Reduced capability deprivation through education? An exploratory study among young adults in the Veenkoloniën, the Netherlands

Marion Plegt

S2575361

m.h.plegt@student.rug.nl

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Research Master in Spatial Sciences

Faculty of Spatial Sciences

University of Groningen, the Netherlands

Supervisor: Dr. S. Visser

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Abstract

This article explores the experiences of young adults growing up in intergenerational poverty in the Netherlands. The goal of this research is to acquire deeper knowledge about how young adults in intergenerational poverty perceive the need and opportunities for reduced capability deprivation, and the role education plays in this process. By defining poverty as a capability deprivation, their individual needs and opportunities are taken into account. Through semi-structured interviews with students and their teachers, it becomes clear that the students strive towards being educated and being employed, and through that hope to achieve stability and independence. There are various factors that influence their success. Social networks can for example support or restrain the students, depending on their view on further education. While their area of residence is considered attractive and supportive, it can be limiting as it might not offer enough jobs and types of education. Other challenges are the high costs of education, and the difficulty of accessing information and mapping out pathways of opportunity. Schools assist their students in handling these challenges, by offering support, sharing knowledge and encouraging students. This support could be more conducive by formulating guidelines on recognizing and handling poverty, ensuring the necessity of mandatory books and other costs and creating a safety-net for those that cannot afford these items, possibly in cooperation with the Dutch government. Lastly, society should recognize that inequality still persists in education; only by acknowledging that can we start to create equal chances for all students.

1. Introduction

While short-term poverty is on decline in the Netherlands, the number of people living in long-term poverty is increasing (CBS, 2018). This increase is also visible in the Veenkoloniën, a region in the north-east of the Netherlands (Sociaal Planbureau Groningen, 2019). This area, located in the periphery, has historically been a poor area that is still characterized by low educational levels, low wages and dependency on the government for support, through for example welfare (Edzes & Strijker, 2017), despite being located in an industrialized setting with easy access to commodities as education and internet. From previous poverty research, we understand that these low educational levels, low wages and dependency on governmental support are often caused by multiple factors, such as marital status and household composition (da Costa & Dias, 2015; Green & Hulme, 2005), addiction to alcohol and drugs (da Costa & Dias, 2015), and health problems (da Costa & Dias, 2015; Guiaux et al., 2011). The Veenkoloniën also show a rise of intergenerational poverty, where poverty is passed on from one generation to the next (Homan, Valentino, & Weed, 2017; Sociaal Planbureau Groningen, 2018; Visser, 2018). Moreover, citizens of the area are found to have a strong place identity and place attachment, even if they move away (Rijnks & Strijker, 2011). Thissen, Fortuijn, Strijker and Haartsen (2010) found that among youth, the higher educated indicate that they want to leave the area, for example to areas that have more opportunities for schooling or employment, whereas the lower educated youth indicate they want to remain in the area.

Living in (intergenerational) poverty has many consequences that often make leaving poverty more challenging. Guiaux, Roest and Iedema (2011) describe that poverty often transpires simultaneously with other forms of social exclusion. A lack of finances can result in limited participation in social, cultural and physical activities, for both adults and their children, which can in turn lead to a more limited social network, social exclusion and fewer resources (Guiaux et al., 2011; Wagmiller & Adelman, 2009). According to Dewilde (2008, in Guiaux et al., 2011) and Harper, Marcus and Moore (2003), children that grow up in poor families are more likely to have fewer monetary-, family-, and social resources compared to their peers that grow up in richer families. As a result, they are more likely to have difficulties to finance education, do not have similar chances to achieve their preferred education and stay in lower market positions later in life, which increases their chances of remaining in poverty (Dewilde, 2008, in Guiaux et al., 2011; Harper et al., 2003).

It is problematic that especially those that grow up in poverty face more challenges regarding education compared to their peers from more advantaged households (Ladd, 2012), as education can be an important component in escaping poverty (Leseman & Slot, 2014; Metcalf & Ribich, 2006; Tilak, 2002). Through education, students improve and expand their capabilities (Saito,

2003) as they are taught skills and productive knowledge, which increases their self-confidence, social skills and the chance of finding employment (Tilak, 2002). In the Netherlands, school is mandatory until the age of 16. Between 16 and 18, there is an obligation to gain so-called qualifications. That is, education is mandatory until a degree, other than the lowest level of high school, has been obtained (Rijksoverheid, 2019). At the age of 18, young adults themselves decide whether or not to pursue education, which makes them an interesting group to study. While they may know that education can help them achieve long-term goals and prevent poverty, not all of them choose to stay in school. Therefore, in this research, we studied the experiences of impoverished young adults in this age of transition, within the light of the capability approach.

This paper takes a novel approach to poverty, as it considers poverty to be a capability deprivation, instead of just a monetary deprivation (Sen, 1999). The goal of this research is to acquire deeper knowledge about how young adults in intergenerational poverty perceive the need and opportunities for reduced capability deprivation, and the role education plays in this process. Furthermore, by considering the view of educational professionals, a deeper understanding of the support asked and offered by educational institutions is acquired. Learning more about these needs, opportunities and levels of support can help improve the way schools support their students living in intergenerational poverty, to prevent students from dropping out and to increase their chances of leaving poverty. Moreover, considering poverty to be a capability deprivation lets us take people's differing needs and resources into account (Hick, 2015), while also allowing us to recognize that children growing up in intergenerational poverty lack more than just money. Income deprivation often has underlying problems such as the aforementioned limited human- and social capital (Guiaux et al., 2011; Harper et al., 2003).

2. Theoretical framework

In the traditional concept of poverty (i.e., as income deprivation), researchers identify four types of poverty: (i) short-term poverty, (ii) long-term poverty, (iii) intergenerational poverty and (iv) downward mobility (Green & Hulme, 2005; Homan et al., 2017). Commonly stated causes of poverty are employment situation and a lack of education (Blanden & Gibbons, 2006; da Costa & Dias, 2015), marital status and household composition (da Costa & Dias, 2015; Green & Hulme, 2005), addiction to alcohol and drugs (da Costa & Dias, 2015), inadequate government support (da Costa & Dias, 2015), discrimination (Green & Hulme, 2005), health problems (da Costa & Dias, 2015; Guiaux et al., 2011), bad luck (da Costa & Dias, 2015), ethnicity (Hill, Ramirez, & Dumka, 2003; Homan et al., 2017; SCP, 2018) and living in deprived neighbourhoods (Guiaux et al., 2011). Some of these causes can be considered to be internal (e.g. addiction, marital status and household composition), whereas others are external (e.g. discrimination and inadequate government support). Having to cope with these causes can lead to capability deprivation.

