



PÄIVI SIIVONEN

# From a “Student” to a Lifelong “Consumer” of Education?

CONSTRUCTIONS OF EDUCABILITY  
IN ADULT STUDENTS’ NARRATIVE LIFE HISTORIES

FERA  
FINNISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION



# From a “Student” to a Lifelong “Consumer” of Education?

*Constructions of Educability in Adult  
Students’ Narrative Life Histories*

Päivi Siivonen

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

To be publicly examined and debated, by due permission  
of the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences at the University of Helsinki  
in the Main building, Auditorium XII, Fabianinkatu 33,  
on the 29th of January, 2010, at 12 o’clock.



From a “Student” to a Lifelong “Consumer” of Education?

*Constructions of Educability in Adult  
Students’ Narrative Life Histories*

Finnish Educational Research Association  
Research in Educational Sciences 47

# From a “Student” to a Lifelong “Consumer” of Education?

*Constructions of Educability in Adult  
Students’ Narrative Life Histories*

Päivi Siivonen



# Research in Educational Sciences

Publisher: Finnish Educational Research Association

Editorial Board: Jouni Välijärvi (Chair), Professor, University of Jyväskylä  
Joel Kivirauma, Professor, University of Turku  
Liisa Tainio, Professor, University of Helsinki  
Mailis Salo (Editorial Assistant), Research Amanuensis,  
University of Jyväskylä

The publications published in the series have gone through a referee-system.

Orders: [www.kasvatusalan-tutkimuksia.fi](http://www.kasvatusalan-tutkimuksia.fi)  
Finnish Institute for Educational Research  
Customer services  
P.O. Box 35, FI-40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland  
Phone +358 14 260 3220, fax +358 14 260 3241  
E-mail: [ier-customerservices@ktl.jyu.fi](mailto:ier-customerservices@ktl.jyu.fi)

© Päivi Siivonen and Finnish Educational Research Association

Cover and graphic design: Martti Minkkinen, original photos Petri Loman  
Layout: Taittopalvelu Yliveto Oy

ISBN 978-952-5401-49-3  
ISSN 1458-1094

ISBN 978-952-5401-95-0 (PDF)  
ISSN 2489-768X (PDF)

Printed by Jyväskylä University Press  
Jyväskylä 2010

Electronic version produced by University of Jyväskylä,  
Open Science Centre 2021

## Abstract

SIIVONEN, PÄIVI

From a “Student” to a Lifelong “Consumer” of Education?

Constructions of Educability in Adult Students’ Narrative Life Histories

Finnish Educational Research Association. Research in Educational Sciences 47.

ISSN 1458-1094, ISBN 978-952-5401-49-3

2010

The focus of this study was to examine the constructions of the educable subject of the lifelong learning (LLL) narrative in the narrative life histories of adult students at general upper secondary school for adults (GUSSA). In this study lifelong learning has been defined as a cultural narrative on education, “a system of political thinking” that is not internally consistent, but has contradictory themes embedded within it (Billig et al., 1988). As earlier research has shown and this study also confirms, the LLL narrative creates differences between those who are included and those who fall behind and are excluded from the learning society ideal.

Educability expresses socially constructed interpretations on who benefit from education and who should be educated and how. The presupposition in this study has been that contradictions between the LLL narrative and the so-called traditional constructions of educability are likely to be constructed as the former relies on the all-inclusive interpretation of educability and the latter on the meritocratic model of educating individuals based on their innate abilities. The school system continues to uphold the institutionalized ethos of educability that ranks students into the categories “bright”, “mediocre”, and “poor” (Räty & Snellman, 1998) on the basis of their abilities, including gender-related differences as well as differences based on social class. Traditional age-related norms also persist, for example general upper secondary education is normatively completed in youth and not in adulthood, and the formal learning context continues to outweigh both non-formal and informal learning. Moreover, in this study the construction of social

differences in relation to educability and, thereafter unequal access to education has been examined in relation to age, social class, and gender. The biographical work of the research participants forms a peephole that permits the examination of the dilemmatic nature of the constructions of educability in this study. Formal general upper secondary education in adulthood is situated on the border between the traditional and the LLL narratives on educability: participation in GUSSA inevitably means that one's ability and competence as a student and learner becomes reassessed through the assessment criteria maintained by schools, whereas according to the principles of LLL everyone is educable; everyone is encouraged to learn throughout their lives regardless of age, social class, or gender.

This study is situated in the field of adult education, sociology of education, and social psychological research on educability, having also been informed by feminist studies. Moreover, this study contributes to narrative life history research combining the structural analysis of narratives (Labov & Waletzky, 1997), i.e. mini-stories within life history, with the analysis of the life histories as structural and thematic wholes and the creation of coherence in them; thus, permitting both micro and macro analyses.

On accounting for the discontinuity created by participation in general upper secondary school study in adulthood and not normatively in youth, the GUSSA students construct coherence in relation to their ability and competence as students and learners. The seven case studies illuminate the social differences constructed in relation to educability, i.e. social class, gender, age, and the "new category of student and learner". In the data of this study, i.e. 20 general upper secondary school adult graduates' narrative life histories primarily generated through interviews, two main coherence patterns of the adult educable subject emerge. The first *performance-oriented* pattern displays qualities that are closely related to the principles of LLL. Contrary to the principles of lifewide learning, however, the documentation of one's competence through formal qualifications outweighs non-formal and informal learning in preparation for future change and the competition for fur-



ther education, professional careers, and higher social positions. The second *flexible learning* pattern calls into question the status of formal, especially theoretical and academically oriented education; inner development is seen as more important than such external signs of development – grades and certificates. Studying and learning is constructed as a hobby and as a means to a more satisfactory life as opposed to a socially and culturally valued serious occupation leading to further education and career development. Consequently, as a curious, active, and independent learner, this educable but not readily employable subject is pushed into the periphery of lifelong learning. These two coherence patterns of the adult educable subject illuminate who is to be educated and how. The educable and readily employable LLL subject is to participate in formal education in order to achieve qualifications for working life, whereas the educable but not employable subject may utilize lifewide learning for her/his own pleasure.

Keywords: adult education, general upper secondary school for adults, educability, lifelong learning, narrative life history

## Tiivistelmä

SIIVONEN, PÄIVI

Opiskelijasta elinikäisen koulutuksen kuluttajaksiko? Koulutettavuuden rakentuminen aikuisopiskelijoiden narratiivisissa elämänhistorioissa

Suomen kasvatustieteellinen seura. Kasvatusalan tutkimuksia 47.

ISSN 1458-1094, ISBN 978-952-5401-49-3

2010

Tutkimuksessani tarkastelen kompetentin koulutettavan subjektin rakentumista elinikäisen oppimisen näkökulmasta aikuislukioista valmistuneiden narratiivisissa elämänhistorioissa. Elinikäinen oppiminen määrittyy työssäni kulttuuriseksi koulutuskertomukseksi, ”poliittisen ajattelun järjestelmäksi”, joka ei ole sisäisesti yhtenäinen, vaan johon sisältyy myös ristiriitoja. Vaikka elinikäinen oppiminen on kaikkialla yhteiskunnassa vaikuttava suuri pelastuskertomus, tämä tutkimus osaltaan vahvistaa, että kaikilla ei ole itsestään selvästi pääsyä oppimisyhteiskunnan ideaaliin.

Koulutettavuus määrittyy työssäni tulkinnaksi siitä, kenellä on oikeus koulutukseen ja millaiseen koulutukseen. Työni lähtökohtana on koulutettavuuden tulkintoihin sisältyvä ristiriita elinikäiseen oppimiseen sisältyvän kaikkia koskevan koulutettavuuden ja meritokraattisen yksilön luonnollisiin kykyihin perustuvan koulutettavuuden välillä. Koulujärjestelmä ylläpitää institutionaalista koulutettavuuden eetosta, joka jakaa opiskelijat kykyjensä mukaisiin kategorioihin ”hyvät”, ”keskinkertaiset” ja ”huonot”. Koulutettavuuden eetokseen sisältyvät myös sukupuolen ja sosiaalisen aseman mukaiset julkilausumattomat erottelet. Niin ikään totutut ikäsidonnaiset odotukset tarjoavat normatiivisen mallin, jonka mukaan esimerkiksi lukio käydään nuorena eikä aikuisuudessa. Elinikäisen oppimisen kertomus puolestaan korostaa myös muodollisen koulujärjestelmän ulkopuolella ja myöhemmällä iällä tapahtuvan koulutuksen arvoa. Aikuislukio sijoittuu niin kutsutun perinteisen ja elinikäisen oppimisen koulutettavuuden tulkintojen rajapinnalle, ja oma kyky opiskelijana ja oppijana tulee uudelleen arvioita-

vaksi koulun ylläpitämin arviointikriteerein. Myös oman koulutustien epäjatkuvuutta joudutaan arvioimaan ja selittämään. Tarkastelen tutkimuksessani, miten nämä perusdilemmat jäsentävät aikuisopiskelijoiden koulutuselämänsä merkityksenantoa ja elämäkerrallista työtä.

Tutkimus sijoittuu aikuiskasvatuksen alueelle ja edustaa teoreettisesti ja metodologisesti naistutkimuksesta vaikutteita saanutta narratiivista elämänsähistoriatutkimusta. Tutkimuksella on kytkentöjä kasvatussosiologiaan ja sosiaalipsykologiseen koulutettavuustutkimukseen. Aineiston analyysissä yhdistyy Labovin ja Waletzkyyn rakennemallia hyödyntävä elämänsähistoriaan sisältyvien narratiivien lähiluku sekä jatkuvuuden (koherenssin) rakentumisen analyysi elämänsähistorian kokonaisuudessa, joka mahdollistaa sekä mikro- että makrotason analyysin.

Aikuislukiosta valmistuneet opiskelijat rakentavat elämänsähistoriallista jatkuvuutta suhteessa omaan kykyynsä opiskella ja oppia selittäessään koulutustiensä epäjatkuvuutta. Seitsemän tapaustutkimusta valottaa koulutettavuuteen liittyvien sosiaalisten erojen rakentumista suhteessa sosiaaliluokkaan, sukupuoleen, ikään ja ”uuteen opiskelijan ja oppijan kategoriaan”. Kahdenkymmenen pääasiassa haastatteluin tuotetun aikuislukiosta valmistuneen opiskelijan narratiivisista elämänsähistorioista on tulkittavissa kaksi koulutettavan subjektin jatkuvuuden rakentumisen mallia. Ensimmäisessä *suoritusuuntautuneessa* mallissa jatkuvuus rakentuu läheisessä suhteessa elinikäisen oppimisen periaatteisiin. Kuitenkin vastoin elämänlevyisen oppimisen periaatteita oman pätevyuden osoittaminen muodollisesta koulutuksesta saaduista tutkinnoista rakentuu tärkeämmäksi kuin esimerkiksi työpaikkojen ja kansalaisopistojen kurssit tai arkielämän oppiminen. Toinen *joustavan oppimisen* malli taas kyseenalaistaa teoreettisen ja akateemisen oppimisen arvon: oma kehittyminen rakentuu tärkeämmäksi kuin koulutuksen ulkoiset tunnusmerkit, arvosanat ja tutkinnot. Tällä uteliaalla, aktiivisella ja itsenäisellä oppijalla ei kuitenkaan ole pääsyä elinikäisen oppimisen ideaaliin, vaan oppiminen mahdollistuu harrastuksena ja keinona tyydyttävämpään elämään. Se ei rakennu yhteiskunnallisesti merkityksellisenä toimintana, jonka päämääränä olisivat jatko-opinnot ja urake-

hitys. ”Suoritusuuntautuneen” ja ”joustavan oppimisen” mallit kuvaavat, ketä kannattaa kouluttaa ja miten. Valmius työllistyä on tutkimukseni mukaan oleellinen osa elinikäisen oppimisen ideaalia. Koulutettavan ja työllistettävissä olevan elinikäisen oppimisen subjektin tulee osallistua formaaliin koulutukseen saavuttaakseen tutkintoja työelämää varten, kun taas koulutettava mutta ei työllistettävissä oleva subjekti voi oppia elämänlevyisesti omaksi ilokseen.

Avainsanat: aikuiskasvatus, aikuislukio, koulutettavuus, elinikäinen oppiminen, narratiivi, elämänhistoria

## Acknowledgements

It is my pleasure here to express my debt to all those whose encouragement and support, guidance and advice has been essential for the completion of this book. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Arto Kallioniemi, who initially encouraged me to become a doctoral student. His encouragement was timely and paved the way for academic life. I thank Arto for all the support, guidance, resources, and flexible arrangements that I have been provided with during the research process. Equally, I am thankful for my second supervisor Docent Katri Komulainen. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with you. Your enduring guidance, innovative orientation, and thought-provoking questions and comments at different stages have made this research process a memorable scholarly journey. I am also grateful for the examiners of my dissertation Docent Hannu L. T. Heikkinen and Professor Hannu Rätty. Their thoughtful comments have helped me to improve my work in its final stages.

I also thank Katri Komulainen for the especially enjoyable and stimulating TEET seminar. Under Katri's guidance our small but enthusiastic group gathered together for intensive seminar sessions in 2005–2007 to discuss our work. For these discussions and all the valuable comments I thank first of all Katri as well as my colleagues Maire Antikainen, Pekka Antikainen, Päivi Berg, Kristiina Brunila, Hanna Guttorm, Minna Kelhä, Minna Lähteenmäki, Tarja Lang, Sari

Mononen-Batista Costa, and Silja Rajander. I also thank Maire among other things for enjoyable discussions over a pint.

Furthermore, I thank Arto Kallioniemi for the seminar “Religious Education, Human Values and Ethics” and my colleagues at the seminar, especially, for the methodological discussions at the initial stages of my study. I would also like to thank Professor Elina Lahelma for commenting on my work at different stages as well as for the Kitka seminar. I thank my colleagues at the seminar for the introduction to “feminist knowing”. I also want to thank my research colleagues in the “Narrative club” for the discussions on narrative methodology. Especially I want to thank Ulpukka Isopahkala-Bouret for inspiring discussions on narrative studies. The “Arabica” and “Industringum” communities have been important sites for discussions over lunch. I thank Katariina Hakala, Pirkko Hynninen, and Sirpa Lappalainen and all the other members of the “Arabica” and “Industringum” communities over the years. I also want to thank my long-time community mates Päivi Poukka, Päivi Virtanen, and Sanna Voipio-Huovinen for good company, support, and solidarity. Furthermore, I am thankful to Päivi Virtanen for her comments on the dissertation manuscript in its final stages.

Without the general upper secondary school adult students who participated in this study it would not have been possible to conduct this study. I thank you for sharing your time, thoughts, and life history narratives with me. Equally I am grateful for the support I have got from the principals, the personnel and my ex-colleagues at the general upper secondary school for adults where this study was conducted. The funding from the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the University of Helsinki, and Oskar Öflund’s Foundation has made it possible for me to concentrate full-time on research for which I am grateful. I want to thank Dr. Mark Shackleton for his conscientious proofreading and valuable comments for improving the readability of the text. I also thank Research Amanuensis Mailis Salo for editing the book and Planning Secretary Martti Minkkinen for the cover and graphic design. I want to thank Finnish Educational Research Association for the publication of this work.

I thank my paddling friends Hanna Kortejärvi, Pilvi Pääkkönen, Tapio Saarinen, Jukka Sirén, Päivi Vänskä, Auli Väänänen, and all the others with whom I have shared memorable moments on canoe trips and otherwise over the years. I thank my friends Anu Ahlamo, Markku Luotamo, my goddaughter Kerttu and her big brother Matti most of all for the delightful birthday and other parties that I have had the pleasure to participate in. I also want to thank Mia Spangenberg for long-lasting friendship and inspiring discussions over the years. I thank my father-in-law Päiviö Rauhansalo for support and interest in my research. I also thank Julia, Joonas, and Jemina for bringing liveliness in our home; it has been refreshing amidst scientific ponderings. I thank my parents Eila and Toivo Siivonen for love and support. My father did not live to see this book published, but his encouragement over the years was steadfast. I dedicate this book to his memory. And finally, my dear husband Juha. Thank you for being there during the ups and downs of this research process and sharing everyday life with me.

Helsinki, 1<sup>st</sup> of November, 2009,

*Päivi Siivonen*





# Contents

|       |                                                                               |     |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1     | INTRODUCTION.....                                                             | 21  |
| 2     | GENERAL UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL<br>FOR ADULTS (GUSSA).....                     | 28  |
| 2.1   | Contextualizing GUSSA in the Field of Finnish<br>Adult Education .....        | 28  |
| 2.2   | Local School Culture.....                                                     | 32  |
| 3     | THE CULTURAL NARRATIVE OF LIFELONG<br>(AND LIFEWIDE) LEARNING (LLL) .....     | 38  |
| 3.1   | Coping with Uncertainty and Societal Change.....                              | 42  |
| 3.2   | Totalization of Learning .....                                                | 45  |
| 3.3   | The Educable Subject of the Lifelong Learning<br>Narrative .....              | 50  |
| 3.4   | The Fear of Falling Behind.....                                               | 53  |
| 4     | LIFELONG AND LIFEWIDE DILEMMAS OF<br>EDUCABILITY.....                         | 58  |
| 4.1   | The Dilemma of Getting Formal General Education<br>in Adulthood and LLL ..... | 63  |
| 4.2   | The Dilemma of the Institutionalized Ethos of<br>Educability and LLL.....     | 71  |
| 5     | THE NARRATIVE LIFE HISTORY APPROACH.....                                      | 82  |
| 5.1   | Generating the Data.....                                                      | 83  |
| 5.2   | Narrative Life History Interview.....                                         | 88  |
| 5.3   | Positionings and Further Reflections on<br>Ethical Issues .....               | 96  |
| 5.4   | Interpreting Narrative Life Histories.....                                    | 102 |
| 5.4.1 | Narrative .....                                                               | 103 |
| 5.4.2 | Life History .....                                                            | 109 |
| 5.4.3 | The Creation of Coherence in Narrative<br>Life History .....                  | 111 |

|       |                                                                                  |     |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 6     | CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE EDUCABLE SUBJECT<br>IN GUSSA NARRATIVE LIFE HISTORIES ..... | 119 |
| 6.1   | Narratives on Educability and Social Class.....                                  | 122 |
| 6.1.1 | Achieving the “Cap” in Adulthood .....                                           | 122 |
|       | Comprehensive School .....                                                       | 122 |
|       | The Importance of Practical Training and<br>Getting a Trade.....                 | 129 |
|       | General Upper Secondary School for Adults .....                                  | 135 |
|       | Kaarina’s Story about Mathematics .....                                          | 139 |
|       | Concluding Summary.....                                                          | 142 |
| 6.1.2 | Developing Oneself All Life Long and Wide.....                                   | 145 |
|       | Lifewide Learning at Work .....                                                  | 147 |
|       | General Upper Secondary School for Adults .....                                  | 149 |
|       | Concluding Summary.....                                                          | 155 |
| 6.2   | Narratives on Gendered Differences of Educability.....                           | 157 |
| 6.2.1 | Healthy Normality and Healthy Laziness.....                                      | 157 |
|       | Comprehensive school.....                                                        | 158 |
|       | Educability and General Upper Secondary<br>School Choice .....                   | 166 |
|       | The Regret for Dropping Out of General<br>Upper Secondary School.....            | 171 |
|       | General Upper Secondary School for Adults .....                                  | 173 |
|       | Bright or Poor? .....                                                            | 176 |
|       | Matriculation Examination.....                                                   | 180 |
|       | Further Education: Vocational School,<br>Polytechnic, or University?.....        | 184 |
|       | Concluding Summary.....                                                          | 188 |
| 6.2.2 | The Story of a Transfer Woman.....                                               | 191 |
|       | Substitute Doings – Informal, Non-formal,<br>and Formal Learning .....           | 197 |
|       | Reflections on Teacher-Student Relations and<br>Learning Mathematics .....       | 201 |
|       | Grades and Scholarships .....                                                    | 204 |
|       | Women Studying and Working .....                                                 | 207 |
|       | My Own Thing.....                                                                | 208 |
|       | Concluding Summary.....                                                          | 211 |

|       |                                                 |     |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 6.3   | Narratives on Educability and Age.....          | 214 |
| 6.3.1 | What Will I Be When I Grow Up? .....            | 214 |
|       | The Curious Child.....                          | 215 |
|       | The Reluctant Teenager.....                     | 218 |
|       | Learning in Different Learning Contexts .....   | 220 |
|       | The New Adult Learner .....                     | 225 |
|       | The White Cap with a Golden Rim .....           | 234 |
|       | Concluding Summary.....                         | 236 |
| 6.3.2 | Learning on the Edge of Working Life.....       | 238 |
|       | Curiosity and Desire to Learn in Different      |     |
|       | Learning Contexts .....                         | 242 |
|       | The Meaning of Studying “at this age” .....     | 248 |
|       | Who is the Educable GUSSA Student?.....         | 253 |
|       | Age and Learning.....                           | 254 |
|       | Good and Bad Students.....                      | 256 |
|       | Narratives on Mathematics .....                 | 260 |
|       | Grades and Qualifications.....                  | 269 |
|       | Concluding Summary.....                         | 273 |
| 6.4   | New Category of Student and Learner – Diagnosed |     |
|       | as Educable.....                                | 275 |
|       | From General Upper Secondary School Study       |     |
|       | to Vocational Studies .....                     | 282 |
|       | Learning to Learn in General Upper Secondary    |     |
|       | School for Adults .....                         | 283 |
|       | On the Road to Myself .....                     | 288 |
|       | Concluding Summary.....                         | 288 |
| 7     | CONCLUSION .....                                | 291 |
| 7.1   | The Coherence Patterns of the GUSSA Students’   |     |
|       | Narrative Life Histories .....                  | 291 |
| 7.2   | Questions of Validity and Generalization of     |     |
|       | the Results .....                               | 300 |
| 8     | DISCUSSION.....                                 | 304 |
|       | References .....                                | 311 |
|       | Appendices.....                                 | 326 |



# 1

## Introduction

*The spring before starting school in the autumn (...) I've said in a dream that this is not a dream (whispers), this time it's really true that I've come here (...), the feelings been terribly positive and (...) everybody's clapping their hands and welcoming me (...), they come and tap me on the back (...) 'oh cool that you're here and we knew that you'd be coming back', you know, those who then stayed there [in the general upper secondary school in her youth that the narrator interrupted after one semester], it was like ten years afterwards but still those same guys were there (...). I've had such dreams and then the thing that in the dream I've also said that this is really not a dream and that I've dreamt that I'd be coming back to upper secondary school but that now I'm not dreaming (...) and then I wake up (...) and the feeling when you wake up, it's always been kind of nasty, really wistful, a bit sad. (...) I no longer have those dreams (laughter) (...) I had those dreams perhaps once a year (...) after dropping out. (Helena,<sup>1</sup> female aged 29.)*

Educability expresses socially constructed interpretations on who benefit from education and who should be educated and how (Häyrynen & Hautamäki, 1973). These interpretations do not travel unchanged

---

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the report pseudonyms are used for the research participants.

through time and space. They alternate, acquiring their expression in the concurrent socio-cultural and historical circumstances. They move from modernity to post-modernity or the so-called new economy. For all these reasons an all-inclusive interpretation of educability has been thought necessary. So instead of relying on the meritocratic model of educating individuals based on their innate abilities, everyone is considered educable and the development of everyone’s potential is needed in order to maintain and improve our standard of living (see Dohmen, 1998).

This change in the interpretation of educability can be connected with the historical trends that Yrjö-Paavo Häyrynen and Jarkko Hautamäki (1973, pp. 10–11) have noted in educational policy making. According to them there is a demand that the increased competence, skills, and intelligence of the workforce correspond to the level of technological developments. Moreover, the demand for increasingly generalized abilities and skills should facilitate increased co-operation within a workplace. What is needed today is “multi-skilled individuals who advance on their individual study paths, who have some general qualifications for working life and who are equipped to adjust to continuous change” (Filander, 2007, p. 269).

The lifelong learning narrative has emerged as a salvation programme and a strategy for survival to cope with the societal change and the uncertainties of the future (see Filander, 2007, p. 262). The grand narrative of lifelong learning emphasizes everyone’s need and possibility to learn throughout their lives by taking advantage of different learning contexts – formal institutes, non-formal courses at the workplace, clubs and associations as well as informal learning in everyday life – according to her or his needs and desires. Lifelong learning acknowledges equal learning opportunities and the importance of learning in all contexts and for all kinds of people regardless of age, social class, or gender. Everyone is capable of learning and getting education if they only wish to do so. A positive attitude towards learning is the key to lifelong learning. In order to cope with the uncertainties of the future, learning has become an obligation as well as an opportunity.

My interest in examining educability and lifelong learning in the

context of general upper secondary school for adults has emerged through the data. On reading the data more closely we noticed that narrators frequently reflect upon their ability and competence as students and learners. Despite the equality rhetoric of the lifelong learning (LLL) narrative, one's ability and competence as a student and learner was not self-evident, but one's educability was questioned and needed to be proved over and over again through the grading system maintained by schools. This led to the focus of this study: constructions of educability, i.e. the principles of lifelong learning for all and how they are being constructed in the narrative life histories of general upper secondary school adult students.

This study is based on the presupposition that the constructions of educability may be contradictory as the school system continues to uphold the institutionalized ethos of educability that ranks students into such categories as “bright”, “mediocre”, and “poor” (Räty & Snellman, 1998; see also Snellman & Räty, 1992) on the basis of their abilities, including gender-related differences (e.g. male and female abilities) as well as differences based on social class (e.g. theoretical and practical skills). Traditional age-related norms (e.g. general upper secondary education is normatively completed in youth and not in adulthood) in relation to educability also persist and the formal learning context continues to outweigh both non-formal and informal learning. Moreover, in this study the social differences of educability and, thereafter unequal access to education (see Anthias, 2005), are examined in relation to age, social class, and gender. The biographical work of the research participants in their accounts of completing general upper secondary school study in adulthood forms a peephole that permits the examination of the dilemmatic nature of the constructions of educability in this study. General upper secondary school study which is part of the Finnish educational system (see Appendix 1) and is “normally” completed in youth is especially fruitful for examining the dilemmas between the traditional constructions of educability and the grand narrative of lifelong learning. Participation in general upper secondary school study in adulthood inevitably means that one's ability and competence as a stu-

dent and learner becomes reassessed through the assessment criteria maintained by schools, whereas according to the principles of lifelong learning everyone is educable; everyone is encouraged to learn from cradle to grave. Such formal education in adulthood, then, is situated on the border between so-called traditional and new narratives of educability, where the traditional may persist or break, giving way to lifelong learning constructions of educability.

There is, then, a curious tension between the seemingly atypical nature of participating in formal general education in adulthood and not normatively in youth and the institutionalized ethos of educability determining “who is entitled to what kind of education” (Räty & Snellman, 1998) in relation to the grand narrative of lifelong and lifewide learning. This narrative emphasizes everyone’s need and possibility to learn all their lives taking advantage of different learning contexts according to their needs and desires. This is considered an obligation, a necessity; in order to succeed in life, and to retain full citizenship (see Koski & Moore, 2001; Silvennoinen, Tulkki, & Honkanen, 1998) an individual has to be ready to learn all her/his life. Not participating in general upper secondary school study normatively in youth and the atypical participation in such study in adulthood results in a ‘gap’. This lack of formal general upper secondary education in adulthood can be seen as a type of discontinuity that, according to Charlotte Linde (1993, p. 152), must be evaluated and explained; it cannot simply be left without any further comment. In other words there is a need for the narrator to create coherence between the past and the present to prove her/his competence in the present, i.e. the moment of the interview. Narrating one’s life history, thus, becomes a resource for the narrator in establishing a desired self, i.e. that of a competent student and learner. The competent educable subject of GUSSA students’ narrative life histories is constructed using different coherence principles (see the discussion on coherence below in 5.4.3). These principles include educational narratives available in the social and cultural context, and currently the most powerful and pervasive of these is the grand narrative of lifelong learning. The focus of this study is to examine constructions of the



competent educable subject, including possible contradictions, in relation to the educational narrative of LLL.

This study is situated in the field of adult education (e.g. Alheit & Dausien, 2002a, 2002b; Fejes, 2005, 2006; Filander, 2007; Koski & Moore, 2001; Moore, 2003; Tuomisto, 1998, 2002, 2004), sociology of education (e.g. Antikainen & Huotelin, 1996; Koski, 2004; Popkewitz, Olsson, & Petersson, 2006), and social psychology research on educability (e.g. Häyrynen & Hautamäki, 1973; Komulainen, 1998; Rätty, 1993, 2001, 2006; Rätty & Snellman, 1991, 1998; Walkerdine, 1998; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). Moreover, this study contributes to narrative life history research (e.g. Labov & Waletzky, 1997; Labov, 1972, 1982, 1997; Linde, 1993; Miettinen, 2006; Mishler, 1986, 1990; Riessman 1993, 2004a, 2004b) and is also informed by feminist studies (e.g. Käyhkö, 2006; Lahelma, 2003, 2004, 2005; Reay, 1998, 2005, 2006; Skeggs, 1997a, 1997b, 2005). The data for this study were generated in a general upper secondary school for adults in the capital area, approximately 3–4 months after the participants' graduation from there in 2004–2005, generated in four different phases. The data consist narrative life history interviews of 20 (15 female and 5 male representing the age range of under 30-year-olds to over 60-year-olds) general upper secondary school adult graduates based on the participants' written narratives and life-lines as well as on (semi-structured) themes (Appendix 5) common to all participants. On interpreting the data I have applied the structural approach for analysing personal narratives modelled by William Labov and Joshua Waletzky (Labov & Waletzky, 1997; Labov, 1972, 1982, 1997). Besides the individual narratives, i.e. 'mini-stories' within the life histories I have read the life histories as structural and thematic wholes, interpreting how narrators construct coherence in telling about their lives. On interpreting the data the following research questions were examined:

1. How do the participants account for the discontinuity in their life histories created by the participation in general upper secondary school study in adulthood? What kinds of coherence

- patterns are constructed in order to account for such discontinuity?
2. What kind of an educable subject is constructed in these accounts? Do the constructions of educability have qualities of traditional constructions of educability or lifelong learning?
  3. Are the social differences of educability in relation to age, social class, and gender constructed in these accounts? If so, how are these social differences of educability constructed?
  4. Is educability outside the formal learning context that would challenge the traditional constructions of educability constructed?
  5. What kinds of contradictions between the traditional constructions of educability and lifelong learning are constructed?

This study is in eight parts. After the introduction to the purpose of this study, the context of the general upper secondary school for adults, how it is situated in the field of Finnish adult education as well as its specific characteristics and the local school culture are examined in part 2. In part 3 the cultural narrative of lifelong (and lifewide) learning is discussed, including arguments for the necessity of lifelong and lifewide learning for all as well as the construction of the educable subject of the lifelong learning narrative. Part 4 examines the dilemmas between lifelong and lifewide learning in relation to the traditional constructions of educability. Constructions of social differences in relation to educability including age, social class, and gender are discussed. Age and learning context as well as the institutionalized ethos of educability that ranks students into the categories “bright”, “mediocre”, and “poor” are examined. Part 4 illuminates the research design together with the research questions for interpreting the data. In part 5 the methodology of this study, i.e. the narrative life history approach is discussed. Points covered include researcher positions, generating the data, narrative life history interviews, reflections on ethical issues, as well as the three main methodological concepts, namely narrative, life history, and coherence, for interpreting the data. In part 6 the results of this study are reported,

with a special emphasis on constructions of the educable subject in GUSSA narrative life histories in relation to the traditional constructions of educability on the one hand and the lifelong learning narrative on the other. Part 7 summarizes the two main coherence patterns found in GUSSA students' narrative life histories and also examines questions of validity and the generalization of the results. Finally, the results of this study are discussed in part 8.

# 2

## General Upper Secondary School for Adults (GUSSA)

### 2.1 Contextualizing GUSSA in the Field of Finnish Adult Education

This study is concerned with the general upper secondary school for adults in Finland, an institute that provides formal general education for adults of all ages. So far studies concerning the general upper secondary school for adults have been extremely scarce in Finland.<sup>2</sup> General upper secondary education is situated in a field of adult education that has adopted the principles of lifelong learning as its objective for future development. The Finnish National Board of Education<sup>3</sup> has defined the objective of adult education in Finland as follows:

The objective of adult education in Finland is to support lifelong learning among the citizens and to develop society's coherence and equality. Furthermore, it aims to ensure that workforce is

---

<sup>2</sup> Arto Kallioniemi (2000) has examined the "Adult senior school students' beliefs concerning religious and history education" and Jyrki Jokinen's (2002) PhD study on "The identity of a teacher for adults" partly concerned general upper secondary school for adults together with adult education centres and adult education institutes.

<sup>3</sup> The Finnish National Board of Education (n.d.a).

available and trade skills are developed, to support raising the employment rate and covering the deficit in skills brought on by retirement.

In practical terms, Finnish adult education can be divided into general and vocational education, which both include studies leading to qualifications and so-called subject studies, i.e. individual courses in some subject(s) that do not lead to qualifications. General education is provided in general upper secondary schools and in liberal adult education institutes like adult education centres, workers' institutes, folk high schools, and summer universities. (Kumpulainen, 2007, pp. 18–19.) There are around 1000 educational institutions in Finland providing adult education, but only some that specialize solely in adult education, general upper secondary schools for adults being one such institution. Adult education is primarily provided within the normal educational system (see the Education System Chart in Appendix 1), including universities, polytechnics, vocational schools, and also “normal” general upper secondary schools; or outside educational institutions, in work places, organized by employers. Much of it is directly connected to work and occupational skills but some may also be purely evocative. (Finnish National Board of Education, see footnote 3.)

As mentioned above general upper secondary school adult students can either aim at getting the general upper secondary school certificate and/or passing the matriculation examination, i.e. the school leaving exam of the Finnish upper secondary school, or take courses in individual subjects. Students have the possibility of taking the matriculation examination after completing the compulsory upper secondary school courses or alternatively they can take it based on former vocational qualifications. The matriculation examination is taken in at least four subjects and it is the same for all general upper secondary school students and it is taken simultaneously in all Finnish schools. Graduation from general upper secondary school and passing the matriculation examination is the most common route towards polytechnics and universities (Vuorio-Lehti, 2006, p. 20). General upper secondary schools

for adults also provide the possibility of studying individual subject syllabi and improving grades in subjects completed earlier. Individual general upper secondary schools for adults also specialize in specific courses, e.g. comprehensive school courses including the optional 10<sup>th</sup> grade, language courses, and “computer driving licence” courses or in the instruction of specific adult target groups, e.g. immigrants, prisoners, school dropouts, etc. It is also possible to take summer courses and to study through distance learning. The so-called “double certificate”, i.e. an upper secondary school certificate together with a vocational certificate, has been made possible through co-operation with vocational schools. (Evening Schools Association, 2007; Finnish National Board of Education, see footnote 3; Hallikainen et al., 2002.)

Education has traditionally been highly valued in Finland, and participation rates in adult education are among the highest in the Nordic countries (Rubenson, 2007) as well as in comparison to other OECD countries (Rinne, 2004, p. 235). Participation in adult education has continued to increase and in 2000 more than half of 18–64-year-old adults participated in adult education (The Statistics of Finland in Rinne, 2004, p. 234; see also Ministry of Education, 2002). This is 5 % more than in 1995 and twice as much as in 1980 (*ibid*). However, the ‘them-who-has-gets’ pattern of adult education, meaning that those who already have education also attend adult education, has been repeatedly shown by research (Rinne, 2004, p. 234; Tuomisto, 1998). This means that those who are well-educated, employed, in high socio-economic positions, and at the optimum working age are the most likely participants in adult education in Finland; the most cited reason being work-based (Rinne, 2004, pp. 234–235).

The unequal participation rates are seen as a societal problem (see Rinne, 2004). However, non-participants are being encouraged to further their education through such programmes as the Noste Programme<sup>4</sup> launched by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and social partners in 2003. The Noste Pro-

---

<sup>4</sup> Noste-aikuisten koulutustason kohottamisohjelma [The Noste programme for raising the level of education and training among the adult population] (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

gramme has united 600 education providers, including general upper secondary schools for adults, with the purpose of raising the level of education and training among the adult population. This programme aims “to improve poorly trained adults’ career prospects and satisfaction at work, to relieve the labour shortages due to the exit of the large post-war age groups from the labour market and to raise the employment rate”. It is “mainly intended for working adults aged between 30 and 59 who have no post-compulsory qualifications” and for the age bracket 25–59 “[it] can also be used to support people in completing their basic education”. According to the Finnish National Board of Education (see footnote 3) “Completion of upper secondary education is considered to be the minimum requirement for performance in working life and life-long learning”.

The Noste programme is a practical example of the current lifelong learning policy in Finland. Despite its emphasis on the provision of vocational qualifications for those adults who lack them, the general knowledge provided by general upper secondary school for adults is most evidently also seen as important for ensuring individual and societal success in the labour market and, thus, for its part ensuring Finland’s economic competitiveness. Despite the LLL narrative, however, Pekka (male aged 32), a participant in this study who officially belongs to the Noste target group of “working adults aged between 30 and 59 who have no post-compulsory qualifications” before completing his GUSSA study, evaluates the LLL narrative as not accessible for everyone. According to him: “*During the adult education campaign week, especially, it may be said how important it is [to study], but after that it’s not. Anyway, I don’t take society’s support for studying very seriously at the moment (...), they just say go ahead and study and so on but in practice not everyone has the kind of chance to do that*”. He also posits that one has to find one’s own sense of purpose for studying in GUSSA as it is officially defined as “leisure activity”. He evaluates: “*You have to find the value for the evening upper secondary yourself, ’cause you are not going to get it anywhere else. It’s seen as nothing. It’s like your own leisure activity like it was said somewhere (...) ’cause it doesn’t prepare you for a trade (...). Then*

*again I think quite a few would be better off if they first went to upper secondary school (...) instead of trying out some school without the skills needed for studying there".* Unlike the "normal" general upper secondary school, studying in GUSSA is not considered full-time study, which affects the available social benefits (The Social Insurance Institute of Finland, 2009).

Today there are around 50 institutes specializing in general upper secondary education for adults in over 40 municipalities in Finland. In 2005 there were 12 100 adult students (Kumpulainen, 2007) engaged in getting general upper secondary qualifications as well as an increasing number of students engaged with individual subject syllabi, i.e. taking individual courses in some subject(s) (Jääskeläinen, 2007). Among the former group about sixty percent of the students are female. The total percentage of all students has remained about the same during the period 2001–2005, diminishing from 11.5 % in 2001 to 10.3 % in 2005. (Kumpulainen, 2007, pp. 28–30.) About eight percent of the matriculation examinations in 2003 were generated in general upper secondary schools for adults (The Statistics of Finland/Matriculation Examinations, 2003). For students the schooling is free of charge, except for subject studies, and the entrance is not limited for those of age. The age limit of 18 can be lowered under special circumstances. (Finnish National Board of Education, see footnote 3.)

## **2.2 Local School Culture**

As stated in the introduction, general upper secondary education for adults is situated on the border between so-called traditional and lifelong learning constructions of educability. One's ability and competence as a student and learner becomes reassessed through the assessment criteria, i.e. the institutionalized ethos of educability, maintained by schools, while simultaneously the all-inclusive interpretation of educability enhanced by lifelong learning is also present in locally shared meanings and interpretations, i.e. the local school culture (Gubrium &



Holstein, 1995, pp. 50–51; Komulainen, 1998, pp. 237–240). Even though they are mutually contradictory, both interpretations of educability are part of local school culture and, thus, act as resources for the research participants in telling about their lives and in constructing meanings for studying and learning.

The national curriculum of general upper secondary school education for adults (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004, p. 20) defines “school culture” as the “practical interpretation of the adult education institute’s teaching and educational task” including “the institute’s formal and informal ways of acting, behavioural models as well as values and criteria that the quality of teaching is based on”. Furthermore, it is stated that “All the practices within an educational institute are constructed to support the targets that have been set for teaching” (ibid). In reference to the traditional and lifelong learning constructions of educability this means that whereas the institutionalized ethos of educability can be detected as being more overtly present in school practices, for example, in the form of class-tests and the matriculation examination, the principles of lifelong learning are more difficult to grasp. However, as will be shown below, lifelong learning principles of educability are also implicitly or explicitly stated in the national curriculum of general upper secondary school education for adults (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004) as well as other documents concerning general upper secondary education for adults. My own subjective experience of working in a general upper secondary school for adults also confirms the existence of what could be called ‘the spirit of lifelong learning’, a spirit that, I would like to argue, is strongly present and constructed on a daily basis, for example in teacher talk. It is easily sensed but more difficult to point to in practice.

General upper secondary schools for adults have been in existence in Finland for over eighty years. The first, Helsingin suomalaisen yksityislyseon iltalinja (Helsinki Finnish-speaking Private Lyceum Evening Classes), nowadays Töölön yhteiskoulun aikuislukio (Töölö General Upper Secondary School for Adults) was established in 1927 by Yrjö and Hilma Jahnsson in order to provide studying opportunities for

those who had had to interrupt their education on account of WWI. (Salomaa, 2002, pp. 7–22.) The change of name in 1992 from general upper secondary evening school to general upper secondary school for adults switched the emphasis to age and a special target group; i.e. education for adults (Ministry of Education, 1992, p. 32 in Kallioniemi, 2000). Despite or should I say because of the cultural heritage established over its 80-year-long history, “general upper secondary schools for adults have been in the foreground in creating flexible and individualized study programmes and in implementing lifelong learning in practice”, as stated in the report of the committee devising a development programme for upper secondary adult education (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 20). Course-based general upper secondary studying and the recognition of prior learning are examples of these innovations (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 20; Paakkunainen, 2002, pp. 34–40). In line with lifelong learning the curriculum of general upper secondary school education for adults has provided flexibility in taking into consideration the demands of the rapidly changing working life and the need to constantly update and renew one’s working skills and knowledge-base (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 20). Moreover, the afore-mentioned development committee report states that the special task in educational policy in the field of general education for adults has been to offer a “second chance” to gain on education for those adults who did not have the possibility, interest or maturity to acquire sufficient education in childhood or youth. General upper secondary schools for adults and other institutes offering general education for adults provide flexibility and, thus, also equal opportunities to gain an education as well as provide an effective educational system. These institutes make it possible to study alongside work. This possibility prevents exclusion and creates opportunities for studying also when it is especially challenging. (Ibid, p. 20.)

Similarly, in line with the principles of lifelong learning in an adult secondary school brochure (Evening Schools Association, 2003), studying in the general upper secondary school for adults is defined as being for “*everyone* interested in general education that leads to qualifications”

(my emphasis). Furthermore, it is stated that “Studying is no longer only part of childhood and youth, but instead it continues throughout life. It is possible to start studies even after starting in working life”. Referring to students’ experiences and research, it is emphasized in the brochure that learning is not merely for the young: “One’s ability to learn even demanding tasks remains until old age. (...) Many pensioners, for example, study foreign languages and get different kinds of diplomas, e.g. the matriculation examination certificate”. Under the heading “One’s ability to learn depends on various things” adulthood is described as good a stage in life as any for studying:

An adult person, better than a young person, is able to organize her/his studies and to cope with different kinds of difficulties that one often faces during the studies. One’s ability to learn is best preserved by continuous study. After getting started, studying becomes part of one’s life; success in one’s studies motivates life-long learning. (Evening Schools Association, 2003.)

Studying in the general upper secondary school for adults is encouraged as a useful leisure activity as well as a way of acquiring the basic knowledge needed in vocational training. It is also a route to polytechnics and universities and provides opportunities for those who have interrupted their studies earlier. As stated at the beginning of the brochure: *It is for everyone.*

The national curriculum of general upper secondary school education for adults (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004) is an adapted version of that for young people aged 16–19. It has been devised to take into account the needs of adult students in different ways. The number of compulsory courses (44 out of the 75 that are compulsory for young people) and the length of the courses and lessons have been reduced. The lessons are often held in the evening (although not exclusively) and, as mentioned above, general upper secondary schools for adults were the first to apply course-based general upper secondary studying in Finland (Paakkunainen, 2002, pp. 34–40). The

completion of comprehensive school education or the corresponding syllabi is a prerequisite for entering a general upper secondary school for adults. (Finnish National Board of Education, see footnote 3.) In 2005 34 % of the students entering general upper secondary school adult study had completed a post-comprehensive school degree, most often in vocational school (Kumpulainen, 2007, p. 30).

The national curriculum of general upper secondary school education for adults (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004) supports a lifelong learning policy. It defines its task as giving the student the possibility of increasing her/his general knowledge in order to improve basic vocational skills, increasing her/his learning skills and possibilities for further education, improving the preconditions of success in working life, strengthening active citizenship and entrepreneurship, preventing social exclusion, and finally creating conditions for positive learning experiences that improve self-esteem, self-knowledge, and encourage personal growth. In the general principles for teaching it is also stated that “the student’s need and desire for lifelong learning should be strengthened” (ibid, p. 15). Studying, working, and well-being are seen as interlinked.

The aim is that the student’s own life management skills and her/his studying, career and other future plans become possible. (...) Teaching should encourage the student to understand studying as work and knowledge and skills as the basis for well-being. (...) The aim is that studying helps the student to confront the challenges of the changing world more creatively and flexibly than before. (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004, p. 15.)

Besides these principles that are closely linked with the lifelong learning policy (see e.g. Ministry of Education, 1997, 2002), the national curriculum emphasizes such humanistic values of education as respect for life and human rights, truth, humaneness, justice and democracy.

Albeit learning is seen as the “the result of a student’s active and goal-oriented activity” as well as being constructed “in interaction with other

students, the teacher and the surroundings” (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004, p. 7), individual responsibility is emphasized in the overall learning process. After all “What is learned depends on the individual’s prior knowledge and on her/his learning strategies”. Furthermore, in the national curriculum of the general upper secondary school education for adults it is stated that “as a learner an adult student constructs her/his learning based on life experience, on prior knowledge and skills, and possibly on concurrent studies” (ibid, p. 5). Studying in different kinds of life situations is encouraged by offering a wide range of optional courses. The personal curriculum should be based on a student’s prior education and work experience should be flexibly and individually applied. Even though everyone is considered educable, it is important to take into consideration “the diversity of adult students’ backgrounds” (ibid, p. 5). Adult students’ life experiences are seen as a special resource in teaching adults, but as “students’ ability to study independently varies”, the teacher is needed as a tutor for ‘learning to learn’. Basic skills for acquiring and evaluating knowledge through information technology are seen as especially important. (Ibid.)

Finnish general upper secondary education for adults has followed Western educational policy trends (see the discussion in part 3) and taken as its mission to enhance lifelong learning. This is not surprising as a lifelong learning policy places special emphasis on adult education on the whole. The changing meaning of work and the need for multi-skilled individuals blurs the traditional division between vocational and general education. A firm knowledge base acquired in general education is seen as important in changing work tasks. Alongside the “traditional” institutionalized ethos of educability, lifelong learning has become part of the locally defined school culture. To what extent and how it materializes in the narrative life histories of general upper secondary school adult students as they construct meanings for studying and learning remains to be seen in part 6.

# 3

## The Cultural Narrative of Lifelong (and Lifewide) Learning (LLL)

The origins of lifelong learning (LLL) are commonly traced back to the 60s and 70s; its antecedents being lifelong education or recurrent education/continuing education (see e.g. Tuomisto, 2002<sup>5</sup>). However, the interest in lifelong learning peaked in the 90s being once again adopted “with the suddenness of a new fashion” (Field, 2006, pp. 11–17). According to Peter Alheit and Bettina Dausien (2002b), the concept of lifelong learning has been adopted with an astonishing political consensus in the postindustrial societies of the western hemisphere at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Adopting lifelong learning as the guiding principle of all education (Commission of the European Communities, 2000, p. 3 in Alheit & Dausien, 2002b) has been called “a paradigm shift” (Alheit & Dausien, 2002b, p. 216), “a new educational order” (Field, 2000, 2006), “the silent explosion” (ibid, 2006, p. 4), “a new global planetspeak discourse” (Nóvoa, 2002), and “a universal discourse” (Tuomisto, 2002) that not only influences the workforce but most people’s lives. As Andreas Fejes (2006, p. 698) argues, it is “a way of reasoning that seems to have no structural roots, no social locations and no origin” and it is “put forward as a remedy to keep the individual

---

<sup>5</sup> For a review of the development of the concept lifelong learning see e.g. Field, 2001, 2006; Tuomisto, 2002, 2004.

nations, and the European Union, in the forefront of education, research, economy, etc.” (p. 697). Having started in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a policy narrative, a strategy to cope with the so-called new economy, lifelong learning has spread to all spheres of life (see e.g. Ball, 2007; Popkewitz, Olsson, & Petersson, 2006; Tuschling & Engemann, 2006). It has become the most important and influential cultural narrative on education that concerns society as a whole, educational and other institutions as well as individuals (Alheit & Dausien, 2002b).

The LLL narrative entails a firm belief in education and the view that an individual has endless opportunities and capabilities to learn according to her/his needs and desires as long as s/he adopts the right attitude – desire and determination – i.e. the key to lifelong learning (e.g. European Commission, 2000). Learning as such is seen as the solution to both societal and individual problems (see e.g. Crowther, 2004; Fejes, 2006). Arto Jauhiainen and Marika Alho-Malmelin (2004, p. 459) use the metaphor of religion to illustrate the “strong faith in the power of education to create and maintain many kinds of progress in society: social cohesion and order, economic growth, equality, justice, etc.” According to them, “Education as a great tale of development is becoming the great tale of salvation through learning and knowing in a risk society tinted with threats and continuous change” (p. 463).

In this study the concepts *grand narrative* and *cultural narrative/collective account of education* are used interchangeably in relation to lifelong learning. Lifelong learning as a collective account of education is seen as a resource for making sense of the self and one’s life as the participants in this study account for their lives. Accordingly, Fejes (2005, 2006) sees the concept of lifelong learning as a linguistic construction, though he also sees it as a neo-liberal rationality of governing subjects. I acknowledge the grand narrative of LLL being the most essential principle of the educational policy of our time, i.e. a structure limiting our subjective choices, but simultaneously I also see it as a resource among other resources for telling about one’s life, a point I shall return to in parts 4 and 5. Having been informed by social constructionist thinking, I argue that within the limitations of structure, i.e. the socio-historical

and cultural context we live in, subjective meanings are constructed within individual biographies (see Alheit & Dausien, 2002b; see also the discussion in 5.4), and within the individual construction of meanings the grand narrative of LLL acts as a resource for the narrator in telling about her/his life. As Beverly Skeggs (1997b, p. 29) posits, “Knowing is always mediated through the discourses available to us to interpret and understand our experiences”.

By referring to lifelong learning as a collective account of education, I do not wish to argue that the narrative of lifelong learning would be univocal. Similarly, Michael Billig and his colleagues (1988) do not assume what they call “intellectual ideology”, i.e. “a system of political, religious or philosophical thinking and, as such is very much the product of intellectuals or professional thinkers” (p. 27) as an internally consistent system with an inner unity, but instead see contradictory themes embedded within it (pp. 30–32). They (p. 19) see the dilemmatic nature of ideology as positive in the sense that it enables active thinking “permitting debates to continue both internally and externally”. They explain that “to uncover the dilemmatic aspects of ideology, it is necessary to look for the contrary themes of lived ideology”, i.e. “ideology as a society’s way of life” (p. 31).

This, I argue, is also applicable to LLL as a collective account of education. It can be seen as “a system of political thinking” and “as such is very much the product of intellectuals or professional thinkers” (Billig et al., 1988, p. 27). This means that although there are widely-held arguments for the necessity of lifelong learning and its implementation as well as characteristics of the new lifelong learning educable subject that may be detected both in research literature and in policy documents, launched by such international political organizations as the EU, UNESCO, and OECD as well as nation states, these texts also contain differing emphases and views, for example, in relation to the purposes of LLL. Richard Edwards, Stewart Ranson, and Michael Strain (2002, p. 530) separate three traditions within which lifelong learning has been framed, namely, “humanistic, economic, and social”. The first one focuses on “equal opportunities and the personal



development of individuals”, the emphasis being “on second chance education for adults and the fulfillment of individual potential”. The economic dimension “draws on human capital theory” and argues that learning throughout life is essential “for personal and national competitiveness”. The social dimension “focuses on learning that can promote changes in social structures and engagement by individuals in a relevant social setting with intersubjective processes that promote greater empowerment, reciprocity and equity” (see also Crowther, 2004; Rubenson, 1997, pp. 3–5; Tuomisto, 2002, 2004, pp. 50–54).

There is also widely-held criticism against the purposes of LLL. It has been blamed, among other things, for its economic motives (see e.g. Fejes, 2005; Olssen, 2006; Tuomisto, 2002, 2004) and as such for serving neo-liberal educational policy (see e.g. Crowther, 2004), for being a “neo-liberal rationality of government” (Fejes, 2006, p. 704), or for being part of the ideal of an “unfinished cosmopolitan” (Popkewitz, Olssen, & Petersson, 2006). All these discussions and debates add, for their part, different dimensions and perspectives to the LLL narrative. Nevertheless, it has commonly-held features that may be detected and described and that form the core of LLL as a collective account of education. As Thomas S. Popkewitz and his colleagues (2006) put it: “In different contexts and with different logics, the same story seems to be told. The story is that we are now, more or less, obliged to live with constant change in society. Modern schooling, for example, continually links the individual to narratives of social or economic progress and the revitalization of democracy that will bring personal betterment”. Similarly, Hannu Järvinen (1996, p. 65, 71) argues that the principle of continuing education can be presented as a mythical narrative, as it is often the case with ideologies. He presents the mythical narrative of continuing education based on discourse analysis on Finnish educational policy documents:

In order to face the socio-cultural changes as well as the changes in working life the educational policy and its makers have adopted as their goal the overall continuing personal development of all

citizens, and especially those involved in working life. The flexible and multi-dimensional education creates a working system; even though the lack of economic and mental resources keeps slowing down its development. In any case the splendid future is waiting for us and the increased competitiveness in the global market economy results in growing resources. The development keeps rolling and the growth spiralling upward as does the never ending need for getting education. The citizen willing to educate her/himself harvests the crop; her/his far developed and many-sided personality enables her/him to follow her/his calling as an employee and ascertains for her/himself as for her/his nation a good position in the global competition. (Järvinen, 1996, p. 65.)

### **3.1 Coping with Uncertainty and Societal Change**

According to Edwards and his colleagues (2002, p. 531): “The argument for lifelong learning, as it is most often put forward, is that to be able to negotiate uncertainty successfully, people need to engage in learning throughout their lives, with an implicit threat that not to do so is to risk economic and social exclusion”. The foundation of the LLL narrative lies in the risk, uncertainty, insecurity, contingency, and unpredictability of contemporary life; the societal change we are facing and the individual’s capacity to cope with that change through personal growth and development. Popkewitz et al. (2006, p. 436) talk about “the taming of change in the name of progress and self-fulfilment”. And according to Fejes (2006, p. 704), “Society and the future are constantly changing and so are the subjects since they have to adapt to this”. It is up to each individual “to become flexible and adaptable to these changes”. “By enabling the subjects to become autonomous, self-regulated actors responsible for their own futures, the future can be controlled, but not planned”. (Ibid.) In the UK context Edwards et al. (2002, p. 526) posit that “the present is a period of intense structural and destabilizing change” central to “establishing policy contexts, to which

there needs to be a response". According to them, "[c]hange and adaptation to change have become watchwords of policy, including educational policy", to which lifelong learning is a response.

The individual's need to adapt to change is also clearly stated in the Finnish strategy of lifelong learning "Oppimisen ilo", "The Joy of Learning" (Ministry of Education, 1997) that Finland among other European countries generated in the zeitgeist of the 90s in developing lifelong learning. Three distinctive changes are reported in the strategy: the globalization of the economy, increasing international communication, and technological developments. Change is described as a discontinuous, unexpected, and permanent state that necessitates constant learning and updating of one's competences. (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 1; see also Tuomisto, 2002.) The title "The Joy of Learning" provides in itself the principal message of the report: all Finnish people should start developing themselves with joy and a positive learning attitude. According to Jukka Tuomisto, the primary concern of the committee is to ensure Finland's competitiveness in the global market and only secondly the humanistic principles of education. (Tuomisto, 2002; see also Edwards et al., 2002 above.)

At the European level Alheit and Dausien (2002b) have analysed the new era and the emergence of LLL, referring to the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (adopted in March 2000 in Lisbon by the European Commission). According to them, the Memorandum gives "two decisive reasons" for the new development. The first concerns Europe's development into "a knowledge-based society and economy". In order to ensure Europe's competitiveness and the employability and adaptability of the workforce lifelong learning is a necessity. Second, "Europeans live in a complex social and political world". Therefore, "more than ever individuals want to plan their own lives, are expected to contribute actively to society, and must learn to live positively with cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity". "Education, in its broadest sense, is the key to learning and understanding how to meet these challenges". (Commission of the European Communities, 2000, p. 5 in *ibid*, p. 212.) First and foremost, the argument for the necessity of lifelong learning con-

cerns the economic changes we are facing and our capability of coping with these changes, and secondly, the changing cultural, social, and political circumstances (e.g. Field, 2006, p. 4).

The often-cited characteristics of post-modernism are individualization within society, the increasing development of global knowledge-based economies and societies, and increasing reliance on information and communication-based technologies. In the same vein, Alheit and Dausien (2002b; see also Cornford, 2002; Field, 2006) distinguish four different changes we are facing that, as they claim, have necessitated the adoption of lifelong learning as a policy goal: 1) the changing meaning of work 2) the change in the function of knowledge 3) the increasing dysfunctionality of education and training institutions 4) and in Beck’s and Giddens’s terms the “individualization” and “reflexive modernization” faced by individuals themselves (p. 216). In relation to work they (pp. 216–217) posit that we spend much less of our lifetime at work, that the structure of work has changed, moving “jobs from the industrial to the service sector”, and that steady jobs no longer exist as our occupational careers are less stable and predictable as in the past (cf. Field, 2006, p. 18; see also Edwards et al., 2002). In order to cope with these challenges and make reasoned choices that we face across our life course lifelong learning is “the obvious answer” (p. 217). As it is, “knowledge has become the key resource for the future” (p. 217), in Field’s (2000, p. 1 in Alheit & Dausien, 2002b, p. 218) terms the “grey capital” that no longer entails fixed bodies of knowledge and skills but “doing knowledge, a kind of ‘lifestyle of knowledge’”. This leads to what Alheit and Dausien (pp. 218–219) call “the dysfunctionality of education and training institutions” as what is important in the new order is to create learning environments that encourage self-directed learning, i.e. learning to learn (see also Cornford, 2002; Crowther, 2004). Finally, they claim that as more options are open for us, life courses have become “much less predictable than in the past” (p. 220). This so-called “individualization” or “reflexive modernization” necessitates “new and flexible structures of competence” that can best be achieved through lifelong learning (p. 221). (Alheit & Dausien, 2002b.)

### 3.2 Totalization of Learning

Lifelong learning has been referred to as “a beautifully simple idea” (Field, 2006, p. 1; see also Alheit & Dausien, 2002b; Nyysölä & Hämäläinen, 2002): “an individual is able to learn throughout life and in order to survive she has to learn all her life” (Nyysölä & Hämäläinen, 2002). We are permanently enrolled in “the University of Life” (Field, 2006, p. 2; see also Alheit & Dausien, 2002b). As Alheit and Dausien (2002b, p. 211) posit, “the most important things we learn often have little to do with the official curriculum”. Nevertheless, so far formal learning has dominated political thinking, the production of general and vocational education, and has influenced people’s conceptions about learning (European Commission, 2000). The emphasis on lifewide learning has brought in the significance of learning in all contexts and non-formal and informal learning have been declared “pristine modes of learning” (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006, p. 455).

According to Anna Tuschling and Christoph Engemann (2006, p. 455), “degrees of formalization and institutionalization of training” and the extent to which “learning occurs incidentally or even unintentionally” are commonly used to define learning in different contexts. In the same spirit, the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, adopted in March 2000 in Lisbon by the European Commission defines learning in formal, non-formal, and informal contexts. It explicitly states that lifelong learning relates to all meaningful learning activities:

- to the *formal* learning processes that take place in the classical education and training institutions and which usually lead to recognized diplomas and qualifications;
- to the *non-formal* learning processes that usually take place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training – at the workplace, in clubs and associations, in civil society initiatives and activities, in the pursuit of sports or musical interests, and
- to *informal* learning processes that are not necessarily intentional and which are a natural accompaniment to everyday life

(Commission of the European Communities, 2000, p. 8 in Alheit and Dausien, 2002b, pp. 212–213).

Günther Dohmen (1998, p. 225) explains why lifelong learning could not possibly mean lifelong education for all. He argues that adults do not want to, and they should not, be in formal education all their lives and lifelong education “could not be organized and financed by society”. Therefore, it is “necessary to conceive ‘lifelong learning for all’” as “more self-directed learning”. It is also the way to motivate those adults who have not traditionally participated in adult education, as it already is “naturally” part of everyone’s life (p. 226). According to Dohmen (1998, p. 224), it is not enough in the new circumstances we are living in “to develop the abilities, skills, and competencies of an elite group of leaders”, but instead “a broader development” of everyone’s potential is needed in order to maintain and improve our standard of living. The message is that in order to survive everyone must participate in the lifelong learning project and to achieve this “a change in the mental attitude of people” is needed (p. 228). Learning can no longer be thought of “primarily as something which has to be directed by society for the people but as a more self-directed activity which selects and uses adequate learning opportunities in numerous networks of learning challenges, learning situations and learning supports which are available in a learning society” (p. 228). This means a shift in the emphasis of educational policy-making; a turn from state organized education and responsibility to individual responsibility i.e. self-directed learning (see also Fejes, 2005; Martin, 2003; Olssen, 2006). (Dohmen, 1998.)

Learning has, thus, been disengaged from organized learning settings and expanded over the adult life course and across all life spheres; it is demanded as a way of life (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006). Fejes (2006, p. 698) sees lifelong learning as “an expression of this new rationality of governing” that does not only concern formal education but also “the person’s everyday life”. In the same vein Popkewitz et al. (2006, p. 438) argue that “school and education have to be expanded and connected to all aspects of society in an everlasting way. The subject

must be prepared to learn during the whole life and be connected to learning in a wider sense". According to Popkewitz et al. (2006, p. 438), lifelong and lifewide learning concerns all sectors of life: "education policy, employment policy, the policy of industry and commerce, regional development policy and social policy". They see learning "as a boundary-crossing route to unite the increasing and unforeseeable multiplicity, fragmentation and diversity within subject-oriented democratic education". "Dewey's notion of 'School as Society' has been reshaped into 'Society as School'". (Popkewitz et al., 2006, p. 438.)

In Tuschling and Engemann's words "a totalization of learning" is taking place. In the same vein, making reference to Bernstein (1996), Stephen Ball (2007; see also Fejes, 2006) posits that what is in the making is "a 'totally pedagogised society' and the 'pedagogisation of life' in which learning is an activity that is conducted endlessly, 'in which the State is moving to ensure that there's no space or time which is not pedagogised'". According to Tuschling and Engemann (2006, p. 456): "Within this totality, individuals and not institutions seemingly become the centerpiece of learning, but totalization means also that every actor is potentially a learner regardless of being an individual, a group, an organization or an institution". This transforms the relationship between the educational institutions and the learner as the learner is placed in the centre and institutions have as their role to facilitate learning in providing counselling, mediating, and mentoring. (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006.)

What Tuschling and Engemann (2006, p. 457) call the "boundlessness of learning" is according to them "an integral part to the flexibilization of work in post-fordist organizations, where lifelong learning takes the place of lifelong employment". They continue that in periods of unemployment, in order to ensure one's employability in the future, learning is obligatory "for finding out how to manage oneself in changing living and working conditions". They further posit that "The management of the formation of one's own self, and one's performance in the labor-market are concurrent processes that are labeled as learning".

(Tuschling & Engemann, 2006, p. 457.) On the basis of a textual analysis of European Commission documents on lifelong learning and knowledge economy from 1993 to 2005 Jacky Brine (2006) has noted that the White Paper (Commission of the European Communities, 1993 in Brine, 2006, p. 652) has shifted the goal from employment to employability, i.e. “the *ability to become* employed, rather than, necessarily, the state of employment itself” (emphasis in the original). She posits that, thus, “individualisation became linked with the concept of employability: a state of constant becoming, of readiness for employment”. Jim Crowther (2004) has criticized the current development in Bourdieu’s terms as “flexploitation”, i.e. “a new mode of domination ‘based on the creation of a generalised and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation’” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 85 in Crowther, 2004, p. 126). Mark Olssen (2006, p. 222) also posits that the “new technology of flexible adaptation ensures that responsibility for employment tenure belongs to the individuals themselves”.

Individualization and totalization go hand in hand as the above described arrangement also “pluralizes self conduct” (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006, p. 452). Individuals have more freedom to utilize their individual skills and circumstances in planning their life opportunities as “people are set free from the comparably rigid frameworks of the classical social welfare states” (ibid, p. 452). There has been “a profound change in the distribution of responsibilities between state and individuals, calling for a stronger utilization of individual ‘resources’ for the good of the society” (ibid, p. 452; see also Koski, 2004; Olssen, 2006). Alheit and Dausien (2002b, p. 213) see the current development as twofold. First, there are the goals of “competitiveness, employment and adaptive competence on the part of the ‘workforce’”. Second, there is the intention “to strengthen freedom of biographical planning and the social involvement of individuals”. Lifelong learning indicates an obligation as well as an opportunity to learn. They place the emphasis on the ‘biographicity’ of learning that entails combining “the twin poles of structure and subjectivity”, in other words focusing on biographical



learning within the societal structures (Alheit, 1995, p. 63; see also Alheit & Dausien, 2002b).

Alongside the introduction of the lifewide dimension of learning it has been seen as important to create a system for the acknowledgement of non-formal and informal learning so that individuals would profit more from their learning and officials would be able to “see” and judge the value of non-formal and informal learning (Tuomisto, 2004; see also Crowther, 2004). “Formalization of non-formal education and non formalization of formal education” (Straka in press in Tuschling & Engemann, 2006, p. 460) is taking place. In the new regime of learning individuals need to look for new ways to represent their knowledge and skills, i.e. new accreditation regimes to measure and make visible informal and non-formally acquired knowledge. Besides being responsible for their own learning individuals are also made responsible for presenting their knowledge and making their capabilities visible; “the internalization of the ‘knowledge of the individual’ into themselves while simultaneously they need to tactically externalize it in order to make it recognizable” (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006, p. 464). Tuschling and Engemann call this “a new regime of documentation of oneself”. Alongside formal certificates “comprehensive accounts on individual achievements” are needed as proof of individual competence. These include portfolios, CVs, individual websites and web logs. (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006, p. 464.) Per Andersson (2008, p. 131) argues that “This affects the extension of disciplinary practices across populations and the construction of new knowledge about the subject whereby both population and individual can be made more active and productive”. This may result in what Edwards et al. (2002, p. 528; see also Andersson, 2008) argue, that people may be learning “but not what is valued, nor in the ways that are constructed as of value in policy terms, such as the more readily auditable activities accessible through routes leading to assessment and accreditation”. And as Edwards et al. (2002, p. 529) rightly posit, the diverse forms of learning that people engage in may “not directly open to instrumental control and manipulation”. Tuomisto (2004), on the other hand, has warned against the current

accreditation regime as leading to the overvaluation of credentials and asks if the result will be the end of non-formal and informal learning. According to Crowther (2004), accreditation and certification for ensuring future employability puts individuals “in competition with each other to acquire more and more proof (certificates of educational attainment) of their learning commitment” (p. 130). Paradoxically it may be that the instrumental value of learning becomes emphasized rather than learning as such.

### **3.3 The Educable Subject of the Lifelong Learning Narrative**

In order to be able to face the economic, societal, and political changes ahead of her/him the educable subject today needs to have and develop special competencies and qualifications. The reorganization of the learning regime as lifelong and lifewide learning makes new demands on the educable subject. According to Tuschling and Engemann (2006, pp. 457–458): “It is a reorganization of the role of the subject in the field of education, shifting from conceptualizing the learner as a passive container that is exposed to education to promoting an active individual that seeks to augment its attributes”. This involves the learners’ “abilities to organize themselves and to perceive and use their circumstances as learning opportunities”. (Ibid.) In the same vein, Edwards (1997 in Edwards, 2002, p. 359) suggests that there has been “a significant shift from a notion of ‘students’ to one of ‘learners’ in the discourses of lifelong learning”. He explains: “Students have a clear location, role and identity; they belong within an institution. The sense of belonging is important in establishing boundaries and a sense of identity. By contrast, learners can be argued to be deterritorialized, individualized and flexible consumers of learning opportunities; active subjects identifying themselves as in need of learning and recognizing the endlessness of that process”. (Ibid.)

