The Russian middle class families on the school market in Helsinki metropolitan region:
ethnicity versus social class

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Based on 20 semi-structured interviews with Russian parents living in Helsinki metropolitan area, this Thesis investigates interrelation of ethnicity and belonging to middle class in the context of free school choice. Using, on the one hand, the theory of social reproduction by Bourdieu, and, on the other, various studies on how immigrant parents cope with school choice, I aim to uncover whether immigrant background of the interviewees undermines the positive effect of their social class on school choice.

Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction is a backbone for this study. According to Bourdieu, social class, family environment and education are closely interrelated. In particular, education plays the pivotal role in social position perpetuation and preservation since it shapes the cultural capital which volume reflects the social position of its holder. Furthermore, this reproduction is facilitated in school and during the process of school choice since families with the highest amount of cultural capital can make the most balanced choices whereas those with little volume of cultural capital are not capable to evaluate their choice opportunities properly. In this sense, the middle class families have raised to their social position through cultural capital of which education is an important part. That is why the middle class families are the most interested in making the best possible choices in order to secure their social position. Such theoretical paradigms as habitus, cultural capital, linguistic capital, economic capital and social capital, coined by Bourdieu, are referred to in this Thesis.

On the other side, many scholars argue that free school choice increases the gap in education between social classes, making families with immigrant background especially vulnerable. They emphasize that free school choice can lead to yet another layer of social stratification since white and wealthy try to maintain their status by ignoring or leaving schools with social mix and thus distance themselves from the lower status groups. As a result, immigrant families are concentrated in particular - usually dilapidated - neighborhoods and possess little, if any, knowledge or skills to exercise school choice. Consequently, the so-called “school segregation” occurs. Additional effects of this school separation are obstacles on the way of establishing daily contacts with the natives which, in its turn, hampers language proficiency necessary for educational progress.

This Thesis is focused on two implications within school choice theory: immigrant background and middle class. The interviewees – Russian immigrants on the school market in Helsinki, belong to both of these groups. The main research question is whether immigrant background undermines the positive effect by middle class created on the school market. A set of sub-questions is developed to make analysis in-depth and coherent. Based on 20 semi-structured interviews, I group the narratives into mutual “themes”. While developing the analysis, I divide all the themes into factors that have impact on school choice and lay within the families (gender, cultural capital etc.) and those that are inferior to the families (for instance, school reputation, distance from home etc.). In the former case I elaborate if the middle class families of the Russian origin are able to make use of their personal characteristics while carrying out the task of school evaluation. In the latter case I compare the way the parents evaluate the inferior characteristics with previous research on immigrants and social class in the context of free school choice. By this, I am trying to uncover if the reasoning of the interviewees bears the patterns of either immigrants’ or middle class representatives.

According to the findings of this study, Russian middle class families in Helsinki metropolitan area are capable to wisely use their cultural capital in order to make the best possible (in their view) choice on the local school market. Regardless particular constraints that occur due to context-specific knowledge or lack of linguistic capital, the immigrant background of the interviewees does not seriously undermine the privileges created by their middle class position on the local school market. In particular, the interviewees show high level of interest in educational progress of their children, have relatively high educational standards, are trying to be as inclined in school life of their children as they can and generally attribute high level of importance to everything connected with schooling.
Preface

The idea for this Thesis was derived from larger research called “Parents and School Choice – Family Strategies, Segregation and Local School Policies in Finnish and Chilean Comprehensive Schooling (PASC)” (https://tuhat.halvi.helsinki.fi/portal/fi/projects/pasc-parents-and-sc%28ef66c90b-d8f1-41ba-ac68-0ebf8b132efb%29.html). This study was carried out jointly by University of Helsinki (Finland), University of Turku (Finland) and The Catholic University of Chile (Chile) during the period 01.01.2010 – 31.12.2013. The purpose of research on school environment in Chile and Finland was to analyze the instruments of social policy on education and to make conclusions on how administrative measures could prevent further educational segregation by limiting the basic freedom for school choice. The study was done under the supervision of the professor of University of Helsinki Hannu Simola.

I would like to thank Venla Bernelius who introduced me to the project “Parents and School Choice – Family Strategies, Segregation and Local School Policies in Finnish and Chilean Comprehensive Schooling (PASC)” and Mira Kalalähti who was guiding me through my Thesis and supplying me with necessary scientific literature on the topic of school choice strategies as well as with thoughtful remarks on my own research.

I am very grateful to all the Russian parents-interviewees who agreed to share their experience, were very open towards me and showed genuine interest in my study.

I appreciate help that I was getting all way through my work from my Thesis supervisor Anne Haila who was guiding me and advising on how to improve this paper.

Introduction

My thesis will focus on school choice process and the way it is performed by Russian-speaking immigrant minority in Helsinki metropolitan region. Importantly, school choice is studied within free school choice market. The analysis is based on the paradigm of social reproduction developed by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Free choice in the context of school system is understood as the right of parents to choose any school in contrast to the previous system based on school catchment areas when schools were appointed based on pupil’s home address.

My step-by-step assessment of the school choice is based on twenty interviews with Russian middle class families living in Helsinki metropolitan area. Regardless small number of interviews, I am able to find similarities and distinguish similar themes in the narratives of the interviewees. The interviewees in this research are Russian parents whose children study in Finnish schools (ranging
from the first grade of primary school to the first grade of gymnasium). All twenty families are classified as middle class based on their education, occupation and income.

The paradigm of social reproduction is based on interrelation between education, family and social class. According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), education plays the pivotal role in social position perpetuation and preservation since it shapes the cultural capital which volume reflects the social position of its holder. Furthermore, this reproduction is facilitated in school and during the process of school choice since families with the highest amount of cultural capital can make the most balanced choices whereas those with little volume of cultural capital are not capable to evaluate their choice opportunities properly. In this sense, middle class families have raised to their social position through cultural capital of which education is an important part. That is why middle class families are the most interested in making the best possible choices in order to secure their social position. (Bourdieu, 1986.)

There is still a debate going on about advantages and disadvantages of free school choice system. The academics still argue on the consequences free school choice has on race and class segregation (Saporito, 2003; Levin, 1999). The proponents of free choice system theorize that free school choice increases chances for success for deprived – especially poor and inner city – groups of population and thus create conditions for greater educational equality (Peterson, 1998). According to this view, free school choice allows race and social integration across schools (Brandl, 1998, Chubb & Moe, 1997; Coleman, 1992) because students from poor families may choose other than schools that serve the impoverished neighborhoods they are usually stuck in (Finn, 1999). All this assumptions are done under consideration that white and relatively wealthy families are choosing schools based on schools’ academic quality rather than social characteristics of its students (Hess & Leal, 2001; Merrifield, 2001).

The opponents argue that free school choice will lead to yet another layer of social stratification since white and wealthy try to maintain their status by ignoring or leaving schools with social mix and thus distance themselves from lower status groups (Taeuber & James, 1982). The free school choice is indeed problematized in the context of immigration and cultural diversity, in Finland in particular (see Seppänen, 2006). According to Palttala (2012), Finnish media has been stressing the fact that Finnish parents prefer to avoid schools with high concentration of foreigners. Szulkin and Jonsson (2007) argue that first-generation immigrants in Sweden perform poorly at school compared to Swedish-born pupils. In addition, first generation immigrants tend to depress grades among the pupils in a given school (ibid.). Similarly, scholars have been emphasizing the notion of
“school segregation” which generally refers to the degree two or more groups attend school separately, be it in specific area, city or country region (Massey & Denton, 1988; 282). In the context of today’s immigration trends, school segregation based on socioeconomic background is often backed up by ethnic segregation since immigrants are generally believed to concentrate in particular dilapidated neighborhoods and possess little, if any, knowledge or skills to exercise school choice. Regarding immigrants and their children, school separation might cause additional effect since it prevents the establishment of daily contacts with the natives (Esser, 2006) and thus hampers language proficiency necessary for educational progress (Fillmore, 1991).

Scholars stress that many studies on school choice has been emphasizing a relatively common set of criteria which parents consider important (Parsons et al., 2000; 34). These are, among others: school accessibility and journey safety, discipline, the child’s preference, a wide choice of subjects, good examination results, able and caring teachers, a good head teacher, the quality of facilities, and the presence of siblings who attend the same school (Bastow, 1991). Parsons et al. (2000) note that “although ethnic considerations have been studied by Gewirtz et al. (1995) and Bagley (1996), gender and single-sex schools are much more prominent in the literature than ethnicity, despite the latter’s being more important in the context of parental choice.” (Stillman & Maychell, 1986 cited in Bastow, 1991.) Therefore, there is a gap in research on school choice involving ethnicity that is understudied.

In this sense, I am interested in looking at school preferences of Russian ethnic minority in Helsinki metropolitan area in order to contribute to studies on ethnicity within school choice research. On the other hand, as has been shown above, immigrant parents have always been described in scientific literature as disadvantaged group whose choice of school is limited. In this research, however, Russian families are classified as middle class. Hence, I am interested to investigate how the families who, on the one hand, possess substantial volume of cultural capital (privileged actors on school market) balance the disadvantages resulting from their immigrant background (the unprivileged actors on school market).

I am particularly interested in how these two characteristics are interrelated and how they balance one another on school market among Russian families in Helsinki metropolitan area. Although Kristen (2008: 499) suggests that immigrant parents might lack context-specific knowledge regardless their own cultural capital, there is no profound research on whether middle class advantages outweigh disadvantages that result from the immigrant background. Weekes-Bernard (2007) refers to social class in her research on Black/Asian parents on the school market. However,
the focus of her study is race, so the findings address school choice within immigrants’ community without direct social class implication. Therefore, I am making an attempt to investigate interrelation between ethnicity and social class and thus to contribute to narrowing the gap that exists in theoretical literature on the subject.

The primary research question for this Thesis is “Does the immigrant background of Russian middle class families in Helsinki metropolitan area undermine the positive effect of their social class on school choice?” To answer this question, a set of minor questions has been developed:

1. What school characteristics are taken into consideration by Russian middle class families?

2. What problems do Russian middle class families voice in their narratives when talking about their school choice?

3. Can any special school strategy be traced in the narratives of the interviewees or are they happy with a local school automatically appointed by the municipality?

To answer these questions, this Thesis is structured as follows. I begin chapter 2 with introduction of the main concepts I am using in my Thesis. Firstly, I summarize the definitions of free school/parental choice. I proceed with review of how this concept has been transformed within history. I trace its history from John Lock to modern times. Next, I suggest what types of schools can be distinguished based on academic literature. I introduce this point since the interviewees of this research were trying to classify the schools in their discourse, sometimes in their own words. For instance, the local school was frequently called “Finnish school”, “ordinary school”, etc. Also, the notion of “elite” schools was prominent in the narratives. Therefore, I am trying to find the equivalents to be able to thematically summarize my findings.

Afterwards, I shortly describe the free school choice system in Finland, including the Law on Education 628 that regulates primary education in the country. In the final part of Chapter 2 I look at *habitus* and different forms of capital that are used in the paradigm of social reproduction by Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Habitus, to put it shortly, is an inherited set of cultural codes that condition individual practices. Being an important form of cultural inheritance, habitus reflects individual position in social space and ensures the perpetuation of an existing dominance structure (see Tzanakis, 2011: 77). The forms of capital are crucial theoretical concepts developed by Bourdieu as cultural capital, for instance, “provides the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy” (Gaventa 2003: 6) because different forms of capital can be transferred from one form into another.
The third chapter considers the main theoretical framework for this Thesis. I begin with the description of Bourdieu’s social reproduction paradigm of which \textit{habitus}, economic, cultural and other forms of capital are substantial parts. An important inclination in this context is the explanation of logics of practices that are dependent on \textit{habitus}, forms of capital and social conditions.

Next, I move on to family characteristics that influence school choice. Among these characteristics are innate characteristics such as gender or race and acquired such as values. Also, the connection with space is regarded in the context of bad and good neighborhoods and how they influence schools’ reputation. The mutual theme that unites most of this characteristic is social class, and particular attention is paid to how parental characteristics within middle class fraction shape school choice.

I continue with introducing Kristen’s (2008) concept on school choice process which she splits into three stages: namely, the perception of school alternatives, the evaluation of such and eventual school access. Although Kristen sees parents as rational actors, she notes that immigrant parents are less capable in carrying our proper evaluation due to shortage of cultural capital and other means or because they are unfamiliar with educational context in a new country.

In the final part of chapter 3 I list schools’ characteristics that are taken into consideration, especially by middle class parents, when making school choice. MacKenzie (2010) has adopted McDonald’s (2007) supposition that factors that influence consumer behavior can be divided into enablers (those that make consumer to consider a good as an option) and deciders (that are unique characteristics that win consumer’s attention over other goods). MacKenzie thus regards parents as consumers on school market who are choosing schools as goods.

In the forth chapter I deliberate on method that I use to elicit data. The analysis is based on twenty semi-structured interviews conducted with Russian speaking parents in Helsinki metropolitan region. I firstly introduce interviewing as a tool for data collection in qualitative research and then describe my own experience before, during and after the interviews. I back up my reasoning with scientific theory on interviews. Then I describe the problematic procedure of search for interviewees that I had to undergo. Next I introduce my interview questions divided into topical sections. At the end of this chapter the interviewees’ profile is presented. I summarize the main characteristics of the interviewees such as their marital status, place of living, income and school they have chosen for their children (local/non-local). I also justify why the families in this research are classified as middle class.
The fifth chapter deals with in-depth analysis of data elicited. I have reorganized data into thematically similar blocks that I then incorporate into previous research on the same topic. While reading through the narratives of the interviewees I have unified the similar blocks into topical themes that reflect experience, views and opinions of Russian parents on school market in Helsinki metropolitan area.

The final chapter of this Thesis provides the summary of the whole study and discussion on findings in the analysis. Also, I answer my research questions posed in Introduction as well as discuss possible shortcomings of this Thesis. Finally, I reflect on possibilities for further research that result from the topic.

**The main concepts**

**What is parental choice regarding education?**

Since parental choice is a key concept of my Thesis, there is a necessity to provide explanation for this term. The scientists point out that the definition may vary from person to person and from one location to another. However, Rofes (1992) gives profound interpretation of what parental choice is, suggesting that basically it means that “parents are free to send their children to public or private school or to teach them at home”. Another position is that parental choice refers to parental ability to choose which school their child to attend by choosing their place of residence. Finally, in the context of the modern free choice educational system, parental choice may be interpreted as the direction of governmental measures and policies aimed to provide parents with substantial power over their children’s place of schooling. To draw some conclusion, the definition suggested by Metcalf et al. (2001) defines “parental choice” as “a means of providing individual parents or families with some range of alternatives in their children’s education”. Parental choice allows for choices families believe are the best for their children (Metcalf, Muller & Legan, 2001).

**The notion of parental school choice within the history**

A great deal of attention has always been given to parental choice in educational systems. To start with, Gutman (1987) distinguishes between three distinct positions by Plato, John Locke and John Stuart Mill in terms of purposes of education. Plato who is described by Gutman as the proponent of the so-called family state position argued that in order harmony between individual virtues and social justice to be established, an absolute power of family state over educational issues should be exercised. John Locke, on the contrary, called for necessity of children’s rights protection, and parents are claimed to be the best representatives of their child’s educational interests. This view is
described by Gutman as “state of families” (ibid.). The liberal conception of Mills is extended by Gutman’s logic of an ideal education system, where the choice possibilities are organized in a way which minimizes prejudicing towards any controversial conception of the “good life”. This position called the state of individuals balances positively the conceptions of the family choice and the choice of families paving the way for both opportunity for choice and neutrality within the circle of various suppositions of a good life (Gutman, 1987: 5). The most radical view was expressed by economist Milton Friedman (1955) who at the middle of the 20th century urged for the abolishment of governmentally provided education and called instead for the provision of special funds enabling any family to choose how and where their child to receive his/her education. Friedman’s theory is in accordance with Adam Smith’s classical “The Wealth of Nations” where the introduction of the similar funds to boost competitiveness and responsiveness was suggested (taken from Bryan, 2004).

Until the late 80s the free practice of parental choice was restricted by the neighborhood-based system within which children were allocated to local schools only. Even then, however, particular parental strategies such as “mortgage schooling” (Walford, 2003) emerged. This strategy, also known as “Tiebout choice” supposes that family would move to the district where the school which suits their interests is located rather than send their child to a local school. Obviously, this kind of strategy was available to more or less affluent families with means to bear the mortgage burden. Researchers indeed note that school segregation, if studied in metropolitan areas, is higher than residential segregation, but in most Western countries these types of segregation go hand in hand (see Karsten et al., 2003; Rangvid, 2007). Residential segregation is also the first issue to arise due to the school districts via which schools are assigned. The negative consequences of neighborhood-based system were partly eliminated with introduction of vouchers available to poor households. On the other hand, parents who possessed enough social and cultural capital were using their personal connections with teachers or headmasters to gain a place in a desirable school. Sometimes the tactic of “false address” (a family registered in a location where a desired school operates) was used to bypass the law (Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007).

The introduction of free choice policy on the educational market in the late 80s is regarded by many (see, for instance, Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007) as the reduction of welfare state provision and adoption of neo-liberal paradigm with less state involvement. In the period of crisis it also allowed for cutting state expenditures. Raywid (1989) lists three premises underlying the popularity of free school choice system: 1) the multiplicity of viable and desirable ways to educate children; 2) the impossibility to develop the best programme that can respond to the diverse educational preferences found in pluralistic, democratic society; 3) the desirability to offer diversity in school programmes
to meet family value patterns and orientations. However, there are still debates on pros and cons of free choice system and various positions continue to emerge (see Bunar, 2008).

Notably, though free choice system gives much freedom for parents it is still oriented and constrained by public policy. Overall opportunities the authorities provide (restrictions, laws) and kinds of norms they convey (local normative framework which makes certain choices more legitimate and frequent) are mechanism that steer parental choice to a large extent (Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007). These instruments regulate access to the free choice school market. The norms favored by government often support particular cultural positions which may determine the immigrants’ place within the community. For instance, legal framework may place no restrictions on the immigrants’ possibility to choose a school while the norms supported might make the exercise of choice impossible or considerably difficult.

**Types of schools**

While referring to a school as “local”, I mean the school which is appointed to a pupil by the authorities (lähikoulu). There are other types of schools in this research such as schools with special curriculum (language schools, Math schools, Art schools, Montessori schools etc.).

There are less formal school characteristics in scientific literature: for instance, “high-achieving” schools (Kristen, 2008: 499) which seem to offer the most favorable conditions for a child’s development. “<…> one of the core characteristics is a school’s student composition. In general, small proportions of children from immigrant families or pupils from lower socioeconomic status groups contribute to a more positive evaluation of the school’s achievement potential” (Kristen, 2008).

Study by Boterman (2012) introduces “black” and “white” schools in Amsterdam referring to the racial composition of these institutions based on race.

There is also quite a comprehensive typology developed by Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1995) where schools are divided into circuits related to choice, class and space (ibid., p. 53). The first is a circuit of local community schools “which recruit the majority of their students from their immediate locality and have highly localized reputations.” (Ibid., p. 54). The second circuit comprises cosmopolitan, high-profile schools that are also referred to as “elite”. The authors state that these schools mostly recruit students from outside their catchment area and are frequently oversubscribed. Next, there are independent schools which compete with the schools from the first circuit. Finally, there is a circuit of Catholic school. However, it should be noted that this classification is based on
the UK educational system and thus it does not fit in every context. However, the “elite” schools have been frequently mentioned in many studies on school choice, Finland included (see Kosunen, 2012).

