s part, when receiving tasks. P4 agrees about the role of the teacher, but he also highlighted again the ability of the teacher to be friendly: “I did not like the teachers in lower secondary school and they did not like me. So it did not go too well there. But when I came up here I got a good connection with the teachers. So then... I have received better grades”.

As mentioned, the participants are all very content with the school atmosphere. The teacher and fellow students seem to be the deciding factors which contribute to this school climate. The carpentering course entails a lot of work in groups which seems to also coincide with these sentiments; P5 highlights how he would really dislike school if he had to work together

with people with which he did not have friendly relationship. There are also some tendencies which imply a sort of a positive spiral compared to previous school experiences, better relationships with teachers, better grades and more friendly relationships with teachers seems to constitute an increasingly positive social climate.

4.5 About school withdrawal

The participants' own conceptions about the background for school withdrawal are all interesting in the project. However, the phenomenological approach to the problem also indicates a highlight of the individual's own relationship to school. None of the participants seem to be at-risk for school withdrawal themselves, but might also have some interesting viewpoints about why students eventually come at-risk for school withdrawal. P2, P4, P5 and P6 offered opinions about school withdrawal in Norway. Not all participants were asked about this, but the participants who mentioned it might also convey some insight into their perceptions which are gathered through their subjective school experiences. P2 believes school withdrawal is linked with theory and the study preparatory subjects, P4 agrees that too much theory may be linked with drop outs, though he said general well-being is "very important" to keep students in school, he also talked about getting tired of school and of theory especially:

I think that it is because people... They get tired of school. And then they do not bother going to school. It can also be because there is too much theory. We have three days of theory a week, and two practical. We had that last year too; I think we could have had more days of practical work. I mean, we go carpentering, we are supposed to learn carpentering. We do not need to learn Norwegian. Right? Carpentering is what we do.

P6 focuses more on the affective bond to school, though P6 thinks that school withdrawal can be rooted in how "it is probably someone who thinks it is boring, for instance if they are away one day and just think I can not bother to wake up". P6 defined boredom in this context as, for instance, "having a teacher you do not like at all. And that, that you might not have that many friends at school. Maybe you are being bullied, I don't know". The bond to school is weakened through inactivity, teacher and peer relationship until dropping out entirely is the next step. P5 appears to think that students that come at risk of school withdrawal make an uneducated course choice, or are at least unprepared for the course they have chosen. This

may lead to students starting several different educations and never actually finishing. P5 does not think the courses necessarily are too difficult, but believes that failure to complete a course is more connected to interest, or lack of interest, in a particular education: “No, I think that is unnecessary. I mean, if you like it and you think that ‘no, I am not able to do it’, then you do not like it. If you really like it, you can do it.”

We see that the participants offered conceptions about school-leaving which can be said to be somewhat different, P6 and P2 thinks that school leaving is connected to boredom which is rooted in disinterest in school activity, though the conception of boredom is not necessarily a expression of state of having little to do, but rather a result of repeated disruptive experiences in school. P5 on the other hand believe that students choose the wrong educational course, which might eventually *lead* to boredom, as described by P6 and P2, but here P5 describes a concrete measurable factor.

5. Discussion

How do upper secondary school students describe their own experiences of the Norwegian school system?

The project's problem for discussion is to examine how upper secondary students describe their own experiences of the Norwegian school system. As subsequent research questions we have chosen to look at how students describe important factors for their well-being, their bond to school and how they perceive their bond to school compared to previous school experience. In the following, we shall shed light on these points in relation to the background, theory and results presented previously in the project. Again, the affective bond to school is a term which is used here in a way that has relevance for well-being, academic achievement and school withdrawal. Therefore, even if the following chapter is divided into separate sections the content is heavily intertwined.

As mentioned, the drop-out rates in Norway are significantly differentiated by gender (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2012), which indicates that an approach to school experience through a gender-oriented perspective can be relevant. However, the data-material only consists of male interviews and hence, the following discussion will not touch upon gender perspectives in a significant way. This is notable, because gender differences in Norwegian school might have to be taken into account to gain a comprehensive understanding of the field, of which this thesis is only a part of.

5.1 School experience and well-being

As pointed out, the focus of the project has been to create a broader understanding of the constituents of students' affective bond to school. The subjective value of the students' experiences to this end, whether to disrupt or to strengthen their affective bond to school, has been instrumental in this pursuit. In the background and theory chapters we saw that several quantitative projects were concerned with the students' affective bond to school and school leaving, but lacked concrete distinctions as to what this actually means subjectively (Hascher, 2007). The theoretical foundation for these studies generally postulated that several complex affective processes could lead to an inconsequential relationship toward school, these processes can for instance be uncaring or powerlessness, which function towards school withdrawal and finally school leaving (Finn, 1989; Hascher & Hagenauer, 2010). In the

following section, we shall look at how the participants described their own well-being in school. All participants seemed to define their class as one with “god stemming”, a sense of contentment, or positive class social climate. To better understand these sentiments we can use Konu and Rimpelä’s well-being model (2002). It is important to note that the following discussion is not at all an attempt to gauge the participants’ mental state, but rather to discuss how their utterances can be interpreted into a school well-being context. Due to the subjective nature of our inquiry, we shall focus on the subjective dimensions of the model, which contains both objective and subjective indicators. However, since Konu and Rimpelä distinguish between factors which are intertwined it might not be directly transferable to our discussion. Therefore, we shall rather look at external and internal factors, but use the model as a point of departure.

5.1.1 School conditions, material fulfillment.

Briefly, the participants’ subjective interpretation on the class-size, buildings and similar have a subjective as well as an objective component (Allardt, 1976). Several of the participants had sentiments about the school maintenance, but seemed to indicate that its importance relative to the general social atmosphere of the class is negligible. Further, a subjective sense of material fulfillment, or socioeconomic background was never discussed during the interviews. Thereby, we can say that immaterial factors which had a direct consequence for the affective life of the participants are the prime factor to discuss for school well-being in this particular project. Diener et al. also highlight that “well-being necessarily includes positive elements that transcend economic prosperity” (1999, p. 276) which implies that well-being can be discussed beyond the immediate material conditions of the participants. That the participants do not put greater weight on the issue seems to accentuate this point. However, we should note that this can be due to material fulfillment being largely unimportant due to the relative high living standards in the Norwegian context, but might also be because the students did not want to bring the matter up by themselves.

