‘Doing transitions’ in education

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Morena Cuconato, Andreas Walther

Morena Cuconato, Department of Psychology and Sciences of Education, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy, Morena.Cuconato@unibo.it

Andreas Walther, Institute of Social Pedagogy and Adult Education, University of Frankfurt, Frankfurt, Germany, A.Walther@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Morena Cuconato, Associate Professor at the University of Bologna, teaches social pedagogy and intercultural education. She carries out research in the areas of youth policies, transitions in the life course, youth welfare, and European school systems in comparative perspective. She has recently edited together with P. Loncle, V. Muniglia, and A. Walther, “Youth Participation in Europe. Beyond discourses, practices and realities,” Bristol: the Policy Press, 2012.

Andreas Walther, Professor for Social Pedagogy and Youth Welfare at the University of Frankfurt and Director of the Research Centre, “Education and Coping in the Life Course,” has coordinated several EU-projects on young people’s transitions to adulthood, including the project, “Governance of Educational Trajectories in Europe” (GOETE). Recent publications include the article, “Support across Life Course Regimes. A comparative model of social work as constructions of social problems, needs, and rights” (accepted by the Journal of Social Work).

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According to an interactionist perspective, educational trajectories are neither structurally determined nor are they the result of individual (rational) choice. Instead, they emerge from a complex negotiation processes between young people and intervening others, particularly teachers and parents, and imply different levels of action and meaning making. This editorial first presents the overall approach of the European project, *Governance of educational trajectories in Europe,* that analyzes educational trajectories from a life-course and governance perspective. Second, it introduces the key concepts cross-cutting the articles in this issues such as transitions, gate keepers versus significant others, cooling out, and decision-making before presenting a summary outline of them.

Keywords: transitions, life course, educational trajectories, biography, qualitative multilevel analysis

Introduction

Since the 1990s, European research on young people's transitions to adulthood has focused on transitions from school to work. In this perspective, education has been considered either a starting point for these transitions, leaving school, or as a factor of social inequality, which determines their outcomes in terms of different employment status. Education tends to be dealt with as a mere input factor for the life course and as a functional concept with regard to the reproduction of social inequality. At present, this reduction is being reinforced as policies addressing young people's transitions to work no longer start after school but are already a factor in the final school years.

This trend is reflected by a major interest in understanding reasons and consequences of early school leaving (cf. European Commission, 2011). One key driver behind this perspective has been

the political will to reduce the share of young people leaving the education system with less than post-compulsory qualifications, as lower certifications have been identified as a central factor for precarious transitions to work and youth unemployment. The focus on early school leaving reflects, on the one hand, a normative perspective of policy and research inasmuch as 'early' means 'too early'. The social representation of individual careers and life courses includes assumptions about the 'normal' timing of life phases and transitions. Delays compared to this schedule are seen and addressed in terms of deviations ascribed to individual deficits and interpreted as risks concerning future life course trajectories. On the other hand, early school leavers are conceptualized as self-responsible actors making individual decisions against continuing with school. Policy reforms consequently aim at influencing the school leavers' decision-making processes and preparing them for informed choices that are 'realistic' in the light of actual family resources and school performance.

These policies are characterized by incentives aimed at pushing or pulling young people towards post-compulsory education or training while providing support and guidance. They reflect major discourses at European, national, and local levels, which serve as mechanisms of educational governance and coordinate diverse actors across different levels in terms of loose coupling (cf. Jessop et al., 2008). The concept, 'knowledge society', was adopted in 2000 in the Lisbon Strategy in order to promote the EU as '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' (European Council, 2000). Against this backdrop, the concepts of 'lifelong learning' and 'activation' represent the declared need to restructure both education and training systems (lifelong learning) and welfare states (activation). These concepts share an emphasis on the individual responsibility of life chances to legitimize a shift of public activities from welfare rights toward investing in human capital.