**Free school choice system in Finland**

School education in Finland is regulated by Law on Education 628 (Perusopituslaki) that was passed in 1998. This law abolished school catchment areas when a local school was appointed based on home address. In addition, parents gained possibility to choose another than local school. Thus the free school system has introduced in Finland since late 90s.

According to this law, the main objective of school education is to support pupils’ growth as humanistic and ethnically conscious and responsible members of the society and to provide them with necessary skills and knowledge. Also, the law should guarantee the equality of all children during the process of their education in school (PL 628/2).

As mentioned, Law on education 628 abolished school catchment areas, eliminating the influence of geographical proximity. Instead, total number of pupils in particular year influences the prescription of the local school. When prescribing this or that school, the authorities are steered by several criteria. Firstly, the prerogative is given to children who have health issues or another special issue for attending this particular school. The second criterion is the presence of elder siblings in the same school. This criterion is not taken into consideration if the access to school is restricted or/and if elder children had to pass tests in order to get place in this school. Another criterion is safe route from pupils’ home to school. Importantly, the appointed school is not necessarily the closest one to the place of living but nevertheless the route from home and back is relatively quick and safe. Place in a local school is automatically reserved for every pupil. However, any parent has right to apply to any school they wish to.

According to clause 6 of the same law, any Finnish municipality is obliged to guarantee a place in one local school and, in addition, to organize teaching in pupils’ native language. In Helsinki metropolitan area pupils of Russian origin are offered Russian language lessons once a week. Also, pupils of a foreign origin are offered pre-school training that lasts half a year (valmistava opetus) where they are taught Finnish language in order to catch up with Finnish natives.

The measurement of equality in education all around Europe is carried out by PISA-research. Finnish school system has always scored high in these studies. PISA-report thus addresses that difference in education between Finnish pupils is minimal (Välijärvi & Malin, 2005). Although
Arinen and Karjalainen (2007) report that Finnish educational system copes well in ensuring equal education for all, Sihvonen (2009: 34) warns that differences do exist on the national level; moreover, Helsinki metropolitan area is rather heterogeneous in this sense as well. For instance, Bernelius (2008) notes that children from families with low socioeconomic capital tend to enroll into local schools, although Ministry of Education has declared the transgression of municipal borders through active parental participation in choosing school that is the most compatible with capabilities and aspirations of their children as one of its main principles (Opetusministeriö, 2008).

**General school structure in Finland**

All 7-years old in Finland have to start school or to complete the programme via other methods. School education in Finland is divided into primary school which lasts from the 1\(^{st}\) to 6\(^{th}\) grade (rarely from 1\(^{st}\) till 4\(^{th}\) grade) and upper secondary school from the 7\(^{th}\) till 9\(^{th}\) grade. Finnish children study at school altogether 9 years. Afterwards, students can continue their studies in a professional college or a gymnasium.

Gymnasium is a special level in Finnish educational system that can be accomplished in three years. The classes in gymnasiums are usually topical and upon graduation students can continue into universities. There are municipal, national and private gymnasiums with both impetus on particular subject or general curriculum.

Education in Finland is free. Parents can apply for a place in a non-local school, and their application would be accepted if there are places available.

There is also an option of a class with special curriculum. In other words, pupils have in-depth lessons in particular field, be it Math, music or Arts. Usually pupils have to pass some entrance exam such as Math test, musical performance or have to do some painting task etc.

**Forms of capital**

**Habitus**

Habitus is an important part of cultural inheritance that guides individual behavior and thinking. Wacquant (2005: 316) describes habitus as “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them.” Habitus is by no way fixed and unchangeable, but it transforms under the influence of circumstances or over historic time (Navarro, 2006: 16). Also, habitus is formed under social rather than individual circumstances that lead to formation of
particular patterns and is thus created and reproduced “without any conscious concentration” (Bourdieu, 1986: 170).

**Cultural capital**
Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between three types of cultural capital. These are: an imbodyed state represented by dispositions of body and mind; an objectified form represented by cultural artefacts such as paintings, books etc.; and institutionalized state in forms classifications.

Cultural capital in Bourdieu’s theory refers to cultural codes that are passed from parents to their offspring and practices capable of securing a return to their holders (see Tzanakis, 2011: 77). The acquisition of cultural capital depends on period, society and social class, it cannot be acquired second-hand, but only by the bearer himself/herself and depends largely on personal scientific libido - libido scienti (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu explains that the transmission of cultural capitals depends on the volume of cultural capital embodied in the family of the recipient.

Bourdieu describes the link between economic and cultural capital in terms of time. In other words, it depends on free time an individual is provided with by his or her family (for instance, time others might use for wage earning).

However, non-economic forms of capital, especially cultural, can be transferred into other forms and thus compensate the shortage of, say, economic capital.

**Linguistic capital**
Bourdieu (1992) investigates the relationships between speech and social context in which it is produced: “Every linguistic exchange contains the potentiality of an act of power, and all the more so when it involves agents who occupy asymmetric positions in the distribution of the relevant capital.” (Bourdieu, 1992: 145.) Bourdieu suggests that market properties endow different linguistic products with different value of linguistic capital. As a result, different levels of value are attached to different linguistic products. Consequently, different agents, depending on their value of linguistic capital and on how valued the content of this capital on a given market is, possess different purchasing power. Moreover, linguistic capital is closely linked with other types of capital, cultural in particular, and the sum of all these capitals determines the social position of a certain individual.

An important implication in this context is that linguistic markets are heterogeneous, attaching different purchasing power to different skills, i.e. languages and dialects. While standards language and dialects are the most empowering on some markets, nonstandard or minority languages or
dialects are more acceptable on the others. The linguistic market created by the dominant group in a society (usually an official language) gives the highest possibility for economic success and mobility. Those who are excluded from this market are thus left with very few tools for economic and social achievements. On the other, those who choose a subordinate market (where a minority language or dialect is the most acceptable) gain access to a membership in their own group. On the contrary, when going to the dominant market, an agent might gain purchasing power at the expanse of his/her membership in a subordinate market. In reality, however, the actors may become bidialectic, bilingual (or even bicultural) and move confidently between the linguistic markets. Others, in contrast, are incapable of attaining or using the linguistic capital required on the dominant linguistic market and have a subordinate position on linguistic market. (Bourdieu, 1997; see also Blackledge, 2001.) Also, the more formal a situation is, the higher the chances that the dominant linguistic market is prevailing.

I introduce the notion of linguistic capital since I study Russian speaking minority in Helsinki metropolitan region in Finland. These people speak Russian as their native language; some speak Finnish rather well, others possess no Finnish language proficiency at all. As a result, the level of inclusion and the way the informants in this research function on school market might vary depending on what linguistic markets they can enter. Additionally, question of education are often formal which makes Finnish language the major language of communication.

**Economic capital**

This type of capital is the one that can be easily converted into money and other material possessions and is institutionalized in property rights. Bourdieu in his book “Distinction” regards economic capital as prerogative of dominant class. Those social fractions whose reproduction largely depends on economic capital (usually inherited) are opposed to fractions who are mainly dependent on their cultural capital. (Bourdieu, 1986.)

**Social capital**

Social capital is defined by Bourdieu (1986) as a set of durable networks often measured as membership in particular group. This membership can be maintained via material or symbolic exchanges. “The reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed. This work, which implies expenditure of time and energy and so, directly or indirectly, of economic capital, is not profitable or even conceivable unless one invests in it a specific competence (knowledge of genealogical relationships and of real connections and skill at using them, etc.” (Bourdieu, 1986).
According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), social capital is “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (p.119). Such factors as trust, exchange and reciprocity are crucial for social capital formation (Putman, 2000). Maggard (2004) defines social capital as resources gained from the relationship with other people established within a community.

To transmit economic capital into cultural requires time. For instance, membership or even friendship could be acquired by means of gifts. However, there is always the risk of ingratitude, refusal etc. that could hamper the development of such ties. (Bourdieu, 1986.)

**Theoretical considerations**

**The theory of social reproduction and education**

Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) offers an explanation of why the social structure with its system of domination is persistent over time. He suggests that parents endow their children with physical, cultural and social assets whose volumes and content creates stratification among children’s attainment of educational and professional qualifications. Bourdieu argues that educational system helps in perpetuating the existing dominant structure since it rewards the existing elite cultural standards and penalizes those who possess none or little. The primary difference to distract between social classes lies in the volume of capital taken as “the set of actually usable resources and powers – economic capital, social capital and cultural capital.” (Bourdieu, 1986.)

Bourdieu (1986: 85) states that family and school are two markets where necessary competences are constituted, and where the price of these competences is determined. That is, market by its positive or negative sanctions evaluates, encourages what is acceptable and discourages what is not. Consequently, any acquisition of cultural competence presupposes the acquisition of a sense for sound cultural investment. This sense for investment is in itself a dimension that characterizes individual relation to culture or education – close or distant, hedonistic or academic etc. (Bourdieu, 1986: 85).

Bourdieu (1986) notes that intensified competition for academic classifications led to changes in social structure. He notes that the dominant class who controls the largest amount of economic capital was not able to make the most use of education in order to ensure the reproduction of the current social structure. Sooner or later, the social class who previously made little use of
educational system starts to actively hunt for academic qualifications. As a result, the classes whose raise was due to education have to step up in order to keep and maintain their social position. “Academic qualifications and the school system which awards them thus become one of the key stakes in an interclass competition which generates a general and continuous growth in the demand for education and an inflation of academic qualifications.” (Bourdieu, 1986: 133.)

Bourdieu estimates (1986:120) that distribution of economic capital is symmetrical and opposite to distribution of cultural capital. Hence, he is talking about hierarchy of two principles of hierarchization where economic and cultural forms of capital are playing roles of two indicators of state of power between social fractions. He checks the frequency of movement between the fractions (those endowed with the highest volume of economic capital and those endowed with substantial amounts of cultural capital) against the proportion of endogenous employees engaged in positions that are rare on the labor market. In other words, Bourdieu is interested in proportion of dominant class or other fraction representatives who are employed in positions with high level of requirements. The results address that the hierarchy is constructed on the basis of economic capital endowment. Bourdieu specifies, however, that this indicator can be contested on the ground that “different fractions have very unequal control over the conditions of their social reproduction.” (Bourdieu, 1986.) Consequently, the high proportion of dominant fraction employed in these rare positions mirrors the power to transmit one’s privileges without proper control.

Bourdieu proceeds with proposition that absence of means for control creates conditions for greater freedom and reduces the urgency for quick cultural investments compared to those social classes who depend entirely on educational system for securing their social reproduction. As a result, families richest in economic capital have priority to postpone their educational and cultural investment in favor of economic investment. Notably, the fractions richest in cultural capital might invest that much in education and cultural development of their children in order to maintain their specific rarity (Bourdieu, 1986: 120). Those fractions – primary middle class – less endowed with economic capital use the tactics of reconversion of economic capital through the wages thus compensating its initial shortage. In other words, their education enables them to extract profit – discreet but still more reliable compared to “unearned” income – from industrial and commercial companies (Bourdieu, 1986: 137). Therefore, academic classifications have become an object for competition against “downclassing” and for “upclassing”. The “upclassing” or at least keeping the current social position becomes possible thanks to opportunity of transformation of one type of assets into another. There are exceptional professions (such as lawyers and doctors) who possess large volumes of both economic and cultural types of capital. However, Bourdieu reasons (1986:
that these professionals invest more actively in their children’s education and development of cultural practices and are less inclined into usage of economic capital. That is explained by the necessity to maintain respectability that is often essential for keeping and attaining social capital and thus helps increase clientele.

Regarding social capital and social reproduction, personal connections are influential if one’s classifications become outdated and devalued. In such cases individual substitution strategies enable the holders of inherited social connections to move on to relatively relaxed and unbeurecritized areas where educational qualifications play weaker role. (Ibid., p. 147.)

**Family characteristics influencing school choice**

**Social class**
Great amount of research on school choice is based on the notion of social class. Scholars note that different social classes have different relationships with educational system, and in academic literature on school choice class, education and notions of economic, social and cultural capital are interrelated.

The primary question then is “How to classify parents into classes?” Many scholars make attempts to classify the interviewees based on the amounts and proportion of their types of capital. Boterman (2012) studies the relation between middle class families and space in the context of school choice. He analyzes the discourse of 24 couples defined as “middle class” before the birth of their first child and some years after in order to check their attitude toward school choice before and after becoming parents.

Boterman (2012) uses cultural and economic capital as measurement for class definition. Economic capital is defined by self-reported annual income of the informants and id divided into low and high. Cultural capital is defined using binary scores of special questionnaires which included questions on educational qualifications and on frequency of visits to museums, concerts, theaters etc.

**Social class and relation with space in the context of education**
Bourdieu (1984) suggests the notion of socially ranked geographical space. He states that the ability of different social classes to appropriate the particular class of assets (and time needed for this appropriation) depends on the volume of economic, cultural and social capital. Apart from position on the social space, geographical position and distribution of the assets in geographical space play their role. These relationships are measured by the distance between the facilities or traveling time
that depend on the accessibility to means of transport. As a result, “the real social distance from certain assets must integrate the geographical distance, which itself depends on the group’s spatial distribution” (Bourdieu, 1984; 124).

In the context of school choice, a common strategy for middle-class families is retreating into predominantly white, middle-class homogeneous areas within city boarders. Some middle-class parents practice moving to the catchment area of the desired school in order to maintain and safeguard the reproduction of privilege (Noreish, 2007). Notably, this strategy requires substantial amounts of economic capital (Butler & Pobson, 2003; Leech & Campos, 2003).

Boterman (2012) has discovered that relationships between space and parenthood in regard to school choice has complicated relations in Amsterdam.

Boterman (2012: 2) notes that “(S)everal studies have shown that middle-class parents in diverse urban contexts fear exposing their children to lower standards of education, the “wrong” types of socialization and even victimization (Byrne, 2006; Reay, 2001 cited in Boterman, 2012).

However, Boreman in his study describes several implications that arouse in Amsterdam context. These peculiarities are: 1) private and public education are funded by the state – therefore the role of economic capital are minimal compared to religion or cultural capital; 2) the intertwining of school and neighborhood is eliminated due to free school choice when any school can be chosen; 3) most neighborhoods in Amsterdam are diverse both socially and ethnically. According to the researcher (Boterman, 2012: 2) these peculiarities create special schooling landscape that is different from other countries, the UK in particular.

The outcome of the study addresses that the attitude of middle-class representatives changes when they become parents. Then the choice of a local school depends on the neighborhood. Thus “the fear that their children would be outsiders at a school with a large majority of children from non-Western background” dominate the reasoning of the interviewees (ibid., 8-11).

**Race**

Research on race preferences show that the dominant racial group tends to avoid other racial group they consider less socially advantaged (Bobo, 1999; Saporito, 2003). Saporito (ibid.) connects it to out-group avoidance. By this she means that “higher status groups avoid places occupied by persons whom they perceive to be of lower status” (Saporito, 2003: 184). She suggests that the term “out-group” does not merely signify one’s own group but sense of group position. Individuals who identify themselves as superior in status maintain the distance with lower status group by avoiding
intersection, be it in neighborhood or school. The unsettled question in this context is whether these individuals make selection based on racial/social groups that are dominant in the area/school or based on other characteristics such as safety, academic qualifications, amenities etc.

Saporito (2003) in her quantitative research checks interrelation between individual school choice and race. Her findings address that wealthier white families show propensity to leave local schools when percentage of non-white in the area increase. Importantly, the level of poverty may stay constant. Saporito concludes that school choice in case of wealthy whites is strongly correlated with racial composition of the school even if economic composition does not change (p. 192).

Non-whites, on the contrary, do not avoid exposing their children to other racial groups. As a result, it is impossible to predict if a non-white parent seeks or avoids racial mix in schools (Saporito, 2003).

Saporito (ibid.) concludes that while parents of all races avoid schools with low test scores (case of Philadelphia, USA), only white population take racial composition into consideration. Saporito’s findings address that non-whites show neither out-group avoidance nor racial affiliation.

**Gender in parental school choice**

In her article “Engendering social reproduction: mothers in the educational marketplace” (1998) Reay measures the impact of market-oriented educational system on mothers with different social background (namely, middle-class and working-class mothers). The author is comparing how much time mothers spend helping their children with homework and preparing them for examinations. She also pays attention to such factors as child’s free time, extra-tuition and extra curriculum activities such as poetry, music or dance classes. Firstly, it comes obvious that mothers are more engaged in their children’s schooling than fathers. Jaana Poikolainen (2011) refers to the same article when explaining why she was mostly interviewing mothers when doing her research. Secondly, the main conclusion is that middle-class mothers are the most active consumers on the free choice school market and possess necessary resources to exercise their power over schools’ curriculum and thus promote own interests (Reay, 1998). It is also shown that working-class mothers spend less time doing homework with their children, but this is mostly due to their personal circumstances (single mothers), and they often cannot afford tuition and extra curriculum activities. In general, working-class mothers lack the sense of entitlement and hardly ever act as consumers on the free choice school market (Reay, 1998). Although the article analyzed concentrates mostly on social class membership it suggests that gender matters in parental strategy implementation.
Values in parental school choice
In several works (Ball & Vincent, 1997; Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007) it is assumed that there is a set of values regarding education common for all the parents. It is the degree of priority granted to different values that varies from one social class to another. These values are: (a) possibility to be happy, to learn and to achieve; (b) experience of social relations; (c) paving the way for future career (Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007). Ball and Vincent name the first two sets of values “person-oriented” while the third group is objective or goal-oriented. Working-class parents are more often person-oriented while middle-class parents prioritize goal-oriented approach which brings more gains in the long-term run. As a consequence, the social class division is reproduced and perpetuated within time. (Ball & Vincent, 1997.)

On the other hand, Raveaud and van Zanten (2007) in their case study of middle-class parents in France and England claim that school choice patterns even within middle-class is not homogeneous and national culture and mentality shape parental choice strategy. In Raveaud and van Zanten’s article (ibid.) it is argued that as far as French labour market relies heavily on qualification and recruitment is based on academic achievements, parents in France are more concerned about the content of the curriculum and the overall teaching process. In England, on the contrary, labour market functions in a way when extra activities and some special qualities are given the priority (awards, participation in community projects). These distinctions influence the way parents choose schools for their children in France and England.

Regarding the immigrants and ethnic issues, Raveaud and van Zanten in the same article (2007) divide values into personal (duties to oneself – the education of your own child) and impersonal (duties perceived to others – the universal and equal education for all). According to the authors, disbalance between these values leads to negative attitude among middle-class parents towards the social mix (Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007). The interviews conducted in the study uncover that strong perception of immigrants’ children as “nasty and disturbing” still exists on both sides of the Channel. On the other, a group of parents determined in the study as “caring” is found among both French and English middle-class parents. For them universal values are of high importance, although the researchers claim that it is hardly possible that the wellbeing of the own child could ever be subordinated to the universal wellbeing of all children. (Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007.)