This research takes on a different approach to poverty, moving away from solely financial indicators and towards the concept of poverty as a capability deprivation (Sen, 1999). This approach was introduced by Amartya Sen and has been extensively discussed in scholarly literature (Hick, 2012, 2015; Rippin, 2016; Sen, 1999). Considering poverty as a capability deprivation allows us to take into account individuals' differing needs and resources. For example, a student from the countryside might have to move to a city to attend their preferred education, which may come with higher costs compared to a student with similar goals who is already living in the city. Furthermore, this approach takes into account that monetary poverty often transpires simultaneously with one or more of the above-mentioned causes of poverty that can likewise limit an individual's capability.

The concept of poverty as a capability deprivation is situated in Sen's capability approach. The fundamental question behind this capability approach is 'what are people actually able to be and do in their daily lives?' (Chiappero-Martinetti & Venkatapuram, 2014, p. 709; Robeyns, 2005), which allows for a focus on people's capabilities, also known as their actual opportunities. Sen's capability approach consists of five main concepts: (i) resources, (ii) conversion factors, (iii) capabilities, (iv) agency and (v) functionings (Chiappero-Martinetti & Venkatapuram, 2014; Robeyns, 2005). An overview of the capability approach and these concepts, as well as how they relate to each other, can be found in Figure 1. Conversion factors can be seen as internal and external factors, that, together with (financial) resources either limit or support an individual's capability, or the ability to achieve. Agency is the capacity to act or not to act; the freedom to pursue goals that one values. Functionings are the actual outcomes or achievements, based on whether or not a person has the capability to achieve something, and then acts on it (Chiappero-Martinetti & Venkatapuram, 2014; Robeyns, 2005; Saito, 2003). The functionings achieveable can be negatively influenced by area or context, as in some contexts certain functionings are not available or achievable (Robeyns, 2005), such as for example specific types of education. Furthermore, it is important to note the difference between functionings that people are unable to achieve, and functionings that they simply do not achieve (Hick, 2015). A person not achieving something does not mean they are not able to achieve it; it might be that they have the agency to choose not to achieve a well-being goal (Alkire, 2005; Hick, 2015). Someone might, for example, accept a lower-paying job in their area of residence, instead of a higher paying one for which they would have to move, as they value their current place of residence over a higher-paying job. Considering poverty to be a capability deprivation allows for these individual factors to weigh in.

One of the criticisms on the capability approach is that it is difficult to operationalize, as Sen has not formulated a list of 'basic' capabilities, since these differ with context (Alkire, 2005; Robeyns, 2006). Researchers and organizations, such as the United Nations, have formulated lists of

capabilities (Hick, 2015; Nussbaum, 2003; United Nations Development Programme, 2019). However, similar criticism can be identified, as the capabilities on these lists still differ with context and cannot be applied to every situation (Alkire, 2005). In practice, this entails that for each (research) context the relevant capabilities have to be identified and selected, depending on the research questions and goals of that specific context (Alkire, 2005).

Taking this criticism into consideration, in the current research, the identified capability is 'the ability to be educated', to eventually achieve the functioning 'reduced capability deprivation through education', as shown in Figure 1. Agency, together with an individual's resources and conversion factors, influences whether this can be achieved. The capability approach allows for the conceptualization and evaluation of the experiences and capabilities of young adults in intergenerational poverty, and the role education can play in their lives.
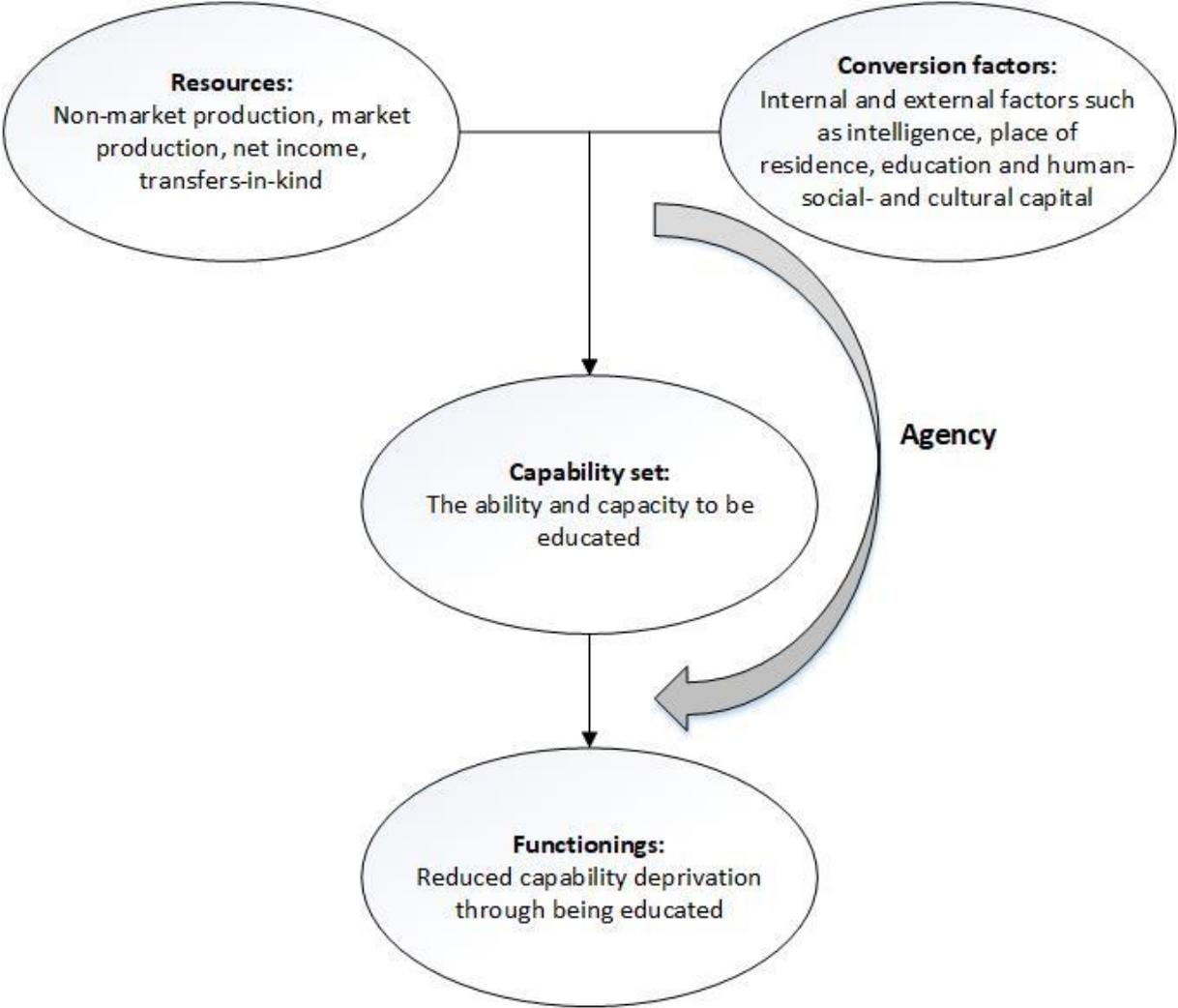