5.1.2 Constituents for well-being

Where Diener defines subjective well-being broadly as the absence of negative emotions, presence of positive emotions and subjective definition of life as positive (2000), Konu and Rimpelä’s (2002) description of well-being in school can be used to separate the sentiments of the participants into more distinct parts. To determine “being” Konu and Rimpelä (2002) highlight these factors:

Being: Means for self-fulfillment

- Value of student's work
- Guidance, encouragement
- Influence school-decision-making
- Increase self-esteem
- Use creativity

Figure 6: Components of "being" (p. 85)

In order to delve into the implications of these factors we can use P4's utterances about his personal experiences. In lower secondary school, P4 experienced repeated failures at school and talks about how "the teachers did not like me, and I did not like them", indicating a lack of guidance and encouragement as outlined above. Further, the repeated failings at achieving the appointed goals set by the curriculum seems to have led P4 to eventually lose academic self-esteem and he was about to quit school beyond lower secondary altogether. However, eventually he began in NyGiv, which seemed to mark a great change in P4's school experience. P4 seems to say that through NyGiv he generated a stronger sense of self, which was further enhanced in upper secondary school. Important factors which made NyGiv a transformative experience according to P4 are a change of methods, increased use of peer-cooperation and more time with each teacher. In upper secondary school, P4 seems to say that the teacher is a great help, and that the class climate is good. Further, he has ambitions to become an engineer, indicating that academic pursuit is not out of the question anymore, whereas in lower secondary school he was ready to start in an entirely work-based education program with no school component.

P4's account of transformative experiences seems to accentuate several factors, the relationship to his teacher and the curriculum can be said to have had drastic consequences for P4's school experience. This is highlighted by what appears to be utterances describing a strong bond to school in present circumstances in upper secondary school. P4 offers the connection to his teacher as an explanation, as well as the subject matter he is required to master; the current curriculum in vocational education requires the appropriation skills of an arguably more practical nature (UDIR, 2012c). Further, there can be said to be a consistency to Hascher's argument of how school well-being should be regarded as holistic, in the sense of dependent on different intermingling factors (2007). However, also how school well-being

can be regarded as a separate entity from everyday life, in that the student may have high well-being in school, but low well-being in everyday life (Hascher, 2007). This is because P4 says nothing about extracurricular factors which disrupt his judgment of his own well-being, but also because the factors which function toward this disruption seem to be found at school.

So on one hand, P4 tells us about several experiences which *overall* can lead to low school well-being. On the other hand, we cannot ascertain whether lower secondary school consisted of solely disruptive experiences or not. The factors which impact P4's experiences and which has led him to focus on positive factors within upper secondary school can be argued to be a result of high well-being factors. However, again, the overall experience is the overriding factor here. Even some singular negative experience is not sufficient basis for us to say that P4 talks about school as a place which cultivates low well-being. This can be said to be important because we are able to put forward some concise elements which aid us in understanding P4's well-being in school. The overall analysis of P4s utterances about different school experiences is the basis for emphasizing this, not single experiences, which would primarily serve to illustrate the point. Park (2004) assert that autonomous activity seem to affect adults' subjective interpretation about life satisfaction, which contribute to a high subjective well-being but deems the impact on underage students to be uncertain due to limited prior research. However, drawing on the utterances of the participants we can argue that this has been significant for them, at least by considering the sense of worth attained through increased achievement and positive social interaction in upper secondary school.

P4's utterances about his school experience can be argued to be neither surprising nor very different from what the other participants have brought forward. It is unsurprising because it seems to follow closely what theorists portray as important factors for well-being, and how the replacement of these underlying factors in NyGiv and upper secondary subsequently appears to have influenced a higher well-being. For instance, if the participants talked about an increased well-being in school which was conditioned upon factors previously thought to be insignificant for these emotions to occur. Since well-being is conditioned upon repeated, not single instances (Diener et al., 1999), it is important to note that the participants who arguably seemed to dislike several factors within lower secondary school did so in a general way, even if some factors may have mitigated these emotions. So, if lower secondary school entailed experiences which created low subjective well-being, there were also instances which were of positive affect, even if the *general* outlook was of negative affect. The relevant points

to the study of school well-being are that we have identified some factors to be of distinct importance in order to constitute well-being, such as teacher interaction and coping with subject matter. Further, the well-being model's factors appear to coincide with a sense of power, belonging and influence; social processes which are disrupted when a sense of alienation occurs (Seeman, 1959). So when the participants talk about experiences which led to an increased sense of uncaring towards their school results, this can be said to be preliminary signs of school alienation. A process, which left unchecked or mitigated by other factors, can lead to school withdrawal and even school leaving.

From this we might also point out that putting a parallel of terms between well-being in school and comfort, in the sense of avoidance of challenging situations can be regarded as a misconception of the terms. Tuominen-Soini et al. (2012) show that students who avoid school work also have lower school well-being, what we in this project can identify to be within an affective school relationship. These findings seem to coincide with the participants' utterances. P4 can be said to exemplify this: "A good teacher is direct and doesn't mess about". Clear cut and intelligible work goals can therefore be said to be an aspect of well-being- and motivation-driven education according to this student. None of the participants puts forward any desire to avoid activity, but all seem to be intent being able to *overcome* the difficulties in school. This is important to point out because well-being might, at a glance, be likened to inactivity. Also, we can be said to demonstrate that the participants have a wish to achieve what is expected in school.

5.2 Bond to school

As has been mentioned, well-being and school alienation all touch upon similar contextual explanatory models where the subjective sense of self-worth is important. In the thesis we have approached the phenomena through the students' experiences and their affective bond to school. For instance, during the presentation of P4's experiences we saw what we can identify as a progressively strengthening bond to school through change of schools and NyGiv. This seems to be due to an increased sense of well-being, but also of ability and accomplishment. In this section we will first look at academic sense of accomplishment and the impact towards school learning, before looking closer at how processes of alienation can have influenced the participants' bond to school.

5.2.1 Modes of activity

As shown in the results-chapter, several of the participants clearly preferred tangible work, which was much more predominant in upper secondary school compared to lower secondary school. In the following we shall look further into these sentiments, and how they coincide with students' bond to school. The academic bond to school entails the relationship the participants have to the academic responsibilities in school in the sense of the ability to cope with the skills the curriculum expects the students to acquire. As we shall see, the difference between being active and passive can be modeled as central opposites in the participants' exposition about academic bond to school.

P1's sentiments about tangible work serve to illustrate how many participants felt about tangible work. P1 said much about his preference of "using his body" and how working with practical work outside was better than theoretical work inside. Thus, we can say that P1 creates a clear distinction between theoretical work on one side, and tangible work on the other. As well as pointing out a transformative component in that school was previously focused on theoretical work, where there now is an increased practical emphasis. It seems that P1's sentiments coincide well with Dewey's (n.d.) discussion about the disruptive dualism between body and mind, wherein the body is identified primarily as a vessel of the mind, rather than an inherent and important part of human functioning. P5's utterances can also serve as an example of similar sentiments:

I: Is it something special with carpentering... That you like to do?