The way English middle-class parents express their feelings towards ethnic blend still differs from their French counterparts. While Englishmen are trying to find a fragile balance between the notion of being a good parent and a good citizen, Frenchmen estimate that ethnicity is strongly
subordinated to the social class and thus call for positive discrimination. For instance, middle-class families have organized free classes for children in need of extra-training in French language or other courses which are often the only option available for the families of immigrants who have no means to hire a tutor for their children. English parents stress the positive impact of getting accustomed to other cultures and traditions which are crucial for future life and career. Both groups of parents admit that children of immigrants need special attention from teachers and are eager to accept this fact.

**Social capital and school choice**

In the context of education, Jose P. Salinas (2013) investigates the impact of the social capital among the Mexican immigrants in the US. Using the method of life interviewing, he suggests that social capital is beneficial for school performance of the pupils with Mexican origin, especially those whose parents are agricultural farm workers and travel from one place to another in search of work. In this case, social bonds help in orientating on a new place, including education related questions. Also, kin relationships are necessary substitutes when lacking other resources (Salinas, 2013).

Ball and Vincent (1997) in their article “I heard it on the grapevine: “hot” knowledge and school choice” define that inclination and capacity to choose a school is partly shaped by various myths, stories and gossips circulating around the living area. In other words, there is a certain kind of communication and interaction with city and its landscape. The quality and other features of this interaction depend largely on the level of personal inclusion into the local community. Social class is once again emphasized in the work by Ball and Vincent: that is, people from different social classes tend to form different communities and social connections. The knowledge attained through this communication is defined as “grapevine” or “hot” knowledge and stands in opposition to the so-called “cold” knowledge (formal, intentionally produced by schools – brochures, league tables or outline of the official school policies) (Ball & Vincent, 1997: 4). Grapevine is defined as “a collective attempt to make sense of the locality and particular features within it.” (Ibid., p. 4) and is determined by where you live, who you know and what community you belong to. In this sense, the notion of geographical community is seriously undermined by the totality of social contacts and by the presence of social comparison with those who are “like us” and those who are not “like us”. As a result, different social classes patronize different schools regardless geographical boundaries.

Parental reaction to grapevine might be of three distinctive types. The first type of reaction is suspicion when the impact of grapevine is fairly minimal and is mitigated by other factors (Ball &
Vincent 1997). It also has subdivisions based on social classes. The first subgroup is represented by middle-class people who are trying to fill the gap by searching for additional information. Importantly, they have enough cultural capital to seek out the needed material. The second subgroup, comprised by working-class people, rejects the information obtained through the networks. As a rule, they prefer to rely on their own impressions and often feel negative pressure from their peers who are obsessed with the school choice. Moreover, they often percept that there is no serious difference between the schools and the selection strategy is just useless. The third group is the marginal one, consisting of people who have no or little connections in their area. This position might be defined by their status of “outsider” (for example those who have just moved in) or their immigrant status. On the other hand, men who have been residing quite long in the area may also be included in the exclusion group as far as grapevine is a female led process. For example, widowers are in a very vulnerable position in this respect. An important remark is that mothers are believed to be in position of power when deciding which school their children to attend. (Reay, 1998.)

The second large group is the “doubt” group whose members rely heavily on grapevine, but still question some of the aspects. People of middle-class background comprise this group. All in all, they have positive attitude towards grapevine which they regard as a kind of confirming factor in establishing their own position.

The last group (the group of “acceptance”) consists of semi-skilled parents from various social classes who regard grapevine as highly reliable source of information. Inclination to make choices is rather high in this group, but capacity is limited. So these parents are looking for opinion of those whom they perceive authoritative enough. Evidently, these “reliable informants” are found in a circle of people with similar background.

**Multiculturalism and school choice**

Academics often refer to tipping-point model when discussing on multiculturalism and school choice. By tipping-point researchers mean the share of immigrants' population in an area after the increase of which the natives start moving away or changing schools (Hynynen, 2003; Komulainen, 2012). There is no precise border and researchers note that the tipping-point may vary from area to area. 20-30 percent is the commonly cited share, but some studies (Rangvid & Shindler, 2007) note that Danish natives leave local schools when the immigrants’ share increase 35% border.

White-flight is a popular term in urban studies originating in the USA that means the move of white population from the areas where the proportion of immigrants raises dramatically (Anderson, 2004).
In the context of schools white parents change schools for private or those with special curriculum. Crucially, Betts and Fairlie (2003) study the phenomenon of black-flight by which they mean the move of middle-class blacks from the areas they consider deprived.

Komulainen (2012) explores the influence of multiculturalism on parental school choice in Turku. Major conclusions she comes up with are weak influence of multiculturalism on parental choice of primary school and neighborhood choice. What is more, the notion of “multiculturalism” as well as of “immigrant” is rather loose and parents percept them differently depending on their own experience and scope of knowledge (e.g. living abroad).

The researcher notes that in case of Turku neighborhood defines the school, not vise versa whereas such factors as distance and child’s friends in the same school are way more crucial. The choice of neighborhood is influenced by the sum of factors that include material conditions of the family when moving.

As far as newspaper rhetoric on multiculturalism is concerned, some parents are negatively influenced by articles discussing immigration in negative light. Simultaneously some parents in research by Kosunen have chosen school with high share of immigrant pupils in order to expose their children to multiculturalism. However, the narratives suggest that Finnish natives rarely blend with immigrants in school or neighborhood activities. (Kosunen, 2012: 65.)

**Children preferences**
The children’s views and preferences for particular school is discussed by scholars in many research papers (see, for instance, Coldron & Boulton, 1991; Bastow, 1991; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Jowett, 1995) and is established as an important criterion, particularly in working class families. In line with this view, Ball & Vincent (1997: 11) classify the parents depending on their expectations and hopes concerning children’s education. Some parents care that school environment fits properly their child’s tastes, preferences and personality. Such matching is very personal and is related to immediate concerns such as child’s happiness and comfort.

Also, Poikolainen (2011) distinguishes a group of parents with well-determined position about their school choice whose discourse she names “parentocracy”. These parents possess whether social or both social and cultural capitals which they actively use in their school choice strategies. They are also aware of their choice possibilities and rank them highly. Parental discourse prescribes active participation in child’s education, but Poikolainen stresses that this discourse has little to do with child’s talents and is exactly about parental active position.
The process of school choice
Cornelia Kristen in her work “Primary school choice and ethnic school segregation in German elementary school” (2008) develops a framework on school selection decision. According to her paper, parental school choice represents a three-step sequential process of school selection is divided as follows: the perception of school alternatives, the evaluation of them and eventual school access.

The perception of school alternatives
The general approach (see, for example, Lankford and Wyckoff, 1992; Manski, 1992; Glazerman, 1998) is that individuals, when making decisions concerning education, are driven by their own interests. Thus the school selected out of several alternatives is perceived as the most promising in meeting this criterion. When making decisions, individuals calculate costs and benefits of each alternative as well as probability to achieve the final goal. An important implication in this contest is the fact that the final goals, costs and benefits may differ from one ethnic group to another. Consequently, school alternatives might be evaluated from different angles depending on who is making the choice. The main limitation of this model, and Kristen (2008) addresses this issue in her research, is the lack of supposition that individuals hardly ever consider the whole pool of alternatives available. Instead, they tend to concentrate on the limited set of options and occasionally even disregard completely all but one single school.

To make a clear school assessment, a parent should be familiar with the structure of school system, including regulations on education, school types and the alternatives at hand (Kristen, 2008: 499). Regarding the immigrants and their families, the parents have frequently attended schools in the country of their origin, and this fact influences their perceptions of school alternatives. In addition, the school systems of modern Finland and the Soviet Union (since the now-parents graduated from the Soviet schools) differ from one another.

The evaluation of school alternatives
The school evaluation stage concerns those individuals who choose between several schools. According to the general investment perspective which was originally implemented for human capital (Becker, 1964), but nowadays is applied to any kind of resources (Bourdieu, 1986), individual resources are regarded as production forces which can be invested in order to achieve individual aims or to produce new resources for reinvestment. On the general level, type, amount and combination of resources an individual controls put restrictions on the action mode. From the school choice perspective, family’s or parental resources indicate how beneficial, costly, risky or
difficult a certain school choice might be. The availability or, on the other hand, the lack of particular resources might put limits on the evaluative schemes of a parent.

Following the logic of this investment perspective, Kristen concludes that the preference of one school over another may result from “disproportional distribution of important resources or characteristics across population” (Kristen, 2008). Hence, school choice can arise from particular school-related characteristic which hold particular value to certain population groups. For instance, parents might want their children to study in a school which corresponds to their religious orientation, educational values (special schooling programs) or is carried out in particular language.

**Access to school**
School choice is largely dependent on the institutional structure. Hence, the role of civil servants is essential. On the one hand, there are might be clearly defined criteria to gain access to particular school: a school for girls only, for instance, accepts pupils based on gender. Similarly, residence turns into a decisive factor if school places are assigned based on pupils’ address.

On the other hand, pupils might be selected using differential evaluation of the applicants. “Depending on the institutional or informal conditions, school representatives may select among pupils according to what these students are expected to contribute to the school” (Kristen, 2008). Consequently, the school representative might choose those pupils whose family characteristics complies the most with that of the school in order “to maximize the common ground between the orientation of the school and that of the family” (Kristen, 2008). Hence, the chances for a positive answer concerning the school admission differs from family to family.

Finally, the school access might be an issue of discrimination (Becker, 1971). In this case pupils are accepted based on the preferences for a certain group or “on systematic objection against others along ethnic lines or skin color” (Kristen, 2008; 500) regardless of other characteristics of the

**Studies of school choice among immigrant parents**
Little research is done on how immigrant parents make choice on schools in their new country.

Ellen, O’Regan and Conger (2009), for instance, have studied the dynamic of immigrants’ distribution among schools in New York district. Their paper had as a purpose to check whether tipping model works in the country’s largest school district. According to the tipping model introduced by Thomas Schelling (1978), neighborhoods in a long-run tend towards racial homogeneity due to the racial differences in propensities to enter or exit the neighborhoods. In school choice context it means that over time schools shift to become 100% or 0% composed of the
immigrants. This concept sheds light on how parents-immigrants make choices about schools. Presumably, they have low propensity to choose and thus their children are concentrated in particular schools in contrast to middle-class families who can freely exercise their choice regardless the neighborhood boundaries. Interestingly, this theory was not confirmed in New York case (Ellen, O’Regan & Conger, 2009), where no such tipping tendency was found. Intriguingly, while some schools were losing in particular groups of immigrants, they were also gaining in immigrants of other origins. On the other hand, scholars argue that families might favor a school where the majority of pupils are of their own origin (Schelling, 1978). In this case, individuals have preference for a particular ethnic student environment and send their children there purposefully.

The profound research by Weekes-Bernard (2007) on school choice among black and ethnic minority parents’ in England is of particular interest for me. According to her findings, immigrant parents sometimes find it difficult to exercise school choice. Consequently, they often “downgrade their options prior to selecting schools” or their narratives differ from their actual actions on the school market (Weekes-Bernard, 2007: 4). These findings are in tune with Kristen’s (2008) conclusions on how ethnic minority parents cut off options that they actually could have just because they possess no resources to explore these options. As a result, these parents (who also frequently originate from lower social classes) choose their local school. However, the preference for local schools among ethnic minorities is influenced by the size of the family (which might be large, especially in Muslim families), absence of own transport, convenience etc. (Weekes-Bernard, 2007).

Next, Weekes-Bernard’s research reveals that ethnic minority parents often find the admission procedure difficult and thus do not even take the chance. Even those middle class immigrant parents who wish to approach “academically selective” schools, give up the idea due to mixed and complex entrance procedure.

Albeit the choice of ethnic minority parents might be influenced by school reputation, the “locality factor” still outweighs reputational. This fact might explain why immigrant children are concentrated in local school usually avoided by the native population. (Weekes-Bernard, 2004.)

For instance, faith plays crucial role in school choice process of Muslim parents. Also, black parents tend to enroll their children into schools that cater specifically immigrants’ children. As a result, these schools attain the reputation of schools for underachieving ethnic minority children. However, often immigrant parents, especially those who are rather active, evaluate the teachers’ commitment in Black majority schools as low and insufficient.
Weekes-Bernard (2007) concludes that, although free school choice is often seen as possibility to mix children from different backgrounds for mutual communication and learning, these policies might act in opposite direction resulting in segregation and keeping young people of different ethnic roots largely apart. (Weekes-Bernard, 2007.)

**School characteristics that influence parental school choice**

MacDonald (2007) has proposed to divide the factors that influence the consumer choice into “enablers” and “deciders”. The former are those that make a consumer consider a product as a potential purchase. The latter are those that make consumer prefer one product over the other. MacKenzie (2010) applies these marketing categories to school market. Thus, if from the very beginning parents are interested in English-language education then only school with such curriculum comprise the initial pool for choice. Then, choosing among the schools with English language curriculum, parents may prefer one school over another because there is an IB programme. In this case IB programme acts as “decider”. MacKenzie notes, however, that the classification of the factors varies from family to family depending on the characteristics of parents.

**School proximity**

The distance between home and school has always been cited as a common factor and many scholars see that parents would always choose the local school provided it satisfies all the other basic criteria (see Thomas & Dennison, 1991; Jowett, 1995). According to Adler et. al. (1989) this is the “satisfying model” meaning that parents prefer a school that “satisfies various defined standards rather than trying to find an alternative that maximizes particular predefined goals”. In the Finnish context Poikolainen (2011) describes that nearest school is natural choice for a group of families she defines “traditional”. According to this traditional position, school attendance is every citizen’s duty. However, there is no importance attached to the question what school to attend since all schools are relatively the same. Importantly, Poikolainen (ibid.) measures the social and cultural capitals of the interviewees. The families defined as “traditional” boast low levels of social and cultural capital. Hence, the “satisfying model” is measured against the social class.

This characteristic is related to the notion of neighborhood. Boterman (2012) distinguishes the strategies of managing school choice varied by both residential location and personal parental preferences (p. 11):

1) Moving from Amsterdam to another municipality with less population diversity and what is perceived as “good” school;
2) Moving to (or staying in) a neighborhood within Amsterdam with heterogeneous environment and schools;

3) Moving or staying within diverse neighborhood area, although enrolling children into “white” schools in the same area or outside;

4) Staying in the diverse neighborhood and, along with other parents preaching international liberal values, send children to “black” school and thus mixing them;

5) Staying in a diverse area and sending children to diverse, sometimes “black” schools.

The second type of strategy is the most popular among the interviewees of Boterman (2012), while moving away from Amsterdam is the least often exercised.

Social composition of a school
One of the greatest concerns regarding parental school choice is division between elite and deprived schools where the former are meant for the natives whereas the latter type is left for deprived groups of population, particularly immigrants.

This factor contributes to residence segregation as parents tend to move to areas with more favorable, from their view, social composition of the pupils (Adler & Raab, 1988; Ball, 1993).

Kauppinen (2008) mentions that often neighborhood composition reflects the success of youngsters at school (p.380). There are several theories that study this interconnection. The first one is called “contagion” theory (Mayer & Jencks, 1989). According to this, the socioeconomic composition of the neighborhood determines the behavior patterns transmitted via youngsters' influence (see Kauppinen, 2008). “This “contagion” of behaviors and attitudes from peers may happen in school, thus the main role of the neighborhood might be to select the pupils to the school, thereby affecting the social composition of the pupil body”. (Ibid., p.380). The traditional patterns that arise from this composition might well determine the traditional educational patterns, exerting pressure on peer groups in a neighborhood. Indeed, this is believed to be the traditional explanation of compositional effect of the neighborhood on local schools (Dreeben & Barr, 1988).

Another mode, called “social control model” (Mayer & Jencks, 1989), is related to high-status students at school who can be the role models to other students and exercise control over mutual norms and traditions. Teachers as well might be the role models, partly because they possess means for controlling behavior at school. Kauppinen (2008) suggests that it is harder for schools located in poorer neighborhoods to attract qualified teachers compared to prestigious or elite schools.
Donnelly (2000), when studying the effect of socialization through peers and other actors, introduces the notion of school ethos which she understands as “observed practices and interactions of school members” (p.134). In addition, the researcher explains that the notion of “ethos” exists within two broad camps which fall into positivist and anti-positivist approaches. In positivist's view ethos is perceived as an independent social phenomenon which exists independently from people or events within organization (ibid., p. 135). In school context this means that school ethos is reflected in “formal expression of the authorities' aims and objectives” (ibid.). Thus, school officials see particular norms of behavior as acceptable. In Torrington and Weightman's (1989) view, school ethos can be looked upon as “the expressed wishes of those who command authority within an organisation and it is the means by which individuals within the organisation are committed to what is deemed natural, proper and right.” Donnelly (2000), who studies ethos in Catholic school, notes that rules and behavioral manners in such type of school are steered and directed by Catholic Church hierarchy.

Anti-positivist approach, on the contrary, sees ethos as less formal, emerging from informal social connections. Hence, ethos is something that is strongly bound to organisation and its internal structure rather than documented rules. Moreover, as far as ethos is connected to norms and expressions of school members, it tends to reflect the dominant cultural norms, assumptions and beliefs (ibid., p. 137). For a school ethos to be truly uniform, believes of the authorities or those in power should coincide with beliefs of other members (Morris, 1998). Morris pays attention to possible tensions which arise if there is a mismatch between opinions of the authorities and other school members.

Kauppinen (2008) who studies the neighborhood effect on choice of tracks within secondary education in Helsinki, states that “the interaction among pupils and teachers of the school brings out a certain kind of a normative environment regarding proper’ educational behavior, which may constrain the actions of the pupils” (ibid., p. 380). These tensions might arouse from the fact that norms supported at school reflect the social composition of the school. For instance, as Kauppinen (2008) suggests, parents might connect the school ethos with neighborhood social composition and judge school based on this criterion. Consequently, if parents are dissatisfied with social composition of the neighborhood, they might avoid a local school due to the fact that the ethos of school reflects norms and behavior that parents do not see as acceptable for their children.
Additionally, parental involvement is seen as part of school ethos if anti-positivist approach is adopted (Donelly, 2000: 148). Difference in religion, values, behavior norms etc. are causes for conflicts that bring out inability for constructive dialogue.

**Bilingual and international education**

MacKenzie (2010) research families whose children study in international schools in Switzerland, Japan, Argentina, Israel and Singapore. MacKenzie (2010) notes that definition of “international” school is rather problematic. He explains that generally these are schools where curriculum differs from the ordinary curriculum of the national schools. Importantly, “many international schools today will still be populated by the children of expatriates who are relieved to discover in their new home a school which will offer an education acceptable to them and in a language <…> that they value” (MacKenzie, 2010: 108). Although this research studies the importance of education in English, I include this factor into my Thesis since bilingual education is vital in the context of my Russian speaking interviewees who are interested in maintenance of several languages.

Bilingual education is often believed to expand the general perception and moral values of children. Potter and Hayden (2004: 98) found that such schools offer, apart from bilingual education, means to “inform students about other cultures and customs which are very different to their own” via expatriate teachers employed in such schools. Foreign parents interviewed in the research by MacKenzie (2010) enjoy cultural and national diversity in international schools that exclude narrow-mindedness. The first impression is that such a view contradicts the common perspective when parents avoid schools or classes where immigrants are numerous. An important remark in this context is that international schools under discussion are not free or have entrance examinations as a mean to evaluate and choose pupils. Therefore, these are often schools with good reputation and are considered “elite” schools. Parents who send their children to such schools have often lived abroad or studied in international schools. Undoubtedly, these parents enjoy high levels of social, cultural and (in case if there are educational fees) capital and can be considered middle-class.