Figure 1 - Conceptual model of the capability approach applied to this research *(based on Chiappero-Martinetti & Venkatapuram, 2014; Robeyns, 2005)*

Saito (2003) argues that the capability approach can be applied to education, which develops two aspects of capabilities: (i) education expands students' capacities or abilities, as well as (ii) the opportunities students have. Chiappero-Martinetti and Sabadash (2014) support this notion, arguing that, within the framework of the capability approach, education can be a conversion factor, as well as a capability and a functioning. To illustrate: in school, students are taught various skills, such as reading. This gives the student the capability to read books and realises the functioning 'being literate'. This functioning, being literate, is then also a conversion factor that gives children the ability to broaden their knowledge and read about different other topics, further expanding their capabilities (Saito, 2003). The skill or functioning 'being literate' can be replaced with many of the other skills students learn throughout their education; these skills are captured in the general functioning of 'being educated'. The skills students are taught allow them to access and discover new opportunities. Furthermore, schools are often places where students are taught values, giving them a framework for applying their capabilities. Building on White (1973, in Saito, 2003), Saito suggests that education can foster autonomy among children. Walker (2005) adds that education can be an important influence on a person's identity, as well as on the way people see each other.

However, research shows that children growing up in poverty, for whom education and the expansion of their capabilities are very important, face more challenges in accessing and staying in school compared to their peers from more advantaged households (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2010; Crosnoe, Mistry, & Elder, 2002; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Ladd, 2012; Noguera, 2011). Therewith they have higher changes to stay in deprivation. These challenges vary, and consist for example of struggling to pay tuition fees and other school costs, such as laptops, books and uniforms (Stichting Leergeld, 2015; Zhang, 2014), inadequate contact between school and parents (Noguera, 2011) and limited involvement from parents with school and homework (Crosnoe et al., 2002; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000). This can be caused by parents not valuing education (Lacour & Tissington, 2011) or parents lacking the ability or motivation to help their children map out pathways of opportunity (Crosnoe et al., 2002). Furthermore, students that grow up in poverty are more likely to drop out of school than their middle-class peers (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2010; Holter, 2008; Tilak, 2002). Meng, Coenen, Ramaekers and Büchner (2009) and Allen and Meng (2010) studied motives for dropping out among young adults in the Netherlands. They found various reasons, such as (i) a preference for working over school, (ii) a dislike for the chosen education/wanting to switch to a different type of education, (iii) (mental) illness, (iv) need for an income or (v) problems with school, internship or at home.

Holter (2008) emphasizes the importance of students' social networks and argues that students who are at risk of dropping out more often have close friends that have dropped out as well.

Education, and expansion of capabilities, can be a way to broaden these social networks and help students in their decision-making process of whether or not to remain in school. This is especially relevant for students from poor or deprived neighbourhoods, such as parts of the Veenkoloniën. While social networks can be strong and supportive in these deprived areas (Livingston, Bailey, & Kearns, 2010; MacDonald, Shildrick, Webster, & Simpson, 2005), they can also weigh people down and limit their opportunities (Castro & Lindbladh, 2004; MacDonald et al., 2005). Social capital in deprived neighbourhoods can be characterized as 'bonding' social capital, that allows people to get by, opposed to 'bridging' social capital, that allows people to get on (Kearns & Parkinson, 2001, in MacDonald et al., 2005). Moreover, social networks are an important mechanism in the search for a job. However, since social capital is limited in these areas, the people in these social networks often have the same prospects in work and/or education which may reduce the chance of personal progression (Webster et al., 2004). This, as well as a lack of more successful examples, can limit people, as they do not feel the need to pursue education or perceive their situation as the highest attainable (Castro & Lindbladh, 2004; MacDonald et al., 2005). Through education, students get in touch with different people and new role models, changing their view on the need for education (Guiaux et al., 2011; Tilak, 2002). In the Veenkoloniën, too, many people are working in low-income jobs with limited social networks (Edzes & Strijker, 2017). Next to that, there are families that live according to existing social norms that may discourage students from continuing education. Recipients of social benefits and welfare sharing information about these benefits might have the same demotivating effect (Edzes & Strijker, 2017). These characteristics make the Veenkoloniën an example of an area where education could be a way to expand the capabilities and capacities of, and opportunities for the next generation.

3. Methodology

Data has been gathered through semi-structured interviews with four students and three lecturers from two schools in the Veenkoloniën. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in the way issues are addressed, so time spent on topics could be adapted accordingly to the importance participants assigned to these topics (Dunn, 2016), allowing us to focus on both the topics that were relevant according to literature, as well as on the topics the participants deemed relevant. The interview-guide was discussed with the supervisor, as well as with an educational professional to assess the relevance and comprehensibility of the questions. The interview-guide for students was structured along four central themes: (i) their household situation and backstory, (ii) their goals and expectations with regards to education, as well as the significance of education, (iii) their possibilities for being educated and expectations for their future and (iv) their friends, family and neighbourhood. The interview-guide for teachers was structured slightly differently

and focussed on (i) the current role of education for students in poverty, (ii) their view on the home-situation of these students and (iii) what education could contribute in an ideal world.