What Tuschling and Engemann (2006, p. 458; see also Olssen,

2006) call “‘responsibilisation’ of the self” is taking place. This involves both more freedom and more risks on the part of the individual as responsibility in educational tasks is placed on the individual learner. The individual “becomes the ‘entrepreneur’ of its own education, managing its own self and herewith also the formation of itself” (Kirchhöfer, 2003, p. 222 in Tuschling & Engemann, 2006, p. 458). “Self responsible individuals learn to generate ever suitable self-concepts on the basis of what they judge as an existing demand” (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006, p. 459). Likewise, as Popkewitz et al. (2006, p. 433) argue, what is in the making is “a lifelong learner who continually re-creates one’s self through being a problem-solver”. Also, in analysing official reports on Swedish municipal adult education from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century and the present time Fejes (2005) has found that the adult learner/subject today is constructed as “an autonomous subject who should take responsibility and be committed” (p. 75). He continues that “the adult learner should be mobilized to be a part of lifelong learning. He/she is construed as autonomous and self-regulated, making his/her own choices” (p. 78). According to Fejes (p. 79), “In an educational system where this freedom to choose is present, the subject can be offered numerous ways of studying” and the subject is “free to choose” among them. In his analysis an active subject participates “in his/her own learning process” (p. 79). Making choices involves risks so that they are encouraged to “make the risk calculation and the choice according to their own values” (p. 83). In line with Tuschling and Engemann, Fejes (2005, p. 83) argues that “The adult subject today is construed to become an autonomous and enterprising self”.

Popkewitz et al. (2006) see a learning society as both instrumental to economic growth and national welfare as well as embodying “a cultural thesis about a cosmopolitan mode of life that mutates through modern schooling” (p. 432). For them “Cosmopolitanism is an historical ‘tool’ to consider the transmutations of European Enlightenment images of a universal reason, rationality and progress as a mode of living inscribed in the Learning Society. The learner of this new society is a cosmopolitan guided by compassion for continual change and innova-

tion. It is a consuming project of life that regulates the present in the name of the future action" (p. 432). They see "the learner of the Learning Society as fabricating the unfinished cosmopolitanism" (p. 433). It is a lifelong learner "that plans one's biography as continuously solving problems, making choices and collaborating in 'communities of learners' in a process of continuous innovation" (p. 433). They further posit that "Today's cosmopolitan is the agential individual who is talked about as empowered, having a voice, and self-responsible in producing innovation in the processes of change" (p. 434). "There is a continual remaking of oneself through the active intervention in one's life as a lifelong learner. Life becomes a continuous course of personal responsibility and self-management of one's risks and destiny – "autonomous learners" are continuously involved in self-improvement and are ready for the uncertainties through working actively in "communities of learning". (Popkewitz, 2003, p. 48.)

To sum up, today's lifelong-learning educable subject needs to be active, autonomous and self-directed, have self-responsibility and self-determination in the learning tasks that need to be pursued everywhere and nowhere in particular. (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006.) Tuschling and Engemann (p. 458) make the claim that "such an individual is currently an idealistic conception" and that it is "strikingly similar to the modes of subjectivation described in the governmentality literature" (see also Fejes, 2005, 2006). The educable subject described here is an abstraction, but as this study shows, qualities of the lifelong-learning educable subject act as resources in the construction of the competent adult learner. They become narrators as they construct their life histories and make sense of their selves and their lives. Similarly, Tuschling and Engemann (2006, p. 458) posit that "Lifelong learning seeks to provide tools to individuals that make them able to act in the cited manner". In this study the tools are seen as cultural, linguistic, and material resources in narrating one's life history, but as will be seen, they are not the only ones available for the narrators.

### 3.4 The Fear of Falling Behind

Lifelong learning has been promoted as a means for providing equal learning opportunities for all kinds of people regardless of age, gender, and social class. The LLL narrative has as its most important goal the contribution that learning and education can make in promoting an inclusive society (e.g. Edwards, Armstrong, & Miller, 2001; Popkewitz et al., 2006). In the Lisbon Strategy from 2000 it is also stated that:

The Union must become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. (Commission of the European Communities, 2000, p. 3 in Brine, 2006, p. 653.)

Edwards et al. (2001, p. 424) place such a narrative within “the universalist and humanist discourses that position those who are excluded as a cause for concern”. They continue that “In such discourses, exclusion can be overcome or transcended by changes in social and economic policies and practices, including lifelong learning; inclusion conquers exclusion” (p. 424). Those who do not participate in lifelong learning are considered to be at risk in falling behind and becoming marginalized, as the work of the researchers below has shown. Those who are excluded are also included in the grand narrative of LLL. The inclusion in or exclusion from the LLL narrative will be discussed in more detail below.

Popkewitz et al. (2006) approach the constructions of inclusion/exclusion in what they call “learning society” through the idea of the cosmopolitan ideal (see also above). They argue that inclusions and exclusions “occur through inscribing distinctions and differentiations between the characteristics of those who embody a cosmopolitan reason that brings social progress and personal fulfillment and those who do not embody the cosmopolitan principles of civility and normalcy” (p. 431). According to them, “The unfinished cosmopolitan inscribes fear

of what is not cosmopolitan and ‘civilized’” (p. 433). They argue that the fears “are often expressed in terms of inclusion and questions of equity, to reach out to those at risk of falling behind or not catching up – immigrants, ethnic, and racial groups who have not succeeded and who are marginalized” (p. 443). “The individual who is not the unfinished cosmopolitan is distinct human kinds that demand programs to govern the processes of exclusion in the move to create an inclusive society” (p. 444). “Special theories and programs are constructed to make the excluded into unfinished cosmopolitans” (p. 444). Someone who is not an unfinished cosmopolitan is defined as someone “who has not yet the ‘problem-solving skills’ and is not a flexible learner”, s/he “lacks self-esteem”, “has a poor self-concept and scarcity of skills, and does not embrace ‘problem-solving’, collaboration, and a life of continuous innovation and choice that mark the autonomous, unfinished cosmopolitan” (pp. 444–445). Such a person is constructed as needing remediation.

Drawing on Foucauldian notions of genealogy and governmentality Fejes (2006) has analysed the educable adult subject in Sweden based on official documents from the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries concerned with adult education in Sweden. According to him, “the educable subject today is created in relation to a new rationality of governing where it is governed and constructed through its own choices and actions instead of through institutions based on knowledge produced by the social sciences and experts” (p. 697). As today learning concerns everyone and all spheres of life, those who do not participate in lifelong learning are excluded. These ‘others’ are the risk groups who should be given study opportunities in order to be part of lifelong learning.

According to Fejes (2006, p. 701) today “The normalized adult subject is one that has basic social skills”. These are to be acquired through relevant learning opportunities in adult education in order to avoid the risk of being marginalized in society and excluded from the labour market. The basic social skills include “the capacity to communicate, think critically and creatively and to develop self-criticism and social competencies” (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 18 in Fejes, 2006, p.

701). According to Fejes, “With such qualities, it should be possible to acquire a job” (p. 701). Those who “lack these basic social skills and cannot handle change (...) should participate in adult education” (ibid, p. 701). This is possible in the LLL narrative as according to Fejes (2006, p. 702 ) everyone is educable and “everyone can be part of lifelong learning”. It only depends on the support provided and “the will to learn”. In other words, in the LLL narrative, as Fejes puts it, “Subjects are not divided into categories of people able to study and not able to study by birth (heritage)” (p. 702). So, according to Fejes, “by creating the normalized adult subject, these texts in themselves produce exclusion; ‘the other’ who is the one focused on by social policies as a way of normalising him/her” (p. 702). On one hand, there is “‘inequality’ that is to be reduced and ‘the other’ that should be governed to be made part of lifelong learning” (p. 703). If this does not happen there is a threat to the future welfare. The responsibility is placed on the subjects themselves, which Fejes calls the “neo-liberal rationality of government” (p. 704). (Fejes, 2006.)

Alheit and Dausien (Alheit & Dausien, 2002b; see also above) see an inner contradiction in the new educational order in relation to political and economic precepts on the one hand, and its emphasis on the freedom of biographical planning, on the other. They posit that “lifelong learning ‘instrumentalises’ and ‘emancipates’ at one and the same time” (pp. 213–214), seeing the consensus of this new order as problematic in that it is seemingly indifferent to the social consequences it implies. They argue that there will be “a small majority of ‘winners’, but with a life sentence to learn” and “a growing minority of ‘losers’ who never had a chance, or who voluntarily liberated themselves from the straitjacket of having to perpetually acquire and market new knowledge” (p. 222).

On the basis of a textual analysis of European Commission documents on lifelong learning and the knowledge economy from 1993 to 2005, Brine (2006) has also identified two categories of lifelong learner which differentiate between the knowledge economy and the knowledge society: the high knowledge-skilled learner for the knowledge

economy and the low knowledge-skilled learner located in the knowledge society. The winners and losers, however, have slightly different meanings on the basis of her analysis as the winners are apparently those who have high knowledge skills, i.e. graduates or postgraduates and, therefore, do not have identifiable learning needs. Low knowledge-skilled learners are not only constructed as those “*at risk*” but are also themselves “*the risk*” (p. 656; emphasis in the original). They have specific basic skill learning needs related to vocational education, social skills, and skills needed to increase entrepreneurship and employability. (Brine, 2006.) In the LLL narrative the need for basic skills is frequently expressed in the form that those who lack them should acquire them in order to avoid exclusion and marginalization (see also Fejes, 2006; Popkewitz et al., 2006 above).

Brine (2006) also identified the low knowledge-skilled learner as belonging to particular social groups: the early school leaver, the young unemployed, older long-term unemployed, those with low income, the disabled, ethnic minorities, immigrants, single parents, parents returning to the labour market, older workers, or ex-offenders. The high knowledge-skilled learner, on the other hand, has the opposite characteristics: “a high-income, able-bodied, white, male British citizen, who is neither an early school leaver nor a lone parent” (ibid, p. 662). Whereas high-knowledge-skilled ‘winners’ are needed to ensure the competitiveness of the EU in the global market, the ‘losers’ who are at risk or who are the risk are the ones in need of being “normalized”. They need to become lifelong learners, and avoid the risk of being unemployed (cf. Fejes, 2006 above).

On the whole, LLL as a collective account of education is a seemingly contradictory ideology, i.e. “a system of political thinking” (cf. Billig et al., 1988 above) that for its part creates differences between those who are included and those who fall behind and are excluded from the learning society ideal. Thus, the all-inclusive interpretation of educability acknowledged by the LLL narrative becomes reversed within the ideology itself. Simultaneously, however, it is all-intrusive as “a great tale of salvation through learning and knowing in a risk society” (see



Jauhiainen & Alho-Malmelin, 2004 above). As such I would argue it is primarily an individualistic middle-class project with the “presumption of *access and entitlement* to a range of cultures” (Skeggs, 2005, p. 973, emphasis in the original; see also Skeggs, 1997b) that in this case can resource the construction of the educable subject of the LLL narrative. But as Skeggs (2005, p. 973) argues: “It is up to the individual to ‘choose’ their repertoire of the self. If they do not have access to the range of narratives and discourses for the production of the ethical self they may be held responsible for choosing badly, an irresponsible production of themselves”. “The middle-class have no choice but to choose (...) [o]thers do not have access to ‘choice’, all they can display is ‘lack’” (p. 974). She goes on to posit that “What is significant in the use of culture as a resource in self-making is *how different forms of subjectivity are made available to different groups*; subjects with and without value; different forms of subjectivity therefore constitute and display class differences” (p. 975, emphasis in the original). The educable subject included in the LLL narrative has value, the subject who is excluded remains without value. The educable subject of the LLL narrative acts very much as a middle-class norm against which those who are excluded are assessed.

## 4

### Lifelong and Lifewide Dilemmas of Educability

*Then we moved, we did not live long in that x [name of town], I was about thirteen or fourteen when we moved to x [the capital area] to live in x [a working class area]. And then from there I went to x [an elite comprehensive school]. Anyhow I got in there (...), mum had got me in a good school, but also there somehow I didn't do so well (...). But it was a much better school, much better and you really had to make an effort and do your homework well to be as good as you could be (...) but somehow I was anxious, everything was new again and I felt like an outsider, so I didn't put so much effort into homework. But the school was okay, nobody got bullied or anything. But I had problems with maths, there was a real ironlady, a matriarch in that school and we had her for maths. And finally she said to me: 'What do you think you'll become when you grow up, a messenger girl or what?' (said spitefully) as I didn't learn maths (...). She didn't get it either that I should have been taught in some other way (...) or somehow made to concentrate at least for a minute (...). 'What do you imagine you'll become, some messenger girl or what?' And all those children came from rich and fine families, almost all of them in that school (...) from really rich families (...), it didn't disturb me but it felt like that teacher looked down on me*

(...), *some class division (...), it was a bit odd (...). And I didn't even become a messenger girl (laughter). I've sometimes thought that I should've gone to that teacher and told her that I became a drug addict that I didn't even become a messenger.* (Tiina, female aged 30.)

In telling our stories we simultaneously tell a story about “how we place ourselves in terms of social categories, such as those of gender, ethnicity and class at a specific point in time and space” (Anthias, 2005, p. 42). Tiina’s narrative above places her “*outside*” the community of students from rich and fine families in an elitist school. Her positioning as the ‘other’ is confirmed by the teacher who despises different kinds of students. This is similar to Skegg’s (1997b, p. 75) study on working-class women who experienced class as exclusion. Tiina’s narration explicitly shows the existence of social differences of educability, in this case more specifically “*class division*”, in the GUSSA students’ narrative life histories in this study (see 6.1 for a more detailed discussion). This is despite the grand narrative of lifelong learning that relies on an all-inclusive interpretation of educability; everyone is capable of learning and getting education if they only wish to do so. It is up to the individual to take advantage of learning opportunities throughout their lives and in different learning contexts. And this concerns everyone regardless of age, social class, or gender. The LLL narrative places the autonomous individual responsible for her/his actions in the centre, making the social differences of educability disappear (cf. Komulainen, Rätty, & Korhonen, 2008). The consequences of success – or failure – are up to the individual to bear.

The absence of the social differences of educability within the LLL narrative coincides with the prevailing discourses which consider that class is irrelevant as a social category (see Reay, 1998, 2005, 2006; also Skeggs, 1997b; Tolonen, 2008; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). However, as Diane Reay (1998, p. 261) argues “Discourses of classlessness are in effect class discourses in so far as they operate in class interests. While discourses which recognize the existences of classes can

operate in the interests of either the middle or the working class, both market discourses which assert freedom of choice for all, and discourses of classlessness act in the interests of the privileged in society by denying their social advantage”. She later continues “The current orthodoxy of individualistic self-realisation represents the almost universal acceptance of middle-class perspectives in society, which have replaced the collectivist inclinations of earlier eras among working-class groupings” (p. 263). She argues, however, that “rather than classes disappearing in response to new social discursive and material formations, they have evolved and changed” (p. 263). Social inequalities are “repackaged under late capitalism as the responsibility of the individual alone” (p. 263). The social differences of educability lurk behind the lifelong learning rhetoric of equal opportunities for all. As a middle-class project the lifelong learning narrative advances middle-class privilege.

I make reference to social class as a socially constructed category, in Skeggs’s (1997b, p. 7) words “a historical specificity and part of a struggle over access to resources and ways of being”; it is a category which has been produced in order to consolidate middle-class “identity and power by distancing themselves from definable ‘others’” (Finch, 1993 in Skeggs, 1997b, p. 4). Resources literally materialize as different types of socially valued resources, be it economic or cultural, e.g. knowledge, that in turn position individuals differently in terms of social categories (see Anthias, 2005; Skeggs, 1997b, pp. 5 and 74–75). Cultural practices, such as the institutionalized ethos of educability maintained by school, are important locations for constructing social divisions, i.e. social differences of educability related to gender and class in this study (see Tolonen, 2008, pp. 12–13). I do not see class as a static position; rather it is a process that is lived on a daily basis (see Reay, 2005, 2006; see also Anthias, 2005; Komulainen et al., 2008). As Reay (1998, p. 265; see also Skeggs, 1997b, p. 2) argues “Class is part of the micropolitics of people’s lives. It is lived in and through people’s bodies and permeates their thinking as powerfully as gender, ‘race’, age and sexuality”. Citing Skeggs (1997a, p. 134), she defines “the emotional politics of class” as “a politics of dis-identification, a result of classifying prac-

tices enacted on a daily basis by many of those who do not think class is an issue” (p. 265).

The social differences of educability in this study, then, act as forms of signification of social divisions which, according to Floya Anthias (2005, p. 27), relate to boundary formation “which classify human populations according to ontological claims and attributions of difference, involving differential treatment on this basis, including systematic social processes of inferiorisation, hierarchisation and unequal resource allocation”. By unequal resource allocation she makes reference to concrete access to economic, political, symbolic, and cultural resources. Age, class, and gender as they relate to educability provide the core analysis of social divisions in this study. Through the notion of intersectionality they can be seen “as crosscutting and mutually *reinforcing* systems of domination and subordination” (Anthias, 2005, pp. 36–37; emphasis in the original). These categorizations may also “construct multiple, uneven and *contradictory* social patterns of domination and subordination; human subjects may be positioned differentially within these social divisions” (ibid, p. 37; emphasis in the original).

In this study I am interested in the social differences of educability, i.e. who is being educated and how, and how these constructions relate to the grand narrative of lifelong learning that acknowledges equal learning opportunities and the importance of learning in all contexts and for all kinds of people regardless of age, social class, or gender. The presupposition is that contradictory meanings in relation to educability are likely to be constructed as the school system continues to uphold the institutionalized ethos of educability that categorize students on the basis of their abilities, including gender-related differences as well as differences based on social class. Traditional age-related norms in relation to educability also persist, e.g. participation in general upper secondary education is more likely in youth than in adulthood. Also the formal learning context continues to outweigh both non-formal and informal learning. Moreover, I argue that despite the equality rhetoric, social differences of educability are also likely to be constructed within the LLL narrative.

I will now develop the discussion on the traditional constructions of educability and the grand narrative of lifelong learning (LLL). First, I will focus on the dilemma between learning context and age and the lifelong learning narrative. Second, I discuss the dilemma between the institutionalized ethos of educability that ranks students on the basis of their abilities, including gender- and class-based differences, and LLL. Although the two dilemmas are here discussed separately they intertwine both theoretically and in the general upper secondary school adult graduates' life histories as they account for their participation in general upper secondary school study not normatively in youth but in adulthood (see the discussion below). Also the research questions related to the dilemmas overlap so that the first three questions as well as question number 5 relate to both dilemmas, whereas the fourth question focuses on the dilemma between learning context and age and the lifelong learning narrative:

1. How do the participants account for the discontinuity in their life histories created by the participation in general upper secondary school study in adulthood? What kinds of coherence patterns are constructed in order to account for such discontinuity? (Dilemmas 1 and 2.)
2. What kind of an educable subject is constructed in these accounts? Do the constructions of educability have qualities of traditional constructions of educability or lifelong learning? (Dilemmas 1 and 2.)
3. Are the social differences of educability in relation to age, social class, and gender constructed in these accounts? If so, how are these social differences of educability constructed? (Dilemmas 1 and 2.)
4. Is educability outside the formal learning context that would challenge the traditional constructions of educability constructed? (Dilemma 1.)
5. What kinds of contradictions between the traditional constructions of educability and lifelong learning are constructed? (Dilemmas 1 and 2.)

## 4.1 The Dilemma of Getting Formal General Education in Adulthood and LLL

Education and learning at any age or at any stage in life are not questioned in the grand narrative of lifelong learning. Instead, it is no longer considered enough that children and young people preparing themselves for the labour market profit from the educational opportunities around them. An aging European population is given as an argument for adults' need to learn and educate themselves, as there are not enough young people to satisfy the needs of the labour market in the future (European Commission, 2000). As Leena Koski and Erja Moore (2001) posit, lifelong learning has become an important or even the only way to full adulthood, consisting of demands for personal growth and development as well as fulfilling one's potential. An individual is seen as in continual need of development; adulthood does not mean being "ready" but is marked by incompleteness, imperfection, uncertainty, and new beginnings (Vilkko, 1997). This so-called "new adulthood" (Koski & Moore, 2001) and prolonged youth or adulthood (Nikander, 1999) reflects postmodern thinking where traditional age-related norms are disappearing and a single-age culture is becoming stronger; youth-related characteristics becoming part of all age groups (Rantamaa, 2001; see also Nikander, 1999). This also reflects individualization; reflection and self-surveillance/governance are expected on the part of the individual in planning their individualized educational paths in the grand narrative of lifelong learning.

From the outset of this study I have presupposed the participation in general upper secondary school for adults and graduation from there, as well as the passing of the matriculation examination in adulthood as meaningful and reportable<sup>6</sup> (Linde, 1993, p. 22) events. The willingness of students to participate in this study and recount their stories suggests

---

<sup>6</sup> A reportable event is not something that happens every day; instead, it has to be unusual in some way or opposed to expectations or norms (Linde, 1993, p. 22; see also Labov, 1972, p. 390). For instance, Linde (1993, p. 23) lists career milestones, marriage, divorce, major illness, and religious or ideological conversions as events that are relevant and reportable, although not obligatory, for a life story in our Western culture.

that we shared this understanding. I see this shared understanding arising from participating in formal general upper secondary education not normatively in youth, but in adulthood. Adult students who have graduated from general upper secondary school most certainly have to reflect on meanings related to age. Age appears to be socially normative in relation to planning one’s life, further education, and the demands of the labour market. A 30-year-old and a 60-year-old student have different positions available for them despite the equality and democracy rhetoric of the LLL narrative. As Pekka, a research participant in his early 30s confirms, he would be happier “*If there wasn’t any stress coming from the outside, pressure from the part of others and the like, presuppositions about what one should have become at this age*”.

General upper secondary school study in adulthood, and not normatively in youth appears unconventional in relation to age and the traditional life-course model where youth is the normative and predictable stage for going to school and getting education (see Vilkkö, 2000; also Aapola, 1999b; Alheit & Dausien, 2002b). Childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age are separated as distinct stages that are marked with transitions like birth, going to school, getting into the labour market, marriage, parenthood, retirement, and widowhood. These stages and transitions are socially and culturally constructed and provide norms and predictability for life. Alheit and Dausien (2002b) talk about a “societal curriculum” in this context, stating that an individual’s life from birth to death is more or less defined by norms and expectations, although constantly renegotiated and subject to historical change. Thus, in terms of the societal curriculum, studying in the general upper secondary school can be seen as a stage that is generally completed in youth before getting into the labour market. Studying in general upper secondary school in adulthood can be seen as a fairly rare postmodern project that only a few adults get involved with: only around 8 % (The Statistics of Finland/Matriculation Examinations, 2003) of the matriculation examinations in Finland are completed in general upper secondary schools by adults, meaning that around 92 % of these examinations are taken in youth in general upper second-



ary schools, linearly following the comprehensive school education.

As Sinikka Aapola (1999b) has pointed out, as a result of different socially-constructed age norms, going to general upper secondary school as an adult appears atypical. Aapola (1999a, pp. 231–232) argues that certain normative age expectations and institutional arrangements are attached to chronological age. These age expectations and institutional arrangements are, for example, related to school: one is expected to follow a linear pattern, advancing from grade to grade at a certain age (see above). Social age, on the other hand, defines what sort of behaviour is expected at a certain age. Thus, going to general upper secondary school would be expected in youth but not in adulthood (see also Antikainen & Komonen, 2004). In the study conducted by Aapola (Aapola, 1999a; see also Aapola, 2002), school-related age-norms were considered so self-evident that they were only commented on by the students who had violated them. Aapola (1999b, p. 248; see also Aapola, 2002) gives the completing of the matriculation examination and the graduation ceremony as examples of typical age-related rituals in today's Finnish society. According to her (2002, p. 311), "Although the exam has more than a symbolic value in the evaluation of students, it can also be seen as a ritual marking the transition of students to adult members of the society". Aapola (2002) mentions such signs as celebrations and valuable gifts, and the wearing of the white cap to symbolize the status of the new graduate related to the ritual; "*an honour hat*" as I was told it was named by one research participant's daughter. Also, according to Minna Vuorio-Lehti (2006, p. 290) young matriculated (male) students with their white caps have traditionally been presented as "full of hope and expectations for the future, (...) the heralds of a new age, new hope and a new Finnish identity".

In contrast to the expected life course stages and age-related norms, completing general upper secondary school in adulthood is unconventional, demanding reflection on the part of the individual. According to Anni Vilkkö (2000, p. 76), an individual life course is not as self-evidently attached to normal stages and transitions in post-modernity, but instead individual variation is on the increase (see also Nikander, 1999).

Negotiations between socially-constructed age norms and individual reflection on life events become increasingly relevant. In these negotiations the latter often presides: things do not happen as expected but through active life course processing. Alheit and Dausien (2002b) talk about biographical planning, referring to the conditions and opportunities for biographical learning among the members of society. However, this does not mean that traditional stages of a life course disappear altogether. Instead, they become blurred so that the role of transitions becomes more important. (Vilkko, 2000; see also Nikander, 1999.)

General upper secondary school for adults differs from general upper secondary schools for young people, among other things (see part 2), also in its heterogeneity in relation to age. The lifelong learning principle of the importance of learning for all age groups materializes in general upper secondary school for adults, where the age range varies from 18 to 84 (the oldest student I taught in general upper secondary school for adults who passed the matriculation examination and graduated) and over. This means that students representing different educational generations (see Kauppila, 1996<sup>7</sup>) gather together “on the same line” in order to learn in an institute that is generally reserved for a particular age group (see Aapola, 1999b above). This may also break normative age-related student-teacher hierarchies that become renegotiated under new circumstances (cf. Aapola, 1999a). This creates a mixture that is still not very common, especially outside adult education; age-related norms are changing only slowly and gradually in our school system through such arrangements as course-based studying

---

<sup>7</sup> In the study conducted by Juha Kauppila and his colleagues (1996) it was shown that the oldest educational generation who experienced war and had scant educational opportunities (those born before 1935) saw education as an ideal, because it was difficult to reach. For the second generation, a time of structural change and increasing educational opportunities (those born in 1936–1955), education had an instrumental value and work had a central position in life. The youngest generation, living in a period of social welfare and many educational choices (those born in 1956 or after), on the other hand, saw education as a commodity and as self-evident. Kauppila (p. 92) defines commodity as something you throw away after use; it satisfies your needs but offers nothing very permanent. Choosing the educational establishment, finding oneself, and hobbies were important for this generation (p. 48). The growing importance of education in changing circumstances influences the educational position of this generation; the emphasis on economic growth to ensure competitiveness in the global market is reflected in individual choices (see Kauppila, 1996, p. 91).

where students are able to advance at their own pace (Aapola, 2002).

Age-related stereotypes about learning ability also persist. Learning ability, memory, and speed of perception are generally thought to deteriorate with aging. The myth of old people with a bad memory often serves as a useful explanation, e.g.: “I’m old; it is only natural that my memory is starting to fail”. On the other hand, old people are often thought to be able to perceive larger entities better and to be able to profit from their life experience in learning. (See e.g. Hervonen, 1994.) Difficulties in learning how to use new technology is also often associated with age and especially women. The study conducted by Päivi Korvajärvi (1999) showed how younger people were thought to learn the use of new information technology better, because learning abilities demanding speed were thought to deteriorate with age. Therefore, older (female) employees were given more time to learn the new system. Tuula, a 50-year-old employee in the study, also doubted her own ability to learn how to use the new technology. Luckily, she realized that “an old person is able to learn as well”. Expertise in information technology is constructed as masculine both symbolically and culturally and it is not easy for women to adopt it as part of their subjectivities. Similarly, information technology and aging do not seem to fit together very well. (Ibid.) These age- and gender-related constructions on learning are in evident contrast with lifelong learning principles of the importance of learning for all (see also 4.2).

However, completing general upper secondary school, a formal institute providing general upper secondary education, in adulthood is not only an interesting choice in relation to age, but also in relation to the learning context. There is a contradiction between the current emphasis on lifewide learning (see the discussion in 3.2) and the highly valued position of formal education in Finland. Lifewide learning acknowledges the importance of learning in all contexts, i.e. formal institutes, non-formal courses at the workplace, clubs and associations as well as informal learning in everyday life, whereas to date formal learning has dominated political thinking, the production of general and vocational education, and influenced people’s conceptions about

learning. The formal educational system serves especially the well-educated with good socioeconomic positions teaching children and young people the values and thinking of the prevailing hegemonic ideology and selecting individuals for different sectors in society (see Tuomisto, 1998); directing middle-class children towards academic positions and working-class children towards vocational positions; women to women’s jobs and men to men’s jobs (see e.g. Käyhkö, 2006). In the study conducted by Juha Kauppi and his colleagues (1996) differences within social classes were found to be similar to those of educational generations (see footnote 7); for the middle-class, education was more often an instrument for fulfilling a personal dream than for the working class. “Theoretical” and “practical” orientations were also determined by social class and educational status. (See also Antikainen, 1998, p. 210.)

The newly-discovered emphasis on lifewide learning has been called the ‘renaissance of learning at work’ by some authors (Dehnbostel, 2002, p. 37 in Tuschling & Engemann, 2006, p. 457). This view has traditionally been supported by less educated people who have acquired their working skills in practice and been able to succeed in their working careers advancing to valued positions with only a little formal education. Significant learning experiences, however, have been shown to frequently take place outside formal education (Antikainen, 1996) and experiential learning has had a central position in people’s lives. Research has shown that e.g. work experience has been seen as more relevant than formal education in acquiring skills needed at work (Blomqvist, Koskinen, Niemi, & Simpanen, 1997, p. 28, 110–111). Presently, however, general or vocational upper secondary education has become the minimum requirement for performance in working life and lifelong learning (Finnish National Board of Education, see footnote 3).

General upper secondary school has traditionally had and still has a high status in Finland; a little over half of the age group completes general upper secondary education and passes the matriculation examination (Kumpulainen, 2007, pp. 23–24; Vuorio-Lehti, 2006). The need for well-educated individuals and the increase in the level of education

have continued to strengthen the position of the matriculation examination in Finland (Vuorio-Lehti, 2006, p. 284). According to Vuorio-Lehti (2006, pp. 277–295), the public discourse concerning the Finnish Matriculation Examination after the Second World War can be divided into three periods: the period of the traditional matriculation examination (from the mid 1940s to the mid 1960s), the period of the radical elimination of the matriculation examination (from the mid 1960s to the end of the 1970s), and the period of the re-valued matriculation examination (the 1980s and the 1990s). During the first period the matriculation examination was criticized for preventing the inner development of the school as well as for being over-valued, which in turn would lead to a decrease in the value of the examination. Despite critical voices, significant reforms were not implemented during the first period and the matriculation examination remained a selective nationwide examination – a national and traditional institution and an examination of the growing middle class. During the second period, the radical elimination of the matriculation examination, strong demands for democracy and equality were presented in school policy and the matriculation examination was seen as a representative of selection and inequality. “It divided the age group into two parts and gave vocational education a position of secondary importance” (p. 292). Parents, however, preferred general, all-round, education to vocational education and the general upper secondary school and the matriculation examination “gave a guarantee to continue one’s studies at the university level” (p. 293). According to Vuorio-Lehti (2006, p. 293), “It was amazing that after all the violent debate in the 1960s and the 1970s it was decided to maintain the matriculation examination”. (Ibid.)

However, during the third period, the period of re-evaluation, the general upper secondary education and the matriculation examination were seen differently. The examination was seen as “an asset to the Finnish nation and a resource to the national economy” (Vuorio-Lehti 2006, p. 293). Likewise, it was thought that good general education would always be of use (p. 282). According to Vuorio-Lehti (2006, p. 293), “If the Finnish nation wanted to take part in worldwide economic compe-

tion, it would need all the educated young people it could get. Effectiveness and the high quality of teaching and learning were concepts that entered educational discourse with the ideas of neo-liberalism. The matriculation examination assimilated perfectly to this new situation”. It was an excellent instrument for qualifying students for university studies, and for evaluating how upper secondary schools and teachers had managed in their work. Additionally, schools have been listed in ranking order according to the level of their students’ success in the matriculation examination. Nevertheless, the third period also saw great changes in the matriculation examination in 1996. The examination was made more flexible than before. It was possible to complete the tests during three terms (in about one and a half years), whereas earlier all 4–6 tests were taken during a two-week-period in spring. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the examination has been developed further and it has become possible to choose other three compulsory subjects taken in the examination besides the mother tongue; there have also been changes in the structure of the tests in the humanities and natural sciences and the mother tongue. (Ibid.) All in all as Vuorio-Lehti (2006, pp. 294–295) posits, “especially for the middle class audience a matriculated student with a white cap on his/her head has been an important part of the national discourse”. The examination has, moreover, been important to higher education, being a gateway to university studies for over 150 years. And as stated above, in the spirit of neo-liberalism school matters. Kalle (male aged 24) evaluates:

*Then I remember (...) this one counsellor (...) I felt a bit of pressure about deciding which upper secondary school to choose (...). In comprehensive school there were so many other things to think about (...) and I kind of had this wrong idea that I somehow thought that the choice of the upper secondary school was so essential that the school you choose to go to practically determines the rest of your life (...). If you stay in some x [name of bad quality] upper secondary school then it's a bad thing (laughter) (...). It's really ridiculous but that kind of spirit was aroused (...) it was said that (...) we should head*

*for as good an upper secondary school as possible (...) but afterwards I've thought it was a bit old-fashioned, the way of thinking that there are still good (with emphasis) (...) and bad (with emphasis) upper secondaries (...) where a student has to go (...) and has to stay and (...) learns nothing and (...) the future is that of a plater-welder.*  
(Kalle, male aged 24.)

Age and learning context intertwine as the students in this study account for their participation in general upper secondary school study not normatively in youth, but in adulthood. Not participating in general upper secondary education in youth has resulted in a lack of formal general upper secondary education in adulthood that, I argue, creates a discontinuity that needs to be accounted for in order that the narrator of the story appears to be a competent member of society. I see the demand for adequate causality, i.e. the participation in general upper secondary school study not normatively in youth, but in adulthood, as contradictory in the context of lifelong and lifewide learning promising equal learning opportunities for people of all ages in all social groups and in all learning contexts. Despite the emphasis on lifewide learning formal education including general upper secondary school study has kept its high social status and its middle-class academic values. It continues to have a gate-keeping role in that it leads to further studies, i.e. it serves as an instrument for selection, determining educability in higher education, as well as providing qualifications and merits for working life.

#### **4.2 The Dilemma of the Institutionalized Ethos of Educability and LLL**

*I always come back to the seventies (...) it was the time when political party membership still existed (...) and children were given grades according to their parents', or their father's, membership. I went to a school for about sixty-seventy children (...) there were six*

*classes and (...) I went to the lower level of the comprehensive school and in our class there were a lot of those so-called good students (...). There were bank directors' daughters and there were teachers' daughters and so on (...) they always had ten in their report and I often wondered why even if I got ten in a test I still had nine in the report, it wasn't very encouraging either (...). So that if you use the Gauss curve then some are given a good grade while others can't have it.* (Hanna, aged 39.)

Permanent and rapid change in society due to the challenges brought about by the knowledge economy or the information society, globalization, and individualization is the most frequently presented argument for lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is needed in order to ensure individual and societal success. According to Hannu Rätty and Leila Snellman (1998; see also Kasanen, 2003), society is on the move, but paradoxically school is not; at least when it comes to the assessment criteria it maintains. School's most important task is to objectively recognize individual students' different innate potentials of educability (Rätty & Snellman, 1995). And as this objective has not changed for a hundred years, neither has the differential conception of ability promoted by school (ibid). Rätty and Snellman (1998, p. 361) claim that this view has a strong hold “because the routines and principles of the school make diversity among children an issue that can be conveniently addressed through a differential notion of intelligence”.

Besides the contradictions between age-related norms on learning and the norms related to formal, non-formal, and informal learning contexts in relation to the principles of lifelong and lifewide learning, there is also a dilemma between the principle of lifelong learning promising education for all and the institutionalized ethos of educability maintained by school. Rätty and Snellman (1998, p. 361; see also Snellman & Rätty, 1992) discuss the ethos of educability as a prevailing feature of our school system. They argue that “all talk about school and education is grounded on conceptions of intelligence (...) which build the core content of the social definition of educability”. According to



Räty and Snellman (1998, p. 361), the school system upholds the institutionalized ethos of educability which derives to a great extent from the psychometric concept of intelligence. Students are ranked according to the normal distribution into such categories as “bright”, “mediocre”, and “poor” through class tests and standardized national testing as well as other assessment criteria. Intelligence is defined primarily as a cognitive capacity attached to such attributes as problem-solving skills. “Theoretical” and “practical” skills and the related school subjects, i.e. cognitive-linguistic and others, as well as male and female abilities, i.e. cognitive-logical and linguistic-social, are separated into distinct categories. (Ibid, see also Räty, 2001; Räty, Kasanen, & Kärkkäinen, 2006.)

This division implies social differences of educability related to social class as regards the distinction between theoretical and practical skills, and gender as regards the distinction between male and female abilities and the corresponding school subjects (see Räty et al., 2006). The social differences of educability in turn “are transformed into the individualized interpretations of the child’s educational prospects” (Räty, 2006, p. 14). In the same vein Skeggs (1997b, pp. 59–60) argues that hierarchical relations between different forms of knowledge – practical and academic – generate “a network in relation to these hierarchies” and defines “what it is to be cultivated and clever against what it is to be practical, useful and responsible”. “Personalities thus come to be seen as the natural consequence of the aptitudes and practices of the people who occupy the subject positions available”, i.e. a feature of themselves rather than part of a process of educational differentiation. (Ibid.; see also Reay, 2005, 2006; Walkerdine et al., 2001.)

The psychometric concept of intelligence reflecting the biological view of “The theory of natural talent” (Räty, 1993; Räty & Snellman, 1991; Snellman & Räty, 1992; see also Kasanen, 2003) implies that intelligence is fundamentally inexplicable by science; it is an innate ability – some are just born more intelligent than others. According to Räty (1993) intelligence cannot be talked about, whether we agree or not, without referring to biological notions. In the same way intelligence

cannot be talked about without referring to problem-solving skills or speed of perception. Intelligence is seen as an ability for logical and abstract thinking, which at school is seen especially in mathematics, geometry, reading, and grammar. (Ibid.) Logico-mathematical intelligence is the prominent prototype of intelligence that is especially attached to men (e.g. Rätty, 2001; Rätty et al., 2006; Walkerdine, 1998). Paul Ernest (in Walkerdine, 1998, p. 8) posits that “dominant discourses impose a ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1980) in which views such as *maths = male*, *maths ≠ feminine* and *female = inferior* are confirmed and sustained”. He later continues that gender inequity reinforces gender stereotypes, sustaining such views as “*maths = male* and *maths = rational ≠ irrational = female*” (p. 9). He argues that “social gender stereotyping negatively influences many girls’ perceptions of mathematics and their own abilities in mathematics” (ibid, p. 9).

According to Rätty and Snellman (1995), masculinity and cognitivism carry a high social value. Therefore, they claim, there is an implicit assumption that there is a bond between intelligence and social status. An intelligent person cannot be just anyone, but is most likely to be a middle-class rational male. (Ibid.; see also Walkerdine, 1989; Walkerdine et al., 2001.) Similarly, Fejes (2005, p. 77) posits that “talent has a relation to what social class you are born into”. In his analysis of the official reports from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century on Swedish municipal adult education he has found the claim that there are “more talented people in the higher social groups than in the lower ones” (p. 77).

Rätty and Snellman (1998, p. 370) have found that “teachers and middle-class parents – the groups traditionally close to the educational system and its values – share the institutionalized ethos of educability maintained by the school; whereas low-status parents – the groups farther from the school – are more critical towards it”. They see this as possibly due to middle-class parents’ worry about maintaining the legitimacy of the differential representations of educability, on one hand, and the working-class parents’ worry, on the other hand, about the tendency that school has in devaluing them and their children by placing them on low-status, non-theoretical academic tracks. (Rätty &

Snellman, 1998; see also Rätty, Snellman, & Vornanen, 1993.) Similarly, the study conducted by Rätty and his colleagues (2006) showed a difference between academically and vocationally educated parents and the evaluations made by them on their children's strong and weak school subjects. The former group explained their child's strongest subject (the parents chose mathematics for boys and Finnish for girls) by reference to talent more than vocationally educated parents did. Also, vocationally educated parents explained the child's weakest subject (the parents chose Finnish for boys and mathematics for girls) as a lack of talent more than the academically educated parents did. According to Rätty and his colleagues, the study suggests that parents' education relates to "the trust they place on their child's learning potential" (p. 22) – and consequently the child's possibilities for further education, especially in upper secondary school. (Ibid.)

The research conducted by Jorma Kuusinen (1992) has also shown the effects of social position in relation to education. Going to general upper secondary school depends on both measured intelligence and parents' social position (educational level and profession); 88 % of students in a high social position started general upper secondary school and among them there were relatively more "poor" students than in the other two social groups. Students in different social groups were, thus, in an unequal position also in relation to their measured abilities. (Ibid.) According to Rätty (2006, p. 3) "Kuusinen's findings suggest that it may well be the *social* rather than 'psychological' definition of ability that plays a pivotal role in applying to gymnasium education" (emphasis in the original).

Similarly, the studies conducted by Reay (2006, see also 2005) and her colleagues in the UK are in line with the above-mentioned findings as regards the bond between educability and the social status. Reay (2006, pp. 297–298) posits that "educational processes are simultaneously classed processes in which relations of teaching and learning too often position working class pupils as inadequate learners with inadequate cultural backgrounds, looked down on for their 'stupidity'" and, consequently, "positioned as less human". She and her colleagues con-

firmed that "the pupils in the bottom sets were exclusively working class, while top sets were predominantly middle class". Students from the working classes are more likely to experience educational failure and become devalued as a result. In relation to testing and assessment Reay posits that although "the stated aim is to raise the achievement of all children, one consequence of the growing preoccupation with testing and assessment is (...) the fixing of failure in the working classes" (p. 299). Within the new testing regime the working classes become represented "as incapable of having a self with value" (ibid, p. 301). Class destinies are tied to academic achievement and class has entered "psychological categories as a way of socially regulating normativity and pathology" (Reay, 2006, p. 301; see also Skeggs, 1997b above).

Valerie Walkerdine and her colleagues (2001, pp. 111–112) make the claim that the recent interest in gender and attainment and the interpretation that school is a problem for boys has overshadowed the interest in class. In their longitudinal study in the UK they found very stark differences in educational achievements between middle- and working-class girls; girls' high performance being set in middle-class schools. None of the working-class girls in their study continued in higher education in any straightforward way, and only one middle-class girl chose not to continue at university after school. The differences between the two groups increased as they moved through the education system (ibid, p. 214; see also Walkerdine, 1998). Walkerdine and her colleagues (2001, p. 120) argue that "for middle-class girls femininity is regulated in such a way as to ensure educational success and entry into the professions" whereas "the working-class practices are produced to adapt to much more difficult conditions". They (pp. 41–42) write that "The painful recognition of Otherness as marked on the body was displayed by many of the young working class women, a feeling that they were less, lacking, a lack that had to be carefully hidden in some circles and revealed in others, a complex hide and seek game that amply demonstrated both that the working-class subjects knew exactly how they were positioned and that they knew fragmentation for what it was. That is, a complex game in which it appeared possible to be one thing in one

circumstance, another in another, a masquerade or passing”.

Walkerdine (1998, p. 20) argues that up till now the concern for inequality within the British education system has been addressed “within a meritocratic system aimed at selecting children of aptitude and ability to join the ranks of professionals”. This discussion has been located within “theories and practices within the psychological literature of ability” linked with “wastage, talent and finding talent”, ability being understood “as a product of a certain sort of mental equipment” joining “ideas about differences between male and female minds, brains and modes of thinking”. (Ibid.) She shows in her study how “selection as the way of catching talent” among working-class children does not inhibit inequality, as middle-class children succeed far better in tests that are familiar to them through classroom practices (pp. 82–84). As a result “oppression and inequality cannot easily be removed when a privileged section of the population attend fee-paying schools and are coached to success” (p. 84). Even if Walkerdine’s study is not directly applicable to the Finnish school system it has been repeatedly confirmed that the comprehensive school ideology based on the meritocratic system has not abolished social differences of educability within the Finnish education system (see e.g. Kuusinen, 1992; Rätty et al., 2006 above; also Rätty, 2006; Hautamäki et al., 2000 in Rätty, 2006<sup>8</sup>).

Individual success is valued highly, but not all success at school is judged as equally valuable. Rätty and Snellman (1995) separate two distinct explanations concerning school success based on expert discussion carried on in Finnish educational journals, implicating that not all success is due to genuine talent. They call the two distinct explanations: “genuine achievement” and “pseudo-achievement”. They define the former as originating from natural, spontaneous, and inborn abilities and the latter from hard work, industriousness, memory, rote learning, and conformity. It is, thus, possible to be successful for the “wrong

<sup>8</sup> Drawing on Hautamäki et al. (2000) Rätty (2006) posits that students’ social background contributes significantly to their academic success in Finland. Children who belong to the higher social classes tend to get higher grades at school than those belonging to the lower social classes. On the same level of ability, as measured by a standardized psychological test, the effect of social class is about one grade unit on the seven-point rating scale (4–10) used in the Finnish comprehensive school.

reasons”, as the Finnish discussion they refer to has shown where girls have been argued to succeed better than boys because girls are hard-working and social (see also Lahelma, 2004; Rätty, 2001; Rätty et al., 1993). The study conducted by Rätty and his colleagues (2002) also suggests that parents rated their sons’ and daughters’ success in both mathematics and reading differently: boys’ success was explained by talent whereas girls’ success was explained by effort.

Similarly, Walkerdine (1998, pp. 29–41) makes the distinction between real understanding based on the attainment of concepts by following particular stages of logical thought, and rule-following or rote-memorization, “which yields success without the solid foundation of real understanding” (p. 29), thus making it possible to be successful for the “wrong reasons”. The related signifiers of rote-learning are rule-following, hard work, and passivity (p. 37). She gives the contrast between understanding multiplication as cumulative addition, i.e. learning through activity, and only being able to chant one’s tables as an example of the two modes of learning (p. 29): “knowing how” as opposed to “knowing that” (pp. 127–128). Moreover, success in mathematics implies success in reasoning, it is indicative of the “*development* of the reasoned and logical mind” (p. 33; emphasis in the original). Walkerdine continues that girls’ success is explained by “low-level rule-following, rote-learning and computation” instead of real understanding. “Moreover, girls’ correct performance is seen not only as wrong but as pathological. Girls threaten the smooth running of the child-centered classroom because they seem to learn in ways which have been outlawed for leading to authoritarianism and producing the wrong kind of development. (...) Girls may be able to do Mathematics, but good performance is not to be equated with proper reasoning” (p. 33). Walkerdine argues that beneath the child-centred approach associated with progressiveness and liberating children from the authoritarianism of ‘chalk-and-talk’ methods, there lies “a covert regulation of the autonomous and reasoning subject” (p. 33). (Ibid.)

Paradoxically, however, in the study conducted by Walkerdine and her colleagues (2001, p. 181; see also Walkerdine, 1998, pp. 82–98)

“while the term ‘hard work’ was used pejoratively in the case of the middle-class girls, it was praised in the working-class schools”. Moreover, it “was used less frequently to describe good boys than good girls” (Walkerdine, 1998, p. 88). While working-class girls received elaborate praise for much more modest achievements, for middle-class girls excellent performance was the norm that was expected of them, which for the majority of them caused considerable anxiety about not being good enough. (Ibid.) In middle-class schools teachers commonly attached natural ability to top performance. (Walkerdine et al., 2001.) Drawing on Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) Walkerdine and her colleagues (2001) posit that “when the girls were 10 years old it was much more common for teachers to attribute poor performance to a lack of ability among working-class girls, while in the few cases where middle-class girls were producing the same poor results, this was far more likely to be viewed not as evidence of any lack of ability, but rather as a problem of motivation” (pp. 124–125). Also lack of ability was not attributed to boys with very poor attainment as they were still judged by teachers to be bright or have potential (Walkerdine 1998, p. 85, 88).

Also drawing on Jones (1989), within the highly individualistic North American cultural context Daphna Oyserman and Hazel Rose Markus (1998, p. 115) make the distinction between “the self as innately capable rather than as capable by dint of effort”. According to them “intelligence is valued more than perseverance, and creativity or innovation are valued more than perfecting a project or carrying through a task”. They argue that, as a consequence, this may lead to a process where children, instead of investing in school, try “to ‘discover’ which are the domains they have talent in and focus on those”. (Ibid.)

Räty (2001, pp. 344–345) discusses how making an effort becomes problematic in what he calls an “ability game”. He explains that hard work and failure are a combination that is to be avoided, as it would be interpreted as a lack of ability. Hard work might not be worth it or it might be better to belittle one’s effort. Or the target should be high enough for failure to become acceptable. Or it is advantageous to set easy targets and ascertain a good result. Räty concludes that all the

above choices are negative for learning outcome. (Ibid.) Besides hard work, Rätty and his colleagues (1995) mention memory as a factor that intelligence researchers have wanted to exclude from their definition of genuine talent since an individual with a good memory can make an impression that s/he is intelligent when that is not the case and success in demanding further education would not be possible. Mathematics, on the other hand, has been considered a subject where genuine talent is best shown. But as Hakama (1939 in Rätty et al., 1995, p. 182) warned: “a student can get a good grade in mathematics due to hard work and not genuine talent!”

The institutionalized ethos of educability has been shown to be influential in individual conceptions of ability. At an early stage of their educational careers children start learning their individual places in the hierarchy of abilities. By the time they have reached the last grades of comprehensive school, they have adopted the pessimism of differential notion of intelligence. (See e.g. Rätty, 2001; also Kasanen, 2003.) Moreover, in this study, as Jaana, a 48-year-old woman evaluates her ability as a student and learner in relation to a successfully passed matriculation examination test, it is very difficult for her to reposition herself in a higher category as a student and learner on the basis of her ability and competence: “*I almost didn’t believe that I had finally passed (...) I had to call back (...) [the school office] and ask ‘did you really mean me?’*” Only after the school clerk has repeatedly checked her name and date of birth and told her that she has actually passed the test is she finally reassured.

The task of schools can be seen as contradictory. On one hand, its task is to enhance individual abilities and learning and at the same time to classify and differentiate students through assessment, testing, and giving out certificates, labelling students on the basis of the institutionalized ethos of educability as “bright”, “mediocre”, and “poor”. Being genuinely talented has specific preconditions that relate to rationality, masculinity, social position, and “the theory of natural talent”. Enhancing individual abilities and learning can be seen as constructions related to lifelong learning, but the classification and differentiation into dis-



tinct categories determining “who is entitled to what kind of education” (Räty & Snellman, 1998) on the other hand, is contradictory to the emphasis on providing learning opportunities for all. The institutionalized ethos of educability follows the meritocratic ideal of “placing the right man in the right place” as opposed to the principle of lifelong learning that any individual has endless capabilities to learn from cradle to grave – the freedom to choose from endless opportunities for learning.

Fejes’s (2005) analysis of official reports on Swedish municipal adult education from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century and the present time supports the above contradiction between the lifelong and the talented learner. As opposed to the self-governing and autonomous subject mobilized in lifelong learning, the adult subject of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century is constructed as talented and belonging to the elite. According to Fejes (2005, p. 77), the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century “emphasized talent as central to success in studies and in a future academic labour market”. He continues, “It seems as if there is a notion of an inner essence of what an individual can potentially become” (p. 77). This inner essence can be measured and evaluated and the subject categorized as talented/not talented. The subject is to choose the right path in life according to this essence which will lead to happiness and self-fulfilment. (Ibid.) The categorization into talented and not talented on the basis of the inner essence that can be measured is in line with the “theory of natural talent” and the institutionalized ethos of educability described above. However, my argument is that both the self-governing, autonomous lifelong learning subject and the categorization into the talented and not talented subject prevail in today’s educational narratives.

# 5

## The Narrative Life History Approach

Following what Matti Hyvärinen (2004a, p. 242; 2004b, p. 297; see also Heikkinen, 2002) names as a narrative turn at the beginning of the 1980s and which caused such concepts as narrative and story to become widely used outside literary studies, in social sciences for example, I apply what I have named a *narrative life history approach* to this study. It is understood as an overall methodological approach and includes the methods for conducting this study. It is concerned with the generating and the interpretation of the data as well as how the construction of knowledge including ethical considerations is understood in this study.

Having been informed by social constructionist thinking, in this study the subjective meanings are seen as having been constructed within individual biographies, within the limitations of structure. The narrative life history approach, thus, combines both the micro – subjective and interpersonal – and macro – historical and socio-cultural – context in this study, placing the emphasis on the ‘biographicity’ of learning that entails combining “the twin poles of structure and subjectivity” (Alheit, 1995, p. 63; see also Alheit & Dausien, 2002b). Similarly Jens Brockmeier (2001, p. 266) does not see “the canonical forms in which a life story is to be told” as “entirely determined by the culture”. “Rather, they are amazingly malleable, negotiable, and adaptable to the conditions under which each individual life is lived”. “Especially

in Western cultures this flexibility and openness can be seen as a general characteristic of life narratives". (Ibid.)

## 5.1 Generating the Data

The data for this study were generated in one general upper secondary school for adults in the capital area, approximately 3–4 months after the participants' graduation from there in 2004–2005 in four different phases. This was for practical reasons: newly graduated students from a school where I had worked as an English and French teacher were fairly easy to reach and for the most part they were also eager to participate in this study. I also thought that a few months after the graduation would be a good time to evaluate the GUSSA study. Four different data generating phases were needed to find a fair number of participants of different ages. The precondition was that they had both completed their general upper secondary school certificates (this is not necessary for those who already have vocational qualifications, see also part 2) and passed the matriculation examination in general upper secondary school for adults as well as attended regular classroom sessions instead of distance learning.<sup>9</sup> Generating data in four different phases also helps to protect the anonymity of the participants, thus I do not provide information about the exact time of the graduation of the participants. The above-mentioned criteria for inviting participants in this study were created in order to form a homogeneous group representing those who had the most experience of studying in a formal institute of this kind. The school also formed a common cultural and social space for me as a researcher and the school's adult graduates as research participants to refer to and to talk about (see the discussion in 2.2 and below in 5.3). Including students who had not completed their study yet or had dropped out would have added to the multivoicedness of this study, but

---

<sup>9</sup> In the course of the study this third criteria of attending regular classroom sessions instead of distance learning was not entirely met as these two ways of studying are blurred in practice and many students attend both forms of teaching in GUSSA.

would also have demanded comparisons between different kinds of student groups, which would have been beyond the scope of this study and was not my concern at this point. Doing research on participation and/or non-participation in formal education in the context of lifelong learning will be an interesting issue for future research.

The secondary school leaving certificate being a prerequisite for general upper secondary school study all the twenty adults participating in this study had completed secondary school prior to general upper secondary school study, and some of them also had vocational qualifications. All the participants had both completed their general upper secondary school certificates and passed the matriculation examination in GUSSA. All of the participants were white Finnish citizens representing different ages (see Table 1). Two of them had one parent with a non-Finnish background. Fifteen of the participants were female and five male representing the age range of under 30-year-olds to over 60-year-olds. The majority of the participants were under 40 (12 students), four students were between 40 and 60, and four students over 60. The large number of female students and students who were under 40 reflects the overall student body in the general upper secondary school for adults whose students participated in this study. The pilot participant had graduated from another general upper secondary school for adults a long time prior to the others and was, thus, not included in the final data. Also one other participant was not included as he had only completed a few courses in GUSSA and the rest in a “normal” general upper secondary school.

**Table 1.** The number of research participants according to gender, ethnicity, and age.

| Gender |   | Ethnicity |         | Age  |       |      | Total number |
|--------|---|-----------|---------|------|-------|------|--------------|
| F      | M | Fin       | Non-Fin | < 40 | 40–60 | > 60 |              |
| 15     | 5 | 18        | 2       | 12   | 4     | 4    | 20           |

The data consist of life-lines<sup>10</sup> (Appendix 4), written narratives on general upper secondary school experiences (Appendix 3), and narrative life history interviews (Atkinson, 1998; Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi, 2005; Kvale, 1996; Riessman, 2004a) based on the aforementioned written assignments as well as (semi-structured) themes (Appendix 5) common to all participants. Life-lines and written narratives turned out to form a helpful basis for the interviews, the primary data in this study. For the researcher the initial information provided by them formed the basis for asking personally relevant questions from each interviewee. And through them the research participants were able to reflect upon their experiences prior to the interviews. They also provided support especially at moments of confusion for both participants. Initially I had chosen to use them to include additional written media for expressing oneself, thinking that it would complement the data. Becoming aware of the fundamental differences between the construction of oral and written data (see e.g. Vilkkö, 1997; pp. 73–76) the interviews were used as the primary research material of this investigation. However, in some instances I have used information from the written assignments to provide a context for interpreting the narratives generated during the interviews. At such instances this is explicitly stated. The life-lines were not analysed as such but were analysed indirectly as they were referred to during the interviews. The interviews lasted from approximately one

<sup>10</sup> Inga Elqvist-Saltzman (1991) has used a life-line question as part of a questionnaire as a starting point for life stories in her study on how women make use of the Swedish educational system. The participants in her study marked on “a time-line ranging from 18 to 65 years of age when they had been or wanted to be occupied with education, professional work or staying home with children. They were also asked to indicate on the same line childbirths, marriages, divorces and other important events in life” (p. 110). Similarly, Katri Komulainen (1998) has also applied a life-line in her PhD study on women’s educational life stories, the primary data of which were thematic life story interviews. The life-line in this study is an application of Elqvist-Saltzman and Komulainen’s (see Appendix 4 for more details).

and a half hours to four hours. They were recorded and I provided word to word transcriptions<sup>11</sup> for them. The interview data consist of 1054 pages of transcribed text.

Typically for a qualitative study the research questions in the study in hand have also changed and developed during the research process. The questions for generating the data<sup>12</sup> concentrated on the experiences – both prior and during – the general upper secondary school and the meanings constructed in relation to general upper secondary school, providing data on the route leading to general upper secondary school and general upper secondary school study as an adult. The research scheme below illustrates the generating of the data. First, I sent an introductory letter (see Appendix 2) to all the graduates who met the initial criteria described above. The introductory letter informed them about this study and invited them to participate in it. The letter was followed by a phone call to discuss the investigation further and the research subjects’ potential participation in it. We agreed upon the deadline for the written assignments as well as the time and place for the interview. I interviewed the participants once except for one participant who herself felt that she was not able to provide all the information she wanted to during the first interview. Fifteen of the interviews were implemented in a small and fairly quiet classroom at the general

---

<sup>11</sup> The transcriptions were provided using the following notation: P: researcher’s comment (in the final report researcher’s comments inside square brackets [P:] were only provided when thought relevant for the interpretation of meanings constructed in the narrative), (laughter) = relevant non-verbal information in brackets. Additionally for reporting purposes the following notation was used (...) = missing data, [missing word] = researcher’s interpretations for missing words were provided for clarification. Pauses, hesitations, etc. were not transcribed due to the large amount of data.

<sup>12</sup> The following research questions were applied for generating the data of this study:  
***What kinds of meanings do adult students construct in relation to general upper secondary school study as part of their life course?***

*1. The route leading to general upper secondary school*

- a. What kinds of life events/experiences lead students to study in general upper secondary school for adults?
- b. What are the meanings of these life events/experiences for them and their life course?
- c. How are these life events attached to general upper secondary school study?

*2. General upper secondary school study*

- a. What kinds of events and experiences do students face as adult students?
- b. What are the meanings of these events and experiences for them and their studies?
- c. How do the students experience their studying process?
- d. What are the meanings of general upper secondary school study for the students and their life course?

upper secondary school where the participants had studied. One participant preferred to have the interview at her workplace and one in my study at the university. One interview took place in a public library classroom outside the capital area. Two interviews were conducted in the participant's home. Reflections on the place for the interview will be discussed in connection to the interpretation of the data, when seen as relevant for the overall interpretation of the data.

In order to base the interviews on subjects' written assignments and on common themes, the written narrative of each subject was analysed before each interview. On analysing the written narratives, six categories were used to categorize the data: studying and learning, relationships at school and significant others, studying as an adult, memories from the general upper secondary school for adults, development as a student and a learner, and the meaning of the general upper secondary school study. The categories were based on the themes (see Appendix 3) that were stated in the instruction for the written assignment. Furthermore, the data were processed by preparing complementary questions to gain more information on significant issues and to clarify unclear ones. Thus, each interview was based on the life events and experiences of each individual while also covering themes that were common to all participants. The interviewees were encouraged to associate their experiences freely through open-ended questions (see Appendix 5) according to the principles of the narrative interview (Atkinson, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Riessman, 2004a; see the discussion below).

## Research scheme

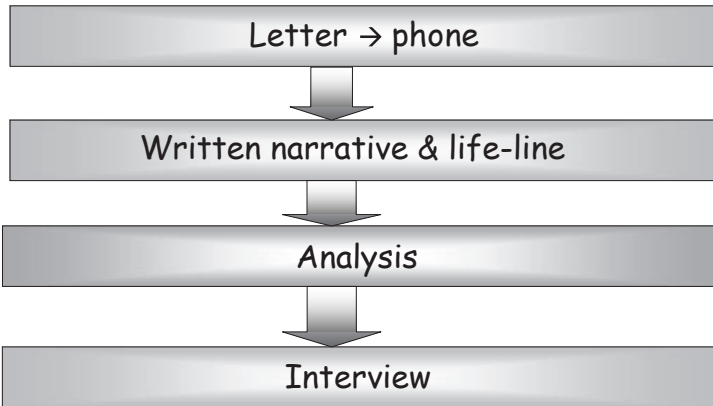


Figure 1. Research scheme.

### 5.2 Narrative Life History Interview

I have named the method of interviewing in this study *narrative life history interview* although other concepts could equally well have been used, namely, thematic interview, semi-structured (life world) interview, interview conversation, open interview, in-depth interview as well as ethnographic interview (see Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2000; Kvale, 1996; Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2004a; Tolonen & Palmu, 2007). But as Hanna-Mari Ikonen and Hanna Ojala (2005) have stated, naming a method does not alone determine how it is applied in a study. Therefore, it is necessary to specify how the knowledge formation of a narrative life history interview is understood in this study.

Steinar Kvale (1996, pp. 3–5) suggests the metaphors miner or traveller to describe the role of the interviewer in two contrasting understandings of interview research. According to Kvale (ibid), the two different metaphors represent different concepts of knowledge forma-



tion. The miner metaphor refers to knowledge as “given” whereas the traveller metaphor refers to the constructive formation of knowledge. Kvale posits that in the former conception “the knowledge is waiting in the subjects’ interior to be uncovered, uncontaminated by the miner” so that the interviewer is able to get “meanings out of a subject’s pure experiences, unpolluted by any leading questions”, like a miner digging for valuable metal. On the other hand, the traveller metaphor, according to Kvale, is the process by which “What the traveling reporter hears and sees is described qualitatively and is reconstructed as stories to be told to the people of the interviewer’s own country (...)”. He continues “The potentialities of meanings in the original stories are differentiated and unfolded through the traveler’s interpretations; the tales are remolded into new narratives, which are convincing in their aesthetic form and are validated through their impact upon the listeners”. Instead of the metaphors used by Kvale, Tarja Aaltonen (2005, p. 181) suggests the metaphor weaver in describing the dialogic nature of interview interaction. According to Aaltonen, as a weaver the interviewer is not searching for a vein of gold or a tourist sight, but instead she is generating texture, text, meanings (ibid). The three metaphors also illustrate my own journey as a researcher. As Kvale states in relation to the traveller metaphor “The journey may not only lead to new knowledge; the traveler might change as well”. He uses the German concept *Bildungsreise* to describe a scholarly, formative journey. As a researcher I have also journeyed from being a miner, a traveller, and a weaver. I cannot trace the exact time for the occurrence of the changes in my conception of knowledge formation, and the three different concepts of knowledge have also overlapped and the distinctions between them have not been as sharp as described above. The metaphors, however, illustrate the changes in my own thinking that I have undergone as a researcher during this research process. My process as a researcher is, then, inevitably linked to the implementation of this research, although the weaving of meaning best describes my present understanding of knowledge formation, and necessarily becomes emphasized as this report is written from “the weaver position”.

So for my present understanding I see the life histories including the narratives, i.e. mini-stories within the life histories, as co-constructed in an interview situation between the narrator and the addressee: different narratives would have been told to a different audience and in a different situation. In other words the interviews, i.e. the data have been generated in an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Both the interviewer and the interviewee are active participants in constructing meanings in the interview situation. As Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein argue (2002, p. 28; see also Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi, 2005, p. 221; Ruusuvauro & Tiittula, 2005, p. 23; Tienari, Vaara, & Meriläinen, 2005, p. 111), despite being an institutionalized form of interaction, providing particular resources for asking and answering questions and prescribed roles for interview participants as well as privileging certain accounts over others, interview participants “do not act like robots” but are more “artful” in adopting narrative resources available for them. But as also Kvale states (1996, p. 6; see also Tolonen & Palmu, 2007), “The research interview is not a conversation between equal partners, because the researcher defines and controls the situation”. That is, despite the respect and space given to the interviewees’ construction of meaning.

In conducting the interviews I gave the interviewees as much space as possible for them to construct narratives about their lives, as my aim was to generate narratives about the research participants’ lives with a special focus on learning and education. I asked for narratives, gave space for narratives, and posed questions that I thought tempted narratives (cf. Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi, 2005, p. 191). I started each interview with a broad open question: Would you tell me about yourself and your life and the important events you have experienced? The aim was to elicit narratives about the subject’s life that would ultimately lead to accounts about the experience of general upper secondary school adult study. Kvale among others (1996, p. 133; see also Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2000, p. 107) has recommended a broad introductory question in order “to yield spontaneous, rich, descriptions where the subjects themselves provide what they experience as the main dimensions of the phenom-

ena investigated” (Kvale, 1996, p. 133). Also Hyvärinen and Löytyniemi (2005, p. 194) state that most of an interview can be based on one broad question and the narration which follows from it, giving Jerome Bruner’s (1987) and Fritz Schützen’s (see Bernart & Krapp, 1997) interview methods as examples. But as Hyvärinen and Löytyniemi (2005, p. 218) argue, with the question format alone we can never totally control what kind of answers we get in an interview situation. This became evident also in this study. Some interviewees answered the initial question with rich narratives full of detail and specificity, whereas some were seemingly confused by such a broad (and personal) question and asked for more guidance than I had initially provided in order to begin their narration. In other words, some told their narratives freely at great length without hardly any interruptions on the part of the researcher, whereas others wanted more guidance in the form of questions. This reflects the interviewees’ differing presuppositions about “an interview”. After Henri’s (male aged 34) interview, which was the first one in this study, I wrote in my notebook:

*I had the feeling that he doesn't tell me if I don't ask him. Did he perhaps presume that I ask and he answers? In this sense the written assignment is good: he has done it and it is the basis for my questions.*

Despite these feelings described in the notes after the interview, it is rich with narratives on Henri’s experiences about learning and education. So although the interview did not evolve smoothly and easily at times, it provided important data on the phenomenon under study. And vice versa, interviews that evolved easily at least for the researcher did not necessarily provide detailed and specific narratives. Janne’s (male aged 25) interview extract below is also an example of the confusion and the negotiation followed by the initial question based on the life-line made before the interview (see above Generating the Data):

P: *Now at the beginning uh based on this life-line, would you please tell me about yourself and your life and and about events that you consider significant in your life?*

J: *So in practice do I tell you the same thing that I've written here?*

P: *Well yes, for example, or then you can pick up certain events or then you can just go through your life course in your own words.*

J: *Well, this is a bit difficult but, well, practically the same thing as here?*

P: *Yes, well, for example your first [experiences] or perhaps before the age you've marked there, seventeen: uh school memories, memories from your childhood.*

J: *Yeah.*

P: *Things that were important for you then.*

J: *Yes, well it's not an awful lot; you can't remember everything anymore, but (...).*

The gender difference between the interviewer and the interviewees in the above examples also had an effect on the interview situation: it was easier to establish rapport and to talk with women than it was with men. But there were also differences between males and females. With some male participants the conversation flowed more easily, the same was true with the female participants. Besides gender, finding “a common language” was an important determinant in establishing rapport. But even within interviews this varied: for some things it was easier to find “a common language” than for others.

After the broad initial question each interview was based on the meanings constructed on the life events and experiences of each individual, while also covering themes that were common for all participants. Similarly, Tienari, Vaara, and Meriläinen (2005, pp. 106–107) also used a combination of narrative and thematic interviews in their study on the establishment of the financial concern Nordea. They started out with open narratives after which they discussed pre-structured themes with the participants. In this study, too, after the broad initial question the interview conversation evolved differently in each

encounter being based on individual written narratives on general upper secondary school experiences and pre-structured themes. I let the “conversation” largely flow following the topics introduced by the participants, posing additional questions or introducing new themes when it naturally suited the situation (see Appendix 5 for examples of questions posed). Keeping the purpose of the interview in mind I concentrated on listening carefully to the narrator, reacting to the telling and showing interest and empathy. I tried to create as relaxed and trustful an atmosphere as possible, balancing between such questions as: Is this important? Should I ask more? Does s/he want to talk more about this? Can I ask about this? Is this too intrusive? These questions had to be asked again and again during each interview and the answers were ethically loaded depending on the topic under discussion as well as the relationship established. In creating a trustful relationship with the interviewee I also sometimes talked about my personal experiences. Also I did not interrupt the interviewees if they wanted to talk about matters that were not directly relevant for the purpose of this study. As Tarja Tolonen and Tarja Palmu (2007, pp. 99–100) remark, many important themes related to the research open up through “a key theme” that is important for the interviewee. After one such instance I wrote:

*At times I thought whether I should lead her to advance more quickly, for example, when she was talking about her relationships with others. I didn't do that, however, but thought that I would ask more about studying later on.*

The above note was written after Helena's (female aged 29) interview who also described the interview situation being “like talking to a psychologist or psychiatrist”. She talked openly and with great detail during the interview. By not interrupting her I wanted to show respect for her meaning making and the importance she gave to different experiences in her life. Some other interviewees also described the interview as therapeutic, “*talking away*” difficult life events. According to Tolonen and Palmu (2007, p. 101) an interview can also work as therapy as

interviewees sometimes bring up difficult issues, such as depression, burnout, personal relationships, divorce, and alcoholism in this study. Dealing with personal life histories such issues can hardly be avoided, but demand cautiousness on what can be asked from whom and in what situation.