**Teachers and class size**

According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), cultural capital assumes the central position in the process of social reproduction because the inequalities in cultural capital are reflected in social class inequalities (see also critical review by Michael Tzanakis, 2011: 76). Also, teachers help foster these social inequalities because their pedagogic actions encourage upper and middle class pupils while penalizing the others. Many researchers have criticized this approach (Tzanakis, 2011: 81). They argue that the assumption about teachers’ cultural values being “qualitatively and quantitatively significantly different from those of the average public.” (Ibid., p. 81) has not been
sufficiently researched. Some studies (see Kingston, 2001) suggest that knowledge about school teachers is limited. So, whenever the so-called “teacher bias” has been reported, it stays unclear whether this is an objective reflection of performance and behavior differences between the children (Tzanakis, 2011). However, exclusion practices in teacher-parent relations have been identified, and they have to do both with ethnicity and social class.

Lareau and McNavara Horvat (1999), for instance, approaches the parental-teacher relationships in the racial context. The scholars note, that generally teachers see their own attitude and behavior towards parents as friendly, welcoming and engaging, however, the researcher concludes that teachers are expecting particular type of behavior from the parents: namely, positive and supportive. The narratives of her interviews, however, address, that particularly black parents find it difficult to comply with these rules. Often black parents approach school and school educators with suspicion since they expect racial discrimination. Also, Lareau and McNavara Horvat (ibid.) draw comparison between black middle class and working class families. They pay attention to the fact that black middle class parents are using disguised methods to keep sure that their child is treated equally at school. They are friendly with teachers and principle on the surface and are actively engaged in their child’s school life. Regular monitoring of her homework, accurate checking of the teachers’ notes, friendly communication rather than direct accusation towards school’s professionals and participation in class activities are the methods they use. Teachers, in their turn, are not aware of the real motivation as they see these parents as polite and supportive. In contrast, poor or working class parents often retreat from problems and, albeit admitting that their children might be treated unfairly, do not maintain any contact with teacher or other school official. Rarely do they answer teachers’ requests or fill in the required forms.

Blackledge (2001) studied the position of Bangladeshi mothers within school system in the UK. According to the findings, these mothers feel quite empowered within their own family and community because they have cultural and linguistic capital attained in the country of their origin. However, they feel completely powerless outside their ethnic community or family because they cannot speak English and know little about the local culture. They keep silence during the parental meeting and avoid direct contact with school officials. In one case a Bangladeshi mother could not read the letter informing that her daughter was offered special reading classes to improve reading skills. In such cases parents have very limited ability to influence the school progress of their children. The teachers interviewed for this research evaluate the cultural capital of these women as useless for their children’s education. Researcher sees that teacher’s general position is to stick to “white middle class norm”. Those who are unable to follow them are seen as problematic or even
unsuccessful. Indeed, drawn on the interviews with Bangladeshi mothers, Blackledge (2001) assumes that these women have tried to enter the majority-culture but felt largely neglected. These conclusions imply that ethnic minority parents might face considerable challenges in their dialogue with school teachers.

Also, Vidovich and Yap (2008: 220) have discovered that the class size is in the top four of the most important factors when choosing school. Ezra (2007) in the study on Israel school choice stresses that parents believe the numerousness of pupils in the class prevents their children from receiving an adequate attention from a teacher. Both in Ezra (ibid.) and MacKenzie (2010) papers the parents evaluate a class size from 30 to 40 students as high.

**School reputation**

MacKenzie (2010) suggests that school reputation has a firm position in the top half of the factors influencing the parental school choice. Potter and Hayden (2004) discovered that the older and more established school was the higher reputation it had. Importantly, there is a strong inverse correlation between school reputation and its geographical position. According to MacKenzie (2010: 119): “parents ranked reputation lower when they had little or no choice between schools and ranked it higher where their chosen school had direct and credible competitors.” MacDonald (2007) classifies reputation as a “decider” rather than “enabler”.

School reputation overlaps with the notion of elite schools. Kosunen (2012) investigates the phenomenon of elite school in her article called “So, we have schools they come from… Finnish elite, I mean” – middle class children leaving local schools” (original name in Finnish “Meillä on siis kouluja, joista ne tulee: siis Suomen eliitti” – keskiliuokan lasten kouuluvalinnat pois lähikoulusta”). According to her findings, the reasons contributing to decision to send a child to non-local school with emphasis on particular subject are the possibility to enter a university upon graduating from this school; the feeling that children can get the sufficient help in their studies from home; belief that special impetus on particular subject at school (painotettu liokka) will contribute to higher interest towards studies in general; and, finally, some parents wished their children to be challenged by harder tasks (Poikolainen, 2012: 13). Poikolainen attributes this reasoning to fear of being excluded from the middle class which was especially visible in case of families where grandparents got only primary school education. In these families the raise from working to middle class has happened only a generation ago through higher education which is thus extremely valued. When analyzing the parental discourse, Poikolainen (2012) discovers that parents already have particular schools on their mind. These schools are believed to be elite schools where only “best
pupils” study. In some cases parents are not that much interested in particular curriculum as such but rather in general environment, discipline and social connections their children can set while studying in an elite school.

**Schools with emphasis on particular subject**
In 1990s the school choice possibilities in urban areas in Finland have significantly improved. The classes with emphasis on particular subject (e.g. foreign language, music or sports) have become a desired option for many families (Seppänen, Rinne & Sairanen, 2012).

In their recent study on classes with emphasis on particular subject Seppänen, Rinne and Sairanen (ibid.) conclude that pupils in these classes are mostly coming from the outside the catchment areas of these schools. Namely, these schools are not appointed as local for the majority of its pupils. Importantly, parents usually choose the primary schools that are affiliated with an upper secondary school so that their children could easily continue in this upper secondary school. Consequently, the choice of primary school often conceals in itself the choice of upper secondary school as well (ibid.). The results of the quantitative research by Seppänen, Rinne and Sairanen (ibid.) show that English language is the most popular option among classes with impetus on some subject. Math and music come next.

Although the research quoted does not measure the social composition of the pupils but rather concentrates on school geography, the topic of interest is interrelated with research carried out by Poikolainen (2012) on elite schools. Also, the fact that the majority of pupils in such classes are coming from the outside of catchment areas of these schools coincides with general assumption that middle class parents search for special educational options regardless their location.

**International examinations**
According to MacKenzie’s findings (2010) parents “want their children to leave school with a ticket to the next level of education – and ideally one which will open many doors rather than few.” IB Diploma, for instance, has reputation of legitimizer in the global educational and labor market and thus is an important factor for some parents, particularly those who have obtained it themselves (MacKenzie, 2010).
Method, data and interviewees’ profile
This research is based on 20 semi-structured interviews conducted with Russian-speaking parents. Further I will describe my work before the interviews, during the interviews and working with the elicited narratives afterwards.

The complicated process of search for interviewees follows. Next I present my interview questions split into topical sections. Finally, the profile of the interviewees with main personal characteristics is summarized.

Interview as a tool for data collection
Intensive interviewing has long been regarded as effective tool for data gathering in qualitative research which allows in-depth exploration of particular experience or topic (Charmaz, 2006). An interview represents a directed conversation between an interviewer and interviewee (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) where the former seeks to understand studied phenomenon while the latter possesses relevant experience to explain it (see Seidman, 1998). According to Charmaz (2006), “the interviewer is there to listen, to observe with sensitivity, and to encourage the person to respond.” Consequently, an interviewee does most of the talking during an interview.

When choosing an interview as method for research, it is important to keep in mind that interview is contextual and negotiated. Even though an interviewee may express their view on situation without interruption from interviewer, the narratives produced represent a construction or reconstruction of a reality. The stories elicited via interviewing are accounts from a particular point of view constructed under the conversational rules of an interview. (Charmaz, 2006: 27.)

I have chosen semi-structured interviewing because I am interested in meanings that people attach to certain phenomenon, and I am trying to explore this by letting my interviewees speak and share their perceptions and experience. The questions that I pose in my research and school choice phenomenon in general are hard to be quantified. Instead, the relaxed formula of a semi-structured interview gives room for the interviewees to freely express what they think or feel about choosing a school or when dealing with questions concerning education.

Preparing for an interview
The challenging task on the preparation stage was to design suitable questions which would help in revealing the topics of interest. I had to develop broad, open-ended and non-judgmental questions to invite “a detailed discussion of topic” (Charmaz, 2006: 26). Open-ended questions allow for
unanticipated answers from the interviewees, albeit keeping them within the topic of study. Any researcher who chooses interviewing as method for his/her study should design question in such a way that, on the one hand, they allow keeping the necessary level of comfort between the interviewer and interviewee and, on the other, are sufficient enough to gain necessary information for future analysis. Also, a researcher should keep the eyes open for emerging of any unanticipated material during the interview and be prepared to react quickly with new questions (Charmaz, 2006: 30).

Glaser (1978) guards the researchers against forcing the data elicited via interviewing into the categories he/she has in mind before interactions with the interviewees. This danger emerges from the fact that researchers have particular preconceived categories born out of theories and knowledge obtained before. As a result, an interviewing should represent a blend between asking important questions and forcing responses (see Charmaz, 2006).

**During the interview**

The power dynamics is an important factor during interview conduction. Such characteristics as gender, race, status and age might shape power dynamics and thus direct an interview mode (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2002). Arendell (1997), for instance, pays attention to changes in behavior of male interviewees who tell about their divorce situation. Some men may simply refuse to be interviewed on topics that deal with notion of masculinity as during the interview they may face questions that require too much of emotional involvement. Researcher notes that some men are oversensitive and might dramatize intergender relations (ibid.).

In case when both interviewer and interviewee are women, other factors come into play: namely, class, age and ethnicity. Research topic, interviewer’s skills and circumstances of interviewee’s life influence the way a woman responds during the interview (Reinharz & Chase, 2001).

In case of my research I was mostly interviewing women. Most of them were older than me, although not necessarily. The principle difference between us that many interviewees were pointing at was the parenthood. I was frequently asked by my interviewees if I had children myself. Interestingly enough, my answer usually led to positive emotional response. The interviewees were producing more detailed and in-depth accounts when talking on school choice, on children’s psychology and their own feelings as mothers because they were trying to make their reasoning more comprehensive for the childless researcher.
After the interviews. Working with texts
When interviewing is finished, a researcher is left with loads of information in form of text. However, this data provides only basis for analysis whereas interpretation and explanation are the responsibility of the researcher who has to develop a meaningful account (Burgess, 1982). Consequently, an analyst has a task to develop a reliable tool for explaining social phenomenon. Dey (1993) compares working with narratives obtained through the interviews to a puzzle. Consequently, a researcher has to “cut the bits of the puzzle” out in ways which correspond to the separate facets of the social reality we are investigating, but which also allow us to put them together again to produce an overall picture.” (Dey, 1993: 41.)

The same author notes that there is little value in descriptive research (ibid., p. 31). Any data need to be classified in order to be explained and analyzed. Categorization could be looked at as “funneling the data into relevant categories for analysis” (ibid., p. 42). Also, according to Dey, we do two things when we classify: on the one hand, we break the data into bits; on the other, we assign these bits to different categories which, in their turn, put these bits together again, although in a novel way (ibid., p. 44).

I started with reading through the texts over and over again and marking the pieces or even words that seemed to signify a meaning. When all the interviews were read through, I repeated the task again but this time I was trying to compare the narratives of the interviewees and find mutual “themes” between the narratives of different interviewees. This is how I was creating categories. Some categories were easy to classify: gender is an obvious example. On the other hand, some categories turned out to be complicated and hard to classify. For instance, when developing a category of “elite school” I was including such characteristics mentioned by parents as “rich families” and “educated families”. At the same time, I saw that these two characteristics were of a distinctive type as the former one could be also included in the category of “economic capital” whereas the latter is part of a bigger category of “cultural capital”. Therefore, while moving further with my analysis, I had to start to discriminate clearly between the criteria for categorizing data into categories (Dey, 1993). Thus, I admit that the process of categorization was a tough one, and I had to regroup and look at the categories from different angles to make my analysis logical and coherent.

Search for interviewees
This paper is drawn upon 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Russian parents of children from the second year at elementary school up to the first year in gymnasium (lukio). The interviews were conducted in late 2012 and early 2013. All but one interview were conducted in Russian
language. One interview was conducted in Finnish due to the fact that a Finnish father with no command of Russian language was taking part in the interview. The majority of the interviews were conducted at informants’ homes. Rarely an interview was conducted in another place, such as a café, a swimming pool or a school. All the interviews were recorded as the informants had given their permission.

The search for the interviewees turned out to be quite a challenge. Firstly, in spring-summer 2012 a request to municipal department of education of the cities of Espoo and Vantaa was sent. In this request I was giving the general description of my research, its aims and purposes. I was asking those parents who might become interested in taking part in research to contact me via post (my contacts and envelope enclosed).

According to civil servants, my request was followed to the families of Russian origin. However, in a month I received only one letter with parental agreement. Interestingly enough, a Russian mother who contacted me sent me a letter with a detailed description of her rather problematic school access. However, when suggested to voice her story during the interview, she refused. She explained that she did not see school access as a problem at the moment, although she believed her child had not been accepted in a desired school because of his Russian origin.

In addition, the very same request was sent to the principles of the Finnish-Russian and Myllypurro schools, both located in Helsinki. These schools were contacted because of the special impetus on Russian language in their curriculum: the former one specializes in Russian language whereas in the latter a separate Russian class operates. Unfortunately, I got no reply from these sources as well.

In autumn 2012 I made another attempt. Generally, the same steps were taken. As a result, I managed to get two interviewees from Espoo.

Later I composed another letter of request (Appendix 1, a Finnish version) which was sent to the Finnish-Russian school once again. This time I was contacted by Russian language pro-rector who promised that the printed versions of my request would be distributed among the parents.

As a result, about one half of my interviewees were coming from the Finnish-Russian school in Helsinki. A considerable number of informants were approached via snowball method when the interviewees were providing me with contact information of their Russian speaking friends with children. Importantly, I was asking to provide me with contacts of those whose children were studying in another but Finnish-Russian school. This was done in order to eliminate the risk of one-sided approach when children from a limited number of schools were studied.
Thirdly, I sent my request to the secretary of the department of Russian language and literature of the University of Helsinki. I was hoping that students or professors of the Russian origin would be interested in my research. Finally, two people (one student and one professor) wished to participate.

Interview questions
As mentioned, the interviews were semi-structured, so the set of questions was not limited to the list I present here. However, I had the themes that I was interested in and during each interview I made sure that all these themes were discussed.

At the beginning of the interview I presented myself and shortly described the core ideas of my research. Afterwards the interview itself began. The questions for the interviews were divided into 7 sections (for an English version of interview questions see Appendix 2).

The first section of the interview questions did not require long answers and it was thus organized as a table. There I was asking about family composition, family income, the number of children and their gender, Finnish language proficiency etc. This set of questions aimed to uncover general and formal information about the informants.

The second section of the interview questions clarified family situation concerning their living conditions: what kind of dwelling the family was living in (an apartment, a house etc.), for how long they have been living there and what the reasons for neighborhood choice were. This set of questions aimed to explore the relationships between the family in question and their place of residence.

The third section of the interview questions dealt with the nearest school which was prescribed by the authorities as a school for a child. This set of questions aimed at finding out what the attitude of the parents towards the local school was. The number of questions in this set changed depending on whether a child in question attended a local school or not.

The forth section of the interview questions was directly connected to the school choice procedure: I was asking how many schools the parents had regarded as potential study places for their children, how information about the schools was assessed, had they ever visited any school before enrolling their child there etc.

The fifth section of the interview questions was about the educational process. The purpose of this question set was to understand if the parents were satisfied with their school choice or if they wished some adjustments or even radical changes to happen. This set of questions also provided a
picture of what was considered to be an ideal schooling environment by Russian parents for their children.

The sixth section of the interview questions considered parental participation in their children’s school life. This set of questions aimed to uncover how active the parents were in their children’s school life and how interested in their study achievements they were.

The seventh section of the interview questions was about parental projections for their children’s future. The purpose of this set of questions was to make it clear what expectations concerning education of their children Russia parents had in a 10 year interval.

Finally, the interviewees were asked to comment on anything connected with school life they found important or worth telling.

All the interviewees were interested in receiving the results of this research and asked for the final version of the paper.

**Profile of interviewees**

The interviewees in this research are families with Russian background where at least one parent considers Russian language as his/her mother tongue. This was done intentionally in order to widen the pool of potential interviewees. Hence, Russian families interviewed for this Thesis are not necessarily composed of two ethnical Russians. Moreover, one and two parents come from Estonia and Kazakhstan respectfully. Therefore, citizenship is not a restriction (the majority consider themselves “former Soviet citizens”) in this research. Still, all the parents interviewed position themselves as Russians and speak Russian as their mother tongue.

A short description of the interviewees based on some general criteria is presented further. In the final part of this section I justify my classification of the interviewees as middle class.

**Place of residence**

Out of 20 families participating in this research 10 were living in Helsinki, 7 in Espoo and three remaining were living in Vantaa, Siuntio and Kerava. All of these municipalities are parts of Helsinki metropolitan region.

**Local/non-local school**

An important remark in this context is that in some cases there were several schools perceived by parents as “local”. Some were saying that there were two or even more schools located at the same distance from their home. In this research, when referring to a school as “local” I mean a school that
was prescribed by the municipal authorities. Based on this criterion, when saying that a child in question attends a non-local school, I mean that this is not the school appointed by the authorities.

Among the families interviewed, 4 children were attending local schools. In case of one family the older child was attending a local school while the younger was studying in a school out of catchment area. In almost half of the cases children were studying in the Finnish-Russian school (9 cases). In case of two families children were studying at schools where teaching was organized in English.

**Gender of the parents interviewed**
The mothers were participating in 19 interviews. A Russian father was an interviewee in one case only. There were two cases of mutual participation of both parents. However, these were Finnish fathers who wished to be interviewed with their Russian wives.

**Nationality of family members/family composition**
The basic criterion for family selection was the minimum of one person with Russian language as native. As a result, in case of 8 families both parents were of the Russian origin. In two cases mothers were Russian whereas fathers were foreigners, although non-Finns. In all other cases families were composed of Russian mothers and Finnish fathers.

In two cases mothers were divorced. Children were living permanently with their mothers in all cases.

**Social class of the interviewees**
Social class is as avoidable dimension in research on parental school choice. The majority of literature on this topic investigates the influence of parental social class on school choice. This is why I cannot ignore social class in my own research.

However, there is no universal method for social class determination. For instance, Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz in their mutual research on parental school choice in social class context (1995) admit that, after coming up with a social class division “using a simple Registrar General’s classification of occupations, a categorization of educational careers into those terminated at the end of compulsory schooling and those with further education and qualifications <…> and housing status” they found out that, contrary to their expectations, “all but a few families could be straightforwardly allocated in this way.” (Ibid., p. 77).

Boternam (2012) in his study on interrelation between space and parenthood in the context of school choice relies heavily on Bourdieu’s definitions of economic and cultural capitals and uses a
bunch of methods to classify the families according to volumes of these capitals. Although all the families in the study are classified as “middle-class”, the pool of Boterman’s interviewees is heterogeneous as there are fluctuations in the level of both types of capitals. Also, the researcher distinguishes the new middle-class from the old one that used to live in inner-city. “Living in the city has become part of a lifestyle and a distinction strategy of particular middle-class habituses” (Butler & Robson, 2003, Ley, 1994, 1996 cited in Boterman, 2012: 3). Also, their distinctive repertoire lies in the fact that this new middle-class embraces multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism which is reflected in their political views and heir living preferences.