P5: Yes, you are active all day long. I could not imagine sitting in like an office. That would not work for me. I have to use my body.

The disruption between body and mind can be said to be prominent in this quote. In carpentering, P5 is able to use his body in a constructive way in contrast to previous school experience. The transformative essence of this, where lower secondary school-activity predominantly revolved around theoretical work in class can be said to be substantial. Where school was previously, at least to an extent, inhibiting of bodily faculties, school work is now dependent upon it. The constructive usage of the body also seems to coincide with successful school outcomes: P5 is increasingly pleased with his academic performance, and deems himself to be among the top tier in academic achievement in his class, instead of the bottom tier where he was during previous school experiences due to different modes of activity.

Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy can be said to further elaborate on these points: renewed sense of accomplishment and ability increases self-efficacy in turn. The activity of learning the carpentering profession is not only a bodily function, but a function which enhances self-efficacy because it is connected with successful coping. For P6 this point is further accentuated, because of dyslexia he has experienced repeated failings at theoretical school work, especially writing-based subject matter, but with tangible work he is able to complete school work in line with his peers. As Bandura highlights the efficacy of belief in personal ability, which in turn enhances the actual activity (Bandura et al., 2001), we can perceive the residual effects of how P6 identifies himself as competent and able to complete tasks in school, which is markedly different from how he views his own abilities in theoretical subjects on a general basis. Thus, we can say that the efficacy of the students in school curriculum has a significant impact on the participants' overall school experience. On one hand this seems to coincide well with the Norwegian Ministry of Education's focus on the correlation between drop-outs and low school grades (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2009), because the grades can be said to reflect some sort of mastery over the subject matter. On the other hand, by postulating that social interaction is inherent in learning, the ability to contribute in practice allows the participants to engage in schoolwork in a constructive way. Wenger's (1998) description of social practice in a working group (claims processors) can be used to illustrate this point:

A practice is what these claims processors have developed in order to be able to do their job and have a satisfying experience at work. It is in this sense that they constitute a community of practice. The concept of practice connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. In this sense, practice is always social practice. (p. 47)

Here we can say that the practice of activity, which is not necessarily the same as tangible work, is conditioned upon social interaction in order to become meaningful for those engaged in the activity. However, if we follow the participants' utterances, the ability to actually cope with the appointed tasks is the depending factor which enables the meaningful social practices to take place. The active social enterprise of practice seems to be evident in how many of the participants recount experiences comprised of social activity in which achievement was

acquired through group processes, i.e. through building. Vygotsky's (1978) outline of mental processes which develop through peer-interaction seems to indicate that the successful peer and teacher interaction is a condition for successful learning outcomes. So, we can postulate that the sense of achievement the participants talk about is dependent upon successful social interaction which enhances skill appropriation. Further, it can be difficult to ascertain the exact transformative nature of these experiences; whether they were exempt in previous school-life due to social circumstances or if the activity itself is the crucial component. Dewey (n.d.) holds that the interest of the activity can mediate the participants learning outcome, in that the passage from passive observer to active participant denotes the apprehension gained. The origin of interest is difficult to ascertain, but if we say that it is born out of a sense of ability early in school life (Bandura et al., 2001), for instance in practical work, we can also hold that the use of body is an activity which creates room for learning for the participants because interest and peer interaction come together to create successful school activity. Conversely, P3's hesitance to take lead in group projects also can be said to indicate that the social interaction can be difficult, the complex interaction in a group doing tangible work in concert was his preference but the group dynamic is unclear. Therefore, the different roles the participants associate themselves with are ambiguous, but the impression left is that the increased social interaction through practice led to a strengthened academic bond to school.

Also, it should be noted that Wenger's definition of social practice is also conditioned upon mental performance (1998), we can simply point out that the group activity which is most easily discernible as practical school work, is markedly different from previous school experience. Dewey's (n.d.) premise of body and mind as being equally important thus indicate that the use of *holistic* human functioning is a condition for optimal human development. Further, we should note that theoretical subject matter can also be engaged in an active way, the interaction between student and teacher seem to be the dividing line here, meaning that activity is spurned by disrupted interaction. Therefore, when we put a dividing line between theoretical and tangible work on one hand, and between activity and passivity on the other, we should be careful to immediately thereby denote theoretical work as strictly passive, or tangible work as strictly active. The distinction in the context of the participants' experiences appears to be the pedagogical methods employed at specific times. For instance, the participants who attended NyGiv took part in mathematical education there, which was formerly denoted as predominantly passive, but in NyGiv the pedagogical methods seem to have been more geared toward activity, participation and increased teacher guidance. Even if

tangible work has generally been a mode of activity which increased the participants' bond to school, this does not infer that theoretical curriculum should be regarded as disruptive in general. However, we can argue that the participants' experiences *do* call for closer scrutiny on the pedagogical approach employed when approaching the subject matter in school. Increased use of tangible school work *can* be a method to promote student participation, but tangible work does not equate activity in every instance. However, for the participants, this seems to generally have been the case because mastery of the activity and social interaction has been the general approach to practical work.

So, the participants' academic sense of ability seems to be strengthened in upper secondary school marked by participation. However, it is uncertain how an increased sense of ability plays out in motivational terms. The results indicate that some of the participants are often motivated by the promise of leisure time after tasks are completed. This corresponds somewhat with what Ryan and Deci would identify as extrinsic motivation (2000), if we say that the motivation for learning and participation in school work is not acquired subjectively but from outside influences, or for instance, the promise of concrete reward. These sentiments appear to be prominent in how P6 prefers a strict teacher in order to ensure that something gets done, implicating that without teacher urging there is less motivation to complete the school work. When P1 mentions how his preference for completing his tasks quickly is more prominent in upper secondary school because this yields increased leisure time, he also indicates that the mastery of school work in itself is not necessarily the prime motivator. A more robust urge to actually acquire the skills, as opposed to simply completing the task, would be autonomy, which in this case would be a desire to learn born from an interest in untried activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, this might not be so different than what other secondary school students think, Martin's (2008) notion about secondary school students being more interested in the end-result of their studies rather than the activity in which they are actually engaged, might be said to shed some light on these issues and can indicate a perception of school not as a developing activity, but something which is simply mandatory, much like how Zygmantas (2009) theorizes about how a disruptive relationship can occur between apathetic students and exclusively goal-driven teachers or school authority.