Since poverty is a sensitive, and possibly distressing subject, getting in contact with respondents was a lengthy process. Based on existing contacts from a research project on intergenerational poverty in the area, contact was established with two schools. Informal conversations were held with teachers involved in their school's poverty-policy. After agreeing to participate in the research project, these teachers fulfilled a role as both gatekeeper and participant (King & Horrocks, 2010; Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). They selected and approached students based on criteria discussed during and after the initial conversation. This approach was selected as the teachers know their students and know who come from impoverished households, thus preventing possibly sensitive questions. Furthermore, students and their parents already knew the gatekeeper, ensuring them of the trustworthiness of the researcher. Information letters about the project, composed by the researcher, were distributed to both students and their parents. The gatekeepers were interviewed as well, to illustrate the school's policy regarding students from impoverished households. Respondents could have been approached through other channels, such as social media. However, since educational institutes and their support are an important focus of this research, we wanted to hear and compare experiences from both sides and therefore we only approached participants through their respective schools.

Before beginning the interviews, a letter of informed consent, as well as the participants' rights, were discussed with the participants. It was ensured that the students were participating willingly and not because they were coerced by their teacher, which is especially important as there is a power-relation between students and teachers (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). Furthermore, it was explained that the interviews are confidential and will only be used for this research and that interviews would not be shared with the schools. All interviews were held at the schools in locked classrooms, preventing disturbances and ensuring anonymity. The participants' pseudonyms and their characteristics can be found in Table 1**Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.**. To ensure their confidentiality, all participants were given pseudonyms. Furthermore, to allow teachers to speak freely about their school's policy and their students, the names of the schools are not published.

Table 1 - Characteristics of the interviewees

Interviewee	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Position	Type of school
Interviewee 1	Laura	20	Female	Student	Practical education
Interviewee 2	Merel	19	Female	Student	Practical education
Interviewee 3	Esmee	18	Female	Student	Practical education

Interviewee 4	Peter	-	Male	Teacher	Practical education
Interviewee 5	Lars	19	Male	Student	Secondary vocational education
Interviewee 6	Hanna	-	Female	Teacher	Secondary vocational education
Interviewee 7	Richard	-	Male	Care coordinator	Secondary vocational education

The initial conversations and interviews took place between March and June 2019. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and then coded and analysed using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. Codes were derived both deductively from theory, as well as inductively from the data. By looking at the network around codes, and connecting these different codes, reoccurring patterns and themes were identified. Codes were then grouped together into code-families based on their similar themes. These themes were organized according to the capability approach and literature (e.g. functionings, social networks, income) and the students' backgrounds (Cope, 2016). By going through the codes within each code-family, an overview of participants' thoughts and experiences was created, which allowed for a comparison between the participants. Organizing the codes within these code-families resulted in a structured reporting of the data.

Since the students were selected by the gatekeepers, it was already known that they come from a situation of intergenerational poverty. As a result, it was not necessary to ask questions that the respondent might have experienced as harmful, painful or invasive of their privacy (Hay, 2010). A possible limitation of working with gatekeepers is selection-bias. Gatekeepers might intentionally or unintentionally influence the data through the respondents they select (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). In the case of one of the schools, for example, two of the students stated will pursue further education after graduating. However, of the 30 graduates this year, only six in total will pursue further education, meaning that the interviewed students were the exception instead of the norm. It is therefore important to note that the sample cannot be seen as representing all young adults growing up in intergenerational poverty in the Veenkoloniën.

4. Results

4.1 Participants' background

By looking at poverty as a capability deprivation, we considered that income-poverty often transpires simultaneously with other factors that limit an individual's capability. During the interviews, it became clear that this was the case for all student-participants. Shortly discussing their biographies illustrates who they are and what other challenges they face (Levitt et al., 2018).

Laura is 20 years old and lives with her boyfriend, his father and his brother. Before that, she lived with her mother, until the situation became untenable. Her parents want to separate, however,

their financial situation does not allow for a divorce. Laura is studying to become a seamstress and hopes to one day have her own shop.

Merel is 19 years old and goes to the same school as Laura, though her focus is on elderly care. She will graduate this summer and then pursue further education at a school for secondary vocational education. She lives with her mother; her sister lives with their father. Merel, however, is not in contact with her father. Merel's mother was depressed for years and could not work; her situation is now slowly improving and she volunteers at an organization in their village.

Esmee is 18 years old, will graduate this summer and then pursue further education before starting her career in elderly care. She lives with her mother, sister and step-father, who has been with her mother for about six years. She does not know her own father, though she did know her sister's biological father when growing up. Esmee has a boyfriend; they have been together for nearly a year.

Lars is 19 years old and already goes to a school for secondary vocational education, where he studies to become a teaching assistant. After getting his degree, he wants to continue studying to become a teacher. On weekdays, he lives with his mother and his brother; the weekends, he at his father's. Luckily, Lars' parents still live very close to each other and are on good terms, so he often sees his father on weekdays as well.

4.2 Functionings

In this section, we analyse how the participants understand strategies for reduced capability deprivation, and the role education plays in this process. To acquire deeper knowledge, the first step is to identify how the young adults perceive this need for reduced capability deprivation through being educated. This was done by inquiring about their goals later in life and what it is they want to achieve. From this, two main themes emerged: i) being educated and being employed and ii) having stability and being independent.