In Finland the distinction between social classes has taken the floor in 2000s because of the increased income gap between various population groups (Kolbe, 2010). Researches distinguish between the old and the new middle class (Eskola, 1979; Roos & Rahkonen, 1985) in Finland. Those belonging to the new middle class are highly educated professions whose qualifications do not depend on the level of education of their parents; they usually have superior positions in their working field and are urban dwellers (Roos & Rahkonen, 1985). There have been pieces of research on middle class in Finland where interviewees are classified based on their practices, profession and income (Katainen, 2011; Erola, 2010). All in all, education, relatively high income and employment situation are the determinants of social class in social research (Kahma, 2011; Roos & Rahkonen, 1985). Kosunen (2012) who studies the school choice of middle class mothers in Vantaa selects the interviewees based on education of the interviewees – all of them are either university or university of applied science graduates.

Sauli and Törmälehto (2002) analyze who can be regarded as middle class representatives in Finland based on income only. The basic assumption that middle class are paid workers whereas “poor” are those who live on social benefits from the state is adopted in their study. In addition, the authors mention that retirees comprise the second largest group in Finnish middle class. Students come third, although they are extremely scarce among middle class members. The average income per year for a middle class member in Finland in 2000 is measured in the same article. Sauli and Törmälehto (2002) have calculated the bottom line as well as the highest income for three groups of middle class households: 1 adult, 2 childless adults and 2 adults with 2 children:
| The size of the household | 2000 |  
|--------------------------|------|---
|                          | The lowest border (euro) | The highest border (euro) |
| 1 adult                  | 12 500 | 15 474 |
| 2 adults                 | 21 250 | 26 306 |
| 2 adults and 2 children  | 33 750 | 41 780 |

Table 1 “The average income (the lowest and highest threshold) for middle class households in Finland in 2000 using price level of year 2000”. Data Source: Sauli and Törmälehto (2002: 4.)

Summarizing information above, I consider that the interviewees in this research belong to the middle class. I base this assumption on the volumes of their economic and cultural forms of capital and their professional/employment status. The families differ in levels of these types of capital and sometimes the shortage of one is compensated by substantial amount of another.

**Income**

There was a scale of monthly income with 5 variants (see Appendix 2, part 1, question 8). The income should be calculated in euro as a total sum of all family members’ incomes minus taxes. In 9 cases the income was equal 3000 – 4000 euro per month; in 6 cases family income was more than 4 000 euro per month. 4 families informed their monthly income as 1 500 – 3 000 euro per month. In case of one family monthly income was between 1 000 – 1 500 euros.

The last two groups are dubious in a sense that their income level is lower than those suggested for a middle class by Sauli and Törmälehto (ibid.) (in case of “1 500 – 3 000” this is true if calculations are done using the lowest border 1 500 euro per month). The mother coming from a family with the lowest income in this research (1 000 – 1 500 per month) is a university teacher thus having large amount of cultural capital which can compensate the shortage of economic one. In similar sense Bourdieu (1986) notes a university professor can be considered a dominant class member because of substantial volume of cultural capital he/she possesses.

**Education**

The majority of parents who took part in this research hold a university degree mainly obtained in Russia. In two cases the Russian mothers were studying for obtaining their university diploma in Helsinki. In one case a mother was holding a business-college diploma obtained in Helsinki. In two cases mothers were educated as nurses, but, additionally, they hold university diploma.

I was also asking about the education of the interviewees’ spouses. Hence, I possess information concerning education of both parents. In one case only a single mother did not provide information on education of her former husband.
Employment and occupation
4 mothers are on a maternity leave. One is officially unemployed whereas 5 are housewives. Other interviewees were working when the interviews were conducted. Among the professions were an IT engineer, a civil servant, a doctor, an interpreter, a teacher and managers in private companies. Two interviewees were studying at university. In the families with housewife mothers the income was substantial and exceeded the lower border offered by Sauli and Törmälähto (2002).

Linguistic capital
During the interviews I was asking the interviewees to evaluate their Finish language proficiency. Consequently, their knowledge of Finnish language is evaluated based on how interviewees themselves see their skills.

Three interviewees moved to Finland in their teens and have graduated from educational institutions in Finland. They evaluate their Finnish language proficiency as high, close to native. There are three interviewees who work with Finnish language: one is an interpreter, another one is a surgeon and the third used to work at school teaching Finnish for foreigners. Interviewees who belong to this group evaluate their Finnish language skills as very good. There is a group of parents who think their Finnish is intermediate (10 people). On the other end of continuum are the rest of interviewees who evaluate their skills as poor or no skills at all.

Social capital
I was interested in who the friends of the interviewees are rather than how much they network. Usually the interviewees were reacting quite positively and were telling me how many Russian and foreign friends they have. Based on the narratives, I would suggest that the interviewees communicate with Russian speakers closely and more frequently. Different interviewees explain this fact by different reasons. The most frequent one is the lack of mutual language and difference in culture. One parent claims that although his Finnish colleagues are trying to establish closer contact, he is not looking forward for it as absence of mutual language and culture difference do not allow for relaxed and pleasant communication. Some assume that Finns are not communicative enough and establishing contacts with them is challenging. Obviously, those parents whose spouses are Finnish communicate with Finns more compared to purely Russian families. In addition, many parents state that they communicate with other foreign groups, mostly English-speaking, though.

The data is summarized in the following Table 2. The made up names of the interviewees are used when quoting the extracts from the interviews.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality of the parents</th>
<th>Municipality</th>
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<th>Education of parents</th>
<th>Income per month (euro)</th>
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<td>Local</td>
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Table 2 ”General characteristics of the interviewees”
The Analysis

Family characteristics influencing school choice

Gender: do mothers really rule?
Coincidentally or not, 19 out of 20 interviewees are women. However, when asked about their partner’s participation in children’s educational process, mothers evaluate their roles as prominent enough. For instance, the following quotations illustrate that fathers do play role, especially during the school access phase:

“To tell the truth, I was in Moscow when we received the letter (with information on school). So, my husband was dealing with all this. <...> He sent me the photos (of the school), the pictures, explained how to get there by foot.” (Vera, family 3)

“Every time my next child had to start school we got the letter of acceptance from this school (the one the mother does not like). <...> My husband was negotiating with them (the officials). They told: “No, it’s final. You have to go to this school.” Then my husband went to the principle of the school we wished to be accepted to and asked: “Could we be accepted?” and the principle gave a positive answer, so my husband went back to the officials.” (Anna, family 1)

I have noticed that in most narratives the interviewees describe the process of school choice using such words as “we”, “my husband and I” etc., i.e. meaning that two parents participate in school-related issues:

“D: How did you found about this school?
K: From “Spektr” (a Russian speaking newspaper) There was an article about it, I read and showed my husband. He couldn’t read in Russian, of course, so he googled. <...> We visited the school, checked it out and applied.” (Katya, family 4)

Similarly to what Reay (1998) writes about active participation of middle class mothers in their children’s homework the mothers in this research regularly check the homework. In some cases mothers stress that, although they do not check the homework, they use other tools to make sure that their children do well in school. In particular, they ask questions like “What your day at school was?” etc. to get a general picture of how the child is getting on with school tasks. Based on the answers, the mothers might understand if their interference is needed. This relaxed strategy is typical for the interviewees whose children are the eldest in this research. Extra-attention towards
school tasks is also needed if controversial questions – usually on History lessons – are discussed in class.

“They have History lessons. This is more European History <...>, but now they are studying Russian revolution and we discuss this with her. <...> She tells me how information is presented at school and asks “Was it so?” And I answer that this is true, but this is not completely true. <...> I’d like to compensate this gap in her education. I’ll most probably find some books or I will explain in my own words.” (Tanya, family 17)

All the mothers in this research regularly attend parental meetings at school and take part in other forms of parental activities (fairs, excursions etc.). Reay (1998) explains the difference in level of mothers’ involvement in school life by high workload of working class mothers. Some mothers in this research who work and study simultaneously, have newly born babies or work overtime (a surgeon) admit that regardless work pressure they participate in their children’s school life as children absorb values or patterns of behavior from their parents:

“<...> I wish to show my children that they should not run away from responsibility. I want them see that I am open for communication, that I participate in various activities, bake pastry for school fairs etc. I want them see this as normal since many foreigners here withdraw, distance themselves from the natives.” (Arina, family 11)

Drawing on the narratives, it comes that the mothers who participate in this research are quite actively involved in school life of their children and wish to know how their children progress. Although all but one interviewee are mothers, the narratives do not address that fathers are passive or do not care about school choice and school activity of their children. Mothers describe, for instance, how they negotiated school choice with their husbands. One mother confesses she wishes that her husband would be less involved into their children’s studies since “he has too high demands” (Nina, family 18). All in all, the data obtained suggests that both parents take part in major decisions on school and education. Another reason for mothers participating in interviews might be their relaxed working schedule or housewife status.

Immigrant parents: when cultural capital originates from another context

According to Kristen (2008), the fact that immigrant parents often graduate from educational institutions in the countries of their origin prevents them from obtaining context specific knowledge when dealing with school choice in a new country. Hence, even parents with substantial amount of cultural capital might face problems when placed in a new environment. For example, there is no educational institutions equivalent to Finnish gymnasiums in Russia. That is why some parents feel
lost. In the quotation below a Russian mother expresses her discontent with the fact that she was not informed about the gymnasium choice earlier:

“D: How will you choose gymnasium for your daughter?

T: So far my purpose is to help her raise her average grades at school. The problem with Finnish education, in my view, is that this is the first time they’ve started talking about such a thing (about gymnasiums), that there is such a phenomenon in Finnish educational system… that there is such a problem as being accepted to a gymnasium, that high grades are needed.” (Tanya, family 17)

As seen from the quotation, the parent feels insecure and stressed because she is not able to guarantee her child further educational progress. However, the mother blames school representatives for this shortcoming.

There are other obstacles that originate from lack of knowledge on Finnish law. For instance, in the following quotation a Russian mother shares her experience of limited school choice because of unknown official procedures in Finnish police:

“During the first year (in Finland) I had to enroll her into Russian Embassy school because I was wrongly told in police when I applied for our residence permit... I asked if I could place her in some school so she could start in a reception class, and I was told I could not unless I get the permit. Although Russian immigrants I later talked to told I could have applied for school without this permit. They told that their children had been accepted without it, and they presented the permit later on.” (Marina, family 5)

Another challenge some Russian parents in this research face regardless the volume of their cultural capital is Finnish language fluency. Inability to freely express their thoughts in Finnish prevents some parents from active participation during parental meetings. The interviewees, generally being quite educated people, explain that they are afraid of making mistakes or speaking unclearly. Overall, they are afraid of being placed into awkward situation and thus prefer to “sit silently and listen to what others say.” (Katya, family 4)

“The last year everything was in Finnish (during the meeting). I could understand a little, but did not dare to speak because... well, I wouldn’t speak if I did not feel confident enough that I would make no mistakes and others would understand me.” (Vera, family 3)

The latter problem is interrelated with linguistic capital Bourdieu talks about (1992). Those parents who speak little Finnish do not have enough purchase power on the dominant (Finnish) linguistic
market and are reduced to near-silent or silent position by those who can influence the decision-making process via their linguistic skills.

The examples in this section have to demonstrate that difference in rules and regulations in educational system create challenges even for immigrant parents with substantial cultural capital. Also, lack of language proficiency is often an obstacle on the way of communicating personal opinion during the parental meetings.

Parental values

Race as religion marker and “counterintuitive school choice”
The interviewees discuss race both in the context of neighborhoods and schools. However, the interviewees do not refer directly to race, but rather express fears concerning particular types of immigrants contrasting them against Russian culture in general and Orthodox religion in particular. Although the interviewees express concern about particular immigrant non-white group, they emphasize the Muslim culture and religion rather than race.

The narratives of the interviewees imply that some Russian parents regard Muslim religion and Muslim culture as hostile to their own and are afraid of Muslim influence on their children. As a result, neighborhoods and schools with high proportion of this non-white Muslim group are avoided by the interviewees.

The following quotation demonstrates why a parent avoids immigrants close to their home and inside their school. I pay attention that the parent uses the word “diaspora” rather than naming particular immigrant’s group:

“I won't resist if Russians live in the neighborhood. As far as other diasporas are concerned, I'm against such neighbors because this can influence school progress and out-of-school activity of my children.” (Boris, family 6)

There are parents who have had personal unpleasant experience with the Muslim group of non-white immigrants. I will neither use citations nor describe these stories for ethical reasons. What I see based on the narratives of the interviewees is that they know little about particular culture and religion, but controversial experience (even one-time) and media disputes add to hostility that the parents express towards a non-white Muslim group of immigrants. This is how a Russian mother explains her decision to transfer her children to another school if the proportion of immigrants in class raises:
“Firstly, there is a lot of negative feedback in media. Secondly, we are Orthodox, and I’m afraid of Muslim influence on our children.” (Nadya, family 12)

The position of these parents coincides with the assumption that white middle class avoid living in mixed neighborhoods or send their children to mixed schools with large proportions of non-white population (see Bobo, 1999; Saporito, 2003). The position of these interviewees is similar to conclusions in research by Raveaud and van Zanten (2007) who have discovered that viewing ethnic minority children as “problematic” is common among middle class parents in England and France.

Similarity with tipping-model might be traced in the narratives of some interviewees. For instance, one mother concludes that any group of immigrants regardless its race or religion creates problems whenever it is too numerous thus reaching the point when the natives start to leave the school:

“If there are many Russians (in school) from poor families who are living on state allowances <...> Finns will feel discontent, they will be against these group because it is numerous. This is the most important factor – if they (immigrant group) are too numerous in particular place. <...> We are the only Russian-speaking family in the class. That's why my son has never been discriminated.” (Olga, family 15)

Similarly to the previous view, Boris (family 6) is quite precise in evaluating the percentage of immigrants per class: “not higher than 40%”.

Generally, race is not a prominent theme in the narratives of my interviewees. Although they relate immigration to poverty and social problems, they express the greatest fear towards foreign culture and foreign religion.

On the other hand, there are parents who embrace the idea of multiculturalism and wish their children to study among different nationalities and cultures. This position is called “counterintuitive school choice” (James et al., 2010). The researches have found that parents who stick to this approach are hoping that the multiculturalism in school helps children better understand the modern world in the context of globalization and avoid sticking to any stereotype or prejudice against other cultures. Dina (family 13) uses similar rhetoric in her narratives and refers to misunderstandings that might arise among people of different cultures and nationalities:

“Globalization is escalating. <...> I have some foreign friends, we have different traditions and sometimes they are offended but what I do, they think this is impolite. For instance, my friends from
Azerbaijan think it’s impolite to serve food and drinks on the bare table, but I do not like table clothes, it looks ugly. But we need to know and understand the positions of each other to diminish conflicts.” (Dina, family 13)

Inna’s daughters (family 8) are studying in English, so there are children from all around the globe in their classes. The mother notes that multiculturalism might also contribute to the development of creative skills. Not only children learn to accept difference in opinions, but also think unconventionally thanks to multiplicity in views: “My daughters sometimes come from school impressed and share their experience: “You know, I have never thought of looking at this issue from a perspective an American or an Indian looks.” (Inna, family 8)

Opinion of these parents support some scholars’ position (see Weekes-Bernard 2007) who see school as a possible instrument in building social cohesion and ensuring “good relationship” between different ethnic groups. The study by Weekes-Bernard (2007) who specifies in black parents school choice notes that at least 95% of informants in her poll encourage their children to communicate and mix with pupils with different backgrounds. However, in case of my research there are really few informants who support this view.

**Russian homogeneity at school: ghetto or cultural community?**

On the other hand, the researches admit that some ethnic minority parents may want their children to study with classmates coming from the same culture, religion etc. Weekes-Bernard (2007) investigates, among other factors, the choice of Muslim or single-sex schools, although she admits that the group of parents aiming for these types of schools are the minority in her research (ibid., p. 39).

There is a Finnish-Russian school in Helsinki which has been operating since 1955. Russian language and culture are emphasized in the curriculum of this school¹. Thus the pupils are divided according to their mother tongue: Russian-speaking pupils learn Russian as a mother tongue and Finnish as a foreign language, and vice versa for Finnish-speaking pupils. Moreover, this Finnish-Russian school is not ever appointed as a local school which means the parents of the enrolled pupils are making an independent decision on study place. Special curriculum of the Finnish-Russian school makes its ethnic environment rather homogeneous. There are 9 families in this research who have chosen the Finnish-Russian school for their children. The reasons for choice are

¹http://www.svk.edu.hel.fi/svk/kieliohjelma/
discussed in more detail in the section on bilingual schools. In this section I am trying to uncover if Russian parents in this research are looking for ethnically segregated schools.

During the interviews I raise the question of how the homogeneous environment of the Finnish-Russian school can influence or already influences their children.

Usually parents in this group do not even perceive the Finnish-Russian group as ethnically segregated. This view is similar to findings by Weekes-Bernard (2007) who has discovered that only third of her informants provided the reasons for choosing ethnically segregated school and some were even seeing these schools as mixed. Some of the informants in this research are also surprised by my question on possible consequences and explain that even though their children study in relatively homogeneous environment, they still communicate with children from other backgrounds outside school.

However, when going a bit deeper, the parents who have chosen the Finnish-Russian school recall the unpleasant episodes of abuse from various ethnic groups, not necessarily Finns. Some remember rumors passed from friends and acquaintances according to which some Russian children in Finland are ashamed of speaking Russian. A Russian father reasons:

“I am happy that he is not ashamed of communicating (in Russian). <...> in this school (Finnish-Russian) children do not feel themselves “others”, inferior to Finnish society. As a result, they have stronger defense system, they see that there are other people like them and it’s normal. And, finally, there are fewer chances to be discriminated because of language.” (Boris, family 6)

According to Weekes-Bernard findings (2007), immigrant parents who prefer nationally segregated schools are afraid that their children might be exposed to bullying and discrimination in schools with immigrant minorities. Some Russian parents in this research express the same concerns: they believe there is no racism in Finnish-Russian school because all the pupils have the same ethnic background.

“(I did not choose the local school) because there is no Russian language taught there and because I did not want them to have problems. My children do not even know that “Russian problem” exists in Finland.” (Katya, family 4)

The narratives of the interviewees address that Russian parents who enroll their children into the Finnish-Russian school wish to protect their children from ignorance or bulling from other ethnic groups. As they see it, the homogeneous environment at school protects the psyche of their children
in a way that they see that there are other Russian children in Finland. In a similar way Houtte and Stevens (2009) argue that “in segregated schools, students will associate among “equals” (p. 220).

On the other, the researchers warn (see Esser, 2006; Fillmore, 1991) that voluntary school segregation leads to such problems as little daily contact with the natives and difficulties in acquiring a new language. Some Russian parents in this research face similar problems and are trying to eliminate them by various clubs and additional hobbies in Finnish speaking groups. In the following quotation a Russian mother expresses her concerns about the linguistic problem her daughter has acquired at school. Namely, because of frequent communication with Russian girls who have started learning Finnish just recently, the interviewee’s daughter has acquired an accent she did not have before. In addition, the mother has noted that her daughter has recently started to prefer Russian-speaking friends over others and thus voluntary diminished daily contacts with Finnish native speakers.