On one hand, this kind of narrative interviewing, as I prefer to name it, created rich and interesting narratives that I had not been able to anticipate, but on the other hand, each interview also contained several instances where I afterwards reflected on the paths taken or not taken. I argue that this is an inevitable feature of an open interview that is closer to an everyday conversation than a structured interview. But there is also a difference between the first and the last interview in this study (see also Tolonen & Palmu, 2007, p. 92) that is perhaps best explained by the degree of freedom allowed, for the space given to the interviewee by the interviewer also resulted in longer interviews. In the same vein Riessman (2004a) states: “Opening up the research interview to extended narration by a research participant requires investigators to give up some control”. After the fourth interview with Sara (female aged 66) I wrote in my notebook:

*During this interview I was much less attached to my papers. I noticed that I remembered more or less everything by heart. (...) Sara was more in the main role and we still talked about the same themes. She associated quite freely.*

During the process of interviewing the twenty participants in this study I also became more relaxed, which loosened up my control of the situation. If this did not affect the themes discussed, as Tolonen and Palmu (2007, p. 92) claim, it did affect the kinds of narratives which were constructed on the themes. Moreover, as the research progressed my questions during the interviews also became more focused (see also *ibid.*). To sum up, as Hyvärinen and Löyttyniemi (2005, p. 192) reassuringly state, you can conduct an interview “wrongly” in many ways yet still get interesting and important results.

The importance of reflecting upon the interviewer-interviewee relation has been especially emphasized in feminist research (see e.g. Rastas, 2005, p. 94; Skeggs, 1997b, p. 23; Tolonen & Palmu, 2007, p. 94; Walkerdine et al., 2001, p. 85). It is essential to recognize the effects of the relationship on the research process and results. According to Anna Rastas (2005, p. 95) naming one's researcher position "I'm a white middle-aged academically educated woman" is useless if it is not reflected upon. I will here discuss some general features that I see as having affected my relationship with the interviewees. More detailed remarks on the possible effects will be given while discussing the details of the interpretations of individual narratives.

Dimensions of difference and sameness, familiarity and strangeness intertwined in the encounters with the research participants. Most obviously we had a common interest in the research topic: general upper secondary school for adults (see also Rastas, 2005, p. 88). My own research interest was also an important and positive experience for them, for they had completed their upper secondary certificate and passed the matriculation examination in one such school. The willingness to participate in this study and to be helpful in "giving feedback about school" is also proof of our common interest. Besides this common interest there was also in the interviews the common familiar space that we shared (cf. Tolonen & Palmu, 2007, pp. 100–101). As discussed below, the cultural and social space of the general upper secondary school was familiar to us although from different positions: that of a teacher and that of a student. Thus, as a teacher I had met most of the adult students who participated in this study. As in ethnographic research "the field" was familiar ground to refer to and to talk about. We were able to communicate using what Tolonen and Palmu (2007, p. 99; see also Ruusuvaori & Tiittula, 2005, p. 39) describe as "inside terms" in constructing communality, a sameness between us. In my "field notes" I wrote:

*It helps that the interviewees know me; I'm not a frightening researcher from the university.*

We were two adults – despite our differences – talking to each other about a common interest. Also, although being “more academically educated”, I would argue that the fact that they had completed the matriculation examination, a gate-keeping degree for higher academic study, and that several of them planned to study at polytechnic or university, lessened the educational differences between us as we also shared an interest in academic study. But it has to be noted that what I have here called the “common ground” may have been felt and seen very differently by the interviewees (see Rastas, 2005, pp. 87–88; Tolonen & Palmu, 2007, p. 92), our experiences being based on the social and cultural context we have lived in and our personal “biographicity” (see Alheit & Dausien, 2002a, 2002b), our embodied experience. This also entails gender (see also above), ethnicity, age, and social position in the co-construction of meaning. Both difference and sameness gave rise to curiosity and surprise, demanding sensitivity and attentive listening to be able to hear differently, from another perspective.

### **5.3 Positionings and Further Reflections on Ethical Issues**

The cultural and social space of the general upper secondary school for adults where I generated the data for this research was familiar to me through my work there as a teacher, and so were most of the adult students who participated in this study. I had taught many of them, others I had known through student board meetings or other activities at school; and some I had met in the school corridors. I had known them as students in a common cultural setting that was familiar to us, but from different positions, i.e. that of a teacher and that of a student. Interviewing students in a school where I had also acted as a teacher has most certainly had an impact on how the interviewees present themselves – students tell teachers certain kinds of narratives – as well as how they present the general upper secondary school for adults where they studied and I worked, and which eventually became the context of this



study. However, these positions became blurred as I stepped outside the school to conduct research and the students graduated from general upper secondary school to take part in this study as research participants, having personal experience about being a general upper secondary school adult student. In the meantime they had also taken up new and different positions, as students, workers, parents and so forth, which also became part of this research. I consider that these different positions and power relations raise issues related to the co-construction of meaning including important ethical issues that I feel I need to put forward here.

I chose to conduct research in a school familiar to me primarily for practical reasons: it was easy to gain access there to do research. The familiar environment had also aroused questions that were not possible to deal with as a teacher. I was able to grasp little of the richness of the classroom experiences without being able to know more about my students' lives. My students became my teachers as I decided to take up the task of asking them more about their experiences. I felt the students' experiences were a valuable resource about this type of school that could be profited from much more during lessons and in school practices. This created the initial setting for this research that through the common familiar space and my, the researcher's, and the students', the research participants', relationship exhibits the ethnographic features discussed by Tolonen and Palmu (2007, pp. 89–112; also Coffey, 1999, pp. 33–34). Drawing on Sherman Heyl (2001) and Tuula Gordon and Elina Lahelma (2003) they characterize an ethnographic interview as an interview that has been implemented in the context of ethnographic field work and where both the researcher and the research participant know something about each other before the interview encounter and where the interviewee acts as an informant telling about her/his own feelings and experiences, as well as about the events in the research field. The time spent with the research participant indicates continuity in the sense that the researcher and the research participant do not only meet for the interview. Citing Sherman Heyl (2001), Tolonen and Palmu (*ibid*) also define the quality of the research relationship as a criterion

of an ethnographic interview, i.e. the researcher’s relationship to the research participant is respectful and open to interaction and the research participant’s construction of meaning. I have defined the interviews conducted in this study as a narrative life history interview (see the discussion in 5.2 above), which – as I understand it – like an ethnographic interview provides space for the interaction between the researcher and the research participant as well as space for the research participant’s views and construction of meaning.

Although the study in hand is not based on ethnographic methodology, I would still argue that it has ethnographic features which have had an impact on this research throughout the research process. Knowing the students outside the research context, being inside the school with them, has affected the co-construction of meaning in this study. It has influenced the generating of data and has had an effect on what is expected to be said, what can be said, and what is actually said. I have been present as a teacher and a researcher or even a therapist, at times alternating between these positions depending on each individual encounter. Likewise I have encountered both adult students and research participants, moving between different levels of familiarity and strangeness depending on the relationship established during the research encounter. My own experiences of teaching in the general upper secondary school for adults and knowing (most of) the students who participated in this study as well as the research participants’ past experiences have become part of this research and the meanings constructed. I see this research as constructed through the interaction between theory and data in which my own subjectivity is also present.

So on one hand as a researcher I was an insider – being familiar with the cultural and social space of the general upper secondary school and the adult students who participated in this study – but on the other hand stepping outside the school in the sphere of the research community I also became an outsider. But like Amanda Coffey (2005, pp. 213–223), who problematizes the dualisms close-far, familiar-strange, insider-outsider in her discussion about differing researcher positions, I also acknowledge the multidimensional tension between familiar and

strange in this study. In her discussion Coffey posits that the difference between insider and outsider is not straightforward and the categories of familiar and strange are not prejuxtaposed, but far more complex; researching 'others' and understanding 'ourselves' cannot be seen as distinct or separate activities (ibid).

Despite stepping outside the physical space of the general upper secondary school as a teacher I still shared the cultural and social knowledge of our school culture in general and that of the general upper secondary school in particular. As Coffey (2005, pp. 213–223) states, doing educational research has always meant facing the problems of researching inside a familiar culture, for example the problems of being “too familiar” and not seeing or “knowing” before starting research. However, stepping outside, I would argue, also made it possible for me to make the familiar strange and to apply an analytical and also a critical grip that might have otherwise been more difficult. Being inside as a teacher had meant for me a firm belief in education and the omnipotent individual and societal good that it was able to produce. My thoughts were in line with the overall societal belief in education and the lifelong learning discourse. I had adopted the values of the “model citizen”, a metaphor used by Katariina Hakala (2007, pp. 59–63) for the culturally and historically constructed image of the teacher, the embodiment of societal values. Stepping outside meant looking and seeing education in a different context, i.e. as part of the global economy and educational policy, seeing the lifelong learning discourse as an important part of the Western strategy of coping in the global market. Working in a research community allowed me access to discussions that represented quite different voices about conducting education and its practices than the discussions I had participated in at school as a teacher. In other words stepping outside opened up the possibility of entering into different, even contradictory discussions on education. It has meant making the familiar strange and the strange familiar again in new ways (Coffey, 2005, pp. 213–223).

Being inside and outside of the general upper secondary school for adults, meeting the individuals participating in this study as a teacher

and a researcher allowed me a multidimensional, but not unproblematic position to do research. I will now come to some ethical issues related to this research. The respectful and continuous relationship referred to above (an often trustworthy one as well I would claim), also raises difficult ethical problems which need to be discussed. First of all there is the problem of guaranteeing anonymity for the research participants (see Walford, 2005). Researchers, myself included, are quick to guarantee their research participants’ anonymity, but is it possible to maintain in practice? What does the promise of maintaining anonymity entail? In this research I have promised to protect the research participants’ anonymity, both in the initial letter sent to them inviting them to participate in this study (Appendix 2) as well as at the beginning of our encounter at the interview situation (Appendix 5), without thinking, I have to admit, more carefully what this promise actually involves. I have made the choice of talking about the school where I have worked as a teacher and, thus knowing the research participants over a longer period of time than just the interview. I have made this difficult choice convinced that it will bring a better understanding about the kind of relationship we had, I as a researcher and they as the adult students who participated in this study, and thus having influenced the knowledge production, the co-construction of meaning in this study. But making this choice jeopardizes, for its part, the anonymity of the participants, the outcome of which may potentially harm them in some ways. Being aware of this possibility I have tried to preserve the anonymity of the participants in other ways: by using pseudonyms, by changing or excluding place names, by excluding personal and intimate information, and by providing distance by interviewing students who have graduated at different times in addition to the inevitable time lag between the interviews and the published report (cf. Kuula, 2006). Using the English language to report this study also helps to protect the anonymity of the research participants, as the dialects and other nuances of their spoken Finnish has been translated into written English.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> All the analyses in this study were carried out using the original Finnish transcripts, the data extracts were translated into English only for reporting purposes.

Using English translations for the data extracts means that in the final report my interpretations as a researcher not only involve the transcription from oral to written text but also translation from written Finnish to written English text as I have provided the translations of the data extracts myself. For the reader this means that the original spoken text has been twice interpreted and transformed before acquiring the format of the final report. My task has been to convince the reader of my interpretations as well as protect the anonymity of the research participant. Despite the measures I took to conduct ethically sustainable research, the question what can be written and published has remained a constant concern to me throughout the research process (cf. Tolonen & Palmu, 2007, p. 102; see also Coffey, 1999, pp. 74–75).

Another consideration is that a continuous and trustworthy relationship between researcher and research participant invites intimacy that may at times be closer to a friendship or a therapeutic encounter than a research encounter. This also has consequences that are difficult to anticipate. For example, when and how should one break a relationship that continues after the research encounter? How can the urge for the construction of knowledge and humaneness be combined so that the trustworthy relationship does not become a space for abusing an established trust? The research participants themselves do not necessarily come to think of the consequences of talking about intimate and private matters with the researcher. So although s/he has made a contract with the researcher and given her the permission to use the information for research purposes, the consequences of this action may not be anticipated. As Tolonen and Palmu (2007, p. 103) argue, the researcher needs to balance between the different emotions that arise in a research relationship, i.e. the emotions of abuse, familiarity, strangeness, and intimacy.

These reflections do not revoke my responsibility as a researcher, teacher, and a human being. I am ethically obliged to reflect on the choices I have made during the research process and should anticipate their consequences but, it must also be admitted that all one can do as a researcher is do one's best to conduct ethically sustainable research

and, therefore, the real consequences of a researcher’s choices are only to be seen in the time to come. In the end the published research report is the researcher’s interpretation and view of the world and, therefore she is solely responsible.

## 5.4 Interpreting Narrative Life Histories

In her discussion on narrative inquiry Susan Chase (2005, p. 652) formulates narrative as a generic term referring to “a short topical story about a particular event and specific characters”, “an extended story about a significant aspect of one’s life”, or “a narrative of one’s entire life”, whereas she defines life history as a more specific term to describe an extensive autobiographical narrative. In a similar vein, according to Catherine Riessman<sup>14</sup> (also Riessman, 2004a), at one end there is the restricted Labovian definition of narrative where a narrative is an extremely bounded unit; that is, an answer to a single question (e.g. Were you ever in a situation where you thought you were in serious danger of being killed? (Labov & Waletzky, 1997, p. 5). This unit is temporally organized and consists of specific elements (see 5.4.1 below). At the other end there is the view that “all is narrative” so that for example an entire life story is seen as narrative. Following Riessman’s stance I have located narrative somewhere between these two extremes, seeing narratives as mini-stories within life histories. I see narratives and life histories as interrelated forming thematic and structural wholes that I have reinterpreted in order to give light to the multilayered construction of private (i.e. biographical) and public (i.e. social) meanings on learning and education in the context of lifelong learning. In what follows I will specify the three main methodological concepts of this study: *narrative*, *life history*, and *coherence*, and explain how I see them as inter-related.

---

<sup>14</sup> Kataja-course lecture in Helsinki 13.–17.6.2005.

### 5.4.1 Narrative

Narratives, then, I have defined as mini-stories that have sequence (i.e. the temporal ordering of events) and consequence (one event being contingent upon the next) and that are embedded in the entire life history (cf. Riessman, 1993, 2004b; see also Labov, 1982). Thus, the life histories told in the interview situation are not narrative in themselves but possibly contain narratives. The structural approach for analysing personal narratives modelled by Labov and Waletzky (Labov & Waletzky, 1997; Labov, 1972, 1982, 1997) has proved useful in providing a skeleton for the interpretation of narratives (see also Linde, 1993; Miettinen, 2006; Riessman, 1993; Vilkkko, 1997).

The Labovian structural analysis accounts for both the narrative contents and how these contents are made meaningful by individual speakers, i.e. ‘the told’ (what happened?) together with ‘the telling’ (how the story was told) of the story, its form together with its content (cf. Riessman, 2004b). ‘The told’ and ‘the telling’ are inseparable so that in focusing on *how* a story is told also accounts for *what* happened. Sonja Miettinen (2006, p. 139), who has applied the Labov and Waletzky model of structural analysis argues that this analysis is useful for three reasons: 1) it systematizes and sharpens the interpretation of narratives; 2) the narratives are interpreted as wholes (as opposed to thematic coding for instance (ibid, p. 40); 3) the narrative structure is part of the message – the narrator may communicate both through the form and the contents of the narrative. Labov and Waletzky’s model has been applied since its first introduction in 1967 (Labov & Waletzky, 1997), and has been further developed and applied in different ways (see *Oral versions of personal experience*, 1997). My own definition of narrative as well as the application of this model is different from the original. In what follows I will introduce what I see as crucial aspects of the model, together with its modifications, for its application in this study. For a more detailed discussion on Labov and Waletzky’s model see, for example, *Oral versions of personal experience* (1997), *Eron aika* (Miettinen, 2006), and *Life Stories* (Linde 1993, pp. 67–84).

Labov and Waletzky (1997, p. 5) emphasized the narratives of personal experience of ordinary people, not narratives by expert storytellers, in modelling their “analytical framework for the analysis of oral versions of personal experience in English”. The original model is based on a definition of narrative as a representation of an actual occurrence of events (Labov, 1972, p. 359; 1997, p. 12; see also Linde, 1993, p. 68; Miettinen, 2006, p. 45). In this study, however, I pursue social constructionist thinking; I acknowledge the existence of ‘facts’ about individual lives, i.e. actual life events that have happened sometime in history and, thus, “*entered into the biography* of the speaker” (Labov, 1997, p. 3; emphasis in the original), that are accounted for and constructed in different ways depending on the occasion and the addressee(s). The ‘truth’ about those facts, however, is not the concern of this study; it is the (re)presentation of lives and the organization and structuring of narratives into wholes, i.e. the role of life histories in the construction of meanings concerning studying and learning in individual lives.

However, Labov and Waletzky’s definition of narrative as a simple chronological account of past events, in David Herman’s (2002, p. 31) words a “punctual or at least temporally determinate event”, also poses another problem as it “assumes that achievements and accomplishments are the hallmarks of storytelling” (ibid). As Herman suggests there are also other ways of expressing past happenings that do not fit the Labovian model as appropriately. Adapted from Zeno Vendler’s (1967) investigation on verb semantics vis-à-vis events, actions, and processes Herman (2002, pp. 29–31; see also Miettinen 2006, pp. 46–47) distinguishes a time-schemata for 1) *accomplishments* (definite time periods, e.g. eating an apple); 2) *achievements* (definite time instants, e.g. winning a basketball game the instant the final buzzer sounds); 3) *activities/processes* (indefinite time periods, e.g. growing old); 4) *states* (indefinite time instants, e.g. being in debt any instant between bankruptcy and solvency). Furthermore, drawing on Vendler (1967), Herman (2002, pp. 35–38) distinguishes narrative genres by means of the above-mentioned event types and preference rankings. For example, he posits that psychological novels “prefer to understand events as illus-



trative of (interior) states, else as activities, else as accomplishments, else as achievements” (pp. 37–38).

Herman (2002, p. 36) suggests that “epics such as *The Odyssey*” “display a preference for coding events as accomplishments gained over the course of long but determinate periods of suffering and heroic endeavor”. He continues: “It takes the entirety of Homer’s poem for Odysseus to accomplish his return to Ithaca and victory over Penelope’s importunate suitors”. Characteristic of epics, Odysseus’s actions display “repeated and individually quite extensive tests”. (Ibid.) Likewise, (see also below in 5.4.3), the graduation from the general upper secondary school for adults as well as the passing of the matriculation examination can be seen as an accomplishment. It involves a definite time period of 2–4 years (for most students) which also includes hard work, suffering, and repeated tests in order to reach the well-defined goal. According to Herman (2002, pp. 37–38), epics “prefer to understand events as accomplishments, else as achievements, else as activities, else as illustrative of states”. I suggest that the preference ranking for an epic poem or tale rather than a psychological novel is more likely for the *success stories* of this study, where the protagonist reaches the well-defined goal in the end (e.g. Gergen, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1995).

In this light, it also holds that the Labovian model is more suited for the narratives which lead to successful graduation, i.e. the “accomplishment” stories in this study than, for example, the events illustrative of interior states, such as the daughters’ narratives on the death of an elderly parent in Miettinen’s (2006) study. Seeing the limitations of the Labovian model Miettinen has applied a model created by Judith Hudson, Janet Gebelt, Jeanette Haviland, and Christine Bentivegna (1992 in Miettinen, 2006, pp. 48–49) to analyse emotion narratives in her study. This model is similar to Labov and Waletzky’s model (see below), but the categories of complicating action (what happened?) and resolution (what finally happened?) are absent. Instead there are the categories of actions (e.g. accelerating action, climax) internal responses (cognitive, affective), and dialogue (paraphrases, direct speech) that according to Miettinen permit the analysis of different types of narra-

tive structures, not uniquely the ones that evolve around “punctual or at least temporally determinate event” (see Herman, 2002 above), i.e. complicating action. (Miettinen, 2006.)

Having said this, however, it is important to note that even if the preference in the success stories in this study might be accomplishment and achievement, individual narrators use different resources in telling their life histories. Thereafter, activities and states involving indefinite time instants and periods are also present and some narrators resort to these rather than other types of events. As Herman (2002, p. 38) puts it: “different narrative genres are (...) globally but not always locally operative”. In the data of this study the preference ranking in Kalle’s (male, aged 24) narration is similar to the psychological novel, i.e. mental states and activities rather than accomplishments and achievements. The accomplishment of the GUSSA study – “*landscape of action*” (Bruner, 1986, p. 14 in Miettinen, 2006, p. 48) – is placed in the background, whereas the “*landscape of consciousness*”, i.e. knowing, thinking, and feeling (ibid) construe the core of narration. Becoming conscious of one’s depression, how it feels, and how it affects one’s life is so much more important than succeeding well at school, getting good grades, and winning in competitions between fellow students.

In the analysis of this study I have either interpreted instances of “landscape of consciousness” as evaluation or have extended the original function of complicating action to cover other than “punctual or at least temporally determinate action” (Herman, 2002, p. 31), i.e. action that does not lead to an explicitly stated goal. However, as the main emphasis in this study has not been on interior states, but on action that materializes in events told about learning and education, the Labov and Waletzky model has provided a useful tool for the analysis and the interpretation of meanings. States are, nevertheless, important in providing context for the interpretation of narratives on learning and education.

Besides its definition of narrative, Labov and Waletzky’s model has also been criticized for not taking the social and cultural context of narrative into account (e.g. Holmes, 1997, pp. 93–95; Miettinen, 2006, p.

45). In my application of the Labovian model the social and cultural context –both micro and macro – forms an essential part of the interpretation of meaning, placing the emphasis on the ‘biographicity’ of learning, which entails combining “the twin poles of structure and subjectivity” (Alheit, 1995, p. 63; see also Alheit & Dausien, 2002b), in other words focusing on biographical learning within societal structures. By micro context I refer to both the interview situation where meanings are co-constructed in interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (see 5.2 above) and the life history context in the construction of meanings concerning learning and education. Macro context, on the other hand, refers to the larger social and cultural space surrounding us and influencing us as social actors. In relation to educational policy the lifelong learning discourse is an important part of this social and cultural space. I do not see language and structure as merely accidental and a resource for telling a story; I see them as purposeful and having meaning. Language is not transparent, but political and ideological. Linde (1993, p. 16) also points to the importance of cultural facts in discourse/language: “by remaining within the text and focusing on its structure, the investigation can determine a great deal about processes that are common to the entire culture, as well as some that appear to be particular to individual speakers”. Rather than coding the life history data thematically, narrative analysis makes use of narratives as wholes within a life history context, thus making it possible to combine “the twin poles of structure and subjectivity”, the ‘biographicity’ of learning (Alheit, 1995, p. 63; see also Alheit & Dausien, 2002b).

Labov and Waletzky defined the parts of a narrative formally, partially semantically, and partially by their function within the narrative (Linde, 1993, p. 282). It is these parts of narrative that I have found to be a useful and practical analytic tool for the interpretation of my data (cf. *ibid*). According to the model presented by Labov and Waletzky (1997; see also Labov, 1972, 1982, 1997) a “fully formed” narrative has six common elements: an *abstract* (summary of the substance of the narrative, introducing the theme; what is this all about?); *orientation* (time, place, situation, participants; what’s the situation like?); *compli-*

*cating action* (sequence of events; what happened?); *evaluation* (significance and meaning of the action, attitude of the narrator; what’s the point of telling this story?); *resolution* (what finally happened, reaction to previous events); and *coda* (returns the perspective to the present; what can we learn from this?). All of these elements do not form a necessary part of a narrative, in fact just complicating action is a minimum condition for a narrative (Labov, 1972, p. 360; 1982, p. 226). The evaluative material forms the unordered part of the narrative and according to Linde (1993, p. 69; see also Labov, 1972, pp. 369–370) “may appear anywhere and may indeed form part of some other structure”. The narratives in this study rarely follow Labov and Waletzky’s model as neatly as in the original model. The narratives in this study are often much longer than those which provided the basis for formulating the original model. They are parts of a life history and not answers to a single question (cf. above). Additionally, the narrative elements in this study do not necessarily occur in the above order and some of the elements may be repeated within one narrative. For the purpose of this study I also read fragments of narrative, i.e. for example, evaluative sections, separately from complicating action (cf. the discussion below). I will supply the reader with my interpretation of the narrative elements that have informed my interpretations, being aware that the narrative elements I have ‘found’ might also be interpreted differently.

But as all text is not narrative the Labovian model cannot be applied, for example, to question-answer exchanges, chronicles, and explanations, which I analyse to provide a context for the narratives. Unlike narratives, chronicles and explanations do not consist of an evaluative point, which Linde (1993, p. 72) describes as “socially the most important part of the narrative” as it “conveys to its addressees how they are to understand the meaning of the narrated sequence of events and what kind of response the speaker desires”. Labov himself (1972, p. 367) has referred to narratives without evaluation as “pointless stories”: “There are many ways to tell the same story, to make many different points, or to make no point at all”. Miettinen (2006, pp. 44–45), on the other hand, argues that the concept of evaluation in itself shows that con-

structuring a narrative is not just bringing up events from the past, for the narrator simultaneously evaluates these events from her/his perspective. In this way the whole narrative can be seen as an evaluation of the past and evaluative sections as concentrated structures of evaluation (ibid; Labov, 1972, p. 369).

#### 5.4.2 Life History

Life history, then, is not seen as a narrative in this study, but it possibly contains narratives (see the definition above; see also e.g. Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 114; Riessman, 2004b). In order to define life history I have adopted Linde's (1993, p. 51) definition of life story which she describes as "a temporally discontinuous unit told over many occasions and altered to fit the specific occasions of speaking, as well as specific addressees, and to reflect changes in the speaker's long-term situation, values, understanding, and (consequently) discursive practices". The life histories constructed in this study are seen as (re)presentations of individual lives that have been constructed on one occasion, i.e. in the interview situation, and as such I take them to be constructions of the participants' individual lives at that particular time in history. On another occasion different kinds of life histories would have been constructed giving the temporally discontinuous and open nature of life history (Linde, 1993, p. 31). But at the same time I also acknowledge the existence of 'facts' about individual lives, i.e. actual life events that have happened some time in history, that are accounted for and constructed in different ways depending on the occasion and the addressee(s). But as has already been stated above the 'truth' about those facts is not the concern of this study; it is how the individual speakers make sense of their lives, their constructions on studying and learning in particular, that is of interest here.

Instead of the concept of life story used by Linde (1993) I have sought to emphasize the social and historical context of telling our lives (see Goodson, 1992, p. 6; 1995; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, pp.

125–126), applying the concept of life history in relation to both oral and written narratives and life-lines in this study. The written narratives and life-lines discussed and (re)interpreted in the interview situation (see 5.1 and 5.2 above) thus form part of the life histories told on one particular occasion. In other words, written narratives and life-lines were reconstructed in the interview situation between the narrator and the addressee and thus became part of the individual life histories.

I consider that the meanings constructed about studying and learning in the life histories in this study arise from both individual lives and from the socio-historical and cultural context in which they were lived in. Thus, the private and public meanings become intertwined in the construction of life histories. Alheit and Dausien (2002b, see also 2002a) use the concept of *biographicity*, referring to “the accumulation and structuring of experience in one’s life history” where “institutionally and socially specialised fields of experience become integrated, congealing to form a new and particular construct of meanings” (p. 223). They make a distinction between the “societal curriculum” and “learning in the life history context” (p. 224). With the former they refer to the life course as an institution where “an individual’s life from birth to death is more or less defined in norms and expectations” (p. 224), while with the latter they refer to other, i.e. biographical rules; the two being mutually dependent on each other. They see life course models that operate within a society as being “shaped and formed in decisive ways by institutionalised education, for example” (p. 225). Therefore, they argue that biographical education and training processes must be understood from two perspectives: first, “as appropriational and constructional accomplishments, given the individual and reflexive organisation of experience, knowledge and ability” and second, “as the biographical formation of social networks and processes, of collective knowledge and collective praxis” (p. 232). It, thus, they continue, “becomes possible to comprehend education and learning both as individual identity work and as the ‘formation’ of collective processes and social relations” (p. 233). These two perspectives, or should I say meaning-making processes, emerge as one in the construction of life histories, so that the

“societal curriculum” also becomes part of our personal histories to the extent that the ‘individuality’ of our lives may be questioned (e.g. Shotter, 1997). I see the construction of an individual life history as an active process on the part of the narrator (and the addressee), where the narrator constructs her/his life integrating biographical and social meanings as part of the narration.

### 5.4.3 The Creation of Coherence in Narrative Life History

Besides the individual narratives I read the life histories in this study as structural and thematic wholes. As mentioned above they are all success stories (e.g. Gergen, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1995) in the sense that they all have ‘a happy end’, i.e. all the adult students (15 female and 5 male representing the age range of under 30-year-olds to over 60-year-olds) who participated in this study reached their target and graduated from general upper secondary school for adults as well as passed the matriculation examination. We – I as a researcher and they as participants in this study – *knew* how the story would end even before starting it. What was of interest then was *how* the story would be told in order to fit that particular ending, in other words how the past was narrated and made meaningful from the present perspective (cf. e.g. Komulainen, 1998, p. 65; Hyvärinen, 1994, p. 49).<sup>15</sup> In Brockmeier’s (2001, p. 251) words, in telling their story they can be seen as to have reached “a kind of development towards a certain goal – as if the end (that is, the present of the narrative event) were the destination of one’s journey, an objective which from the very beginning had to be reached like Odysseus’ Ithaca”.

<sup>15</sup> In her PhD study *Kotihiiriä ja ihmisiä* [A course of one’s own: The rhetorical self in educational life stories by women] 1998 Katri Komulainen has also examined the creation of coherence. She has studied female students training for social welfare work in Finland and how they create coherence in their life stories. In her study she has focused on the biographical work the women engage in as they construct a bridge from their past to their present. Similarly, Matti Hyvärinen in his PhD study *Viimeiset taistot* [The final battle] 1994 has examined life stories and how former activists of a communist student movement create coherence and continuity over political transformations.

In Brockmeier’s (2001) view autobiographical narrative that refers “one way or the other to one’s life history” is “a forceful way to give human life an order in time” (p. 247). He considers it to be “about the past, the present, and the process in which both merge; and it is about the future as well, about the future that starts the very moment the story is told” (p. 250). In telling one’s story “the narrative event” and “the narrated event” fuse forming one coherent whole, “the *telos* of one’s life history – as if a sequential order in time becomes a causal or teleological order of events” (pp. 251–252). In this process life appears as a unified whole, losing an essential dimension of human life, i.e. chance. Brockmeier talks about the “teleological linearization of contingency” in this context, in other words “a pattern of coherence that, in the end, almost unavoidably takes shape whenever we tell history, whether it be the *histories* of historiography, the narrations of myths and other forms of cultural memory, or the stories of our individual lives” (p. 253). (Ibid, emphasis in the original.)

Consequently, the concept of coherence has turned out to be most useful in this study. Linde (1993) has studied the creation of coherence in life stories (see the definition of life story above). According to her (ibid, p. 12, 18–19), “coherence is a property of texts; it derives from the relations that the parts of a text bear to one another and to the whole text, as well as from the relation that the text bears to other texts of its type”. In this study narratives constitute “the parts of a text” to be studied, i.e. “the parts of” individual life histories, whereas “other texts of its type” here relate to all types of autobiographical and other narrative texts, oral or written, that can be seen as using common cultural elements, such as common story patterns, as their resources.

Furthermore, the creation of coherence in a life story is achieved in co-operation between the narrator and the addressee; there is a social demand for them to create coherence in order to appear as competent members of their culture (Linde, 1993, pp. 16–17). Coherence is usually provided “in the form of a chain of causality that is neither too thick nor too thin. If (in the estimation of a given addressee) this obligation is not met, the speaker is liable to be criticized or corrected by the



addressee”. The social correction of the coherence thus achieved is “an extremely important aspect of discourse as a socially constructed rather than individually constructed phenomenon”. According to Linde, such cases are, however, rare as “we are excellent at the task of constructing coherence and normally accomplish it unnoticeably and without difficulty”. (Ibid.)

In the process of creating coherence Linde (1993, p. 134; see also Komulainen, 1998, p. 86) posits that “positive character traits are used to explain a positive career choice, while negative character traits are not used to explain an unsuccessful choice”. Negative career traits are presented only when they are irrelevant to the present person. (Ibid.) In this study Hanna, aged 39, (see 6.2.2), for example, explains her better than expected result in the Swedish matriculation examination test as due to her competence in Swedish and her poorer than expected result in English as the result of the test that according to her does not measure “*real language competence*”. The positive result is explained by her positive character traits and the negative result by a reason external to her, i.e. the test that does not measure real competence. Positive results describe her as a person, whereas the negative results do not: “*I think that those good grades also tell something about me as a person*”. She explains:

*Well, English that I didn't have time to study an awful lot but I thought that I knew the basics as I came straight from an expatriate assignment. But after all it wasn't like that (...) so that well I didn't do badly in English as I got a c<sup>16</sup> in it but I had expected a better grade from myself (...). So in a way I was disappointed but I explained it to myself in a mature way; as it really didn't measure my ability to communicate and that it only measured the skills needed in the test (...). Then again Swedish turned out a real surprise for me as I hadn't studied it for years, in x [in the former GUSSA] I*

<sup>16</sup> The Finnish Matriculation Examination assessment scale is i (improbatuur), a (approbatuur), b (lubenter approbatuur), c (cum laude approbatuur), m (magna cum laude approbatuur), e (eximia), l (laudatur) (The Matriculation Examination Board, n.d.).

*took all the six courses (...) and went off to the war without worries (...) and then got an e (...). I was very surprised when the teacher called me, I wondered if she was calling the right person, perhaps she had missed a line or something (...). I couldn't believe it had gone so well (...). I explain it by the good basic skills I most evidently had in Swedish and probably I had also studied enough. So that I already had good basics and then the last courses before the matriculation exam, plus what I had studied at home; all that was enough for me (...) and I guess I had enough motivation (...) so that the results turned out to be the wrong way around. (Hanna, female aged 39.)*

The narrator may, thus, present the protagonist in a negative light as long as s/he develops into a competent person: “the speaker is always moral, even if the protagonist of the narrative is not” (Linde, 1993, p. 123). The narrator and her/his description about her/himself as a protagonist are here understood as being separate from one another. What the narrator recounts about her/himself as a protagonist is not directly related to what the narrator is like as a person. (Komulainen, 1998, p. 26; Linde, 1993, pp. 120–24.) This separation of the narrator from the protagonist of the narrative makes it possible for “the narrator to stand apart from and comment on the actions of the protagonist” (Linde, 1993, p. 123) and establish moral judgment over her/his actions (cf. Labov’s evaluation above). According to Brockmeier (2001, pp. 250–251), “[A]utobiography always is an account, given by a narrator in the here and now, about a protagonist bearing his name who existed in the there and then. And this is only how it starts. Usually, when the story terminates (in the present, a present that looks into the future), the protagonist has fused with the narrator: *I* tell a story about someone who in the course of this story turns out to be *me*, that is, the *I* who has been telling this story all the time”. (Ibid; emphasis in the original.)

The participants in a conversation have a supply of cultural resources, for example, ‘common sense’ beliefs and popular versions of expert knowledge, available for them to provide coherence (Linde, 1993, p.

19). Collective accounts of education discussed by Katri Komulainen (1998, pp. 34–38; see also Hänninen, 2000) are also such cultural resources which are available for narrators. Komulainen refers to stories that account for change in which education is linked with such concepts as “reform”, “development”, and “progress” (in Popkewitz, 1991, pp. 34–35; see also Popkewitz et al., 2006). Progress has been tied to reason since the European Enlightenment beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Popkewitz, 1991, p. 32). According to Popkewitz (1991, p. 34), “to speak of change in social consciousness as involving secularization and the development of science is to accept a progressive view of humanity”. This has made it possible to talk about “rational change, social progress, and mass schooling” (pp. 32–33). According to Popkewitz (1991, pp. 35–36), the concept of “progress is fundamental to pedagogical thought”. “Evolution meant that pedagogy should recognize and nurture differences through greater attention to individual”. (Ibid.) The view of world development and change as a natural state links the notions of “reform”, “development”, and “progress” to the grand narrative of lifelong learning, which emphasizes the individual’s capability to cope with societal change through personal growth and development (e.g. Ministry of Education, 1997); it is generally believed that “through hard work our social situation can improve” (Popkewitz, 1991, p. 34). Education is seen as the most important resource for individuals and educated individuals for society.

Linde defines the temporal continuity or identity of the self through time as “the most basic form of coherence we can create” (1993, pp. 106–107). This she explains is due to the very nature of narrative, temporal continuity being an important characteristic of narrative which relies on the principle of narrative order matching the order of events as they are presumed to have happened (cf. Labov above). The narrative order of events forms the plot of the story; it is not presumed to be the factual order of events in this study, but the order of appearance through which the reader or listener becomes aware of what happened (see Linde, 1993, p. 68). In Brockmeier’s (2001, p. 251) terms it is the sequence of narrated events that represent the very content of the story.

Besides continuity, narrative order is also the basis for another coherence principle, namely, causality. Linde defines “adequate causality as a chain of causality that is acceptable by addressees as a good reason for some particular event or sequence of events”. (Ibid, p. 127.) According to Bruner (1990, p. 49), “when you encounter an exception to the ordinary, and ask somebody what is happening, the person you ask will virtually always tell a story that contains *reasons* (or some other specification of an intentional state). The story, moreover, will almost invariably be an account of a possible world in which the encountered exception is somehow made to make sense or to have “meaning” (emphasis in the original). In this study the participation in general upper secondary school for adults is the “exception to the ordinary” for which adequate causality is established.

Drawing on Bruner’s (1986, p. 11) two modes of knowing, the traditional logical-scientific mode of knowing paradigmatic cognition and storied knowing narrative cognition, Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes two modes of analyses, analysis of narratives and narrative analysis. The former makes use of paradigmatic reasoning resulting in common themes and categories that hold across the stories that are collected as data, whereas with the latter events and happenings are collected as data and synthesized by means of a plot into a story, for example, a case study or individual life history. (Ibid.) Both modes of knowing can be argued to have influenced the analysis of the data in this study; paradigmatic cognition to focus “on what is common among actions”, narrative cognition to focus “on the particular and special characteristics of each action” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11; see also Heikkinen, 2002). The coherence patterns that have emerged through a recurring movement between the data and the theory evolving around social differences of educability describe and explain a social and cultural phenomenon, i.e. the construction of the educable subject of the LLL narrative. Age, social class, and gender as well as the new category of student and learner around which coherence is constructed in the seven case studies in section six represent common social and cultural themes, or in Polkinghorne’s (1995, p. 13) words “conceptual manifestations”

that intertwine within as well as across the narrative life histories in this study, and I would like to argue in the construction of the educable subject of the LLL narrative more generally. In this sense these so-called conceptual manifestations are also representations of paradigmatic reasoning.

However, besides being common conceptual manifestations, simultaneously the coherence patterns also represent instances of the particulars. As the adult students in this study account for the participation in general upper secondary school study in adulthood and not normatively in youth, they account for discontinuity in their life histories that, as has been argued earlier, needs to be evaluated and explained (Linde, 1993, p. 152; see also the discussion in part 1). Creating coherence between the past and the present acts as a resource for the narrator in establishing a desired self, i.e. that of a competent student and learner. On analysing the creation of coherence I as a researcher have produced chronological researcher narratives that display the linkage among data elements, i.e. narratives and narrative elements within a particular life history, primarily generated in the interviews, but also accounts on general upper secondary experiences in written narratives as well as life-lines drawn by the participants. This process of producing such researcher narratives on the data elements can be seen as an instance of what Polkinghorne (1995) has referred to as narrative analysis. It produces “stories as the outcome of research” (ibid, p. 15), in this case narrative life histories that function as retrospective explanations (cf. ibid., p. 16) accounting for the participation in general upper secondary school study in adulthood. Polkinghorne (1995, p. 16) compares the process of narrative analysis to the hermeneutic circle: “The creation of a text involves the to-and-fro movement from parts to whole that is involved in comprehending a finished text. (...) The final story must fit the data while at the same time bringing an order and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves”. (Ibid.) In the analysis of narratives and narrative analysis implemented in this study the aim has been to reach both the general conceptual level of interpretation and the particular unique level of individual construction of meaning.

In principle, on interpreting the narrative life histories in this study the analyses have proceeded following the four steps mentioned below. In practice, however, on analysing a narrative life history, these steps have become less distinct, overlapping and resulting in an overall process of interpretation moving from interpreting the overall structural and thematic pattern to particular narratives and back to the overall pattern again. It should also be noted that the level of specificity and detail of the analysis of the narrative life histories has varied depending on what I have interpreted as necessary for the overall construction of meaning in this study. The overall interpretation process described below has been applied systematically and in detail to what could be called *core narrative life histories* represented in part 6 that best illuminate the researched phenomenon. Other less detailed processes have been applied elsewhere. Nevertheless, these four steps illuminate the narrative life history interpretation process. I have first read the life histories as structural and thematic wholes looking for overall structural and thematic patterns, i.e. coherence in the life histories. Second, I have reconstructed chronologically coherent narrative life histories including what I have interpreted as relevant narratives on education and learning as well as the context for those narratives. Third, using the Labov and Waletzky model I have analysed the narratives concerning education and learning in different learning contexts. Fourth, I have deepened the analyses in order to provide the reader with the overall structural and thematic patterns as well as the specificity and detail for constructing coherence in the data. In part 6 I have included narrative life histories that represent diverse coherence patterns to illuminate the social differences of educability found in this study. I have supplemented the core narrative life histories with data either supporting or contradicting these so-called core narrative life histories.

# 6

## Constructions of the Educable Subject in GUSSA Narrative Life Histories

This chapter is constitutive of seven case studies or core narrative life histories that can also be read independently or as parts that constitute the whole illuminating the overall phenomenon of the construction of the educable subject in GUSSA narrative life histories. Table 2 summarizes the principles of the grand narrative of lifelong learning and the traditional constructions of educability discussed in parts 3 and 4. The dilemmas of educability related to lifelong learning and traditional constructions of educability will be discussed and analysed in the seven case studies that follow.

The core narrative life histories presented below are chronologically coherent researcher narratives, the researcher acting as a narrator in the reconstructed, i.e. analysed and reported life histories. The analysis evolves around the coherence patterns related to the social differences constructed in relation to educability (see Table 3): social class (the core narrative life histories in 6.1), gender (6.2), age (6.3), and the new category of student and learner (6.4). Two of the case studies consist of more than one participant's life history data that complement each other (i.e. Lisa & Janne in 6.2.1 and Sara, Kaija, Pirkko, & Roosa in 6.3.2). Each case study ends with a concluding summary. Data presented from other life histories in this study, either supporting or con-

**Table 2.** A summary of the principles of the grand narrative of LLL and the traditional constructions of educability.

| Lifelong learning (LLL)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Traditional constructions of educability                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Equal opportunities of education in order to cope with societal changes<br>LLL has become an obligation<br>Everyone is educable: regardless of age, social class, and gender<br>Emphasis on lifewide learning: formal, non-formal, and informal learning<br>The LLL educable subject is:<br>– active and willing to learn<br>– autonomous and self-directed<br>– responsible and determined<br>– flexible and adaptable<br>Fear of not being an LLL educable subject and falling behind the learning society ideal | Meritocratic ideal: “placing the right man in the right place” based on her/his abilities<br>Emphasis on formal education<br>Age-related norms on education, e.g. youth is the best time to acquire upper secondary education<br>Students categorized as “bright”, “mediocre”, or “poor”, i.e. talented/not talented<br>Differentiation of theoretical and practical skills and related subjects<br>Differentiation of female and male skills<br>An intelligent person encouraged to learn is likely to be a middle-class rational male |

tradicting the core narrative life histories, provide multivoicedness to the analysis. Table 3 gives the patterns related to the social differences constructed in relation to educability, the pseudonyms of the research participants of the core narrative life histories as well as their gender, age, and the section in which the participant’s narrative life history is dealt with in detail.

The data extracts presented in this part consist of interview data; data from written narratives, life lines, or field notes are pointed out in each case. Finnish pseudonyms are used for participants’ names, the names of significant others, and place names including workplaces. The age of the participants refers to the time of the interview. Sensitive data have not been included in the report. To improve the readability of the data extracts repetitions, odd words, and other data that have been interpreted as analytically irrelevant have been omitted and marked with three dots in brackets (...). Researcher’s interpretations for missing words are provided in square brackets [] and relevant non-verbal information in brackets, e.g. (laughter). The researcher’s comments in square brackets [P:] are only provided when interpreted as relevant for the



**Table 3.** The case studies of the core narrative life histories presented in detail in this study.

| Social differences of educability | Research participants | Gender and age | Section |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------|
| Social Class                      | Kaarina               | F 49           | 6.1.1   |
|                                   | Aino                  | F 40           | 6.1.2   |
| Gender                            | Lisa                  | F 25           | 6.2.1   |
|                                   | Janne                 | M 25           | 6.2.1   |
|                                   | Hanna                 | F 39           | 6.2.2   |
| Age                               | Henri                 | M 34           | 6.3.1   |
|                                   | Sara                  | F 66           | 6.3.2   |
|                                   | Kaija                 | F 60           | 6.3.2   |
|                                   | Pirkko                | F 60           | 6.3.2   |
|                                   | Roosa                 | F 64           | 6.3.2   |
| “New category”                    | Riitta                | F 24           | 6.4     |

meanings constructed in the narrative. Pauses, hesitation and such are not reported due to the large amount of data. Researcher interpretations of Labovian structural elements (abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, coda) are provided for narrative extracts. The number and length of the data extracts in this report aims at increasing the transparency of the analysis; it is also in keeping with the kind of narrative analysis in this study where language together with social and cultural context forms the core of the analysis.

## 6.1 Narratives on Educability and Social Class

### 6.1.1 Achieving the “Cap” in Adulthood<sup>17</sup>

*The meaning of studying in my life has been really great, I've gained general knowledge of course, but the greatest meaning has been better self-knowledge and self-esteem. It's great to achieve a goal that you've set for yourself and to realize that as long as you set your mind on something there's always a way to achieve it. (Kaarina, female aged 49; the extract is from the end of her written narrative on general upper secondary school experiences in adulthood.)*

#### *Comprehensive School*

Kaarina, aged 49, told me she was born in a middle-size town in southern Finland, the eldest child of a family that “*led a normal working-class everyday life*”, living next to her extended family. She describes her childhood as secure as she was well taken care of and insecure in the sense that her father died when she was five. She talks about starting school as “*normal*”, describing herself as a “*calm*” and “*ordinary*” but also “*frightened*” student, evaluating in this way perhaps due to not having been in big groups before starting school. She evaluates that her mother had no time and energy to encourage her in her study: “*You had to go to school and stay at school (...) and that's it*”. After finishing comprehensive school she told me she moved to the capital area where her mother and siblings had already moved one year earlier.

Kaarina's educational path coincided with the educational reform in the late 1960s that gradually replaced the old parallel school system with the new compulsory nine-year comprehensive school system in

---

<sup>17</sup> The “cap” (= the white cap) symbolizes passing the matriculation examination, i.e. the school leaving examination of the general upper secondary school, and graduation from general upper secondary school in Finland. Nowadays it is only worn on special occasions, such as at the graduation ceremony and to celebrate the first of May (see also 4.1 above).

Finland. This reform was based on the ideal that each individual has all kinds of options open for her/him in society (Koski & Nummenmaa, 1995). The comprehensive school ideology was in line with meritocracy: education was to be based on a child's age and abilities, not on social background. Comprehensive school, thus, aimed at equal educational opportunities, making use of the talent reserves of the population, and also making it possible for working class children to climb the educational ladder in the societal hierarchy. It was thought that there was a bias in favour of the higher social classes, so by levelling off the social differences only "natural differences of ability" would be left. (Räty et al., 1994.)

Kaarina told me that after six years of primary school she had the opportunity to continue in an experimental comprehensive school. Her skills were tested in order to place her in courses that corresponded to her abilities, i.e. at the secondary school level. The secondary school level was the academic route to upper secondary and higher education.<sup>18</sup> Reaching the secondary school level was not difficult as the male teacher Kaarina especially liked in the last grade of primary school "*got my grades up*". Kaarina told me she was excited about her new school. But as she says "*it all changed (...) the groups were big and there were different teachers [in different subjects]*". As Kaarina recounts in the narratives below the three-year period in comprehensive school did not offer her the opportunity she had expected but turned out instead to be a great disappointment and failure.

---

<sup>18</sup> Pupils were first streamed in foreign languages and mathematics according to their abilities in comprehensive school. Streaming was abolished in 1985.

**“I rebelled against the whole system”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p><i>I just wanted to get away from there<br/>I wanted to get away from this (...) school<br/>I wanted to get away from the whole town<br/>I wanted to get away from (...) the whole system (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>Abstract</p>            |
| <p><i>I’m a strong character and<br/>then I started to notice that<br/>some [teachers] were afraid (...)<br/>And there were boys and girls and<br/>of course mostly boys<br/>who were like<br/>who were making trouble</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>Orientation</p>         |
| <p><i>It was fun to go along with that<br/>because it was fun to make a kind of impression<br/>I started acting in a bad way (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>I was in conflict with myself of course<br/>but also with the whole system<br/>The whole three years I was in such, in such conflict<br/>[P: What do you mean by conflict?]<br/>I mean that that I rebelled against something, against that whole system<br/>but also with such wrong ways like making trouble<br/>I think it was fun and<br/>then it annoyed me<br/>[P: So for yourself they were wrong ways]<br/>So that I understood that<br/>I’m stupid somewhere in between that<br/>this is really dumb (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>But still<br/>I’ve been thinking if I...<br/>but I didn’t,<br/>I didn’t skive off school either<br/>I went to school to get some stimulus (laughter) so<br/>I didn’t skive or</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>I was scared to do that (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>And I decided when<br/>I left school so that<br/>I’ll never open school doors, never again<br/>when I get away from here<br/>[P: Yes so you didn’t think about other educational]<br/>No<br/>[P: opportunities]<br/>Not at all (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p>Resolution</p>          |
| <p><i>Well I wouldn’t have got anywhere with that paper [i.e. school certificate]<br/>But it wasn’t so after all it wasn’t so bad<br/>It could’ve been worse (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>Coda</p>                |

**“This is like an awfully big failure”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>Somehow it actually (...) felt like a big failure</i><br/> <i>It has kept troubling me somehow (...)</i><br/> <i>This is like an awfully big failure</i><br/> <i>I think I feel I've failed somehow</i><br/> <i>that that I (...) failed in this</i><br/> <i>[P: In what way did you fail in that then</i><br/> <i>or how do you think you failed in that?]</i><br/> <i>Or perhaps I (...) regret it (...)</i><br/> <i>I don't know where that feeling of failure comes from</i><br/> <i>but I think I regret it</i><br/> <i>that I acted in that way there [in comprehensive school]</i><br/> <i>that here [in GUSSA] I look for a kind of revenge</i><br/> <i>that I have to equalize the game</i><br/> <i>[P: Is that general upper secondary school for adults somehow...?]</i><br/> <i>Yes it's a kind of revenge for this</i><br/> <i>that here [in comprehensive school] has kept troubling me</i><br/> <i>that this [comprehensive school] is the basis for that</i><br/> <i>you somehow failed</i><br/> <i>or you were a bad student</i><br/> <i>a bad student just (...) 'cos</i><br/> <i>you didn't feel like working and</i><br/> <i>bad 'cos you behaved so too</i><br/> <i>So that perhaps here [in GUSSA] I wanted</i><br/> <i>that at least one part of it is fixed (...)</i><br/> <i>[P: that I'm not bad and] (...)</i><br/> <i>Yes it's because of that</i><br/> <i>that you aren't [bad] and</i><br/> <i>that you show yourself</i><br/> <i>that if I set my mind on something</i><br/> <i>I'm able to achieve it.</i><br/> <i>Although I've somehow always known</i><br/> <i>that I'm capable if I want to.</i><br/> <i>But just that it's that it's in everything</i><br/> <i>I think I put it down there [making reference to the written assignment]</i><br/> <i>that where there's a will there's a way</i><br/> <i>no matter what the thing is</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

The discontinuity in Kaarina's life history is constructed in a similar way to Paul Willis's (1977) and Mari Käyhkö's (2006, p. 65) studies as selecting oneself out to fit a working class position, seeing one's own potential as limited in relation to the academically oriented, systematic, and goal-oriented ideal student. In the same vein, the narrator here

evaluates the protagonist’s behaviour as “*bad*” as she selects herself out from the learning society ideal. This means that the educational opportunities available after comprehensive school are constructed as limited and what is available, then, is what Käyhkö (2006, p. 30) calls “class b” education as opposed to more desired academic education that general upper secondary school and the educational route opened up through it would represent. Despite the ideal of equal learning opportunities the impact of social background on education has repeatedly been shown in research (Käyhkö, 2006; Kuusinen, 1986; Willis, 1977; see also Rinne, Kivinen, & Kivirauma, 1984, pp. 23–24 in Rinne & Salmi, 1998, p. 180; the discussion in 4.2).

This corresponds to the school’s task to place the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ students on tracks in life that correspond to their abilities (Räty & Snellman, 1998). In Kaarina’s life history difference is constructed between “*smart teachers*” who know the truth and “*dumb students*” who do not learn the knowledge placed before them by the teachers; as well as the “*plus*” and “*minus*” girls (see the narrative below). Those who do not correspond to the middle-class norm become othered and are pushed towards non-academic education and careers with limited possibilities of promotion and with less prestige (e.g. Käyhkö, 2006). Rinne and Kivirauma (2003, p. 31) argue that while in a meritocracy some are encouraged to learn, others are being discouraged even to the state of acquiring permanent immunity against education.

The categories of stereotypical “nice” feminine behaviour and “rowdier” male behaviour, which is not constructed as acceptable for girls, are constructed in the narrative below and used as a means for constructing difference of educability between these categories. Kaarina recounts:

## Plus and minus girls

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| There then, it was based on grades this whole comprehensive school here it was always grades<br><i>If (...) you were otherwise nice your grade got higher</i>                                                                                                                                                                  | Orientation         |
| (...) <i>if (...) there were two pupils who knew about the same one got eight<sup>19</sup> in her report</i><br>and the other one got nine                                                                                                                                                                                     | Complicating action |
| <i>And you got nine when you kept being</i><br>[P: nice]<br><i>nice you sit at the desk nicely</i><br><i>and you don't talk back</i><br>[P: Yes, yes did you feel that you were not treated fairly in this sense?]<br>Well sometimes, I don't remember anything particular now                                                 | Evaluation          |
| <i>but sometimes I felt</i><br><i>that if I (...) I had gone through the trouble of doing my homework</i><br>and if I knew something that                                                                                                                                                                                      | Complicating action |
| <i>nobody encouraged me anyway</i><br><i>that's how it's done</i><br><i>But it was always like</i><br><i>that there was always the little minus there anyhow</i><br><i>when I was compared to that quiet girl</i><br><i>who always got the plus</i><br><i>and then there was the minus</i><br>That got in there from somewhere | Evaluation          |
| (...) <i>But a lot of it was my fault (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Resolution          |

In the above narrative Kaarina constructs difference between nice, well-behaved, quiet girls who “*don't talk back*” and more action-oriented girls, a category in which she herself has become positioned, who have difficulty in adjusting themselves to middle-class academic values and practices (cf. Käyhkö, 2006, p. 81; Lahelma, 2004; Tolonen, 2001). In Käyhkö's (ibid) study working-class girls resemble more the stereotypical view of adolescent boys' attitude to school than the stereotypical view of girls who love reading, sitting still, and who enjoy school and do well there, adapting nicely to school practices and demands for scrupulousness and concentration. In the above narrative the quiet, well-behaved ones are awarded better grades than the less well-behaved ones

<sup>19</sup> The seven-point rating scale 4–10 is used in Finnish comprehensive and upper secondary schools: 4 means fail and 10 is the top grade.

(cf. Tolonen, 2001). “*The plus*” and “*the minus*” girls have been determined in advance on the basis of their behaviour; for the protagonist of the narrative it is no use making an effort, as “*the minus*” is already there. Similarly, in the study conducted by Reay (2006, p. 297; see also Reay, 2005) “the working class students talked about a sense of educational worthlessness and feelings that they were not really valued and respected within education”. At the end of the narrative above, the focus switches from the school and its teachers to the individual, i.e. the protagonist herself, as personal responsibility (and implicitly regret) for such minus behaviour is established.

Likewise, the categories of stereotypical “nice” feminine behaviour and “rowdier” male behaviour, which is not seen as acceptable for girls in Kaarina’s life history, are also constructed in Jenni’s (female aged 23) and Tiina’s (female aged 30) life histories. In Jenni’s narration “*boyish*” behaviour is described as leading to bullying which lasts throughout comprehensive school (see also 6.3.1). Vocational school is evaluated as a place where she “*was finally able to be what she really is*”. Tiina also describes herself as “*wild and cheerful*” in comprehensive school, which according to her led to bullying and to being “*misunderstood*” by some teachers until in GUSSA “*there was room to be what you are*”.



*The Importance of Practical Training and Getting a Trade*

**The home economics school**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Well, then at some point I                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Orientation         |
| <i>I went to the home economics school</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Complicating action |
| <i>Then I was (...) in [the name of the place where the school was situated] (...) but it was a year after that I had left school that I went there</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Orientation         |
| <i>I wouldn't have gone 'cos I started regretting it then that I won't go to that home economics school [P: How did you end up applying there?] 'Cos I felt like that I should apply to some school anyway without thinking about it too much, that's why I don't remember it anymore but then I regretted it that I applied there And I got in there and (...) [P: Yes, what kind of experience was it?] (...) It was a good good experience of getting independent (...) Well, home economics wasn't really my thing either but it was a good school really and just basic things about (...) home economics and I didn't think about any of these fields but when I told my mum then somehow that I don't, I won't go there (...) that I won't become a domestic kind of person anyway, so what's the use of it Then my mum told me that it's always worth it that it's not only now if I won't be anything like in that field it's always worth it that all schools are always worth it that you should go there it's only four and a half months (...)</i> | Evaluation          |
| <i>Well, it was ok although I didn't end up cooking soup at all and didn't even think about it (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Resolution          |
| <i>With that knowledge I learnt to cook when I got a family but otherwise it was a good school (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Coda                |

Kaarina talks about the choice between school and work in her youth as her own “*free choice*”, the (single-parent family) circumstances at home not being a financial or other obstacle to acquiring formal education. She told me she was, nevertheless, encouraged to start at the home economics school by her mother, a significant other, a year after she finished comprehensive school. The choice is described as having been made “*without thinking about it too much*” and thinking that she “*should apply to some school anyway*”. This reflects the inherent value of formal education and acquiring a trade as well as the unofficial compulsory nature of upper secondary education after comprehensive school today, whereas the educational domain is seen as less important. In similar fashion the working class girls in Käyhkö’s (2006, pp. 56–58) study started cleaning courses at vocational school as it was important for them to have qualifications to ensure their employment in the labour market; their choice to study cleaning is construed as haphazard and spontaneous.

The narrator constructs the choice of the home economics school as being based on the short duration of education, on the one hand, and the usefulness and value of (all) education, on the other. They can partly be seen as being in contradiction with each other. The short duration of education reflects traditional working class values of getting a good trade in order to move on to practical and physical blue-collar jobs, i.e. “real work”, as soon as possible (Käyhkö, 2006, p. 67, 59). The value of all education, on the other hand, reflects educational positivism also enhanced by lifelong learning, and being in line with more middle-class academic values of educating oneself throughout life.

But the highly valued position of formal education in Finland has also been adopted by the working classes, Finnish society having been described as educationally oriented and culturally uniform in this respect (Käyhkö & Tuupanen, 1996). The value of the home economics school, especially, also relates to skills (see the discussion in 4.2 on gender-related abilities) that are typically needed by women in carrying out so-called ‘feminine’ tasks, such as cooking and other household chores that women have traditionally done at home and that they have

continued to do professionally (cf. Kaarninen, 1995, pp. 66–83, 246–247; Käyhkö, 2006, p. 17). Working class girls typically select gendered feminine domains for their profession and reconstruct the traditional segregation of feminine and masculine education (Nummenmaa, 1996, p. 36 in Käyhkö, 2006, p. 31; see also Skeggs, 1997b; Walkerdine, 1998, p. 22). Such educational choices are also constructed elsewhere in the data. In Kaarina’s narration the home economics school is constructed as not her field “*I won’t become a domestic kind of person anyway*”, but as providing useful knowledge (for a woman), especially when she has a family.

## Cleaning education

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Well, I kept working there and then I started thinking that I should get some trade and                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Abstract            |
| <i>And then I got this, it was like that I just heard it somewhere by chance that in [the name of the place where the school was situated], there in vocational school there was this cleaning technician branch (...) and it takes a year and you become like (...) a cleaning manager as it was advertised by my workmate, young like me (...), like our bosses here that you'll become a boss then Well, I thought if I get to be a boss of course I will go there (laughter)</i> | Orientation         |
| <i>Well, then I applied for it and (...) and well I got in there and (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Complicating action |
| <i>'cos it's in [the name of the town] and I have a free place to stay there and it only takes a year I will go there as I don't have anything else and no matter what branch it is I will go there (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Evaluation          |
| I went to that school wondering what, what it's all about and and really I studied all these cleaning systems in there for that year in other words, this field of cleaning services that I'm on right now                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Complicating action |
| <i>And then then there I was terribly successful There I got these fours, fives these grades [P: Those were the best] the best and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Evaluation          |
| <i>And then I was a grade-five student</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Resolution          |
| <i>I liked that practical training I got really good feedback and I was training in a hotel and in a hospital and I got really good feedback and I liked doing those cleaning plans and I liked that practical work and I really liked that school The teaching was good there and (...) It was very thorough and and then</i>                                                                                                                                                       | Evaluation          |
| <i>I didn't get any "tutkinto"<sup>20</sup> from there 'cos it's a vocational school of course so it [tutkinto] didn't really have any name (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Coda                |

<sup>20</sup> Kaarina uses the term “tutkinto” in Finnish which is somewhat ambiguous as it is not clear what she means by it in this context (and I did not ask!). “Tutkinto” refers to an “examination” or it can mean “certificate”, “diploma”, “formal qualifications”. On the basis of her narration I have, however, interpreted her to refer to a diploma or formal qualifications that she says she did not get from vocational school.

Kaarina told me she continued in working life after the home economics school. However, she considered that getting a trade was important and this required formal education (cf. above the home economics school). Kaarina's choice to do the cleaning line at vocational school is described as not her first choice (which was also in the traditionally feminine caring domain), a decision based on hearsay and not a planned systematic choice – "*I don't have anything else*". It is also chosen for the short duration of study – "*it only takes a year*" – in a similar vein to the way she talks about her choice to study home economics (cf. Käyhkö, 2006 above). The choice is also seen as practical: "*I have a free place to stay there*". Käyhkö (2006, p. 61; see also Walkerdine et al., 2001, pp. 153–154) has shown that the location of the educational institute was meaningful for the working class girls in her study in determining whether to take up further education. Kaarina, however, constructs getting into the cleaning line as her own choice "*if I get to be a boss of course I will go there*" and "*I got in*" (getting in there instead of having to go there). This is in keeping with Käyhkö's (2006, p. 30) study in which she found that the working-class girls constructed getting into cleaning services education as their own choice, despite the circumstances that led them to a domain that has statistically been one which is easy to get into, and one where you would go if you cannot get into anywhere else. In contrast to the girls in Käyhkö's (2006, p. 49, 215; cf. Käyhkö & Tuupanen, 1996, p. 119) study, however, Kaarina describes herself as ambitious, expressing her desire to become a boss. Education is, thus, not constructed as a mere necessity to get a job, but a route to better employment with higher prestige. Education and learning is thought to bring both societal and individual betterment.

The cleaning line at vocational school is constructed as leading to the narrator's present career. She constructs difference between theory and practice, a difference that is also present in the institutionalized ethos of educability (see 4.2). Similar to the study conducted by Skeggs (1997b, p. 59) on British working-class girls attending a caring course who preferred "the practical side of the course to the detriment of the academic side", Kaarina also appreciates "*the practical work*" in the hotel and

hospital where she did practical training. Skeggs (ibid) posits that this appraisal of the practical rather than the academic side of the curriculum “involves an assessment of their own competence and assessment of the relevance that the knowledge itself has for their perceived future positioning”. Kaarina evaluates herself as competent in the practical work as she got “*really good feedback*” for what she was doing. She also talks about herself as belonging to the “bright” category, stating that “*I was a grade-five student [the best]*” and “*terribly successful*” in her study.

The preference for practice rather than theory can be seen as a typically working class appreciation of “real work” (see also above) instead of middle-class academic study. The narrator also states that she was given no formal qualifications by the school “*as it was a vocational school and it [the diploma] had no name*”. Also elsewhere the lack of formal qualifications is constructed as a deficiency that needed correcting in the form of attending general upper secondary school for adults. This is despite constructing herself as not a “reading type” and not fit “*for such professions where you have to read a lot*”. In Käyhkö’s (2006, pp. 48–51, 118–119) study the working class girls who took the cleaning line of education had a strained relation to education and especially school and its middle-class practices; going to general upper secondary school was no choice for them except for one girl who had dropped out from general upper secondary school.

To sum up, the difference between theory and practice, theoretical middle-class academic education and working class practical vocational schooling is also constructed elsewhere in the data of this study. The practical alternative is constructed as being chosen first, not vice versa, in order to have a trade in which one can earn one’s living, as Jenni (female aged 23) citing her father evaluates: “*It’s no harm getting vocational training as you get a job you can work in (...) and it’s the kind of job you can make a living from*” (see also Hanna in 6.2.2 and Pirkko in 6.3.2). After first getting a job Jenni told me she continued in general upper secondary school, combining work and study. The division between theoretical and practical skills and the related school subjects implying social differences of educability related to social class is a cat-

egorization maintained by school and the institutionalized ethos of educability. The stark contrast between theoretical and practical skills can be seen to dissolve within the LLL narrative, which emphasizes flexibility of learning and the importance of learning in different learning contexts – non-formal and informal as well as formal – and improving the ties between general and vocational education (see e.g. the OECD, 1995 in Rinne & Salmi, 1998, p. 143).

### *General Upper Secondary School for Adults*

Using the vocabulary of sports and competitions, general upper secondary school is presented as a “second chance” to get a general education: “*to get one’s revenge*” and “*to equalize the game*” (see the narrative “This is like an awfully big failure” above). The narrator evaluates herself as ready to participate in the educational game and with full effort she prepares herself to win, i.e. to get the highly valued middle-class academic education that is seen as the best asset in the labour market and encouraged in the grand narrative of lifelong learning. The choice of sports vocabulary also makes reference to the institutionalized ethos of educability maintained by the school through its practices that enhance competition between students. Accordingly, a “second chance” means for Kaarina proving her own competence, showing herself (and others) that she is able to learn if she wants to: “*where there’s a will there’s a way*”. Kaarina has adopted the ‘right’ attitude towards learning, taking individual responsibility for it.

**“I want that cap”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p><i>When I told my workmate often enough<br/>that I never<br/>I never even finished general upper secondary school<br/>and that I don't really have any proper qualifications<br/>and that I never went to general upper secondary school</i></p>                                                                                                                                     | <p>Orientation</p>         |
| <p><i>And then I saw this ad<br/>and then I thought<br/>that now I will either go there<br/>or then I will never mention it again<br/>that I never went and never went<br/>But now I will go there<br/>or then you won't<br/>and you accept it<br/>that you don't go there</i></p>                                                                                                      | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>But why go there?<br/>Well, I want that cap<br/>Well, what's it for?<br/>Nothing (laughter)<br/>There it is gathering dust<br/>if you don't want to wear it on the first of May</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>But something like that<br/>that I kind of wanted to challenge myself into doing it<br/>that surely you are able to do it<br/>if you want to<br/>show yourself<br/>if you are capable of doing it or not<br/>or else stop whining<br/>you can't keep thinking about something your whole life<br/>that I wish I had this and that<br/>So it became such a big thing (...)</i></p> | <p>Resolution</p>          |

Despite the positive evaluation of vocational education and success in working life (“*I have succeeded brilliantly in vocational education and extremely well in working life*”), in the above narrative the lack of formal qualifications is constructed as a deficiency that needs to be corrected. The meaning of formal qualifications is attached to “*the cap*” that symbolizes matriculation/graduation from general upper secondary school. The cap stays in the closet gathering dust except for once a year, on the first of May, when it is put on to show the status of its holder.

Starting general upper secondary school study is seen as a challenge



for the protagonist who tells herself: “*show yourself if you are capable of doing it or not*” (see the discussion in 6.2.2 on different types of dialogue in expressing evaluation), thus pushing herself to seize the challenge and start the competition with herself (cf. Käyhkö & Tuupanen, 1996, p. 122). She encourages herself by saying: “*you are able to do it if you want to*”. In line with lifelong learning, a positive attitude is constructed as the key to learning. So on one hand, general upper secondary school study is a challenge that needs to be seized and one’s educability tested and, on the other hand, a positive attitude towards learning is constructed as the sole prerequisite for all learning. Individual responsibility together with individual abilities determine one’s success in the competition.