4.2.1 Being educated and being employed

The students are all still in school. Laura will finish her formal education this summer but will continue studying and acquire more skills to achieve her dream of becoming a seamstress. For the next two years, she already secured a job as a teacher's assistant at her current school. Lars is studying to become a teaching assistant and plans to continue studying, so he can eventually become a teacher. Merel and Esmee will both graduate this summer and then pursue further education. Merel plans to acquire one more degree, whereas Esmee plans to acquire two more. Both girls are convinced that their sector, elderly care, will have enough jobs, so they should both be able to find work. For Merel, having a degree is the first thing she needs to be able to achieve her goals; not just for getting a job but also to for example find a nice house:

> *Interviewer: 'And do you think you'll be able to acquire these things [you want],*
> *the good job and the nice house?'*
> *Merel: 'Well, if I try I think I will.''*
> *Interviewer: 'And what do you think you need to acquire all this?'*
> *Merel: 'A degree.'*

All four of them see being educated as a way to progress and access opportunities. For example, when it comes to being employed, the students value having a permanent contract and see being educated as a way to increase their chances of achieving this. Esmee describes having a stern conversation with her boyfriend when he told her he wanted to discontinue his education to start working. She told him to make sure he secured a permanent position with the company before dropping out:

> *No, he dropped out, because he could start working at this company. And well, in*
> *the beginning, I was angry with him. You won't get anywhere without a degree, I*
> *said, you first have to make completely sure that you will get a permanent*
> *contract. He is supportive of me continuing my education though. And even if he*
> *didn't agree, I'd still do it.*

This shows that while the students all view being educated as a goal in itself, they recognize it is also a conversion factor to achieve the goal of being employed. While they acknowledge that employment can be achieved without education, they argue that their chances of achieving employment are much better after obtaining a degree.

4.2.2 Social functioning: having stability and being independent

The other goals are of a social nature: having stability and being independent, through being educated and being employed. Laura and Esmee both want stability: stability in the sense of having a conventional family life, and being able to provide that stability for themselves and their family, as stability is something they both have lacked for years but are recently (re)discovering. This instability they experienced was caused by monetary poverty on the one hand and an unstable household situation on the other hand. Laura and Esmee see 'being educated and employment' and 'income' as ways to convert their situation and means to be able to provide this stability for themselves and their family. Laura illustrates:

> *A normal income, that allows you to get by, that is enough for me. [..]What I'd like*
> *to have most is stability, for my family, you know. So everyone knows what they*
> *can expect of each other and that when you have to go to the hospital, you know*

where the money is coming from and that you have some money saved up. That
would be nice.

When asked about his future, Lars does not mention stability. He does, however, mention independence, a theme Laura and Esmee also mentioned several times. All three want to be able to stand on their own feet and take care of themselves, without help from outsiders. Esmee explains that she thinks school already offers enough help, and that she does not need any more help, as she wants to do it on her own anyway:

No [they don't need to offer more help], they already do a lot. And I want to do it
by myself anyway. [..] I need to be independent, and it is better to learn that now,
instead of having someone arrange everything for me. I don't want to be out of
my depth in the future.

The mothers of Lars, Esmee and Merel have been or are involved with one or more organizations to help with the problems that arose as a consequence of poverty. Laura's parents are not involved with any organizations, though she wishes they were, as she doubts they can solve their problems without help from outside. Seeing this dependency in their parents, as well as the independence once problems are solved, might be the motivation for these young adults to strive for independence as well. They see being educated and being employed as important steps to convert their situation.

While reduced poverty, or reduced capability deprivation, was never specifically mentioned, it became clear that it is something all four students want to achieve. We now understand that for these participants being educated, having work, having stability and being independent are important achievements. Through the capability approach, the next step is to obtain insights into the possibilities and strategies to achieve these outcomes and where and how capabilities are deprived for these participants.

4.3 Resources, conversion factors and capabilities

Whether or not young adults will be able to achieve their goals depends on their resources and conversion factors, and whether or not these result in the ability to achieve something. From the interviews, several themes emerged with regards to means which influence their ability to achieve: (i) social networks, (ii) access to knowledge, (iii) income and (iv) area of residence. Having or lacking these resources or conversion factors will influence whether or not students have the ability and capacity to transform these factors into capabilities.

4.3.1 Social networks

Among our participants, the most important social contacts were friends and family. The young adults all say that their parents support them, though they do admit that it is sometimes hard for their parents to keep up, as their children surpass them or because they have other matters to worry about. Merel explains that her mom does try to help her with school, although that does not always work out:

> Interviewer: 'Is your mother involved with your education? Does she for example
> help you with homework, that kind of things?'
> Merel: 'Yes, if I need help she does try to help me, but ...'
> Interviewer: 'It does not always work out?'
> Merel: 'No...'

This also makes it more difficult to discuss possibilities for further education. Merel, Esmee and Lars all emphasize the importance of their grandparents for achieving their studies, and in their lives in general. This might be because grandparents have more time and resources to support their grandchildren (Hagestad, 2006). Lars calls his grandfather one of his best friends, whom he shares and discusses a lot with and who supports him, for example when he wanted to switch his degree. For Merel, her grandparents are an example of what she wants later in life, as they have everything sorted out. For Esmee, her grandmother and great-grandmother were very important in her decision for elderly care. They both state that they are partly pursuing their education to make their grandparents proud. While her grandmothers were very important to Esmee, the one that matters the most, and whom she looks up to, is her mother. Her mother now has everything sorted out, and is an example to Esmee:

> My mother. She also organizes everything for my grandpa. And, my mom, if I don't
> know something and I ask my mom, she can help me. She has everything sorted in
> terms of important documents and so on.

Their teachers, too, emphasize the importance of parents in the process of staying in school. They see that for some of their students, parents are not that involved. This might be because parents do not value education, or they do not understand the relevance of what their children are doing. A lack of support from their parents limits students in their ability to be educated. This means that parents can be both supportive and restrictive, depending on what they value. In the literature, limited support from parents when it comes to education is described as a challenge that students that grow up in poverty are more likely to face than their peers from middle-class households (Crosnoe et al., 2002; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Noguera, 2011). Based on the students' statements, it seems that grandparents can possibly play an important role in

offering additional support, though this is not something mentioned by the teachers; they might not be aware of it. Furthermore, Hanna and Peter, the teachers that were interviewed, think that this lack of parental support, in combination with the parents being on welfare makes students more likely to drop out, as information on how to receive welfare is easily available and parents might not support their child's educational-path. This is similar to the mechanism Edzes and Strijker (2017) describe.

Another important part of the young adults' social network are their friends. They all had groups of friends, be it from school, sports or through their partner. This network of friends offers support, which Laura and Lars experienced when they switched studies. Some of their friends are still studying as well, whereas others are already working. Of these working friends, some already graduated, whereas others dropped out. Holter (2008) describes that students that are at risk of dropping out often have friends that dropped out as well. However, during the interviews, it did not appear that the young adults were at risk of dropping out or feeling social pressure to do so. Merel illustrates the mutual support within her group of friends, no matter their decisions regarding education:

> Well, I think it's okay [that they drop out], it's their choice right? Everyone should
> do what feels right. [Continuing education] is my choice, they also support that.