“Now she has quite a strange accent when she speaks Finnish. She did not have it before. Previously she heard Finnish language from Finns only. Here, in this school, there are pupils who have recently moved from Russia and are beginners in Finnish. They learn quite fast, but they still have a strange accent because they lack practice. And my daughter kind of mimics this accent when she speaks Finnish. Another disadvantage that she makes friends with Russian girls because speaking in native language is easier. As a result, she has in a way distanced herself from Finns and isn’t looking for contact with them on the playground, for instance. But we are solving this problem: she has several “purely Finnish” friends, plus she attends some Finnish-speaking hobby clubs.” (Arina, family 11)

In contrast to the group of parents who prefer rather homogeneous ethnic environment at school, there are interviewees who think that ethnical mix and even conflicts between children of different nationalities bring positive results in a longer run. According to their reasoning, bulling makes their children stronger as they learn to protect themselves:

“<...> to be bullied... not constantly but if sometimes somebody points a finger at you or laughs at you... it might even be of advantage since you learn that life is not smooth and easy, so you learn to overcome these difficulties.” (Vera, family 3)

Allport’s contact theory (1954) identifies the prerequisites for positive results of intergroup contacts that can relate to this study. If contact is broken, Allport argues, intergroup contact might reinforce existing stereotypes and increase inter-group hostility. Other research (see Pettigrew, 1998) argue
that, although inter-group interaction per se will not necessarily produce positive results, reduction in prejudice might be achieved through established friendships. Russian parents in this research see communication with Finnish speakers as possibility to break stereotypes against Russians that might still persist in the society. For instance, Katya (family 4) reveals that she warns her daughters against speaking Russian only when they are surrounded by Finnish children. The mother reasons that other children might feel suspicious about what exactly Russian girls might be discussing in their language. Consequently, she encourages them to communicate in Finnish as much as possible in order to have relaxed and friendly relations with their peers.

*Higher education as a future perspective: “What other options do they have? None.”*

In order to clarify general educational perspective for their children I am asking the interviewees “Where would you see you child, say, in 10 years?” Importantly, I do not specify that I am asking precisely about education. To disguise my initial intentions, I pose probing questions such as “Could your children have their own family; work somewhere; or become materially independent from you?”

Intriguingly, all the interviewees deny any chance for their children to have family at that time and talk exclusively about higher education. The interviewees see university degree as a natural route for their children since most of the parents are university graduates. Some even go as far as stating that any parent would want higher education for their offspring:

“Like any mother… like any parents I would like my child to study in university.” (Nadya, family 12)

Some parents even list particular universities that they wish their children to study in the future: these are University of Helsinki and Aalto University.

In the following quotation a Russian mother expresses general concern of middle class families mentioned by Bourdieu (1986), when she reasons that shortage of wealth does not prevent from acquiring high qualifications. Also, the interviewee’s opinion coincides with the view that cultural capital might compensate for the shortage of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), when middle class parents try to primarily develop their children’s skills via discussions, talks, additional reading, travels rather than mere material means:

“I travel to the US with my children. Both my sons speak English fluently. This came naturally: not because of extra studies, but because of communication, you see? <...>Also, I have been always working with people who have higher education. So I was looking at my colleagues’ children and I
see that, even though the families might not be wealthy, these are quite mature and educated children because their parents discuss various issues with them, explain questionable issues, talk to them.” (Olga, family 15)

On the one hand, the Russian parents in this research stress that they do not directly push their children towards higher education. They explain that they are trying to pass the idea about the necessity of higher education via personal experience or through discussions with their children:

“We discuss what the purpose of her studies is. For example, there’re lots of things at school she does not like. She likes neither History nor Biology. But she knows that she has to get a high grade in order to pass to a good university later on. We have made it clear to her that she has to enter a good university and obtain a good profession. She needs to study to reach these goals.” (Vera, family 3)

Interestingly, the peculiarity of Finnish higher education – namely, the division between Universities and Universities of Applied Science – gives space for maneuver. Consequently, some parents doubt the necessity of studying in “universities”; they base their reasoning on personal experience – difficulties in keeping job or finding a new one during stagnation or outdated skills that have no value on the labor market. As a result, a group of parents want their children to have qualifications that are more compatible with current requirements of the labor market. This is a very pragmatic reasoning that is often backed up by the fear of being unemployed, especially during an economic crisis:

“He’d better get some profession. This is based on my personal experience. <...> I want my child to have a profession, not some scientific title. He’d better have some practical skills. <...> This is based on my personal experience. I am a geographer. Who on Earth needs this?” (Nina, family 18)

“I am currently unemployed although I have higher education. <...> So, I wonder if it’s better to obtain some profession. To start, say, your own business, <...> something that would survive any crisis. So that you always can find a job and get wage.” (Olga, family 15)

Bourdieu (1986: 143) introduces the notion of “the cheating of a generation” that results from democratization of schooling. He estimates that many young people, especially originating from working class, who gain access to schooling, might face the problem of disparity between qualifications they graduate with and requirements of labor market. “In the period of “diploma inflation” the disparity between the aspirations that the educational system provides and the opportunities it really offers is a structural reality which affects all the members of a school
generation” (ibid.). Consequently, a clash between generations emerges. The quotations above illustrate how mothers share their negative experience about personal education that, in the end, mismatched the requirements of labor market, and they would like their children to avoid the same troubles.

As seen from the narratives, Russian parents in this research see education as a path to decent profession that allows stable income. These expectations are similar to the third group of values distinguished by Raveaud and van Zanten (2007) that they call “paving the way for future career”. Other researchers call the same set of values goal-orientated (Ball&Vincent, 1997) and attach it to middle-class families interested in securing their social position.

I notice several other themes regarding desire for higher education in the narratives of Russian parents in this research. For instance, in purely Russian families it is assumed that their children, still being regarded as immigrants, need extremely high qualifications to compete on labor market with the natives. Next, many parents reflect on their personal educational experience in former Soviet Union or Russia. Usually interviewees, when compare Russia to Finland, consider Finnish educational system as better. The advantage, however, lies in the fact that Finnish educational system is more relaxed compared to what these parents came through. Many remember strict discipline, loads of homework, unlimited teachers’ power and “good” and “bad” pupils labeling. Also, the Russian parents reminiscent that university diploma in Russia has value per se regardless real qualifications of the holder. Also, parents who are coming from families where university degree was considered a norm (interviewee’s parents had higher education) see university studies as a natural path. Back then it was natural to graduate from school, then study at university and only then start working. In this research some parents admit that they might still stick to these old standards they have taken from their Soviet past:

“<...> I grew up in the USSR so I am also in a way committed to these dogmas. But I know Finnish (educational) system and, all in all, I trust it. It is well constructed because children can get work experience or life experience and can become independent relatively young. <...> My parents had university degree and I was directed in a way that I should finish 12 grades at school and then continue my studies. So this was dogma in my own family. Probably I also stick to this dogma...”

(Galina, family 20)

“All school tasks are obligatory”: balance between free time and studies
Raveaud and van Zanten (2007) distinguish between three types of educational values the parents might be looking for at school. It is assumed that working-class parents primary care about their
children comfort and happiness in school environment whereas middle-class parents are more concerned with long-time goals such as future academic prospects.

In case of this research I am asking the interviewees what, in their view, would be an ideal balance between work and play for their own children. They can provide answers in shares (for example, 50/50) or in hours per day.

Only few parents evaluate ideal balance as 50/50. The majority prefer their children to spend more time studying rather than playing. Russian parents in this research stress that by “being busy” they do not necessarily mean doing homework but also going in for sport or reading additional literature. Some parents buy additional books with tasks that are different from what is done at school. One mother says she regularly contacts a former Math teacher in Russia and asks him to send additional tasks for her daughters in order to keep them interested in Math. If the homework is divided into obligatory and non-obligatory parts, the interviewees ask their children to do extra tasks or state directly that “all the tasks are obligatory” (Irina, family 9)

On the other hand, some interviewees explain that often their children do not need to be reminded of their homework:

“I am pleased to notice that when test is coming my son does not need to be forced, he revises the material himself, rereads the material. <...> We are trying to show our children that if they want to be successful they have to know how to get information and how to use it. <...> What they learn in school is not enough. Self-education is definitely needed.” (Alisa, family 10)

Bourdieu (1986: 65) talks about the manners of acquisition of culture or knowledge. He distinguishes between “imperceptible learning, performed within the family from the earliest days of life and extended by scholastic learning which presupposes and completes it” and “belated, methodical learning.” (Ibid., p. 66.) The general difference between the two lies not so much in durability and in-depth of these two types but rather in their relation to knowledge and culture. He notes that middle class families often hand the knowledge down to their offspring unconsciously with ignorance and familiarity which comprises the paradox in relationship between social classes and culture. The so-called “competence of the connoisseur” (ibid.) is introduced and defined by Bourdieu as “an unconscious mastery of the instruments of appropriation”.

The narratives of the interviewees suggest that they percept the homework as necessary part of knowledge acquisition. However, they do not wish to force their children into this. Nor they wish it to be mechanical or to be limited to mere fulfillment of basic tasks offered in school textbooks. The
parents see it as natural to extend the knowledge of their children via other methods and sources such as discussions or more creative tasks that are also more challenging. Teaching through own actions and by own example (for instance, showing the children that parents also read daily) is present in the narratives. The quotation of Alisa (family 10) presented above illustrated that the mother is happy that her son sees learning and preparation for tests as natural part of his education, and parents do not need to force him into this. The overall idea of self-education rather than mechanical acquisition of material given at school sounds similar to Bourdieu’s idea of unconscious manner of knowledge appropriation derived from general culture of a middle class family.

There is a mother in this research who has been studying abroad and has an IB diploma. She describes her views on education as “pro-Western”, and her interview answers reveal that she is a proponent of IB programme. However, when sharing her daughter’s schooling experience she doubts her original views. Her daughter started her studies in a school with IB programme, but, as the mother states, this was the first year this programme was introduced at school and thus the whole process was rather chaotic. As a result, the Russian mother was so dissatisfied with her daughter’s school progress that she decided to change the school. On the other hand, this mother criticizes Russian education system which, as she sees it, is too formalized and inflexible. Therefore, I ask her to reflect upon advantages and disadvantages of both schooling systems. It is interesting to follow her reasoning and the way she tries to reconcile her opinion on education from the position of a student and a parent. This is how the mother describes her daughter’s experience in school affiliated with Russian Embassy:

“My daughter complained that the style was completely different there. (The teachers) were telling her: “You have to write accurately” or “Start a new paragraph leaving space here” etc. (in IB) there were no such rules, and anything she did was considered right or perfect. Here (in Russian Embassy school) she was told: “No, this is wrong. This is badly done.” <...> She hated this.”

(Tanya, family 17)

However, when I ask her about the reasons for school change, she admits that she was looking for more order and for “a system” in teaching process:

“<...> I was completely fed up with this disorder. It was unclear what was happening in class and what the homework was. <...> Then we decided to change school. <...> As a result, I see more system in a new school… I like it so much more since the pupils have textbooks and there is kind of respect between pupils and teachers.” (Tanya, family 17)
When reflecting upon what type of teaching she would like for her own child, the mother is trying to reconcile “strict” Russian system with Western which is more relaxed. On the one hand, she would like pro-Russian system to be more mobile, more creative, to bring more fun into teaching. On the other hand, she admits that children should just keep in mind that homework might be boring but they still have to do it accurately and regularly. The mother uses multiplication table as an example and asks a rhetoric question: “How can you make a multiplication table creative or fun? You just have to learn it by heart.” (Tanya, family 17)

Tanya's experience is similar to Donnelly's (2000) analysis of school ethos, especially via positivist interpretation which sees ethos as formalized rules and norms. For instance, when talking about the school affiliated with Russian Embassy, Tanya refers to formal rules that are maintained and preached by school officials. For instance, the Russian mother cites a teacher who comments on how much space in the notebook should be left, how many lines should be left between the texts etc. In a similar way Torrington and Weightman (1989, p. 18) explain: “The ethos of a school is a more self-conscious expression of specific types of objective in relation to behavior and values. This can be in various forms such as a formal statement by the head teacher and in such comments as “we don't do things that way here.”

I would compare this “we don't do things this way here” to Tanya's description of strict rules that exist in the school affiliated with Russian Embassy in Helsinki. On the other hand, it seems that the mother welcomes the ethos of IB programme since it is less formal and is closer to anti-positivist interpretation. During the interview Tanya tells that the idea of the whole programme is to adjust the curriculum to students' inspirations. In this sense, this is closer to anti-positivism interpretation of ethos, according to which social interactions of the members are integrated into the notion of ethos.

**Children's preferences: room for a compromise?**

The narratives suggest that children’s preferences do not play a sufficient role in parental school choice of the interviewees. Some parents directly admit that their children’s opinion was not taken into consideration. Others tell that as long as their children feel happy at school, like their teachers and get on well with the classmates, preferences are considered to be matched.

Some interviewees try to find compromises between what their children enjoy and what kind of education the parents want for their children. This theme is prominent in the narratives of the Russian parents who chose Finnish-Russian school and whose spouses are not Russian speakers. These parents explain that their children speak Finnish better than Russian. Hence, children might
be reluctant to learn Russian as hard as their parents wish to. These parents worry that their children often see Russian language homework as additional duty. The parents, on the other, have chosen Finnish-Russian school right because of language (detailed exploration of these theme is presented in the section “Bilingual schools”). According to the narratives elicited, these parents are trying to compromise as, on the one side, they do not want to force their children into anything; on the other, Russian language is a way too important factor for them. For instance, one mother tells that, albeit studying Russian at school, her children refuse to have any additional Russian language activities (mother has been thinking about hiring a tutor). So, in this family the balance between the preferences is kept as follows: the children still have school curriculum their mother is looking for, but children have right to determine the borders of their involvement into particular activities:

“When they were 6 they told me that they did not want any additional tasks… neither tasks in Russian nor any other activity... In other words, they choose how they spend their time themselves.” (Galina, family 20)

However, some parents express concerns about emotional comfort of their children at school, not necessarily in the context of racism or bulling. Several parents describe their children as shy and emotionally dependent on their group of friends. These personal characteristics can influence parental choices, those connected with school included. For instance, some parents recall that they could have send their children to school a year later, but they refused this options because they wanted their children to study with the same children from their kinder garden group. The following quotation illustrates why the Russian mother has postponed the decision to move to another area and change school:

“Our family has recently become bigger. So we are thinking about relocation to a bigger place. But I can’t because of my elder daughter. She’s very emotionally closed off, so it might be hard for her to get used to a new place. I fear she won’t find friends if we place her in new environment. That’s why I am against moving away from here. We will wait till she grows a bit older, then it might be easier…” (Anna, family 1)

This reasoning is not related to future prospective but rather to immediate concerns such as child’s emotional comfort that Ball and Vincent (1997) often relate to working class families. In this research parents who are talking about emotional peculiarities of their children are the minority, although obviously any parent does care about such a thing. In case of those parents who did talk, the children are believed to be extremely emotionally vulnerable. One mother, for instance, explains that her son is physically smaller and weaker. Moreover, his Finnish is not good enough. Mother
argues that these physical and linguistic peculiarities contribute to her son feeling of insecurity in a new company. That was why she insisted on her son continuing in a class with his friends, even though the school officials warned her that it would have been better to wait for another year and send him to a special class to brush up Finnish language.

Also, the narratives suggest that Russian parents, though being really determined about higher education for their children, do not adopt what Poikolainen (2011) calls “parentocracy discourse”. According to the researcher, the parents who adopt this discourse are very active in the school choice process. However, their choice fits neither their children’s preference nor their talents. The Russian parents in this research, on the contrary, admit that their children can choose their professional path whereas parents will do all they can in order to help them in their progress. Parents state that school choice will then correspond to their children’s interests, preferences or talents:

“<...> (gymnasium choice) will depend on what he’s interested in... If he has, say, music talent or is good in painting, then we’ll try to find a suitable school.” (Nina, family 18)

An intriguing issue in this context is word expressions that the parents are using in their discourse. For instance, the interviewees say “to direct children”, “to discuss with children”, “to show”, “to explain” rather than “to persuade” or “to force”. One mother describes her discussions on professional perspectives with her son and how she is trying to explain what is appropriate or inappropriate for him using neither critique nor rudeness:

“So he told me that he wanted to study in some technical college. <...> And I was like “Do you understand that then you’ll have to do all the hardest and most boring tasks? Do you understand that you’ll have to do lots of calculations?” So he forgot this idea. Then for some time he wanted to become an IT engineer. His uncle is working in IT. So I explained: “You see, your uncle has always been all into computers, he prefers sitting in front of a computer rather than communicate with people. He has been spending all days long in front of a computer. <...> And you’re a social boy, you like to be around people.” So he got this idea out of his head as well.” (Olga, family 15)

As seen from the quotation above, the mother does not directly criticize her son’s choice. In reality, the mother worries not so much about the professions per se, but rather about how well they suit her son’s personality.

Overall, the narratives of the Russian parents in this research address that the children’s preferences do not play a prominent role in school choice process, especially if a primary schools is in question.
The parents explain that their children are too young to make a choice by their own. Moreover, it is still unclear what talents or interests they have to decide on schools with special curriculums or impetus on some subjects. However, the parental discourse implies that this position varies depending on the age of a child in question. Importantly, the older the children of the interviewees are the more aware of their preferences the parents are. The parents whose children are about to graduate from upper secondary school talk the most about what their children like or dislike. Although parents are trying to navigate the educational path of their children (especially in upper secondary school and when choosing gymnasium), they prefer to discuss and to explain rather than force or persuade their children into options the parents see as the best.

School characteristics that influence parental school choice

“When there is no other choice”: bilingual and international schools

Finnish-Russian school is a bilingual school chosen by nine families in my research. In addition, in two cases children are studying in English.

In all nine cases of bilingual education, Russian language was an enabling factor (McDonald, 2007) in school choice process. Russian language, being native for the interviewees in my research, influenced the perception of school alternatives in case of these interviewees. As a result, all the parents from this group were choosing only between schools where Russian is taught. As one mother puts it: “I’m not sure if my story is of any interest. To tell the truth, I had no school choice at all: there is only one Finnish-Russian school in Helsinki.” (Nina, family 18)

Even though the perception of school alternatives is limited by schools that provide lessons in Russian, some parents mention several alternatives within their pool of options. Russian language is still an enabling factor but other school characteristics take stage being “deciders” (McDonald, 2007) when evaluation of school alternatives is carried out:

“I did some Internet search looking for schools with Russian language and found out there were only two options. These were Finnish-Russian school and Russian Embassy school. However, there is no teaching in Finnish in the Embassy school. This school is suitable for those who live in Finland temporary and does not plan to stay here. <...> Of course this would not suit us at all. The lessons at our school are in Finnish, but in addition there are in-depth Russian language lessons.” (Boris, family 6)

“I reflected upon my children’s education perspectives and ways to preserve their Russian language. First I had to understand how many options (with Russian language) I had.
Communication with mother in Russian is not enough to maintain the language. Plus there is not much motivation (in studying Russian). Language can be studied while reading or watching TV. Children enjoy watching TV, of course, but not the linguistic programmes. We were offered a place in the local school with Russian language class, but it did not fit my criteria. Finnish-Russian school is quite far away, and its building is not inspiring at all. But there are people who speak Russian and those who teach Russian. Other children are learning Russian as well. The whole school is concentrated on Russian language learning. What's more, parents of the pupils from this school support their children in learning Russian.” (Janna, family 7)

The former interviewee explains that among the school with teaching in Russian the one that is affiliated with Russian Embassy fails in meeting other important criteria such as Finnish language teaching. According to Russian father, the question is not so much about Finnish language per se, but rather about general curriculum that is compatible with Finnish educational standards.

