



Career counsellors work with parents of students in risky educational transitions

Åsa Sundelin & Anneli Öljarstrand

Department of Education

Riding the wave of change - IAEVG International Conference, 2024

Theme: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Guidance Services

Agenda

- Background
- The study and its' context
- Preliminary results and conclusions



Background



- About 15% of the pupils in Sweden lacks eligibility to upper secondary education (USE).
- Introduction program (IP), situated at upper secondary level. The aim is to enable the pupils to attend regular education in USE, other education or work.
- Heterogeneous group
- School failure - usually a combination of several reasons:
 - Diagnoses, illness, disability
 - Social vulnerability, absenteeism, substance abuse, trauma
 - migration background

The critical transition to IP

Stigmatization process
Uncertainty



Pupils and Parents

- The importance of schools supporting parents so that they can support their children in this educational transition

- Further studies are needed on school actors' work with parents in critical transitions (individualization - marginalized groups)

(Lundahl et al, 2022; Sundelin & Lundahl, 2023)



This study (pilot)

- The aim is to enhance understanding of how schools collaborate with parents of students at risk of not qualifying for USE.
 - What organizational conditions to collaborate with parents exist for school staff ?
 - What methods and strategies do school staff use?
- **A multiple case study design:** two schools
- **Data collection:** document studies, interviews (principals, teachers, counsellors, social worker), observations (meetings with parents).
- Lipsky's (2010) theory of street-level bureaucracy
- Organizational theory concepts (Scott & Davies, 2007)
 - a) normative structure, i.e. organizational norms, values and role expectations
 - b) cultural-cognitive structure, such as shared beliefs and preconceived schemas, models and concepts of action
 - c) behavioral structure, which focuses on actual behavior rather than normative or cognitive behavior

Our schools

Suburban School

Metropolitan area
17 000 inhabitants

- Low socioeconomic index
- 92% of the population has a foreign background
- **MANY IP alternatives**

- 65 pupils in year 9
- 25-30% not eligible to USE
- Approx. 30 nationalities at the school:
Somali and Arabic countries
- Career counsellor 50%

City School

City in central Sweden
110 000 inhabitants

Socio-economic diversity; city, countryside
25% foreign background

3 IP alternatives

- 150 pupils in year 9
- 25% not eligible to USE
- Diversity: countryside, city, socio-economic weak areas
- Somali and Arabic countries
- Career counsellor 100%

Strong focus on USE eligibility in both locations but difference in resource allocation (Suburban school)

Social workers are present in both schools

Schools' work with parents - examples

- **City School:**

- Parent meetings for everyone and separate for parents of pupils with school absence and parents with Swedish as a second language (SwSL)
- Communication strategies, parents with SwSL
- The issue of eligibility for USE, from year 7
- Career counselling

- **Suburban School:**

- Parent meeting for "everyone" - interpreters in six languages
- Adapted study programme after year 8 for increased eligibility to USE - parents are informed and 'accept'
- Career counselling

Career counsellors' perceptions of the parent group in relation to pupils' schooling

- Limited opportunities to support their children
 - personal factors: knowledge, language, mental health, family circumstances
 - socio-economic circumstances: educational background, working life, overcrowding
- Many parents have high trust in school - handing over responsibility to school

- High demands in relation to the student's ability
- 'Non-attendance' approach: no communication about school between parents and children
- 'Cooling down' approach

Interviewer: What do you think about the parents' knowledge about upper secondary school or the choice of upper secondary school?

Counsellor: No, it is very low knowledge about it. That's what I find so strange. They know that their child should go to a science programme and become a doctor, but they don't know anything else.

The transition to IP

- Causes major concerns about the childrens' future
- Conflicts between children and parents

Counsellors' strategies (advocacy)

City School
Direct communication with parents

Suburban School
Indirect communication with parents

STRATEGIES	INFORM	EDUCATE	INFLUENCE (argument)	CONVINCE (persuade)	ACT on behalf of someone
	Individual conversations Parent meetings	Individual conversations Parent meetings	Individual Conversations	Individual Conversations Study visits	Accompany to study visits instead of parent
City School counsellor	Parent & Pupil	Parent & Pupil	Parent & Pupil	Parent & Pupil	
Suburban School counsellor	Pupil (Parent)	Pupil (Parent)	Pupil (parent)	Pupil (parent)	Pupil (parent)

Some tentative conclusions

Discrepancy between the cultural-cognitive structure and behavioral structure?

Although parents are perceived as having limited opportunities to offer both practical and informative support and thus perhaps also emotional support in the transition to USE (cf. Barnes et al., 2020), counsellors do limited work to support parents' learning about career issues (Scott & Davies, 2007). This seems to be due to both routines and (unreflected) priorities (Lipsky), and resources (time, lack of material adapted to the target group).

Ethical dilemmas may follow advocacy work

The aim of counsellors work is to support the pupil but risk creating distance between the pupil and the parent. When children have to mediate information about IP to their parents, they risk having to deal with their parents' reactions (disappointments, worries).

References

- Barnes, S. A., Bimrose, J., Brown, A., Gough, J., & Wright, S. (2020). The role of parents and carers in providing careers guidance and how they can be better supported. *International evidence report, University of Warwick.*
- Lipsky, M. (2010). *Street-level bureaucracy: dilemmas of the individual in public services*. 30th anniversary expanded ed. New York: Russell Sage Foundation
- Lundahl, L., Lindgren, J., Rosvall, P-Å. & Sundelin, Å. (2023). *Att komma vidare. Introduktionsprogram som stöd för unga i riskfyllda övergångar*. [Moving on. Introduction programmes to support young people in risky transitions] Lund: Studentlitteratur
- Scott, W. R. & Davis, G. F. (2007). *Organizations and organizing: rational, natural, and open system perspectives*. 1. ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall
- Sundelin, Å., & Lundahl, L. (2023). Managing critical transitions: Career support to young people risking ineligibility for upper secondary education. *European Educational Research Journal*, 22(4), 572–591.

KIITOS!
TACK!
THANK YOU!