Social networks can offer important support in developing the ability to be educated and in the choice of the participants to strive for being educated.

4.3.2 Access to knowledge

Another theme that emerged is access to knowledge, especially with regards to choosing their education. Whereas Esmee and Merel have always known what they wanted to do, Laura and Lars were unsure and eventually even switched. Lars choose his initial education, business studies, because he did not know what to do and a friend said it was fun. Lars did not enjoy it and skipped a lot of classes. Eventually, his mentor helped him choose a different educational track:

> Yeah, it was because of my then-mentor. He really helped me find what it is I enjoy,
> he really helped me a lot with that. We did some tests, and back then I also gave
> soccer training [...]. I always really enjoyed that, you of course also teach things
> to kids during soccer practice. And with teaching assistant, you also have to teach
> things to children. And I enjoy that so much more, because you can also see them
> making progress, that kind of thing.

This shows the importance of having someone in a youngster's network that can help them make informed decisions with regards to education, and who embodies the conversion factor

knowledge about education. Meng et al. (2009) and Allen and Meng (2010) found that if you dislike your field of study, you are more likely to drop out and not achieve the ability to be further educated. By having someone in their network, such as a family-friend or teacher, with whom young adults can discuss your possibilities, it can reduce the chance of dropping out.

Knowledge also plays an important role when it comes to acquiring funding. Parents of underage children can, for example, get additional funding through *Stichting Leergeld*[1] (Foundation Learning-support). Richard, however, explains that some parents and students are not aware of this or do not know how to get in touch with the foundation, and he helps them out:

> *Some do not know how to get in touch with them. I often give them a business card with the information and then they call, or we sit behind the computer together and I show them the steps. And this is all quite accessible really. But for some parents, and then I'm mainly talking about those from disadvantaged areas, they do indeed have a hard time looking things up on the internet.*

One of the challenges students in poverty face is that their parents cannot always help them map out pathways of opportunities (Crosnoe et al., 2002). In such cases, it is very important for students to have someone, in this case school, that can help them out and, through that, expand their resources. This example also shows the importance of being literate, understanding guidelines and procedures, and having access to books and internet, to eventually have the possibility to achieve being educated.

4.3.3 Income

The cost of education can be a challenge for students growing up in intergenerational poverty (Stichting Leergeld, 2015; Zhang, 2014). Lars and Esmee already worry about how they will pay for their future education; both consider taking a gap year to earn some money before going back to school, as at this moment they do not have the resources to achieve their abilities and being educated. Lars describes that after his current studies, he will work for one or two years before going back to school to get his qualification as a teacher:

> *I definitely want to work for a year first, so I have some money to pay for education because teacher training is quite expensive. So it's better to work for one, two years. Depends on how well I like it of course [laughs].*

While it is wise to already think about the future, a gap-year is risky as well, as it can be challenging to return to school after a year of working or volunteering (Torpey, 2009). Esmee explains that

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[1] *Stichting Leergeld* is a foundation that wants to ensure that parents whose income is around welfare level are still able to pay for their children's school equipment, school trips and fees for a sports club.

she and her sister are lucky, as their grandmother has been saving for their education all their lives. This allowed Esmee's sister to attend school to become a hairdresser and afford the required hairdressers' kit, which she would not have been able to acquire without the savings, as it costs around 1300 euros. The savings allow Esmee to afford a large part of her education, though it is not sufficient to pay for her second studies as well, hence the gap-year. Hanna and Peter explain that, as Esmee said, it is not just the costs of tuition; it is also the costs of laptops, books, excursions and other necessities for each specific type of education. Hanna knows that there are students that cannot start their preferred education because of the high costs of school, and suspects that there are even students that drop out as they cannot afford the costs anymore:

> *I have my suspicions, but I can't confirm them. [They say] they are needed at home,*
> *or that they are ill, or that they don't like it anymore, or that they don't belong*
> *with the group. This is where poverty is one of the reasons.*

This means that a lack of income can restrict young adults in their freedom to achieve further education and thus can create capability deprivation. While the Dutch government does offer some monetary support, Richard explains this becomes more difficult once students are adults. As long as students are under 18, their parents can apply for funds at *Stichting Leergeld*. However, the funding is only for minors: once these students turn 18, they have to turn to different organisations. It is, for example, possible to get a loan from *DUO*, part of the Dutch government. Depending on their parents' income, part of this loan might even be a gift. This does, however, result in students graduating with debt, which might result in students refusing this loan and not continuing their education (Nationale Onderwijsgids, 2018).

4.3.4 Area of residence
The three girls all want to stay in the Veenkoloniën, even though it is located in the periphery of the country, and has relatively high unemployment compared to the surrounding area (Trendbureau Drenthe, 2019). The girls would, however, be willing to move to a bigger city, such as Emmen or Groningen. This move would be mainly for the facilities the city has to offer, as wll as the better job-prospects, which could increase their chances for employment. Lars is the exception in this: in the future, he would like to live in Rotterdam. Whereas he does like the countryside, he thinks the city has more to offer:

> *No, no, I don't want to stay in this area, I think I'd rather go towards the city. I*
> *think, yeah, I do enjoy living in a village but a city, there are way more job*
> *opportunities and that sort of things, but to me it also seems more fun.*

Lars points out the importance of job-opportunities and would be willing to move for work or education. Hanna supports the impression that most of her students want to remain in the area,

be it for work or studies; they feel a strong sense of place attachment and belonging, which is in line with the findings of Rijnks and Strijker (2011). While Hanna encourages her students to look outside their comfort-zone, she also states that the region needs both lower- and higher educated people to remain there, to keep it liveable. Furthermore, she emphasizes the happiness the area brings people. Moving away might improve their chances of employment or secure higher earnings, but that might not be worth it if they are less happy in that new area:

> *But do you need that [moving away for higher earnings] to be happy? And what would be the correct balance? [..] My son, he lives in Emmen and works for a company in Amersfoort. He has to drive for three hours every day, sometimes even more. And then he says, I'd much rather do that than live over there.*

The Veenkoloniën might be an area located in the periphery, it has a lot to offer in terms of nature, social contacts and community; all possible reasons for staying discussed by Stockdale and Haartsen (2018). Laura, Merel and Esmee indicated they might have moved for their studies if it was necessary, though it is unclear if they would have been able to. However, since it was not necessary, they never had to make that decision. Unfortunately, some students do not have the capacity to go to another city to study, for example because their parents do not think it is necessary or because they cannot afford it:

> *He wanted to be a mechanic, but then he had to go to Assen for his studies. And his parents were like yes, but we can't afford that, so the whole thing was cancelled. Now he's doing something else, he had to redo a year already. Yeah you know, such a kid, I just think well there is the next generation that has to do something they don't enjoy.*

As pointed out before, not enjoying your studies is an important reason for dropping out (Allen & Meng, 2010; Meng et al., 2009). On the one hand, it is because the parents could not afford it. Then again, had they already lived closer to a city that did offer this studies, there would not have been a problem at all. In that sense, the area of residence can also limit students in their freedom to achieve further education.