The concept of lifelong learning dates back to 1970s and has been strongly promoted by supranational institutions like the UN, the OECD, and the EU. Starting with a focus on the democratization of education, attention has been diverted to preparing individuals for flexible labor markets since

the 1990s. Education no longer has fixed points of entry and exit but it is supposed to extend beyond boundaries of time and space between formal learning in school and non-formal and informal learning in the social environment (lifewide learning). Compulsory school has the 'inclusive' mission of laying the grounds for such a learning attitude and compensating for different family backgrounds.

The discourse of lifelong learning is complemented by that of re-shaping the welfare state in terms of activation. Comparative research offers a controversial picture: quantitative analyses suggest a stabilization of social expenditure (cf. Castles 2004); qualitative perspectives focus on cuts and tying benefits to conditions (cf. Korpi and Palme 2003); and a third position argues that maintenance or rise of social expenditures does not exclude changes in *how* and *to what extent* specific aims are being addressed (cf. Clasen, 2005; Obinger and Starke, 2008). Central to all these discourses is an activation approach implying a growing conditionality of social rights and the diffusion of workfare elements, which reduces state and political responsibility in favor of a direct contract between individual and labor market requirements (cf. Dingeldey, 2007; Morel et al., 2013).

Lifelong learning and activation respond and contribute to the de-standardization of 'normal' life courses. The promise of the welfare state that surmises that following the institutionalized life course secures social integration is being questioned while life course trajectories are individualized and diversified (cf. Beck, 1992). While the European discourse aims at the convergence of national pathways promoting a 'European educational model' and a 'European social model', research has shown that lifelong learning and activation are interpreted and implemented differently at national and local levels (cf. Pohl & Walther, 2007; see also Tikkanen et al. in this issue).

The research documented in this special issue seeks to analyze how, under these conditions, educational trajectories emerge and develop differently, how decisions are made in young people's educational trajectories, and who is involved in this decision-making and in what way. This means introducing a life-course perspective into educational research that conceives of education as a central element of the life course and, vice versa, depicts the life course as an integral factor for processes

of education and learning. Our central assumption is that educational trajectories emerge from complex interactions between a diversity of socio-economic, institutional and individual actors, and factors across different levels, which are manifest at *transitions* points.

This introduction presents the research project, "Governance of Educational Trajectories in Europe" (GOETE), on which the articles in this special issue draw. It outlines the objectives, the theoretical framework, and the methodology of the project relating it to existing educational research. It concludes by providing a framework of interpretation for the findings of the other articles in this special issue; an overview of the insights contained within them will be presented at the end of this introduction.

The project: Governance of Educational Trajectories in Europe

The study, 'Governance of educational trajectories in Europe. Access, coping and relevance of education of young people in European knowledge societies in a comparative perspective', was funded by the European Union's 7th Framework Programme of Research between 2010 and 2013. Against the backdrop of a changing discourse about the role of education within so-called knowledge societies and the increased importance of outcome-oriented educational research, the project sought to improve the understanding of *how* different educational processes and trajectories develop**.** The study was organized as a comparative, cross-county analysis involving Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom. These eight countries reflect constellations of socio-economic, institutional, and cultural factors that contextualize the educational trajectories of children and young people in Europe.

The main aim of the GOETE project was to understand the changing relation between social integration and education in knowledge societies by investigating how educational trajectories are shaped by the interplay between different (f)actors. This research perspective implies combining a life course and a governance perspective that has been operationalised by three key dimensions:

- How access to and the accessibility of education are regulated considering the power that socio-economic factors and institutional structures have in reproducing social inequality?
- How do young people act in either conformist or deviant ways to cope with the demands of education and what formal and informal support do they mobilize in this respect?
- What does education mean and what does it make relevant for whom, and how are different meanings and relevancies of education negotiated between different actors?

The focus of the research was on transitions within educational trajectories between the end of primary and the beginning of upper-secondary education and training (the age range between 10 and 16) with special attention to the transition from lower to upper-secondary education. This passage confronts young people with new (adult) expectations, status, and practices, and contributes to their positioning in a segmented labor market and an unequal society. Therefore, a second focus was placed on young people attending schools in disadvantaged urban areas. The aim was to analyze the perspectives of all actors involved in the decision-making process associated with these young people in transition, dismantling the underlying interactive relationship of structure and agency. This implied analyzing the way in which these interactions are both structured by and contribute to social inequalities, and the way in which they are embedded in different education systems. Accordingly, decision-making in educational trajectories is not conceived of in terms of individual choice, as conceptualized by rational choice theories, but is part of complex negotiations between different actors in which individual agency and structural factors interact**.** In the following section the theoretical framework will be discussed more in-depth and situated in the context of existing educational and transition research.