**“I wasn’t compared with anyone”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>So before students were always ranked in those categories (...) who got what grade</i><br/> <i>So that somehow students were always assessed, compared with each other (...)</i><br/> <i>That there were always those grade ten students and then there were those grade five students and the ranking was always like that</i><br/> <i>and the ranking order was always made known</i><br/> <i>Somehow it was through the whole school time (...)</i><br/> <i>But here [in general upper secondary school for adults]</i><br/> <i>I wasn’t compared with anyone</i><br/> <i>[P: Although grades are given here too]</i><br/> <i>Yes, but I only compared them with myself</i><br/> <i>they were never published that way here,</i><br/> <i>only in a good way (...)</i><br/> <i>so that I felt that I wasn’t compared (...) with anyone else</i><br/> <i>so that I always compared things with myself me with myself</i><br/> <i>and I did everything for myself (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

In Kaarina’s narration differing interpretations of educability are constructed between her comprehensive school and general upper secondary school experiences. She recounts that in comprehensive school students were categorized based on their educability: “*that there were always those grade ten students [the best] and then there were those grade*

*five students* [the lowest passing grade]”, in other words the “bright” and the “poor” students. In general upper secondary school for adults, on the other hand, she evaluates herself as equal or being at the same level as others as “*here I wasn’t compared with anyone*”. My statement that there is also a grading system in GUSSA does not shake the narrator’s evaluation as she confirms: “*I always compared things with myself*” and “*I did everything for myself*”. The deconstruction of the competition between students in general upper secondary school for adults adheres to lifelong learning in the form of self-assessment and personal development (cf. Koski, 2004, p. 86), as it encourages lifelong personal growth. A conscientious individual commits herself to learning and development and takes individual responsibility for them. However, in lifelong learning these individual characteristics are also turned into assets in the competition for positions in the labour market. (Ibid.)

### Theory/practice

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>From there [comprehensive school] I remember some separate things, but mainly that it’s something (...) that you don’t need much in life (...)<br/>Where can you use them (...) those things (...) school knowledge (...), after you’ve read it from the book and memorized it?<br/>So what’s the use of it in practice (...)?<br/>And when you come here [in GUSSA]<br/>and you read the same things any way (...)<br/>but, but just what your own life experience has brought you<br/>and in a different environment where there are adults<br/>suddenly the interest towards those things arises<br/>so that also that world history is really actually an interesting (...) thing<br/>like (...) where we’ve started and how far we’ve come (...) to this day</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

The difference between theory and practice also starts to dissolve as the narrator moves from comprehensive school to general upper secondary school in her narration above. The theoretical knowledge derived from books that is evaluated as practically useless in the context of comprehensive school is evaluated as interesting in the context of general upper secondary school for adults. Life experience and age intertwining with theoretical knowledge – non-formal and informal intertwining with formal learning – is seen as making such subjects as history, for exam-

ple, interesting in a new way. Aging is, thus, described as a positive thing in learning and non-formal and informal learning are constructed as valuable, although only through formal learning. This reflects the emphasis on lifelong learning and, for example, the OECD (in Rinne & Salmi, 1998, p. 143) policy on lifelong learning as it aims at improving the ties between general and vocational education and breaking the distinction between theoretical and practical skills.

*Kaarina’s Story about Mathematics*

Mathematics being the prototype of intelligence and a stereotypical male ability, it has also been constructed as the most demanding subject throughout Kaarina’s life history. The story about mathematics starts at primary school as the narrator describes mathematics as difficult and scary: “*it was difficult for me to learn arithmetic*”, “*I was afraid of that mathematics*”. Mathematics has also been used as an example where students who do not learn mathematics are categorized as “*dumb*” as opposed to “*smart teachers*”.

**1. Terrible risk**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p><i>But still I took them [the courses on mathematics] the very last</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>It was quite crazy<br/>it wasn’t very systematic (...)<br/>it’s that I always (...) do those things first that are fun<br/>and then (...) I finally (...) took those that are less fun<br/>and at this point it was good that it went well<br/>but it was a terrible risk after all (...)<br/>Well, the end was really terrible<br/>and it wasn’t fun any more but<br/>and you should not do it that way<br/>But that’s how it went anyhow<br/>(...) and then there was no choice<br/>[P: So that you had a lot of those maths courses left]<br/>Well, I had all of them</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p>          |

## 2. Great achievement

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <p>[P: Right you wrote that somehow it was like a great achievement]<br/> <i>Well, it was such a great achievement, yes, it was<br/>         For some people it's a modest achievement<br/>         and that's what it is of course but I think that<br/>         for me that grade six is like grade ten if I compare with what I</i><br/>         [P: What made it such a great achievement?]<br/> <i>It's that I was able to do it<br/>         I kind of, I saw what the situation was<br/>         that I'm in quite a force play (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p>              |
| <p><i>I made that plan that (...) this is how it goes<br/>         and I advance with small steps<br/>         that now it's, it's this course and or these courses<br/>         and I work on these things<br/>         and I don't think about anything else<br/>         I just concentrate on these<br/>         And then I went to (...) [the teacher's name] remedial instruction</i></p>                                                                                                                                                      | <p>Complicating<br/>action</p> |
| <p><i>And (...) I managed (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>Evaluation</p>              |
| <p><i>And I just studied that book on mathematics<br/>         and I just did sums<br/>         and I tried to understand<br/>         and [the teacher's name] tried to make me understand</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p>Complicating<br/>action</p> |
| <p><i>And I did understand<br/>         and I understood that much<br/>         that it was enough for that level<br/>         I don't need to understand more than that now<br/>         And just that I had a plan, how to proceed and<br/>         And I was proud of it</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p>Evaluation</p>              |
| <p><i>I don't think I've ever struggled for anything that much<br/>         to get something in my head<br/>         and that it would go like I've planned and scheduled and set as my<br/>         target (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p>Coda</p>                    |

Also in relation to general upper secondary school Kaarina tells a story about mathematics. I have divided the story above into two parts: Terrible risk and Great achievement. They represent quite contradictory evaluations of the protagonist of the story. In the first part the narrator evaluates the situation that has been created by describing most of the courses on mathematics at the end of her general upper secondary school study as “quite crazy”, “not very systematic”, “terrible”, and “it should not have been done like that”. This is constructed as a “terrible

*risk*” which could have resulted in not getting the general upper secondary school certificate. Not being systematic in one’s study represents the opposite of a theoretically oriented ambitious student who aims at her goal systematically, thus reconstructing the stereotypical working class orientation towards academic study (cf. Käyhkö, 2006, p. 221).

In the second part of the story on mathematics the protagonist is, however, constructed as systematic, i.e. having a clear goal – acquiring the general upper secondary school certificate by a certain date – and a plan in order to achieve this goal. Passing the courses in mathematics is described as a “*struggle*” and an “*achievement*” that the narrator is proud of: “*for me the grade six is like grade ten*”. The struggle to achieve her goal is evaluated as the greatest in her life so far. Passing something as difficult and unpleasant as mathematics in a risky situation where the result could have been a total failure proves the protagonist’s ability to act rationally and systematically, and also shows determination in her action.

So despite the principle of lifelong learning stating that everyone has the ability to learn there is a need for the narrator in the above narrative to negotiate her own educability and competence as a student and learner. The negotiation is constructed by making reference to mathematics, the prototype of intelligence. The protagonist develops into a systematic, individualistic, and goal-oriented, i.e. good student (cf. Käyhkö, 2006, p. 221), willing to invest in learning and education; reaching for the norm of the LLL narrative and its middle-class academic values.

Despite the success in vocational studies and working life the formal qualifications from general upper secondary school are constructed as important together with the general and updated knowledge it has brought. The general upper secondary school certificate is important for its gate-keeping role: “*with that paper I’m able to apply to any school*”. Besides the formal qualifications the significance of general upper secondary school resides in the mental capacity such study has brought: “*I’m stronger as a person when I left this school*”. Kaarina values the general upper secondary school study as well as the whole Finnish school

system highly, constructing, thus, discontinuity with her earlier criticism towards school and the comprehensive school system. Graduation from general upper secondary school is constructed as valuable for an adult just as it is for a young person: “*As if I had been in the same way (...) a young graduate and in the same position in that celebration*”. Kaarina plans to continue her studies after general upper secondary school: “*I would like to continue (...) actually I would like to study full-time*”.

### Concluding Summary

In Kaarina’s life history general upper secondary school study in adulthood is constructed as the “second” or actually the first chance, as Erja Moore (2003, p. 171) has critically remarked, to get education that has not been available normatively in youth, making it possible for her to climb the educational ladder and attain a new, higher social position in adulthood. By means of GUSSA study in adulthood Kaarina is able to “*get her revenge*” and acquire education that opens up new opportunities for further education and a professional career for her. This has by no means been a straightforward educational path to upward mobility, but a winding road that besides success has also included failure, even to the extent of entertaining thoughts of abandoning any kind of formal education (cf. Walkerdine et al., 2001). The GUSSA study, however, reestablishes the once lost “joy of learning” throughout life (Ministry of Education, 1997). Educational positivism is constructed unproblematically in Kaarina’s life history despite or perhaps because of the increasing uncertainty and unpredictability of individual careers in the global market economy (see e.g. Rinne & Salmi, 1998, pp. 180–181).

The institutionalized ethos of educability determines the protagonist’s educability in comprehensive school as she describes herself as “*a bad student*” and “*a minus girl*”, not willing and able to learn, i.e. lacking motivation as well as ability (cf. Walkerdine et al., 2001). As Walkerdine and her colleagues (2001, p. 19) argue, social class “can more easily be read as evidence of personal failure and pathology than

social inequality and oppression”. Kaarina becomes selected out in the working-class position and less valued non-academic vocational education, i.e. the home economics school and the cleaning line at vocational school (see Käyhkö, 2006; also Skeggs, 1997b; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Getting education and success in these practically oriented and stereotypically gender-specific schools does not, however, suffice to prove her competence as a student and learner. Only in GUSSA does the narrator describe herself as developing into a lifelong learning educable subject who is able to learn if she only wishes to, i.e. “*where there’s a will there’s a way*”. Nevertheless, also in relation to GUSSA there is a need for the narrator to negotiate her own educability and competence as a student and learner, especially in relation to mathematics, the prototype of intelligence. The label “*bad student*” and belonging to the category of poor students in comprehensive school, fades away in GUSSA, giving way to the new lifelong learning educable subject willing and able to learn.

Despite the strong emphasis on lifewide learning and the demand for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning alongside formal learning, the triumph of formal qualifications and its gate-keeping role in further education has not been superseded. Drawing on the OECD (1995) Rinne and Salmi (1998, p. 156) claim that all knowledge and skills can be achieved through formal learning, which undermines the value of non-formal and informal learning, thus weakening the status and the social positions available through other than formal learning. So despite the knowledge and skills gained in vocational training as well as non-formal and informal learning at work, Kaarina evaluates her learning as having not led to formal qualifications, which she evaluates as a deficiency that needs to be corrected. This is in keeping with the idea of an individual’s permanent insufficiency, imperfection, and guilt, as well as the continuous need of improvement inherent in the grand narrative of lifelong learning. (E.g. Koski & Moore, 2001, p. 11; Rinne & Salmi, 1998, p. 172.) The success in working life and the security of a permanent job are not constructed as sufficient in Kaarina’s life history, but instead the “*cap*”, i.e.

qualifications from GUSSA, are needed as an official proof of competence. As Tuschling and Engemann (2006, p. 464) argue, “the self performance of the new learner includes making one’s efforts visible and recognizable”, calling this “a new regime of documentation of oneself”. They continue, “in lifelong learning the individual becomes the subject of its own documentation” as “official certificates of acquired knowledge need to be accompanied by comprehensive accounts of individual achievements”. (Ibid.) This also reflects the meritocratic ideal that formal qualifications are a prerequisite for participation in competition as each individual competes with everyone else relying on his or her own “natural talents”. Rinne and Salmi (1998, pp. 158–159) argue that formal qualifications are not primarily needed to inform others of individual knowledge and skills but to show the status of their holder, fixing them on their careers in the world where jobs are no longer permanent but in a constant flux.

The importance of the visibility of one’s merits in the form of official certificates is also explicitly stated in Leena’s (female aged 54) life history. Like Kaarina, Leena also told me she had not continued in upper secondary education in her youth. She gave her family’s economic circumstances as a reason for this. Unlike Kaarina, however, Leena told me “*in the autumn I always missed school*”, several times taking up her studies again in different institutes, including general upper secondary school for adults. Leena also told me, again like Kaarina, that she had had a long career in working life and had a permanent job at the time of the interview (however, she expressed some fear of the possibility of losing her job in the future on account of her age “*they don’t look at people of my age any longer*”).

In her life history Leena constructs continuity in relation to her educability, giving proof of herself as an educable subject of “natural abilities” within the institutionalized ethos of educability, and belonging to the category “mediocre” or “bright”. Continuity is constructed by means of a medical diagnosis that reports that learning some subjects is difficult for her (cf. Riitta in 6.4), but more importantly through official certificates that prove her competence. This is how she evaluates



the importance of getting the formal qualifications from GUSSA: “*It can be said that I’m no longer dumb; at least I’m not dumb, there’s been some change*”. But the qualifications from GUSSA do not suffice as she told me she had sent for her old grammar school certificate in order to prove her competence that does not become evident in the GUSSA certificates: “*I miss those grades that were good in these subjects, humanities and sciences (...) tens and nines [the best grades] (...). In this school [GUSSA] I didn’t get such grades*” (...) “*the skills I really have that don’t show; that is my secret knowledge*”. In Leena’s life history the educable subject of the LLL narrative becomes constructed only at a few instances through such qualities as the curiosity and hunger for knowledge as well as the constructions of a self-directed and autonomous learner. Her educability, however, remains determined by the institutionalized ethos of educability and official proof, i.e. through assessment.

Despite the lifewide learning rhetoric and the importance of learning in different learning contexts, also elsewhere in the data of this study the gate-keeping role of formal qualifications leading to further education and professional career is emphasized. Interestingly, there are also life histories where non-formal and informal learning alongside formal education are constructed as equally relevant (see Aino in 6.1.2, Hanna in 6.2.2, Sara, Kaija, Pirkko, and Roosa in 6.3.2). As will be seen, however, this is not indicative of the construction of the educable subject of a LLL narrative in any clear-cut way.

### 6.1.2 Developing Oneself All Life Long and Wide

Aino, aged 40, told me that the circumstances in her childhood home in the capital area were unstable, insecure, and financial resources were limited. It was for the most part her mother’s responsibility to support the family and take care of the four children. Aino told me she did not get any help with school work at home. Despite the circumstances she describes herself as a stereotypical female student, i.e. nice and scrupulous, who does well at school and has friends: “*I took care of everything,*

*I was never ever late for anything, I've never skived off either or been a nuisance in any way and I've not been bullied and I've not bullied anyone, and I think I was a jolly person (...) I had friends and such”.*

Being positioned as working class has been seen to discourage working class children and young people from going to school and getting education (see Käyhkö, 2006, 2008; Skeggs 1997b, Walkerdine et al., 2001; Willis, 1977; see also 6.1.1). On the other hand, Aino describes studying as positive and the home circumstances as not having affected concentration at school. Markku Vanttaja’s (2002, pp. 121–122) study on the most successful students in the matriculation examination shows that those students whom he calls “survivors” had experienced school’s regular rhythm and practices as secure as opposed to the unpredictable circumstances at home. Doing well at school provided security for these students. (Ibid.) Similarly, Aino told me that she went to school even after such nights when she had had to sleep at her relatives’ or neighbours’ because of the situation at home.

After secondary school Aino started in general upper secondary school, but continued there for only a few months. She gives a lack of financial resources as the reason for this. She recounts:

**“I would have liked to stay”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>I then left that school as<br/>I decided that<br/>I'd start working<br/>I saw this ad in Hesari [the national newspaper] that<br/>messengers were hired so (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                    | Abstract               |
| <i>So [the general upper secondary school principal] took me into the<br/>principal's office and I started crying.<br/>She kept asking me if I took drugs or something<br/>And why?<br/>You have succeeded well, you've got nines and tens in these [subjects]<br/>She went through the information teachers had given her<br/>So why?</i> | Complicating<br>action |
| <i>I couldn't tell her that in our family they would practically die of hunger<br/>(laughter)<br/>if I didn't go to work<br/>I also cried because I would have liked to stay there (...) really</i>                                                                                                                                        | Evaluation             |
| <i>But then I left (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Resolution             |

Contrary to working-class girls' unwillingness to continue their education in general upper secondary school in Käyhkö's (2006, 2008) study, in the narrative above Aino expresses her desire to continue in the general upper secondary school in her youth and her regret at not being able to do so. She repeats a conversation between herself and the secondary school principal (see the discussion on different types of dialogue in narration below in 6.2.2), through the words of the principal she evaluates herself as a good student getting nines and tens, i.e. the best grades for her school work; her ability and competence as a student and learner, thus, are not a hindrance to her study. Instead the lack of financial resources at home is seen as the reason for having to drop out of school, although it is described as too shameful for the protagonist to state out aloud to the principal.

#### *Lifewide Learning at Work*

Aino told me she started to work at 16 and has stayed in the same organization, Postipalvelu, (the organization has been invented) since then, getting ahead in working life through non-formal and informal learning at work as well as formal learning. As for the working-class girls in Käyhkö's (2008, p. 262) study, work is an integral part of Aino's life, however, contrary to the girls in Käyhkö's study it offers a means for self-realization that she enjoys, besides being a means for earning one's living.

### Career in Postipalvelu

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p><i>(...) here it started going well<br/>I've got ahead really nicely and</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Abstract</p>            |
| <p><i>I've been thoroughly trained here by the firm (...)<br/>For example, now I do layouts for printing (...)<br/>It's really been rewarding<br/>and I've learned how to use all those graphics programmes<br/>I do pictures and (...)<br/>I like my job a great deal (laughter)<br/>[P: Yes, okay what kinds of things have you done here during your work career?]</i></p> | <p>Orientation</p>         |
| <p><i>Well, first I worked as a messenger<br/>then I went to typing school</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>which was very good<br/>I learned to touch type</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>and then I became a typist (...)<br/>and from there I was picked (...) I became a course assistant (...)<br/>I was there for quite a while (...)<br/>I had children (...) and then (...) I applied to (...) [to a new job nearer to home]<br/>And, well, then I applied to the administration to become a secretary<br/>and got there then and (...)</i></p>            | <p>Complicating action</p> |

Aino describes her job as permanent, secure, and flexible giving her plenty of satisfaction. She sees learning at work as an opportunity for personal development. This is how she evaluates her workplace: *“I have (...) a nice job, it's really important, wonderful colleagues we have a really good atmosphere and you can develop yourself here; I'm allowed to attend courses and training also outside”*. In her written narrative she also makes reference to a secretarial certificate that she achieved *“outside work”*. She also evaluates that she got a lot of support at work for her general upper secondary school study. Graduation from GUSSA was treated *“like I had received a doctorate”*. In line with the LLL narrative the general attitude towards learning and developing oneself is seen as very positive in Aino's account about her workplace. Aino's interview is also the only one that was carried out at the participant's workplace, at her own request; and after the interview she wanted to introduce me to the organization as well as some of her workmates. At the time of the interview Aino had no intention of leaving her job and getting on with her

career outside the organization she was engaged in. Going to school as well as a permanent job may both be interpreted as sources for providing well appreciated security in Aino’s life (cf. Vanttaja, 2002 above).

*General Upper Secondary School for Adults*

**“I can do that”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>And then I went to school (...)<br/>It was like<br/>it bothered me a bit<br/>as I had interrupted my studies earlier (...)</i>                                                                                                 | Abstract           |
| [P: <i>How long had you been thinking about that one day when you would?</i> ]<br><i>I guess it was at the back of my mind the whole time<br/>but then of course when the children were so little<br/>I couldn’t go and (...)</i> | Orientation        |
| <i>And then somehow I just got it [into my head]<br/>as I saw it [an ad] in Hesari [the national newspaper] and then</i>                                                                                                          | Complicated action |
| <i>First I thought that<br/>I’d go to the workers’ institute and study languages (...)<br/>but then I thought that<br/>I can do that<br/>if x [Aino’s husband] stays with the children</i>                                        | Evaluation         |
| <i>And as he agreed to that<br/>I went ahead</i>                                                                                                                                                                                  | Coda               |

Aino constructs continuity in her life history with her desire to continue her general upper secondary school study as “*it was at the back of my mind the whole time*” and expresses regret for having to interrupt her studies in her youth: “*it bothered me a bit as I had interrupted my studies earlier*”. As Moore (2003, p. 171) critically states, the GUSSA study is not the “second chance” to get education as she actually never got the first one as her childhood home was lacking resources for her to continue the formal general education at the time. Aino constructs difference between non-formal liberal education and formal general upper secondary school for adults and decides to choose the latter: “*I can do that*“. Her statement implies that the GUSSA study and the formal

qualifications achieved through it is more demanding and, thereafter, more valuable than liberal education which does not result in formal qualifications. Despite the emphasis on learning in different learning contexts, i.e. lifewide learning, slightly more prestige can, thus, also be seen or “heard” to be attached to formal education in Aino’s narration.

Aino describes her husband as the significant other supporting her choice, which for him means a new kind of responsibility for taking care of the home and the children, thus making it possible for Aino to engage in her studies. This kind of support is not an alternative for Sara (see 6.3.2) whose narration coincides with the experiences of the two oldest educational generations described by Kauppila (1996, p. 86), i.e. the generation of war and scant educational opportunities (those born before 1935) and the generation of structural change and increasing educational opportunities (those born in 1936–1955), or for Hanna (see 6.2.2) whose studying and learning are dependent on her husband’s career and taking care of the home and the children.

**“If I had done badly (...) I wouldn’t have continued”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p>[P: Okay, well what kind of experience was that general upper secondary school for you? How would you describe it?]<br/>         (...) Well mainly really positive<br/>         [P: Could you describe in a bit more detail in what way it was positive?]</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>Abstract</p>   |
| <p>(...) it was so amazing that<br/>         I succeeded that<br/>         I really actually learned and<br/>         when we had these tests and exams so that you could see (...) and<br/>         it really motivated me a great deal<br/>         I think that if it had started off badly for me like<br/>         I would have failed in the first or second period in something (...) then<br/>         I think I wouldn’t have continued<br/>         I’m kind of so, in a way so quick-tempered<br/>         or how should I say it<br/>         I get nervous when (...)<br/>         or I start thinking that I’m wasting my time<br/>         if I need to take things over and over again (...) and<br/>         here at work, too, I like it when<br/>         things get done or are taken care of and<br/>         and if you don’t know something then you learn it and so on.<br/>         Of course I expect of myself that<br/>         I have to manage and (...)<br/>         I don’t know if you understand what I mean<br/>         [P: Well how would you take it if you had failed for example?]<br/>         Then perhaps I’d have tried it out once (...)<br/>         if not I would have probably left it at that</p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |

Aino evaluates starting the GUSSA study as a “*risk*” that was “*worth taking*”, having the courage to try it out and test her ability and competence as a student and learner. Maturity improves one’s ability to concentrate but due to one’s failing memory “*learning [is] more difficult than in youth*” as Aino puts it in her written narrative. She describes it as “*amazing*” that “*I really actually learned*”. Implicitly, this implies fear of falling behind, i.e. not being the educable subject of the LLL narrative (see e.g. Popkewitz et al., 2006). Success in her study is seen as a prerequisite in her willingness to continue her study. She evaluates herself as incapable of continuing to study if she had not succeeded well in GUSSA. In her statement “*although it’s dumb to say this, but grades pushed me ahead (...) and then of course I learned*”. First, good grades and, second, learning are described as important in her GUSSA study

(cf. Hanna 6.2.2 and Sara 6.3.2). Contrary to the LLL narrative the opportunity to study depends on one’s ability and competence as a student and learner, most importantly in mathematics (see the narrative below), and whether one belongs to the category of students who are encouraged to educate themselves and acquire formal academic qualifications through the practices maintained by school.

### Learning mathematics

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| [P: <i>Yes yes okay, why do you think it was so amazing or somehow surprising that you succeeded?</i> ]                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Abstract            |
| <i>Well, first I told you about that maths that it was the whole thing that I was thinking if I go [to GUSSA] at all I will not manage it ‘cause I don’t understand it ‘cause I remember from secondary school, too, that maths was so amazing (...) that I just didn’t (laughter) understand that with good luck I got six or seven so that</i> | Orientation         |
| <i>Then all of a sudden I understood there [ in GUSSA ] and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Complicating action |
| <i>That x is such a wonderful teacher that (...) how was she able to present it so that I could understand Others too had such hallelujah, you know, experiences that (...) that I got it [P: Yeah and it was from the very beginning that] Yes [P: Somehow that now you understand?] Yes, yes (...) and</i>                                     | Evaluation          |
| <i>Then after that it was fun (...) It was fun to solve those problems and (...) like really interesting</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Resolution          |
| <i>Now I’ve been thinking that sometimes, after some time, I could take all the courses in advanced maths just for fun (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Coda                |

The narrator evaluates herself as a systematic, goal-oriented student who at the beginning of her GUSSA study decides on the date of her graduation and keeps that target to the end of her study: “*I held on to it the whole time that no, I can’t, I can’t interrupt it*”. Nevertheless, she evaluates her ability to complete her GUSSA study as depending on her



success in mathematics, the prototype of intelligence (see the discussion in 4.2). This is similar to Kaarina (see 6.1.1 above) as well as many other participants in this study.

Aino evaluates herself as having been afraid of managing mathematics on the basis of her experience about it in secondary school, where the protagonist “*with good luck*” gets such grades as six or seven. Contrary to secondary school where learning mathematics is talked about as “*I don’t understand it*”, the protagonist in the above narrative develops into a competent learner in mathematics in GUSSA; she “*understood there*” as the teacher is so “*amazing*”, after which mathematics becomes interesting. Aino explains her ability to learn mathematics as due to a good teacher as well as hard work and not her own “*natural talent*”. This is an explanation that is stereotypically attached to girls who, thereafter, have been seen as successful for the “*wrong reasons*”, i.e. hard work and not natural talent (see 4.2). At the end of the narrative above Aino talks about her willingness to choose the advanced syllabus in mathematics,<sup>21</sup> i.e. the most demanding courses in general upper secondary school and, thereafter, the highest proof of ability and competence (cf. Pirkko and Roosa in 6.3.2). Aino evaluates success in mathematics as one of the greatest achievements in her GUSSA study. Interestingly, however, she evaluates that “*the arts class surpasses even mathematics*”. This is contrary to the institutionalized ethos of educability and the hierarchical relations between theoretical and practical skills that attach more value to academic than practical abilities (see the discussion in 4.2 and Kaarina in 6.1.1).

In the narrative below Aino evaluates the meaning of the GUSSA study as a hobby (cf. also Hanna in 6.2.2, Sara, Kaija, Pirkko, & Roosa in 6.3.2) like any other kind of learning and studying she has undertaken – be it non-formal, informal, or formal. In the dialogue between herself and her father-in-law the narrator justifies the importance for developing oneself all life long and wide.

<sup>21</sup> In the Finnish upper secondary school there is an option of choosing either the regular or the advanced syllabus in mathematics. Either syllabus can also be chosen in the matriculation exam, but mathematics is not a compulsory subject in the exam.

### A cultivating hobby

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p><i>(...) My father-in-law (...) as I told him that at that time I had already been to school for quite a while that I'm in general upper secondary school What for, why's that, do you get more salary or what, or the job title changes when</i></p>                  | <p>Orientation</p>         |
| <p><i>I was like no, it's not that I'm as satisfied with my work as I possibly can be (...) that it's not a question of that This is like a hobby and he didn't get it at all and</i></p>                                                                                 | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>I started ranting and told him that a human being could keep on developing himself for the rest of his life and that 'it would do you some good, too, to educate yourself' (laughter)</i></p>                                                                       | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>He didn't get it (...)<br/>[P: (...) Is this the main thing about your study that you wanted to develop yourself?]<br/>Yes, yes and then</i></p>                                                                                                                    | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>it will, it will not [end] here</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p>Resolution</p>          |
| <p><i>Now I'm interested in, I'll go (...) on a sign language course (...), just for fun, I don't know any deaf people (...), it's four evenings<br/>And then in November there'd be an advanced course (...) after that something else, Russian (laughter) (...)</i></p> | <p>Coda</p>                |

As the LLL narrative indicates, learning and developing oneself throughout life are talked about as important, but contrary to the obligation to learn in order to participate in further education, to compete for jobs in working life, or to get a better income, learning is seen as a means for a more satisfactory life. The GUSSA study is seen as one opportunity among others, e.g. attending language courses, to learn more and develop oneself. Moreover, learning languages along with computer literacy have been seen as part of the LLL key competencies for employed adults in order to be able to face the changes in working life, the development of a knowledge-based society and globalization (Ministry of Education, 2006). In the same vein in the written narrative Aino evaluates learning languages as the most useful GUSSA subjects in practice, although she does not speculate further how she will profit from them in the future.

### *Concluding Summary*

Leena Koski (2004) argues that the development of oneself is an individual's most important task in our society, where the traditional social adherences have grown weaker or broken down; self-developing individualization and a tool kit for self formation according to occurring needs are offered instead. This also includes the idea of an individual's permanent insufficiency, imperfection, and guilt, as well as the continuous need for improvement (e.g. Koski & Moore, 2001, p. 11; Rinne & Salmi, 1998, p. 172). In the same vein, Aino talks about the importance of learning and studying lifelong and lifewide for personal growth and development.

Similar to Kaarina's narration the GUSSA study is a "second chance" (see the discussion in 6.1.1) for Aino to acquire general education in adulthood, an opportunity that she lacked in her youth. Unlike Kaarina, however, who selects herself out in the working-class position of "*a bad student*" (see Käyhkö, 2006), Aino describes herself as a good student who does well and likes school. I have interpreted school, and later the security of a permanent job, as providing her with the security she was lacking in her childhood home (cf. Vanttaja, 2002). Unlike all the other participants actively involved in working life in this study, Aino talks about being satisfied with her present job having no intention of pursuing further education, changing jobs, and/ or climbing the social ladder.

Whereas for Kaarina GUSSA study presents an opportunity and a social location for upward mobility through education and the new career prospects created through it, for Aino it is a hobby and a means for a more satisfactory life. Aino can be seen as having adopted the middle-class individualistic self-developing project of the LLL narrative but only to a certain extent, i.e. inner development without external signs leading to further education and a new career, frameworks through which individual ability and competence is understood to be expressed in Western societies (see Komulainen 1998, p. 11; see also Hanna in 6.2.2). Thereafter, I would argue that she shows herself to be an educa-

ble person but is not employable in a new job. This inevitably means being positioned on the periphery of the LLL narrative. It means stagnation instead of change. It is a “wrong” choice in comparison with the middle-class norm (see e.g. Walkerdine et al., 2001, p. 14; see also the discussion in 3.4).

Paradoxically, the LLL narrative principle of lifelong and lifewide learning becomes possible for Aino, who lacking resources in her youth is now in the position of having a permanent and satisfactory job and has no intention of participating in further education or seizing career opportunities elsewhere. Also elsewhere in the data of this study (see Hanna in 6.2.2 and Sara, Kaija, Pirkko, & Roosa in 6.3.2) those women who are not readily employable are the ones who appreciate lifelong and lifewide learning the most, describing learning in different learning contexts as a pleasant and interesting hobby. However, for those looking for new career opportunities formal education is the principal way of studying and learning, as the formal qualifications are needed in the competition to pursue further education and progress in one’s working career. The paradox lies within the LLL policy goal of guaranteeing flexibility in an employable work force through lifewide learning alongside lifelong learning. On the basis of this study this does not seem probable as the women in this study who are not readily employable are those who profit most from lifewide learning. Consequently, learning as a hobby places these women on the periphery of the LLL narrative. The power of the LLL narrative, then, remains in its effect to categorize individuals into those who are included as educable and employable subjects of the learning society ideal and those who are excluded as mere educable subjects studying and learning just for the mere “joy of learning”.

Kaarina’s and Aino’s life histories are by no means the only ones representing social differences of educability concerning social class in the data of this study. I would argue that social class intertwines with gender- and age-related differences (see 6.2 and 6.3) as well as differences constructed in relation to the new category of student and learner (see 6.4) in this study. Although especially encouraged within adult

education and as has been seen in Kaarina's and Aino's life histories, the LLL narrative as a middle-class project is not as self-evidently available for the GUSSA students as it might first seem.

## 6.2 Narratives on Gendered Differences of Educability

### 6.2.1 Healthy Normality and Healthy Laziness

Lisa (female) and Janne (male), both 25 at the time of the interview, have spent their lives in the capital area. Both of their parents are not academically educated,<sup>22</sup> but have encouraged them in their studies. Lisa's and Janne's life histories reflect those of the youngest educational generation in the study conducted by Ari Antikainen and his colleagues (Kauppila, 1996, p. 99), i.e. that of social welfare and many educational choices. Lisa and Janne both reflect on different educational choices available to them as well as possible educational establishments in their life histories. Their attitude towards school also reflects the aforementioned study in which comprehensive school and general upper secondary school have lost their meaning and become boring places that just have to be endured. Both Lisa and Janne told me that they had dropped out from general upper secondary school several times (Lisa about 4 times, Janne 2–3 times) so that graduation from the general upper secondary school for adults appears not as the second but the third, fourth or even fifth chance to acquire education (Moore, 2003, p. 171). Lisa and Janne also have similar plans for the future: they both told me that they want to continue in higher education in order to obtain a good profession.

There are, however, besides similarities also stereotypical gendered differences in relation to how Lisa and Janne construct educability in their life histories. By making a comparison between female and male narratives I do not argue that Lisa's and Janne's narratives are the only

<sup>22</sup> I assume this also about Lisa's mother, on the basis of what Lisa told me, although she does not explicitly state her mother's education.

representations of female and male narratives: in my data there are also different kinds of narratives told by women and men. Rather, I wish to show how stereotypical gendered constructions of educability relate to the construction of the educable subject of the LLL narrative. In what follows I compare Lisa’s and Janne’s life histories.

### *Comprehensive school*

Contrary to the lifelong and lifewide learning narrative that emphasizes the importance of learning throughout life in different learning contexts, both Lisa and Janne construct difference between school and “real life”, that is, work, taking care of home and children, and free-time. They talk about going to comprehensive school as secondary, friends and free-time being more important than schoolwork. Nevertheless, they both start to describe themselves as competent students and learners.

**Lisa** starts her life history by describing her comprehensive school experiences. As her family has moved she has to start the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, the last grade of the lower level of comprehensive school, in a new school, where she does not know anybody. She evaluates: “*I was thrown in there (...) and I was a bit of an outsider in that class and that 6<sup>th</sup> grade went by so that I just waited to get out*”. She starts to reflect on her ability and competence as a student and learner in the narrative below as she talks about the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, the first grade of the upper level of comprehensive school, which she describes as a new beginning for everybody. She recounts:

### “I was smart enough” (L)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| That upper level of comprehensive school then it was a kind of a new beginning for everyone and I got new friends there                                                                                   | Orientation         |
| <i>Then actually these teenage things started and we hung around the mall and</i>                                                                                                                         | Complicating action |
| <i>going to school was a bit secondary but I was smart enough so that when I listened during the lessons I got decent grades, I can't remember that I did much homework but I didn't skive off either</i> | Evaluation          |
| <i>So that I got out of there anyhow with an average of over 8</i>                                                                                                                                        | Coda                |

In the narrative above, Lisa talks about her lack of interest and effort in school work, but not about a lack of talent. Instead, she describes herself as belonging to the category of a “bright” pupil (Räty & Snellman, 1998, see the discussion in 4.2), evaluating herself as “*smart enough*”: “*when I listened during the lessons I got decent grades, I can't remember doing much of homework but I didn't skive off either (...). So that I got out with an average of over 8*”. She talks about herself as a naturally talented person who does not need to do much in order to get good grades (see Kasanen, 2003; Räty, 1993; Räty & Snellman, 1991; Snellman & Räty, 1992). In other words, she evaluates herself as successful for the “right” reason, i.e. natural talent rather than hard work (Räty & Snellman, 1995; Walkerdine 1998, pp. 29–41).

However, in relation to learning languages, paradoxically a stereotypical female ability (Räty & Snellman, 1998), Lisa starts expressing anxiety about her ability to manage such study despite hard work; i.e. a fear of not being good enough. In learning languages Lisa talks both about a lack of talent as well as a lack of interest. She describes “*losing the track*” in learning languages already in primary school and evaluates: “*I was afraid of going to those [English] lessons*” as “*I got negative feedback from the very beginning*”. This is how she evaluates learning English at the beginning of the upper level of comprehensive school, i.e. a new beginning in a new school and a new class:

**“I tried really hard” (L)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>I tried really hard and<br/>I got, when we had some lists of irregular verbs,<br/>I even got tens in those [tests]<br/>I like ground away those words<br/>but somehow there was so much work that</i> | Evaluation          |
| <i>little by little I started losing grip and<br/>I never understood word order and such [things]</i>                                                                                                    | Complicating action |
| <i>and I wasn't too interested in studying them anyway and<br/>as I didn't know them<br/>I wasn't able to</i>                                                                                            | Evaluation          |
| <i>It wasn't much help writing words one after the other in the test and<br/>they always went wrong and<br/>I was always pitied and passed with fives practically</i>                                    | Resolution          |

**Janne** also constructs continuity in his life history, implicitly, in having a lack of interest and, explicitly, making little effort in school work. He recounts:

**Little effort in school work (J)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>What I remember is that<br/>it was when school started, I think</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Orientation         |
| <i>I wasn't terribly really<br/>I can't say that<br/>I wasn't interested but<br/>I just maybe didn't make much effort<br/>I kind of just thought it was</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Evaluation          |
| <i>I just practically went there really (...) and<br/>and then I've done a lot of sports since I was very young (...)<br/>all kinds of sports and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Complicating action |
| <i>that's how I spent my free time (...)<br/>only when parents sometimes pushed me to do homework and such (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Evaluation          |
| <i>And then perhaps a bit because of that<br/>you can't say that my school work suffered because of that but<br/>it just perhaps didn't feel like,<br/>just no energy to do anything (...)<br/>And then also teachers started to notice at some point that<br/>I could do homework and such (...) a bit more and (...)<br/>And then perhaps I've been a kind of, maybe a wild character (...)<br/>What I remember is that<br/>I wasn't the quietest one during the lessons (...) in comprehensive school (...)</i> | Resolution          |



In his evaluation about the beginning of school Janne describes school as a place where he “*just practically went*” without “*having the energy*” to make much effort. Nevertheless, he evaluates “*you can’t say that I wasn’t interested*” or “*you can’t say that my school work suffered*”. Instead, he talks about having been interested in sports from very early on and having invested all his free time in them (he told me he practised sports, mainly team sports, four times a week from the beginning of comprehensive school till general upper secondary school). Success in sports is described as important also for the future: “*I had it in mind a bit to succeed in it*”. Elina Lahelma (2005, p. 84; see also 2003) argues that “some resources are more easily available to the young men than to the young women” giving sports as an example of one such resource. According to Lahelma, the benefits gained in sports easily tempt some boys to put more effort into sports than school, especially because achievement in sports is more appreciated in some boys’ cultures than achievement in school. (Ibid.) For Janne sports can be seen as such a resource (cf. Janne’s plans about further education below).

Janne also describes himself as a “*wild character*” who “*wasn’t the quietest one during the lessons*” and who “*has always liked talking during the lessons*”. Contrary to Kaarina (see 6.1.1 above), for example, who expresses regret about her rowdy behaviour at school, Janne evaluates it fun – “*it amused me then really*”, implicitly evaluating it as a minor thing (cf. Tolonen, 2001). Walkerdine (1998, p. 39) argues that boys’ “*activity is frequently read as a sign of understanding*” (emphasis in the original) by teachers. She continues that activity “may encompass naughtiness, even displays of hostility and conflict towards the teacher”. This, however, is taken as evidence of real understanding as opposed to girls’ good behaviour and hard work, which are interpreted as a deficiency. (Ibid.) According to Lahelma (2004), in school discourses (see footnote 24 below) boys’ poorer school achievement is among other things explained by boys’ natural masculine characteristics, like wildness and little interest in school work. Boys’ opposition to school is seen as heroic, healthy laziness or justified criticism towards school (ibid; see also Lahelma, 2005; Tolonen, 2001). In the same vein Janne does not

doubt his ability and competence, but evaluates his interest in sports and lack of interest in school work as a natural thing; lack of effort in school work is not seen as problematic. Whereas Lisa displays feelings of fear and anxiety, Janne displays feelings of confidence towards learning.

Lahelma (2005, p. 79) has also argued that boys' lack of success is uncritically attributed to schools' working methods as well as to the feminization of the schools in the media and by the authorities. Schools are thus represented as being unsuitable for boys. In the same vein Janne evaluates the impairment of school achievement in the upper level of comprehensive school as due to the way studying was organized in the lower level of comprehensive school, i.e. working methods. He told me he attended an experimental class from the third or fourth grade until the end of the sixth grade, i.e. the end of the lower level of comprehensive school. He describes studying being largely organized in the form of projects, where students themselves explored things and "learned by doing". Janne evaluates this method as not "*particularly efficient*" and evaluates that "*it started to feel like you have to work more*". Poorer grades in the upper level of comprehensive school are seen as the result of earlier working methods and not due to lack of talent. More effort would have been needed to compensate for the insufficient working methods.

Without being asked Janne then starts telling me about studying Swedish at the beginning of the upper level of comprehensive school. He recounts:

**“Since then I’ve been crazy about Swedish” (J)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <p><i>Then (...) in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade we got started with Swedish (...) and I had no, no motivation whatsoever (...) in the whole thing and I almost blew it, I was lucky not to get a four sometimes (...)</i><br/> <i>And then I’ve got a really good memory of our Swedish teacher we had her/him in the 7<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade</i><br/> <i>And when s/he noticed that</i><br/> <i>I kept talking during the lessons and so perhaps disturbed the class a bit when others tried to answer and so (...)</i></p> | Orientation         |
| <p><i>And then once we had like</i><br/> <i>we wrote some little essay about where you’ll go to school (...)</i><br/> <i>And then I said, I wrote there that</i><br/> <i>I’ll go to a school of economics in Sweden</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Complicating action |
| <p><i>At that point, I don’t know the reason why</i><br/> <i>I was interested in Sweden</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Evaluation          |
| <p><i>Then I had a bet with that teacher that</i><br/> <i>if I get, I’ll get an eight</i><br/> <i>I said I’d get eight [in Swedish] in upper secondary and then</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Complicating action |
| <p><i>Now that I then got it</i><br/> <i>perhaps since then I’ve been interested in Swedish, like crazy about it (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Resolution          |
| <p><i>I’ve never found that teacher again</i><br/> <i>so that I’d be able to tell her/him</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Coda                |

In the narrative above Janne evaluates that he had “*no motivation whatsoever*” to study Swedish<sup>23</sup> and evaluates his success in it as very poor: “*I was lucky not to get a four sometimes*”. However, the situation is changed after a bet with the Swedish teacher. In the vocabulary of competition and sports the protagonist is constructed as a motivated and competent student and learner with a desire to beat the competition and to get a good grade in Swedish. Open competition with the teacher is constructed as inspiring the protagonist’s motivation and arousing his interest in studying Swedish. As a result: “*since then I’ve been crazy about Swedish*”. Janne’s upper secondary school Swedish teacher can be seen as having created “suitable male pedagogy” (see Lahelma, 2004, 2005) for motivating a competitive youngster in getting interested in studying

<sup>23</sup> Along with Finnish, Swedish is the other official language in Finland and a compulsory subject in comprehensive school and general upper secondary school. From time to time political debates about its compulsory nature have come up. It has been referred to by its adversaries as “pakkoruotsi” (“compulsory Swedish”). The compulsory nature of studying Swedish has also been criticized by pupils, and some have acquired a negative attitude towards studying it.

“compulsory Swedish”. The narrator becomes constructed as a competent student and learner when the working method is right. According to Lahelma (2005, p. 78; see also 2004), “worry about the poor achievement of boys is one of the current travelling discourses that is repeated in one country after another”.<sup>24</sup> In this travelling discourse of “failing boys”, “plans for a pedagogy for boys have been suggested” (p. 79). Lahelma criticizes this discourse for overlooking the “differences in achievement between different kinds of boys or between different kinds of girls” (p. 79). However, the narrator above implicitly reconstructs the need for pedagogy for boys.

Moreover, Janne evaluates much of his learning of Swedish as having taken place informally outside school. He told me that he had learned Swedish by reading newspapers in Swedish, and by watching Swedish-speaking TV programmes. He also said he had Swedish-speaking friends although “*I don't really get around to it with them, it feels too strange to speak Swedish then*”. When I asked him about his learning strategies he mentioned reading Swedish newspapers first and school-books second. School, the formal institute, had nevertheless an important role in displaying his talent in Swedish as the grade eight (on a scale from 4 to 10) in his general upper secondary school certificate and the good matriculation examination result officially proved his competence (cf. Kaarina in 6.1.1). Similarly, Pekka (male aged 32) told me he created a suitable (male) pedagogy for himself in Swedish as “*being present during the lessons made me anxious*”. With the help of teaching material he studied Swedish independently without attending lessons: “*I could do all the exercises from the book and a lot of extras like what we would have done at school and I kind of had to learn the language myself*”. He told me he practised listening by watching Swedish-speaking programmes on

---

<sup>24</sup> Drawing on Sverker Lindblad and Thomas S. Popkewitz (2003), Anne-Lise Arnesen, Elina Lahelma, and Elisabet Öhrn (2008, p. 2) argue that “discourses can comprise ideas and assumptions of what shall count as ‘facts’ that travel between countries in various ways. Educational discourses travel from one country to another as theoretical ideas and categories of international statistics, which become translated into particular political-historical contexts. They construct and bring into being notions of differences between groups and make distinctions by classification procedures and practices”. The travelling discourse of boys’ underachievement constructs differences between ‘failing’ boys and ‘successful’ girls. According to Arnesen, Lahelma, and Öhrn, this discourse regularly reappears in Finland, thus also travelling in time.

TV and by listening to Swedish programmes on the radio. His test results proved the efficacy of the method as well as his competence in Swedish.

To sum up, in both **Lisa's** and **Janne's** narration, the narrator is constructed as competent "the self is innately capable rather than as capable by dint of effort" (Oyserman & Markus, 1998, p. 115 referring to Jones, 1989); in other words successful for the 'right' reason, i.e. natural talent, and not hard work. As Walkerdine (1998, p. 33; see also the discussion in 4.2) argues, it is also possible to be successful for the wrong reasons: "*Work*, then, forms a metaphoric relation with *rote-learning* and *rule-following*" and therefore it is not considered to be as valuable as real understanding (p. 38). She argues that "girls' good performance is down played, while boys' often relatively poor attainment is taken as evidence of real understanding" (p. 33). Whereas girls' success is seen as due to hard work or conformity, boys' success is seen as due to talent (Lahelma, 2004). Through the emphasis on lack of effort the narrator becomes constructed as a competent (i.e. educable, having an ability to learn) student and learner regardless of school results.

In line with the differing explanations of girls' and boys' school success, where boys' failure is explained by lack of interest and school's unsuitability for boys, whereas girls' failure is seen as related to a lack of talent (Lahelma, 2004; see also Dweck & Repucci, 1973 in Walkerdine, 1998, p. 21–22), Lisa, unlike Janne, evaluates herself as lacking language-learning skills, expressing anxiety about her educability. As Reay (2005, p. 923) has argued, "even successful working-class students, the ones who escape 'being a nothing' still often have to deal with the shame and embarrassment of not being good enough". Only good grades, i.e. official proof, can verify Lisa's ability to learn. For Janne, formal qualifications are also important, not to prove his talent, but to furnish evidence of the knowledge he acquired informally in learning Swedish.

*Educability and General Upper Secondary School Choice*

Both Lisa and Janne construct the categories “bright” and “poor” students. And they both evaluate themselves as competent students and learners belonging to the category of “bright” students. But there is a difference in that Lisa evaluates herself as belonging to the “bright” category on the basis of her good grades (Lisa told me her comprehensive school average was over 8), whereas Janne evaluates himself as capable, something that “*shows in the grades*”, if he bothers to make an effort (he told me his comprehensive school average was around seven), thus, constructing continuity in his confidence in his ability to learn. In the narratives below Lisa and Janne reflect on their educational choices:

### Garbage man or astronaut? (L)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>When this general upper secondary school stage started it was a bit like, I felt like all the students with an average of over 8 were expected to go to upper secondary</i>                                                                                               | Orientation         |
| <i>It was like generally expected that if you're a good student then of course you go to upper secondary and university and so on And I couldn't give a shit</i>                                                                                                             | Evaluation          |
| <i>But as everyone else went there</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Complicating action |
| <i>And then again I think it was terrible to choose at that age that I'll study this trade now for four years then I'll be a garbage man and then I decide I want to be an astronaut and like this</i>                                                                       | Evaluation          |
| <i>I just couldn't decide and I just went to upper secondary then</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Complicating action |
| <i>And a bit because everyone expected you to go somewhere anyway and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Resolution          |
| <i>Then it started to really go badly at some point I got stuck in town with a friend and had coffee at Stockmann's and did not go straight to school</i>                                                                                                                    | Complicating action |
| <i>Then bit by bit I lost the track and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Evaluation          |
| <i>Then I changed to that [reference to GUSSA] (...) But soon that too and then again with English and Swedish I had, with them I've always had a bit trouble, so I felt that, as I didn't pass the first courses so</i>                                                     | Complicating action |
| <i>right away I was like oh my God how can I ever pass some examination if I can't pass the first courses</i>                                                                                                                                                                | Evaluation          |
| <i>My motivation always dropped like that Somehow I thought that it's a pretty impossible task to pass the English or Swedish examination I was thinking that I would only be wasting four years of my life and study terribly and then fail like one test and that's it</i> | Resolution          |
| <i>So then I started working to get money so that it was easier to get on with life and it can be that as I really had no kind of long-term plans that going to some school, it was really like somewhere there outside and</i>                                              | Coda                |

**Lisa** does not see studying in general upper secondary school as self-evident, but expresses anxiety in choosing her future career at that age, i.e. right after comprehensive school. In her narration starting general upper secondary school is constructed as compulsory for those who are “bright”, i.e. students who have an average of over 8. Thus, Lisa too,

ends up choosing general upper secondary school, the academic route leading to higher education. The choice between garbage man and astronaut can be interpreted as metaphors representing extreme social positions in a meritocracy and the route chosen to lead to the position with higher prestige on a given scale. Stupidity becomes juxtaposed with cleverness “metaphors for forms of knowledge that are highly class-specific” (Lawler, 2000 in Reay, 2005, p. 918). Lisa’s narration reflects the opposite of the flexibility of the LLL narrative, the professional choice being based on an individual innate ability (cf. Rätty & Snellman, 1998) which determines a future career.

Lisa negotiates her ability and competence in relation to managing general upper secondary school, and in relation to passing the first language courses and passing the matriculation examination. So on one hand she evaluates herself as a good student who expects and is expected to continue her study in general upper secondary school and, on the other hand, she expresses anxiety about her ability to manage such study even despite hard work. Lisa’s feelings of uncertainty and anxiety in choosing her future career reflect those of the working-class in which an academic career is not considered a self-evident choice (cf. Kaarina’s life history in 6.1.1; see e.g. Käyhkö, 2006; Kuusinen, 1992; Rätty & Snellman, 1998; Reay, 2005).

Contrary to Lisa, **Janne** evaluates continuing in general upper secondary school as self-evident and a natural choice for him as he is “*not bad at school*”. He recounts:

**“It has always been upper secondary school” (J)**

|                                                                                                                                      |                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Then I got in upper secondary school but</i>                                                                                      | Complicating action |
| <i>I had always been sure about it that I’d not go anywhere else but continue from comprehensive school to upper secondary (...)</i> | Evaluation          |
| <i>Then I got in with that average I had it was just enough to get in upper secondary and (...)</i>                                  | Resolution          |

Despite constructing continuity in making little effort and having little interest in school work in comprehensive school, Janne describes con-



tinuing his studies in general upper secondary school as his first choice “*it has always been upper secondary school*”. He talks about getting into general upper secondary school as his own choice, although he applied for a school with the easiest entry requirements: “*I didn’t have to get in there because people made me even if it happened to be a school where you got in with the lowest possible average*” (cf. Kaarina and the choice of cleaning education in 6.1.1; see also Käyhkö, 2006, p. 30). He chooses an upper secondary school where he is able to get in and continues on the linear route to academic education and a career.

Janne does not consider vocational school to be an option, as it is only for those students who are not interested in studying and who do not do well at school (cf. Käyhkö, 2006; Willis, 1977): “*Those who are really not interested in school get in there [in vocational school] (...), I’ve noticed with myself that if I’m a bit interested, it shows in the grades too*”. Also continuing in general upper secondary school for adults becomes constructed as a choice for “others”, i.e. for “poor” students: “*somehow it felt like it’s almost a bit like the 10<sup>th</sup> grade,<sup>25</sup> going to some general upper secondary for adults*”. Business college and GUSSA are, however, described as possible alternatives after dropping out of “the normative” general upper secondary school (for young people), the narrator’s first choice. Contrary to the principle of lifelong learning that emphasizes the importance of learning at all ages, general formal education in adulthood becomes constructed as a less attractive alternative in relation to the normative general upper secondary school. In the same vein further education “*after five years*” is not seen as a possible alternative.

Janne talks about his willingness to study and the importance of getting “*a good profession*” despite dropping out of general upper secondary school, for which he expresses regret: “*it has really annoyed me*” (see also below). This was not due to his ability as a learner as he evaluates himself as not belonging to the “poor” category stating that “*I was never bad at school anyway*”. Motivation, and not a lack of natural talent,

<sup>25</sup> In the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, additional basic education is provided for those who have completed their comprehensive school study. Pupils have the chance to improve their grades and get support in planning their future. (The Finnish National Board of Education, n.d.b.)

determines his ability and competence as a student and learner and, thus, if he is interested in the course "*it shows in the grades*". Janne's narration displays feelings of certainty in relation to his ability and competence as a student and learner.

To sum up, **Lisa's** and **Janne's** constructions on educational performance reflect the gendered stereotypical differences between "healthy normality" and "healthy laziness". Lisa's constructions on educability reflect what Walkerdine and her colleagues (2001, p. 179) have found about British middle-class girls in their study. They argue that for middle-class girls "many of whom achieved outstanding exam results (...) found it considerably more difficult to be proud of their performance, or to hold on to a sense of what they had achieved" than working-class girls, thus expressing anxiety about their educational performance. High achievement is expected but not valued of them. Walkerdine et al. (2001, p. 164) call this "healthy normality". And as Lahelma (2004) argues, it applies to all girls in Finland. According to Lahelma (2004), girls' "healthy normality" may be examined in relation to boys' "healthy laziness", i.e. boys' lesser school success and interest in school work. So, unlike Lisa, Janne has no need to negotiate his competence in relation to his educational choices and to passing general upper secondary school courses and the matriculation examination. For him it is a question of effort and not ability. As Walkerdine (1998, p. 17) posits, "Girls are still considered lacking when they perform well and boys are still taken to possess something even when they perform poorly".

"Healthy normality" and "healthy laziness" can also be juxtaposed with opposing feelings of inferiority and superiority, fear and shame as opposed to arrogance and pride, these juxtapositions being displayed in Lisa's and Janne's narratives. In her discussion about emotional and psychic responses to class and class inequalities, Reay (2005, p. 912) argues that class thinking and feeling generate class practices. With case studies she illustrates that "it was the black and white working-class girls agonizing that they would be 'a nothing'" (p. 917). She continues that "the risks of finding they have very little value are disproportionately high for such working-class girls. These girls, in the context of school-

ing, inhabit a psychic economy of class defined by fear, anxiety and unease where failure looms large and success is elusive; a place where they are seen and see themselves as literally ‘nothing’” (ibid, p. 917). I interpret that such classed and gendered feelings of fear and anxiety are also displayed in Lisa’s narration in the context of schooling.

*The Regret for Dropping Out of General Upper Secondary School*

Both **Lisa** and **Janne** regret having dropped out of general upper secondary school, thus implicitly reconstructing the importance of the normative age for studying (see above) and graduation from general upper secondary school. This is contrary to the principle of lifelong learning that emphasizes the importance of learning for all, for example, regardless of age. **Lisa** evaluates her ability to learn stating that she was not any “*dumber*” at the time she went to general upper secondary school normatively in youth. **Janne**, on the other hand, expresses regret and embarrassment for dropping out of general upper secondary school, describing it as a failure, as “*all my friends go to school*”, making a comparison between himself and his basketball friends. He recounts:

**“Not much effort in school work” (J)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| [P: <i>Yes right, you wrote there that it was a bit like a feeling of failure somehow and also embarrassment as others went</i><br><i>Yeah</i><br>[P: <i>to school and</i><br><i>Yes it was that really</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Abstract            |
| <i>I have all those [friends] in my basketball team, they are, when I really played they were all in these top schools in the centre of Helsinki and they all had averages of nine and so (...)</i><br><i>and I was in some x school [a less valued school in the suburbs]</i><br><i>and at its worst my average was around 7</i><br><i>it felt a bit like, not really, a bit embarrassing and</i><br><i>and it was a bit surprising really</i><br><i>how others can get tens and so for the courses and (...) so on but</i> | Orientation         |
| <i>I didn't do anything about it really so that</i><br><i>I would have got better grades (...) and so</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Complicating action |
| <i>I talked or was really quiet about these things with my friends</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Evaluation          |
| <i>But they knew it really that I don't make so much effort (...) in school work</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Resolution          |

In the above narrative Janne constructs difference between himself and his basketball friends who “*were all in these top schools in the centre of Helsinki and they all had averages of nine and I was in some x school and at its worst my average was around 7*”. He expresses surprise at his friends’ excellent school success and embarrassment about his own school results; he was quiet about the results “*but they knew it really that I don’t make so much effort in school work*”. He constructs continuity by explaining his poor results as being due to a lack of effort, “*not doing anything*”, and not a lack of ability. Unlike Lisa, he attributes his poor school success not to his character traits but to reasons external to him (see Linde, 1993, p. 132, 134; see also Helkama, Myllyniemi, & Liebkind, 2001, pp. 131–140<sup>26</sup>).

<sup>26</sup> When things do not go as planned, causes and explanations are sought for. Research on attributions examines observations and explanations for behaviour. According to the theory of *correspondent inference* observed external behaviour is explained by a corresponding internal trait. Based on Jones and Davis (1965), the observer is most likely to interpret behaviour as an internal trait if 1) the behaviour is socially undesirable 2) the behaviour has unusual, discernible effects 3) the behaviour affects the observer either positively or negatively (i.e. hedonistically relevant) 4) the behaviour is aimed at the observer personally (personalism). Based on Miller (1984), in Western individualistic cultures there is a much greater tendency than in collective cultures to explain behaviour in terms of internal traits. (Helkama et al., 2001, pp. 131–140.)

As Noyes (2004 in Reay, 2005, p. 918; see also Rätty & Snellman, 1995) has found, in both students' and teachers' discourses, "clever becomes correlated with middle-class and stupid with working-class", in the above narrative Janne constructs difference between the two schools, i.e. middle-class and more working-class, as good and bad, as well as the two categories of students, i.e. "the bright" and "the poor" in the corresponding schools. This may also be seen to reflect differing values of school success for boys and their corresponding performance of masculinities. Lahelma (2004) discusses boys' success at school, stating that masculinity that is based on doing well at school may be valued in middle-class schools, but in the working-class school where Lahelma and her colleagues carried out ethnographic research it created a clear risk of being bullied. Or as Reay (2006, p. 301) posits, pupils "are expected to make difficult – and in particular for working class students – impossible choices: 'costly' choices between prioritizing official pedagogic practices on the one hand and local pedagogic practices on the other; between popularity among the peer group and a successful learner identity". Similarly, in middle-class schools where academic study and success in it are highly valued, Janne's basketball friends are evaluated as performing accordingly, whereas in his more working-class school in the suburbs where you could get in with the lowest possible average, studying is evaluated as not worth the effort and, instead, non-academic behaviour, i.e. concentration on sports rather than school, as an acceptable form of masculine behaviour. In the above narrative the two different cultures of masculine performances become united on the basketball court, but their differences in relation to educability also become visible even if silenced "*I talked or was really quiet about these things with my friends*".

#### *General Upper Secondary School for Adults*

**Lisa** told me that meeting her current partner started a change in her life. She describes her former life using metaphors of air, such as "*flying*"

and “*hovering*”, and her life at the time of the interview with metaphors associated with the ground, such as a steady life, a firmly standing house, and future plans, education being part of those plans. Lisa recounts:

**“Perhaps it wouldn’t be an impossible task” (L)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>But then I thought that I have to think of something and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Abstract               |
| <i>as my friends were in this school [GUSSA] and<br/>as x [where she was working] was so close<br/>I thought that<br/>I could come here like two nights a week to study Swedish or something<br/>'cause in whichever school I go to in the future<br/>it'll be of use as<br/>those were the ones which I had difficulties in<br/>I thought that I'd brush up a bit<br/>before I know what I'm going to be doing and</i> | Orientation            |
| <i>I started Swedish there and (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Complicating<br>action |
| <i>It felt surprisingly easy (...) that somehow it was<br/>I feel it was so easy<br/>that all of a sudden I noticed<br/>that I'm ahead of the others<br/>that the thing that I've always thought about as really hard for me,<br/>I noticed that others are perhaps as good or even worse at it</i>                                                                                                                     | Evaluation             |
| <i>which again was like perhaps it wouldn't be an impossible task<br/>if I really tried hard and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Resolution             |
| <i>The point was just to take all the Swedish courses (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Coda                   |

Lisa has a firm belief in studying, describing it as useful in any case in the above narrative before knowing what her future career would be: “*before I know what I'm going to be doing*”. She talks about starting out with subjects “*which I had difficulties in*”. Lisa negotiates her ability in Swedish describing it as being “*surprisingly easy*” after all. By contrasting herself with others she evaluates her ability and competence as a student and learner as quite good, even better than others. In conclusion learning Swedish is evaluated as not “*an impossible task*”. Contrary to Janne’s narration, educability is not constructed as self-evident in Lisa’s narration but needs to be negotiated. The protagonist’s ability to learn is first called into question, but in the end she proves to be competent in a

difficult subject like Swedish. This leads to enthusiasm to go through general upper secondary school for adults. In comparison with the “normative” general upper secondary school, the general upper secondary school for adults is seen as easy as “*half of the courses had disappeared*”.<sup>27</sup> Feelings of pride and hopeful anticipation replace those of fear and anxiety (cf. Reay, 2005).

**Janne** told me he made two or three efforts to continue his study in general upper secondary school for adults before deciding “*to continue his study in earnest*”. Paradoxically, among other things, he describes younger students who were “*making a disgusting noise*” as a reason for dropping out from general upper secondary school for adults. However, similarly to Lisa (see below), he does not evaluate his graduation from general upper secondary school for adults as self-evident: “*even when I talked with the school principal here I didn’t perhaps, even then it felt really strange to think that one day I would graduate*”. He evaluates his studying as having gone better than before, making reference to his developmental age as he has “*grown up*” (Aapola, 2002; cf. Komulainen, 1998, pp. 175–206 and 6.3.1 below), but going to work at the same time is evaluated as resulting in absences from lessons and delaying graduation. This is how he evaluates going to general upper secondary school for adults: “*I don’t know if you can say that I liked it but (...) it didn’t feel bad at least*”. Unlike Lisa, Janne does not base his doubt about graduation on his ability to learn, but on reasons external to him and his motivation to study. He constructs continuity in expressing feelings of shame as he makes a comparison between himself and his basketball friends; describing going to general upper secondary school for adults as shameful and something he does not want to talk about with his friends (see the discussion above), who have completed upper secondary school normatively in their youth. A difference is constructed between successful others, i.e. basketball friends as well as some relatives, and the pro-

<sup>27</sup> In Finland the general upper secondary school for adults curriculum is an adapted version of that of “normative” general upper secondary school for young people. There are 75 compulsory courses in the latter, whereas in the general upper secondary school for adults there are 44 compulsory courses. The Matriculation Examination, however, is the same for all general upper secondary school students. (For a more detailed discussion see part 2).

tagonist attending general upper secondary school for adults. He, thus, constructs continuity in making a difference between the “normative” general upper secondary school for young people and the general upper secondary school for adults. In contrast to lifelong learning for all regardless of age, not completing general upper secondary school normatively in youth is constructed as shameful in Janne’s narration. The feelings of shame in Janne’s narration can also be interpreted as a “class feeling”, “the psychic landscape of social class” (see Reay, 2005) – working-class thinking and feeling that generate working-class practices.

### *Bright or Poor?*

**Lisa** told me she started her general upper secondary school study in “*a terrible hurry so that a tick there and I simply passed*”. But then just passing the courses was not enough any more, and Lisa started setting herself higher targets: “*And then at some point it turned out that the ticks weren’t enough for me any more and I started aiming unnecessarily high*”. In Lisa’s narration hurrying, performance, and good grades reflect the competition between students that is maintained by schools, for example, through the grading system that ranks students on the basis of their school performance (Räty & Snellman, 1998). Thus, grades and performance at school are constructed as more important than learning itself.



## Mathematics is important (L)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>And then at some point I got this insane [mania]<br/>I actually didn't have any problem<br/>as long as I read something like Swedish<br/>that I'm not interested in</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Abstract               |
| <i>But then I started those maths courses<br/>and I had this, you know,<br/>like earlier I chose the advanced syllabus in maths<br/>but now I thought I wouldn't have time to do homework<br/>so I can't take the advanced one I wouldn't pass (...)<br/>and I thought I'd content with the regular one</i>                                                                                                           | Orientation            |
| <i>But then I kind of, 'cause for me it was like, I did the homework<br/>I didn't even need to go to the lessons<br/>I felt everything was self-evident (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Evaluation             |
| <i>So I started competing with myself like I didn't accept anything but ten<br/>[the highest grade]<br/>so that I went to renew tests in which I got nine to get ten</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Complicating<br>action |
| <i>which many people thought was quite crazy in my situation<sup>28</sup><br/>and as I say it aloud like this it sounds stupid but</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Evaluation             |
| <i>for me it was just something I had to get and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Resolution             |
| <i>Then there were subjects like chemistry and physics<br/>and they, too, started being like</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Orientation            |
| <i>I studied and raged and cried and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Complicating<br>action |
| <i>I had to like understand everything and know everything and get a ten<br/>and then I started having this idea in my head that<br/>I have to get an I [the best grade in the matriculation exam] and<br/>it was really a blow that<br/>I thought that if I really blow it<br/>it could drop down to an e [the second best grade]<br/>but all the pre-exams and all went well and<br/>I had ten for every course</i> | Evaluation             |
| <i>And then somehow I<br/>there was like too much pressure in the examination<br/>that I blew that too<br/>and I got an m [the third highest grade]<br/>I was like how can it be<br/>I wouldn't have thought it would go so badly but</i>                                                                                                                                                                             | Resolution             |
| <i>I had these mishaps on the way</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Coda                   |

<sup>28</sup> Here Lisa makes reference to having two small children.

**Lisa** talks about choosing the regular course in mathematics, and as being “content” with it, and describes how easy it was: “*for me it was like I did the homework, I didn’t even need to go to the lessons, I felt everything was self-evident*”. Thus, Lisa evaluates herself as naturally talented in mathematics: she does not need to make much of an effort to understand it. The advanced syllabus, on the other hand, is constructed as demanding more effort for her talent to become evident.

The study conducted by Walkerdine et al. (2001, pp. 179–180) about the expectations of middle-class girls’ school performance and their anxiety about not being “good enough” despite the evidence of their grades (see also the discussion above) is also found in Lisa’s narration. Similar findings by Reay (2005) in relation to working-class students conclude that even successful students often have to deal with the shame and embarrassment of not being good enough. Lisa also evaluates her ability on the basis of the grades she gets and only a grade ten for the regular course in mathematics can prove the narrator’s competence and talent. Lisa negotiates whether she belongs to the “bright” or “poor” group. In the regular mathematics course belonging to the “bright” group requires a grade ten for general upper secondary school courses and an l (the highest grade) or at least an e (the second highest) for the matriculation examination test. Getting an m – the third highest grade – she regards as failure, and is explained by the pressure of the matriculation examination situation. An l or e would have been needed to prove her competence as a student and learner. In comparison, in Swedish, which Lisa says she is not particularly interested in, it is enough to “*pass well*”.