4.4 Agency

Agency, the capacity to act, or not act, is the freedom to pursue (well-being) goals that one values. The students' agency can be clearly identified with regards to wanting to stay or moving away from the Veenkoloniën. Stockdale and Haartsen (2018) argue that staying can be a deliberate choice; hence, immobility or staying can be positive, as long as one has the capacity to act. This shows that the girls' goal to remain in the area is an expression of their agency, as is the intention to move away for Lars. For Lars and Laura, their capacity to act played a crucial role in switching

between studies, instead of not acting and remaining in the one they did not like. In Esmee's case, her agency was shown when she decided to break with some of her childhood friends. All they wanted to do was hang at the local supermarket all day, whereas Esmee wanted to do something more. These different goals made it clear for Esmee that she did not want to hang out with them anymore; a decision she had the capacity to act on.

The young adults we interviewed have many goals that they want to achieve. However, they might not have the agency to achieve all of them. Laura and Esmee actively talk about their self-confidence, which has been negatively affected by their experiences growing up. Lars, too, says that experiencing poverty during childhood has affected him. This lack of self-confidence might limit these young adults in pursuing the well-being goals they value. It might even take away their agency, in that they do not have the capacity to act. Peter explains that this lack of confidence often is not rooted in poverty alone; for his students, it is usually partly caused by their experiences in primary school and by having to go to a school for practical education, instead of a regular high school:

> *These students come from a situation where, in primary school, they were always the ones that had to sit apart from the rest during mathematics. The class continued but they were always working on a lower level. And then, they have to go to practical education, whereas all their friends get to go to a regular high school.*

This whole process can be disastrous for a students' self-confidence, especially if they lack support from home. Peter delineates how they try to support their students and give the acknowledgement they need. Having the agency to pursue valued functionings gives students a sense of freedom and self-confidence, whereas lacking this agency can prevent them from achieving the goals they value.

4.5 Reducing capability deprivation, through education and school

Schools support the capability expansion of their students in various ways. Students are not just taught knowledge and skills; schools and teachers support them through the earlier discussed knowledge of education and by helping them map out pathways of opportunity. The students all indicate that their schools offer plenty of support and that they can approach their teachers about many different topics. In Laura's case, the school even pays the tuition for the private institute she attends to become a seamstress:

> *The school knows about my financial troubles, so they have been really nice, paying for my education to become a seamstress [..] They asked me, wouldn't you like to become a seamstress? And I said I would like to, but the education is quite*

expensive and I don't have that kind of money. And they said well maybe we can arrange something and that's what they did.

Teachers also offer support outside the criteria defined by their schools. Hanna, for example, took the too-small clothes of her children to school and left them in an empty classroom so her students could pick the items they liked or needed. Peter, with the support of his school, has made an special effort to both arrange and acquire funding for trips abroad, through for example organizing dinners, markets and baking and selling snacks. As a result of the funds raised, the school could keep the individual contribution as low as 20 euros, ensuring that everyone was able to join.

While education has an important and versatile role when it comes to reducing capability deprivation and achieving higher mobility, its' role has limits. One of the first challenges teachers face is that, in the end, school is 'just' for education. Hanna would for example like to visit the households of the students she coaches, to get a better idea of their situation at home. However, she is confronted with rules about the costs, the time it takes and whether or not that still qualifies as education:

I would be open for that [house visits], I think it will bring us a lot. But then you're faced with regulations, and what will it cost? You have 24 students and how will you organize it. And then, this is a discussion we have often, is it your job? [...] Is it still education? Or are you more of a social worker, or a replacement-parent?

Peter's school does support house visits, and he finds them very useful, as it gives him a lot of insight into his students' home-situation. House visits allow him to quicker recognize potential challenges, such as poverty, and offer additional assistance, if necessary. He is, however, like Hanna, wary of getting to close to his students or even taking over the parental role. He emphasizes that students or their parents should not get too dependent on school; they should be the ones to stay in control. As Peter says, in the end, school is first and foremost an institution where you can get a degree:

You have to remain at an appropriate distance. You can recognize, you can make sure action is taken. But if you want to solve things for parents and students, they will become dependent on you. And I think it is very important that students, and especially parents, can stay in control. Maybe they could use some help, but I don't think that's the task of a school. The school has to be viewed as the opportunity to get a degree and continue towards work or further education.

This shows that support from school can expand students' capabilities; however, too much support might limit students and their parents, as they become too dependent which can pose

challenges once students leave school and cannot call upon their lecturers anymore. Laura states that she would have liked more support on learning how to prioritize what she spends her money on. In the end, she did not acquire this skill in school, even though she does think it would be useful to learn there. However, she also admits that teenagers might still be too stubborn to pay attention:

> *I did not really learn it [budgeting] in school. They could bring it up more, how*
> *you can sort out your priorities and how to use your money. But at the same time,*
> *I could understand it if they didn't. Because teenagers are quite stubborn.*

Richard also suggests that budgeting could be taught at schools, or possibly through the municipality, as he often encounters students that consider budgeting a challenge. Peter points out that they do offer this kind of information, though students are, at that time, often not that interested. His school, therefore, decided to offer budgeting as a course in their evening school, where former students and other interested people can come and take various classes, for free. This evening school allows many people to continue learning and expand their capabilities. It also shows that education is not just useful or of interest for young adults; it is also relevant for those whose days of school are far behind them. Funding the evening school was becoming a challenge; fortunately for the school, the municipality has recently dedicated itself to the evening school and will assist with funds. It seems that Richard was not aware of the evening school; spreading information about the it to other schools in the region, especially now that the municipality is involved, could help tackle this issue.