5.2.2 Alienation

During the interviews, several of the participants had sentiments which can be said to resonate with the phenomenon of alienation. In the following, we shall look at the phenomenon in

concert with the participants' utterances. In the theory chapter we have seen how the alienation term is dependent on a contextual basis in order to make the usage distinct, and not ambiguous (Williamson & Cullingford, 1997). From this we can draw that we do not discuss alienation in general, but affective processes which lead to alienation from *school*. Whereas several participants talk about transformative experiences in regard to school well-being, within these sentiments there are also indications of processes of alienation. The alienating processes can here be directly linked to the students' affective bond to school, wherein participants tell of alienating processes which lead to a disruption of the affective bond to school.

In order to determine different factors which can lead to alienation, we can use P2 utterances as a point of departure. During lower secondary school, P2 describes how he felt increasingly uncaring towards school. When taking a test he "did not care" or tried not to think about it. The academic achievements in school seem to have become unimportant, or simply beyond P2's control. If the participants felt unable to alter their present state, a sense of powerlessness and normlessness can occur (Seeman, 1959). An alienating process seems to predominantly originate from academic contexts in P2's case. There is little mention of either teachers or peers who created a disruptive bond to school. So, using P2's experiences in relation to Finn's (1989) model of decreased self-esteem and deficient school practices as an explanation of school withdrawal can be argued to primarily indicate a: School subjects and b: P2's ability to overcome the challenges presented by the curriculum. This distinction is important because it seems that P2's experiences coincide well with Finn's (1989) model, which therefore is adoptable. Also notable is the fact that P2 is not a school leaver. He overcame the difficulties of lower secondary school and commenced with upper secondary school, which has a marked improvement for him. However, the importance of dysfunctional school practice is again difficult to ascertain; if we hold that a curriculum consisting of confusing or irrelevant content acts toward school withdrawal, it may be that strong peer or teacher relationship can mitigate the effects. It seems that a holistic perception of factors must be employed in order to ascertain the differences, which also leaves us with increasing difficulty to pinpoint different important factions to alleviate school leaving.

The participants' utterances can be said to make the distinction between school withdrawal and school leaving clearer. Although some participants experienced processes which can be said to be alienating, there is no history of school leaving among them. However, there seems

to have been some structural changes which created a stronger bond to school among those participants who might have otherwise been at-risk for school leaving, namely NyGiv and the transition to upper secondary school. Markussen et al.'s (2011) study can be put up as an interesting contrast to the participant's utterances. Markussen et al. shows that several upper secondary students drop out of school because of issues connected with the transition from lower to upper secondary school. What the participants in the present study can be said to underline is that a transition to a course which enables activity which stirs a sense of ability and achievement can actually strengthen the bond to school. However, through Markussen et al.'s study (2011) we can hold it as probable that this is conditioned upon selecting the right course in line with future goals and interests.

The previous discussions can be said to have demonstrated different factors which can be seen as having been predominant in the students' utterances about school leaving. Below is an attempt to conceptualize the utterances into a general model of what can be said to have been distinct factors. Some of the factors appear to have carried greater weight for the participants than others. For instance, external factors seem to be almost negligible judging from the participants' utterances. However, it has *some* relevance, as it was mentioned by some participants how their former school looked more like "prison", and that their current facilities was better than their previous ones.

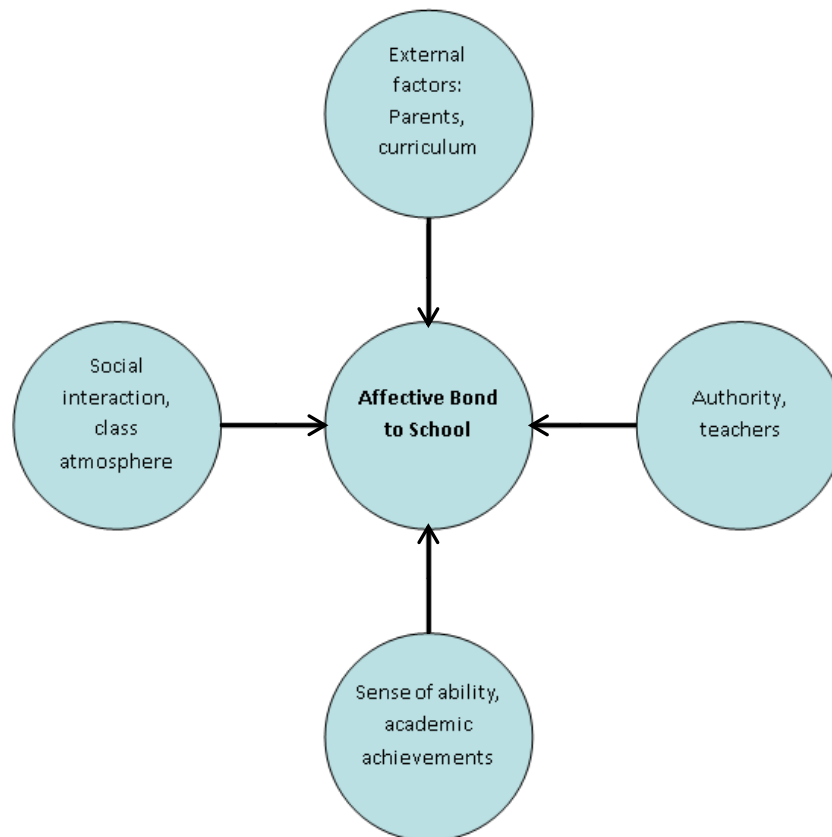


Figure 7: Affective bond to school

The distinction between sense of ability, class-room authority and social interaction can be said to be rooted in Finn's "participation-identification" model (1989, p. 130). However, it is also an attempt to create more detailed constituents into what might in some instances be paramount to affective school bonds. The model is not generally applicable, but a product of what can be interpreted as several of the participants' subjective meaning. In his model, Finn (1989) highlights how participation in school activity also strengthens the subjective bond to school through school affiliation; school becomes part of the student's identity. This perspective is arguably coherent with the participants' account of how group and teacher interaction was important, because it seemed to lead to increased sense of subjective worth and strengthened school climate. P6's utterances about "boredom" as a reason for school-leaving arguably show that several points in the above model are parts of the disruption of school bond. P6 defines boredom here through examples such as damaging social interaction through bullying and inability to cope with curricular demands. Through increased negative experiences students may become ostracized from the social group, and lack motivation for continued school participation.