Lisa talks about herself as a naturally logical person, who learns logical things: “*I’m perhaps the kind of person that for me something like mathematics, it has certain rules that you can apply you know (...) but in English there are a million things that you should remember*”. Lisa compares Swedish with mathematics; they are logical and, thus, possible to learn unlike English: “*Swedish was alright somehow, it’s terribly logical (...), it has word order and declinations and such, but I think that English is nothing but an exception, which has a couple of exceptions more (...) so*

*whatever you learn you have to learn a hundred exceptions at the same time*". She constructs difference in her competence between logical mathematics and illogical English: "*the ten in mathematics balanced the five in English*". Thus, Lisa constructs herself as a rational and logical person, qualities that according to Walkerdine (1989, p. 268 in Ernest in Walkerdine, 1998, p. 8; also Rätty & Snellman, 1998) are "bound up with the cultural definition of masculinity and 'that the discursive production of femininity [is] antithetical to masculine rationality to such an extent that femininity is equated to poor performance, even when the girl or woman is performing well'" (emphasis in the original). This is stated outright by Lisa's physics teacher (male) when he evaluates Lisa's work: "*They [physics problems] are quite correct but done in a stupid way [the teacher walks to the next student] you've solved them in a smarter way, go and write them on the board*". This is one of the rare instances in the data of this study where a GUSSA teacher displays overt authority over a student (cf. Hanna in 6.2.2 and Henri in 6.3.1).

Lisa's narration on mathematics reflects "The theory of natural talent" (Rätty & Snellman, 1991; see also Kasanen, 2003; Walkerdine, 1998, p. 36), which implies that intelligence is an innate ability (see the discussion in 4.2). Intelligence is seen as an ability for logical and abstract thinking, which at school is seen especially in mathematical, geometrical, and grammatical ability. Logico-mathematical intelligence is the prominent prototype of intelligence that is especially attached to men, so that it is not a coincidence that it is important for Lisa. In the same vein, Walkerdine (1998, p. 33) argues that "Success in mathematics is taken to be an indication of success at reasoning. Mathematics is seen as *development* of the reasoned and logical mind" (emphasis in the original). And as it is also possible to be successful for the wrong reasons (Walkerdine, 1998, p. 33; see also the discussion above), it is important for Lisa to have *real understanding*, natural talent, in mathematics.

**Janne** constructs continuity in describing himself as a naturally talented person, who despite not making "*such a terrible effort*" and without grinding away gets fairly good grades also in general upper secondary school for adults, even despite "*the bad foundation*" from

comprehensive school. He thinks he has a natural ability in mathematics at the comprehensive school, whereas in the general upper secondary school getting better grades in mathematics would have demanded more effort, although “*the grades were quite good (...) anyway*”. He evaluates mathematics as interesting, but not so interesting that “*I’d use my free-time*” for it, making a clear distinction between free-time and school (cf. Lisa below). Nevertheless, he evaluates himself as competent in mathematics “*if I just bother to study it*”, implicitly reconstructing its importance as the prototype of intelligence.

### *Matriculation Examination*

However, both **Lisa** and **Janne** construct fear and anxiety in relation to passing the matriculation examination – “*the big difficult thing*” as Janne describes it below. The feelings of fear and anxiety displayed towards the examination can be interpreted as due to the risk of failure and the exposure of being ‘a nothing’ as a consequence (cf. Reay, 2005). However, Lisa and Janne construct different explanations for their fear. They recount:

## Getting rid of the fear of not passing (L)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>And somehow then I lost my terrible fears for the exam</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Abstract            |
| <i>I had chosen Swedish so that<br/>I took the Swedish and Finnish exams first</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Complicating action |
| <i>'cause those were the ones I had always thought that<br/>I'm never gonna pass them so that it's not even worth trying<br/>So the way the Swedish pre-exam went [quite well]<br/>I really like had this thing that I just wanted to pass them (...)</i>                                                                                   | Evaluation          |
| <i>And then I started to count those points and (...)<br/>I even put the lowest ones possible I could get in those [subjects]<br/>And then I understood that really I could get like a b</i>                                                                                                                                                | Complicating action |
| <i>And I thought it was really great that<br/>I won't get the worst [grade] after all,<br/>that it's some i or even an a that I could get a b and I got all excited</i>                                                                                                                                                                     | Evaluation          |
| <i>I even studied it all summer, I worked at it really (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Complicating action |
| <i>And then it was really a high moment when we had this last brush up<br/>course in Swedish and I was like oh my God that in a week<br/>we should go through the whole grammar and</i>                                                                                                                                                     | Evaluation          |
| <i>Then I realized how much I actually know<br/>'cause it was really all just revision that I had studied in the summer<br/>and I didn't learn anything new there<br/>I just realized that, really<br/>I know this thing and</i>                                                                                                            | Complicating action |
| <i>That somehow it was a really wonderful experience that<br/>it's fun to be at school and not have to learn anything new<br/>that you just realize that you're that much ahead of the others<br/>that you don't have anything to learn about that thing (...)<br/>That it's just revision (...)</i>                                        | Evaluation          |
| <i>And then for that Swedish I got a couple of points minus m and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Complicating action |
| <i>for me it was like it can't be that<br/>I can't remember that<br/>I would have ever been so content with anything so that<br/>I couldn't even be bothered that<br/>I missed just about two or three points I think, but that it wasn't an i<br/>and it really wasn't a b either that I had counted on,<br/>but that it was a c (...)</i> | Evaluation          |
| <i>Those [Swedish and Finnish tests] were,<br/>it was not like I just barely passed them<br/>but it was like I really think I passed them well</i>                                                                                                                                                                                          | Resolution          |
| <i>So I got this [grade] and<br/>this really makes sense and that<br/>I'm able to achieve just about anything</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Coda                |

Similarly to Janne (see below), **Lisa** expresses anxiety about passing the matriculation examination, but for her even hard work would not compensate for her lack of talent: "*I can never pass them [Swedish and Finnish] so it's not even worth trying*". The narrator expresses surprise in understanding and knowing Swedish in the last brush-up course in Swedish; this proves that she has natural talent in languages as well, her grades in the preliminary matriculation examination test in Swedish, as well as the final one, are an official proof of this. This makes the effort put into studying worthwhile: "*this really makes sense and I'm able to achieve just about anything*". Lisa evaluates this as "*the starting point for the megalomaniac maths thing*" (see Bright or Poor? above).

Lisa constructs continuity in her life history expressing anxiety about dropping out, which she told me she had done several times before: "*I think I've started general upper secondary school four times*". "*I had a kind of fear the whole time that when will I grow tired of this*". Moreover, having had "*two children and a diploma with good grades*" in three years, as she stated in her written narrative, was very stressful. She told me that her school work piled up at times and she had difficulties on concentrating in systematic study. Most importantly, however, I interpret the fear of failing to achieve what is expected as a thread that can be traced throughout her narration: "*Like in principle the whole thing can fall down on that one essay; every essay, every talk, every everything became a kind of stumbling block for me (...), I felt like it must be the hundred words but that my whole three-year-work can fall down on that if I don't pass a course*". The possibility of dropping out is, thus, attributed to the protagonist's educability, i.e. a lack of talent to manage general upper secondary school study despite all the effort put into it. This is again despite the success proved by the grades.

Like Lisa (see Bright or Poor? above), **Janne** also expresses the importance of passing the general upper secondary school courses as well as the matriculation examination as quickly as possible. This, however, would have demanded more effort than he was ready to invest in studying: "*I guess I should have worked quite hard so that I'd have made it in two years*". Speedy graduation from general upper secondary school is important in

order to be able to continue to further education and a good profession as soon as possible as “*as I’m starting to be kind of old already, not really old but anyhow, it’d be good to get anyhow (...) now that this upper secondary is not [the end], it’s just an intermediate stage here*”. The meaning of general upper secondary school is, thus, in its gate-keeping role and not learning as such; it is an “*intermediate stage*” on the way to academic education. Speedy graduation can also be interpreted as reconstructing the speed of perception as a “*natural quality*” related to intelligence and the institutionalized ethos of educability (Räty, 1993).

In relation to the matriculation examination Janne constructs discontinuity in relation to his competence as a learner. He evaluates:

**“The big difficult thing” (J)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>I like, it felt like I need more (...) practice (...)<br/> like I didn’t believe that I’d be able to make it yet (...)<br/> It was, it just felt like the matriculation exam is a big difficult thing (...)<br/> It was just that I had never talked about it with friends,<br/> about that exam (...)<br/> When my friends took it<br/> I wasn’t at school myself<br/> so I didn’t feel like talking about it and (...)<br/> so I thought that it’s really difficult (...)<br/> but then it wasn’t like that (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

Contrary to his narration elsewhere in the life history the narrator negotiates the protagonist’s competence in relation to the examination and evaluates it as “*a big difficult thing*”. The protagonist is evaluated as needing “*more practice*” before he is ready to participate in the examination that he evaluates thus: “*I didn’t believe I would manage yet*”. On the other hand, the narrator constructs continuity in being able to learn if he only makes an effort. The narrator appears competent as his first examination is sent to the Matriculation Examination Board with the highest possible grade.

To sum up, **Lisa** and **Janne** also construct continuity in their narration in relation to passing the matriculation examination. Whereas Lisa constructs lack of talent in learning languages and the possibility of not

passing the matriculation examination even despite hard work, Janne evaluates it as possible to manage such “*a big difficult thing*” with “*more practice*” if he only makes an effort. This is again in line with the different explanations for boys’ and girls’ failure, i.e. lack of interest and lack of talent respectively (see Lahelma, 2004; cf. also the discussion above). However, both narrators are officially proved competent on the basis of their matriculation examination results.

*Further Education: Vocational School, Polytechnic, or University?*

**Lisa** became interested in continuing her education after general upper secondary school for adults. She evaluates that upper secondary education is not enough in the future, and it would not provide enough possibilities for working life. She recounts:

**Good basic skills for further education (L)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>It is no use if you've gone to upper secondary school, I could continue education (...), I didn't think of university (...) first, I thought of a normal vocational school but I guess I have to go to the polytechnic because I've graduated from general upper secondary school (...)</i> | Orientation         |
| <i>She [career counsellor] then just asked me (...) why don't you apply to university (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                | Complicating action |
| <i>At that point I started thinking for the first time that I have always thought that university is for super humans (...) and that I don't belong to that caste that I wouldn't have any chance (...)</i>                                                                                    | Evaluation          |
| <i>But then I started looking at these application, you know, possibilities and other criteria and I understood that</i>                                                                                                                                                                       | Complicating action |
| <i>actually I've got a good chance to get in there (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Evaluation          |

Both Janne and Lisa told me that academic education and a profession are part of their future plans. Again Janne talks about this as a self-evident choice for him (cf. the choice of general upper secondary school study above), whereas Lisa negotiates her educability in relation to



vocational school, the polytechnic, and university. She constructs difference between “*that caste*” who go to university and the other that does not. She evaluates herself as belonging to the latter until the school’s career counsellor makes the narrator believe in her own chances of becoming a university student. This is how she evaluates her general upper secondary school achievement and future plans:

**Success (L)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>Perhaps I could have let those demands diminish a bit, a bit and (...)<br/>but I don't know,<br/>if I'd ended up feeling bad<br/>if I had just got average papers for everything<br/>Now I've got this like really, really good memory of it that<br/>I now got these good grades, scholarships and then that<br/>if I'm lucky I managed it so that<br/>I may not need to worry about that university entrance exam and such<br/>So that if I'm lucky, hard work will open doors for me in the future and<br/>and then I've got this feeling that I succeeded at this school and<br/>I really I didn't get just pass through<br/>I got such papers that I can look at with joy and (...)<br/>Even a greater thing is that (...) there have been so many attempts and<br/>I've always thought about it as a kind of a line that I can't reach, something<br/>that I'll not manage<br/>so somehow it's even a bigger thing for me that<br/>I made it, I reached it</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

In the narrative above the narrator is finally proved to be competent as she gets good results, instead of just average ones, that she can “*look at with joy*” and that open up the possibility of further education at university for her. Like Janne, and contrary to the principle of lifelong learning for all, studying at any age is not constructed as self-evident; Lisa, however, evaluates the age of 25 as still possible for university study. Big demands and hard work are here perceived in a positive light, proving the narrator’s talent rather than underrating it; “*if I'm lucky hard work will open doors for me in the future*”. Graduation from general upper secondary school and the passing of the matriculation examination is evaluated as all the more valuable due to the protagonist’s several attempts to achieve them. General upper secondary school for adults

and her own high targets in subjects that are important for her like mathematics and chemistry are seen as giving Lisa good basic skills for her further studies. Lisa’s talk about the qualification reached through higher education reflects normative thinking in which you advance step by step on your educational path, until the required qualifications are reached and you move on to working life, where what you have learned can be applied. This is in contrast with the LLL narrative that emphasizes flexibility in educational and career paths.

Lisa’s life history can be described as a story about change: in general upper secondary school for adults the protagonist develops into a competent student and learner as she is no longer the “*bad girl (...) in the corner who’s given detention for any possible reason*” (cf. Kaarina in 6.1.1). Equally, the learning process is constructed as becoming more important than performance and passing courses. Lisa evaluates her changed values:

**My life values have changed (L)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>Actually all my values have changed completely in every aspect. Still in comprehensive school and earlier I had this thing like living like crazy one day at a time and if you die today you die today, so that nothing was important and (...) I thought that going to a club the next Friday was practically the most interesting moment of the week (...) and it has been very important what other people think about me and looks and such such matters (...). Somehow all my values have turned upside down so that I’ve really started thinking more, like I’ve started to accept people a lot more as they are and here I’ve met such such a wide range of people of different ages (...) and all kinds of (...) and I’ve noticed that the nerd can be (...) quite (laughter) a nice fellow and I don’t know. And the most interesting thing was that learning in itself can give you satisfaction that you understand something and you examine something and you notice that it’s wonderful in itself (...) and not only a “parrot mark” [a sticker that teachers in elementary schools put in pupils’ notebooks to praise good work] (...) that you get in your notebook (...) it’s wonderful for yourself (...) to learn something new, you know.</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

Despite her fragmented educational path Lisa has a strong belief in education, her hunger develops on the way, and she starts setting her goals higher. Just passing a test is not enough any more, and she wants

a good foundation for her future studies, although she talks about her crazy targets in mathematics. Her plans for further education change from vocational school to polytechnic, and finally to university. What Lisa is naturally good at is worth studying more. There is no sign of uncertainty, despite the uncertain beginning on the educational path, as Lisa continues her pursuit of further qualifications. In line with life-long learning she finds “the joy of learning” in the end.

In **Janne’s** narration completing the general upper secondary school for adults and passing the matriculation examination are primarily constructed as means for continuing studies in higher education; achieving the “cap” and the status it has brought are evaluated as only secondary (cf. Kaarina in 6.1.1): “*Well, it’s a thing in itself too that you’ve graduated (...) and that the 1<sup>st</sup> of May you can put the cap on and (...) be proud of it really (...) that you’ve finished it*”. In planning his further studies Janne constructs continuity in his desire to continue his studies in Sweden (cf. the bet with the comprehensive school Swedish teacher). Having had sports as a serious hobby he sees domains related to sports as possible choices for a future career. Sports is evaluated as a resource for Janne (see the discussion above), although he is unable to make his dream come true in relation to sports: “*But also after that I’ve played it as a hobby (...) but perhaps when I was younger, I thought of something else (...)*” and “*I had this goal that I’d do well in it*”.

Despite constructing continuity in having little interest and making little effort in school work the narrator constructs continuing in higher education as self-evident. He evaluates the further studies in the future as “*the best time in my life*”:

**“The best time in my life” (J)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>I can see that (...)<br/>         university study will surely be the kind of best time in my life (...)<br/>         It must be different than here [in general upper secondary school for adults]<br/>         kind of freer, so that you can decide yourself and<br/>         it’s interesting (...)<br/>         Well, general upper secondary school was too<br/>         but still you have to pass the compulsory courses (...)<br/>         Now I’ll just have a different kind of feel about it [studying]<br/>         if it’s motivating</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

Janne does not doubt his educability (cf. Lisa: university is for super humans) in the realms of higher education, but believes in his ability to learn when studying is motivating. He constructs difference between general upper secondary school study and his future further education: “*Now I’ll just have a different kind of feel about it if it’s motivating*”, evaluating his further studies as more pleasant and motivating. Getting into further education is not seen as demanding hard work or as success in a competition; it is achievable by improving the general upper secondary school average through taking courses in chemistry and physics.

According to Lahelma (2005, p. 85), typical male choices such as mathematics act as resources in applying for further education. Lahelma (2005) argues that whereas high-achieving girls compete with each other in the predominantly feminine domains that are hard to get into, boys more often than girls get into domains they want to study. She posits that “for young men in the current Finnish educational and political context, school grades are not as important as for young women” (p. 78) and “typical male choices act as resources in applying for further education” (p. 85).

### *Concluding Summary*

Lisa’s and Janne’s constructions of educability are the most coherent and systematic representations of stereotypical gendered differences of educability in the data of this study. For Janne “healthy laziness” is accepted and it does not call his competence or possibilities of further education into question. Lisa, on the other hand, constructs “healthy normality” in her narration; she negotiates her educability in relation to her performance in GUSSA, testing her competence through the grading system. Only the highest grades and belonging to the “bright” category proves her competence as a student and learner. (Walkerline et al., 2001, pp. 164, 179; see also Lahelma, 2004.) The same pattern is repeated in other female narratives, e.g. Helena, aged 29, constructs good grades as important and renews tests in order to ensure her place

in the category of “bright” students. For Helena, success in her GUSSA study is a cause of some amazement for her as she told me “*I was not even a grade 8 student*” in comprehensive school: “*I was like, what, I know these things, what’s the thing that has happened in my head, it was really magic (...) that oh my God, I’m able to do this*”. Lisa attributes failure to her lack of talent, whereas Janne does not doubt his ability to learn, but evaluates himself as a competent learner if he only bothers to make an effort, i.e. has a positive attitude to learning in line with life-long learning. For him the motivation to learn depends on working methods and the school’s suitability for the narrator rather than the lack of innate qualities like natural talent. (Cf. Lahelma, 2004.)

However, gendered differences of educability are also constructed elsewhere in the data of this study. For a girl (see Kaarina in 6.1.1) “healthy laziness” is not constructed as acceptable, meaning that a girl with rowdy behaviour becomes positioned as “*a bad student*”. Passing the courses in (advanced) mathematics is constructed as more likely for a man than a woman (see Hanna in 6.2.2 below; Roosa and Pirkko in 6.3.2). Acquiring formal education and having a career is constructed as more important for a man than a woman (see Hanna in 6.2.2 and Sara in 6.3.2). A heroic story about one’s career and education is more likely to be masculine (see Henri in 6.3.1) than feminine (see Hanna 6.2.2 and Roosa in 6.3.2). Also, similarly to Janne’s narration Jani, male aged 29, describes making an effort rather than his ability and competence as a student and learner as a prerequisite for success in studying. In the same vein Pekka, male aged 32, gives reasons external to him as leading to poor success in comprehensive school and business college. Thereafter, lack of interest and motivation rather than his ability and competence as a student and learner result in failure, whereas maturity and the school’s suitability in the case of GUSSA allow his talent to become evident: “*It’s that my grade point average went up by two grades and (...) I don’t think that there’s otherwise been such vast intellectual development, it’s just ‘cause I’m older and then there was this place that was suitable and when these two things matched, the rest of it was easy*” (cf. Henri in 6.3.1). Kalle, male aged 24, constructs continuity in his life

history, stating that he never had any learning difficulties and that learning was easy for him. He describes himself as a good student who does not put a great deal of effort into his school work, sports and other hobbies having been more important to him.

I argue that the constructions of stereotypical gendered differences in relation to educability also become manifested in different positions in relation to lifelong learning: whereas some are included, others are being excluded. On the basis of his narratives and constructions of educability Janne constructs himself as a lifelong learner "by nature", attributing failure to lack of interest and effort and not lack of ability, constructing reliance on his logical and rational masculine mind despite poor achievement. In this sense, Janne's constructions on educability are in line with lifelong learning and everyone's ability to learn. He is able to learn if he wishes to do so and external conditions are suitable for learning. Lisa, on the other hand, despite her attainment constructs anxiety about her educability, in other words a fear of not being a lifelong learner and becoming excluded from the learning society ideal (see Popkewitz et al., 2006).

Both Lisa and Janne reconstruct the importance of acquiring formal education for its gate-keeping role in getting into further education in order to get a good profession and youth as the normative age for receiving education. Even if informal learning may be more efficient than formal learning, the latter, however, has the important role of displaying the educability and competence of the narrator. This confirms the importance of formal education and qualifications that has also been shown elsewhere in this study. The stereotypical gendered differences of traditional constructions of educability shown in the data of this study suggest that hegemonic masculinities pave the way for the learning society ideal and make the construction of the LLL educable subject more easily accessible for men than hegemonic femininities for women. This is despite the greater number of female participants in this study and in adult education in general, as men are included in the ideal if they only wish to be so.

## 6.2.2 The Story of a Transfer Woman

Hanna, aged 39, describes herself as “*mother, wife, woman, and mistress*” and continues “*I miss that thing of my own, because if you think about my life really, I’ve had very little that’s my own (...) I’ve been in (...) the mother’s role and in the wife’s role and as we were abroad I was always somebody’s wife (...). Now at the moment I feel that (...) there could be something else besides being somebody’s wife*”. She evaluates her family as the most important thing in her life and adds: “*About studying it’s important that I now find the right moment to go on to continue my own life and now that I’m approaching 40 to think about what I’ll be ‘when I grow up’, what I want to do for the rest of my life (...) it’s also very important for me (...) that I do it in a way that’s best for the family*”. She is looking for ways to “*rid herself off the white uniform*” – which could be interpreted both metaphorically and concretely – and get ahead in life.

Hanna constructs continuity in her life history evaluating herself as “*a person who goes her own way*”, which I have interpreted as her life metaphor, i.e. a theory about her life (Vilkko, 1997, pp. 145–146; see also 6.3.2). She describes herself as “*a rebel*” in her youth, which she evaluates as her survival strategy in finding herself “*a different kind of way to live*”. Paradoxically, however, she also constructs discontinuity in relation to her life metaphor as lacking things of her own, constructing herself as somebody’s “*other*”: mother, wife, mistress – a transfer woman.

Katri Komulainen (1998, p. 123) posits that in order to be an independent individual the protagonist has to be talked about as an active agent, a human being who makes decisions and choices and is also responsible for the choices that are described as personal. Personal decisions and choices, especially in relation to education, are also constructed as displaying autonomous agency and independence in Hanna’s narration. She chooses not to follow the path foreseen by her parents: “*My parents had quite clearly planned it for me what I’ll be when I grow up and what schools I go to and such (...). They had a plan that I would finish comprehensive school and then continue in upper secondary school and after that I would become a doctor or something*”. She refuses to fulfil

her parents’ dreams; she has her “*own dreams*”; rebels and goes first to vocational school, a home economics school that, however, “*qualified her for nothing*” (cf. Kaarina in 6.2.1). Similar to Kaarina, she, thus, chooses “class b” education as opposed to the more desirable academic education that general upper secondary school and the educational route opened up through it would represent (cf. Käyhkö, 2006, p. 30). Nevertheless, Hanna evaluates herself as a good student (see the data extract in 4.2) who would have managed general upper secondary school in her youth: “*I didn’t go to that upper secondary school then (...), it wasn’t that there was something wrong with my brains, I would have managed in that upper secondary school then, too, but (...) it just wasn’t a good time for me to go there, I had to see 20 more years of life before I went*”. The narrator displays active agency in choosing the time and the place for formal general education that suit her best.

Hanna describes her childhood home as not the “*easiest*” or “*the most encouraging*” one and considers “*the social capital (...) narrow*”. She evaluates moving away from her childhood home at a fairly young age in order to live on her own as strengthening. She starts “*real life*” with “*a feeling of freedom*”; starts working, has a boyfriend, and moves to the capital. She studies to become a practical nurse, works for a couple of years, and starts further studies in the social field. She told me however, that she decided to interrupt them after a year and move to another town with her newly-wedded husband. The “*terribly important*” state of “*being single*” and “*living alone*” is transformed into the state of being married: “*quite clearly I got transferred to marriage*”. She recounts:



**“Radical change”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>And it was quite a radical change in the sense that</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Abstract            |
| <i>my husband’s job was elsewhere in Finland (...) in x [the name of the town] and well, I had my job here and I had just got on with my studies and I had my friends here and the social (...) circles were here and (...) but I don’t know if I got some 30-year-crisis at the same time and baby fever and everything and</i> | Orientation         |
| <i>I then decided that I don’t like it that I’d be living here and my husband would live in x that it would be somehow strange to start a marriage like that (...) and I then decided I’d leave everything and</i>                                                                                                               | Complicating action |
| <i>I thought that I’d certainly be able to continue at some point (...) that life does not end here, it’s a new stage in my life that is starting and (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                  | Evaluation          |
| <i>and about about two years or one and a half years after we got married we had our first child (...) and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Orientation         |
| <i>and that again too was a terribly big change and (...) so that you can divide your life into before being a mother and then all of a sudden you are a mother (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                        | Complicating action |
| <i>And then again, again life was different (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Evaluation          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Coda                |

I have interpreted the narrative above as marking the beginning of Hanna’s story as “siirtonainen”, literally a transfer woman,<sup>29</sup> a concept introduced by Annika Oksanen (2006) in her study on 17 Finnish women who have chosen to follow their husbands on expatriate assignments. This is a position that has so far been reserved solely to women (ibid, p. 15, 149). According to Oksanen “By reducing dichotomy between housewives and career women, which is damaging to women, and by creating the concept ‘siirtonainen’ it will be possible to expand the cultural space of Finnish women”. The concept of transfer woman makes it possible to examine one’s life situation as a housewife, living

<sup>29</sup> Oksanen (2006, pp. 137–138) notes that by no means does the concept siirtonainen-transfer woman refer to a woman who is passively transported from one country to another without active agency. On the contrary, a transfer woman has chosen to follow her man on an expatriate assignment. Oksanen continues that the concept is free from any former connotations and, therefore, is especially suitable as a performative image, a concept used by Donna Haraway (1997, p. 11 in Oksanen, 2006, p. 137) in order to permit us to look at a phenomenon that is familiar to us from a fresh viewpoint. According to Oksanen the concept “siirtonainen” in Finnish is especially appropriate as there is only a one-letter-difference with the concept “siirtolainen” – an immigrant.

abroad as “some man’s wife” from a fresh and positive viewpoint. In Oksanen’s (p. 137) words “the concept pierces a hole in traditional thinking and steers its course to a new direction”. Oksanen (p. 138) defines transfer woman first as a woman who chooses solidarity towards her husband (the idea of giving a gift) and second, a woman for whom the idea of a gift makes it possible to access a positive public narrative which has formerly stayed out of her reach.

Hanna’s story as a transfer woman does not start on an expatriate journey abroad, but in Finland, as she chooses to follow her newly-wedded husband to another town where he has his job even if for her it means “*leaving everything*”, i.e. her job, studies, and friends. Similar to Oksanen’s study, this can be interpreted as a demonstration of solidarity towards the relationship in a situation where the cultural practices and social structures of Finnish society favour different kinds of choices (ibid, p. 138, 145). When I ask Hanna how she feels about her choice of “*leaving everything*” the narrator here justifies her decision as her own choice that she takes responsibility for: “*I’m in the habit of making my own decisions so that I may think about these things for a terribly long time but then I make the decision quite quickly and then I stick to it*”. However, the contradictory nature of the choice is expressed as Hanna evaluates what life would have been like if she had finished her studies at the time: “*It was that kind of a decision that even today I can’t say that I regret it, sometimes I’ve thought about what life would have been like, of course (...), what life would have been like if I had stayed here for another year and a half*”.

Starting the general upper secondary school study in a new town where her husband’s job has taken her for the second time offers Hanna the possibility to continue her “*own life*”. At this point she plans to finish the GUSSA study in two years. Like also elsewhere in the data of this study the narrator here displays feelings of shame (cf. Lisa & Janne in 6.2.1 and Pirkko, & Roosa in 6.3.2) related to age, i.e. participating in formal general education in adulthood and not normatively in youth. Hanna evaluates: “*I wanted to start there but it was, in a way I also found it embarrassing (...) that in a way it also embarrassed me that I had not completed it at the time or when it was time for me to do it (...) but then*

*the welcome was so supportive and so (...) encouraging (...) the welcome was so warm that nobody ever criticized my choice or anything else (...) so that I found it quite positive after all (...) the whole time in upper secondary school for adults". This is how she describes the beginning of her GUSSA study:*

**Starting GUSSA – “a tough hobby”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>But then at that time our youngest child was quite small (...) and I got this terrible need to do something with my own life (...) and to get ahead in a way and</i>                                                                                  | Abstract            |
| <i>at that point I started thinking about I had thought about this upper secondary for adults before but, some time when I was 25 or so and perhaps it wasn't the time for it then (...) Other studies were more important to me at that point (...)</i> | Orientation         |
| <i>And that upper secondary for adults was a kind of a hobby for me then (...) but it was a tough hobby in the sense that</i>                                                                                                                            | Evaluation          |
| <i>I did the homework and other things quite passionately then (...) I did homework in the evening till quite late at night sometimes and (...)</i>                                                                                                      | Complicating action |
| <i>it was really important to get into that studying and those things then (...) The days I spent with my child and then evenings and early night time, it was time for myself (...)</i>                                                                 | Evaluation          |
| <i>and then in a year I took half of these courses and and then I signed up for the Swedish [matriculation] exam (...) when suddenly we got this chance that we could go abroad and left then (...)</i>                                                  | Complicating action |
| <i>And then too it was clear to me in the sense that for me going abroad was good timing or nothing happens accidentally but I like knew that going to upper secondary will not end there but there'll be another way to do it then (...)</i>            | Evaluation          |
| <i>like I then found this distance learning</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Resolution          |

As Komulainen (1998, pp. 115–116) argues, it is difficult to attach such concepts as autonomy, self-realization or self-development to “being” (quotation marks in the original) at home. Similarly, in the narrative above Hanna differentiates between taking care of her child in the daytime and studying in the evenings and at nighttime. She describes how she goes to great trouble to find babysitters for her child to be able to attend lessons in GUSSA, “*to do something with my own*

*life*”, “*to get ahead in life*”, “*have time of my own*”, even if with a bad conscience. She evaluates: “*I however saw that I need that time for myself and that upper secondary for adults was so important to me*”. Her own things are situated outside the home and related to studying as opposed to taking care of the child at home.

In the narrative above the decision to start the theoretical GUSSA study is constructed as secondary to practical vocational education. Only after having a trade is it possible to make the decision to study in GUSSA (cf. the discussion in 6.1.1). Hanna describes the GUSSA study as a hobby – albeit a tough one. Evaluating formal general education as a hobby does not undermine its value and importance for Hanna, it “*was so important*”. However, describing it as a hobby studying in GUSSA becomes opposed to more serious occupations connected to working life. Also elsewhere in the data of this study studying in GUSSA has been described as a hobby when it is not connected to getting formal qualifications for further studies and working life (cf. Aino in 6.1.2, Sara, Kaija, Pirkko, & Roosa in 6.3.2). In such cases learning in different learning contexts has been described as equally important. In the position of a transfer woman, following her husband from town to town and from country to country, Hanna also seizes whatever opportunities there are for things of her own, i.e. studying and learning in different learning contexts (see also below). In so doing she needs to be flexible in arranging her own activities outside the family sphere.

According to Oksanen (2006, p. 141), on expatriate assignments the traditional bourgeoisie family model in which the man is the breadwinner and the wife is at home is a reality in most cases. In Oksanen’s words (2006, p. 145), being out of working life pushes the wife into “a kind of backyard of womanhood” as for Finnish women a paid occupation and earning one’s living is the norm. I would go on to argue that Hanna’s position as a transfer woman pushes her into the backyard also in relation to lifelong learning, as not being involved in working life leaves her in a position where studying and learning as a hobby is the only alternative, not as a serious occupation leading to formal qualifications for further studies and more importantly for working life. Not

being readily employable also means not being included in the LLL narrative as a full-blown member.

### *Substitute Doings – Informal, Non-formal, and Formal Learning*

Hanna and her family spent five years abroad in two different countries outside Europe during which time she took distance courses from GUSSA, taking tests whenever she came to Finland. She describes the expatriate life as very different from Finland, which for her meant that her main task was to take care of the home and their child: “*There, for example, the husband’s working days were a lot longer (...) and somehow life is organized so that the other spouse stays at home and takes care of everything there*” (cf. Oksanen, 2006, p. 40). Besides this she told me she was involved in informal and non-formal learning in the new environment: “*I wanted to study the local language and culture*”. As she wanted to profit from the possibilities of experiencing and learning new things abroad she “*could not take courses [in GUSSA] at a very high speed*”. She told me she also participated in different kinds of social events, for example, at school and did voluntary work – things which were different from her life in Finland. She said she always talked about “*substitute doing*”, doing things to fill her life as opposed to “*real doing*” (see also Oksanen, 2006, p. 113). She told me, however, that she did not miss going to “*real*” work, a paid occupation. Hanna evaluates that living abroad has taught her flexibility and adaptability as well as the capability to cope with different kinds of situations in life as well as tolerance towards different kinds of people; she continues that there are things “*that you only learn through experience*”. In Oksanen’s (2006, p. 132) words the best thing about following their husbands on expatriate assignments is the time and the possibilities it provides for women to be present in their children’s lives, have hobbies of their own, and develop themselves.

In the process of creating a satisfactory and meaningful life in a foreign country being an active and independent learner in different learn-

ing contexts can be interpreted as having been important for Hanna. In the narrative below she describes the role of the GUSSA study in her life abroad.

**Distance learning as a transfer woman**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p>[P: How did you find that distance learning then? You kind of have experience of both traditional and distance learning]</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>Abstract</p>            |
| <p>In some ways it was easier because you were not tied up with the time that you have to be in some specific place at a certain time and (...) I had the freedom to go and buy the books myself and study and say when I come (...) but then again I didn't have anyone to ask for help</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p>Of course I got the [course] plan saying what to study and so from the teachers but (...)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p>But if there was some little thing I didn't have anybody there to ask (...) it was what I studied for the course and It's a good thing that there's the Internet and such where you find a lot of info and</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p>And then I bought, for example, if for some particular course there was a book (...) that was used in this school I bought another corresponding book (laughter) so that I was studying two books and sometimes even three that I kind of dealt with the info that way I kind of dug out the info</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p>[P: Yeah, so a kind of thirst for knowledge and] Yes<br/>                 [P: (...) You told me that you probably read a lot of things that you didn't have to read] Yes, some kind of ambition and responsibility and whatever it was. In practice, a lot of things that were useless or nothing is ever useless (...) you can't say useless but considering the course, the amount of studying was perhaps (...) useless but I had the time<br/>                 [P: Why do you think you acted in that way?] I think I was so terribly curious and I'm the kind of person that I can't leave some thing (...) I question things quite a lot (...) that I've got this terrible need to know why and how<br/>                 [P: So that you kind of look for different sides in those matters] Yeah, yeah that I kind of get stuck and I can't take things as black and white if somebody says a pike is a fish, I say why is it a fish (...) I'm like that (...)<br/>                 I know that I probably could have taken it easier</p> | <p>Evaluation</p>          |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p>[P: <i>Then on the other hand you've perhaps got a lot out of it</i>]<br/> <i>Yes (...) I've thought that too</i><br/> <i>I think I wouldn't have gone to upper secondary</i><br/> <i>if I had tried to get through more easily (...) that (...)</i><br/> <i>I wouldn't have got (...) what I wanted</i><br/>         [P: <i>So what did you get out of it now?</i>]<br/> <i>I got a really vast general knowledge (...)</i><br/> <i>and like the view of the world broadened that way (...)</i><br/> <i>that general knowledge and then I think human relationships that (...)</i><br/> <i>during all these years I've got,</i><br/> <i>those are not small things for me either</i><br/>         [P: <i>Even if you were doing distance learning</i>]<br/> <i>even if I was far away I was still close (...)</i><br/> <i>and then in a way upper secondary was for me that kind of fixed (...),</i><br/> <i>that kind of one thing I had in Finland</i><br/> <i>because I didn't have anything else in Finland (...)</i><br/> <i>I didn't have anything like</i><br/> <i>if you think of the other women there or the spouse</i><br/> <i>who was now at home</i><br/> <i>they were perhaps on a leave of absence or something</i><br/> <i>I didn't have anything like that (...)</i><br/> <i>I was as free as a bird</i><br/>         [P: <i>A fixed point</i>]<br/> <i>this was the fixed point (...) yes it was a fixed point that I had here (...)</i><br/> <i>I was afraid of getting totally free after all</i><br/> <i>if you think about it now afterwards</i><br/>         [P: <i>You wanted to have that connection to Finland</i>]<br/> <i>Yes, yes it was like, like my own thing (...) here (...)</i></p> | <p>Resolution</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

In Hanna's position as a transfer woman distance learning in GUSSA offers a welcome possibility to study the remaining general upper secondary school courses. It provides freedom in studying whenever and wherever it suits her. She describes distance learning as more relaxed as she studies at her own pace and looks for information she is interested in. It also demands activity and independence on the part of the learner as there is nobody there to ask for help; instead, she has to find out the information independently from the Internet and books. Contrary to Janne (see 6.2.1), who implicitly reconstructs the need for pedagogy for boys, Hanna looks for different ways to find information as well as creates innovative strategies to acquire knowledge. Hanna describes herself as "*terribly curious*" and learning feeds her curiosity as she wants to find

out about things thoroughly: learning things by heart, i.e. “*a pike is a fish*”<sup>30</sup> does not suffice, it is important to know “*why is it a fish?*” She evaluates: “*I looked for information for my own sake (...) not only for this school*”. Hanna’s description of studying can be interpreted, like Henri’s (see 6.3.1), as a mature adult’s way of studying. General knowledge, one’s outlook on life, and relations with others are described as the things which are gained from studying in GUSSA in mature adulthood.

Curiosity to learn is also constructed elsewhere in the data. Interestingly, in this study it is by and large a feature of those adult students who talk about learning in different learning contexts, seizing learning opportunities at all times in all places. These learners are also the ones who one way or another are situated on the margins of working life as they are not readily employable, Hanna as a transfer woman and Sara as a pensioner (see 6.3.2) or as Aino (see 6.1.2) who has a permanent and secure job she is satisfied with and has no intention of changing jobs. For them, learning as such is more important than performance and formal qualifications. Despite displaying qualities of the educable subject of the LLL narrative they become positioned in the backyard in relation to LLL, as being involved in working life as a flexible, adaptable, and employable worker is a prerequisite for being included in the learning society ideal. Those outside can at the most enter the periphery of the LLL narrative, studying as a hobby and not as a serious occupation.

Those learners who are not in working life are also responsible for organizing their own time, day after day. A transfer woman’s position is, however, even more demanding and fragile in the sense that she is missing out the social network at school as well as the former network of relatives and friends (Oksanen, 2006, p. 68, 73). Hanna describes studying in GUSSA as her own thing in Finland while living abroad; it provides a fixed point, a connection to Finland. She evaluates: “*I was not able to get totally free after all*”. She juxtaposes her GUSSA study

---

<sup>30</sup> The Finnish idiom “*hauki on kala*”, literally “*a pike is a fish*” refers to rote-learning and rule-following rather than real understanding (see Walkerdine, 1998, p. 33, see also the discussion in 4.2).



with the jobs other transfer women had in Finland, waiting for them while living abroad. Similar to Komulainen's study (1998, p. 175) having a connection with Finland through the GUSSA study can here be interpreted as a bond, i.e. security against isolation. Studying in GUSSA, thus, serves a dual function in Hanna's narration; it represents autonomy and independence in order to "*do something with my own life*", "*to get forward in life*", "*have time of my own*" as well as a bond in order to ensure security against isolation.

### *Reflections on Teacher-Student Relations and Learning Mathematics*

In Hanna's narration the teacher-student hierarchy breaks down in several narratives as she talks about her relations with former (female) teachers whom she has had in adulthood both abroad and in the two general upper secondary schools she has been to. She describes these teachers having become more like friends than teachers, as well as encouraging her in her studies. In GUSSA "*they [teachers] really want me to succeed and get finished with my study and it's nothing like 'study it in the book and try to make it somehow' but they really care about all of us students*". This is contrary to how Hanna describes her (male) mathematics teacher in comprehensive school whom she is too afraid to ask for clarifications. She told me this caused her to dislike mathematics, although on the lower level of comprehensive school she liked mathematics. In the narrative below she reflects upon learning mathematics as a woman with the help of an encouraging female teacher.

**“It can’t be a question of gender”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>And then there was, I think I mentioned there that maths teacher.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Abstract            |
| <i>That maths teacher was a woman and she had (...) a lot of personality</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Orientation         |
| <i>But she made me understand and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Complicating action |
| <i>she also taught so well that or then I was perhaps more positive towards that maths then</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Evaluation          |
| [P: Do you mean here or there?]<br><i>There [in the former GUSSA] (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Orientation         |
| <i>So she made me understand mathematics (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Complicating action |
| <i>So that I don’t know then if I’ve had or I’ve probably had it before too that I haven’t been terribly talented in mathematics and so (...) and then I’m a woman too (...) so that I don’t understand it like that but then she made us all, the whole class, understand that we are able to do just about anything that it’s not a question of gender or attitude that you have perhaps got when you were little that (...) you can’t study mathematics and [P: So you’ve thought that women are not so good at mathematics] I think it must be something like that (...) I suppose I think something like that women are not technical in any way and [P: How did it affect you that the mathematics teacher was a woman?] Well perhaps it was that a woman too can understand these things and the thing is she argued that as it’s said that you can divide people into those who learn mathematics and those who learn languages but it’s the same brain cells that you use in both (...) and in the same way also in languages you learn these logical wholes (...) like in mathematics that it’s a kind of question of attitude or desire if you don’t want to study then (...)</i> | Evaluation          |
| <i>It must have been that attitude for me then</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Resolution          |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <p>[P: What do you think about these things now?]<br/> <i>Well, I think that it can't be a question of gender really (...)</i><br/> <i>It's like, I believe there are gifted persons and there are people who are more gifted in mathematics and less gifted in mathematical problems (...)</i><br/> <i>And everyone can learn to some extent but you can't be made to learn anything</i><br/>         [P: What do you mean by that?]<br/> <i>You're always able to [learn but] everyone has her/his limits it can be in maths</i><br/> <i>it can be in languages</i><br/> <i>it can be in humanities</i><br/> <i>it can be anywhere (...)</i><br/> <i>but everyone can learn to some extent but I believe that there's a limit there in any case (...) for everyone</i><br/>         [P: What do you think about your own ability to learn mathematics or languages?]<br/> <i>Well in mathematics I've got a limit there somewhere that I know (...)</i><br/> <i>I know that I can manage upper secondary school maths (...)</i><br/> <i>and that I did manage it quite quite well and so but well (...) it's not only a question of attitude (...)</i><br/> <i>but I'd say that my attitude has changed so that I think I'm able to (...) able to learn and (...)</i><br/> <i>Languages have always been easier for me (...)</i></p> | <p>Coda</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|

In the narrative above Hanna talks about a female mathematics teacher in GUSSA who “*made me understand*” mathematics (see also Aino in 6.1.2 and Riitta in 6.4). This is despite evaluating the protagonist as “*not terribly talented in mathematics*” and stating “*I’m a woman (...) I don’t understand it*”. However, the present understanding of the narrator is described differently: “*it is not a question of gender*” and “*even a woman is able to understand these things*”. She describes how a female teacher in mathematics makes the whole class understand that “*one is able to do just about anything*” and “*it’s not a question of gender*”, this also applies to mathematics, the subject that is stereotypically similar to technology, and associated with men. In other words, it is possible to change the attitude one has adopted in childhood and youth in relation to one’s ability and competence as a student and learner (see the discussion in 4.2). On the basis of the present understanding of the narrator learning is most of all based on one’s own attitude and desire to learn; everyone can learn languages and mathematics as well as other subjects to some extent. In Hanna’s narration, however, one’s ability as a student and learner determines in the end how good one is able to become in

various school subjects. The narrator here thinks she is, after all, better at learning languages, a stereotypically feminine ability, than mathematics, a stereotypically masculine ability. Gender-related differences of educability are also constructed elsewhere in the data of this study (see e.g. Lisa & Janne in 6.2.1 and Roosa in 6.3.2).

### *Grades and Scholarships*

Being on the margins of working life the qualities of the educable subject of the LLL narrative, i.e. autonomous and self-directed learning rather than studying in order to achieve qualifications, is constructed as possible for both Hanna and Sara (6.3.2). Moreover, they both express how little emotion they felt when finally graduating from GUSSA. Hanna told me that she was not at all nervous about the matriculation examination. She evaluates this as having been on account of her age: *“If I had taken the exam when I was young I would have thought more about how I would manage and like the results too, so that I should have gotten some particular results”*. This is similar to Sara, who describes studying at GUSSA as a hobby and evaluates that *“grades were not so important any more”*. Hanna said that in the midst of taking care of her family: *“I just thought that I do the job as best I can”*. She evaluates that in her former vocational studies grades were more important to her as she was thinking of applying for jobs and further studies. Nevertheless, scholarships as a formal proof of one’s ability and as a sign of the seriousness of the GUSSA study is well-appreciated by Hanna (see also 5.4 for Hanna’s explanations about her matriculation exam results). She recounts:

#### **“You have been good at this”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                           |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| [P: (...) <i>What would you say, mm like what have been like mm the kind of highlights in upper secondary for adults?</i> ]<br><i>I think I wrote there that scholarships were (...) highlights (...)</i> | Abstract |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <p><i>as I didn't think that they'd be given out (...) at all in upper secondary for adults (...)</i><br/> <i>I thought that upper secondary for adults is adult education and [P: And then you didn't think that scholarships or such like are part of it]</i><br/> <i>Yes, I didn't think that this is in that way so school-like (...)</i><br/> <i>and then in x [the former GUSSA]</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Orientation         |
| <p><i>I got that first scholarship in Swedish</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Complicating action |
| <p><i>so then I had like my mouth wide open and was taken by surprise that these things are given out and</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Evaluation          |
| <p><i>Then that Swedish dictionary was like actually handed to me and (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Complicating action |
| <p><i>that you've been, you've been good at this and (...) so (...) and it felt good (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Evaluation          |
| <p><i>And now after I graduated I was given two scholarships (...)</i><br/> <i>one I got once again in Swedish</i><br/> <i>and the other one was like from the studies in general (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Complicated action  |
| <p><i>But I didn't think about it either that this is so official that now you graduate and get scholarships.</i><br/> <i>I think it was also so funny that the one that was for the studies in general was like for continuing the studies (...)</i><br/> <i>but then on the other hand it opened my eyes in that I think it's nice that it encourages adults too (...)</i><br/> <i>that some foundation like that thinks about it</i><br/> <i>[P: Like you interestingly said there that you didn't think that it's so official] Yeah [P: As you're adults] Yes</i><br/> <i>[P: What did you think about this then?]</i><br/> <i>Well I probably thought that it's more like a hobby and it's like that, you just go through it and that's all there is to it.</i></p> | Evaluation          |
| <p><i>For example about that white cap first I wasn't even going to buy one for myself (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Complicating action |
| <p><i>I didn't think that when I graduate I'd need the cap for anything (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Evaluation          |
| <p><i>And then my husband said that of course you'll buy it and and then I said that why is it of course.</i><br/> <i>Why would I buy it?</i><br/> <i>Why would I buy it to stay in the closet and so on, but then he said that he himself felt that,</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Complicating action |
| <p><i>well of course he went to upper secondary at the time (...)</i><br/> <i>with his own age group.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Orientation         |
| <p><i>But he said that he wasn't able to value it at the time, that he values my cap much more than he does his own (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Evaluation          |
| <p><i>[P: Yes you mentioned there that it somehow feels surprisingly little (...)]</i><br/> <i>Yes, yes, so that I didn't think it was perhaps so [important], that in the end it was my husband who must have thought it was more, a greater thing then (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Coda                |

In the narrative above getting scholarships is constructed as a symbol for serious and formal “*school-like*” and “*official*” education as opposed to studying and learning as a hobby. Simultaneously, “normal” general upper secondary school becomes contrasted with less official and less appreciated general upper secondary school for adults (see the discussion in 2.1), and studying in adulthood as less “normal” than in youth. This is repeatedly found elsewhere in the data of this study, one exception being Henri (see 6.3.1), who describes morally mature adulthood (see Koski & Moore, 2001, pp. 9–10) as the best age for getting formal education. In the narrative above, on the other hand, Hanna expresses feelings of surprise about achieving a scholarship and encouragement to continue her study as an adult. However, she also expresses positive feelings in getting such formal proof and recognition for her achievement: “*that you’ve been, you’ve been good at this and (...) so (...) and it felt good*”.

In Hanna’s narration there are several dialogues in which the narrator constructs interpretations through repeating conversations she has had with important people, for example with her husband, a friend, and other women who are studying (see below). Contrary to the “inner” dialogue the “outside” dialogue (see Komulainen, 1998, p. 126) can be interpreted as a way to evaluate the present self and its choices without directly talking about the self, i.e. showing rather than telling. Drawing on Labov (1972), Miettinen (2006, p. 43) discusses three types of dialogue available for the narrator to express evaluation. First, the narrator may present her/himself talking to her/himself, second the narrator may be presented as talking to another character, and third the narrator may express the evaluation through the mouth of another character. Through the dialogue with her husband, in the narrative above, Hanna expresses the newly-established value for formal general education in adulthood: “*But he said that he wasn’t able to value it at the time, that he values my cap much more than he does his own*”. Making reference to her husband she evaluates: “*He even once said how it was easier for him as he lived at home (...) than as an adult to do it when you have a family*”. After his encouragement she decides to buy the cap, the symbol of matricula-

tion, “*the honour hat*” as she told me her daughter called it. For her as a transfer woman with a family it is actually more demanding and challenging, not just a mere hobby, to complete the general upper secondary school study than for a young person still living at home with her/his parents. Besides the scholarship the white cap can be seen as another symbol for the appreciation of formal “*official*” education in adulthood.

### *Women Studying and Working*

By repeating conversations she has had with other women studying in GUSSA Hanna expresses how demanding it can be for women to combine studying with working and taking care of the home and children and how important it is to get help and encouragement from one’s spouse. I interpret Hanna’s narrative below to mean that it is more demanding for women than it is for men to study in adulthood as many women still live with the imperative of double work: a career outside and inside the home. This is how she describes women studying:

#### **“It’s so demanding”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>It’s so demanding</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Abstract            |
| <i>I remember from one brush-up course before the matriculation exam, there was a woman who already had slightly older children then</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Orientation         |
| <i>But then she told us that that oh no that she had had a long work day and she was too tired to come here and she had called her husband that she’s coming home and her husband had said try to make it now, come on just go there and he would wash the socks today (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Complicating action |
| <i>That was the way he had encouraged his wife there then (...)<br/>when his wife would have liked to go home<br/>I guess she too was coming like from a bit further away then (...)<br/>she wouldn’t have been able to make it to this course but (...)<br/>her husband had then done the washing up<br/>so that the wife was able to study and (...)<br/>But then I know cases where the husband has just sat in a bar and the wife has had to leave school in the middle then (...)<br/>you can’t leave children alone (...)</i> | Evaluation          |
| <i>Encouragement has been of that sort then</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Resolution          |

Hanna also refers to the issue of women’s double career at home and at work towards the end of the interview as she takes up questions of equality. She criticizes the Finnish conception of equality which according to her means that “*you should just go ahead and participate in working life*” “*work in the day time and then in the evening do housework at home*”. She questions: “*Does equality mean (...) going to work or does equality mean that you’re able to choose what you do?*” Hanna’s questioning relates to Komulainen’s (1998, p. 92) discussion of the societal turn of the 1960s when women’s work outside the home was defined in positive terms. Komulainen continues that the conception of an equal human being thus defined through education, a paid occupation, and trade was middle-class. Working-class women’s obligation to participate in hard labour outside the home was not an important issue. The gender-neutral ideology of equality denied class-related hierarchies and differences between women. (Ibid.) Even if Hanna criticizes the self-evident demand there is for Finnish women to participate in working life, she also expresses the importance of having “*an occupational identity*” that she says she is currently lacking. I interpret that education and having “*an occupational identity*” are important personal matters for Hanna, “her own things”, that are a necessity in today’s Finnish society in order to have full citizenship as an autonomous and independent human being.

### *My Own Thing*

In her evaluation about the meaning of GUSSA study in her life the narrator compares studying with moving abroad. This is described as necessitating a bigger event than just her personal effort for it to succeed. Hanna evaluates moving abroad “*as a big thing in my life (...) and I would say in my husband’s life too*”. However, the number of references she makes to studying as her own personal thing indicate that completing the general upper secondary school study is even more meaningful for her (see Table 4 below). Studying in adulthood and not normatively



in youth makes it her own choice. However, the narrator’s phrasing “*I finished something that once I didn’t start*” also implies the contradictory nature of the choice and regret at not going to general upper secondary school in her youth. Choosing one’s own route and “*a different kind of way to live*” comes at a price.

**Table 4.** “My own personal thing”.

| Studying                                             | Moving abroad                                |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <i>my personal thing</i>                             | <i>some bigger thing was needed for that</i> |
| <i>I’ve achieved it through my own work</i>          |                                              |
| <i>It’s mine this trade or adult education</i>       |                                              |
| <i>it’s kind of personal</i>                         |                                              |
| <i>something like my own thing</i>                   |                                              |
| <i>something I’ve got</i>                            |                                              |
| <i>I wasn’t able to do it then</i>                   |                                              |
| <i>I finished something that once I didn’t start</i> |                                              |
| <i>I did it out of my own free will</i>              |                                              |
| <i>I didn’t do it because parents told me to</i>     |                                              |
| <i>I did it myself</i>                               |                                              |
| <i>I was able to finish it</i>                       |                                              |

At the time of the interview Hanna is living in Finland and plans to continue studying: “*now that I dare to plan something for myself too*”. But as a transfer woman with children she does not think she is able to commit herself to any long-term studying, at least not just yet. She evaluates that she has done many things in life and has had “*a very colourful life*” but still “*you have to do something else in life too*”. She evaluates the age of forty as a kind of turning point in life: “*It’s that you’re already so grown-up that you either dare to make some radical decisions in your life either in a positive direction or then you stick to the same old thing and live the rest of your life in that same old thing (...). So it’s like the final chance to do something (...) bigger in life (...) it’s also one thing, one fact, that when a woman’s age starts with a four, then unfortunately, in Finland you are no longer the top candidate for a job*”.

She emphasizes that studying is possible at any age, but getting back

to working life as a woman is not. The age of forty is her last chance to rid herself of the position of a transfer woman and accept the imperative of a paid occupation. Mature adulthood also makes it possible to radically redirect the course of one’s life in a “*positive direction*”. As in the LLL narrative, change is constructed as positive movement towards something better in the future as opposed to negative stagnation “*and living the rest of one’s life the same old way*”. Education is constructed as a means for achieving “*the radical change*” in one’s position in working life (cf. Komulainen, 1998, p. 111). Even if Hanna has enjoyed her freedom and colourful life as a transfer woman abroad, in Finland it is not an appropriate position for a woman with older children: “*As long as I was on maternity leave I was left in peace but when the maternity leave ended (...), all you need to do is walk out of the door and somebody is there asking you ‘Oh you’re at home. How long have you planned to stay at home?’*”

Hanna told me a narrative about a woman who at the age of 50 starts a new life through studying an exotic foreign language and culture first in Finland and later on abroad. Hanna expresses admiration about her developing herself at that point in life. In the narrative below Hanna can be seen to talk about her own dream of realizing herself through the experiences of the other woman. She recounts:

## New life at the age of 50

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <p><i>Then there I met,<br/>was it the second year in x [a country where they were both living],<br/>this woman who was a student and<br/>who at the age of 50 had got interested in studying.<br/>She had also had this kind of childhood [meaning life]<br/>that she had brought up two children (...) and<br/>then she went in for x [name of a sport] and<br/>had really got into it and<br/>had been doing it for many years.<br/>She was a children's nanny (...) and alongside that work<br/>until she had got so keen on it that</i></p> | <p>Orientation</p>             |
| <p><i>she started studying here (...) [the language of the country where the<br/>sports came from] wherever she could,<br/>I guess in the school of economics there are those courses that<br/>you can take and<br/>and then she wasn't able to study there enough so<br/>she had got a scholarship and came there to study</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>Complicating<br/>action</p> |
| <p><i>She was, she was around 50 (...) and she was</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>Orientation</p>             |
| <p><i>[P: What do you think about it?]<br/>I think it was quite a wonderful thing that<br/>even if she had just got a divorce (...) that<br/>she had also gone through such negative things but<br/>it was her new life then (...) yes</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>Evaluation</p>              |
| <p><i>I think it's a fine thing that you go on developing yourself that (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p>Resolution</p>              |
| <p><i>[P: That's true and that's what you intend to do too?]<br/>Mm go crazy about something (laughter),<br/>Yes that's it.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>Coda</p>                    |

### Concluding Summary

Komulainen (1998, p. 111) writes that what is meaningful and worth achieving in life in our society is not understood as belonging to a certain social group, but depends on the individual herself, her motives and abilities. She continues that in this sense the inner world is understood as “capital” that agents use and work on to achieve their goals. In Western societies education and professional career are the frameworks through which an individual is understood to express and develop individual motives, abilities, and talents. Achievement in life is not only

attached to the quantitative categories of a standard of living, but first and foremost getting ahead in life implies the inner world, the self. Having a certain kind of education and a professional career correspond to the expectations of being: the career is an expression of the individual’s inner resources. Having a career manifests the activity of the agent – it is more a matter of personal achievement than status. (Ibid.) Drawing on Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (1994), Komulainen (1998, p. 115) posits that the concepts of independence and dependency have originally been used in connection with economic relations between individuals. In pre-industrialized societies independence was a privilege, meaning freedom from a paid occupation. Only in capitalist society the concepts of independence and dependency became redefined, as paid occupation became the norm and the most important criterion for full citizenship. Dependency became the opposite of independence, both political and economic. Housewives, together with slaves and the poor, formed one group that was different, dependent, not-yet-citizens. Thereafter, independence and dependency has also become a moral psychological dimension where social relations “become transformed” as individual characteristics. (Ibid.)

Komulainen’s argument is manifested in Hanna’s life history. As opposed to a demonstration of solidarity in a relationship and following her husband on an expatriate assignment as a transfer woman the personal importance of studying in GUSSA manifests the importance of education in expressing and developing individual motives and abilities. Moreover, I interpret the goal to achieve a position in working life in the future through “*a radical change*” as a search for the expression of the inner potential the narrator has so far not been able to demonstrate as she has been lacking “*things of her own*”, i.e. a professional career. For a Finnish woman to be in the position of a transfer woman and unable to pursue a career of her own pushes her into “a kind of backyard of womanhood”, as Oksanen (2006, p. 145) puts it.

Hanna’s position as a transfer woman makes it possible for her to have some “*things of her own*”, i.e. studying and learning, depending on the time and the place of the expatriate assignment the family is engaged

in. Learning according to one's needs and desires as expressed in the LLL narrative becomes interpreted in a new way: learning opportunities are seized at all times and in all places depending on the time and the place of the family's posting. As a result the qualities of the educable subject expressed in the LLL narrative are a necessity, i.e. flexibility and adaptability as well as being an active and independent learner. However, as I have argued, simultaneously the transfer woman's position pushes her into the margins of lifelong learning. Not being involved in working life leaves her in a position where studying and learning as a hobby, even if a tough one, is the only alternative. It is not constructed as a serious occupation leading to formal qualifications for further studies and more importantly for working life. Rather it is "*learning for oneself*". This result is repeated in the narration of those women in this study who one way or another are situated on the periphery of the LLL narrative due to their position in working life (see Aino in 6.1.2, Sara, Kaija, Pirkko, & Roosa in 6.3.2). They all talk about learning as a hobby, and describe themselves as curious and interested students learning in different learning contexts. Thereafter, on the basis of this study it seems that besides attending formal education a professional career is a necessity in order to be included in the LLL narrative as a full-blown member.

Hanna's narration about the life of a transfer woman is a story that can only be told by a woman. It is an independence story as opposed to Henri's heroic male story (see 6.3.1), which I have named a developmental story. Whereas Henri's story evolves around age and maturity, Hanna's story evolves around gender and her position as a transfer woman. With the family and children at home, the most important things in the narrator's life are contrasted with things which are external to home, i.e. education and working life that the narrator constructs as "*things of her own*", expressions of autonomy and independence in her life. However, the narrator expresses willingness to gain autonomy and independence on her family's conditions, taking their well-being into consideration. Contrary to the independence stories in Komulainen's study in which getting rid of social dependencies is constructed as

development (1998, p. 175), Hanna does not reject her positions as a mother and wife in order to gain autonomy and independence. On the contrary, the imperative of double work – a career outside and inside the home – even if criticized by the narrator, seems to be the only route to autonomous and independent womanhood for her in the Finnish context.

Consequently, the position of a transfer woman is not constructed as permanent. Hanna’s talk about the “*radical change*” is directed to the future (cf. Komulainen, 1998, p. 111) where her “*own thing*” is situated. Mature adulthood makes it possible for the narrator to radically redirect the course of her life and express the inner resources she has through further education and eventually a position in working life. Movement as opposed to stasis, change as opposed to stagnation is constructed as inner development (Komulainen, 1998, p. 115). Getting education and going back to working life are external signs of this inner development (cf. *ibid*, p. 111) that prevents the narrator from falling behind (see 3.4). As in the LLL narrative, change is constructed as a positive thing as opposed to negative stagnation. It is unquestionably a good thing.

## 6.3 Narratives on Educability and Age

### 6.3.1 What Will I Be When I Grow Up?

Henri, 34, told me he came from a big family where he was the eldest child. He told me he moved to the capital area from Middle-Finland when he was about 15, after comprehensive school. He did not talk much about his family background, but at least with respect to education, which was highly appreciated; his family shared middle-class values. Henri was encouraged to learn and to do his best at school from very early on: “*At home it was always seen that I do my homework and study for tests and reports and notes from school were looked over and so, in other words, I knew that it has to be taken care of as well and decently as I*

*possibly could*". He, thus, learned the value of being a "good student" as part of the "universal values and categories in which the child becomes a lifelong learner and a problem solver in order to cope with a changing world" (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2003, p. 11; cf. Janne in 6.2.1). Also, when I asked Henri to tell me about himself and his life, he gave me a very positive evaluation of it: "*I have never had any great, never (...) had any catastrophes, no (...) setbacks worth mentioning. I've led as good a life as you possibly can (...), perhaps things in life have not always gone as I have planned but (...) you can't call them setbacks and catastrophes (...) and my life has been (...) really enjoyable and so, I've never lacked anything (...), I've practically got everything I've wished for from life*".

### *The Curious Child*

Henri describes learning the alphabet and learning to read as one of the most important learning experiences from his childhood (cf. Sara in 6.3.2). He describes himself as a curious and independent child ready to utilize his newly discovered ability to get information on his own. Learning to read is a culturally shared story on early learning experiences, and the curious child who is willing to learn is a shared cultural myth. Henri evaluates his experience of learning to read thus:

### Learning to read

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>But then at that point when it fell into place and eh I learned to handle words and I'm able to read newspapers, comics, road signs and totally independently It was somehow kind of exciting, for a small child it brought with it something that like I'm able to handle the world around me independently and I'm able to get information on my own so that I don't always need to ask things from older people I've always been free to do that (...) I've always had older people around me whom I've always been able to approach and still can whenever I want but there just is some independence in that that I'm able to get information on my own It was a positive realization (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

When I asked Henri about his early school memories he first told me he was “*terribly excited*” about going to school and that “*it was right away a positive thing*” as he “*got new friends and new experiences*”. Then he started telling me about the negative side of school:

### All people are not good

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p><i>And then of course at some point also, so of course because that world circle started to extend like outside my own family, relatives and the near neighbourhood so that I guess there I started to notice (...) in my own school community that not all people are necessarily good that</i></p> | <p>Orientation</p>         |
| <p><i>At some point there were also experiences that you noticed that someone's being bullied and so and</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>Like you notice that the world is not so rosy that (...) there may also be nasty people in the world but then there were also so many good people that it also extended in that [positive] direction and actually mostly did (...)</i></p>                                                        | <p>Evaluation</p>          |

He describes his childhood as safe and protected; having lived among his family, relatives, and neighbours. But starting school meant realizing that “*not all people are necessarily good*” – Henri had to give up his idea of a childhood “rosy world”. Henri introduces bullying into his narration in the third person “*someone's being bullied*” and evaluates that he



realized that the world was “*not so rosy*” after all, thus contrasting his good and safe childhood world with the outside world, where bad things also existed. He constructs a mythical happy childhood and also expresses his realization that he had to be ready to face the bad outside world when he started school. This narrative can also be seen as an important episode in Henri’s “developmental story”; he describes things he has had to learn in order to have the present understanding as an adult person.

I asked Henri whether he had experienced bullying himself. He admits to having experienced some, but hastens to add that “*hardly anyone, I think, can avoid it. I think that everyone has these that at some school stage there was something like that too*”. He also evaluates that “*I think that someone else must have been bullied more*”, “*I don’t think that I’ve experienced it any more than anyone else*”, describing his own experiences of bullying as no different from anyone else’s. Henri can be here seen as constructing a culturally shared story on the experience of bullying in Finnish comprehensive school, constructing bullying as something everyone is likely to experience some time at school, something that is part of school life and you just have to learn to live with. However, this does not indicate that bullying is seen as morally acceptable in Henri’s narration; it is just the opposite. Stories about experiences of bullying are also repeated elsewhere in the data of this study; and in Tiina’s (30) and Jenni’s (23) life histories it forms the major part of the experience of going to comprehensive school.

According to Sverker Lindblad and Thomas S. Popkewitz (2003, p. 18), bullying is a social category of deviance “related to educational categories, such as pupils at risk, disaffection, education achievement, exclusion from secondary school, truancy”, and so forth. In Henri’s narration, however, the moral value of the “good student” overcomes such categorization as Henri does not evaluate bullying as very meaningful in the overall context of comprehensive school and says that his school memories are mainly positive, constructing continuity in his curiosity and willingness to learn. The narrator here remains a “good student” despite the circumstances (cf. Kaarina in 6.1.1). When I ask him how

bullying affected his willingness to go to school he evaluates:

**Experiences of bullying**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>Well, of course, naturally if it felt like (...) in the morning that it's not nice to go to school<br/>it could lower the enthusiasm a bit and so but<br/>it never affected my favourite subjects or (...)<br/>often there were friends anyway close by and and but<br/>I don't believe that, I couldn't claim that it has had a positive effect<br/>if I know that (...) there's some bully waiting for me<br/>or a person with whom the chemistry doesn't work<br/>I can't say that it would have made it better but<br/>it didn't put me down either, overall it was positive that (...)<br/>Yes, but then its effect I,<br/>for how long it has affected my willingness to go to school that<br/>I really can't evaluate<br/>because basically my school memories are that I have pleasant teachers,<br/>school mates, my favourite subjects (...)<br/>basically I was interested in school and<br/>It was especially in the last two grades of the upper level of comprehensive<br/>school that I started having favourite subjects and<br/>I don't think that (...) thing (...) occasional bullying has affected me<br/>for very long anyway (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

*The Reluctant Teenager*

Henri told me a narrative about starting a summer job after comprehensive school that, he said, “*lasted for 16 years*”, i.e. it became a successful and safe career. The time period, the boom of the 1980s, also provides an explanation (external to him) in Henri’s narration for his success in his career; Henri evaluates his story as “*ordinary*”. At this point in his narration Henri also explicitly starts to provide an explanation for not starting general upper secondary school normatively in his youth right after comprehensive school but instead in adulthood.

### A summer job became a career

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p><i>I was just going to start a summer job and so I thought that well I'll have a few months off after comprehensive school and after that I'll go on with my studies and so upper secondary school was of course in my mind the whole time (...) Also my parents did some sensible reasoning like 'Yes, now, you start it Henri and so on'. I had the intention of working for a few months and then start upper secondary</i></p>                   | <p>Orientation</p>         |
| <p><i>Then all of a sudden I got the ball rolling and I noticed that all of a sudden I'd got a permanent position and that suddenly started my career and my salary went up</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>the end of the 80s</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>Orientation</p>         |
| <p><i>And then somehow it just didn't go that way and so I don't know (...) Then I just started living that minor official's life, a sort of calm lifestyle, following almost an exact timetable and (...) then (...) And I've completed the whole career circle from acting as a consultant for managers and employees to normal performance level and there too I've experienced different tasks so that I have quite a vast experience (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p>          |

Adolescence, contrasted with sensible and rational adulthood, represents a rupture in the narrator's moral story about his development into mature adulthood. Developmental age, then, provides Henri with a "natural" and, thus acceptable explanation for not choosing general upper secondary school normatively in youth and according to the middle-class academic values also represented by his parents. As he told me: "*I had this, well, adolescent approach on the threshold of adulthood, so that, I guess I had some kind of desire for independence and (...) I don't know but (...) perhaps it was that stage in one's life that adults' sensible reasoning was not listened to so exactly anymore*". He also told me that his parents always encouraged him to go to general upper secondary school right after comprehensive school: "*Yes of course they encouraged me all the time, yes, that a good vocational basis and that matters related to education have to be taken care of in a sensible way and (...) so on*". But "*it was that stage in one's life*" – "*preadulthood*" – that he did not want to listen to his parents, "*adults' sensible reasoning*", and instead wanted to act independently.