Educational trajectories: education in the life course

The guiding concept of research on 'educational trajectories' is programmatic inasmuch as it combines the perspectives of education and life course, which in turn consist of learning processes and transitions including the interrelation between institutional structure and biographical agency.

The concept of 'life course' refers to the emergence of a social order based on the institutionalization of age-based social roles and positions in early modernity. The life course is a 'social institution … in terms of a set of rules that orders a key area or a key dimension of life' (Kohli 1985, p. 1) in terms of an 'age-based sequence of typical, socially defined conditions endowed with specific expectations (roles)' (Scherger 2009, p. 532). The life course links the individual with the social division of labor, which is structured by education, occupation, gender, and age. In the course of the building of capitalist nation states, two institutional entities developed to ensure that individual lives evolved around *work* and *family* as the cores of the life course: *public education* as a means to prepare young people for work-based adult lives and the *welfare state* as a system of incentives and guarantees that privilege such work-based lives over other lifestyles (cf. Mayer 1997; Lessenich 2005). However, with the different pathways of nation state development, different life course regimes also evolved, characterized by diverse constellations of education and welfare (see also Tikkanen et al. in this issue; cf. Walther, 2014).

During the 1950s and 1960s, in most Western countries the Fordist economic model consolidated the concept of a standardized life course: preparation *for* work structured through educational trajectories (childhood/youth), a life phase characterized *by* work (adulthood), and a life phase *after* work (old age). In this context, education was functional for the qualification of individuals as a labor force, for their allocation to unequal positions, and for their adherence to the normative order. The meritocratic promise of social mobility through schooling set in motion mass education in order to 'produce' future workers thanks to a bureaucratic education model that valorized standardized school curricula in line with the cultural capital of the dominant class. As such, educational research has been concerned with explaining the coincidence of mass education and persisting inequality. While Sewell and Shah (1967) explain it through the individual educational aspirations influenced

and formed in an individual's relationship with significant others including parents and peers throughout the socialization process (cf. Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) introduce the concept of *cultural capital* to explain the mismatch between educational demands and the knowledge and habits of children from lower social classes; other authors highlight less-educated families' limited economic resources (e.g. Boudon 1974). At the same time, another stream of theories seeks to ground the reproduction of inequality in the structure of the education system (e.g. Gamoran and Berenson 1987; Allmendinger, 1989; Oakes 2005).

In the Post-Fordist era, the flexibilization of the labor market contributed to the de-standardization of the life course. Young people started to prolong their educational trajectories in order to compete for the best labor market positions, which was accompanied by the emergence of new life styles. Gradually, school-to-work transitions were decoupled from other life transitions (family, housing, parenthood, etc.). According to late or post-modernity theorists, the erosion of traditions and normative frameworks has accelerated the process of individualization: 'the self becomes a reflexive project' (Giddens 1991, p. 32; cf. Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2001). At the education system level, this trend has been framed by the discourse of lifelong learning whereby individual learners take responsibility for their learning achievements and by shifting towards a managerial model of education (cf. Young 2007; Daun 2007). At the welfare state level, this development was reflected in the shift from a provision-led model of welfare towards activation policies that recalibrate rights and responsibilities towards higher individual accountability (Lessenich, 2005). However, the coincidence of increased responsibility for and uncertainty about the returns of education for an individual's own life course has created a motivational dilemma for individual learners (Pohl and Walther, 2007; Walther, 2009).