5.2.3 Relationships between surveys and the project's findings

Although the participants' relationship to lower secondary school seems to have been strenuous at times, we should also discuss how this compares to the surveys which aim to represent the general relationship of students to Norwegian schools in order approximate more closely their relevance for the present discussion. As we mentioned in the background of the thesis, school contentment and social relationships seems to be relatively strong in Norwegian schools (UDIR, 2012a). Therefore, if we hold that there are instances of student alienation, based on the participants on this study, we can infer that the general impression given by surveys such as Johansen and Schanke (2009) does not give a fully comprehensive conception of the instances which are detrimental to school well-being and which can lead to school withdrawal and drop-outs. Hascher (2008) holds that the issues connected with measuring school well-being is caused by a lack of sufficient explanatory frameworks for the school context, while Park (2004) emphasize that increased knowledge of the effects of well-being on youth development is lacking. So, on one hand comprehensive data material show high well-being in Norwegian school children (Bradshaw et al., 2011; Currie et al., 2004), even if there certainly are instances of low well-being at school. Simultaneously, Norwegian drop-out numbers are high. UDIR's student surveys show that school contentment decreases slightly across the transition to upper secondary school, also for vocational students (UDIR, 2012a), while the participants interviewed in the project all prefer upper secondary school, further emphasizing the discrepancies between the analyzed data material and available surveys.

The establishment of well-being is denoted through the relationship between negative and positive affective experiences (Diener, 2000), while the student surveys in a large part are made through questionnaires with fixed responses to approach an overview of the students *general* conception of school life. As Hascher (2008) has pointed out, these questionnaires do not entail a more detailed background for the reasons *behind* the response. Therefore, we might in turn not get indications of processes which are disruptive for school completion due to complex or singular strong instances. P3's description of lower secondary school can illustrate this:

I did not pay attention at the time, but that was only the different subjects which I did not like. Otherwise it was good. There were a lot of friends I could talk to and... It was there. I was most content at recess though.

So, it seems that for P3 the *general* impression of lower secondary school was that it was good. The main basis behind this assertion is not the subject matter, but the social life, particularly in recess. A basis in the subject matter can therefore infer a lower well-being than previously thought. In the interviews, the participants have preferred the subject matter and teachers over previous school experience due to increased activity, but it is not thereby certain that the overall experience of lower secondary school was a disruptive experience. However, as shown, the relationship to abstract school work was a disruptive experience for some. The distinctness of these two perspectives should be noted going forward in debating an affective bond to school.

5.3 Contemporary Norwegian education policies

In *1. Background* we saw that the Ministry of Education had interest in several factors which are also relevant for the inquiry of the project. Among these, were a concern for school withdrawal, the quality of vocational education and an increased awareness about increased use of practical education (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2009, 2011, 2012). In the following section, we touch upon these different factors and how they relate to the participants' experiences and theoretical insights about students' bond to school.

5.3.1 Abstract and tangible schoolwork

As mentioned, several participants were concerned about a nearly dichotomous difference between abstract and tangible knowledge. Therefore, it is notable that Norwegian educational officials seem to be concerned with this as well; in 2012 the Directorate for Education and Training released the news that all lower secondary schools were to provide the students with distinct amounts of educational time allotted to what can be classified as tangible, non-abstract education divided into eight "valgfag" or elective courses of study (UDIR, 2012b). These courses consist of subject matter ranging from practical technology to drama and screenplay. This change can be argued to be a concrete response to several of the participants' concerns. For instance, P1 mentioned how he desired doing something practical, and that only one teacher in lower secondary had any real interest in practical knowledge. The directorate is now motioning all lower secondary schools to provide this within set rules. Although other subjects seem to continue on as before, the motive behind the change can, at the outset, appear to be within a mind-set that appreciates Dewey's (n.d.) concern for a body and mind dualism. This is argued since the background of the change is the white paper *Motivasjon* –

Mestring – Muligheter (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2011), within this document there are utterances such as:

Further, it seems that active work can lead to greater effort in learning. This can entail the execution of experiments rather than reading them, to participate in role-playing instead of listening to a lecture, or to build a model instead of reading about it. Most students enjoy working together. Learning through cooperation can contribute to make the students help each other and take responsibility for the learning output of the entire class, instead of a competitive-based class-climate which can be alienating to students who lag behind. (p. 15, own translation)

There seems to be an emphasis on a practical and a social component in this quote. We might argue that the Ministry puts up a dividing line between participation, cooperation and activity on one hand, and learning through abstract means and competitiveness on the other. This seems to coincide with Wenger's practice theory (1998), in that cooperation and activity is so closely linked, just as Wenger ascertains this as conditional for optimal human development. However, the active and passive opposites of the examples can also be said to be consistent with Zygamantas' (2009) emphasis on participation in learning in contrast to authority-driven student passivity to ensure critical and emancipatory education. Active participation is also aimed to mitigate alienating processes, which Zygmantas also identifies as a hallmark of authority driven education.

So, based on the participants' utterances we can say that recent government reform seem to be a relevant response. However, the participants have consciously chosen an educational course with a clear practical emphasis. So, we should note that the change appears to be relevant based on six participants' utterances, and that these participants have only chosen one among many other vocational courses. Therefore, it is relevant to question whether the school can be tailored to diverging needs, assuming that different students excel in different modes of activity. One response can be that studies of exceptionally academically gifted children seems to touch upon similar affective processes as those of neglect in school life (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011), for instance through disinterest and irrelevant curriculum the students are already familiar with. The 2011 study of apprentices in Norway show that motivation is far higher in work-based situations than what they experienced in

upper secondary school (Nyen et al., 2011). Thereby, we might hold that the problem of motivation can be extended further than just the participants' experience of upper and lower secondary school, but between activity and passivity in general. To nuance further, Mjelde (2008) argues that preference for workplace-based education does not necessarily entail well-being in and of itself, arguing that for some apprentices the working place is stressful and that the apprentices can be underprepared for the challenges in the firms. On one hand, this highlights the need for increased work-place relevance in vocational education. On the other hand, if we also say that theoretical subject matter need not necessarily be a passive enterprise, increased emphasis towards education through participation appears increasingly valid. Giving students access to subject matter that engages and excites through methods geared towards activity in order to ensure autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) can be one fruitful perspective here.

5.3.2 Relationships between normative goals and subjective experience

The Norwegian government seeks to increase the number of students who succeed in upper secondary school, but unless there occurs some distinct differences in the school completion there are grounds to question whether the goals is realistic within the current school policy paradigm. We can also note that some courses, which have a decidedly practical nature, such as arts and crafts, has been part of lower secondary school for a long time, though the dislike of lower secondary school still prevailed among the participants. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain the exact consequences of the new school reforms in any way before its execution. For instance, whether particular courses with emphasis on tangible work is sufficient to create room for students who fail to accommodate the curricular expectations in other subjects. As discussed earlier, tangible work does not necessarily translate immediately to activity and student autonomy. The way P3 explains his dislike of mathematics suggests that important courses still retain a methodology which can still be a disruptive element to a student's bond to school.