Furthermore, Peter's school acquired a house in a neighbourhood close to school, where students can practice living on their own and dealing with household-tasks such as grocery shopping, cleaning and maintaining a budget. While this cannot be offered by every school, it is an excellent way to prepare students for adult life and teach them the ability to budget.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study aimed to broaden the knowledge about young adults in intergenerational poverty and how and if they can achieve education to reduce capability deprivation. By asking teachers about their perspective, information was gathered about what it is schools do to support young adults in this process, and what else they could possibly do. By approaching poverty as a capability deprivation, people's differing needs and resources were taken into account.

The four young adults interviewed for this research all have clear goals: first being educated, followed by being employed, and, through that, achieving stability and independence. They see a need for reduced capability deprivation and think their chances will increase by having a good

education and then finding a good job. Several resources and conversion factors are important in enabling them to achieve being educated, such as social networks, knowledge, income, area of residence and school and support.

As expected, it is important that students feel supported by their parents and friends. What was unexpected is the importance of support from grandparents, with regards to choosing and continuing education. Parents are not always able to offer the necessary support; the students suggest that grandparents are to some extent able to fill this gap, by providing funding, attention and encouragement. While not all grandparents are around to offer this kind of support, acknowledging their potential important role, and, where possible, involving them with their grandchild's education could improve the student's chances. Schools also play an important role in offering support, by acknowledging their students and helping them in various ways. This help consists of for example mapping out pathways of opportunities, sharing knowledge about ways to acquire additional funding and in general motivating and encouraging students. This does, however, require a lot of resources from schools and their teachers; according to the teachers, schools are first and foremost an institution to acquire a degree. The importance of students and parents remaining independent and in control is emphasized as well. Finding balance in support from (grand)parents and school can greatly help students in reaching their goals of being educated and being employed and might prevent them from dropping out. Additionally, literature suggest that students can feel peer-pressure to drop out of school (Holter, 2008); however, this study did not find evidence for this claim. The students instead emphasized the importance of support from their friends, no matter their educational decisions. Nonetheless, there is some pressure to get a degree, as it increases the chances of a permanent contract, which is highly valued by the students.

Area of residence, though very important to the participants, is hard to influence. Students with a strong place-attachment indicate a deep preference for staying in the area, even though it might limit their chances for education and employment. However, with regards to the sectors education and (elderly) care, it is conceivable that the region offers enough employment opportunities and the notion that there is a shortage of positions is externally imposed; in reality, these students might have favourable perspectives in the Veenkoloniën. Furthermore, the Veenkoloniën also offer them support as their social network is located there, and to ensure long-term liveability, it is important for the region that people remain there. Justification can be found for both staying in and leaving the area; in the end, it seems important that a balance is found between the different levels of education that remain in the area, making it more diverse. To achieve this, it is essential that the region has sufficient jobs on different levels and in various sectors. The municipal- and regional government could facilitate this by creating attractive conditions for companies, by

ensuring that the region offers a broad and diverse range of education and by employing people from the Veenkoloniën or offering attractive living conditions within the Veenkoloniën for employees from outside the area. Additionally, it is essential that the students have the agency to decide whether they want to stay in the area; staying should not be something that just happens to them. Having the agency to make decisions supports capability enhancement; the same goes for having access to knowledge and possessing the necessary funding.

Moreover, this research shows that young adults who grow up in intergenerational poverty are aware of their situation and the possibilities to improve their situation. Nonetheless, it is important to compare their experiences in education with the anecdotes of their lecturers, to get a better idea of the full picture, for instance with regards to the budgeting-example. By recognizing the voices of the young adults and acknowledging the validity of their stories and views on life, we get a better idea of their situation and the support they need to improve their circumstances.

Overall, this research has shown that poverty can successfully be addressed as a capability deprivation. It allows us to take into account that in the industrialized Dutch setting, monetary poverty often has many other underlying problems, such as household composition, employment situation and health problems, that need to be tackled as well, if a capability deprivation is to be diminished. Schools already have a large role in this process. By formulating more conducive policies, for example on how to recognize and handle poverty, the school's role could be more prominent and organized. Costs of tuition, travelling, books and other necessities should not be neglected; schools should consider the necessity of these items and ensure there is a safety net for students for whom the costs are too high. The Dutch government could possibly play a role in the funding of this safety net, especially since they strive for equality with regards to education (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2018).

This discussion on education, and poverty as a capability deprivation in Dutch society, an industrialized setting, shows that inequality still persists. Students and their parents cannot always afford the tuition and additional costs of the preferred education; without the savings of their grandmother, becoming a hairdresser would not have been possible for Esmee's sister. Furthermore, it appears that not all families have the same access to knowledge and the same ability to map out pathways of opportunity; without help from outsiders such as teachers, children from these families would miss out on opportunities. By recognizing that due to a capability deprivation, not every student initially has the same chances, we can identify the additional support each of these students needs and start to facilitate this support to eventually achieve equal chances for every student.

However, this exploratory study has its limitations. There is a possible selection-bias, since gate-keepers selected the respondents and it is possible gatekeepers (un)consciously influence the outcomes of the research with their selected students (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). Furthermore, this exploratory study is based on a small sample, meaning it cannot be seen as representative for all young adults in the Veenkoloniën. Further research is required, with for example a larger sample. Other research trajectories could focus for instance on the level of education. Students that grow up in intergenerational poverty do not just go to secondary vocational education; many of them go to a university of applied sciences or to a university. By comparing their experiences with those of their secondary vocational education counterparts, other mechanisms to support or confine students could be identified. Furthermore, the current sample exists only of students that are still in school and plan to finish their education. It would be interesting to learn more about what motivated their peers with a similar background to drop out of school, and what could have persuaded them to stay in school. Moreover, it would be interesting to interview students that are a few years older or have already graduated, as they might reflect on this life-stage differently and are better able to compare the differences between work and education. Lastly, by talking to the parents of these students, knowledge could be gathered about how they feel about school, and what challenges they face when it comes to their child's education.

6. Literature

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