The individualization process has sensitized social theory and research to the actuality of an interactionist understanding of social integration and reproduction in terms of a dialectic relationship between structure and agency (cf. Giddens 1984; Emirbayr and Mische, 1998). Accordingly, the perspective that depicts the life course as an institution needs to be complemented by a *biographical*

perspective that incorporates the subjective life stories that individuals construct in the process of dealing with their identity while progressing through the institutionalized life course. Individuals do not reconstruct their lives independently from life course institutions and dominant normality; instead, such processes take place according to subjective meaning and continuity. The relationship between life course and biography is dialectic; the life course provides individuals with keywords they (have to) refer to in their biographical construction—affirmatively or in terms of resistance, in explicit or implicit terms—while at the same time life course institutions depend on individuals using them for the construction of their biographies. Therefore, educational trajectories need to be analyzed and rethought in terms of *learning biographies* (cf. Bloomer and Hodkinson 2000; see also Walther et al. in this issue). Similar to the duality between life course and biography, education also needs to be conceptualized in terms of the duality that exists between its functional concept that focuses on cognitive instruction and qualification and the biographical concept, which is understood in terms of the transformation of the self-world relationship (cf. Mezirov, 2000; Koller, 2011). This understanding of education ('*Bildung*') implies the autonomous reflection of experiences and learning processes. Similar to social learning theories, it considers individuals as active learners and learning as situated within a social context (cf. Vygotsky 1962; Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998; Chisholm 2008). It is also associated with the concept of *biographicity* developed in the context of research on lifelong learning as it is used to understand an individual's capability to reflect on his own life history and identity process in relation to external conditions and demands (cf. Alheit and Dausien, 2002; Walther et al., 2006).

The duality that exists between life course and biography is also involved in the transitions young people are confronted with during their educational trajectories: school entry and exit, change between different school levels, progression through standardized curricula, assessment according to expected outcomes, and the qualifications needed for specific positions in stratified labor markets. Structure and agency do not influence transitions as such, but they are mediated through interactions with other actors. These others are either 'gate-keepers' (cf. Heinz, 1992) appointed by life

course institutions with the role of guiding and channeling individuals through transitions in a way that preserves the normative and structural order of society, or they are 'significant others' (Mead, 1934) who have a particular subjective relevance for the identity process of the young person. *Teachers* are institutionally appointed to exercise the power of assessment, diagnosis, and differentiated streaming, and are deeply involved in influencing the progression of students through education and this qualifies them for the role of 'gate-keepers' (see also Cuconato et al. in this issue). Goffman (1959) introduces the concept of 'cooling out' to show how professionals in education and welfare function as moderators of the allocative competition for social positions with unequal status. On one hand, education represents the promise that everyone can make it based on their own achievement, while the built in liberal ideology of equal opportunity on the other hand contributes to the individualization of the unequal outcomes of this race. Cooling out hides the selective function of the education system while 'on the surface it seems to give them (students, *authors*) (….) another chance to be educated. In doing so, the school system appears to treat them fairly' (Kim, 2011, p. 79).

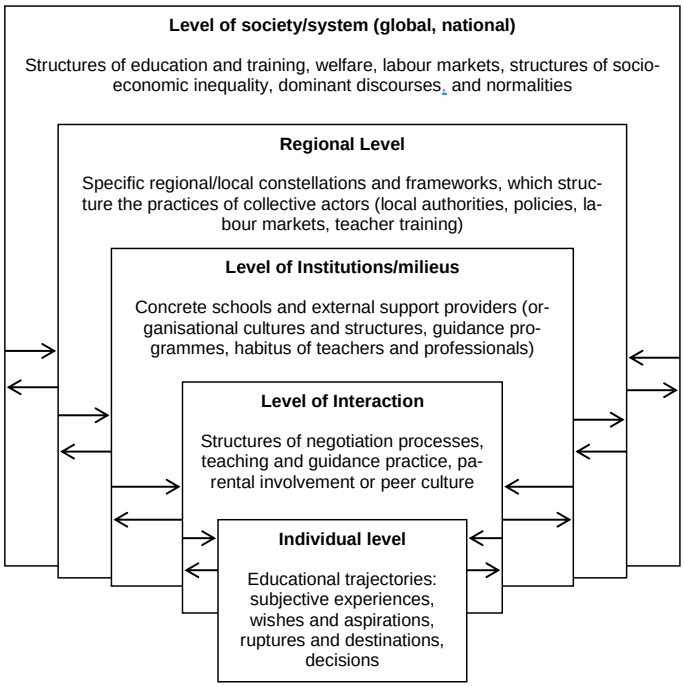
Teachers can also, however, potentially act as significant others. Narratives of young people reveal that most of them met at least one teacher in their lives who was 'special' and by whom they felt recognized and supported (cf. Walther at al., 2006). Apart from teachers, *non-teaching pedagogical staff* (psychologists and social or youth workers cooperating with schools internally or externally) is increasingly involved in young people's educational trajectories, especially for the so-called disadvantaged students who lack family support in meeting school demands. Here, the function of cooling out may be less obvious. However, while counseling also has the function of gate keeping, it is embedded in non-formal contexts and depends on processes of co-production between professional and young person, whereby the scopes of discretionary agency are broader on both sides (cf. Lipsky, 1980). Notwithstanding, *parents* are the most influential agents in students' decision-making process. Most young people tend to describe their parents as significant others they trust and by whom they feel supported unconditionally. However, it is worth considering that parents'