The latter quotation addresses that overall atmosphere at school (teachers who speak Russian language, parents who are interested in studying Russian language etc.) overshadowed the criterion of proximity to home. Also, it was more important than aesthetic values (ugliness of the building). This reasoning coincides with anti-positivism approach to school ethos (see Donnelly, 2000). In this case, school environment is regarded as set of rules and norms established through personal connections and expressed in these daily interactions. According to Janna, the progress of learning Russian depends on general atmosphere at school, created by mutual efforts of school officials, parents and children.

Interestingly enough, there are Russian speaking interviewees who are strongly against Russian language teaching at school. These parents assume that families where both parents speak Russian as native need no other tools for Russian language maintaining as this is the language spoken at home. Finnish language attainment, on the contrary, is the primary challenge these parents should care for. “Living in Finland in a Finnish way” is kind of motto for these parents who are primary concerned about being accepted by the Finnish society. The position of these parents might be explained by desire to introduce their children to dominant linguistic market with higher options for social mobility:

“If both parents are Russian, it’s better choose an ordinary Finnish school so that a child can assimilate in Finnish society. <...> I know that some Russian parents choose schools with Russian language in order to preserve the language. As a result, these children do not learn Finnish properly. He or she is still a foreigner here after graduating from school.” (Polina, family 19)
When asked about the importance of Russian language preservation, the parents were listing such factors as the possibility to keep in touch with Russian relatives (usually grandparents), better perspectives on labor market and emotional connection between the parents and their children. In the latter case parents base their reasoning on personal experience or experience of their acquaintances. Some interviewees recall that they have seen families where children are ashamed or afraid to speak Russian. The interviewees reveal that some Russian parents in Finland even encourage their children not to speak Russian in public places. The interviewees in my research are openly critical of such practices. I will reflect upon the reasons for this further.

“I wish to preserve Russian language. My younger sister went to school here in Finland and she wasn’t studying Russian. As a result, she has very basic Russian. She can’t neither read nor write (in Russian). Well, she knows the alphabet, but she does not know grammar rules, so she can’t write anything (in Russian). Now she has a child and she speaks Finnish only with him. In other words, she doesn’t feel being Russian at all. I wouldn’t like my children to follow the same route.” (Arina, family 11)

“I know that many (Russians) are trying hard to fully assimilate, to practically become Finns. They will hardly ever achieve this but will, for sure, lose contact with their own children. <...> Well, that’s why we care that much about maintaining Russian language: we want to keep contact with our children.” (Boris, family 6)

Based on the narratives of the interviewees, I suggest that parents see the mutual language as the prominent tool for both verbal and psychological communication with their own children. For instance, the majority of parents admit that their children hardly consider themselves Russian. Instead, they use rather mild formulation as “Russians born abroad”, “Finns of the Russian origin” etc. The parents, on the contrary, state openly that they will always be immigrants in Finland and might face challenges in the adaptation process. Some parents describe how hard the decision to move from Russia or the Soviet Union was: “I was reflecting upon the move for two years because <...> I will always be an immigrant here. I have to start from the very beginning: to start my career, to find my own way and be accepted.” (Marina, family 5) These parents are also anxious about ambiguous facts in mutual Russian and Finnish history that create tensions between the nations. The Russian parents in this research note that keeping contact with their own children might be extremely hard if the children see themselves as Finns whereas their parents are Russians.

Simultaneously, the balance between Russian and Finnish languages is a prominent issue in the narratives of the interviewed Russian families, regardless school curriculum. Those families with
both Russian speaking parents raise concerns about their children being able to communicate properly in Finnish. Interestingly enough, various sports sections and clubs are emphasized as major instrument to balance these two languages. Also, an ordinary municipal kinder garden (or “a Finnish kinder garden” as the interviewees call it) is the prime source for Finnish language practice for children whose both parents are Russians. Many parents explain that they were searching for a kinder garden with very few foreigners (ideally no other Russian speakers at all), so that their children could get used to communicating in Finnish.

“The elder child started learning Finnish in a kinder garden. He was in a Finnish (municipal) kinder garden, but then we enrolled him into the Finnish-Russian kinder garden for a year. <...> We later regretted since his Finnish proficiency had gradually diminished. <...> Then he started school <...> and we were given advice to send him to some Finnish language club.” (Nadya, family 12)

In cases when Russian language is neither enabler nor decider in the school choice process, parents find other ways to maintain Russian language. The most common tool is weekly native language courses provided by the municipalities for non-Finnish pupils. Some parents admit that they “would have been in quite a challenging situation” (Vera, family 3) without this additional studies which help maintain Russian language.

Children of two families in my research are studying in English. In the first case (family 17) the child is bilingual and speaks Russian and English as native languages. The mother admits that the proximity between her work place and school and the possibility to study in English were two factors taken into consideration when choosing school. Besides, the Finnish-Russian school was also regarded as an option, but entrance requirements prevented the family from choosing this school as child spoke no Finnish at all. In this case one of the schools was excluded due to access procedure.

In another case the family moved to Finland when children were 15 and 11 years old. As none of the children spoke Finnish, education in English was considered to be enabling factor during the school choice. Importantly, in case of this family, economic capital and linguistic capital (a mother speaks English well) have enabled the children to accumulate necessary cultural capital in order to gain access to school with education in English language:

“D: Have they ever had any problems with learning in English?
"I: No, they have never had. <...> But we used to send them to the summer school in London every summer. This might be an explanation. <...> Sometimes we speak English at home, although this isn’t our family language.” (Inna, family 8)

Overall, the linguistic capital plays a prominent role in school parental choice in case of interviewees in this research. The majority of parents feel that knowledge of Finnish language increases chances for economic mobility and success. They are concerned about their children being able to speak Finnish in order to become powerful agents on the dominant linguistic market. On the other hand, they are interested in maintaining Russian language as well because then their children would be able to gain membership on a linguistic market of minority of which the parents are members themselves. This is crucial for keeping contact with own children, to introduce them to Russian culture etc. Generally, the interviewees are hoping their children to be bilingual, although many admit that Finnish language might become dominant over time. The parents in this research attach high level of significance to languages, and some believe that being member of minority language market allows social mobility as well (finding a job where Russian is needed, close business relations between Finland and Russia are stressed).

**School proximity: moving because of school or school because of moving?**

In this research 7 families have chosen the local school as a studying place for their children. Although much has been said about the importance of home-school proximity (see Thomas & Dennison, 1991; Jowett, 1995), in my research very few parents refer to this factor as crucial.

Out of all 20 family only one mother can be considered as a follower of what Adler et al. (1989) call a “satisfying model” and Poikolainen (2012) a “traditional” approach. This mother states: “Generally speaking, education is all the same (at schools). I trust Finns in this regard.” (Anna, family 1)

Moreover, there are cases when a local school is chosen due to the refusal from an initially desired school or due to personal circumstances such as a divorce when an ex-husband simply opposed the decision to enroll a child into the Finnish-Russian school as in case of Lena (family 14).

The issue of home-school proximity is interesting to look at from the perspective of neighborhoods and the relation to geography. As Boterman (2012: 1140) explains “<...> reasons to move are only partially related to school choice. Yet, geographical location has the consequences for the options available.” Hence, it makes sense to look out for hints that geography and education are related to each other.
In this research several families have based their decision to relocate exactly on the opportunity to live closer to school. However, this was usually done in order to make trip easier, less dangerous and time consuming for all family members rather than to ensure school access.

“We moved only because of the school. Everything was based on the school choice. I had in mind the school my children would go to, so we were searching for a new home nearby. <...> There were two main criteria: the first one was the proximity to school and the second was the direct bus from home to school.” (Boris, family 6)

“This was connected with school (the move). My husband and I, we’ve decided long ago that our children will be bilingual. When the first child was born, we were living in Vantaa. We enrolled him into Finnish-Russian kindergarden. Then the second child was born. <...> Trip from home to school was inconvenient. We just imagined that I would have to pick up the younger child from the kindergarden and then pick up the elder one from school and then go home. We finally decided that moving closer to school was the wisest choice.” (Alisa, family 10)

On the other hand, there are families who believe that relocation to what they think to be a decent place ensures the proximity to a decent school:

“If we decide to move, then we will move because of a neighborhood, not because of school. We will look what kind of housing there is, what kind of neighbors, what kind of people are living in this area. It’s not a secret that there are bad and good neighborhoods.” (Marina, family 5)

These parents firstly look at such neighborhood’s characteristics as social composition and types of housing which, in turn, ensure the presence of a good local school in this locale. One interviewee (Olga, family 15) even confesses that when they were moving to Kerava, they were reasoning that “in a tiny town a school is good <...> because of really few foreigners living here.” Notably, this mother sees immigrant families as problematic strata. During the interviews immigrants are also frequently listed among the inhabitants of social housing.

Dina (family 13) relocated to what she perceived to be “prosperous” neighborhood because of the general environment. The narrative suggests that Dina perceives school to reflect this general (good or bad) neighborhood environment, so she started to collected information on school only after she had chosen the apartment.

“I was hoping to purchase a flat, to take a mortgage. So I was looking for an apartment far away from Helsinki, in a peaceful place. <...> Espoo was the priority since I’d heard... I always hear
that Espoo has more money and more resources. <...> Then I saw my future apartment: close to the sea, far from Helsinki – just perfect. Then I started looking for information on school and it turned out that there was a new school in the process of construction, it opened this autumn, right next to my place. So this was perfect from any perspective.” (Dina, family 13)

This position is similar to one of the strategies Botermn's (2012) study has revealed. According to his classification, one of the strategies applied by middle-class parents in Amsterdam is staying in a relatively homogeneous area where a good school is perceived as an additional bonus and a secondary issue (ibid., p.12).

Other interviewees feel reluctant to move because of a school. Some Russian parents feel that relocation makes sense only if economic capital is substantial: according to their view, “good” schools are located in the neighborhoods with higher real estate prices. Consequently, moving there implies high expenditures that are justified only if “your child will be 100% enrolled” (Polina, family 19). Others, on the contrary, explain that a desired school might be located in the area that parents would rather avoid. In the following quotation Russian mother does not directly connect the quality of a school with neighborhood quality but she makes it clear that the quality of living is far more important than living close to school:

“<...> the problem with Russian language kinder gardens and schools is that they are all located in the neighborhoods I do not wish to live in. There are apartment buildings, social housing, some mixed communities... <...> To my mind, I’m living in Finland and I wish to ensure that my child gets good Finnish education.” (Olga, family 15)

Overall, social housing is the primary type of housing about which the interviewees give a negative feedback. Russian parents in this research admit that they would not let their children to interact with peers from social housing or would rather avoid classmates from families living on social allowance. Sometimes parents see the type of housing as a marker of family’s income and social status. Some parents reveal during the interviews that they were interested in particular types of housing, mostly townhouses, when looking for a new dwelling. For instance, Boris (family 6) explains that inhabitants in blocks of flats might belong to very different social strata, so he “would not risk and allow the children interact with these groups.” (Boris, family 6)

Other parents see mixed social environment as risky because it can have kind of stagnation effect on their children: namely, mixing with disadvantaged families may persuade their children that this kind of living is normal and, hence, demotivate them. Russian mother whose quotations I have
chosen as illustration for this fact compares their current place of living (the town of Kerava) to the
previous one (Espoo). In the latter case they were living in quite homogeneous environment she
enjoyed (middle class, higher education, employment). When they moved, the social environment
changed into more heterogeneous. The mother sees her son being at risk to absorb the patterns of
living that she finds inappropriate:

“When we were living in Espoo, we were among the families of more or less similar kind: all
parents with higher education, all were office employees, we all were quite the same. Here (in
Kerava) it’s different. Here people are coming from absolutely different backgrounds. You never
know who you are going to meet. <...> My son is thus at danger to stuck in this rut and stay here
forever. I have to show him what other options he has.” (Olga, family 15)

The relation between education, economic capital and locality is a captivating theme in this
research. As seen from the answers of the Russian parents, they do not directly connect wealth to
educational success. Rather, their reasoning reflects the social control model (Mayer & Jencks,
1989; Jencks & Mayer, 1990) that suggests that high-status students act as role model and thus
exercise control over others. During the interviews the informants voice their concern about their
children’s reaction to wealthier pupils or wealthier environment. In a way, they fear that wealthier
students might exert pressure via social patterns and behavior norms. In a former quotation a
Russian mother tells about her husband’s and her own perception of school environment shaped by
wealthy students. Being middle class themselves, they feel a bit skeptical about wealthier
environment at school, suspecting this might awake the feeling of insecurity in their children:

“My husband was worrying that if we lived in a tiny apartment then our children would see
wealthier houses nearby. He was anxious about them feeling insecure in such circumstances.”
(Katya, family 4)

The following quotation reveals the story of a middle class girl who has found herself in a wealthy
school environment. The interviewee shares the experience of her friend who originated from the
middle class and who entered an elite gymnasium with predominantly wealthy students. She
describes that this girl had to go through the reevaluation of the whole set of values since wealthy
pupils were dictating the behavioral norms.

“I have a friend who has been living her whole life in K in Espoo. She’s from a middle class
family; her parents are very educated and nice people, both Finns. By the way, K is the wealthiest
neighborhood. There are the biggest and the most expensive villas near the sea. This friend of mine
tells that there were <...> drugs circulating because parents compensated the shortage of attention by giving money to their children. My friend always thought that she painting well. And then she entered the gymnasium in K neighborhood where all these children from wealthy families studied. <...> During the first Art lesson she was shocked when she compared her paintings to paintings of other children. Other children’s paintings were so much better that she had to hide hers (laughs). And this situation repeated in every class. This friend of mine admits that she went through painful personal reevaluation. Perhaps this wealthy gymnasium was not the best choice for her.” (Olga, family 15)

In latter case the view of the mother corresponds with how Bourdieu (1986: 75) sees the difference between the social origin and production of visual art or playing musical instruments. Both acquisition and performance in these fields “presuppose not only dispositions associated with long establishment in the world of art and culture but also economic means <...> and spare time.” (Bourdieu, 1986: 75.) The academic notes that painting and sculpture, if checked against the same educational level, are much more common among the dominant class.

**School reputation**
Social networks and the official list of Finnish gymnasiums are two main sources for comparison between the schools for the interviewees in this research.

“I heard negative feedback but still wanted to try”: feedback on schools received through social connections

Interviewees who were searching for feedback about school most actively are those parents whose children study in Finish-Russian school. Interestingly enough, these parents admit that they have heard both bad and good feedback about this school. They have also read negative feedback on the Internet. However, the negative feedback, although taken into consideration, did not influence the initial decision to study in Finnish-Russian school. These parents also say that, as far as this is the only feasible option for Russian language learning in Helsinki, they wanted at least try and see.

“Y: We’ve heard some negative feedback. There was my husband’s course mate who had graduated from this school. He was of low opinion about it.

D: Did he explain the reasons for this?

Y: Obviously, this was because of his Russian proficiency. We then read in the Internet what exactly the school offers. But this guy… he’s a Finn, so he was studying Russian without any help from his
parents which is challenging. I can help my children and my husband can help them as well, so we didn’t adopt this gloomy perspective.” (Yulia, family 16)

As seen from the quotation, the interviewee connects dissatisfaction of their acquaintance with the fact that Russian language was too difficult for him to learn without any help from parents or other sources. The interviewee believes that the same difficulty would be avoided in their case since mother is Russian native speaker. Similarly, other parents note that they are very cautious about the negative feedback because “people are subjective by their nature” (Alisa, family 10).

On the other hand, there are interviewees whose school choice was influenced by negative feedback. While studying this question I kept getting an impression that there were similarities in their reasoning. Crucially, this was type of feedback that dealt with questions of nationality.

“I got acquainted with a woman from Ukraine. <…> So, I heard from her that her son and another boy had problems in this school right because they were Russian speakers. According to this woman, the teachers were initiating this. As a result, I did not even wish to try.” (Katya, family 4)

Other interviewees recall that they have heard about bullying aimed at children of Russian origin. Ambiguous and painful facts from mutual history of Russia and Finland, according to feedback received, have often been reasons for arguments between the pupils. Maria (family 2), for example, changed the school right before the beginning of the school year. She heard that Russian pupils were bullied in a school she had enrolled her son into. The mother quickly applied to another school in order to avoid potential emotional risks.

Ball and Vincent (1997), as mentioned in the theory part, compare social networking to a grapevine and claim that it is largely determined by where you live, who you know and what community you belong to. In addition to social class, the interviewees in this research belong to Russian speaking community (because of their linguistic capital) and thus all of them have connections with other Russian speakers. When interviewing the informants, I paid attention that many of them refer to feedback they have heard exactly from Russian speaking friends or acquaintances.

Also, based on Ball and Vincent’s (ibid.) classification of reactions to grapevine information, I would suggest that the interviewees in this research are similar to “suspicion” group where the influence of feedback is minimal and is mitigated by other factors. As seen from the examples above, parents in this research are ready to ignore negative feedback if they are especially interested in other resources a school can offer – a teaching in Russian, for instance. Simultaneously, the interviewees are extremely alarmed by stories about discrimination of Russian children. This type
of information is usually passed from Russian speaking acquaintances as well because this group is particularly interested in avoiding such situations.

**List of gymnasiums as reputational marker: looking for top 20**

In opposition to “hot” knowledge obtained via social networking Ball and Vincent distinguish “cold” knowledge which is formal and is usually produced by school officials in order to promote schools (Ball & Vincent, 1997: 4).

According to Bourdieu (1984), “given that scholastic success mainly depends on inherited cultural capital and on the propensity to invest in the educational success,” (p. 122) it is only natural that the proportion of the pupils with the richest cultural capital increases with a school’s position in academic hierarchy (that could be measured by previous success of its pupils) and is the highest in the institutions reproducing the professorial corps. Bourdieu distinguish between two “opposing principles of hierarchy” (ibid.). The former type of hierarchy is the one based on academic merits and on the share of pupils drawn from the population fractions with the highest volume of cultural capital. The latter principle of hierarchy which is opposed to academic criteria of the first type is based on the principles that are outside the academic field, economic capital, for example. If the students of economically advanced fraction are less represented in a particular school, then a given educational institution operates on the basis of academic criteria and the access is defined by previous academic success. Moreover, this criterion is respected the most within the social fractions that are mostly dependent on reproduction of cultural capital (for instance, in case of teachers’ children, the success is fully correlated with academic success). (Bourdieu, 1984: 122.)

The list of Finnish gymnasiums is published annually by Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta² and is based on a minimal examination score required for entering a gymnasium. All Finnish pupils have to pass a matriculation exam in order to graduate from upper secondary school. This list might be considered a “cold” knowledge since it is produced by an official body, it is available to everyone and its circulation does not depend either on social networking or community membership.