As we have argued, the sentiments presented by the government seem to coincide with components of emancipatory and inclusive educational theories. However, the experiences presented by the participants in lower secondary school do not appear to be in accordance with the expressed goals of the government, because several of the participants indicate their school experiences to be marked by passivity and inactiveness, with a clear curricular emphasis on abstract knowledge, which primarily was an inactive mode in the participants'

utterances. Admittedly, the presented government-papers are recent, and hence they are assumedly not all fully in effect yet, but there is still a discrepancy between the stories told by the participants and the envisioning of school officials. If this is due to ineffectual methods, if the methods have not had time to be implemented or locally (school) based opposition to the sentiments is unclear. However, if the participants' experiences signify a systematic underrepresentation of education through participation, the changes can be said to be comprehensive due to the large discrepancy between the experience of students and the political visions of the Norwegian government. Further research must be made to ascertain the development of policy and the effectuated experiences in Norwegian schools. Also, whether the discrepancies are based on different course differences or a more deep seated imbalance of views between school leadership and student body is also unclear. To summarize: on one hand it seems clear that the school officials are aware that some students do not achieve self-efficacy and motivation-based self-efficacy and thus come at risk for developing alienating tendencies towards school, and see increased use of practical work as a response (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2011). However, to increase the use of tangible methods in particular courses is not in and of itself a solution to those who struggle with significant difficulties in distinct parts of school life since the students would still struggle unless a sense of worth, achievement and self-efficacy is connected with the comprehensive school experience, which thus ensures school well-being through the subjective judgment (Diener et al., 1999). This does not infer that the policy changes are ineffectual, but would indicate that a deeper look than only the symptomatic and observable facets of the issues connected to school leaving can be pursued.

As seen, some of the prime motives for the Norwegian government to increase the number of upper secondary school students are both economic, due to demands from the labor-market, and the correlation between finished upper-secondary and increased socioeconomic achievements by those who complete upper secondary school (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2009). However, the newer school reforms seem to be consistent with theories about the relationship between school leaving and affective bond to school (Finn, 1989; Hascher & Hagenauer, 2010; Tuominen-Soini et al., 2012) *as well* as a response to the participants' concrete issues with an inability to cope with the emphasis on theoretical school work. However, the government's most immediate response, NyGiv, was judged by the participants to be a significant and sometimes vital component of transformative experiences which led to strengthened school bond. Thereby, we can say that for the participants, NyGiv

was a success in the sense of giving the participants the means to achieve and employ abilities in school contexts. In a broad scale, the constituents of these experiences seem to be formed by increased guidance and help, as well as increased peer interaction to overcome curricular challenges. Thus, the school policies should not be seen entirely as ineffectual. However, the NyGiv program was only an option during the final semester of lower secondary school for the participants. Therefore, the preceding school experience was not mitigated. On this basis, we can argue that increased use of NyGiv methods might need to be explored further.

5.3.3 Summary

We might say that the variety of factors which seems to impact school bonds lends credence to Skjervheim's (1992) critique of a sole empiricist approach to educational practice, because objective knowledge can scarcely account for the subjective interpretation of what constitutes a positive school experience. Therefore, even if the educational policy changes are in accord with the participants' envisioning of school work, we have no certainty of its effects on different school practices because the subjective experiences are so varied. As we have seen in the background chapter, school policy is largely based on quantitative evidence (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2009, 2011, 2013). However, the tendency of alienation towards authority in school is not mentioned as a societal problem, but discussed primarily through measurable objective data. Therefore, school officials do not use distinct perspectives to increase the basis for policy development, which otherwise could have been used to create a more comprehensive foundation for decisions.

Martin's (2008) highlight of the danger of material goals as the prime motivator for increased school attendance in school can also be used to critically review the aims for education. Even though some coherence with labor-market demands are important in order to ensure that education is relevant, the Norwegian education law (Opplæringsloven, 1998), also hold the students' right for holistic development and self-esteem as central factors in school education. Thus, the aims for education mainly based on material or prospects of work, for instance highlighted in *Utdanningslinja* (The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2009), can in turn present a disruption of what can be said to be equally important parts of school life. Therefore, an increased awareness of autonomous students, which are active rather than passive, empowered rather than careless, can be proposed. These points are rooted in modern theoretical approaches, but based on the participants' utterances; it also seems to resonate with what some students actually *experience*. If we hold that the broad aim and function of

education is to reproduce society (Dewey, n.d.) in order to allow society to function as a robust democracy, the details of what constitutes relevant goals for a modern society might need to be debated further. For instance, we might firstly propose that school can foremost aim to create space for autonomous exploration or creative subjective development, with dialogic relationships between student and school authority (Martin, 2008; Zygmantas, 2009). Secondly, that school experience should emphasize activity rather than passivity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Lastly, to employ a dualistic approach to student participation in school work in a holistic perspective wherein all available human faculties are employed (Dewey, n.d.). These perspectives are not necessarily conditioned upon increased upper secondary school completion, but upon a dialogic aims as to what school experience should ultimately entail. Increased use of such perspectives can be an entry-way to discuss school withdrawal in a new light.

6. Conclusions

During the course of the project we have seen several examples of how student experience can unfold in Norwegian schools. It seems that through a comprehensive examination of student experience we can discuss in depth topics such as school leaving and withdrawal as well as modes of activity and apprehension. A central finding however, can be said to be the sheer exposition of variety of distinct experiences which has relevance for contemporary Norwegian drop-out debate.

From the general exposition brought forward by the participants we can highlight some points: That some of the participants reveals that school life has been difficult in Norwegian schools seems to show not only a recurring lack of activity which the participants could overcome with available subjective faculties, but that the relationship between curriculum and familiarity to school and the school institution was central: The disruption of this interaction can lead to alienating processes, weakening the students' bond to school. None of the participants appears to envision school as a problem-free or solely comfortable place, the disproportion between pleasant experiences and disruptive experiences to the participants' affective bond to school are phenomena which are approachable through use of theories such as Finn's bond to school (1989) or well-being (Diener, 2000; Hascher & Hagenauer, 2010). These overarching tendencies connected with the interaction between affective bond to school and school experiences accentuates that increased knowledge must be gained in order to ascertain more information about how students' lack of social cohesion in school can be handled by teachers and government institutions.