motives for becoming involved in their children's education not only result from their concerns about the well-being of their offspring but also about future family status and therefore is part of their personal biography (see also Ule et al., in this issue). The same accounts for *friends* and *peers* who are reciprocally involved in their educational trajectories as school experiences are and have to be interpreted and negotiated within the context of youth culture (cf. Willis, 1977). Due to the social contextualization of both parental involvement, peer relationships, and youth cultures, parents and friends can also act as 'gate-keepers'—consciously or not.

Research methodology and sample

The GOETE project's objectives and research questions imply a conceptualization of the research object in its complexity; when educational trajectories are understood as interplays between structure and agency, different levels of meaning making and of structuration are involved.

Figure 1: Levels of young people's educational trajectories (elaborated from Helsper et al.,



2010)

For the GOETE project, this multilevel analysis of the differential development of educational trajectories has been facilitated by a differentiated mixed-methods research design, which included the following aspects: quantitative surveys with individuals, parents, and school principals; a comparative content analysis of teacher training curricula regarding social aspects of education; a critical discourse analysis of high-level educational governance based on expert interviews and document analysis; and qualitative case studies on 'local school spaces' (Maroy, 2004), the social space around a lower secondary school through which young people's educational trajectories evolve and which is structured by different actors, perspectives, and power relationships. The case studies involved and included interviews with students, parents, teachers, school principals, youth and social workers, employers, representatives of local authorities, and other relevant stakeholders.

The sampling started with the identification of three urban areas in each of the countries where field work was carried out, which differed according to socio-economic indicators and structures of secondary education (in countries with different education systems across regions or federal states). After the surveys, a lower-secondary school located in a disadvantaged area was selected in each city for a qualitative case study. It is on these data that the articles in this special issue are based.

Data were gathered from focus-group discussions with students during their final year in lower-secondary school (N=195) and individual in-depth interviews with students after they had left lower- secondary education (N=109) reconstructing their trajectories up to their current status as well as with parents (N=109). Expert interviews were conducted with professional actors inside and outside school: teachers and school principals, counselors, social and youth workers, employers, representatives of local authorities, and other local stakeholders (N =208).

In order to balance openness for inductive data collection and comparability across cities and countries, common themes to be addressed in the interviews were identified on a general level leaving space for contextualization with regard to individual cases and local and national contexts. All in-

terviews were type-recorded and fully transcribed. The analysis of the interviews sought to compare interpretations and reconstruct constellations across different actor perspectives, different local contexts and countries, and the interviews were coded accordingly. As there was a need to balance openness and comparability, a 'middle road' between grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and content analysis (Mayring, 2000) was adopted. Each national team conducted a round of open coding with regard to one or two contrasting interviews. On the basis of the code systems emerging from this first open coding, a common joint code system was developed and deductively applied to the other interviews (see also Walther et al. in this issue). Specific software for qualitative data analysis was used for coding. After the interviews were coded, each team interpreted the findings for each group of interviewees in every local context. For the interpretation—first at local, then the national and cross-country levels—reference was made to the model of 'qualitative multilevel analyses' developed by Helsper and colleagues (2010) for the analysis of educational processes. According to this model, education results from the interaction between actors and their meaning-making across different levels. It aims at reproducing—not reducing—the complexity of the relationship between structure and agency and builds upon the notion of triangulating the findings from different levels, which are obtained using different research methods according to the necessities of the object. The focus lies on the *relationships* between the different levels. This means that qualitative multilevel analysis does not refer to original empirical data but aims at identifying 'bridges and connection points' and relating the findings from each level to the others. The result of such analysis has the status of a 'second-order grounded theory' requiring further empirical analysis.