In his narration Henri can be seen as relying on developmental (Aapola, 2002) or psychological (Rantamaa, 2001) age, notions that are based on psychological theories on development where a certain chronological age is seen to correspond to a certain psychological phase of development. An adolescent matures to a higher developmental level and reaches mature adulthood, leaving behind the problematic phase of life, i.e., adolescence, that for the protagonist is marked, for example, by rebellion against “*adults’ sensible reasoning*” or wrong attitudes towards learning mathematics (see below). Similarly, in her study on female students training for social welfare work, Komulainen (1998, p. 192) has named maturation narratives such transformation narratives that describe the process of change as the protagonist’s upward trajectory of growth and ripening. In such narratives the past self is described as more elementary than the present self; “a drifting, irrational teenager in the throes of puberty” is contrasted with free, rational adults who are able to control their lives responsibly. (Ibid.)

### *Learning in Different Learning Contexts*

Developing oneself throughout life is constructed as important in Henri’s narration. He describes himself as ambitious and eager to learn, looking for new challenges (cf. Sara in 6.3.2): “*In principle I’m naturally a person who needs suitable (...) challenges things to aim at (...). I like that quite a lot*”. Non-formal courses at work were necessary and also made it possible for Henri to advance in his career: “*In that (...) organization at that time it was no use applying for permanent positions if you didn’t have certain diplomas, there was an internal education system that you had to go through if you wanted to advance in your career*”. He values his education at work highly: “*almost aca[demie] I don’t know how, well (...) in that field*”. So-called adult life, however, was a disappointment to him: “*everything doesn’t necessarily go as I have planned*”, giving as an example “*not getting some jobs I would have liked*”. Henri evaluates these types of experiences as “*normal adult life*”, including himself in the normalcy of

adulthood (cf. the experience of bullying; the rebellion against “*adults’ sensible reasoning*”). In order to get ahead in life non-formal and informal learning did not suffice anymore, and formal education was needed. He recounts:

**What will I be when I grow up?**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>It could have been that at that stage it started bit by bit, well the whole (...) time it has been there that change of career but it must have been around that time (...) before I was 30 and it must have been like (...) between 25 and 30 that</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Orientation         |
| <i>I started having the idea that<br/>I may not want to stay in this field for the rest of my life that<br/>I perhaps want something else out of life and<br/>I perhaps want to find new challenges from somewhere else that (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Complicating action |
| <i>Perhaps (...) that kind of grown up person’s way of thinking<br/>kind of dissatisfaction with your own work environment and (...) with your own work and (...) that minor official’s exact life may have tired me a bit somehow, not really tired but like<br/>perhaps I had this thought of doing something else<br/>perhaps from there I got the idea about finding new challenges and changing careers and these thoughts caught fire bit by bit and then (...)<br/>It was that secure, permanent job and (...) permanent income, it just went round and round week after week and month after month, year after year and (...)<br/>It had been at the back of my mind the whole time that<br/>I’ll get a real occupation,<br/>I would perhaps say it like this that I would get a real occupation and (...)<br/>I’m going to look for what I’ll be when I grow up, like it’s often said about those who are 30 or a bit over, that saying, what we’ll be when we grow up (...)</i> | Evaluation          |
| <i>And so at this point I started having this idea that<br/>I want to find something else.<br/>I don’t want to keep doing this the rest of my life, although okay, quite (...) a good job, quite a good organization and so on, nothing else but</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Resolution          |
| <i>I just wanted that and I still want to just do something else, I want to retire from some other job (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Coda                |

In the narrative above Henri talks about his job and work environment as unsatisfactory; describing his willingness to look for “*new challenges*” and “*to change jobs*”. He constructs difference between his current job and the “*real occupation*” he wants to get. Henri ends the narrative with

a coda making reference to the future and himself at the age of retirement: “*I want to retire from some other job*”. This is a culturally shared phrase that can here be seen as referring to “a good future with a job that gives you satisfaction” as opposed to the current dissatisfaction. Henri, however, does not talk about being obliged to study under the threat of losing his job. He describes his job as permanent and secure, constructing change and a new profession as more important than keeping his old occupation and job.

Henri describes these reflections as “*adult thinking*”, thus constructing age as an explanation for his thoughts. Similarly, Komulainen (1998, p. 175) posits that in what she calls maturation narratives the meanings related to age are under negotiation. In Henri’s narration “*I’m going to look for what I’ll be when I grow up*”; refers to an adult, a grown up person who around the age of 30 reflects upon what he will make of his life. Henri shares the culturally common way of talking and reconstructs a so-called prolonged youth (Nikander, 1999; Rantamaa, 2001) or ‘new adulthood’ (Koski & Moore, 2001) marked by incompleteness, imperfection, uncertainty, and new beginnings (Vilkko, 1997), where traditional age-related norms disappear and an individual is seen as in continuing need of development, studying and learning having become part of being an adult. Koski and Moore (2001) argue that lifelong learning has become an important and sometimes even the only way to full adulthood.

## Renaissance

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Certainly one of the best moves I've ever made in my life is that I started upper secondary school study and (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Abstract            |
| <i>It started when my family had been talking about it for a long time (...) like 'go and ask when they are taking new students over there in x [the name of GUSSA] upper secondary for adults'<br/>My own sister graduated from this same school and this was already a kind of familiar place for me and I had heard a lot of positive things about it and every once in a while my family told me that now they're taking new students there again and</i>                                                                                                  | Orientation         |
| <i>Then at one point the day came (...) at the end of August (...) and I came here (...)<br/>Yes and then I popped in the office and (...) that started it and I became part of this school and (laughter) and that was it really and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Complicating action |
| <i>I've written there after my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday the renaissance that perhaps it was like that (...) how would I say it? (...)<br/>It was such a very positive thing, such a new thing in my life and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Evaluation          |
| <i>then I noticed that I got (...) a lot of new kicks (...) that I started finding a lot of new abilities in myself,</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Complicating action |
| <i>things that I had never thought I would have been able to find in myself (...) new abilities and the ability to learn things that I had never thought I'd be able to handle (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Evaluation          |
| <i>And then quite soon at the very beginning I started having the idea what I might be when I grow up</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Complicating action |
| <i>It was perhaps because of this and it was one reason why I used that word renaissance because as I told you that I had grown quite tired of this, my previous job and I would say really tired and then (...) But it was just like never getting anywhere, that it was it could be described as quite grey that I didn't have a feel for it and I started growing tired of it really strongly and I would say that I couldn't get anything any more from there, and there are no new challenges and such things that would give me mental satisfaction.</i> | Evaluation          |
| <i>Basically I'm the kind of person who demands things. I need suitable, how would I say it, suitable challenges, things to aim at and I like that quite a lot.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Resolution          |
| <i>So because of that, this brought me a clear change, this renaissance, then new abilities, new discoveries about myself and then of course I got these new kicks and (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Coda                |

In Henri’s life history the narrative above which I have named “Renaissance” can be seen as representing an epiphany, i.e. a meaningful turning point (e.g. Keskitalo-Foley, 2004, p. 34) in Henri’s overall narration. He starts to describe the changes that starting general upper secondary school has brought for him. Starting GUSSA means he is like newly born (cf. Komulainen, 1998, p. 185) as it is “*one of the best moves I’ve ever made in my life*”; “*a renaissance*”, “*a clear change*” that was “*a very positive thing*”, “*a new thing in my life*”. He gets “*new kicks*” out of it. Henri told me he found “*new abilities*” in himself that he did not know he possessed. He repeats his dissatisfaction with his old job ever more strongly, thus emphasizing the difference between the old and the new life, and consequently the meaning that the change presents for him. Henri’s narration on his “renaissance” can be seen as analogous to a so-called conversion account (Hovi, 1997), which has traditionally been seen as a complete change that happens once in a life time. Making reference to Meredith McGuire (1981, p. 60), Tuija Hovi (1997, pp. 322–323) states that it is characteristic of change rhetoric in conversion accounts that the former life is seen as desperate and the present life after the conversion as happy. Important events preceding the conversion are brought up and constructed to form a coherent plot that accounts for the protagonist’s development towards the present understanding. (Ibid.) In the same vein Komulainen (1998, pp. 178–179) posits that in the maturation narratives in her study narrators create the present self through the past self, constructing the latter as the “Other”, a barbaric self that in the narration must be excluded from the inner world.



*The New Adult Learner*

**Discovering new abilities**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Then I noticed that the upper secondary school started rolling along nicely</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Abstract            |
| <i>Then I noticed that I made these new discoveries about myself<br/>I noticed that oh boy that I learn such things,<br/>I'm able to learn such things that I didn't believe I would learn as a child<br/>I started off (...) I got so many successes that</i>                                                                                                                | Complicating action |
| <i>It then gave me extra kicks that wait a minute,<br/>these dreams I have might actually come true that<br/>they are not out of the blue that these goals can be quite possible<br/>[P: That you can get self-confidence, somehow trust more and more your<br/>ability to learn, as you had these positive experiences then]<br/>Yes (...) exactly, and then</i>             | Evaluation          |
| <i>Then (...) I had the courage somehow to make plans and<br/>I had the courage to set goals for myself in getting good grades and<br/>just like that I had courage in that way</i>                                                                                                                                                                                           | Resolution          |
| <i>(...) I noticed that wait a minute this is going just fine and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Coda                |
| <i>(...) As a teenager not everyone necessarily likes mathematics and<br/>of course right away there was this pre-existing situation that<br/>no, I can't learn maths and<br/>I even believed that I'd fail my upper secondary study after the first period<br/>and precisely in that mathematics</i>                                                                         | Orientation         |
| <i>But as I got an excellent grade for that first course</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Complicating action |
| <i>then I thought that, well, it started off nicely</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Evaluation          |
| <i>And I also got excellent for the next course and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Complicating action |
| <i>Then at once I had this wait a minute<br/>if I've got excellent for the first two then<br/>(...) I'll try the same with the next one and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Evaluation          |
| <i>And then again I got excellent</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Complicating action |
| <i>Just the thing that you referred to there that<br/>I had the courage to set my goals at that certain level that<br/>I was not afraid of setting that goal because<br/>I knew that I have got a chance to reach that goal and<br/>the same also with other school subjects then that<br/>I had the courage to keep certain, of course, also a realistic goal then (...)</i> | Evaluation          |
| <i>Like I learned what I could aim at and also see that a bit and<br/>because of that also these future plans there then boosted my motivation</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Resolution          |

In the narrative above Henri constructs continuity in describing his present self as better and more competent than his past self (Linde, 1993, p. 24; see also Komulainen, 1998). The past self serves as a mirror in constructing the competent present self who succeeds well in his study in GUSSA. As Henri discusses making “*discoveries about myself*” in GUSSA he constructs difference between his ability to learn as a child/adolescent and now as an adult: “*I’m able to learn such things (...) that I didn’t believe I could learn as a child*”. As also elsewhere in this study (cf. e.g. Kaarina 6.1.1, Lisa 6.2.1, Roosa 6.3.2) educability, i.e. one’s competence and ability to learn is discussed by making reference to mathematics, the prominent prototype of intelligence that is especially attached to men (e.g. Rätty, 2001). As Henri’s narration indicates learning mathematics is not constructed a problem only for girls and women. For a man it is all the more important to prove his talent in mathematics. In his written narrative Henri evaluates mathematics and similar subjects as boring and difficult (see also the narrative below). Referring to general upper secondary school he told me: “*Right away there was this pre-existing situation that no, I can’t learn maths (...) and I even believe that I’ll fail my upper secondary study after the first period and precisely in that mathematics*”, “*but I got an excellent grade for that first course*”. In Henri’s developmental story the protagonist abandons his belief that he is “naturally” bad at mathematics and, instead, he constructs himself as succeeding very well in it. Henri describes the discovery of being able to learn mathematics (cf. Kaarina in 6.1.1) as a key incident in GUSSA; it encourages him also in relation to other subjects and his future plans, i.e., the possibility of further studies and a new profession. As for Lisa (see 6.2.1), however, the official approval through the grading system upheld by school that ranks the narrator in the “bright” category in mathematics (see e.g. Rätty & Snellman, 1998) is needed for the recognition of the narrator’s competence. This seems to involve a paradox: in order to become aware of one’s competence and abilities, i.e. one’s “worth” as a student and learner, one’s ability needs to be tested. Only then is it possible for an individual to become an educable subject of the LLL narrative (see Koski, 2004), unless one is

“naturally” a lifelong learner like the narrator in Janne’s life history (see 6.2.1).

**The adolescents’ wrong attitude to mathematics**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p>[P: <i>So you believe that it was precisely especially in this mathematics that you thought that that it was difficult and that’ll be it</i>]<br/>                 (laughter) <i>It was like that, it’s based on those comprehensive school experiences that there I guess that all teenagers think that hey mathematics and other related subjects are boring</i></p> | <p>Orientation</p>         |
| <p><i>It started off there then</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>Sixteen years ago I had got this presupposition now a grown up person looks at this matter perhaps in a different way, in a lot more mature way and combined with the fantastic teachers (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                              | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>So there upper secondary school started rolling along really nicely and these future [plans] started to become stronger (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>Resolution</p>          |

Henri constructs difference between adolescents and adults in their attitude to mathematics. In comprehensive school “*all teenagers think that hey mathematics and other related subjects are boring*”. The protagonist in Henri’s developmental story develops from an immature adolescent who has a “*wrong attitude*” into “*a grown up person looks at this matter perhaps in a different way, in a lot more mature way*”. With age the protagonist develops into a morally mature learner who has the right attitude to learning mathematics. The moral of the story is that learning depends on your own attitude, if things do not go as expected it is YOU who is to be blamed in the end. The educable subject of the LLL narrative takes personal responsibility for his or her own learning.

## Comprehensive school vs. general upper secondary school for adults

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <p>[P: So that in comprehensive school you like had this feeling that you're not such a good student or something]</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Abstract               |
| <p>Well, yes, perhaps I got it from there (...)<br/> a small bias at least against some school subjects so that (...)<br/> in comprehensive school it was like grinding away<br/> the same thing over and over again and no calculators,<br/> no mathematical table books, you learn everything by heart and<br/> pupils [are asked to go] straight ahead to the blackboard,<br/> one after the other, whether you understood the thing or not.<br/> It had such an unpleasant effect there in comprehensive school that<br/> it was such “pakkopullaa” [i.e. the compulsory nature of studying something<br/> unpleasant; see footnote 31]</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Evaluation             |
| <p>And then I came to upper secondary for adults</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Complicating<br>action |
| <p>where the methods were creative (...)<br/> Learning became interesting,<br/> it wasn't like being forced to rote-learn something<br/> because there are mathematical table books<br/> where you can look up the formulas,<br/> you can use the calculator so that you don't like waste your time<br/> in that grinding away for nothing and rote-learning<br/> [P: So that has perhaps also had an effect on the atmosphere,<br/> the atmosphere is kind of more relaxed then]<br/> Mm [P: in upper secondary for adults]<br/> Precisely that, and then I also noticed that<br/> now I don't need to rote-learn something totally useless (...)<br/> Here if you don't understand something right away<br/> you don't have to go to the blackboard and show it.<br/> In upper secondary for adults<br/> I at once had this, like you said, this relaxed feeling that<br/> studying mathematics and other such subjects,<br/> it also applies to other subjects,<br/> was made fun and pleasant and interesting so that (...)<br/> if you didn't understand something the first time,<br/> you didn't have to understand it (with emphasis)<br/> because it was returned to later and there were remedial lessons,<br/> that was one type of medicine.<br/> You could go and talk to the teacher and<br/> see to it together until you'd understand it<br/> (...) but there was none of that “pakkopulla” [compulsory studying] (...)<br/> like you had in comprehensive school that<br/> from the window row exercise number one two three<br/> whether you had understood it or not (...)<br/> well, this was perhaps one example (...)<br/> And it hasn't come up yet in this conversation that<br/> individual personality is respected here [in GUSSA]<br/> we don't all learn at the same pace (...)<br/> everyone has better and poorer subjects (...)<br/> and the ability to learn is different for different people and<br/> this has been respected here the whole time and then<br/> as the slower ones, too, have got along then there it has always (...)<br/> the result has been positive, however, that<br/> there has always been progress.<br/> That's something that I have noticed as one of the numerous good things (...)</p> | Evaluation             |
| <p>Now if I went on with that list it would be really long, that<br/> like I said I don't have a single negative memory from here</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Resolution             |

Henri constructs a sharp contrast between comprehensive school and general upper secondary school for adults in relation to teaching methods used as well as the overall atmosphere. He describes GUSSA as pleasant and encouraging, a place where the protagonist is able to develop and flourish. The difference constructed between comprehensive school and GUSSA also reflects the difference between the past and the present self in Henri's narration and his competence as a student and learner (see also above). In the narrative above he describes comprehensive school study as "*grinding away the same thing over and over again*" and "*pakkopulla*"<sup>31</sup> and gives a mathematics lesson as an unpleasant example. The teaching methods in GUSSA, on the other hand, are described as "*creative*" and learning, even mathematics, as "*fun and pleasant and interesting*", resulting in the narrator's "*thirst for knowledge*". General upper secondary school for adults is also described as giving space for "*not understanding right away*" (...) "*if you don't understand something right away you don't have to go to the blackboard and show it*". According to Henri, "*you don't need to rote-learn something totally useless*" as in comprehensive school. He also said that "*individual personality has been respected here [in GUSSA] we don't all learn at the same pace everyone has better and poorer subjects*" (...) "*the result has been positive however*". Rote-learning in comprehensive school gives way to real learning in GUSSA (cf. Walkerdine, 1998; see the discussion in 4.2).

Henri's narration in relation to comprehensive school and GUSSA can be seen to reflect those related to the traditional constructions of educability and the LLL narrative respectively (cf. Kaarina in 6.1.1). In comprehensive school the "bright", "mediocre", and "poor" categories of students (e.g. Rätty & Snellman, 1998; see the discussion in 4.2) are displayed overtly during the lessons, especially in mathematics as students are made to show their competence on the blackboard. In GUSSA, on the other hand, everyone is given time and support for learning resulting in a positive outcome. Everyone has the ability to

---

<sup>31</sup> By "*pakkopullaa*" (literally translated "compulsory bun") Henri might also be referring to everyone's obligation to study in youth, in contrast to the voluntary nature of general upper secondary school for adults.

learn when the method and the learning environment are favourable. The “speed of perception” (see Rätty, 1993) is no longer constructed as playing a major role in GUSSA. The compulsory nature of strenuous study in comprehensive school is contrasted with that of creative and pleasant study, based on everyone’s desire to learn in GUSSA, where each student is respected as an individual adult learner, i.e. the educable subject of the LLL narrative (cf. Kaarina in 6.1.1).

The traditional teacher-student hierarchy is also broken in Henri’s narration (cf. Lisa in 6.2.1 and Hanna in 6.2.2), as he evaluates the teacher not as authoritarian but, in line with the LLL narrative, as a facilitator, advisor, and mentor, showing respect for students. The teacher can always be asked for help and is there to help students; “*teachers have been somehow part of the same team*”. He constructs difference between teaching adults and younger people and describes the teachers in GUSSA as “*really professional*” and “*encouraging*”, saying that “*the teacher has been a really important counsellor, adviser, mentor whom you’ve always been able to ask for advice so that (...) there’ve been no dumb questions at all so that if I’ve not understood that thing, I’ve been encouraged to ask as many times as I want to understand it and (...) as a professional the teacher has found a way to help me to understand some (...) thing; the teachers’ attitude [has been] really magnificent*”.

## Learning to learn

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p>[P: OK, a bit more about this studying and learning, so how would you describe your development as a student here in this upper secondary for adults like if you think about the beginning of upper secondary for adults and then your development as a student and then what kind of a student you were towards the end?]</p> <p><i>I think that related to scheduling as well as learning methods there started to be these changes<br/>So that I was able to schedule (...) better and then<br/>I was able to use [my time] better for the studies, the time that I had</i></p>                                                                                                                | <p>Abstract</p>            |
| <p><i>So that if I noticed that like<br/>I didn't have time to do all the homework because of a lack of time (...)<br/>I did the most important then and<br/>I preferred doing that better then</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>As then at the beginning it may have been that<br/>I just tried to do everything, the whole litany of things and then<br/>oh sentences to translate, I wasn't able to do them, okay let's leave them<br/>or at least let's translate them into Finnish or translate it in the middle,<br/>So that I was able to use the time more efficiently<br/>I'd rather do one or two exercises well and so and</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>Then there were all these things<br/>In sciences I learned to look up the most important things<br/>from the whole so that I learned to go through the whole material and<br/>then go through the less important things and then<br/>pick up the important things from there, the ones that were relevant (...)<br/>And then perhaps I learned to make use of new studying techniques<br/>quite quickly then</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>(...) I still belonged to this comprehensive school generation<br/>who kept grinding away things like<br/>grinding away everything, the long litany of things (...)<br/>So that I believed that now<br/>we're going to grind away at the terrible litany with no results</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>As very quickly, knowing you, as the result of your courses<br/>I learned these more advanced techniques (...)<br/>And then as I developed as a student<br/>I learned to use them or without the teacher always having to remind me<br/>because I was able to make use of them automatically<br/>[P: So you think that you were much more efficient as a student already<br/>towards like the end of the upper secondary for adults, already before the<br/>exams then]<br/>Yes, yes I'm sure I was, at least I felt that I had developed enormously<br/>during that upper secondary school time as a student,<br/>so that I was able to get ready for the exams with enough and (...)</i></p> | <p>Resolution</p>          |

When I asked Henri about his development as a learner in GUSSA, he answered, as I had expected him to, that there was a change in the way he organized his studying timewise and in his use of studying techniques. My question, thus, contributed to an answer about the protagonist’s self-development and self-management as a lifelong learning educable subject. Henri constructs difference between “*grinding away the long litany of things with no results*” in comprehensive school and learning the most important things properly in GUSSA. The protagonist is constructed as “learning to learn” in GUSSA, i.e. developing into a self-directed learner who is able to take advantage of efficient studying techniques independently without “*the teacher always having to remind me*”. Concentration and responsibility are constructed as adult features in studying, and failure attributed to unsuccessful studying techniques and not the ability to learn. This involves self-monitoring and self-reflection about one’s learning where the aim is to become aware of one’s abilities and characteristics (Koski, 2004). Henri told me he analysed his studying techniques when he did not reach his target; aiming at finding out what went wrong and improving his studying in order to reach the target. He attributes failure to the working methods rather than personal traits: “*If you fail it doesn’t mean you are bad at it*”. Henri explains this kind of analytical attitude towards failure as due to a grown up way of seeing things “*as a whole*”, realizing that things may not go as expected the first time, but it is worth trying again. The narrator, thus, constructs continuity in making a difference between comprehensive school and GUSSA. He constructs the former in terms of externally oriented teacher-directed methods and the latter in terms of internally oriented self-directed learning. Internally oriented self-directed learning in GUSSA is described as far more efficient and motivating, making it possible for the protagonist to grow into an educable subject of the LLL narrative.

When the narrator describes the relations between students in GUSSA, the institutionalized ethos of educability can be seen to break down as the competition between students is constructed as non-existent: “*Among us there was never like any competition and there wasn’t*



*any kind of pecking order, or not a terrible desire to be the best*". The narrator describes himself and his fellow students as "half relatives" supporting each other in studying: "When we had these successes, it could [be] somebody else who had got the really excellent grade; so we were all able to be happy about it together and there was nothing like like again that one, no we were able to all enjoy it together that wow you succeeded, a really wonderful essay". This creates an atmosphere of solidarity; a grown up way of seeing things. Such solidarity between students in GUSSA is also constructed elsewhere in the data of this study, for example, Hanna (see 6.2.2) talks about "we-spirit", i.e. togetherness among students who hardly know each other.

Instead of competition and comparing himself with others (which is in line with Kaarina's life history in 6.1.1 and opposed to Lisa's life history in 6.2.1), the narrator assesses his grades in relation to his personal targets, comparing himself with himself. For example, in talking about the English test in the matriculation examination he evaluates the grade he got as reflecting his level of learning, with which he was satisfied: "It wasn't a top grade but it was my grade".

Henri also describes the students of different ages as belonging to the same team: "In that circle of friends there were in fact people of different ages so that there are like those who are under 20 and those who are under 70 and we have all somehow been like on the same wavelength so that if we had put some ideas on paper and had not seen the person, I couldn't have necessarily been able to say how old that person is. So that it was like everybody belonged to the same team, the same group there the whole time, so that age was no issue there". Henri can be seen as constructing students of all ages as equal in relation to learning. This can be seen to challenge the age-related norms on education that would indicate that youth is the best age for getting formal general education and, instead, the GUSSA students are constructed as educable subjects of the LLL narrative, able to learn at all ages. He evaluates age by saying: "It wasn't a sort of relevant matter". Does Henri here construct discontinuity in relation to the relevance of age for studying and learning? Elsewhere he evaluates age and maturity as important in order to have the right atti-

tude to learning. Or should this be read that as long as you are an adult it no longer matters how old you are; the difference being between children/adolescents and adults?

### *The White Cap with a Golden Rim*

The narrator constructs continuity between the past and the present in his life history, accounting for the “gap” of a 16-year-long career between comprehensive school and general upper secondary school. He evaluates going to general upper secondary school and passing the matriculation examination as having always been the first choice for him, the first steps on the way to middle-class academic education. As Henri wrote in the written narrative, “*I knew that even after 150 years the matriculation examination had a golden rim and an academic diploma was a possible consequence of it*” (cf. Vuorio-Lehti, 2006). Following the institutionalized ethos of educability the narrator constructs difference between theoretical and practical abilities (e.g. Rätty, 2001; see the discussion in 4.2) stating that he is not a practical person and would not have made a good carpenter or a craftsman. He evaluates:

#### **“I’m not a practical person”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <p>[P: (...) you wrote there that you had always planned starting the upper secondary school study or passing the matriculation exam, so I would like to ask you why was that upper secondary school and passing the matriculation exam so important for you?]</p> <p><i>Perhaps, perhaps partly because I’m not a practical person and I would have hardly become (...) anything like (...) a good carpenter (...) or very good (...) craftsman, so that [graduation from upper secondary school] has always been number one</i></p> <p>[P: So that you’ve thought that it’s good to build on that?]</p> <p>Yes, yes.</p> | Evaluation |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

Henri evaluates getting the “*white cap*”, which he describes as a “*crown*” as one of the highlights in his life; something that he had been dreaming of for a long time. Getting the white cap is not based on natural talent,

but demands hard work and is so valuable because of that. At the time of the interview Henri told me that he had been accepted at a polytechnic; he was also studying for a university entrance examination and planning to go to university – i.e. the highest academic institution (cf. Lisa in 6.2.1) – “[it] *would be a dream come true*”. Formal education and the qualifications it provides has a special meaning in comparison with informal and non-formal learning achieved in working life: it is a prerequisite for a new career.

When I asked Henri about the meaning of going through general upper secondary school for adults and passing the matriculation examination and how these experiences have perhaps changed him as a person, he evaluates himself as more confident, stronger, better at problem-solving skills, more courageous, better as a person, i.e. qualities of the desired educable subject in the LLL narrative. Henri evaluates:

**“I’ve become stronger as a person”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>(...) at least I’ve become stronger as a person nowadays (...)</i><br/> <i>When I found those new dimensions, new strengths in myself, so of course it’s reflected in everyday life and working life and so (...)</i><br/> <i>You have new strengths so that it feels like you have more options, you feel that it’s possible that</i><br/> <i>you are able to stretch out more if needed and</i><br/> <i>of course after the upper secondary school study</i><br/> <i>the problem-solving skills have got better and</i><br/> <i>if I’m faced with some new problem in working life,</i><br/> <i>I don’t have like hands in the air right away, like what is this, but now automatically, after all the successes,</i><br/> <i>I’m starting to look for a solution to it and</i><br/> <i>there’s there’s more courage in random situations.</i><br/> <i>[P: There’s more self-confidence]</i><br/> <i>Yes, yes I could say that too that</i><br/> <i>I’ve learned to know my[self], my limits much better so that you can handle your own weaknesses too in a much more rational way and find strength more efficiently as I’ve just learned through different school subjects and through the studying techniques and through the better problem-solving skills to find answers, appreciate strengths, improve weaknesses; you have like more weapons to overcome the weaknesses (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

### *Concluding Summary*

The learning society ideal attaches such qualities as responsibility, mature choices, and personal development as well as a positive attitude towards intellectual, aesthetic, moral and social growth as part of being an adult (in Koski & Moore, 2001 making reference to Ministry of Education, 1997). In Henri’s narration age and maturity coincide as the protagonist develops into morally mature adulthood (see Koski & Moore, 2001; Tight 2002, pp. 14–15). The “right” and “wrong” kind of educable subject are constructed in juxtaposition with each other as the immature child/adolescent in comprehensive school develops into the mature adult in general upper secondary school for adults. In Henri’s narration the new adult learner, i.e. the educable subject in GUSSA, has individual ethical and moral qualities that according to Leena Koski (2004, p.89) are not particular but common to all individuals as they are obliged to become alike, malleable, and transparent in the course of educational policy making. Based on Foucault’s thoughts, Koski (Vähämäki 1998, p. 145 in Koski, 2004, p. 85) posits that the individual objectifies her/himself (finds the “other” in her/himself), forms a kind of a communicative relationship with her/himself (...) and makes her/himself the arena for the application of the (communicative) norm. However, in discussing with her/himself s/he rids her/himself of the features that prevent the implication of the functional communicative norm. In relation to Henri’s narration this could mean, then, that the protagonist rids himself of the childlike qualities, like for example an immature attitude towards studying, and adopts such adult-like features as self-directedness, concentration, and responsibility for one’s action. This involves the recognition and acceptance of one’s abilities, which in turn involves honest self-monitoring and self-reflection of one’s learning, knowledge acquisition and behaviour, where the aim is to become aware of one’s abilities and characteristics (Koski, 2004) as well as individual moral qualities (cf. Koski & Moore, 2001).

I have read Henri’s life history as a kind of conversion account

(Hovi, 1997), where the protagonist faces “renaissance” and is “newly born”, discovering and recognizing the inner potential he did not believe he had. Similarly, in Komulainen’s study (1998, p. 185) the metaphor of giving birth has been used to refer to “the self” one has always had but lost, and discovers through education. I interpret Henri’s story as a heroic male account on a successful career that the protagonist rejects of his own free will in order to develop his inner potential as an educable subject. This is opposed to the less heroic female account that Roosa (see 6.3.2) constructs about her career that is cut short against her own will and after which it becomes necessary to prove one’s ability to be employed (cf. Brine, 2006) or Hanna’s (see 6.2.2) account where the female career is constructed as only secondary to the male career.

Developing one’s inner potential involves moral regulation that according to Koski (2004) is attached to the educational policy ideology in which it is the individual responsibility to be able to compete for a limited number of social positions in the futures of permanent unemployment and growing competition. It is the narrator’s moral duty to face the responsibility and become a lifelong learner. Accordingly, Lindblad and Popkewitz (2003, p. 19; see also Koski, 2004) posit that “The ‘good’ student across the countries is flexible, problem-solving, collaborative and perpetually involved in a self-monitoring and active ‘lifelong learning’”. These characteristics embody the prevailing entrepreneurial logic. (Ibid.) This also entails the idea that an individual is in a constant state of becoming, being never ready, but always imperfect and incomplete; uncertainty and new beginnings having become part of this so-called “new adulthood” (see Koski & Moore, 2001; Vilkkö, 1997). Accordingly, in Henri’s narration becoming a lifelong learner is constructed as an opportunity to have a long-term dream come true, to achieve “the white cap with a golden rim”, the first step towards the highly valued middle-class academic diploma. Adopting the “right” attitude towards studying and becoming a lifelong learner is constructed as extremely positive: “*I don’t have a single bad memory from here [in GUSSA]*”. In this sense education “emancipates” (cf. Alheit & Dausien, 2002b) the protagonist, who rejects the constraints of the institutional-

ized ethos of educability and develops into the “right” kind of educable subject of the LLL narrative. Against the traditional constructions of educability morally mature adulthood is constructed as the best age for getting formal education. This is contrary to what has been found in all but one other life history in this study, where regret for not completing general upper secondary education normatively in youth is established (cf. e.g. Kaarina in 6.1.1, Lisa and Janne in 6.2.1). Similar to Henri, Susanna aged 29, evaluates studying in adulthood as more rewarding than in youth because of her greater maturity. However, unlike Henri’s I have interpreted her life history not as a conversion account, but a self-developing project in which the self develops throughout life in different learning contexts, the formal context being, nevertheless, the most important one.

In Henri’s narration the traditional constructions of educability break down in relation to the narrator’s competence and age as well as the teacher-student relations, giving way to an LLL educable subject who is able to learn when the learning environment is pleasant and encouraging, as in the context of general upper secondary school for adults. Like elsewhere in this study, in the context of GUSSA it is possible for the morally mature adulthood to develop (see e.g. Kaarina in 6.1.1, Lisa in 6.2.1). However, against the principle of lifewide learning only the formal learning context is constructed as an alternative in getting ahead in life and finding a “*real occupation*”.

### 6.3.2 Learning on the Edge of Working Life

**Sara, Kaija, Roosa, and Pirkko** are the oldest participants in this study. I have chosen to represent my interpretations of their life histories together, not on account of their age, but because the meanings constructed on learning and studying intertwine and create interesting contradictions in relation to the LLL narrative. I argue that being on the edge of working life, having either already retired or being at the end of the working career, has an effect on the meanings constructed. Age-

related norms, however contradictory to the LLL narrative, determine for their part what is expected at a certain age. Hanna Ojala (2005, p. 51) argues that in practice lifelong learning has been reduced to learning throughout working life and not throughout life. But as she (ibid, p. 55) also posits, making reference to Alheit (1995; Alheit & Dausien, 2002b), the meanings related to learning and studying are constructed in the overall “biographicity”, i.e. the biographical and subjective meanings within the societal structures. The meanings constructed in Sara’s and Kaija’s narrative life histories, on one hand, and Roos’a and Pirkko’s on the other, although similar in many ways, also differ importantly in relation to the traditional constructions of educability and the LLL narrative. To begin with I will introduce the four women to the reader.

When asked about her life, **Sara**, aged 66, begins by identifying herself as a Karelian<sup>32</sup> “*Because I’m a Karelian (...) and an evacuee*”. She told me she was born in Karelia and when she was five was evacuated together with her mother and siblings to a small village where people from the Karelian village lived close together as a community. In the written narrative she writes about a “talkoot” when the whole village was working together on a building project or potato harvest, work being a natural part of her life already in childhood. She talks about leaving Karelia behind and going towards the unknown with only a few belongings, wondering how people could bear something like that. In relation to education Sara told me her family’s economic circumstances formed an obstacle to her to being able to continue in secondary school in her youth: “*I would have liked to go but my elder brother was already in secondary school and then everything cost, books cost and commuting cost and school fees, and everything else (...) so that I couldn’t go*”. She says going to secondary school “*stayed at the back of my mind*”, but on the other hand she says that “*I didn’t keep feeling sorry for myself*”, thinking one day she would do it.

In her written narrative Sara writes an anecdote about a moment when she was standing on top of a rock where she had been playing as

<sup>32</sup> Part of Finnish territory in Karelia was lost under Soviet rule during WWII (Wikimedia Foundation, n.d.b).

a child and from where she could see the village five kilometres away and how she thought about the different kind of life that was out there and that could be part of hers. Learning to read fed her curiosity and made her long for the life outside the small village. She wrote that reading “*everything from Anni Polva<sup>33</sup> to Kafka*” opened up the world for her and said: “*That kind of life exists too and it’s not only the small village community or the small circles; (...) I think I will never stay here*”.

**Kaija**, aged 60, also told me about experiences similar to Sara’s. She told me she spent her childhood, which she describes as stable, secure, and happy, in the countryside living on a small farm in western Finland, where she was engaged in farm work from very early on. She got a taste for cultural resources as her father was “*a great storyteller*” who also played the violin: “*When I was a child I woke up in the morning to the sound of violin (...) and fell asleep in the evening*”. Kaija also told me that she was eager to leave the countryside “*to see the world*” and start working outside the small farm contrary to her parents’ expectations as she was the eldest child, even though “*born in the wrong sex*”. However, she describes education as an ideal that was out of her reach both physically – 40 kilometres away – and economically, as her family was unable to provide secondary education for her. Moreover, only the best students could continue in secondary school, mathematics being the most important assessment criterion – “*arithmetic was the most important*” – and as her younger sister had “*very good arithmetic*” she was the one who got extra lessons and was accepted to continue education (at the time there was an entrance test). However, Kaija evaluates practice as more important than natural talent in learning: “*I would be able to do it if I got extra lessons*”.

**Roosa**’s story (aged 64) begins in an urban working class home during World War II. She described her childhood family as “*lacking everything*”; but that it was not much different from the other families around her. Roosa, her elder brother, and their parents lived in a one-room flat. Her parents being at work she became a latchkey child very

---

<sup>33</sup> Anni Polva (1915–2003) is a well-known Finnish author who has written several books especially for young people (Wikimedia Foundation, n.d.a).



early on and learned to take care of herself. Despite the circumstances Roosa told me she “*could have gone to [upper secondary] school*”. She finished secondary school, worked for a couple of years and started upper secondary school, but finished it after a year. Roosa evaluates the circumstances at home – “*I didn’t have peace for studying*” – as one important reason for dropping out. She also “*fell in love*”, got married, and had children. She emphasizes the instrumental value of secondary school in her youth: “*As I have gone through secondary school, at that time not everyone did complete even that, so it was already something in those times (...) you applied for secondary school and went through it, so it was something different, as mostly I remember that from our class in folk [i.e. elementary] school only four pupils applied for secondary school*”.

**Pirkko**, aged 60, also told me about her childhood and youth as her mother’s only child in a poor urban home. She makes a difference between the urban ascetic life and rural “natural” life she led part of the year in the countryside, which fed her curiosity for new experiences. Pirkko told me her mother divided people into “*the good and the bad*”; the rich and well-educated belonging to the former category. Moreover, her mother encouraged her to apply to secondary school. Like Kaarina (see 6.1.1), however, Pirkko selects herself out from the learning society ideal and positions herself as “*a baddy*” with bad school grades and resentful behaviour, and dropping out without getting the secondary school leaving certificate. She told me that at that time: “*I wasn’t at all interested in school*”. Getting married and having children also made it more difficult for her to continue secondary education. This, however, she said bothered her later on and she continued in different evening schools and got the secondary school leaving certificate, which helped her get ahead in life. However, practical vocational education and getting a job is seen as more important at the time than finishing the theoretical upper secondary school study, i.e. despite the dream of becoming a vet, which Pirkko said she had from very early on. Pirkko decided: “*Once I retire I’ll finish this school*”.

The four women’s experiences can be seen to reflect those of two educational generations defined by Antikainen and his colleagues

(Kauppila 1996, pp. 46–48; 2002): the generation of war and scant educational opportunities (those born before 1935), and the generation of structural change and increasing educational opportunities (those born in 1936–1955). As for the oldest generation for both **Sara** and **Kaija** education is seen as an ideal, because it was difficult to reach. Also, the war experiences had a holistic impact on Sara’s life in her childhood. All the four women told me they lacked resources in their childhood and youth. Work had occupied a central position in their life, reflecting the educational generation of structural change and increasing educational opportunities. All of them told me that they had suffered from burnout towards the end of their working life, which had resulted in early retirement, except for Kaija, who was still in working life at the moment of the interview. For **Roosa** and **Pirkko** education is not described as an ideal; in their youth formal education was already more readily available in the town than in the country. But as for the second educational generation, learning and studying had instrumental value for them in getting ahead in working life. Similarly, Sara and Kaija also talk about the instrumental value of learning in different contexts.

### *Curiosity and Desire to Learn in Different Learning Contexts*

Near the beginning of the interview **Sara** introduces the metaphor “a frog that jumps around with no worries”, around which her life history evolves. Anni Vilkkö (1997, pp. 145–146) has used the concept of life metaphor for this kind of a personal metaphor, a theory about one’s life, around which the self and life events are constructed. This is how Sara introduces her life metaphor in the interview:

**“A frog that jumps around with no worries” (S)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>My life's been a bit like,<br/>I'm like a frog that (laughter) jumps here and there instinctively<br/>without worries, you know, and [shows with her hands how a frog jumps]<br/>then ends up in a churn every now and then<br/>where you can only start treading water or drown (...)<br/>So I think I've put myself again and again in that kind of situations<br/>when I was younger, now that I'm older (...) not so much<br/>how would I say it, in some ways (...) it's a pity,<br/>it was kind of a richness as I always started doing something that<br/>I couldn't do, now I notice (laughter) that I've become like,<br/>I wouldn't like to learn things and I, I've lost my curiosity (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

Sara constructs continuity (see Linde, 1993, p. 151) in her life history around the frog metaphor, describing herself as curious, adventurous, ready to take new challenges, and being interested in new things. Old age is given as an explanation for the loss of her curiosity; which she says she would like to regain. **Kaija** also talks about herself as “*curious*” and having “*a thirst for knowledge*”. In her written narrative Kaija wrote that “*I've always read a lot and different kinds of literature: books, articles, columns, papers and magazines, non-fiction*”. Curiosity and a positive attitude towards new things reflects the LLL narrative and the emphasis on lifewide learning, i.e. learning in all life spheres; all the more so as formal education has been out of Sara’s and Kaija’s reach in their youth. In **Roosa**’s and **Pirkko**’s narration a positive attitude towards learning is also present, as Pirkko evaluates: “*I'm awfully open-minded and awfully curious about everything*”. For Roosa learning new things revolves most importantly around working life and success in her career, whereas Pirkko constructs discontinuity in her desire for learning in her youth, gaining it again later in adulthood.

**Sara** moved from the country to the town when she was 16, like so many others during that period, and started to work taking care of children. Learning was closely connected to work: she went to typing school and on courses offered by her employer to improve her language skills. She, thus, participated in non-formal learning that was intended to improve her position in the labour market. Being curious she jumped

into challenges like a “frog”, and this also applied to the jobs she had. She told me *“I had stayed in jobs for two years or so, it wasn’t fun any more, and I knew what it was (...) by that time I had seen this job and I knew how to do it so what was the point of staying there any longer”*. But despite the increasing educational opportunities (cf. Kauppila, 1996, pp. 46–48) Sara did not think of going to evening school at that time: *“But I didn’t really in that thrill of youth or when everything was so new and strange when I came here at the age of sixteen or seventeen and life itself was so much fun and interesting that I didn’t even think about any evening school or anything like that”*.

**Kaija** told me she got ahead in working life with the help of *“a little office course”* for five or six months, as she got a job in a bank and later on other office jobs. However, she describes learning informally at work as most important: *“No, I can’t go on doing the same and the same and the same thing all the time, when you know it well enough there should be something new or then new machines to do the work with or something new”*. This is thought possible in a secure job, which is seen as the opposite of the alternation between contract work and studying today (cf. Suikkanen & Linnakangas, 1998 in Koski & Moore, 2001). The so-called “new adulthood” (Koski & Moore, 2001, see also the discussion in 6.3.1) and learning alongside work is also, however, evaluated as being possible in the position of a contract worker where *“work is not taken so seriously”*. She evaluates:

### Working was the most important (K)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>See, in those times it was, it was working that was the most important (...)<br/>and that you're scrupulous in your work<br/>and you develop yourself in that work (...)<br/>It was not like you have some contract work<br/>I do a bit of that and<br/>then I study a bit and work again a bit and<br/>do that for ten years (...) and such that<br/>It was like you had a possibility there,<br/>it was much easier if you were hard-working (...)<br/>It's rare that a twenty-year-old gets to be the responsible accountant<br/>just like that and that, too, I got it just because<br/>I learned that accounting job so quickly and (...)<br/>Then I learned to see that (...)<br/>as long as you just work hard or develop yourself and do your job well (...)<br/>you get ahead that way too (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

Similarly to Sara, **Kaija** also told me that going to general upper secondary school was always on her mind, but her time was limited because of long working hours. Then again, real learning, i.e. autonomous thinking and understanding, does not happen at school, but outside the formal learning context: “*You don't become less stupid or more intelligent just by sitting at school*”. This reflects what Walkerdine (1998, p. 38) argues about rote-learning and rule-following, that it is not considered as valuable as real learning. In Kaija's narration rote-learning and rule-following becomes analogous to “*book knowledge*”, i.e. theory, whereas real understanding is achieved through other means, i.e. in practice (cf. Käyhkö 2006, p. 77; Komulainen 1998, pp. 153–154). However, in relation to GUSSA Kaija constructs discontinuity in the value of non-formal and informal learning and evaluates formal learning as more efficient on account of tests that force you to make a full effort.

Both women also told me that they worked as an au pair in their youth. **Sara** describes herself as a “monkey” and says that “*it is said that languages are best learned through listening*”. She says everyday life and imitating other people are the best way to learn a foreign language, i.e. informal learning, thus profiting from the learning opportunities that have been around her. **Kaija** also evaluates her experiences of travelling as very meaningful to her: “*I was never the same when I came back*”. She

also says she is interested in different languages and has attended, and would still like to attend, several language courses. She constructs continuity in her desire to learn languages since she was a child: "*Even as a child I had this longing for learning (...) a child learns really quickly (...) even then I wished that I would have had someone who would have taught me Swedish*" (laughter).

Continuing in formal education was also not possible after **Sara's** return from abroad. She told me she was occupied in taking care of the home and her children. She told me that there was no communal day care, but also that she liked staying at home. She also said that she would have liked to study, but gives her husband's irregular working hours and her own inefficiency as reasons for her not to. According to Kauppila (1996, p. 86), for many women of the generation of structural change and increasing educational opportunities, education and work were often secondary to men's plans, but as Kauppila claims they were not bothered by this.

Typically for her generation the formal education **Roosa** had from secondary and upper secondary school helped her to get ahead in working life. This is contrary to Sara and Kaija, for whom secondary school education was not available in youth. Roosa had no vocational qualification. She told me she had thought of it sometime but gives the instrumental reason of not gaining economically even if she had had a university diploma: "*Even if I had had some academic diploma I wouldn't have got a better salary*". Similarly to Sara, Kaija, and Pirkko she also gives work and her small children as reasons for not studying alongside work. Roosa describes herself as hard-working, "*without any further intention*", but who liked what she was doing and did the best she could, being then rewarded with higher positions by her employers (cf. Kaija above). This is how she evaluates her working life: "*But I think that I can boast a bit, too, as I have advanced in my career the whole time in working life like without trying to get anywhere. So that I've been offered these like (...) better jobs (...). Well, I'm just really hard-working, I liked it and then I did a lot of things that were not part of my work and, of course (...) without any further intention*".

Roosa participated in non-formal learning through courses offered by her employers. When an employer offered her a new task she was interested in taking the challenge of “*completely different work*” (cf. Sara and Kaija). Similarly to Sara and Kaija I interpret work as being a very important part of Roosa’s life; something that she wanted to do and that gave her satisfaction (see Kauppila, 1996). Likewise Roosa’s narrative about the end of her career reflects the importance of work for her. The last work task is constructed as a rupture in her otherwise successful work career. She describes the work she did at the end of her career with enthusiasm, evaluating it as many-sided and nice, something she really liked doing. However, she told me it ended up in burnout and early retirement.

Despite having to take the responsibility of the workload of two on her own, Roosa evaluates the end of her career as a failure: “*I had failed in that work which I think I had done (...) no matter how much they explained that I wasn’t given any chance to cope (...) I still felt that I had failed, I just should have been able to do it, I should have been able to stay there*”. Difficult circumstances at work are thus pathologized as individual responsibility, which reflects the individualistic discourse also strongly present in the LLL narrative. Another high target that Roosa set for herself was to reach the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro. When Roosa evaluates her Kilimanjaro hike she could equally well be talking metaphorically about her “failure” at the end of her career: “*Of course, I was sorry that I couldn’t reach the top because it was my goal, but then of course later I thought that it was just the right thing for me because I had taken it somehow as self-evident that of course I’ll get up there (...) and then again how would I be better as a person if I had got up there (...) or would I now have one more experience but is it, is it now worth dwelling on, it’s not, I don’t dwell on it (...) I just think that the whole trip in itself was an experience*”.

The target at work and on the Kilimanjaro hike had been the same for her: to reach the top, to succeed. So far Roosa had succeeded well in her work career; she had no reason to doubt it would not continue. When describing her burnout she told me: “*I couldn’t understand how*

*that could happen to me*”. She also said reaching the top of the mountain was self-evident for her. The failure to reach the target is seen as a kind of punishment, her own fault, for reaching too high. She goes on to say that reaching her aim would not have made her a better person so it is not worth lamenting; the trip as a whole had been worthwhile. Nevertheless, Roosa displays feelings of bitterness and anger towards the way work had been organized because she “*had to leave*” the job she would have liked to continue.

Also for **Pirkko** work occupied a central position in life. She gained vocational qualifications and a profession through adult education that directed her in working life. She evaluates non-formal and informal learning as important for learning the caring profession in practice: “*The studies in that field are a bit [theoretical]; it’s the work that really teaches you how to do the job*”. However, she evaluates the work she did as “*a substitute job*” for the academic career as a vet that she had dreamt of in her youth.

### *The Meaning of Studying “at this age”*

As Hanna Ojala (2005) argues, the LLL narrative creates rather than reduces inequalities in society in relation to age and one’s position in working life. According to Ojala, old people, who are no longer involved in working life, are encouraged to learn, but only as a hobby; they should not be interested in grades or performance, i.e. traditional signs of formal education. Learning is encouraged as a form of socializing and having something worthwhile to do (ibid). This becomes evident in the four women’s narration as they construct meanings for their GUSSA study from the edge of working life, implicitly or explicitly constructing difference between younger students and themselves. However, being on the edge of working life does not alone determine the meanings given for the GUSSA study, but differences are also constructed in relation to individual biographies as the following analyses of **Sara’s**, **Kaija’s**, **Pirkko’s**, and **Roosa’s** narration shows.



In **Sara's** and **Kaija's** narration the formal signs of education are described as more or less unimportant and the meaning of the GUSSA study as a useful hobby and having something worthwhile to do. **Sara** evaluates the meaning of GUSSA being primarily in the rhythm it gave to her life: "*You need some regularity in your life*". It gave her something worthwhile to do, but learning "totally" new things (see Korvajärvi, 1999, p. 94), getting good grades or even new friends are not the primary issue for her. In the same vein, **Kaija** evaluates studying in GUSSA: "*For me it was like for fun (...), for others, younger ones, it's that they want to get ahead in life, somewhere (...) a trade for themselves and then some may want to prove to themselves or their employers (...) something*". She was able to feed her "curiosity" and "thirst for knowledge" by filling in empty spaces with new pieces of knowledge: "*I filled in those (...) that I didn't know or got some more knowledge there, a kind of logical order (...) it calmed me down*".

Now that **Pirkko** is positioned and positions herself outside working life it is important for her to learn what she is really interested in: "*Because I'm not heading for working life, I have to be able to study the things that I'm interested in*". In the narrative below she describes studying in youth as "*pakkopulla*" (compulsory work, cf. Henri in 6.3.1) and an intermediate stage in one's career, whereas "*at this age*" she is able to concentrate on learning and her target, i.e. "*to get the cap*". She says she thought about the possibility of further studies only later. However, her lifelong dream of becoming a vet is silenced as impossible and such subjects as psychology and philosophy that are interesting and "*that you always need*" are given as possible alternatives "*at this age*". Studying in GUSSA is constructed as a possibility for theoretically oriented academic study that slipped out of Pirkko's reach in her youth. Now that she has the chance she has "*a passion for studying*" and no intention of stopping. However, although **Pirkko** and **Roosa** value learning in itself, for them it is also important to officially prove their ability and competence as students and learners through the assessment criteria maintained by school (see Rätty & Snellman, 1998; cf. Grades and Qualifications below).

**Studying “at this age” (P)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p>[P: <i>But does it add some extra spice to it as it's at this age?</i>]<br/> <i>Definitely</i><br/>                 [P: <i>Yes, how is that?</i>]<br/> <i>Well (...) if you do it while young, that's at least what I would imagine about myself that if I had continued then (...) it would have been like, I just go through it, and then you make like a career or something (...)</i><br/> <i>But now I feel it's totally different like I learned terribly much here (...) and I think this was really wonderful and I'm sure that young people (...) never see school as anything else but like the kind of “pakkopulla” that you just have to get done</i><br/>                 [P: <i>Yes (...) why is it that it was different that it's not compulsory “pakkopulla” anymore?</i>]<br/> <i>Well it's, well that it's voluntary, of course, that in itself, and then for me especially as I didn't have that, this school, too, is full of those who have ready-made plans that they apply here and there and (...)</i><br/> <i>like ten different options after this school (...) I didn't have that (...)</i><br/> <i>My only goal was to get that white cap</i><br/>                 [P: <i>But then later on you had these plans for further education</i>]<br/> <i>Yes, they came then anyway, yes (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

Unlike the LLL narrative would indicate, studying is not constructed as equal for all age groups (see also Ojala, 2005). Both **Pirkko** and **Roosa** reconstruct the age-related norms of getting general upper secondary education principally in youth, and further studies that they might have been interested in as belonging to young people who are still in working life and thus able to benefit from the diploma. As **Roosa** stated, “*I've realized everything there is and (...) what I could go and study if I was still like (...) starting off this working life*”.

Despite her retirement, **Roosa** does not position herself as being outside working life, but constructs continuity for the instrumental value of schooling (cf. Kauppila, 1996). In order to fill in the void she was living in after having to give up the job she would have liked to continue, she told me she first took up a cleaning job. Getting a job that was poorly paid and often socially and culturally very little valued shows, for its part, the importance of work for Roosa. Then she got the

idea of studying something. It was one way of filling in the empty space left after the unexpected and undesired early retirement, and offered in particular formal learning that led to a useful diploma: “*Well, what if I went and got a taxi driving licence, it could be of some use. It’s not that kind of studying that you just study something but there was enough motivation as you like got some qualifications from it*”. Roosa was motivated to study something that she could use afterwards in practice; something that would be valued in working life and not just learning for its own sake.

Susan Sontag (1979 in Rantamaa, 2001, p. 56) describes the marginalization of an old woman by using the term ‘double standard of ageing’ to describe marginalization, first because of gender and second because of age. Roosa uses the pejorative Finnish term “*muija*”, which has the connotation of an old woman, when she expresses her pride at getting a professional driving licence: “*Yes that a 60-year-old ‘muija’ went and got a professional driving licence*”. By referring to herself as a “*muija*”, Roosa represents herself in the position of the “other” in relation to gender and age. In fact, Roosa told me she never drove a taxi, but being able to get a professional driving licence as a woman and at the age when it was not ‘normal’ social behaviour proved to her that she was capable of succeeding in the male-dominated area as a woman at her age, which gave her great satisfaction. She describes getting a professional driving licence as amusing, which I see as reflecting her satisfaction. Roosa repeatedly evaluates herself as competent in traditional male arenas (in getting the work position in competition with “*a man*”, in climbing to the top of Kilimanjaro, in getting the professional driving licence, in studying the advanced syllabus in mathematics with success).

As for Sara and Kaija, going to GUSSA is also described as a way of filling an empty space in Roosa’s narration and giving her something “*important*” and “*sensible*” to do (cf. Ojala, 2005). For Roosa, however, the void was perhaps even deeper and the need for it to be filled also more important. Studying in GUSSA is evaluated as motivating as it forms “*a certain whole*” and “*a clear target*”, “*the final result was the matriculation examination*” and “*the cap*”. Although studying in GUSSA

is not seen as having any instrumental value like the professional driving licence, nevertheless, it also led to a clear target unlike learning something like a language and “*just getting all the courses done*”. In this sense it is “*real study*” as opposed to learning in a workers’ institute “*where they demand nothing*”, as tests measure performance and show what you have learned.

When I asked Roosa about the meaning of general upper secondary school, she told me she wanted to show herself that she was capable of doing “*some bigger thing*” after “*the failure*” she had experienced in working life. She evaluates:

**The meaning of GUSSA study in my life (R)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p>[P: Yes I, well what would you say, what has been the meaning of this upper secondary school study for you?]<br/>                 Well, yes, at some point I also thought about that although (...) I didn’t do it consciously.<br/>                 Perhaps there has been a bit of this that.<br/>                 I wanted to show myself that I’m able to do some (...) bigger thing like this.<br/>                 If there was still the effect of this failure in working life (...)<br/>                 [P: Yes as you had experienced it as failure]<br/>                 Yes just like that (...) so it can be there a bit in the background that (...)<br/>                 [P: So that you did not come to make up for having interrupted upper secondary school in youth?] No, no.<br/>                 [P: it was this rather] Yes [P: like this last event]<br/>                 Yes, I think so yes, I think it has had an effect (...)<br/>                 Even though I didn’t think it could be that (...)<br/>                 But it could be that, couldn’t it?<br/>                 [P: Yes it sounds like it] Yes [P: may well have been] Yes<br/>                 [P: Yes, and you’ve succeeded in that]<br/>                 I’ve succeeded yes, I made it, I succeeded (...) in this task.</p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

In the narrative above Roosa sees problems in working life as personal failure. In line with the LLL narrative she takes personal responsibility “for finding out how to manage oneself in changing living and working conditions” (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006, p. 457). Despite being on the edge of working life it is important for Roosa to be employable. As Brine (2006, p. 652) argues, “the *ability to become* employed, rather than, necessarily, the state of employment itself” (italics in the original)

is important. This is the function that I interpret the GUSSA study as serving here.

To sum up, in all four women's narration the social differences constructed in relation to educability relate to age and gender and how they become positioned in relation to working life. This is, however, constructed in at least three different ways. Whereas for **Sara** and **Kaija** learning at this stage in life becomes reduced to a mere hobby, **Roosa** needs to prove herself "employable" through the GUSSA study after the "failure" she experienced in working life. For **Pirkko** alone, learning represents an opportunity for theoretical academic study, even if with the restriction of being "40 years behind" and the consequences it entails.

#### *Who is the Educable GUSSA Student?*

Age-related differences of educability are constructed in both **Pirkko's** and **Roosa's** narration as they negotiate starting their GUSSA study. **Pirkko's** description of coming to the school for the first time refers to the school as a physical space that she approaches with awe: "*I sneaked in cautiously (...) I went around this school (...) then I thought that I'd slide in (...) shyly*". Being 40 years behind, as Pirkko says raises feelings of uncertainty and shame: "*I didn't know if there had been a 50-year-age limit that those who are over-aged are not allowed here [in GUSSA], I didn't know about that (...). It was quite new to me about really old people, and now I know that I'm not ashamed [to go] to university (...), it's just nice that they think I'm a teacher*". I interpret educability as relating to "the psychic landscape of social class" (Reay, 2005) and age as going to school "*at this age*" is negotiated raising emotions of uncertainty, fear, and shame – the possibility of not being good enough for the GUSSA study (cf. Reay, 2005).

Both **Pirkko** and **Roosa** describe the negotiations they went through with the GUSSA principal about starting their study. **Pirkko** evaluates the beginning of her GUSSA study thus:

### Can somebody who’s this old come here? (P)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>I tried to ask her carefully<br/>if somebody this old can come here (laughter) to this school (...)<br/>She started laughing (...), she took the last graduation picture<br/>with all the graduates and<br/>'look that one is 75 and next to her there's an 18-year-old and that (...) one is<br/>over 60' she showed me (laughter) (...) who they have there.<br/>[P: How did you feel?]<br/>Well, I was quite confused of course then, but<br/>of course I felt that I was really welcome (...).</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

**Roosa** also constructs difference between older students – like herself – and younger ones. She describes GUSSA as a space for the younger ones; an older person like herself not fitting in there as evidently: “*Oh my goodness, I’m over 60 and retired and I go to some upper secondary school that has traditionally been education for young people. That’s what it was, you know, nothing else*”. Contrary to the “education for all” agenda of the LLL narrative she constructs upper secondary school as a place for young people aged 16–19 or 30 at the most, reflecting the traditional age-related norms on getting education in youth, i.e. normative cultural and social rules attached to chronological age (Aapola, 1999b, pp. 223–253; Rantamaa, 2001, pp. 49–95).

#### *Age and Learning*

All the four women emphasize the meaning of life experience, i.e. non-formal and informal learning, for studying in GUSSA. **Pirkko** constructs difference between young and old students: “*We old ones we have this life experience which young people need (...) and they have the comprehensive school study just around the corner so that they could give like good pieces of advice from there*”. **Roosa** evaluates the experience gained in working life as especially useful:

**“Life experience has been useful” (R)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>Yes in that way life experience has been,<br/>not perhaps in languages but<br/>in other subjects like in history, political science, for example (...)<br/>It's crystal clear to me how you vote, how elections operate,<br/>I've like in my job, I've needed such things and (...)<br/>So that in that way life experience has been useful (...)<br/>And all this about political parties, I already knew all sorts of things and (...)<br/>so in that way the life experience and<br/>Then of course otherwise, too, like in some essays you're able to do a lot<br/>as you're older and you have experience of all sorts of things,<br/>so there it helps too (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

**Kaija** constructs continuity in emphasizing practical lived experiences rather than “*just*” reading theoretical knowledge in a book (cf. Käyhkö, 2006, p. 77; Komulainen, 1998, pp. 153–154). She thinks it is important to know the background for what is being studied during the lessons at school and in books: “*Since I was fifteen, I’ve always read papers and such so that I remember those dates about what has happened in the world*”. **Sara** also evaluates age and her experiences as making learning easier for her; studying is not “*a burden or (...) or a bad thing (...) just the opposite*”, “*it’s like revision*”.

However, learning is also seen as more difficult and slower “*at this age*”. This is in line with what Korvajärvi (1999) has also argued in relation to age and educability in working life; i.e. older employees are seen as not being able to learn new things. In her study this especially relates to older women and new technology. (Ibid.) In **Sara**’s narration learning “*totally new things*”, of which she gives computers as an example, forms a rupture, a discontinuity with her life metaphor “*a frog that jumps around without worries*”. She evaluates learning new technology: “*I don’t think it would have been that difficult with computers*” (...) “*but I have this attitude that I wouldn’t like to bother with any, it’s good enough that I get along with my mobile phone*”. As Johanna Uotinen (2005, p. 233, 237; see also Vehviläinen, 2002) posits, hegemonic masculinities pave the way and make technology easily accessible for men: young men do not have to face similar difficulties and cultural barriers as, for

example, women and old people. Similarly, as an older woman Sara does not think new technology is easily accessible for her as a resource.

### *Good and Bad Students*

**Sara**’s illness and retirement caused her to re-evaluate her life. She started meditating and practising yoga and says “*I started seeing pictures in my head*”. She cannot remember having had an urge to paint before “*I had never had the urge to paint anything*”. Sara presents painting as something totally new in her life: “*It was a really nice experience for me; it was everything was new*”, thus constructing continuity in connection to her life metaphor and her attitude towards life, i.e. looking for challenges and new experiences.

Sara describes herself as an enthusiastic, but stubborn and wilful student who does things in her own way. She compares herself with students who are just the opposite and ask the teacher for help (“*Which colour should I put here?*”) and says that does not suit her because “*in that sense I’m a really bad student* (laughter), *I have to do things in my own way*”. This can be seen as contradictory to the traditional constructions of educability and the values it presents, i.e. opposed to the norm student who studies hard the basics (cf. Lisa in 6.2.1), listens to the teacher, and does what the teacher tells her to do. Sara does not see herself a “*bad student*” in the same sense as Kaarina (see 6.1.1); she does not select herself out from the learning society ideal, but instead constructs herself as curious and willing to learn, but in her own way, not in the way encouraged by school.

By describing herself as the opposite of the norm student, a “*bad student*”, **Sara** also frees herself from the traditional constructions of educability; its rules and regulations as well as the traditional signs of formal education, i.e. grades and performance. When I asked her to describe herself as a student in secondary school she told me: “*I have always been a bad student*”. She recounts:



**”I’m a bad student” (S)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p>[P: <i>In secondary school, how would you describe yourself, what kind of a student were you?</i>]</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p>Orientation</p>         |
| <p><i>Well, I’ve always been a bad student (laughter)</i><br/>                 [P: <i>What do you mean?</i>]<br/> <i>Well, I mean that I’m bad that way, bad at studying (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>That mathematics I mean I couldn’t ask him [my son] anything because he got angry at me (laughter) (...) right away</i><br/> <i>’Why do you always think that you should [know everything] right away like you should already know everything?’ you know (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>And mathematics it’s like you must study it really well, you can’t know it without studying</i><br/>                 [P: <i>Yes, yes, and is it also what you said that you are impatient to know things right away?</i>]<br/> <i>Yes, I should know right away and it makes me angry when I don’t (laughter) (...)</i><br/> <i>Yes, well, in primary school I don’t remember studying anything at all, and in that evening school I’m sure you had to study something (...), but not anything like grinding away really (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                          | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>Then, well, this upper secondary school.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p>Orientation</p>         |
| <p><i>It sort of went like that.</i><br/> <i>I could have aimed at a bit better, how to say it, grades.</i><br/> <i>But (...) then again I’m lazy, like I said.</i><br/> <i>I’m like this (laughter), how would I say it,</i><br/> <i>and now at this point those grades don’t mean so terribly much to me (...)</i><br/> <i>Of course if I was younger</i><br/> <i>I would have been more eager and hard-working and so on.</i><br/>                 [P: <i>What was important for you in studying?</i>]<br/> <i>Well there were interesting subjects like philosophy and ethics and (...) religion too has begun to interest me more (...).</i></p>                                 | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>And you learn all kinds of things there anyway (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>Resolution</p>          |
| <p><i>Now of course that out of us seven [siblings] (...)</i><br/> <i>I’ve like gone to upper secondary (...)</i><br/>                 [P: <i>So you are the only one?</i>] <i>I’m the only one, yes.</i><br/> <i>I’m the youngest (...) the only one who has graduated, yes.</i><br/>                 [P: <i>Yes, well, so that’s showing your siblings</i>]<br/> <i>Yes, that’s it (laughter), that’s it because they have thought that I am a bit (...) difficult or somehow like this (...)</i><br/> <i>but all Einsteins and all (...) they are the youngest ones and they have more like how should I say it like they are more adventurous or like (...) curious (...)</i></p> | <p>Coda</p>                |

In the narrative above Sara describes herself as “*a bad student*”, “*bad at studying*”. This does not imply that she is not talented, but that she does not study like she is expected to. She recounts how she has the attitude that she should know things without making an effort. Also Sara, like many others in this study (cf. e.g. Kaarina in 6.1.1, Lisa in 6.2.1, and Henri in 6.3.1; see also Pirkko and Roosa below), relates educability especially to learning mathematics. On one hand, she sees hard work as a prerequisite for learning mathematics “*you really have to study it; you can’t know it without studying*” and, on the other hand, she describes herself as an impatient person who wants to be able to know mathematics right away; like a naturally talented person (cf. Lisa) who does not need to work hard.

Sara told me she started GUSSA by “jumping in” and says it was difficult to get counselling in organizing her study and especially in mathematics that she would have needed “*I couldn’t really plan it (...), [courses in] some subjects should have been taken one after the other, for example, mathematics*”. I asked her what kind of counselling she would have needed, and Sara replies: “*I don’t know if I would have followed it (...) when somebody tells me to do it that way I do it in the opposite way*”. She goes on to describe her attitude: “*my son says this too, that I reject those things [advice, rules and regulations, patterns] even if I don’t want to (...) and only when forced to [do I follow them]*”. Sara constructs continuity in presenting herself as the opposite of the norm student who does what she is told to do; she might not have followed the counselling even if it had been available.

Sara admits that she did some studying in GUSSA but did not grind away at it. She talks about grinding away as the “right” and accepted way of studying. **Kaija** also talks about having been afraid that general upper secondary school would have been a place where you have to grind away “*like crazy, so I thought that I wouldn’t be able to do that if I had to read an awful number of schoolbooks every day*” (sneers).

Kaija constructs continuity in her narration, constructing grinding away as opposed to real learning, which is considered much more valuable (cf. Walkerdine, 1998, p. 38), reversing the hierarchical relations

between theory and practice, and placing more value on practical skills (cf. Käyhkö, 2006, pp. 47–48, 77; Komulainen, 1998, pp. 153–154). According to Komulainen, attaching more value on life experience is the most common way of devaluing formal education in her study (ibid, p. 154). She argues that this way of talking relates to agrarian popular culture or working-class ways of perceiving education (see also Käyhkö, 2006, p. 77). Success in Kaija’s study in GUSSA is evaluated as the result of concentration during lessons and efficient learning skills, not grinding away:

**“It turned out so easy after all” (K)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>It turned out so easy after all (...)</i><br/> <i>so that it wasn't like (...)</i> some subject would have been so difficult that <i>I can't do it (...)</i> so that you would have to do too much (...),<br/> <i>really make an effort or something (...)</i><br/>                 [P: <i>So had you imagined it to be more difficult?</i>]<br/> <i>Yes, I thought that mathematics (...)</i> or something like that could be<br/> <i>or Swedish or such</i><br/> <i>how much you have to grind away that (...)</i><br/> <i>So in that way I couldn't understand that it was quite easy after all (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

Both **Sara** and **Kaija** give age as a reason for grades not being so important any more, stating that they would have been thought more important if they had been younger. In rejecting the traditional sign of formal education – grades – **Sara** feels she was able to concentrate on what she was really interested in, namely more philosophical subjects like ethics, religion, and philosophy. And even if she studied in her way, i.e. did not read a lot, did not swot, and was lazy, she could not help learning while at school. At the end of the narrative Sara associates herself with Einstein, the well-known genius: both Einstein and she are the younger ones in the family who are adventurous and curious. These characteristics made it possible for her to graduate from GUSSA.