Through analysis we determined that factors such as teacher-relationship and social climate were significantly different in upper secondary school than previous school experiences for all the participants. During the discussion we saw that these differences highlighted how the students felt increasingly active and had increased self-esteem in class settings. Simultaneously, the participants' stories indicate that school has been a difficult experience for *some* students, not all, because although the participants seemed to prefer upper secondary school there were ambiguous sentiments about prior school experience. Also, the impact on certain subjects such as mathematics, were instrumental in some of the participants' perception of school. However, the drop-out rates in Norway as well as the increased motivation gained in apprenticeship relative to previous school experience (Nyen et al., 2011)

seems to indicate that a closer look at the relationships the students have to school life in different modes of activity is warranted.

Within the context of tangible work it has been important to note the problems of concluding that the project's results imply a cohesive synergy between the students' experiences and distinct theoretical terms. Abstract subject matter in and of itself is not necessarily to blame for disruptive bond to school, in the participants' accounts of school experiences most underlined the importance of the subject matter, however it would perhaps be more precise to call mathematics a focal point for exemplification of the participants' sense of failure to meet the school's requirements. These findings rather show that other modes of school apprehension should be considered more closely. One example of successful pedagogical approach to the problem is the NyGiv project. The participants who attended these classes highlight how the change of didactics and strengthened guidance and interaction with teachers was instrumental for a newfound self-efficacy in school work which was previously difficult to approach. By way of a context which cultivated a stronger self-efficacy it seems that participants, such as P1 and P6, were also able to identify themselves as constructive members of a social practice. These sentiments were also seen to coincide with Wenger's description of successful social learning (1998). For many of the participants, social learning in carpentering was therefore seen as another example of the value of learning through interaction, with peers with skills that are complimentary in an interchangeable way.

As mentioned, the lack of active participation in education was through analysis revealed to be one of the main points the participants brought forward as an impact on their affective bond to school. However, we also saw that the Norwegian government has had an increased concern for an over-emphasis on abstract school work, which in turn aims to give students access to challenges which are surmountable. The NyGiv project is also highlighted to be a transformative experience by those participants who attended it. Therefore, we can argue that Norwegian school officials highlight and respond to the same issues that the participants put forward during the project. At the same time, a critical pedagogical perspective highlights how alienating tendencies can occur in a context where there is a less coherent dialogic approach between students and authority. Authority can in this case be identified as school, and school institutions. Martin's (2008) highlight of the estrangement which can occur in a societal sense, where students are less concerned with the pursuit of self-development as a goal in itself and are more concerned with the school's consequences for future material

fulfillment, can be one relevant explanatory model to the high rates of school withdrawal in Norwegian upper secondary school to examine further. Therefore, a comprehensive outlook to the distinct aims of Norwegian education policy can be said to be relevant. This is because the different goals of placating the labor market as well as ensuring all students' healthy mental development must be carefully considered in relation to one another. With increased mastery of skill students attain larger self-efficacy and better functioning in groups (Ryan & Deci, 2000), in order to ensure that skill apprehension is further geared toward mental health *as well* as a robust mental development, we can, through the findings in the project, argue that these are points which have relevance for further pedagogical debate about the actual aims of education.

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Attachments

NSD approval

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Vår dato: 02.07.2012

Vår ref:30871 / 3 / MAS

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 18.06.2012. All nødvendig informasjon om prosjektet forelå i sin helhet 28.06.2012. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

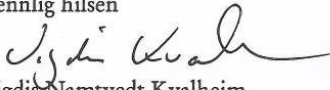
30871	<i>Students' Experiences of the Norwegian School System</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	Universitetet i Bergen, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Kariane Westrheim
Student	Torstein Nielsen Hole

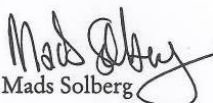
Etter gjennomgang av opplysninger gitt i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon, finner vi at prosjektet ikke medfører meldeplikt eller konsesjonsplikt etter personopplysningslovens §§ 31 og 33.

Dersom prosjektopplegget endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for vår vurdering, skal prosjektet meldes på nytt. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html.

Vedlagt følger vår begrunnelse for hvorfor prosjektet ikke er meldepliktig.

Vennlig hilsen


Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim


Mads Solberg

Kontaktperson: Mads Solberg tlf: 55 58 89 28

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

✓ Kopi: Torstein Nielsen Hole, Bendixensvei 17, 5063 BERGEN

Infoskriv**Forskningsprosjekt om elevers trivsel og beskrivelse av sin egen hverdag i skolen**

Jeg heter Torstein Nielsen Hole, og er en masterstudent i pedagogikk ved Universitetet i Bergen og skal skrive en masteroppgave om elevers egne erfaringer om trivsel i skolen. Forskning viser at trivsel og bånd til skolen kan ha stor betydning for elever. Dette gjelder både resultater og for frafall. For å forstå mer om hva som egentlig er viktig for elever for å oppnå et godt forhold til skolen vil vi i et forskningsprosjekt intervju noen andreårs-elever (VG2) om hvordan de beskriver sin hverdag, og hva som gjør at de trives eller vantrives på skolen.

Informasjonen vil bli brukt i en masteroppgave i pedagogikk som skal ferdigstilles til 15. mai 2013. Etter masteroppgaven er ferdig vil all informasjon fra intervjuene, som ikke er med (og bearbeidet) i oppgaven, slettes. All informasjon (også navn) blir anonymisert fra starten av. Deltakelse er frivillig, men ved å bidra til prosjektet vil vi få verdifull informasjon om et viktig tema. Man kan også trekke seg underveis i prosjektet hvis man ønsker det. Kun jeg og veileder har tilgang til intervjuene.

Spørsmål kan rettes til:

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Interview guide

Written out for ease of use

Formelt:

Du kan avslutte intervjuet når du vil

Ingen navn blir publisert eller lagret

Du kan få e-posten min hvis det er noe du lurer på

Hvilken linje? År? Hva har du gjort før?

Hva gjør du på linjen?

Hvor mange forskjellige lærere/fag har du?

Hvilke fag liker du best? Hvorfor?

Hvordan beskriver elevene well-being, kompetanse og self-efficacy, «being»

Trives du på skolen?

Hva kan gjøres for at du skal trives mer på skolen?

Hva synes du om standarden på skolen? (bygningen og inneklima og sånn)

Når føler du mestring i skolen?

Når føler du at du ikke strekker til på skolen?

Føler du deg passiv noen gang i skolen Hvorfor det?

Hva motiverer deg til å jobbe på skolen? (foreldre/lærere/deg selv)

Noen ganger snakker vi om at en motiverer seg selv fordi en har en egen interesse, et ønske om å klare eller gjøre noe. Har du denne følelsen noen gang?

Har du denne følelsen på skolen noen gang?

Bånd til skolen

Hvordan er forholdet ditt til lærere?

Hører lærere på hva du har å si?

Er det viktig for deg at læreren hører på deg?