It was only at this level that an international comparative analysis came into play. On one hand, constellations were juxtaposed, albeit not in a comprehensive way but starting from specific issues and/or actors perspectives, while on the other hand, the findings were contextualized with regard to the constellations of education and welfare in which they evolved (see Tikkanen et al. in this issue). For this, reference was made to existing models of comparative research such as Allmendinger's (1989) model comparing education systems according to stratification and standardization or Wal-

ther's (2006) model of transition regimes for the different normalities of growing up resulting from specific configurations of socio-economic, institutional, and cultural factors. In earlier studies, this model was applied for the interpretation of biographical data about youth transitions (cf. Walther, 2009).

'Doing transitions': a qualitative multilevel analysis of decision-making in education

Before presenting the other articles that will appear in this special issue, a general idea of what a qualitative multilevel of decision-making in educational trajectories aims to achieve and *why* and *how* this has led to the concept of 'doing transitions' will be outlined. Transitions are considered crossroads of the life course at which individual processes of social integration as well as subjective identities are being negotiated and redirected. However, rather than existing *per se* and representing objective demands to be coped with by individuals, the GOETE findings suggest that transitions are constantly processed through practice. The liminality of transitions requires an intensive and continuous activity of interpretation, negotiation, reconciliation, and decision making, which, in many cases, is neither perceived nor recognized (and supported) in institutional contexts of regulating transitions.

In their seminal works on the interactive mechanisms in reproducing (not only gendered) social positions, roles and identities, West and Zimmerman (1987) and Fenstermaker and West (1995) introduce the concepts of 'doing gender' and 'doing difference' in order to reveal that social orders emerge from individual and collective, latent and manifest, subjective and institutional constructions in the constant flow of social situations. In essence, the underlying understanding of society and the integration or reproduction of society is one of 'doing society' that corresponds to what Giddens (1984) refers to as 'structuration': society exists only through its constant reproduction and reconstruction in every single social situation, relationship and practice.

In turn, practice—and individual agency as its smallest element—is enabled and thereby structured by the rules and routines institutionalized as a result of previous acts and power relationships. In a

similar vein, Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) re-conceptualize agency as an iterative process. Structures incorporated in past experience and the imagined future are linked in the interpretation of and coping with present social situations. This implies that current notions of including 'disadvantaged' young people 'in' society can be understood as ideological interpretations whereby both society and individuals are being 'essentialized' (cf. Levitas, 1996).

A 'doing'-perspective may also be applied to the analysis of transitions in the educational trajectories of young people in order to understand the interrelation between socio-economic and institutional structures on one hand and seemingly individual 'choices' on the other. 'Doing' must not be misunderstood and reduced to individual action but referred to the situational practice evolving from the interplay between these individuals with their wishes and interests, dominant discourses and normality, socio-economic resources and factors, institutional arrangements and opportunities, and the individuals representing these institutions as well as the non-formal and informal others—significant or not—sharing these situations with the subjects. In a nutshell, the analysis documented in this special issue addresses the following questions: How do young people reconstruct their decision-making at the end of lower secondary school? How are individual level decision-making processes negotiated with parents and teachers? How are these negotiations embedded in local and national infrastructures of education, training, support, and guidance?