In the narrative above “I’m a bad student” Sara sees the norm of a good student as opposed to herself – “*a bad student*” – through oppositions. A good student would be hard-working, a swot, whereas she describes herself as lazy and would like to learn things without a great

deal of work. A good student is eager to learn but she herself is impatient. Grades are important for the norm student, while she herself has some real interest in things and does not care about grades. However, being a norm student is not totally absent from Sara’s narration. When I asked her about good memories from GUSSA she described graduation and good grades as such memories, constructing discontinuity with her “stubborn” attitude and will to do things in her own way as well as with her statement that “*grades were not so important any more*”. Instead she says that “*to get good grades is fun*”.

In Sara’s narration the constructions of the “norm” student and “*a bad student*” can be seen to reflect the traditional constructions of educability and the LLL narrative respectively. Swotting to get good grades can be seen as a construction of the traditional educable subject, whereas Sara’s construction of the “*bad student*” has qualities of the educable subject of the LLL narrative: autonomous and self-directed learning in itself is more important than getting good grades in order to show one’s ability and competence as a student and learner. Similarly, **Kaija** describes herself as opposed to the “norm” student grinding away to get good grades, but instead sees learning as having inherent value. Kaija, however, constructs herself as a more systematic learner than Sara and applies new learning skills in her study.

### *Narratives on Mathematics*

When I asked **Sara** if she had had any difficulties in GUSSA, she mentioned mathematics. She constructs thick causality<sup>34</sup> (Linde, 1993, pp. 127–128) for her difficulties in mathematics; first, by saying she had not studied mathematics for ten years. Not studying for ten years is a reason that is external to Sara; she had to finish upper secondary school

<sup>34</sup> Charlotte Linde (1993, pp. 127–128) defines adequate causality as “neither too thick nor too thin”. This means that the speaker must give “enough causality, but not too much” as s/he accounts for the motivation of events in her/his life. If the account is too thin it suggests that one’s life has proceeded at random, without direction; if it is too thick it suggests that the speaker believes in fate. Neither too much nor too little causality is generally acceptable, being in need of correction either by the speaker or the hearer(s).

in the previous evening school she went to after falling ill. Second, she refers to the order in which she took the courses in mathematics, i.e. organizing her schedule in a more “sensible” way, which again is a reason which is external to her: she did not get enough counselling. And third, she refers to the more interesting subjects that she took first, thus constructing herself as the opposite of a norm student, as a student who studies according to her own interests and not systematically. For the aforementioned reasons “*I never really understood it [mathematics]*”.

Why is such thick causality necessary for explaining the difficulties in mathematics? In her narration Sara describes herself as the opposite of the norm student, who, nevertheless, manages school well enough, “*it was just revision*”. Mathematics is the only subject that fails her; “*studying what is interesting*” creates a problem, a rupture in her narration that she has to explain adequately. But, despite her difficulties in mathematics Sara does not explicitly say she is bad at mathematics, rather she refers to mathematics as a subject she is not interested in and that she has not studied enough.

Sara completed the two remaining courses in mathematics a year after passing the matriculation exam and was thus able to get her upper secondary school leaving certificate (in Finland a general upper secondary school certificate is awarded after passing all the compulsory upper secondary school courses and a matriculation exam certificate after passing the compulsory subjects in the matriculation exam). She says she would have thought about it for the rest of her life if she had not finished the courses although she evaluates school as not having been that important for her. **Kaija** also relates learning mathematics to her ability and competence as a student. She told me that her success in mathematics was one of the highlights in GUSSA.

Both **Pirkko** and **Roosa** also negotiate their ability and competence as a student and learner in relation to learning mathematics. Both of them construct a choice between the regular and the advanced syllabus in mathematics, the latter having extreme value as the prototype of intelligence. **Pirkko** recounts how she first chose the advanced syllabus

as she went to upper secondary school for about a year before dropping out to attend vocational adult education:

**Studying the advanced syllabus in mathematics (P)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p>[P: <i>What kind of an experience was it then, could you describe it a bit more, like you had that advanced maths in x [the name of the former GUSSA], so how did you find it?</i>]</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p>Abstract</p>            |
| <p><i>I found it difficult.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>I took it, if I remember right now, I took it just because someone was talking about it, I guess, as I aimed at that (...) veterinary medical school (...) that advanced maths was</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <p>Orientation</p>         |
| <p><i>And then (...) in secondary school (...) I did really well in maths (...) and still the teacher told me that</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>I even remember getting tens from tests quite often, I then had nine in the report; I looked it up once (...)<br/>But anyway s/he told me that<br/>s/he would recommend the regular syllabus for me (...)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>I was quite offended because of that<br/>s/he also thinks I'm so stupid that<br/>I'm sure I can manage this and<br/>I think I would have managed no doubt about that (...)<br/>but with double the amount of work compared to the others (...)<br/>they were like clearly mathematically oriented<br/>the class we were in was small (...) it became half as small so that<br/>in a way it was a really nice crowd and<br/>one thing was that friends [were important] even at an older age</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>Some friends of mine, both male and female, took the advanced maths and went through it till the very end and<br/>[P: <i>So that you kind of went along</i>]<br/>I went along and (...) later I attended their graduation and such</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p>[P: <i>Yes, so you said there that the crowd was somehow really talented in advanced maths</i>]</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p><i>Yes, these boys too had, it was adult education that too, but they had almost all [been to] some technical [institute], I don't now remember quite exactly,<br/>but wherever, but they had all gone somewhere and</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Orientation</p>         |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>They had a readiness to study mathematics in quite a different way.</i><br/>                 [P: <i>How did that come up that they were somehow much more talented?</i>]<br/> <i>They just said it that when the teacher taught some new thing then, of course, they started to boast about it saying 'yes, that's a piece of cake', for me those things were not easy at all (...)</i><br/> <i>And (...) I couldn't open my mouth during the lessons, I somehow feel that now I could, but I was like too timid at that time so that I was too embarrassed to say that I don't get it at all.</i><br/>                 [P: <i>Why were you too embarrassed?</i>]<br/> <i>Well, that's a good question but I guess because I didn't want to show my stupidity to the others. I didn't care about that teacher, the teacher is for teaching, I understood that then too (...) but somehow to confess to the others that I'm not quite able to make it in this competition</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

In the narrative above **Pirkko** reconstructs the two categories of students of the institutionalized ethos of educability: “the bright” and “the poor”. “The bright” are those who have real understanding and “the poor” may succeed with hard work (see Walkerdine 1998, p. 33, 38; also the discussion in 4.2). She evaluates herself as belonging to the first category in secondary school which also encouraged her to choose the advanced syllabus in mathematics, which she says, however, was against her teacher’s recommendation. The narrator here tells us that the teacher categorized the protagonist in the “poor” category despite her good grades. The hurtful feelings seem well-founded. The choice of the advanced syllabus in mathematics is only recommended for “the bright”; the “others” belong to the “poor” category. As Rätty (2001; see also Kasanen, 2003) has argued, the institutionalized ethos of educability has been shown to be influential with individual conceptions of ability. The school teaches us our individual places in the hierarchy of abilities and the pessimism of differential notion of intelligence. Being genuinely talented is not allowed for everyone. (Ibid.) Also as the protagonist in the above narrative is categorized as “poor” in mathematics she changes the advanced syllabus to the regular one, not being able to compete with “the bright (boys)”.

Pirkko evaluates the teacher’s role as extremely important in studying the regular course in the now “*repulsive*” and “*difficult*” mathemat-

ics: “*And then she was quite quite marvellous that teacher x [the name of the (female) teacher in GUSSA], she gets the brightest crown in that without her, I’ve thought about it many times, I wouldn’t have graduated from this school. I found that maths so repulsive and difficult and even if I was told that logical thinking develops and such, I developed nothing else but guts, it was some cause for celebration as I was able to burn my books*”. The traditional teacher-student hierarchy breaks down as the narrator says she was encouraged to ask her female teacher the same thing over and over again “*ten times*” without the feeling of being unintelligent. In comparison the traditional authoritarian male teacher is evaluated as discouraging: “*When x [the name of the teacher] said (angrily) that I’ve already told you this and I’ve also told you that*”.

Both **Pirkko** and **Roosa** talk about taking the advanced syllabus in mathematics as funny. In relation to the regular mathematics course in GUSSA **Pirkko** told me: “*At the beginning it made me laugh to go to maths lessons and think about how (...) it’s possible that I once chose advanced maths*”. In the narrative below **Roosa** shares “the joke” with the principal:

**Choosing the advanced syllabus in mathematics (R)**

|                                                                                                                                          |                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>I still remember how we were having a laugh [Roosa and the principal] as we were like looking at those different school subjects.</i> | Orientation         |
| <i>I told her then that I’ll take the regular syllabus in maths.</i>                                                                     | Complicating action |
| <i>And we were like laughing, yes, what if you take the advanced one. I said that oh yeah tee hee, for sure, I’ll do that.</i>           | Evaluation          |
| <i>And that’s what happened then: I took it.</i>                                                                                         | Coda                |

Educability in relation to (advanced) mathematics intertwines with both gender and age as Roosa and the (female) principal are described as understanding her possible choice of the advanced syllabus in mathematics as humorous. A 60-year-old woman taking the advanced syllabus in mathematics is a commonly understood joke that is immediately shared between Roosa and the principal. Against all odds, however, Roosa ends up choosing the advanced syllabus, encouraged by her



(male) maths teacher (“*What are you doing here? Go there, you’ll get bored here*”) after getting the best grade (10) from the first regular-syllabus maths test. She also constructs difference between herself and the other regular-syllabus maths students: “*they weren’t even able to do division and I thought that I don’t want to be here*”. At this point, Roosa, thus, implicitly constructs herself as talented and belonging to the “bright” category in mathematics (cf. Lisa in 6.2.1).

In line with what Lahelma (2004; see the discussion in 4.2) argues about female success at school, both **Pirkko** and **Roosa** learn to construct success in mathematics as the result of hard work and not natural talent (see also Walkerdine, 1998). **Pirkko** compares learning the regular course in mathematics to English stating that: “*I worked like ten times more with that maths*”. Also **Roosa** evaluates having made the greatest effort in managing the advanced syllabus in mathematics as well as having got the greatest satisfaction after succeeding in it. She evaluates: “*I have to say I used some witchcraft there many times, I told him [her teacher] that you should take responsibility for this (laughter), that it was you who made me go there and I suffer enormously (...), but I really am, you can say that I’m really happy that I did that*”. However, contrary to what Walkerdine (1998) has argued about real learning as being constructed as opposed to hard work that forms a metaphoric relation with rote-learning and is therefore less valued, Roosa constructs real learning in mathematics as the result of hard work. In the narrative below I interpret that the institutionalized ethos of educability breaks down, giving way to the possibility of learning whether you have the “right” attitude and you are ready to work for it. This can be seen as being in line with the LLL narrative, as everyone has the possibility of being successful if they make an effort.

**“It drove me mad when I didn’t understand it” (R)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| [P: Yes, well, what kind of experience was it then to choose that advanced maths?]                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Abstract            |
| <i>Well, it was, I’m like some sort of perfectionist so that’s why I had this burnout too (...) and I’ve got guts so that I didn’t give up (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Orientation         |
| <i>I sometimes used an awful lot of time doing that (...) like hour after hour and then I calculated and calculated and raged and then again I studied the book, looking up things in the Net, everything that I could possibly find there</i>                                                                                                                                                 | Complicating action |
| <i>And when I succeeded so that I got the exercises done I was so so happy (laughter) [P: (laughter) Yes]<br/>So that, that really the greatest successes were in that field, in the subject that made me suffer most.<br/>[P: What do you mean that you suffered?]<br/>Well, as sometimes I didn’t understand, just no way could I understand, and I got really angry as I didn’t get it.</i> | Evaluation          |

Roosa constructs difference between rote-learning illogical languages and understanding logical mathematics (cf. Lisa in 6.2.1), i.e. real understanding (see Walkerdine, 1998), evaluating herself as having logico-mathematical intelligence: “*What kind of logic do they [referring to languages] have (...)? It’s just rote-learning (...) but mathematics has, of course (...) those rules (...) and those things that you have to remember, but it’s kind of logical*”. In addition to mathematics Roosa also attaches logical thinking to grammar, constructing herself as naturally talented in it: “*For me grammar has always been like Finnish grammar, I just somehow under[stand] (...) it’s totally clear (...) as well as all the grammar*”. This reflects the idea also maintained by school that logical and abstract thinking are seen especially in mathematical, geometrical, and grammatical ability (Räty & Snellman, 1991; Räty, 1993; see also Kasanen, 2003).

In relation to mathematics and the matriculation examination both **Pirkko** and **Roosa** express feelings of regret. **Pirkko** told me that if she retook her GUSSA study “*I think I would take the maths [matriculation] exam (...) even if it was repul[sive], I was quite good at it in the end. I got eight in it and (...) when you have the feel for it, then you should take the*

*exam (...) right away*". **Roosa**, on the other hand, says she should have taken the advanced maths test in the matriculation examination and not the regular one as she did. She recounts:

**Regular-syllabus test in the matriculation exam (R)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| [P: <i>Did you take the maths [matriculation] exam?</i> ]                                                                                                                                              | Abstract            |
| <i>I took the regular one.</i>                                                                                                                                                                         | Complicating action |
| <i>I imagined it would be easier (...) and I think that I may have done better in the advanced exam if I had taken it (...) and then if I wouldn't pass the advanced one at all I would have (...)</i> | Evaluation          |
| <i>But it's not, it does not really mean anything to me (...), I did quite well in it (...) if you think of it on the whole (...)</i>                                                                  | Resolution          |
| <i>And at least I've now completed it</i>                                                                                                                                                              | Coda                |

Not taking the regular-syllabus and the advanced-syllabus tests in mathematics and, thus, giving up can be seen as something girls and in this case women learn to do; they attribute failure in mathematics to lack of ability and learn to give up (see Ernest in Walkerdine, 1998, p. 11; Walkerdine, 1998, p. 102; see also Lahelma, 2004). The regular syllabus test turned out to be very different from the advanced one and as a result the grade in it was not satisfactory. **Roosa** evaluates passing the ten courses of the advanced syllabus in mathematics with success as more important than the matriculation examination. She wrote in her written narrative: "*Of course I'm proud of my success, but even more than the matriculation examination, I value the fact that as an over-60-year-old grandmother I passed the advanced syllabus in mathematics successfully*". Likewise in the discussion below Roosa takes up the theme of women of her age passing the advanced syllabus in mathematics in GUSSA.

## Age, gender, and the advanced syllabus in mathematics (R)

*At some point it came to mind that it would be really nice to know how many women of my age have completed the advanced maths in this upper secondary school for adults*

[P: *That’s right*]

*It would be nice to know (...)*

[P: *Do you think that there would be even fewer women?*]

*Yes, absolutely.*

[P: *Older women?*]

*Yes, some men may have taken it but*

[P: *Mm*]

*But I would have really liked to know if there’s such information*

[P: *Why do you think that some men may have taken those courses?*]

*Well, perhaps something like studying mathematics is more natural for men*

[P: *Yes*]

*also at an older age*

[P: *Yes*]

*than for women*

[P: *Yes*]

*(...) it may be that I’m wrong but I kind of think that isn’t it more likely*

[P: *Yes*]

*that men are more interested?*

[P: *Yes, well, men are more likely to be interested in mathematics in general*]

*Yes*

[P: *Yes, yes, that’s right*]

*So that (...) was the point for me that*

[P: *That’s right*]

*that (laughter) it was quite a good thing.*

[P: *Yes, that’s right, so that’s the definite highlight*]

*Oh yes.*

In the above discussion age and gender intersect (see Anthias, 2005) in the construction of social differences of educability between men and women especially in old age. Roosa sees the advanced syllabus in mathematics as more “natural” for men, constructing learning mathematics as innate, and a natural talent men are born with (see e.g. Rätty, 2001; Rätty & Snellman, 1995). Similarly, Korvajärvi (1999) has shown in her study how age and gender intersect in relation to adopting the use of new information technology. In her study older female employees were given more time to learn how to use the newest technology. Both the advanced syllabus in mathematics in this study and new information technology are constructed as symbolically and culturally masculine

and it is not easy for aging women to adopt them as part of their subjectivities (cf. Korvajärvi, 1999). Moreover, breaking the age- and gender-related norms in succeeding in the advanced syllabus in mathematics are mutually constructed as “*the point*” and “*quite a good thing*” in the above discussion between myself, the researcher, and Roosa, the research participant.

### *Grades and Qualifications*

I asked **Sara** about the graduation ceremony. She answered that it felt “nice” and started talking about the preliminary matriculation examination certificate she got together with “a girl” after passing the matriculation examination, i.e. a year before they got the general upper secondary school leaving certificate. She evaluates that after receiving the preliminary certificate “*I felt nothing*”, “*I wasn’t the only one* [referring to the girl] *who perhaps expected to feel something (...) terribly significant or so, but then I didn’t, I felt nothing*”. Not feeling anything was a source of some surprise for Sara; she had expected to feel something, but receiving formal qualifications was not that important for her after all.

Sara takes up the topic of the matriculation exam and how “*it’s talked about all the time*”. She says “*it’s the goal (...) but you wouldn’t need to mention it all the time (...) like you weren’t studying for anything else but the matriculation exam*”. I asked Sara why she had been studying and she said “*well I did it for that of course but I think that teachers emphasize it too much*” and continued “*that’s why we were surprised when we were not altogether thrilled*”.

There is a rupture in Sara’s narration between teachers’ and her own expectations. Teachers emphasize the importance of the matriculation examination and, implicitly, success in it. The examination was Sara’s goal, too, but not the only reason for her study. In Sara’s narration, in line with the institutionalized ethos of educability, teachers value performance, success in exams, and competition for good grades, whereas she represents herself as opposed to the good norm student: other

things besides the examination are important. Sara represents herself as having been surprised about this rupture; she was surprised that the matriculation examination “*felt like nothing*”.

In the same vein, **Kaija** evaluates the certificates as being of no use to her: “*What would I do with that paper? I’ll never do anything with any of those certificates*”. Nevertheless, she evaluates her graduation as “*nice*” and the “*cap*” she can wear on the first of May as having been deserved after many years of studying:

**“I deserve this cap” (K)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p>[P: <i>What kind of feeling did you have</i>]<br/> <i>Kind of nice</i><br/>                 [P: <i>when you were able to put that cap on?</i>]<br/> <i>Yes, really kind of nice (...)</i><br/> <i>Kind of really, how would I say it, it wasn’t exciting, you can’t say it was exciting, there on stage I was a bit excited (...)</i><br/> <i>but it felt kind of good.</i><br/>                 [P: <i>Some satisfaction perhaps?</i>]<br/> <i>Yes, and just that, well, it took a few years (...)</i><br/> <i>That I can say now that I deserve this cap I can wear on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

**Sara** sums up the last six years of her life “*I got divorced, which wasn’t that easy (...)* then *I moved twice, which is [not easy] either, you always have to adjust (...), and then there was this school so that I’ve given myself a bit freedom in that sense*”. She then returns to the loss of her curiosity: “*I have to jump somewhere but not too deep in the churn. I wouldn’t make it elsewhere any more*”. When I asked her what she thought important in her life at the time of the interview, she replied: “*somehow I want to, how to say it, to get new tracks in life*”, “*that you wouldn’t become too old in spirit*” and went on to describe the games she played with her grandchild. **Kaija** also planned to continue studying and learning: “*It would be nice to take at least a couple of languages more in the matriculation exam*”.

Contrary to **Sara** and **Kaija**, both **Pirkko** and **Roosa** construct the formal signs of education – getting good grades and performance – as important in GUSSA. Contrary to secondary school in her youth,

**Pirkko** evaluates herself as always having been a good student in evening school (she told me she had dropped out from evening school twice before retaking it in her retirement). In line with the institutionalized ethos of educability she would not accept a six in her general upper secondary school certificate as it would mean belonging to the “poor” category. In the evaluation below, the formal qualifications from GUSSA, which she can be proud of, officially prove the narrator’s competence.

**“Wow I’m pretty good!” (P)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p>[P: <i>So what kind of meaning do those grades have for you in that school leaving certificate for instance, for you personally?</i><br/> <i>Well, there was a significance, otherwise I guess I wouldn't have tried to get better grades and such (...)</i><br/> <i>I couldn't have accepted a six in the certificate.</i><br/>                 [P: <i>Yes, so what would it have meant if you had got a six?</i><br/> <i>That I'm ba[d], six, at that subject (...) that's what it means (...)</i><br/> <i>It's that you're extern[ally] directed, (...) it's not only that but it's like of course I myself I like to look at that certificate every once in a while and I'm quite like (smacks her lips)</i><br/> <i>Wow I'm pretty good!</i><br/>                 [P: <i>Yes, so it makes you proud as you have good grades]</i><br/> <i>Good grades, of course.</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

Both Roosa and Pirkko construct the general upper secondary school certificate as more important than the matriculation examination certificate. **Pirkko** evaluates the meaning of the latter as “*the cap*” that is nice to wear on the first of May. On the other hand, for her getting the school leaving certificate has the meaning that school is finished and completed, as the name of the certificate indicates. Pirkko raises her graduation from GUSSA as one of the most important events in her life. Similarly to Kaarina (cf. 6.1.1), her ability for theoretical academic middle-class study is officially proved through the formal qualifications achieved in GUSSA. Pirkko evaluates:

**The importance of GUSSA certificate (P)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p>[P: So you would consider this as one of the cornerstones in your life]<br/> <i>Yes, it has been quite important; I made it after all (...)</i><br/> <i>When you think that there are (...) so many of these attempts behind it (...)</i><br/> <i>So perhaps it was one such thing on the way here that</i><br/> <i>I have to be able to prove to myself that I’m able to do this (...)</i><br/> <i>And that there are a lot of people who come here and</i><br/> <i>like the emphasis is on the matriculation exam and</i><br/> <i>I was just really disappointed today.</i><br/> <i>I just went to put in my application papers at the university office (...)</i><br/> <i>and nobody wanted to see my (laughter) upper secondary school leaving</i><br/> <i>certificate so that I don’t need it for anything (...)</i><br/> <i>They are only interested in the matriculation examination certificate (...)</i><br/> <i>and for me it was like if I had to choose between the two (...)</i><br/> <i>Well, it’s nice to have the cap so that</i><br/> <i>you can walk around wearing it on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May if not otherwise (...)</i><br/> <i>But it was that upper secondary school certificate that was important</i><br/>                 [P: So what makes it important?]<br/> <i>Well, just the word school leaving certificate,</i><br/> <i>that’s like the most important thing</i><br/> <i>because every time you leave school</i><br/> <i>you have to get a school leaving certificate (...)</i><br/> <i>You’ve not finished school if you don’t have the school leaving certificate (...)</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

Like Pirkko, **Roosa** constructs performance and grades as important alongside learning, thus reflecting the institutionalized ethos of educability maintained by school. When talking about general upper secondary school she emphasizes the importance of getting good grades, again constructing difference between herself and the younger students. Getting better grades than the younger students officially proves Roosa’s ability and competence as a GUSSA student despite her age: “*I just heard from some people that especially among the younger ones some said that ‘I wish I could just pass the course’; I never thought about it like that. (...) I thought that I have to get a good grade (...) that I do it the best I can*”.



### *Concluding Summary*

As has already been discussed (see e.g. 3.2), lifelong learning relates to all meaningful learning activities in different learning contexts, i.e. formal institutes, non-formal courses at the workplace, clubs and associations, as well as informal learning in everyday life. Learning has expanded over the adult life course and across all life spheres, including everyday life (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006; see also Fejes, 2006; Popkewitz et al., 2006). In the same vein, all the four women – **Sara**, **Kaija**, **Pirkko**, and **Roosa** – describe themselves as curious learners, interested in seizing learning opportunities over the life course and across all life spheres; and profiting from informal and non-formal as well as formal learning. However, the construction of the educable subject of the LLL narrative is not without discontinuity in their narration, and includes contradictory meanings in the overall “biographicity” of meaning making (cf. Alheit & Dausien, 2002ab).

The traditional age-related norms on going to school and getting education in one’s youth before entering the labour market especially concerns those who are “on the edge of working life”. Despite the acknowledgement of equal learning opportunities for all, I argue that the so-called “new adulthood” (Koski & Moore, 2001; cf. also Henri above) is not equally possible for everyone. The marginalization of “the old woman” (Sontag, 1979 in Rantamaa, 2001) implies that formal learning in GUSSA as well as further studies “*at this age*”, and especially learning mathematics and the new information technology, are constructed as symbolically and culturally masculine and, therefore not considered easily accessible for aging women (Korvajärvi, 1999; Uotinen, 2005; Vehviläinen, 2002).

Elderly people are encouraged to learn as a hobby and preferably in non-formal and informal rather than formal learning contexts, as professionally it is not considered beneficial for the individual or the society (cf. Ojala, 2005). Lifelong learning has come to mean learning throughout working life and not from cradle to grave (ibid). In this study this especially concerns those, i.e. **Sara** and **Kaija** above, for whom educa-

tion has been limited in youth. This involves the generation whose experiences reflect most closely those of the oldest educational generation: the generation of war and scant educational opportunities (see Kauppila, 1996, pp. 46–48). For them education is seen as an ideal as it has been difficult to achieve and, consequently educational opportunities are seized wherever possible throughout life, meaning that non-formal and informal learning is constructed as at least as important as formal learning. However, old age and being outside working life, also creates an opportunity to be curious and interested in the world around us without having to concentrate on the symbols of formal education, namely grades and performance. One’s competence and ability as a student and learner does not need to be officially proved (cf. e.g. Lisa in 6.2.1 and Henri 6.3.1). The educable subject has permission to be “*a bad student*” who is able to learn in her own way and study what she is interested in. Learning is more important than performance; the institutionalized ethos of educability breaks down giving way to more freedom and choice, and making it possible to develop oneself throughout life. As Katarina Sipos Zackrisson and Liselott Assarsson (2008, p. 123) posit, people “use adult education within their own stories of their own patterns of life”. However, as they argue, “there is both a price and possibilities for defiance”. The ‘defiant subject’ opposing “the demands and challenges of the implicit rules of participation in education” also illustrated in their study, is “likely to be positioned as failures and as unwilling to undertake necessary change” (p. 121). (Ibid.) As a result, being outside working life permits the position of an educable subject of the LLL narrative only to the extent of studying as a hobby and not as an educable and employable subject for whom studying is a serious occupation leading to further studies and positions in working life (see also the discussion in 6.1.2 and 6.2.2).

In **Pirkko’s** and **Roosa’s** narration, however, studying in GUSSA is not reduced to a mere hobby, instead the importance of the formal signs of education is also acknowledged to officially prove one’s ability and competence as a student and learner. Moreover, mathematics (especially the advanced syllabus) functions as the most convincing proof of ability

and competence. Pirkko and Roosa most closely represent the educational generation of structural change and increasing educational opportunities (Kauppila, 1996, pp. 46–48), the instrumental value of education occupying a central position in their lives. Only on the edge of working life is theoretical middle-class academic study, then, along with the values it maintains constructed as possible, rather than practically oriented vocational study leading to working life in a more straightforward way. As we have already seen this is not without consequences, as age and gender intersect in the construction of social differences of educability in these women's narration.

Admittedly, the meanings constructed on studying and learning would surely have been different in narratives told by men no longer involved in working life. However, none of the male participants in this study were in the position of being “on the edge of working life”; all in all they are in a minority among GUSSA students as about two-thirds of them are female. Moreover, I would like to suggest that social differences of educability become evident in the female narratives where differences are constructed between young and old students, male and female students – in line with the traditional constructions of educability and contrary to the LLL narrative.

#### **6.4 New Category of Student and Learner – Diagnosed as Educable**

Riitta, aged 24, told me she led a happy stable childhood. Only when school started did she notice that she was different as she looked different from the other children because of her ethnic background: “*It was a bit difficult as I was always being picked on*”. She told me that although she was born in Finland she constantly had to convince others that she was Finnish: “*It was a bit tough always having to convince others of your right to exist*”. She also said that some teachers “*paid negative attention*” to her, but when she showed them what she knew it changed. Being placed “outside normalcy” (Popkewitz, 2003, pp. 51–55) on the basis

of her background is implicitly constructed as leading to doubt about her educability, which is constructed as needing to be proved. This is in line with James G. Carrier’s (1983, see also Rätty & Snellman, 1998) argument based on consistent research findings that teachers favour middle-class white students over lower-class non-white students.

The narrator constructs continuity in being outside normalcy as she talks about having a learning disability, as she was diagnosed as having dyslexia (see Popkewitz, 2003, pp. 51–55; also Vehmas, 2005, pp. 83–108). She told me she “*had also been thinking herself that she speaks no language perfectly*” as a sign of this. Not knowing any language perfectly could also be interpreted as making reference to her ethnic background and on “knowing many languages”. The narrator does not, however, implicitly state this. She gives dyslexia as a reason for the difficulties at school, especially the upper level of comprehensive school, when the demands grow. She recounts:

### Diagnosis: dyslexia

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Well, the school started and</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Abstract            |
| <i>then well (...) from the 1<sup>st</sup> till the 9<sup>th</sup> grade the time went really quickly (...) and then of course from the 1<sup>st</sup> till the 6<sup>th</sup> grade it was still quite easy.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Orientation         |
| <i>But then the pace got an awful lot faster in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and there were a lot more demands</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Complicating action |
| <i>which again for me was quite tough when going to school because I've never been the reading type (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Evaluation          |
| <i>But there in the background there was that only in upper secondary for adults was it found that I have dyslexia (...) a learning problem (...) which had not been diagnosed earlier at all which again caused that why I got detention and such</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Complicating action |
| <i>as I was not able to concentrate and it was just experienced as me causing a disturbance even though I myself don't think I disturbed anyone. It was just that I couldn't sit still I couldn't follow the teaching (...) And then our class was quite wild still between 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades and (...) but then we got, I got something out of it. Arts subjects were of course always those which I could concentrate on (...) like handicrafts (...), arts and then there was sports. Those were like the subjects I could really concentrate on (...)</i> | Evaluation          |
| <i>And in those subjects I also got the best grades [P: Were they the ones you liked?] Yes, and (...) as the teachers noticed that too that I, I have like kind of (...) an interest in that so they allowed me to do things in my own way. I was lucky that I had good teachers in that (...)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Resolution          |

Similar to Kaarina (see 6.1.1), Riitta describes herself as a bad student who went to school (upper level comprehensive school) to meet friends, although she also told me that she did some school work “*you have to make an effort, you can't manage if you don't*” and “*I kind of got comfort in knowing that there were even worse students than I was, those who really made no effort at all in anything*”. So even if she evaluates herself a “bad student” she is not categorized as the “worst” (see Rätty & Snellman, 1998).

The narrative above was constructed at the beginning of the inter-

view when I asked Riitta about her life. She starts by describing herself as “*never having been the reading type*” (cf. Kaarina in 6.1.1) and as interested in such practical subjects as handicrafts, arts, and sports (see e.g. Rätty, 2001; Rätty & Snellman, 1998; see also the discussion in 4.2), where she was able to concentrate and also got the best grades. Formal learning was not for her: “*You have to do like this and this and if you do it a little bit wrong you’re wrong*”. She also constructs difference between the teachers in theoretical and practical subjects. The latter are evaluated as “*good*” as they understood the protagonist’s interests and gave her a lot of freedom to do things in her own way during the lessons. On the other hand, the “*bad teacher*” in Swedish made concentration very difficult as the protagonist “*grew tired of listening to her*”.

Unlike Kaarina, despite her difficulties in concentrating on theoretical subjects, showing by her talking and not being able to sit still during the lessons, Riitta does not construct herself as disturbing during the lessons: “*They thought I was disturbing but I don’t think I was*”. The narrator constructs causality in her life history instancing not being able to concentrate at school due to dyslexia, a disability which was finally diagnosed in GUSSA. She evaluates the diagnosis of dyslexia as a great relief as it proves that she is not unintelligent but just learns more slowly than others. She evaluates the diagnosis as giving her a new kind of understanding of herself: “*I’ve been kind of disappointed with myself (...) in my school results*”, “*I’m not so strict with myself anymore; I don’t need to succeed in everything right away*”. In other words, the narrator is educable, although she does not learn as quickly as others, the speed of perception being a “*healthy*” smart person’s norm (Rätty, 1993). The narrator thinks she learns “*naturally*” more slowly than others because of her learning disability and not because she is unintelligent or incapable of acquiring knowledge.

The diagnosis of dyslexia serves as a legitimate and acceptable explanation for the narrator to learn differently, and thus proves the narrator’s competence as a student and learner, i.e. an educable subject capable of lifelong learning. Medicalization of the learning difficulty provides a legitimate explanation that is more valid than the institution-

alized ethos of educability that categorizes students as “bright”, “mediocre”, or “poor” (see Rätty & Snellman, 1998; see also Saloviita, 2002). As Peter Conrad (1992, p. 215) states, “The cases of hyperactivity (Conrad 1975, 1976) and learning disabilities (Carrier 1983, Erchak & Rosenfeld 1989) are examples of the increased medicalization of childhood behavioral problems”. Timo Saloviita (2006) juxtaposes the so-called new rehabilitation model with the Foucauldian analysis of the development of punishment in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Open discrimination in special education has been replaced by what Saloviita calls the “rehabilitation model” (p. 334). It is fundamentally medical. The central metaphor of the model is illness that needs special treatment; treating the soul: the aim being the individual’s ability to control himself. The core of the rehabilitation model is the pathologization of the self. The fault is always to be found within the individual. The advantage of the model is that instead of treating a child as unintelligent or ill-mannered s/he could be said to suffer from dysphasia or minimal brain dysfunction. (Ibid.) A medical explanation of dyslexia does not stigmatize the narrator and removes the stigma attached to poor academic performance (see Erchak & Rosenfeld, 1989). Gerald M. Erchak and Richard Rosenfeld (1989, p. 81) posit that “the student’s moral responsibility is diminished because, logically, persons cannot be held responsible for conditions over which they have no control”. They continue, “The medicalization of learning is also appealing because it seems to be in step with dominant, progressive, and technically sophisticated forces in our society and culture (medicine, humanitarianism, science) and opposed to all that is backward, primitive, and punitive in traditional assumptions about ‘stupid’ or ‘lazy’ students” (ibid, p. 81). It is, thus, socially more acceptable for the narrator to be a different kind of learner than not to be able to learn.

Saloviita (2006, see also 2002) discusses the increase in the decision-making power of individual teachers in placing children in special education. Also, interestingly in Riitta’s narration the validity of the diagnosis of dyslexia is not questioned, although it is not the result of professional testing but given by her teacher on the basis of Riitta’s

school work. Implicitly the teacher becomes constructed as equally authorized to give a “medical” diagnosis when evaluating learning outcomes. The diagnosis given by the teacher suffices to provide a “medical excuse” (see Halleck, 1971 in Conrad, 1992, p. 216; see also Walkerdine et al., 2001, p. 126) for learning more slowly than the others. It serves to prove the narrator’s competence as an educable subject of LLL and no other measures, for example, testing or treatment, need be taken. In this process the limitations of structure also implicitly become “diagnosed” as individual problems (see Carrier, 1983; Conrad, 1992; Saloviita, 2002, 2006). This is how Riitta evaluates the diagnosis of dyslexia she was given by her teacher in GUSSA:



### Dyslexia: a relief

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p><i>It was like a hell of a relief<br/> 'cause you've always like thought of yourself as a bit dumb<br/> or not really dumb but that you understand things but a bit slowly<br/> But it's like kind of much better to be like (...) to be diagnosed different<br/> than to be just otherwise different if you understand what I mean (...)<br/> [P: I think it was like mm quite well said here this sentence]<br/> Yes<br/> [P: this sentence (...) that it's much easier to be a known than unknown<br/> 'wrong writer']<br/> Yes, well (laughter) I guess I wrote that (...)<br/> Yes, well, but it's just that it's generally proved (...)<br/> that you are not like stupid but that you have it so that (...)<br/> not all the pieces work upstairs (...)<br/> It's a great relief (...)<br/> as it's talked about today, nowadays a lot more than (...)<br/> at that time when I was young, it wasn't talked about at all (...)<br/> [P: If you think that okay you've got a learning problem and if you like look at<br/> your school er previous]<br/> mm<br/> [P: school path (...) do you see it differently somehow?]<br/> Well, yes I do (...) yes because then it was,<br/> it was a developing learning problem and<br/> I didn't realize it myself at that point<br/> so that I could have been perhaps a bit gentler towards myself and<br/> not so strict (...) so that in that way I kind of kept pounding my head like,<br/> why can't I get this?<br/> If I had just understood myself that it's a learning problem that<br/> I can't necessarily understand everything<br/> I would have like (...) approached the problem from a different angle<br/> instead of going straight towards the problem (...)<br/> So that in a way you start building bit by bit<br/> like a ladder towards the problem<br/> and not approach it like 120 km an hour<br/> and wonder why I can't make it.</i></p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

In the narrative above the diagnosis of dyslexia proves the narrator's ability and competence as a student and learner. It is essential that the diagnosis is generally accepted and “*talked*” about. It results in the narrator's approval of her way of learning things, which in turn is a way to ensure increased self-control: “*You are like able to control yourself a lot better*” (see Saloviita, 2006).

*From General Upper Secondary School Study to Vocational Studies*

Riitta told me she continued in general upper secondary school right after comprehensive school, where she was accepted as she managed to improve her grades in the comprehensive school leaving certificate due to the effort she put into studying in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Despite her preference for practice she told me she did not really consider other options at the time “*I just went there as everyone else did*” (cf. Lisa in 6.2.1). She evaluates this as a mistake. In contrast to GUSSA, however, the general upper secondary school turned out to be a “*terrible kindergarten*” where “*nobody was interested*” and it was not possible to concentrate on studying there. The narrator, however, evaluates herself as a competent student; being interested and taking studies “*seriously*”. She describes those times as a tough time in her life for many personal reasons and herself as “*drifting*”, ending up by quitting the general upper secondary school study.

After interrupting her general upper secondary school study Riitta told me she did not study or work for about a year. Then she started two-year-long vocational studies that she describes as “*quite nice*”. She constructs causality in choosing to become a cook as she had always liked cooking and her family had always eaten well. It was also an option for practice rather than theory: “*In vocational school you do, like we did quite a lot during the lessons, all sorts of things, but this is more, upper secondary school is more theoretical (...) and in a way that theory, it’s also interesting (...) but hands-on jobs are also a lot of fun*”.

Riitta told me she “*never quite really graduated from the school*” as she was not interested in doing the practical training session in a hotel without any pay. Moreover, she got “*the certificates for everything else*”. “*It is interesting to cook at home in peace and calm, but when you have to throw lunch for 600 people it is terribly stressing and really hard and I can’t do a job that’s mentally so hard*”. She worked as a cook for some time, but then found a new job in commerce that she had at the time of the interview.

*Learning to Learn in General Upper Secondary School for Adults*

Riitta evaluates interrupting the general upper secondary school as a disappointment: “*It was a kind of disappointment, a disappointed feeling that I had to interrupt it because I could have done it together with everything else*”. On the other hand, she says it was the right decision: “*The motivation for studying grew after a couple of empty years without studying*”. Studying in youth is, thus, seen as a norm; without it life is “*empty*”. For Riitta school is life, whereas for Lisa life starts after school. Riitta constructs continuity in knowing that “*at some point I would graduate from there*”. She describes her friends as “*surprisingly smart*” and says they have always encouraged her. She told me that about a half a year after finishing the vocational school she started studying at GUSSA alongside work.

Riitta implicitly constructs difference between theoretical and practical subjects as she thinks she is unable to learn in formal ways; the freedom of doing things in her own way being important for her. She mentions mathematics as one example of these formal subjects and in the following tells me her narrative about learning mathematics.

**Learning mathematics in GUSSA with “a bad head for maths”<sup>35</sup>**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p>[P: <i>Had some subjects been then too formal or something?</i>]<br/>                 (...) <i>Well, mathematics was really tough (...)</i><br/> <i>I’ve such a bad head for maths</i><br/> <i>I can’t, I can’t say like anything about it</i><br/> <i>It was just so hard (...)</i><br/>                 [P: <i>Do you mean from the very beginning?</i>]<br/>                 Yes, <i>from the very beginning, I didn’t understand like anything about those numbers (...)</i> but then here for example</p> | <p>Abstract</p>            |
| <p><i>I was able to make it through the upper secondary school because I myself wanted to succeed so that I had a terrible need to show myself that I’m able to pass that mathematics and then I worked really a lot to do that (...)</i><br/> <i>So I had extra lessons from the teacher (...)</i><br/> <i>like remedial teaching, I attended that quite a lot (...)</i> all voluntarily.<br/>                 Then I was lucky to have x [female teacher’s name], that mathematics teacher</p>                  | <p>Complicating action</p> |
| <p><i>She was really really good (...)</i> and she was able to, she was such an encouraging teacher that she could teach (...) me well (...)<br/>                 that then I understood all right</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p>Evaluation</p>          |
| <p>[P: <i>You wrote here that you had these successes</i>]<br/>                 Yes, <i>I had like a really good feeling</i><br/> <i>as it has always been the thing where I got stuck (...)</i><br/> <i>so to succeed in that; even if you don’t get (...)</i> like a good grade or not anything like a ten<br/> <i>but for me that seven was like a ten (...)</i><br/> <i>so that it was like a really great achievement (...)</i><br/>                 that I passed that mathematics</p>                      | <p>Resolution</p>          |

In the above narrative on learning mathematics, in line with the “theory of natural talent” (see the discussion in 4.2), Riitta describes herself as “*naturally bad at mathematics*”. Elsewhere in her narration she evaluates studying mathematics in comprehensive school: “*The moment you are about to catch on to the idea the lesson ends, if it’s like some (...) theory and then you always get like five or so that you just barely pass and then at home you keep pounding your head against the wall when you don’t understand anything about those like mathematics (...) formulas and (...) no matter how much my parents tried to teach me (...) I just didn’t get it (...) so that*

<sup>35</sup> Riitta’s Finnish expression “*huono matikkapää*” literally means having “a bad head for mathematics”, i.e. to be “naturally bad at mathematics”.

*then I really grew tired of it all and I was like I didn't feel like studying*". In her narration being bad also means slow as the lesson ends when she starts to understand what is being taught. The narrator constructs categories A, B, and C of learners on the basis of their natural competence in learning and those in the category A – to which she herself does not belong – need to make only a little effort in order to succeed well enough. The categories A, B, and C can be seen to correspond to the categories "bright", "mediocre", and "poor" maintained by the institutionalized ethos of educability at school (Räty & Snellman, 1998).

Riitta evaluates studying in GUSSA as a new beginning in learning subjects, for example, Swedish and mathematics, in which she did not do well in the upper level of comprehensive school: *"I kind of (...) restarted school from scratch when I came to this upper secondary school (...). I took many subjects so that I like wanted (...) to study them again like start afresh (...) that I want like (...) to concentrate on those subjects"*. She evaluates starting anew as giving her a new foundation, for example, to understand mathematics, leading her to an interest in studying subjects she was not interested in at comprehensive school. Starting anew, making an effort and succeeding in a subject you are "naturally bad at" proves the narrator's ability and competence as a student and learner; getting a seven (on a scale from 4 to 10) feels like ten.

In line with the LLL narrative individual will and determination to make a full effort are constructed as the principle means to success. Success depends on individual capabilities; failure is due to the lack of such capabilities that lead to a successful learning outcome. Success proves individual competence as a learner, whereas failure leads to the pathologization of the self.

**“It’s here that I’ve learned to learn”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p>[P: I would still like to ask you what if you look at yourself like at the beginning of upper secondary for adults (...), then perhaps in the middle, at the end, (...) what kind of a student were you?]</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>Abstract</p>   |
| <p>Well, (...) it’s here that I’ve learned to learn, like at the beginning I was a bit lost and how can I do this, but (...) towards the middle I learned more and more how to study, you know (...) I learned (...) to understand. I understood like what this is for So that you don’t write a long paper and then it should have been an interview for example (...) So that you learn how to read instructions about how to do this and (...) in which order (...) and then in the middle I started to understand these things much better and the beginning is of course always sort of getting used to it all (...) The closer you came to the end the more certain you kind of [became] so that you knew if you were given some task, you knew what the point was and then you just started doing it.</p> | <p>Evaluation</p> |

My question in the above narrative elicits an account of change as a student and learner, i.e. learning as an active process of self-management and self-regulation on the way to becoming an expert in one’s own learning (cf. Simons & Masschelein, 2008). The narrator responds accordingly and emphasizes learning to learn in starting studying anew. She constructs difference between studying in a practical vocational school and a theoretical, academically oriented general upper secondary school as “it was so different”. As it was four or five years since she had studied in the latter learning to learn is seen as a process necessary in knowing how to study theoretical subjects in GUSSA. Riitta told me her basic reading and writing skills also improved in GUSSA as she learned how to express herself in better ways in writing and started reading novels that she had not read before. Having the basic skills as well as learning to learn are qualities which are also demanded of a self-directed and autonomous learner.

Riitta evaluates getting the formal qualifications from GUSSA as important and describes studying there as a “wonderful opportunity” and a “great experience”: “Everything here, the atmosphere, working methods,

*people are all so different from what you're used to because normally if you're of a certain age you're always in that group (...) together with those people who are of your age but here it's kind of all mixed, it's a kind of positive mixture that I felt (...) so that you can have like (...) different starting points*". Studying at any age is constructed as positive when it is based on the person's own desire to learn but Riitta still evaluates studying as easier at a younger age: "*It's kind of easier when you're a bit younger to go back to school but for some it can be really difficult to go back*". She sees it as positive that "*older grannies near 60 are so eager when they get to come to school*", stating that they do not necessarily graduate from GUSSA but study for example languages for their own pleasure. Contrary to the LLL narrative, studying and learning is not constructed as an equal opportunity at any age. And even at the younger age managing the educational game is not self-evident as it is like participating in a "*marathon or 1500-metre hurdles*". Managing such a difficult and strenuous performance is yet another proof of the narrator's competence.

At the time of the interview, in line with the self-directed learning ideal of LLL, Riitta told me she was "*improving herself*" and getting a driving licence in computing. She was also planning further studies in the polytechnic: "*As I was thinking about it I understood that I went through that upper secondary school and then what, so then at some point I realized the option of going to polytechnic and that it's a much better choice for me than university because I feel that at university I wouldn't be able to do anything*". Riitta evaluates herself as not belonging to the category of students who study at university – the highest academic institution (cf. Lisa in 6.2.1: "*I don't belong to that caste*"), but evaluates the less theoretical institution, the polytechnic, as a more suitable choice for her (see also above theory vs. practice). It is, however, a step forward on the educational ladder.

### *On the Road to Myself*

When I asked Riitta about her self-image posing the question “Who am I?” she told me she was “*going towards myself at a good speed*”. Never being ready, a sense of permanent insufficiency, always being “*on the road*” to something, in a constant state of becoming and the permanent need for self-development are constructed as positive opportunities for lifelong learning. In the narrator’s words:

#### **“Never ready”**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <i>At least I’m going towards myself at a good speed (...) (laughter)<br/>It’s difficult to say who I am but<br/>at least at a good speed I’m finding out what I’ll start doing and<br/>what I want out of this life (...) and try to find myself (...)<br/>I know that you are never ready and it gives you a positive direction<br/>[P: Yes, it’s perhaps important to be on the road to something.]<br/>Yes, that’s right, otherwise it would be boring,<br/>if you reach your goal you have nothing to aim at anymore.<br/>If you are ready, perfect (...) there’s no fun anymore,<br/>just the opposite, it’s so much fun to be on the road and<br/>to stray from the straight path (...)</i> | Evaluation |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

### *Concluding Summary*

Popkewitz (2003, p. 52) names such categories of students who are positioned “outside normalcy” as students with disabilities, females, nonwhite students, and non-native speakers, among others. They are constructed as more likely than others to be victims of low expectations and in need of further assistance and more time to complete assignments. They are the target groups to be rescued from failure in order to become lifelong learners. (Ibid, pp. 35–56.) Also, in Riitta’s narration the institutionalized ethos of educability gives way to a new category of student and learner, i.e. someone placed “outside normalcy”, first, because of her ethnicity, and second, on the basis of the learning disability diagnosed in GUSSA. On one hand, the narrator needs to prove her



educability to her teachers because she looks different from the other students; medicalization, on the other hand, provides causality for learning more slowly than what is considered the healthy person's norm.

As Simo Vehmas (2005, pp. 56–59) argues, medicalization has become the most central explanatory factor in explaining the social world and phenomena that are placed “outside normalcy”. For Riitta it provides an explanation that is not based on an individual's natural talent and ability but on a different way of acquiring knowledge. Being only “different” and not “dumb” is constructed as a great relief for the narrator as it entails the possibility of learning, albeit more slowly than what is considered “the norm”. In other words, special education positions her as having “special needs” (Saloviita, 2006; Vehmas, 2005, pp. 84–87, 97–105) that have to be met in order for her to acquire knowledge. More time for acquiring knowledge brings the narrator as close as possible to “normalcy”, constructing her as an educable subject of the LLL narrative who is capable of acting along the lines of the learning society ideal.

For Riitta having “special needs” does not position her “outside normalcy” in terms of placing her in a special education class or resulting in any kind of special “treatment”. Moreover, it is not constructed as affecting the assessment of the matriculation examination tests in any way, which was the case for Leena (see also 6.1.1), another research participant, whose diagnosis of a hearing deficit changed the assessment criteria to her benefit in the matriculation examination. The recognition of the learning disability is constructed as sufficient for the narrator to exercise self-control which results in a better learning outcome. No other rehabilitation is constructed as necessary. However, it is important to note that the problem is placed within the individual, and therefore it also needs to be dealt with and solved by the individual herself.

The new category of a student and learner marks the narrator with such qualities as self-control, autonomy, self-directedness, as well as being an active student and learner who takes responsibility for her/his own actions. These are all qualities of an educable subject of the LLL

narrative. The new category is constructed as more flexible in the sense that it is possible for the narrator to control her own learning actively on her own, now that she has the diagnosis and knows what the “problem” is. However, belonging to the category of “poor” students based on natural talent that an individual is either born with or not, makes it impossible to influence the learning outcome. Similarly, Walkerdine et al. (2001, p. 130) argue that out of the two competing narratives, i.e. low ability vs. dyslexia, the latter is more positive as it makes it possible “to maintain some sense of self-respect”. Medicalization acts as a salvation for those individuals who would otherwise be permanently excluded from the learning society ideal. Importantly, however, this is not always the case. Kalle’s (male aged 24, see also 5.4.1) diagnosis of depression impedes rather than paves the way for lifelong learning. In his narration being slow becomes a hindrance for studying in a performance-oriented elite general upper secondary school in his youth. Despite success, being positioned “outside normalcy” means exclusion from the learning society ideal.

The journey to oneself, even a difficult one – “*this life hasn’t been made easy*” – is an endless opportunity for learning in Riitta’s narration. It is a strenuous route to oneself and self-development, to one’s own goals in life. An individual is constructed as being in continual need of self-improvement, there being “a continual remaking of oneself through the active intervention in one’s life as a lifelong learner” (Popkewitz, 2003, p. 48).

# 7

## Conclusion

### **7.1 The Coherence Patterns of the GUSSA Students' Narrative Life Histories**

The focus of this study has been to examine the constructions of the educable subject of the LLL narrative in the narrative life histories of adult students at general upper secondary school. The presupposition has been that contradictions between the LLL narrative and the traditional constructions of educability are likely to be constructed as the former relies on the all-inclusive interpretation of educability and the latter on the meritocratic model of educating individuals based on their innate abilities. Formal general upper secondary education in adulthood has been a fruitful context for examining the dilemmatic nature of the constructions of educability in this study.

Methodologically this study contributes to narrative life history research, combining the structural analysis of narratives (Labov & Waletzky, 1997; Labov, 1972, 1982, 1997), i.e. mini-stories within life history, with the analysis of the life histories as structural and thematic wholes and the creation of coherence (Linde, 1993) in them. Drawing on earlier criticism on the original Labov and Waletzky model (e.g. Herman, 2002; Miettinen, 2006; see also the discussion in 5.4.1), their model has been modified to adapt to the purposes of this study. It has been a useful practical tool for organizing and analysing narrative life

history data. This approach has systematized the interpretation of narratives, permitting the interpretation of narratives as wholes as well as presenting the narrative structure as part of the message. Combining the narrative and life history analysis has allowed both close reading and the interpretation of meanings constructed on studying and learning in the overall life history context. The narrative life history approach combines both the micro – subjective and interpersonal – and macro – historical and socio-cultural – context in this study, placing the emphasis on the ‘biographicity’ of learning that entails combining “the twin poles of structure and subjectivity” (Alheit, 1995, p. 63; see also Alheit & Dausien, 2002ab).

Having said this, it should also be admitted that the analysis carried out using the Labov and Waletzky model has been fairly laborious. It points to the specificity and detail of the interview text, and doing so opens up interesting interpretations that are possibly not so easily detected otherwise. Simultaneously, however, the careful reflection on interpreting the structural elements of the narratives demands a great deal of effort, especially, with such large data as in this study, i.e. over 1000 pages of transcribed narrative interview data. One possibility for future narrative analysis of this type of data could be the application of the Labov and Waletzky model not systematically to all the narratives concerning education and learning within a life history as in this study, but only to the core episodes, i.e. narratives that consist of a turning point or other important details for the overall interpretation of the text. The structural analysis of the core episodes using the Labov and Waletzky model could then be combined with other less detailed narrative analyses. However, I want to emphasize, that the form (how the story was told) together with the content (what happened) of the narrative form an inseparable whole and, therefore, both structural and thematic analyses complement each other in narrative interpretation of meaning. How both types of analyses are combined is to be solved based on the specific purposes of the study in each case.

As discussed earlier (see 4.2), the institutionalized ethos of educability maintained by school has been shown to influence individual con-

ceptions of ability. Children learn their individual places in the hierarchy of abilities at an early stage of their educational careers, thus adopting the pessimism of the differential notion of intelligence. Participation in formal general upper secondary education in adulthood inevitably means that the individual conception of ability, one's ability and competence as a student and learner, becomes reactivated as it is re-evaluated through the assessment criteria maintained by school. This also means that the pessimism of the differential notion of intelligence adopted at an early stage of one's educational career may necessitate change in order to adopt "the joy of learning" enhanced through lifelong learning.

This study confirms the differential notion of intelligence which is especially attached to learning mathematics. Interestingly, if not surprisingly, narratives on studying and learning mathematics are constructed across the data of this study, both in female and male narratives. On the basis of this study it relates to individual conceptions of ability in an intrusive way that has consequences far beyond the ability and competence to learn mathematics. It concerns such issues as whether one's ability and competence as a student and learner suffices to complete studies at GUSSA and pass the matriculation examination. Mathematics continues to be constructed as the masculine prototype of intelligence; being "good" at mathematics, and especially the advanced syllabus, implies having intelligence and innate natural talent (cf. Rätty & Snellman, 1998). Consequently, being successful in learning such a difficult subject as mathematics is constructed as a cause of some amazement for many participants. In these instances the teacher-student hierarchy dissolves giving way to a caring and encouraging (female) pedagogy where performance and competition subside, and studying and learning become an exciting adventure into the unknown.

In part 6 I have shown how in accounting for the discontinuity created by participation in general upper secondary school study in adulthood and not in youth, the GUSSA students construct coherence in relation to their ability and competence as students and learners. The seven case studies of the core narrative life histories illuminate the social

differences constructed in relation to educability, i.e. social class, gender, age, and the “new category” of student and learner. This, as I have argued, is done inside mutually contradictory discussions, i.e. that of the traditional constructions of educability and the LLL narrative, which both act as locations for social differences of educability in the GUSSA students’ life histories.

On examining the creation of coherence in the data of this study, two main coherence patterns of the adult educable subject emerge in the GUSSA students’ narrative life histories. These coherence patterns illuminate how the story is told in order to fit the particular ending of the success stories told by the adult students in this study, i.e. how the goal of graduating from general upper secondary school and passing the matriculation examination in adulthood, and not normatively in youth, is accounted for. Although in different ways both coherence patterns constructed in this study account for personal growth and development. As Brockmeier (2001, p. 248) writes the connection between “the beginning and end of an autobiography (...) is almost always based on a story of development”. Moreover, studying and learning is connected to individual and societal progress and development in a fundamental way (see the discussion in 5.4.3).

I have named the first coherence pattern as “*performance-oriented*” and the second as “*flexible learning*”. The first coherence pattern relates to external, i.e. grades and qualifications, rather than internal signs of development. Both the theoretical, academic education and the principles of lifelong learning are constructed as important. The narrative life histories of this first coherence pattern either account for change or conversion or place change in the future. Change relates to the conception of one’s ability as a student and learner as well as the educational and career opportunities created by education. The second coherence pattern, however, calls into question the status of formal education and so-called “book knowledge” and, simultaneously, the LLL narrative is not constructed as very meaningful in the ‘biographicity’ of learning. This coherence pattern relates to internal, rather than external signs of development. The “will to learn” and develop oneself has always existed,

taking different forms depending on the circumstances. On the whole, these two coherence patterns sum up the results of this study: the seven case studies around which this study has been organized as well as the twenty life histories forming the data of this study. As we have seen, however, the creation of coherence in the life histories is not without discontinuities and, consequently, the two types of educable subject described here are abstractions that summarize the overall features of the two main coherence patterns.

The educable subject of the first “performance-oriented” coherence pattern displays qualities that are closely related to the principles of lifelong learning. This educable subject is described as flexible, adaptable, employable, and ready to cope with changing circumstances. Contrary to the principles of lifewide learning, however, for the educable subject of the first coherence pattern the documentation of one’s competence through formal qualifications outweighs non-formal and informal learning in preparation for future change and the competition for further education, professional careers and higher social positions. External signs of development are seen at least as important as inner development for those readily employable subjects actively involved in working life. Moreover, being an ambitious, systematic, hard-working, goal-oriented, self-directed, and responsible student and learner who has a positive attitude towards learning are well-appreciated qualities of this educable subject. S/he has adopted the qualities of “new adulthood” as part of her/his life history, being in a constant state of becoming; being imperfect, incomplete and never ready (see Koski & Moore, 2001; Vilkkö, 1997). Thereafter, s/he has the moral duty to face the responsibility of becoming a lifelong learner.

Interestingly, the optimism enhanced by lifelong learning stands alongside the pessimism of the differential notion of intelligence. This notion is constructed as being very meaningful in the conception of ability of the educable subject of the first coherence pattern who has been discouraged from studying and learning. The negative conceptions of one’s ability have prevailed into adulthood even despite successes in working life and/or vocational and even general education. For these

students the successful experiences achieved through the GUSSA study have healed the wounds, i.e. feelings of inferiority, being a nothing. Being selected out in the less privileged and valued working-class position in relation to education and the cultural, social, and economic resources available through it has been seen as personal pathology through the institutionalized ethos of educability (*Kaarina*). Only in GUSSA does it become possible for these students to develop into lifelong learning educable subjects who are willing and able to learn. Likewise, the stereotypical gendered constructions related to male and female abilities as well as explanations for success or failure as a student and learner are constructed as the result of natural talent or lack of it (*Lisa & Janne*). “Healthy normality” and “healthy laziness” permit differing positions in relation to lifelong learning, i.e. fear of not being a lifelong learning educable subject and being excluded from the learning society ideal as opposed to being a lifelong learner “by nature”. The age-related norm that general upper secondary school should be completed in youth straight after comprehensive school persists in most participants’ narration. However, it is possible for the age-related norm to be broken down and morally mature adulthood to be constructed as the best age for acquiring formal education (*Henri*). Finally, medicalization makes it possible to have a new kind of understanding of oneself as a student and learner, no longer being “dumb” but only “different” (*Riitta*).

The second “flexible learning” coherence pattern calls into question the status of formal, especially theoretical and academically oriented education; inner development is mostly seen as more important than such external signs of development. This is not without consequences, however. Studying and learning as a hobby (e.g. *Sara, Kaija, Hanna, Aino*), as substitute doing (*Hanna*), or as self-development and a means for a more satisfactory life (e.g. *Aino*) as opposed to a socially and culturally valued serious occupation leading to further education and career development, is the most likely alternative for her/him. This does not imply, however, that the qualities of the lifelong learning educable subject would be lacking. On the contrary, this educable subject is



described as curious and interested, active, independent, and self-directed and also, for the most part, a good student. In these narratives being “a bad student” who learns in her own way (*Sara*) gives way to more freedom and choice, making it possible to develop oneself throughout life. S/he may also be a flexible and adaptable student and learner seizing learning opportunities at all times and in all places depending on the circumstances. What is lacking, however, is the emphasis on performance for qualifications, learning as such being seen as more important. Preparation for the change that is seen as being so important in the LLL narrative does not greatly concern this educable subject. S/he enjoys the genuine joy of learning without external constraints, profiting from lifewide learning; formal, non-formal, and informal learning being equally important for her/him. Consequently, despite displaying qualities of the educable subject of the LLL narrative, social differences constructed in relation to educability, namely social class (*Aino*), gender (*Hanna*), and age (*Sara*, *Kaija*, *Pirkko*, & *Roosa*) limit the access of this educable subject to the learning society ideal: this *educable* but not readily *employable* subject is pushed to the periphery of lifelong learning.

This means that being fully included in the LLL narrative requires both the qualities of the lifelong learning educable subject and a readiness to be employed or alternatively a willingness to be employed in a new task. Here lies a paradox: on one hand, an important motive for the grand narrative of lifelong learning has been its ability to guarantee a flexible, adaptable, and employable workforce through both lifewide and lifelong learning, but on the other hand, the educable subject who profits most from lifewide learning is educable but not readily employable, and is consequently situated one way or the other on the edge of working life. This confirms the earlier criticism of the underlying economic motives of the LLL narrative (e.g. Fejes, 2005; Ojala, 2005; Olssen, 2006; Tuomisto, 2002, 2004). This narrative concerns those who are actively involved in working life, whereas others are merely encouraged to study and learn to occupy their time in the best possible manner.

The educable subjects most and least appreciative of formal education in this study resonate with the differences found in the study conducted by Rätty et al. (1993) concerning the most and the least educated subjects. Whereas in Rätty’s and his colleagues’ study the most educated subjects were more likely to believe in the differential notion of intelligence, those who had the least education were the furthest away from the views of “the theory of natural talent”. (Ibid.) My study supports the notion that the institutional conception of intelligence as an innate ability is still going strong (cf. Snellman & Rätty, 1995), to the extent that those educable subjects most appreciative of formal education also construct themselves as most affected by the differential notion of intelligence. However, despite the differing conceptions of educability, my study also indicates that the middle-class groups traditionally closer to the educational system and its values (cf. Rätty & Snellman, 1998) are also closer to the LLL narrative and the values represented by it than those who call into question the status of formal education and do not construct the principles of LLL as very meaningful in the overall ‘biographicity’ of learning.

Although in this study I have not examined learning processes as such, the “performance-oriented” and “flexible learning” coherence patterns of the educable subject can be seen to have common features with the pursue of performance and learning goals shown in Carol S. Dweck’s (1999) studies on people’s self-theories, i.e. “beliefs about themselves” as students and learners. According to Dweck, there is a connection between how one perceives intelligence and the type of goal one is likely to pursue. She writes that “when students pursue performance goals they’re concerned with their level of intelligence” (p. 15). She later continues that this implies that you think of intelligence as unchanging and “as a fixed, concrete thing” (p. 20). As in “the theory of natural talent”, in Dweck’s theory of fixed intelligence, one’s ability and competence as a student and learner is seen as unchanging as opposed to intelligence, which is “dynamic and malleable” (p. 20). According to Dweck, those students who think of their intelligence as dynamic are likely to pursue a learning goal, i.e. “the goal of increasing

your competence” (p. 15). Similarly, as discussed above, the “performance-oriented” educable subjects in this study who were most appreciative of formal education also construct themselves as most affected by the differential notion of intelligence, i.e. see intelligence as unchanging and fixed. The “flexibly learning” educable subjects, on the other hand, were less concerned with “the theory of natural talent” and concentrated on learning rather than performance and were thus less concerned with external signs of development, i.e. grades and qualifications. However, I want to emphasize that the creation of coherence in the life histories is not without discontinuities and the conception of ability is not necessarily described as stable within an individual narrative life history. As we have seen, the educable subject of the first coherence pattern also moves towards a dynamic conception of ability. Thereafter, the connections described here are reflections that would need to be more thoroughly researched before being developed any further.

The lifelong learning principles of the equal opportunities and the importance of education for all regardless of age are contested in this study, as the age-related norms of getting education persist in most cases. This is interesting given that the GUSSA students who participated in this study were predominantly content with their study in general upper secondary school for adults, even recommending it for anyone interested. However, it becomes more understandable in view of the educable but not readily employable subject being pushed to the periphery of lifelong learning because of age and being “on the edge of working life”. The opportunities for further education, a new career, and higher social positions – especially valued in our society – diminish with age. For the same reason formal education is seen as more important than non-formal and informal learning for the educable and employable subject who displays other qualities of the LLL narrative. Moreover, those who have been ranked as “poor” in comprehensive school need to negotiate their ability and competence as a student and learner to become a new lifelong learning educable subject. All in all, for none of the general upper secondary school adult students in this study is the LLL educable subject a self-evident construction; they all

need to negotiate their access to the learning society ideal. Some of them can be interpreted as finally getting “in” – permanently or for the time being; others have a position on the periphery of LLL – also either permanently or just for the time being. If individual success is interpreted as getting ahead in working life resulting in a higher social position and individual failure as the opposite of this, only the stories in which coherence is created in close relation to the principles of the LLL narrative can in effect be seen as success stories in this study. The LLL narrative may be seen as creating opportunities for learning and acquiring education for some, while for others it limits those same opportunities.

## **7.2 Questions of Validity and Generalization of the Results**

Before coming to terms with scientific practice not as a textbook idealization of the “abstract and severe ‘logic’ of scientific discovery” but as “a human endeavor marked by uncertainty, controversy, and ad hoc pragmatic procedures” (Mishler, 1990, p. 417), being engaged with narrative life history research sometimes made me wonder whether I was an artist or a scientist. This involves the realization that the positivist notion of validity and the correspondence theory of truth that presupposes a correspondence between the objective reality and true knowledge was not an issue (see Heikkinen, 2002; Kvale, 1995). As Eliot G. Mishler (1990, pp. 416–417) posits in narrative life history research as well as in other inquiry-guided research that relies on “the dialectic of theory, methods, and findings over the course of study” validation needs to be reformulated as the social construction of knowledge. The key issue, then, becomes “whether the relevant community of scientists evaluates reported findings as sufficiently trustworthy” (ibid, p. 417). Mishler proposes a redefinition of validation “as the process(es) through which we make claims for and evaluate the “trustworthiness” of reported observations, interpretations, and generalizations” (p. 419).

He further posits that “[t]he essential criteria for such judgments is the degree to which we can rely on the concepts, methods, and inferences of a study, or tradition of inquiry, as the basis for our own theorizing and empirical research” (p. 419). Mishler prefers the concept ‘validation’ rather than ‘validity’ in order to focus on the range of ongoing activities of the research process rather than “the static properties of instruments and scores” (p. 419). The functional criterion of validation leads us to understand it “as embedded within the general flow of scientific research rather than being treated as a separate and different type of assessment” (ibid, p. 419).

Instead of an abstract list of rules and criteria as the basis for scientific research, Mishler (1990) approaches validation through three concrete models of narrative research that he argues demonstrate the craftsmanship of carrying out narrative research skilfully and artfully by competent scholars. The proposed candidate exemplars of narrative research share the following six characteristics: 1) a focus on a piece of interpretive discourse (i.e. a text representing efforts by speakers/authors themselves to describe and interpret their experiences) that 2) is taken as the basic datum, 3) the reconceptualization of the text as an instance of a more abstract and general type, 4) the provision of a method for characterizing and analysing textual units, 5) the specification of the structure or pattern of relationships among the units, and 6) the interpretation of the meaning of this pattern within a theoretical framework. Mishler places emphasis on the visibility of the research process as the basis for validation; rather than displaying textualized fragments the model examples all display “the full texts to which the analytic procedures are applied” (ibid, pp. 423–424).

As suggested I have also aimed at the visibility of the research process throughout the reporting. A large amount of narrative data has been displayed to make the basis of my interpretations visible for the reader and, at the same time, to enable her/his own interpretations. Furthermore, the narrative data have been reconceptualized as mini-stories, i.e. narratives within life histories. The Labov and Waletzky model has been applied to both characterize and analyse the narratives in this study and

the researcher's application of the Labovian elements are made visible to the reader. The concept of coherence has been applied to specify the relationships among the Labovian narratives. And, finally, the coherence patterns found have been interpreted within the framework of the LLL narrative and the traditional constructions of educability. Following the line of argument suggested by Mishler (1990), these methods and procedures do not validate the findings and interpretations of the study in hand, what they do, however, is provide grounds for making a reasoned and informed assessment for the reader of this study.