Kanskje litt vanskelig: Hva synes du at du er flink i? Hva er du god i? Får du brukt dette på skolen?

Hvordan er forholdet ditt til medelever?

Tar de deg på alvor? Er dette annerledes på skolen og i fritiden?

Overgang til videregående:

Hva er hovedforskjellene mellom Ungdomsskolen og videregående?

Er det et annerledes klassemiljø her enn på ungdomsskolen?

Hvorfor valgte du denne linjen?

Har foreldrene dine noe å si for dette valget?

Angrer du på valget ditt til videregående? Hvorfor?

Hvis andre ikke er motivert til å arbeide i klassen, hvordan forholder du deg til det?

Om 5 år, hva kommer du til å huske best fra tiden din på videregående?
Negativt? Positivt?

Category table**SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE TABLE, UNITS CATEGORIZED BY IMPORTANT INTERVIEW TOPICS AND INDIVIDUAL MEANING**

Participants 1-3

Category	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Social school experiences	Friendly school environment. Several friends in class and social work tasks. Important factor for bond to school.	Friendly school environment. Does not have close personal relations with class mates in spare-time, but get along well with peers.	Friendly school environment. Always fellow students to interact with.
School subjects and confidence in abilities.	Prefers the tangible subjects in school. Dislikes mathematics and theory in general. Dyslexia contributes to this.	Prefers the tangible subjects in school. Confident in own abilities in these subjects. Less confident in theoretical subjects.	Prefers tangible subjects and English. Is more confident in own abilities in these subjects. Very low sense of abilities in other subjects. Dreads classes in some subjects. Also has problems with plenary subjects, becomes very self-conscious in these settings.
Teacher impact on subjective experience.	Teacher contributes to a friendly school environment. Humor and jokes an important factor in this. Promotes clear cut goals, which is preferable.	Current teachers listen to the students but also they allow them to leave early if they are finished with their tasks. This gives a sense of responsibility. Humorous contributes to friendly school atmosphere. No subject – object relationship.	Prefers an assertive and straight-forward teaching style.
Transformative school experiences from past to present.	Prefers upper secondary school. Several disruptive experiences from previous schools especially connected to teachers and peer pressure because of lower school results. Prefers the smaller classes in upper secondary school. Having dyslexia less stressful presently. Several instances of severed bond and uncaring transformed to present day school due to	Prefers upper secondary school. The vocational part of the education an important contributing factor. Linking theoretical and tangible subjects are easier in upper secondary school. A greater sense of freedom for students.	The biggest transformation was connected to the subject matter. Where the tangible and less theory-heavy subjects has made school much more enjoyable. More confident in talking in front of the class due to closer relationships with other students and with teachers. NyGiv was an important help in lower secondary due to more individually adjusted pedagogical

	other subjects and change in social atmosphere. NyGiv gave more teacher-student time and contributed in a positive way in lower secondary school.		methods. A sense of worth arises from working with things that I am actually able to do, even despite difficult circumstances such as weather and terrain.
Parents	Supports school work.	Wants me to do well. Not very well informed about school.	Generally supportive and curious about the education. Mother was surprised in vocational choice because P3 normally has not been particularly interested in outdoor activity.
Possible causes for school-withdrawal.		Can be linked to being tired of theoretical subject matter. Too much "reading" and concerns over examinations (term-papers).	
Future plans	Wants to be a carpenter, looking forward to this.	Getting a formal education very important, if school is not completed may end up in a low status job.	Does not want an office job, using the body is a lot more appealing.

Participants 4-6

Category	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6
Social school experiences	Friendly class-atmosphere. Subject matter is worked with in groups, so if animosity would make it very difficult to complete assignments.	Friendly class-atmosphere. Very different social atmosphere in lower and upper secondary school. Current school is comprised of more like-minded people.	Friendly school environment. Knows all his class-mates well, which has contributed to general enjoyment of school.
School subjects and confidence in abilities.	Likes tangible work, but also enjoy some theory, especially when theory is more directly related to vocational work. A mix is ideal.	The overcoming of challenges connected with vocational work is motivating. The practical education will be most useful in the future. This is because it clearly stood out from previous theory-heavy education in lower secondary school. The sense of “actually accomplishing something” is stronger now. “I have to do something that entails movement”	Dyslexia is an important deterrent for theoretical school subjects. A sense of accomplishment is derived from tangible school work connected to vocational education.
Teacher impact on personal experience.	Generally very important. A more friendly relationship with teachers has directly led to better grades. Alternately severing and attaching bond contingency between lower and upper secondary school. Prefers strict and demanding teachers who also contribute to a positive school environment.	Current teachers contributed to the friendly atmosphere in school. Strictness is only fine when it is combined with humor and a friendly relationship between student and teacher.	Current teachers have contributed to a friendlier atmosphere. Difficulties throughout school with teachers who forget or refrain from accommodating method to dyslexia. Current teachers seem to have taken this more seriously. Gives an increased sense of subjective worth. A strict teacher enhances productivity, but a nice teacher is preferable to a strict one.
Transformative school experiences from past to present.	Only achieved mediocre results in lower secondary school. A low sense of personal abilities in theoretical subjects, especially when comparing to lower secondary class-mates. Eventually led to detachment or uncaring	Cared less about school in lower secondary school. Connected with a repeated inability to meet theoretical demands. Social atmosphere also increased to such a degree that school is far more important part of	Not that much is different between lower and upper secondary school, except the subjects connected to the vocational course which creates a large difference. This is because the new subjects are more practical and

	to school. Is now far more confident in abilities, and scores among the best in class. Joined NyGiv which was a positive change due to closer number ratio between student and teacher and increased mutual peer-assistance.	regular life in upper secondary school.	more concerned with tangible work. Dislikes being physically inactive and this is therefore preferable.
Parents	Interested in school achievements. And regularly inquire about progress.		Parents are interested in school. But they are not involved in a large degree. It might be preferable if the teachers had access to the digital platform which is used to communicate schoolwork and associated information.
Possible causes for school-withdrawal.	An inappropriately high portion of theoretical curriculum for a vocational education creates more drop-outs. Students' expectations for school are larger proportions of practical work.	Students make an uneducated choice, or are at least unprepared for the course they have chosen. This may lead to students starting several different educations and never actually finishing. Difficulty is more connected to interest in a particular education than with ability.	"Boredom" encompassing the results of several experiences in school which weaken the bond to school.
Future plans	Wants to become an engineer. Looks forward to more education, confidence in own abilities in theoretical subjects increased since lower secondary school.	Would not enjoy an office job, therefore happy about vocational education.	Clearly planned ambition to apprentice and become a shutter carpenter like parent.