In reconstructing these series of interactions, we limited ourselves to a selection of levels and interactive configurations, as illustrated in Figure 2. We start with the macro level. In their contribution, *Jenni Tikkanen, Piotr Bledowski*, and *Joanna Felczuk* outline the different macro contexts in which young people's educational trajectories evolve. Focusing on institutional structures of education and training on the one hand and support and guidance structure on the other, they elaborate three country clusters of education and welfare: a high-level standardized and comprehensive (Finland and Slovenia), low-level standardized and differentiated (Italy, Poland, and UK), and high-level standardized and differentiated (France, Germany, and the Netherlands). This analysis not only reveals that transitions are regulated and supported differently—which is reflected by different forms and

conditions of guidance—but that contexts also differ with regard to the amount of transitions an individual has to cope with. Another relevant aspect on the macro level analyzed within the GOETE project, which is, however, not included in this special issue is the emergence of governance by discourse. Discourses such as lifelong learning, competence, activation, disadvantage, or employability have become highly influential in the regulation of educational trajectories. Comparative analysis illustrates how these discourses are interpreted and set into practice differently according to the path dependency of education and welfare (cf. Parreira et al., 2014).

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Figure 2: multilevel analysis of educational trajectories

Levels	**Society**	**Institutions**	**Interaction**	**Individuals**
Society Education and training systems, welfare, labor market, discourses (implementation at local level)	• High-level standard. and comprehensive • Low-level standard. and differentiated • High-level standard. and differentiated			
Institutions Concrete schools, support and guidance, teaching professionalism		Goals, access, and conditions of guidance and support; professional standards of teaching		
Interaction Negotiation, practices of teaching and guidance, parental involvement, peers			Teaching/guidance practice, parental involvement, use of support	
Individuals Experiences, ruptures, wishes, preferences, coping strategies, destinations				Patterns of educational trajectories, constellations of decision-

				making,

Such an analysis also needs to involve the local or regional level of networks or 'landscapes of education' (McNamara and O'Hara: 2008) involving the formal, non-formal, and informal contexts as well as actors of education addressing individual educational trajectories.

The analysis documented in this special issue continues with the institutional level. *Morena Cuconato, Manuela du Bois-Reymond,* and *Harry Lunabba* analyze how teachers see the educational trajectories of students and how they perceive and express their own professional task and influence in this respect. Teachers are first analyzed in their institutional role as representatives of the education system. It then moves beyond this level of analysis, as, according to Lipsky's concept of street-level bureaucracy, teachers cannot be reduced to their professional role but their professional identities evolve from subjective interpretation of this role. Therefore, the analysis of their understanding of support for young people in their transitions to upper secondary education also reflects the interaction level of pedagogical practice and their negotiation with students as well as parents.

The perspective of parents and the forms and motives of parental involvement in the educational and occupational decision-making is at the centre of the article by *Mirjana Ule, Andreja Zivoder,* and *Manuela du Bois-Reymond.* They present and discuss empirical data on how parents perceive and influence the educational trajectories of their children. This article identifies the structural factors that are involved and how parents and student biographies interact and intersect through parental involvement. With regard to the overall research perspective of this special issue, the perspective of parents relates to the interaction level in directions: on one hand, they are in negotiation and struggle with teachers about the appropriate support for their children, while on the other, they are the primary interlocutors of their children for coping with school and planning future steps in everyday life.

We hope that this introduction has underscored that the special issue concludes that the individual level must not be interpreted as a deterministic perspective according to which the macro level pre-

determines individual agency at micro level. The contribution by *Andreas Walther, Annegret Warth, Manuela du Bois-Reymond,* and *Mirjana Ule* tries to disentangle the complex constellations of structure and agency, which are effective in decision-making processes related to individual educational trajectories. It questions the extent to which these interactions can be understood by analyzing the dynamics, criteria, actors, relationships, and the different levels of biographical reflexivity.

This article distinguishes five patterns of educational trajectories, which have been elaborated according to their destinations after lower secondary education, the ruptures they contain, and the choice young people experienced: *smooth academic, smooth vocational, discontinuous academic, discontinuous vocational,* and *remedial.* It also reconstructs five constellations of decision-making: *family convoy, step by step, fighting for dreams, too weak to resist* and *choosing the simple path.* Rather than forcing the data, the article resists the temptation to integrate the two analytical perspectives into one typology thereby doing justice to the complexity of educational trajectories.

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