Being informed by social constructionist thinking the existence of universal truth has been rejected, and instead the possibility of specific local, personal, and community forms of truth (see Kvale, 1995) has been accepted as the basis of this study – forms of truth not open to generalization as such. The constructions of educability in this study, however, represent a phenomenon that, I would like to argue, is also applicable beyond the local, personal, and community forms of truth represented in the narrative life histories of the general upper secondary school adult students in this study. The possibility for the generalization of the findings and interpretations lies in the possible generalizability of the coherence patterns interpreted in the framework of the LLL narrative and the traditional constructions of educability (see also 7.1 above). The researched phenomenon, i.e. adult students' worry about their ability to learn can be described in Pertti Alasuutari's (1999, p. 234) words as "generally known but badly acknowledged". The aim of this study has been to make this phenomenon visible in analysing how general upper secondary school adult students construct their ability and competence as students and learners in their narrative life histories. The "performance-oriented" and "flexible learning" patterns of the adult educable subject constructed in this study illuminate who is to be educated and how. The educable and readily employable lifelong learning subject of the first coherence pattern should participate in formal education in order to achieve qualifications for working life, whereas the "flexibly learning" educable but not employable subject may utilize lifewide learning for her/his own pleasure. The pattern of in/exclusion

in/from the LLL narrative supported by my study has also been put forward by several other scholars (e.g. Brine, 2006; Fejes, 2005, 2006). This is a phenomenon that does not only apply to adult learners but to society at large. The details of the social constructions leading to this phenomenon are, however, local in character and not generalizable as such, even though the case studies of the core narrative life histories in this study can be seen as representative of the multifariousness of the social world.

The possible restrictions of the findings and interpretations of this study relate to the group of research participants as well as to the timing of the research encounter. As discussed earlier (see 5.1), the data for this study were generated in one general upper secondary school for adults in the capital area, about 3–4 months after the participants' graduation. The newly-graduated students formed a unified group in the sense that they all had a so-called 'success story' to tell; they were all active adult learners. Presumably, those adults who do not participate in adult education or those who have dropped out would have had a different kind of story to tell. Also the circumstances outside the capital area are likely to mediate different kinds of stories. Additionally, the social group represented by the GUSSA students in this study may be representative of adults participating in formal general or vocational education (cf. the Noste-target group in 2.1), but not of adult students in general. The research participants in this study represent a group for whom access to the middle-class norm of the LLL narrative is not a self-evident construction. To conclude, I would like to put forward the argument stated by Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson (1996, p. 163), who do "not wish to draw such a sharp distinction between the local and the general" as "every delineation of the particular should be informed by an understanding of more general forms and processes". They continue that generalizing should remain firmly grounded in the empirical details of the local, which then serves as the basis for the development of "theoretical ideas about social processes and cultural forms that have relevance beyond those data themselves".

# 8

## Discussion

In this study lifelong learning has been defined as a cultural narrative on education, “a system of political thinking” (Billig et al., 1988, p. 27) that is not internally consistent, but has contradictory themes embedded within it (pp. 30–32). As earlier research has shown and this study also confirms, the LLL narrative creates differences between those who are included and those who fall behind and are excluded from the learning society ideal. In/exclusion in/from the LLL narrative is, then, embedded within the ideology itself. By seeing lifelong learning as a cultural narrative on education I have wanted to emphasize that it is by no means the only cultural narrative, even though it is currently the most influential in developed Western societies, and has also influenced the construction of meanings on studying and learning in the narrative life histories of the general upper secondary school adult graduates in this study. It is a ‘new’ narrative as opposed to the traditional constructions of educability that are contradictory to the all-inclusive interpretation of educability of lifelong learning. Although competitive and contentious both narratives of educability are, however, part of the local school culture (see the discussion in part 2.2), and, thus, act as resources in telling about oneself as a student and learner.

As I have argued, there is a social demand for a competent educable subject, the “desired self” to be created (see the discussion in 5.4.3). The ‘new’ and ‘old’ narratives on learning and education affecting the con-



struction of this educable subject have also been embodied in my position as a teacher and a researcher and in the position of student and research participant. The relations of teacher-student, researcher-research participant are hierarchical power relations, where both participants have presuppositions of expected behaviour. The teacher-researcher asks questions and the student-research participant answers them. The authorized teacher-researcher also represents the institutional values of education and science. Both the teacher and the researcher are in the position of “knowing better” as opposed to “*the other* knowledge” of the student-research participant (see Hakala, 2007; emphasis in the original). The desired competent educable subject has then been co-constructed under these presuppositions. Thereafter, the ‘new’ and ‘old’ narratives on learning and education have not just been ‘out there’, but part of local school culture and strongly present in the interview situation influencing the ‘desirable’ ways of talking about learning and education. The social demand to be a “good” student and a lifelong learning educable subject – the ‘will to learn’ –attitude towards learning and education (cf. Simons & Masschelein, 2008) – has been so strong because of that.

The grand narrative of lifelong learning has been adopted with astonishing political consensus both politically, socially as well as individually in the developed Western societies, including Finland, where education has traditionally been highly valued. The LLL narrative is persuasive in its emphasis on equal learning opportunities for all: everyone is capable of learning throughout life in different learning contexts. This is especially tempting for the adult learners in this study for whom education has not been available in youth and/or straight after comprehensive school, be it for economic, social or other reasons. While for many of them the traditional constructions of educability have formed a restriction to going to school and getting an education while young, the LLL narrative has been welcomed as the naturalized and individualized “second chance” to get education in adulthood. The lifelong learning rhetoric promotes everyone’s advantage, having an inclusive society achieved through learning and education as its ulti-

mate goal (e.g. Edwards et al., 2001; Fejes, 2006). Drawing on Foucault’s conception of governmentality, Mark Olssen (2006, pp. 213–214) argues that lifelong learning is identifiable as “a specifically neoliberal form of state of reason” that serves “dominant economic interests”, linking “learning to both politics and economics in developed Western societies”. He gives the EU as an example of “specific governmental significance” as it “has declared lifelong learning as a central educational project in its quest to integrate 25 populations into a new European identity” (ibid, p. 216).

However, based on this study, instead of “promoting everyone’s advantage” (cf. above) the LLL narrative is primarily aimed at those individuals who are currently in working life. And not all of them but those who are both educable and employable subjects, those described as part of the flexible workforce readily adaptable to changing circumstances of the new economy, being readily employable in new jobs and, consequently, promoting economic competitiveness. This is in line with the shift noticed by Brine (2006; see the discussion in 3.2) from employment to employability in European Commission documents on lifelong learning and knowledge economy from 1993 to 2005: “the *ability to become* employed” having become more important than “the state of employment itself” (p. 652; emphasis in the original). According to Olssen (2006, p. 221) “The key strategy, of which lifelong learning is a component, is that of ‘workforce versatility’, which enables high levels of job mobility, premised on a high level of general and technical training and a ready ability to add new skills in order to make change possible”. Workforce versatility, job mobility and change are also reconstructed in the so-called “performance-oriented” stories that are closer to the principles of lifelong learning in this study, whereas the stories on “flexible learning” in which the principles of lifelong learning are not seen as very meaningful are not constructed as being motivated by economic interests.

Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein (2008, p. 53) argue that learners “are no longer part of the social regime of government in the welfare state” instead they see “‘inclusion’, ‘capital’ and ‘learning’” to be the

“strategic components” today. This in turn demands an entrepreneurial attitude towards life, and thereafter, learning to produce human capital. Drawing on Nikolas Rose (1999, p. 162), they conclude that “the responsibility of the entrepreneurial self” is “to mobilize its human capital” and “to capitalize one’s life in such a way that it has economic value” (p. 55). “Learning as a well thought-out investment and as a responsible capitalization and mobilization of life is the main prerequisite for the ongoing business of life. In short, this business ethics is a kind of *adaptation* ethics based upon the following maxim: do what you want but take care that your human capital is adapted” (Simons & Masschelein, 2008, p. 55; emphasis in the original). Those educable subjects who do not employ or mobilize the knowledge gained in the ongoing process of learning do not add human capital in terms of economic value. Thereafter, they do not add value to the new economy as do educable and employable subjects.

In order to be able to compete in the new economy the educable and employable subject needs qualities that assure her/his success in the competition for more prestigious jobs and higher social positions. Citing the European Commission (1995, p. 2), Simons and Masschelein (2008, p. 53) posit that “the individual’s place in relation to fellow citizens will increasingly be determined by the capacity to learn”. The skills and knowledge needed by the flexible, adaptable, multi-skilled lifelong learning educable and employable subject are, however, not achieved through flexible learning in non-formal, informal, and formal learning contexts, i.e. through lifewide learning, as emphasized in the LLL narrative, but through the documentation of one’s ability and competence, in practice, i.e. principally through formal learning. Drawing on Lambeir (2005, p. 351), Olssen (2006, p. 222) argues that “Education has become merely a tool in the fetishisation of certificates”. The demand for the visibility of one’s merits renders flexibilization of learning opportunities through non-formal and informal learning meaningless unless audited, documented, and certified. Thereafter, the significant shift constructed by Edwards (1997 in Edwards, 2002, p. 359; see the discussion in 3.3; see also Fejes, 2006 in 3.4) from ‘stu-

dents' who "belong within an institution" where they have "a clear location, role and identity" to 'learners' who are "deterritorialized, individualized and flexible consumers of learning opportunities" becomes contested on the basis of this study. Formal learning 'within an institution' is still the only worthwhile choice for the lifelong learning educable and employable subject. S/he is not free to make her/his own choices independent of educational institutions.

Furthermore, the argument put forward by Alheit and Dausien (2002b, p. 221; see the discussion in 3.1) of "new and flexible structures of competence" that they see as a necessary consequence of "individualisation" and "reflexive modernisation" is not supported by this study. On the contrary, the traditional constructions of educability continue to determine the ability and competence of a student and learner based on the assessment criteria maintained by schools and other educational institutions. Despite the LLL narrative, subjects are still "divided into categories of people able to study and not able to study by birth (heritage)" (Fejes, 2006, p. 702; see the discussion in 3.4). Age- and gender-related constructions continue to outweigh the equal learning opportunities for all. Social class continues to predict the quality and level of education to be had as well as the future social position and resources available through it. As a consequence, I argue that as long as the traditional constructions of educability are firmly in place, it is not possible for 'new' ideas to be implemented in any serious manner. Albeit that for some ideas that is not all that regrettable.

The grand narrative of lifelong learning links education and learning to the values adopted in developed Western societies: economic growth and competitiveness, and change instead of stability. However, since the European Enlightenment in the 17<sup>th</sup> century "reform", "development", and "progress" (Popkewitz, 1991, p. 32; see also the discussion in 5.4.3) have been seen as essential qualities for survival both socially and individually. What is new, however, is the lifelong learning strategy as a form of "neo-liberal rationality of government" (Fejes, 2006; Olssen, 2006) that links education and learning primarily to economic motives and not to social and individual progress in order to augment security

and well-being in society. Individual development is harnessed to service economic ends. Governmentality is “*individualising* and *totalising*” as it shapes both individuals and populations (Olssen, 2006, p. 215; emphasis in the original). This also affects those students and learners who are not included in the learning society ideal as they are not seen as contributing to economic growth in society. In a lifelong learning society everyone is responsible for developing oneself, maximizing one’s ability and competence, and one’s (innate) potential as a learner.

Instead of abolishing the inequalities related to education and learning, the social differences of educability embedded within the LLL narrative work in the opposite direction. The social differences of educability are hidden under the LLL rhetoric of “equal learning opportunities for all”. The differences created by the traditional constructions of educability continue to have a strong hold and, additionally, there is a new layer of inequalities created by the LLL narrative: those who are included and those who are excluded from the learning society ideal. Either you are in or you are out. You succeed or you fail. Responsibility is laid on the individual for both success and failure: “What s/he becomes depends solely on her/himself and the choices s/he makes” (Olssen, 2006, p. 223). I argue that the black and white picture of the world painted by the LLL narrative is more totalising than the ‘old’ narrative of traditional constructions of educability. The category “mediocre” has been abolished, what is left is the “bright” and the “poor” – the good and the bad. Lifelong learning is the grand narrative of our times in which not learning and not participating leads to paradise lost (see Popkewitz, 2003). The LLL narrative conditions the construction of the competent educable subject in current educational policy.

According to Olssen (2006, p. 225) “In one important sense, we are all, or should be all, inhabitants of a future learning society. The key question becomes for what purposes are learning to be readily available, what ends should it serve?” He argues for a model of learning “as social and political engagement in a global community” (p. 226), a form of democratic participation. In order to promote this development he suggests such themes for future research as “the concern with equality”;

“the role of the state” in guaranteeing access to education and knowledge, information and skills as a fundamental right; “the development of civil society”, i.e. “everyday lives and activities of communities of interest”; and “the role of education” “for learning for democracy” (p. 227–228). In line with Olssen’s suggestion this study can be seen as having contributed to issues of equality in promoting a more democratic future learning society. The social differences of educability constructed in this study make visible the inequalities related to social class, gender, age, and “the new category of student and learner”. To my mind, these are the locations where social justice and development should first be set forward for the future democratic learning society to flourish. The general upper secondary school for adults as an institution that encourages those for whom general upper secondary school education has not been readily available in youth and/or straight after comprehensive school can also be seen as a worthwhile model for the future development of democratic learning opportunities. It can be seen to work to the advantage of flexibilization of learning opportunities in relation to social class, gender, age, and “the new category of student and learner”. Furthermore, I would also like to argue for the possibility of *not* learning and *not* participating all life long and wide in any normatively prescribed way, “as a fundamental force that is necessary for our freedom and for collective well-being” (Simons & Masschelein, 2008, p. 57), as part of the democratic rights of the future educable subject of the democratic learning society.

*About studying in general (...), I used to think that not all people in the world need to study (...) and I still think that (...) but it's never too late to start (Helena, aged 29).*

## References

- Aaltonen, T. (2005). Afaattisen puhujan haastattelu [Interviewing an aphasic speaker]. In J. Ruusuvaori & L. Tiittula (Eds.), *Haastattelu, tutkimus, tilanteet ja vuorovaikutus* [Interview: Research, encounters, and interaction] (pp. 163–188). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Aapola, S. (1999a). Ikä, koulu ja sukupuoli: Peruskoulun kulttuuriset ikäjärjestykset [Age, school and gender: The cultural age norms in comprehensive school]. In T. Tolonen (Ed.), *Suomalainen koulu ja kulttuuri* [Finnish school and culture] (pp. 231–246). Tampere: Osuuskunta Vastapaino.
- Aapola, S. (1999b). *Murrosikä ja sukupuoli: Julkiset ja yksityiset ikämäärittelyt* [Puberty and gender: Public and private constructions of age]. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Tutkimuksia 763. Nuorisotutkimusverkosto Nuorisotutkimusseura Julkaisuja 9/99. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Aapola, S. (2002). Exploring dimensions of age in young people's lives: A discourse analytical approach. *Time & Society*, 11(2/3), 295–314.
- Alasuutari, P. (1999). *Laadullinen tutkimus* [Qualitative research] (3<sup>rd</sup> Rev. Ed.). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Alheit, P. (1995). Biographical learning: Theoretical outline, challenges and contradictions of a new approach in adult education. In P. Alheit, A. Bron-Wojciechowska, E. Brugger & P. Domincé (Eds.), *The biographical approach in European adult education* (pp. 57–74). Wien: Verband Wiener Volksbildung.
- Alheit, P., & Dausien, B. (2002a). "The double face" of lifelong learning: Two analytical perspectives on a "silent revolution". *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 34(1), 3–20. Retrieved April 12, 2005, from <http://weblinks2.epnet.com>
- Alheit, P., & Dausien, B. (2002b). Lifelong learning and 'biographicity': Two theoretical views on current educational changes. In A. Bron & M. Schemmann (Eds.), *Social science theories in adult education research* (pp. 211–241). Münster: LIT Verlag.
- Andersson, P. (2008). Recognition of prior learning as a technique of governing. In A. Fejes & K. Nicoll (Eds.), *Foucault and lifelong learning: Governing the subject* (pp. 126–137). London: Routledge.
- Anthias, F. (2005). Social stratification and social inequality: Models of intersectionality

- and identity. In F. Devine, M. Savage, J. Scott & R. Crompton (Eds.), *rethinking class. culture, identities & lifestyles* (pp. 24–45). Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Antikainen, A. (1996). Merkittävät oppimiskokemukset ja valtautuminen [Significant learning experiences and empowerment]. In A. Antikainen & H. Huotelin (Eds.), *Oppiminen ja Elämänhistoria* [Learning and life-histories] (pp. 251–295). Aikuiskasvatuksen 37. vuosikirja. Kansanvalistusseura ja Aikuiskasvatuksen tutkimusseura. Helsinki: BTJ Kirjastopalvelu.
- Antikainen, A. (1998). *Kasvatus, elämäntulkku ja yhteiskunta* [Education, life course and society]. Porvoo: WSOY.
- Antikainen, A., & Huotelin, H. (Eds.). (1996). *Oppiminen ja elämänhistoria* [Learning and life-histories]. Aikuiskasvatuksen 37. vuosikirja. Kansanvalistusseura ja Aikuiskasvatuksen tutkimusseura. Helsinki: BTJ Kirjastopalvelu.
- Antikainen, A., & Komonen, K. (2004). Elämäntulkku ja elämäntulkku kasvatuksen ja aikuiskasvatuksen sosiologiassa [Biography and life course in the sociology of education and adult education]. In P. Sallila (Ed.), *Elämänlaajuinen oppiminen ja aikuiskasvatus* [Lifewide learning and adult education] (pp. 84–121). Aikuiskasvatuksen 44. vuosikirja. Vantaa: Kansanvalistusseura ja Aikuiskasvatuksen Tutkimusseura.
- Arnesen, A.-L., Lahelma, E., & Öhrn, E. (2008). Travelling discourses on gender and education: The case of boys’ underachievement. *Nordisk Pedagogik*, 28(1), 1–14.
- Atkinson, R. (1998). *The life story interview*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ball, S. (2007, March). Lifelong learning as an investment: What’s in it for me – erasing the authentic learner. Unpublished keynote address to the Nordic Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Turku, Finland.
- Bernart, Y., & Krapp, S. (1997). *Das Narrative Interview: Ein Leitfaden zur rekonstruktiven Auswertung* [The narrative interview: An introduction to reassessment]. Landau: Verlag Empirische Pädagogik.
- Bernstein, B. (1996). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Billig, M., Condor, S., Edwards, D., Gane, M., Middleton, D., & Radley, A. (1988). *Ideological dilemmas: A social psychology of everyday thinking*. London: Sage.
- Blomqvist, I., Koskinen, R., Niemi H., & Simpanen, M. (1997). *Aikuiskoulutustutkimus 1995: Aikuisopiskelu Suomessa* [Adult education research 1995: Adult education in Finland]. Tilastokeskus, Koulutus 1997/4. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Acts of resistance*. Bristol: Polity Press.
- Brine, J. (2006). Lifelong learning and the knowledge economy: Those that know and those that do not—the discourse of the European Union. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(5), 649–665.
- Brockmeier, J. (2001). From the end to the beginning: Retrospective teleology in autobiography. In J. Brockmeier & D. Carbaugh (Eds.), *Narrative and identity: Studies in autobiography, self and culture* (pp. 247–282). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1987). Life as narrative. *Social Research*, 54(1), 11–32.
- Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Carrier, J. G. (1983). Masking the social in educational knowledge: The case of learning disability theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, 88(5), 948–974.



- Chase, S. E. (2005). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 651–679) (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). London: Sage.
- Coffey, A. (1999). *The ethnographic self: Fieldwork and the representation of identity*. London: Sage.
- Coffey, A. (2005). ”Toisen” kohtaaminen ja vieraan monimerkityksellisyys [Encountering the “other” and the multiple meanings of strange]. In R. Mietola, E. Lahelma, S. Lappalainen & T. Palmu (Eds.), *Kohtaamisia kasvatuksen ja koulutuksen kentillä: erontekojä ja yhdessä tekemistä* [Encounters in the field of education: Differences and co-operation] (pp. 213–223). Research in Educational Sciences 22. Helsinki: Finnish Educational Research Association.
- Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Commission of the European Communities. (1993). White Paper: *Growth, competitiveness, employment: The challenges and ways forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Commission of the European Communities. (2000). *A memorandum on lifelong learning*. Lisbon.
- Conrad, P. (1975). The discovery of hyperkinesis: Notes on the medicalization of deviant behavior. *Social Problems*, 23, 12–21.
- Conrad, P. (1976). *Identifying hyperactive children: The medicalization of deviant behavior*. Lexington, Mass: D. C. Heath.
- Conrad, P. (1992). Medicalization and social control. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18, 209–232.
- Cornford, I. R. (2002). Learning-to-learn strategies as a basis for effective lifelong learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 21(4), 357–368.
- Crowther, J. (2004). ‘In and against’ lifelong learning: Flexibility and the corrosion of character. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 23(2), 125–136.
- Dehnbostel, P. (2002). Modelle arbeitsbezogenen Lernens und Ansätze zur Integration formellen und informellen Lernens [Work-based learning models and ideas for integrating formal and informal learning]. In M. Rohs (Ed.), *Arbeitsprozessintegriertes Lernen: Neue Ansätze in der beruflichen Bildung* [Work-based learning: New ideas for vocational education] (pp. 37–58). Münster: Waxmann.
- Dohmen, G. (1998). Another approach to get more adults into continuous learning. In P. Alheit & E. Kammler (Eds.), *Lifelong learning and its impact on social and regional development* (pp. 223–230). Bremen: Donat Verlag.
- Dweck, C. S. (1999). *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development*. Essays in social psychology. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.
- Dweck, C., & Repucci, C. (1973). Learned helplessness and reinforcement responsibility in children. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 25, 109–116.
- Edwards, R. (1997). *Changing places? Flexibility, lifelong learning and a learning society*. London: Routledge.
- Edwards, R. (2002). Mobilizing lifelong learning: governmentality in educational practices. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 17(3), 353–365.
- Edwards, R., Armstrong, P., & Miller, N. (2001). Include me out: Critical readings of social

- exclusion, social inclusion and lifelong learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20(5), 417–428.
- Edwards, R., Ranson, S., & Strain, M. (2002). Reflexivity: Towards a theory of lifelong learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 21(6), 525–536.
- Elqvist-Saltzman, I. (1991). Educational reforms – women’s life patterns: A Swedish case study. In G. P. Kelly & S. Slaughter (Eds.), *Women’s higher education in comparative perspective* (pp. 103–116). Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Erchak, G. M., & Rosenfeld, R. (1989). Learning disabilities, dyslexia, and the medicalization of the classroom. In J. Best (Ed.), *Images of issues: Typifying contemporary social problems* (pp. 79–97). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Ernest, P. (1998). Introduction: Changing views of ‘the gender problem’ in mathematics. In V. Walkerdine, *Counting girls out: Girls and mathematics* (pp. 1–14). London: Falmer Press.
- European Commission. (1995). *Teaching and learning: Towards the learning society*. Brussels: European Commission.
- European Commission. (2000). *Komission yksiköiden valmisteluasiakirja. Elinikäinen oppiminen* [Lifelong learning]. Brussels: European Commission, SEK (2000) 1832.
- Evening Schools Association (IKLO). (2003). *Iltakoulut ja aikuislukiot – Vuxengymnasierna* [Evening schools and general upper secondary schools]. Turku: Litovalo.
- Evening Schools Association (IKLO). (2007). Retrieved from <http://www.aikuislukiot.fi/>
- Fejes, A. (2005). New wine in old skins: Changing patterns in the governing of the adult learner in Sweden. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 24(1), 71–86.
- Fejes, A. (2006). The planetspeak discourse of lifelong learning in Sweden: What is an educable adult? *Journal of Educational Policy*, 21(6), 697–716.
- Field, J. (2000). *Lifelong learning and the new educational order*. Stoke on Trent, England: Trentham Books.
- Field, J. (2001). Lifelong education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20(½), 3–15.
- Field, J. (2006). *Lifelong learning and the new educational order* (2nd Rev. Ed.). Stoke on Trent, England: Trentham Books.
- Filander, K. (2007). Deconstructing dominant discourses on vocational education. In R. Rinne, A. Heikkinen & P. Salo (Eds.), *Adult education – liberty, fraternity, equality? Nordic views on lifelong learning* (pp. 261–274). Research in Educational Sciences 28. Helsinki: Finnish Educational Research Association.
- Finch, L. (1993). *The classing gaze: Sexuality, class and surveillance*. St Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Finnish National Board of Education. (2004). *Aikuisten perusopetuksen ja lukiokoulutuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2004* [National core curriculum for adult basic and upper secondary education]. The Finnish National Board of Education (4.11.2004). Retrieved from <http://www.oph.fi/aikuisops/aikuisperusteet.pdf>
- Finnish National Board of Education. (n.d.a). Retrieved February 5, 2008, from <http://www.oph.fi/english/page.asp?path=447,4699,4834>
- Finnish National Board of Education. (n.d.b). Retrieved October 3, 2007, from <http://www.oph.fi/ops/perusopetus/lisaopetus.doc>
- Foucault, M. (1980). *The history of sexuality: Vol. 1*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Fraser, N., & Gordon, L. (1994). A genealogy of dependency: Tracing a keyword of the

- U.S. welfare state. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 19(2), 309–336.
- Gergen, K. (1991). *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. New York: BasicBooks.
- Goodson, I. F. (Ed.). (1992). *Studying teachers' lives*. London: Routledge.
- Goodson, I. F. (1995). The story so far: Personal knowledge and the political. In J. A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative* (pp. 89–98). London: The Falmer Press.
- Gordon, T., & Lahelma, E. (2003). From ethnography to life history: Tracing transitions of school students. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6(23), 245–254.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1995). Biographical work and new ethnography. In R. Josselson & A. Lieblich (Eds.), *The narrative study of lives: Vol. 3* (pp. 45–58). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2002). From the individual interview to the interview society. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context & method* (pp. 3–32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hakala, K. (2007). *Paremmen tietäjän paikka ja toisin tietämisen tila: Opettajuus (ja tutkijuuks) pedagogisena subteena* [The position of knowing better and the space for knowing otherwise: Pedagogical mode of address in teaching (and in research)]. Kasvatustieteen laitoksen tutkimuksia 212. Helsinki University Press.
- Hakama, K. (1939). Matemaattinen lahjattomuus [Lack of talent in mathematics]. *Kasvatustieteellinen Aikakausikirja* 76, 261–277.
- Halleck, S. L. (1971). *The politics of therapy*. New York: Science House.
- Hallikainen, P., Larjontie, T., Mäkelä, A., Paakkunainen, R., Salomaa, M., & Vepsä, H. (Eds.). (2002). *Iltaoppikoulusta aikuislukioksi: 75 vuotta kulttuuriryötyä 1927–2002* [The historical review of general upper secondary school for adults in Finland: 75 years of cultural work 1927–2002]. Loviisa: Iltaopoulujen liitto.
- Hänninen, V. (2000). *Sisäinen tarina, elämä ja muutos* [Inner narrative, life, and change]. Tampere: University of Tampere.
- Haraway, D. (1997). *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium: FemaleMan©\_Meets\_OncoMouse[TM]: Feminism and technoscience*. New York: Routledge.
- Hatch, J. A., & Wisniewski, R. (1995). Life history and narrative: Questions, issues, and exemplary works. In J. A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative* (pp. 113–135). London: The Falmer Press.
- Hautamäki, J., Arinen, P., Hautamäki, A., Kupiainen, S., Lindblom, B., Niemivirta, M., & Scheinin, P. (2000). *Oppimaan oppiminen yläasteella* [Learning to learn in the upper primary school]. Helsinki: Board of Education.
- Häyrynen, Y.-P., & Hautamäki, J. (1973). *Ihmisen koulutettavuus ja koulutuspolitiikka* [Educability and educational policy]. Helsinki: Weilin+Göös.
- Heikkinen, L. T. (2002). Whatever is narrative research? In R. Huttunen, L. T. Heikkinen & L. Syrjälä (Eds.), *Narrative research: Voices of teachers and philosophers* (pp. 13–28). Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.
- Helkama, K., Myllyniemi, R., & Liebkind, K. (2001). *Johdatus sosiaalipsykologiaan* [Introduction to social psychology]. Helsinki: Edita.
- Herman, D. (2002). *Story logic: Problems and possibilities of narrative*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

- Hervonen, A. (1994). Muisti, oppimiskyky ja vanheneminen [Memory, ability to learn and aging]. In A. Kajanto & J. Tuomisto (Eds.), *Elinikäinen oppiminen* [Lifelong learning] (pp. 193–217). Vapaa sivistystyön 35. vuosikirja. Helsinki: Kansanvalitusseura ja Aikuiskasvatuksen Tutkimusseura.
- Hirsjärvi, S., & Hurme, H. (2000). *Tutkimushaastattelu: Teemahaastattelun teoria ja käytäntö* [Research interview: Theory and practice of thematic interviewing]. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.
- Holmes, J. (1997). Struggling beyond Labov and Waletzky. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7(1–4), 91–96.
- Hovi, T. (1997). Kääntymyskertomukset haastatteluissa: Muotoutuvia muistikuvia ja neuvoteltuja merkityksiä [Conversion accounts in interviews: Reminiscences taking shape and negotiated meanings]. In K. Eskola & E. Peltonen (Eds.), *Aina uusi muisto: Kirjoituksia menneen elämästä meissä* [Ever new memories: Writings about the past that lives in us] (pp. 318–340). Nykykulttuurin tutkimusyksikön julkaisuja 54. University of Jyväskylä.
- Hudson, J., Gebelt, J., Haviland, J., & Bentivegna, C. (1992). Emotion and narrative structure in young children’s personal accounts. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 2(2), 129–150.
- Hyvärinen, M. (1994). *Viimeiset taistot* [The final battle]. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Hyvärinen, M. (2004a). Eletty ja kerrottu kertomus [Lived and told story]. *Sociologia*, 41(4), 297–309.
- Hyvärinen, M. (2004b) Narratologia ja kerronnallinen käänne [Narratology and the narrative turn]. *Kirjallisuudentutkimuksen Aikakauslehti AVAIN*, 1(1), 53–59.
- Hyvärinen, M., & Löyttyniemi, V. (2005). Kerronnallinen haastattelu [Narrative interview]. In J. Ruusuvuori & L. Tiittula (Eds.), *Haastattelu, tutkimus, tilanteet ja vuorovaikutus* [Interview, research, encounters, and interaction] (pp. 189–222). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Ikonen, H.-M., & Ojala, H. (2005). Yhteisyyden luomista ja eron kokemuksia – haastattelu, konteksti ja feministinen tietäminen [Creating communality and experiences of difference – interview, context and feminist knowing]. *Naistutkimus–Kvinnoforskning*, 1, 17–29.
- Jääskeläinen, L. (2007, October 27). Aikuisten yleissivistävän opetuksen kehittämishodotukset yksissä kansissa [Suggestions for developing general education for adults in one book]. *Opinsauna* [Special Issue], p. 6.
- Järvinen, H. (1996). *Jatkuvan koulutuksen ideologia: Yhteiskunta- ja diskursianalyysin kautta tulkintaan* [The ideology of continuing education: Discourse analytical interpretation]. University of Tampere Department of Education Series A/57. Tampere: University of Tampere.
- Jauhiainen, A., & Alho-Malmelin, M. (2004). Education as a religion in the learning society. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 23( 5), 459–474.
- Jokinen, J. (2002). *Aikuisopettajan identiteetti* [The identity of a teacher for adults]. Acta Universitatis Tamperensis 898. Tampere: Tampere University Press.
- Jones, E. E. (1989). The framing of competence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 15, 477–92.
- Jones, E. E., & Davis, K. E. (1965). A theory of correspondent inferences: From acts to dispositions. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology: Vol.2* (pp.

- 219–266). New York: Academic Press.
- Kaarainen, M. (1995). *Nykyajan tytöt: Koulutus, luokka ja sukupuoli 1920- ja 1930- luvun Suomessa* [Modern girls: Education, social class, and gender in Finland in the 1920s and 1930s]. Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura.
- Kallioniemi, A. (2000). *Aikuiskoulun opiskelijoiden uskomukset uskonnon- ja historianopetuksesta* [Adult senior school students' beliefs concerning religious and history education]. Helsingin yliopiston opettajankoulutuslaitoksen tutkimuksia 210. University of Helsinki.
- Kasanen, K. (2003). *Lasten kykykäsitteet koulussa* [School children's notions of ability]. University of Joensuu Publications in Social Sciences 58. Joensuu University Press.
- Kauppara, J. (1996). Koulutus elämänsä rakentajana [Education in the lifecourse of three generations]. In A. Antikainen & H. Huotelin (Eds.), *Oppiminen ja elämänsä historia* [Learning and life-histories] (pp. 45–108). Aikuiskasvatuksen 37. vuosikirja. Kansanvalitusseura ja Aikuiskasvatuksen Tutkimusseura. Helsinki: BTJ Kirjastopalvelu.
- Kauppara, J. (2002). *Sukupolvet, koulutus ja oppiminen: tulkintoja koulutuksen merkityksestä elämänsä rakentajana* [Generations, education and learning: Interpretations of the meaning of education in the construction of the life course]. University of Joensuu Publications in Education 78. Joensuu University Press.
- Käyhkö, M. (2006). *Siivojaksi oppimassa: Etnografinen tutkimus työläistyöstä puhdistuspalvelualan koulutuksessa* [Learning to become a cleaner: Ethnographic study of working-class girls in cleaning services education]. Joensuu University Press.
- Käyhkö, M. (2008). Kädenjälki näkyviin – koulunpenkkiä väistelevät nuoret työläisnaiset [Showing off the work made by hand – young working class women avoiding school]. In T. Tolonen (Ed.), *Yhteiskunta ja sukupuoli* [Society and gender] (pp. 255–273). Nuorisotutkimusverkosto/Nuorisotutkimusseura julkaisuja 83. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Käyhkö, M., & Tuupainen, P. (1996). Työläisperheestä opintielle – reproduktion ilmeneminen nuorten arkielämässä [Starting the educational path from a working class family – reproduction in young people's everyday lives]. In A. Antikainen & H. Huotelin (Eds.), *Oppiminen ja elämänsä historia* [Learning and life-histories] (109–158). Aikuiskasvatuksen 37. vuosikirja. Kansanvalitusseura ja Aikuiskasvatuksen Tutkimusseura. Helsinki: BTJ Kirjastopalvelu.
- Keskitalo-Foley, S. (2004). *Kohti kuulumisen maisemia: Toimijuuden tilat ja paikat lappilaisen maaseudun naisten elämänsäroissa* [Towards landscapes of belonging and of voice: The spaces and places of actorship in the biographies of women living in rural Lapland]. Acta Universitatis Lapponiensis 78. Rovaniemi: University of Lapland.
- Kirchhöfer, D. (2003). Informelles Lernen – Legitimation für De-Institutionalisierung? [Informal learning – legitimacy to deinstitutionalize?] In D. Hoffmann & K. Neumann (Eds.) *Ökonomisierung der Wissenschaft: Forschen, Lehren und Lernen nach den Regeln des Marktes* [Economizing research: Research, teaching, and learning by the rules of the market] (pp. 213–232). Weinheim: Beltz.
- Komulainen, K. (1998). *Kotihiiiriä ja ihmisiä: Retorinen minä naisten koulutusta koskevissa elämänsäroissa* [A course of one's own: The rhetorical self in educational life stories by women]. University of Joensuu Publications in Social Sciences, 35. Joensuu University Press.
- Komulainen, K., Rätty, H., & Korhonen, M. (2008). Elämä ei ole mitään ilman riskin ottamista? Nuorten kuvittelemat eriarvoiset yrittäjämienät [Life is nothing without risk?

- Entrepreneurial selves of different value imagined by young people]. In T. Tolonen (Ed.), *Yhteiskunta ja sukupuoli* [Society and gender] (pp. 175–197). Nuorisotutkimusverkosto/ Nuorisotutkimusseura julkaisuja 83. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Korvajärvi, P. (1999). Ikäyrjännän kokemukset ja käytännöt työelämässä [Experiences and practices of ageism in working life]. In I. Kangas & P. Nikander (Eds.), *Naiset ja ikään-tyminen* [Women and aging] (pp. 85–105). Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Koski, L. (2004). Yksilöllisyyden moraalisuus koulutuspolitiikassa [The morality of individualism in educational policy]. *Kasvatus – The Finnish Journal of Education*, 35(1), 79–90.
- Koski, L., & Moore, E. (2001). Näkökulmia aikuisuuteen ja aikuiskasvatukseen [Perspectives on adulthood and adult education]. *Aikuiskasvatus*, 21(1), 4–13.
- Koski, L., & Nummenmaa, A. R. (1995). Kilpailu kouludiskurssissa [Competition in the school discourse]. *Kasvatus – The Finnish Journal of Education*, 26(4), 340–348.
- Kumpulainen, T. (Ed.). (2007). *Aikuiskoulutuksen vuosikirja: Tilastotietoja aikuisten opiskelusta 2005* [Adult education yearbook: Statistics on adult education 2005]. Opetusministeriön julkaisuja 2007:26. Ministry of Education.
- Kuula, A. (2006). *Tutkimusetiikka: Ainesten hankinta, käyttö ja säilytys* [Research ethics: Generating, using, and storing data]. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Kuusinen, J. (1986). Koulumenestys, lahjakkuus ja sosiaalinen tausta [School achievement, talent and social background]. *Kasvatus – The Finnish Journal of Education*, 3(17), 191–196.
- Kuusinen, J. (1992). Hyvät, huonot ja keskinertaiset: virkaanastujaisesityelmä Jyväskylän yliopistossa 6.11.1991 [The good, the bad and the average: An inauguration speech at the University of Jyväskylä, 6th November, 1991]. *Kasvatus – The Finnish Journal of Education*, 23(1), 47–56.
- Kvale, S. (1995). The social construction of validity. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1(1), 19–40.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city: Studies in the black English vernacular*. Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Labov, W. (1982). Speech actions and reactions in personal narrative. In D. Tannen (Ed.), *Analyzing discourse: Text and talk* (pp. 219–247). Washington D.C.: Georgetown Univ. Press.
- Labov, W. (1997). Some further steps in narrative analysis. *The Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, 1–16. Retrieved September 17, 2004, from <http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~wlabov/sfs.html>
- Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1997). Oral versions of personal experience: Three decades of narrative analysis. *The Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, 3–38. Retrieved May 14, 2004, from <http://www.clarku.edu/~mbamberg/LabovWaletzky.htm>
- Lahelma, E. (2003). Koulutusteiden risteysasemilla: pysyvyyksiä ja muutoksia nuorten suunnitelmissa [At the crossroads of educational paths: Stability and change in young people’s plans]. *Kasvatus – The Finnish Journal of Education*, 34(3), 230–242.
- Lahelma, E. (2004). Tytöt, pojat ja koulukeskustelu: miten koulutuspoliittiset ongelmat rakentuvat? [Girls, boys and the school discourse: How are educational policy problems constructed?] In E. Vitikka (Ed.), *Koulu – Sukupuoli – Oppimistulokset* [School – Gender – Learning Outcomes] (pp. 54–67). Opetushallitus, Moniste 8/2004.

- Lahelma, E. (2005). School grades and other resources: The “failing boys” discourse revisited. *Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(2), 78–89.
- Lambeir, B. (2005). Education as liberation: The politics and techniques of lifelong learning. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 37, 349–356.
- Lawler, S. (2000). *Mothering the self: Mothers, daughters, subjects*. London: Routledge.
- Lindblad, S., & Popkewitz, T. S. (2003). Comparative ethnography: Fabricating the new millennium and its exclusions. In D. Beach, T. Gordon & E. Lahelma (Eds.), *Democratic education: Ethnographic challenges* (pp. 10–23). London: Tufnell Press.
- Linde, C. (1993). *Life stories: The creation of coherence*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Martin, I. (2003). Adult education, lifelong learning and citizenship: Some ifs and buts. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 22(6), 566–579.
- Matriculation Examination Board. (n.d.) Retrieved October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008, from <www.ylioppilastutkinto.fi>
- McGuire, M. (1981). *Religion: The social context*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Miettinen, S. (2006). *Eron aika: Tyttäreiden kertomuksia ikääntyneen vanhemman kuolemasta* [Time for separation: Daughters' stories on the decease of an aging parent]. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.
- Miller, J. G. (1984). Culture and the development of everyday social explanation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46, 961–978.
- Ministry of Education. (1992). *Aikuislukiotyöryhmän muistio 1992* [The memorandum on general upper secondary school adult education 1992]. Opetusministeriön työryhmien muistioita 1992:3.
- Ministry of Education. (1997). *Oppimisen ilo: Kansallinen elinikäisen oppimisen strategia* [The joy of learning: The national strategy for lifelong learning] (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Komiteanmietintö 1997:14. Helsinki: Opetusministeriö.
- Ministry of Education. (1998). *Vuxenutbildning och livslångt lärande: Situationen inför och under första året med Kunskapslyftet* [Adult Education and lifelong learning: The situation before and during the first year of the adult education initiative]. SOU (1998:51) Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet.
- Ministry of Education. (2002). *Parlamentaarisen aikuiskoulutustyöryhmän mietintö* [Report of the parliamentary adult education and training committee]. Ministry of Education committee reports 3:2002.
- Ministry of Education. (2006). *Aikuisten perusopetuksen ja lukiokoulutuksen kehittämissuunnitelma vuodelle 2007–2012* [Report of the committee devising a development programme for upper secondary adult education]. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2006:33. Retrieved February 20, 2007, from <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Julkaisut/2006/>
- Ministry of Education. (n.d.). Noste-ohjelma [Noste-Programme]. Retrieved October 14, 2005, from <http://noste-ohjelma.fi/noste.htm>
- Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Mishler, E. G. (1990). Validation in inquiry-guided research: The role of exemplars in narrative studies. *Harvard Educational Review*, 60(4), 415–442.
- Moore, E. (2003). *Pitkä opintie. Aikuisiällä suoritettu yliopistotutkinto ja koulutuksellisen elämäntien muutos* [Long study paths: Studying for a degree at adult age and change in

- the educational life course]. University of Joensuu Publications in Social Sciences, 61. Joensuu University Press.
- Nikander, P. (1999). Elämänkaaresta elämänkulkuun [From life span to life course]. In I. Kangas & P. Nikander (Eds.), *Naiset ja ikääntyminen* [Women and aging] (pp. 27–45). Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Nóvoa, A. (2002). Ways of thinking about education in Europe. In A. Nóvoa & M. Lawn (Eds.), *Fabricating Europe: The formation of an education space* (pp. 131–155). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Noyes, A. (2004). *A sociological study of school transfer and the learning of mathematics*. Unpublished PhD, University of Nottingham.
- Nummenmaa, A. R. (1996). *Koulutus, sukupuoli ja elämänkulku: Nuoruudesta aikuisuuteen yhteiskunnallisessa muutoksessa* [Education, gender, and life course: From youth to adulthood in the midst of social changes]. Työpoliittinen tutkimus nro 149. Helsinki: Työministeriö.
- Nyysölä, K., & Hämäläinen, K. (2002). Elinikäinen oppiminen Suomessa ja muualla [Lifelong learning in Finland and elsewhere]. *Aikuiskasvatus*, 22(1), 42–47.
- OECD. (1995). *Realizing lifelong learning for all I–IX*. Meeting of the Education Committee at Ministerial Level. Background Report. Paris: OECD.
- Ojala, H. (2005). Ikääntyneenä naisena opiskelemassa – hyödyn ja sivistyksen rajankäyntiä [Studying as an elderly woman – negotiating the meanings of education]. In R. Mietola, E. Lahelma, S. Lappalainen & T. Palmu (Eds.), *Kohtaamisia kasvatuksen ja koulutuksen kentillä: erontekoja ja yhdessä tekemistä* [Encounters in the field of education: Differences and co-operation] (pp. 51–66). Helsinki: Finnish Educational Research Association.
- Oksanen, A. (2006). *Siirtolaisena Singaporessa: Ulkomaantyökomennuksille mukaan muuttaneet suomalaisnaiset kertovat kokemuksistaan* [As a transfer woman in Singapore: Finnish women on expatriate assignments talk about their experiences]. University of Helsinki. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.
- Olssen, M. (2006). Understanding the mechanisms of neoliberal control: Lifelong learning, flexibility and knowledge capitalism. *International Journal of Lifelong Learning Education*, 25(3), 213–230.
- Oral versions of personal experience [Special issue]. (1997). *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, 1–4.
- Oyserman, D., & Markus, H. R. (1998). Self as social representation. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The psychology of the social* (pp. 107–273). Cambridge: University Press.
- Paakkunainen, R. (2002). Iltakoulujen kehitys sotien jälkeen ja peruskoulun tulo [The development of evening schools after WWI and II and the beginning of comprehensive school]. In P. Hallikainen, T. Larjontie, A. Mäkelä, R. Paakkunainen, M. Salomaa & H. Vepsä (Eds.), *Iltaoppikoulusta aikuiskouluksi: 75 vuotta kulttuuriyötä 1927–2002* [The historical review of general upper secondary school for adults in Finland: 75 years of cultural work 1927–2002] (pp. 23–43). Loviisa: Iltakoulujen liitto.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In J. A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative* (pp. 5–23). London: The Falmer Press.
- Popkewitz, T. S. (1991). *A political sociology of educational reform: Power/knowledge in teaching, teacher education, and research*. New York: Teachers College Press.



- Popkewitz, T. S. (2003). Governing the child and pedagogicalization of the parent: A historical excursus into the present. In Marianne N. Bloch, Kerstin Holmlund, Ingeborg Moqvist & Thomas S. Popkewitz (Eds.), *Governing children, families and education: Restructuring the welfare state* (pp. 35–61). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Popkewitz, T. S., Olsson, U., & Petersson, K. (2006). The learning society, the unfinished cosmopolitan, and governing education, public health and crime prevention at the beginning of the twenty-first century. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 38(4), 431–449.
- Rantamaa, P. (2001). Ikä ja sen merkitykset [The meanings of age]. In A. Sankari & J. Jyrkämä (Eds.), *Lapsuudesta vanhuuteen: Iän sosiologiaa* [From childhood to old age: Sociology of age] (pp. 49–93). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Rastas, A. (2005). Kulttuurit ja erot haastattelutilanteessa [Cultures and differences in an interview situation]. In J. Ruusuvaori & L. Tiittula (Eds.), *Haastattelu, tutkimus, tilanteet ja vuorovaikutus* [Interview, research, encounters, and interaction] (pp. 78–102). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Räty, H. (1993). *Kuvia älykkyydestä* [Images of intelligence]. University of Joensuu, Faculty of Social Sciences Psychological Reports 14. Joensuu University Duplication Centre.
- Räty, H. (2001). Lusikasta haarukaksi: Koulun ja koulutuksen sosiopsykologinen näkökulma [From a spoon to a fork: Social psychological perspectives on school and education]. *Psykologia*, 36, 342–347.
- Räty, H. (2006). What comes after compulsory education? A follow-up study on parental expectations of their child's future education. *Educational Studies*, 32(1), 1–16.
- Räty, H., Kasanen, K., & Kärkkäinen, R. (2006). School subjects as social categorisations. *Social Psychology of Education*, 9, 5–25.
- Räty, H., Pölonen, K., Pölonen, P., & Snellman, L. (1995). Älyllisen kyvyn määrittely ja oppilasarvostelu – historiallisia näkökohtia [Determining intellectual ability and student assessment – historical perspectives]. *Psykologia*, 30, 179–185.
- Räty, H., & Snellman, L. (1991). *Älykkyyden sosiaaliset representaatiot ja koulu* [Social representations of intelligence at school]. University of Joensuu, Bulletins of the Faculty of Education 37. Joensuu University Duplication Centre.
- Räty, H., & Snellman, L. (1995). On the social fabric of intelligence. *Papers on Social Representations*, 4(2). Retrieved from [www.psr.jku.at/PSR1995/4\\_1995Raety.pdf](http://www.psr.jku.at/PSR1995/4_1995Raety.pdf)
- Räty, H., & Snellman, L. (1998). Social representations of educability. *Social Psychology of Education*, 1, 359–373.
- Räty, H., Snellman, L., Honkalampi, K., & Vornanen, A. (1994). Yksilöllisyys koulussa – luontaista lahjakkuutta? Eli koulutuspolitiikan simsalabim [Individualism at school – natural talent? The magic word of educational policy]. *Kasvatus – The Finnish Journal of Education*, 25(2), 170–175.
- Räty, H., Snellman, L., & Vornanen, A. (1993). Public views on intelligence: A Finnish study. *Psychological Reports*, 72, 59–65.
- Räty, H., Vänskä, J., Kasanen, K., & Kärkkäinen, R. (2002). Parents' explanations of their child's performance in mathematics and reading: A replication and extension of Yee and Eccles. *Sex Roles*, 46, 121–128.
- Reay, D. (1998). Rethinking social class: Qualitative perspectives on class and gender. *Sociology*, 32(2), 259–275.
- Reay, D. (2005). Beyond consciousness? The psychic landscape of social class. *Sociology*, 39(5), 911–928.

- Reay, D. (2006). The zombie stalking English schools: Social class and educational inequality. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(1), 288–307.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Qualitative Research Methods Series, No. 30. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Riessman, C. K. (2004a). Narrative interviewing. In M. S. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman & T. Futing Liao (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of social science research methods* (pp. 709–710). London: Sage.
- Riessman, C. K. (2004b). Narrative analysis. In M. S. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman & T. Futing Liao (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of social science research methods* (pp. 705–709). London: Sage.
- Rinne, R. (2004). Elinikäisen oppimisen retoriikka ja koulutuspolitiikka [The rhetorics of lifelong learning and educational policy]. In P. Sallilla (Ed.), *Elämänlaajuinen oppiminen ja aikuiskasvatatus* [Lifewide learning and adult education] (pp. 219–246). Aikuiskasvatuksen 44. vuosikirja. Vantaa: Kansanvalistusseura ja Aikuiskasvatuksen Tutkimusseura.
- Rinne, R., Kivinen, O., & Kivirauma, J. (1984). *Lähtökohtia peruskoulutuksen yhteiskunnallishistoriallisen muotoutumisen tutkimiseen* [Points of departure for researching the socio-historical formation of comprehensive education]. Turun yliopiston kasvatustieteiden tiedekunnan julkaisuja B:11. Turku.
- Rinne, R., & Kivirauma, J. (2003). Koulutuksen ja syrjäytymisen muuttuva yhteys [The changing significance between education and social exclusion]. In R. Rinne & J. Kivirauma (Eds.), *Koulutuksellista alaluokkaa etsimässä: Matala koulutus yhteiskunnallisen aseman määrittäjänä Suomessa 1800 ja 1900-luvuilla* [Looking for the educational underclass: Low educational level in determining the social position in 17th and 18th century Finland] (pp. 13–78). Research in Educational Sciences 18. Helsinki: Finnish Educational Research Association.
- Rinne, R., & Salmi, E. (1998). *Oppimisen uusi järjestys: Uhkien ja verkostojen maailma koulun ja elämänmittaisen opiskelun haasteena* [The new educational order: The world of threats and networks as a challenge for school and lifelong learning]. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Rose, N. (1999). *The powers of freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rubenson, K. (1997). Adult education and training: The poor cousin. An analysis of reviews of national policies for education. University of British Columbia & Linköping University. Unpublished manuscript.
- Rubenson, K. (2007). Participation in adult education: The Nordic welfare model. In R. Rinne, A. Heikkinen & P. Salo (Eds.), *Adult education – liberty, fraternity, equality? Nordic views on lifelong learning* (pp. 47–65). Helsinki: Finnish Educational Research Association.
- Ruusuvuori, J., & Tiittula, L. (2005). Tutkimushaastattelu ja vuorovaikutus [Research interview and interaction]. In J. Ruusuvuori & L. Tiittula (Eds.), *Haastattelu: Tutkimus, tilanteet ja vuorovaikutus* [Interview: Research, encounters, and interaction] (pp. 22–56). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Salomaa, M. (2002). Yrjö ja Hilma Jahnsson ensimmäisen iltaoppikoulun perustajina ja kehittäjinä [Yrjö and Hilma Jahnsson as founders and developers of the first evening secondary school]. In P. Hallikainen, T. Larjontie, A. Mäkelä, R. Paakkunainen, M. Salomaa & H. Vepsä (Eds.), *Iltaoppikoulusta aikuislukioksi: 75 vuotta kulttuuriryöyää 1927–2002* [The historical review of general upper secondary school for adults in Fin-

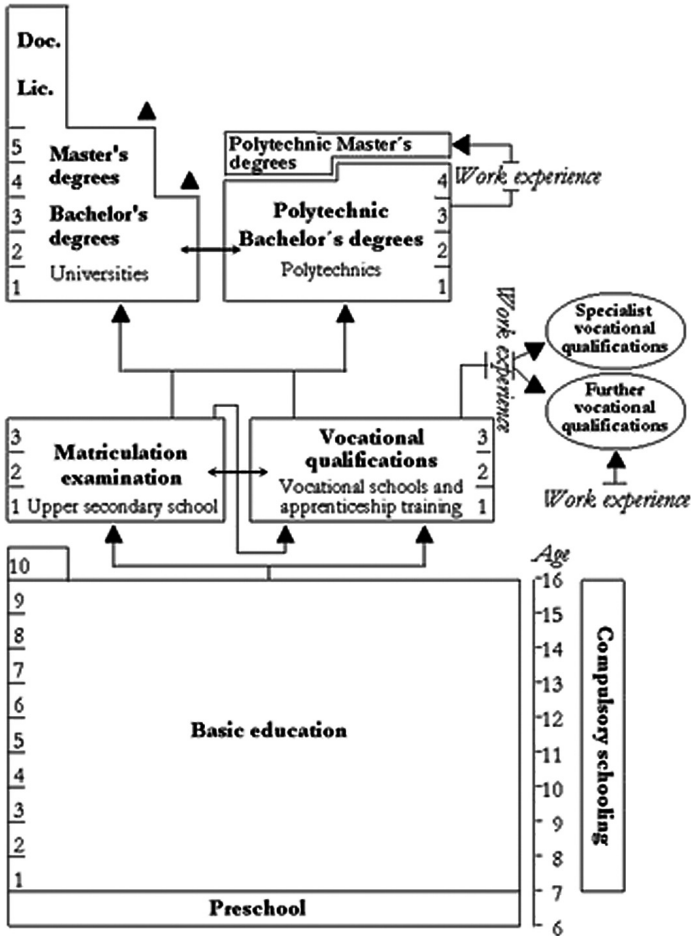
- land: 75 years of cultural work 1927–2002] (pp. 7–22). Loviisa: Iltakoulujen liitto.
- Saloviita, T. (2002). Erityinen absoluuttisena käsitteenä: erityispedagogiikan lähtökohtien sosiologista tarkastelua [Special as an absolute concept: Sociological perspectives on special education]. In M. Kuorelahti & T. Saloviita (Eds.), *Erityiskasvatus ja integraatio. Juhlakirja: Prof. Sakari Moberg 60 v.* [Special education and integration] (pp. 75–105). Research Reports N:o 74 Department of Special Education, University of Jyväskylä.
- Saloviita, T. (2006). Erityisopetus ja inklusio [Special education and inclusion]. *Kasvatus – The Finnish Journal of Education*, 37(4), 326–342.
- Sherman Heyl, B. (2001). Ethnographic interviewing. In P. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland & L. Lofland (Eds.), *Handbook of ethnography* (pp. 369–383). London: Sage.
- Shotter, J. (1997). The social construction of our ‘inner’ lives. To appear in *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*. Retrieved May 18, 2006, from <http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/virtual/inner.htm>
- Silvennoinen, H., Tulkki, P., & Honkanen, P. (1998). Jälkikirjoitus: iloisesti oppien hyvään elämään [Postscript: The good life through joyful learning]. In E. Silvennoinen & P. Tulkki (Eds.), *Elinikäinen oppiminen* [Lifelong learning] (pp. 215–251). Tampere: Gaudemus.
- Simons, M., & Masschelein, J. (2008). Our ‘will to learn’ and the assemblage of a learning apparatus. In A. Fejes & K. Nicoll (Eds.), *Foucault and lifelong learning: Governing the subject* (pp. 48–60). London: Routledge.
- Sipos Zackrisson, K., & Assarsson, L. (2008). Adult learner identities under construction. In A. Fejes & K. Nicoll (Eds.), *Foucault and lifelong learning: Governing the subject* (pp. 114–125). London: Routledge.
- Skeggs, B. (1997a). Classifying practices: Representations, capitals and recognitions. In P. Mahony & C. Zmrocek (Eds.), *Class matters: Working class women’s perspectives on social class* (pp. 123–139). London: Taylor and Francis.
- Skeggs, B. (1997b). *Formations of class and gender: Becoming respectable*. London: Sage.
- Skeggs, B. (2005). The making of class and gender through visualizing moral subject formation. *Sociology*, 39(5), 965–982.
- Snellman, L., & Rätty, H. (1992). Intelligence at school: Social psychological analysis of a multifaced concept. *Nordisk Pedagogik*, 12, 89–95.
- Snellman, L., & Rätty, H. (1995). Conceptions of intelligence as social representations. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 10(3), 273–287.
- Social Insurance Institution of Finland. (2009). Retrieved from <http://www.kela.fi/internet/english.nsf>
- Sontag, S. (1979). The double standard of aging. In S. Williams (Ed.) *Psychology of women* (pp. 462–478). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Statistics of Finland/Matriculation Examinations. (2003). Unpublished general upper secondary school data achieved May 15, 2004, from Statistics Finland.
- Straka, G. A. (2005, in press). Informal learning, conceptual outline, strategic contexts: The demanding search for the lieu, direction and results of informal learning.
- Suikkanen, A., & Linnakangas, R. (1998). *Uusi työmarkkinajärjestys?* [A new labour market order?] Sitra 182: Helsinki.
- Tienari, J., Vaara, E., & Meriläinen, S. (2005). Yhteisyyden rakentuminen haastattelussa [The construction of communality in an interview]. In J. Ruusuvaori & L. Tiittula

- (Eds.), *Haastattelu, tutkimus, tilanteet ja vuorovaikutus* [Interview, research, encounters, and interaction] (pp. 103–124). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Tight, M. (2002). *Key concepts in adult education and training* (2nd Ed.). London: RoutledgeFarmer.
- Tolonen, T. (2001). Hiljainen poika ja äänekkäs tyttö? Ääni, sukupuoli ja sosiaalisuus koulussa [A quiet boy and a loud girl? Voice, gender and socializing at school]. In T. Tolonen (Ed.), *Suomalainen koulu ja kulttuuri* [Finnish school and culture] (pp. 135–158) (3rd Ed.). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Tolonen, T. (2008). Yhteiskuntaluokka: menneisyyden dinosauruksen luiden kolinaa? [Social class: The clatter of dinosaur bones from the past?] In T. Tolonen (Ed.), *Yhteiskunta ja sukupuoli* [Society and gender] (pp. 8–17). Nuorisotutkimusverkosto/Nuorisotutkimusseura julkaisuja 83. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Tolonen, T., & Palmu, T. (2007). Etnografia, haastattelu ja (valta)positiot [Ethnography, interview and (power) positions]. In S. Lappalainen, P. Hynninen, T. Kankkunen, E. Lahelma & T. Tolonen, T. (Eds.), *Etnografia metodologiana: Lähtökohtana koulutuksen tutkimus* [Ethnography as methodology: Educational research as the point of departure] (pp. 89–112). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Tuomisto, J. (1998). Arkipäivänoppiminen aikuiskasvatuksen ja elinikäisen oppimisen kontekstissa [Informal learning in the context of adult education and lifelong learning]. In P. Sallila & T. Vaherva (Eds.), *Arkipäivän oppiminen* [Everyday learning] (pp. 30–58). Aikuiskasvatuksen 39. vuosikirja. Saarijärvi: Gummerus.
- Tuomisto, J. (2002). Elinikäisen oppimisen retoriikka ja vallankäyttö [The rhetorics of lifelong learning and the exercise of power]. In R. Honkonen (Ed.), *Koulutuksen lumo: Retoriikka, politiikka ja arviointi* [The charm of education: Rhetorics, politics, and assessment] (pp. 15–34). Helsinki: BTJ Kirjastopalvelu.
- Tuomisto, J. (2004). Elinikäisen oppimisen toinen sukupolvi – unohtuiko jotain? [The second generation of lifelong learning – did we forget something?] In P. Sallila (Ed.), *Elämänlaajuinen oppiminen ja aikuiskasvatus* [Lifewide learning and adult education] (pp. 49–83). Aikuiskasvatuksen 44. vuosikirja. Vantaa: Kansanvalitusseura ja Aikuiskasvatuksen Tutkimusseura.
- Tuschling, A., & Engemann, C. (2006). From education to lifelong learning: The emerging regime of learning in the European Union. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 38(4), 451–469.
- Uotinen, J. (2005). *Merkillinen kone: Informaatioteknologia, kokemus ja kertomus* [The meaningful machine: Information technology, experience and narrative.] University of Joensuu Publications in the Humanities 40. Joensuu University Press.
- Vähämäki, J. (1998). Elämänpolitiikka ja biopolitiikka [Life politics and biopolitics]. In J. P. Roos & T. Hoikkala (Eds.), *Elämänpolitiikka* [Life politics] (pp. 128–151). Tampere: Gaudeamus.
- Vanttaja, M. (2002). *Koulumenestyjät: Tutkimus laudaturylioppilaiden koulutus- ja työurista* [School successes: A study on the most successful upper secondary school students' educational and work careers]. Helsinki: Finnish Educational Research Association.
- Vehmas, S. (2005). *Vammaisuus: Johdatus historiaan, teoriaan ja etiikkaan* [Disability: Introduction to history, theory, and ethics]. Tampere: Tammer-Paino.
- Vehviläinen, M. (2002). Teknologinen nationalismi [Technological nationalism]. In T. Gordon, K. Komulainen & K. Lempiäinen (Eds.), *Suomineitonon hei! Kansallisuuden*

- sukupuu* [The national gender]. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Vendler, Z. (1967). *Linguistics in Philosophy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Vilkko, A. (1997). *Omaelämäkertä kohtaamispaikkana—Naisen elämän kerronta ja luenta* [Autobiography as a meeting point: The narration and reading of the woman's life]. Suomalaisen kirjallisuusseuran toimituksia 663. Tampere: Tammer-Paino.
- Vilkko, A. (2000). Elämänkulku ja elämäntulkintakerronta [Life course and its narration]. In E. Heikkinen & J. Tuomi (Eds.), *Suomalainen elämäntulkinta* [The Finnish life course] (pp. 74–85). Helsinki: Tammi.
- Vuorio-Lehti, M. (2006). *Valkolakin viesti. Ylioppilastutkintokeskustelu Suomessa toisen maailmansodan jälkeen* [The message of the white cap: Public discourse concerning the Finnish Matriculation Examination after the Second World War]. Turku: University of Turku.
- Walford, G. (2005). Research ethical guidelines and anonymity. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 28(1), 83–93.
- Walkerdine, V. (1989). Femininity as performance. *Oxford Review of Education*, 15(3), 267–279.
- Walkerdine, V. (1998). *Counting girls out: Girls and mathematics*. London: Falmer Press.
- Walkerdine, V., & Lucey, H. (1989). *Democracy in the kitchen: Regulating mothers and socializing daughters*. London: Virago.
- Walkerdine, V., Lucey, H., & Melody, J. (2001). *Growing up girl: Psychosocial explorations of gender and class*. Houndsmills: Palgrave.
- Wikimedia Foundation (n.d.a). Retrieved November 14, 2008, from [http://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anni\\_Polva](http://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anni_Polva)
- Wikimedia Foundation (n.d.b). Retrieved November 14, 2008, from <http://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karjala>
- Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*. Westmead, England: Saxon House.

# Appendices

APPENDIX 1. Education System Chart



Retrieved February 14, 2009 from <URL: <http://www.opf.fi/english/SubPage.asp?path=447,4699>>

## APPENDIX 2. Initial Letter

University of Helsinki  
 Faculty of Behavioural Sciences  
 Päivi Siivonen  
 Valpurintie 6 A 14, 00270 Helsinki  
 paivi.siivonen@helsinki.fi  
 Tel. 050-521 2775, 09-4775 442

Dear General Upper Secondary School Adult Graduate,

Congratulations on your graduation from general upper secondary school for adults! I approach you to ask your willingness to participate in a study concerning students who have graduated from general upper secondary school for adults.

I invite students who have completed their upper secondary school study in general upper secondary school for adults and who have graduated in autumn 2003<sup>36</sup> to participate in this study. I am preparing a doctoral thesis at the University of Helsinki, being funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation. My thesis concerns the meaning that the general upper secondary school for adults has for adult students who have graduated from such school. I am working under the supervision of Professor Arto Kallioniemi and Senior Lecturer Leena Ahteenmäki-Pelkonen. I feel it is important to listen to the students in order to picture general upper secondary school for adults in all its diversity. This in turn is important in order to develop general upper secondary schools for adults based on the students' needs and to put forward the meaning of general upper secondary schools for adults in adult education as a whole. The significance of your experience is especially important. For you this would be a journey into the past that could possibly offer new views on your life and general upper secondary school study.

The anonymity of the research participants is fully protected; it is not possible to recognize any individual person from the research report and the information is solely for research purposes. I will call you soon and tell you more about this research. I sincerely hope that you will agree to participate in this research.

With kind regards,

Päivi Siivonen

We cordially recommend that you participate in the doctoral research conducted by Päivi Siivonen (M.A.): **The Meaning of General Upper Secondary School Study in Adult Students' Life Course.**

Professor  
 Arto Kallioniemi

Senior Lecturer  
 Leena Ahteenmäki-Pelkonen

<sup>36</sup> The invitation was also later sent to students who had graduated from general upper secondary school for adults in the spring and autumn of 2004, and in the spring of 2005.

## APPENDIX 3. Instructions for the Written Narrative

University of Helsinki  
Faculty of Behavioural Sciences  
Päivi Siivonen  
Valpurintie 6 A 14, 00270 Helsinki  
paivi.siivonen@helsinki.fi  
Tel. 050-521 2775, 09-4775 442

Doctoral Study in Education:  
**The Meaning of General Upper Secondary School Study  
in Adult Students’ Life Course**

### **MY EXPERIENCES ON THE GENERAL UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDY**

**Write** about your experiences as a **general upper secondary school student**, reminisce about your studying path, the different stages on the way as well as events and experiences that **you have found meaningful**. These events and experiences may be about studying and learning, the people you have met, or everyday memories both at school and outside school. They may be about studying in adulthood or how other people have reacted to your study. Write about the highlights and difficulties on the way. **Reflect on your own development as a student and learner.**

**Evaluate the meaning of general upper secondary school study in adulthood for you and your life as a whole.**

**Please return the essay preferably both on a disk and as a paper version. If you write by hand, please write on every other line.**

**Please return the essay by the appointed date to the following address: Päivi Siivonen, Valpurintie 6 A 14, 00270 Helsinki. Thank you!**



## APPENDIX 4. Instructions for the Life-line

University of Helsinki  
 Faculty of Behavioural Sciences  
 Päivi Siivonen  
 Valpurintie 6 A 14, 00270 Helsinki  
 paivi.siivonen@helsinki.fi  
 Tel. 050-521 2775, 09-4775 442

Doctoral Study in Education:  
**The Meaning of General Upper Secondary School Study in Adult Students' Life Course**

### LIFE-LINE

Picture your life by drawing your life course as you yourself see it. Give it the shape(s) and colour(s) you prefer. Mark in the picture the most important events and experiences in your life, both good and bad; these events and experiences have perhaps affected your life and the decisions you have made. Timewise they may be of short or long duration, they may also overlap. Also attach emotional assessments to these experiences: What kinds of feelings – negative and/or positive – are attached to the event/experience? How would you name the emotions you have experienced? How strong were these emotions?

Finally, I want to emphasize that the 'life-line' is your own. There's no right or wrong way to present it. All ways are correct.

**Please return the life-line by the appointed date to the following address: Päivi Siivonen, Valpurintie 6 A 14, 00270 Helsinki. Thank you!**

## APPENDIX 5. Interview

### INTERVIEW

The events/experiences leading to the general upper secondary school study in adulthood and the experiences about studying in general upper secondary school for adults.

### BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- \*This is an open interview that resembles a conversation
- \*All the information that you give is absolutely confidential
- \*What you find important is also important for this research
- \*The interview is based on the preliminary assignments
- \*Recording is necessary for me to be able to return to the details later. Is this okay with you?
- \*Would you like to ask something?

### THE OPENING QUESTION

- \*Would you please tell me about yourself and your life based on the life-line?

### Helpful questions for the beginning of the interview

- \*Which events/experiences have you found meaningful in your life?
- \*If you go back to your childhood, how would you describe your childhood?

### Other helpful questions

- \*Would you tell me...?/Could you tell me in more detail...?
- \*How would you describe...?/Would you describe...?
- \*How did you feel...?
- \*How did...affect you/your life?

- \*In what way has it changed you?
- \*Why do you find it meaningful?
- \*Do you mean that...?/What do you mean by?
- \*Who are you?/What kind of person do you feel you are?
- \*What's important for you in your life at the moment?

## **LIFE-LINE THEMES**

CHILDHOOD/ADOLESCENCE/ADULTHOOD  
PARENTS/SIBLINGS/SIGNIFICANT OTHERS  
SCHOOL/STUDYING  
WORK  
DREAMS/FUTURE  
SELF IMAGE

## **THEMES CONCERNING THE GENERAL UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL FOR ADULTS (GUSSA)**

- \* Deepening of the themes in the written narrative: the conversation starts based on the themes the student has written about
- \* The beginning of the studies/the progression of the studies/finishing up the GUSSA studies  
Studying and learning. Development as a student. Relations with other students, teachers, personnel. Significant others. Highlights/difficulties.
- \* Studying in adulthood  
Experiences related to age. Learning. Meaning for personal identity. Life situation/work/family. The reactions of others.
- \* Future  
Plans. The meaning of the GUSSA studies in your life.

## **FINALLY**

- \*What kind of an experience was this interview for you?