In order to uncover the attitude towards this list I ask the parents if they have ever heard about this list and, if yes, will they consider it when choosing gymnasium in the future.

This list of Finnish gymnasiums is a prominent subject in the narratives of the parents whose children are about to graduate from upper secondary school or are already studying in gymnasium (one family), although all the interviewees express their general opinion on this issue.

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Parents often refer to schools in the top list as “elite”. Interestingly, they do not connect the notion of “elite” school to the proliferation of resources or special pedagogical methods but to social environment and families who study there. The interviewees hope that being educated in particular environment, on the one hand, provides motivation towards studies because all the classmates are coming from highly educated families where studying is “natural”. On the other hand, future social connections are emphasized: parents believe that their children could create beneficial social networks that could later help in finding a job. Finally, some parents hope that graduating from an “elite” school literally opens many doors in front of its graduates. In some sense, studying in such a school is similar to being a member in some elite club:

“If your child graduates from this school then you can be 100% sure that he or she will study at university afterwards. It’s like a brand, you know: “He’s from M school.” Best of the best are studying there. <...> They are not necessarily from very rich families. I’ve seen several TV presenters there with their children – I recognized them, of course. Naturally, these people care about their children. Their children have opportunity to see and hear more than others. They are more mature.” (Olga, family 15)

This reasoning is similar to Kosunen (2012) findings on interrelation between school reputation (“elite” schools) and middle class. The conclusions of her study address that middle class mothers in a Finnish town of Vantaa distinguish a separate group of elite schools where “children of Finnish elite” study. Interviewees in Kosunen’s research (2012) argue that upon graduating from such schools children easily pass to universities and establish social connections that can help on the labor market in the future. The underlying reason for this opinion, in Kosunen’s view, is fear of dropping from the middle class (see also Ehrenreich, 1989).

In addition, the parents in my research are interested in social relations their children experience at school. Although Raveaud and van Zanten (2007) distinguish it from the third group of values called “paving the way for future career”, the interviewees link social relations to social position in the future, career included. Namely, some Russian parents hope that networking with children who are coming from the families with rich cultural capital would bring benefits in the future. These interviewees do not mention that they wish their children to just have friends but rather stress that being friends with families with high cultural capital shape your life in a positive way:

“(If you graduate from an “elite” school) you already have friends who are of the same stance. You are then well positioned in your life.” (Olga, family 15)
Some parents in this research, on the contrary, feel skeptical about the list of gymnasiums and think that it is “blown out of proportions” (Nadya, family 12). If this is the case then parents connect the high position of educational institution with the high status of the pupils and its central location. Other skeptical parents reason that the reputation of a school is artificially shaped by potential students who have “wrong type of motivation”:

“When I myself had entrance exams at university, I was quite surprised at how many people came. Some of my friends tried to pass although they were interested neither in Russian language nor in Russian literature. They were like: “Why not? We are Russians, after all!” This was wrong type of motivation. Same with gymnasiums: some pupils may apply not because they really want to, but because “it’s elite”. That’s how the rating increases. So I do not really believe in it.” (Arina, family 11)

Next group of parents feels less skeptical about the list. These interviewees agree that the list might be biased and even name its shortcomings: for instance, it does not compare the theoretical base of the pupils; nor it depicts the social environment of an institution. However, they are planning to consult the list as a reference point. Some even name the lowest possible position for a gymnasium of their choice: “If he enters a gymnasium that is in top-20, this will go.” (Boris, family 6)

Finally, there are parents who, in addition to official listing, refer to their personal experience or visual practices and base their final decision on the blend of these methods:

“I looked through (the list of gymnasium) and worried that the gymnasium affiliated with our school scores that badly. <...> I think that if the situation does not improve, my son won’t study in this gymnasium. <...> The general environment is not healthy there. I base this opinion on my personal experience: the students from this gymnasium often take the same bus I do. I have quite negative impression of these pupils: they curse, smoke...” (Nina, family 18)

Generally speaking, the Russian parents in my research cautiously evaluate the list of Finnish gymnasiums published annually on the basis of average grades of the pupils. Some parents express concerns about the artificial status of some educational institutions created through the economic capital of the families whose children study there. My interviewees, however, understand “elite” schools as those where families with the richest cultural capital are the most prominent group. As seen from the narratives, the parents in this research care about how the students behave, how much attention their parents pay them, who their parents are (in terms of profession, employment), how motivated the pupils are. As my interviewees are only slightly familiar with the mechanism of the
list’s creation, they prefer to back up the information in the list by additional sources of information such as social networks and the Internet.

**Classes with impetus on particular subject: to know when to start**

Among the families interviewed, one child studies in a class with impetus on sports. As follows from the reasoning of the mother, the class with impetus on sports has two main advantages: firstly, various programmes keep the child busy all the time and solves the problem of additional hobbies or interest clubs. Next, the mother cares about the general environment in the class. In her narratives she assumes that the classmates of her son are more motivated and concentrated on studies. This rhetoric is similar to Kosunen’s (2012) findings on middle class mothers’ assumptions about classes with impetus on particular subject who hope that special curriculum awakes general interest towards studies, motivates and helps in perpetuating the belonging to middle-class:

“We enrolled him into a sport class. (...) (It is) Great! Various programmes, no additional hobbies needed. He feels no need for additional activity when he comes home. (...) I’ve noticed that the boys in the sport class study quite well. They go in for sport and have decent grades. So, I’ve developed a particular strategy for my younger son. I think he will continue in sport class (in upper secondary school), he’s talented enough for this.” (Olga, family 15)

Five parents consider schools with impetus on particular subject in the future. Better perspectives regarding future gymnasium as well as higher motivation for studies are mentioned as reasons for these changes. For instance, one mother explains that she would like her children to experience the difficulties of entrance tests and high standards within class: “I’d like him to understand what it feels like to pass an exam.” (Irina, family 9)

Some families who chose Finnish-Russian school to maintain the language admit that they might change the school in the future. They explain that children have particular subject preferences that are not sufficiently maintained in their current school. These parents stress that special impetus on a subject makes it easier to enter university in the future. However, these interviewees emphasize that this shift might occur in case their children show interest or propensity for learning particular subject. Alisa (family 10), for example, tells that she has already decided to enroll her children into school with special Math curriculum. The Russian mother denies that she is looking for an “elite” school; she explains that her sons are really interested in Math lesson and adds: “It might be easier to enter university because Math is major in many university curriculums.”

As seen from above, the Russian parents in this research acknowledge that they might change their current school after their children graduate from primary school. A school with impetus on
particular subject is a desired option for many of them. The primary reason for choosing schools with special curriculum is higher chances to pass later on to a decent gymnasium and then to higher educational institution. Parents admit that then their children will be old enough to travel far away, thus illuminating the distance factor. Even the parents who were looking for Russian language lessons in school, are eager to sacrifice their language motivation in order to ensure access to decent gymnasium. They reason that the gymnasium affiliated with their school does not score high enough. Although the parents partially explain this fact by general unpopularity of humanitarian education, they are still hoping for gymnasium with better scores. This reasoning might be interpreted in a way that parents are keeping in line with requirements of labor markets and, as Bourdieu (1986: 142) suggests “knowing the right moment to pull out of devalued disciplines” and prefer to switch into “those with a future, rather than clinging to scholastic values”.

**Elder siblings' experience as probing**
Those families who have elder siblings already studying at school are given priority during application period. Situation when all the children are studying in the same school solves logistics problems if there is need to accompany children to and from school.

Out of 20 families who participated in this research 17 families have more than one child. Out of these 17 families 11 have elder and younger siblings studying in the same school. In addition, in case of two more families younger children are going to the Finnish-Russian kinder garden and thus will most probably continue in the same school with their elder siblings. Indeed, the majority of those whose children attend the same school are coming from Finnish-Russian school (10) and one family has two children studying in English. These families are mostly quoted in the part on bilingual schools, and language was the decisive factor in their case. Obviously then, that younger children follow the track of their elder siblings.

In case of one family elder and younger siblings are studying in different schools. In case of elder child this is a local school; the younger child studies in a non-local school in a class with special sports curriculum. The mother explains that her children study in different school because she was worrying about poor equipment of the local school and she thus decided to send her younger child to another school. Rumors about better resource equipment of another school influenced the final decision of the mother:

“*When our elder son was already studying, he heard his classmates talking about that another school and saying that children from rich families were studying there. So, I thought: “Well, if there are rich studying there then we should try this school.”*” (Olga, family 15)
The following quote is another illustration on how a negative experience of an elder sibling might modify the parental choice when it’s time to choose school for a younger child. The elder child of Tanya is bilingual (Russian speaking mother, English-speaking father, family 17) but she does not speak Finnish at all. Tanya recalls that when her elder child was younger, they were still unsure about their residing in Finland. The Russian mother admits that they have finally made up their mind about staying in Helsinki. Hence, the importance of Finnish as a dominant language on linguistic market has gradually increased. The educational challenges her elder daughter currently faces (the limited choice of gymnasium, lowering the overall grade because of low score in Finnish) makes Tanya rethink and reshape her educational strategies. However, she is now sure only about the type of kinder garden she is going to choose for her younger daughter:

“We would rather choose Finnish-speaking kinder garden, so she could at least learn the language and won’t have the same problems her elder sister has. I speak Russian, her sister speaks Russian <...>, we also travel to Russia once a year. I think that she will speak Russian all right whereas English language is not a problem at all. <...> As far as Finnish language is concerned, I’d rather choose a Finnish-speaking kinder garden. I can’t say about school yet, but kinder garden will certainly be a municipal one.” (Tanya, 17 family)

Overall, the interviewees in this research choose the same school for younger siblings not because they are given a priority among the applicants but for the same reasons they chose this school for elder siblings, be it a language of teaching or the proximity from home. However, if the experience of the elder sibling is considered unsatisfying, Russian parents in this research could modify their choice strategy and search for other options.

**International examinations and universities abroad**

An IB international programme influenced the school choice in case of one family in this research. The mother herself has graduated from IB programme and advocates it because “I like the goals of this programme, the methods they use to achieve these goals.” (Tanya, family 17). However, IB exam was taken into account in a pool of other factors considered important: namely, the proximity of the school to mother’s workplace and the fact that many children from the girl’s kinder garden group were enrolled into the same class. In general, IB programme was considered important when backed up by psychological comfort of the child and logistic convenience.

As far as universities abroad are concerned, parents mostly evaluate chances of their children to study in universities in Russia as pretty faire unless they are talking about specific professions (such
as a pilot, for instance). Firstly, parents doubt that their children’s Russian language proficiency would be enough for university level. Secondly, high value is given to free Finnish education:

“... it feels that neither her overall education nor her Russian language proficiency would be enough to study at university in Russia. As far as I know, this is hard. You need whether to get a diploma from the Russian Embassy school or to get a foreigner status and pay huge fees. <...> We’ve thought about the US universities, but the main obstacle is that the initial university education is expensive. Otherwise you have to apply for a loan. <...> But if you’re living in Finland education is for free. This is an important factor.” (Tanya, family 17)

Generally speaking, possibility for studying abroad is not a prominent theme in the narratives of the interviewees. On the one hand, they appreciate free Finnish education. On the other hand, the parents reflect upon overall difference in university requirements in Finland and Russia and admit that the university curriculums between the countries seriously diverge. Interestingly enough, many interviewees confess openly that they would not like their children to move away from them.

**On teachers and learning**

Although some Russian parents in this research feel restricted by their limited command of Finnish language, the majority of interviewees are willing to communicate with teachers.

The parents name parental meetings, private 15 or 20 minutes meetings with teachers and Wilma platform\(^3\) as major sources for communication with educational authorities.

The narratives suggest that Russian parents in this research see the teachers’ role as important and prominent in educational process of their children. For instance, parents reason that often it is the teacher’s methods that make a subject interesting or motivate the children for better results.

In the following quotation Irina (family 9) compares two schools. She embraces wholeheartedly the rigid control through tests and sees the teachers who organize regular checking as the obligatory component of a good school:

“To my mind, whether school is bad or good depends on teachers. I asked my friend: “Have your children already had any tests?” and she answered “No”. I was so surprised as my children had already had five or six Math tests starting from September. <...> When my son brings home the

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\(^3\) a web platform in Finland via which the parents and students manage the majority of school related processes (communication with teachers, checking grades, choosing courses, etc.)
results of the test I have to sign in his diary so that teacher knows that I have seen his grades.”

(Irina, family 9)

Another Russian mother who is worried about the future choice of gymnasium appreciates that their class teacher is trying to motivate the children for better perspectives using not just rhetoric but other methods as well. Also, she is thankful that their class teacher motivates the children to start reflecting upon future career perspectives. Importantly, the mother is happy that the teacher’s view coincides with her own view on professional perspectives. This mother opposes her daughter’s decision to work as a waiter during the summer and she is discussing this issue with her child. At school, the class teacher holds similar opinion and tries to influence the pupils. This fact illustrates that similarity between parental and teachers’ values are crucial for parental inclusion into school life (Blackledge, 2001).

“Our teacher, for example, invites her former students who are a year or two years older (than interviewee’s daughter) and who are now studying in gymnasiums. They come and tell what studying in gymnasium looks like and how hard it is...<...> Also, our children should find some working internship, it can be anywhere. <...> Their teacher is so bright since she preaches them: “Do not search for work in some grocery store. You don’t’ need this! Look for something that really interests you.” (Tanya, family 17)

Some parents stress that they want to know what happens in their children’s school life; they are interested not only in final grades but in how the process of learning is structured. They also want to be informed if any parental help is needed and wish to participate. The narratives address that Russian parents in this research would like more intensive parent-teacher interactions. For instance, Katya (family 4) worries that they “only see the (final) grades” whereas she would like to know the structure of the course, its requirements and what pupils will learn next.

Tanya (family 17) reveals that it is hard to control her daughter’s progress since the teenage daughter rarely tells about her school activity. The mother is really thankful to the class teacher who emails her weekly. These emails are mediators through which the mother is able to follow her daughter’s school achievements.

According to other narratives, Russian parents even initiate contacts with the teachers. For instance, some interviewees are worried about the discipline or how serious their children take their studies. Arina (family 11) tells that her husband once approached the teacher with a request to be striker
with their son. The mother evaluates the communication as very constructive because the teacher was attentive to parental request:

“In my husband’s view, our son wasn’t taking his studies as seriously as my husband wished to. <...> So, my husband asked the teacher to be a bit tougher at him, to keep him within stricter borders so that he would understand that he had particular duties, that school was serious, not like “if I want then I do this, but if I don’t want then I won’t do.” So we wished the teacher to limit him in some way, to let him know that he should not be late. <...> The teacher readily met our needs. She contacts us in case of any problem, she emails us.” (Arina, family 11)

In case of another child with disciplinary difficulties, a teacher initiated a problem solving solution through a new method of control. The teacher called the mother and asked if she was not against a separate “behavior-monitoring” diary where the teacher would give additional mark for behavior in class. I pay attention that the mother does not perceive it as discrimination, albeit she understands that this measure is implemented towards her son only. The interviewee admits that her son is “too active” and needs additional motivation to behave himself. Even though this mother does not speak fluent Finnish she is eager to negotiate about her children’s schooling in contrast to some informants in Blackledge (2001) research who could neither read nor understand official documents from school:

“I am happy that she (the class teacher) remarks on any failure, even a minor one. <...> I especially like that now he has a special behavior-monitoring diary. The teacher herself introduced this diary. Now he is much calmer and studies very well. <...> She marks in green color if he behaves himself. If it’s green combined with yellow then there has been some incident.” (Irina, family 9)

However, there have been cases of conflicts between the teachers and my Russian interviewees. The narratives address that Russian informants in this research are ready to react against any situation at school that they find wrong, unfair etc., especially if educational progress of their children is at stake. Thus, Janna (family 7) tells that once she and other parents noticed that Math progress in their class is less quick than in others they questioned the teacher’s abilities to reach the children with her pedagogical methods. The teacher reacted, in the mother’s view, aggressively by saying that she was there for teaching the children rather than being friends with their parents. As a result, the parents proceeded with their request for improvement in Math teaching to the deputy principle and the principle of the school.
Another Russian mother who is especially concerned about her daughter’s poor Finnish blames the teacher for not being enough motivating towards the pupils. For instance, she notes that two lessons per week are not enough to learn such a difficult language, and the children “have been studying the things like colors and days of the week three years in rows!” (Tanya, family 17) Notably, this mother holds IB diploma and fun and motivating learning has been a prominent theme in her discourse because of her own experience.

What I find interesting in the narratives of Tanya is that whenever her daughter scores poorly (6 out of 10, for instance) the mother assumes that her daughter has little motivation for studying this subject, and thus something should be changed within school or class. She reasons that as long as no help with Finnish language can be provided within family this is the school’s responsibility to help them.

“T: We explained our concerns to the class teacher and asked for advice. She recommended us to write a letter to the principle, to voice our worries and ask for changes. <…) I was among the mothers who composed this request letter.

D: What was there in this letter?

T: (We wrote) that we were worrying about poor Finnish language proficiency of our children and we were anxious about how this would influence their future. If not at school then where would they learn Finnish? We have nobody in our family who speaks Finnish… In situation like this school should provide help.” (Tanya, family 17)

Lareau and McNavara Horvat (1999) in their study on interactions between teachers and ethnic minority children have discovered that teachers in the interviews complain that parents usually automatically conclude that teacher is wrong whereas their child is right (p. 42). In regard to Blackledge (2001) research, Tanya (family 17) lacks linguistic capital to help her daughter in her educational progress. The principle difference with Blackledge’s study (ibid.), however, is that the Russian mother does not feel rejected and initiates some steps to improve situation. This might be partly explained by the fact that Bangladeshi interviewees in Blackledge research have limited cultural capital whereas the interviewees in this research possess substantial volumes of such. Tanya, for example, is a university lecturer and researcher who is currently on maternity leave. Thus, although the mother is not able to speak Finnish, her English proficiency is good enough for direct communication with school officials. Also, because this mother has graduated from IB programme in the USA, her values might be regarded as very much the same as mainstream values.
in Finnish educational community whereas the gap between the values is the main reason for immigrant mothers’ exclusion in Blackledge research (2001: 366).

There are other parents who have publicly expressed dissatisfactions with schooling process. For instance, Nadya (family 12) explains that English language lessons in their school are very scarce, so her son is not enough motivated to learn the language. Although the school was not able to react immediately to parental request to improve English language teaching, this particular family appeals to other methods. Nadya reveals that they have hired an English language tutor thanks to their social capital. In other words, the parents are trying to ensure educational progress using available tools outside school.

As far as parental meetings are concerned, many Russian parents in this research enjoy them. For instance, the parents appreciate that formal questions (for instance, money collecting) are settled quickly while the major attention is given to explanations and presentations on study process. Inna (family 8), for instance, summarizes her impressions in the following quotations:

“They (meeting) are usually very constructive and interesting. I’d say... parental meeting in Finland are very different from meetings in Russia. No time is wasted on organizational questions like money collecting – these issues are sorted out through Wilma. <...> During the parental meetings we usually discuss how the class is currently progressing and what the requirements for each course are. These are basic things that are very interesting and sort of entertaining. We are offered to fulfill tasks or even to draw something. Then the teachers evaluate the accomplished tasks, simultaneously explaining the criteria for evaluation. So we are able to understand how to direct our own children. This is a great format for parental meetings, and I like it.” (Inna, family 8)

Notably, family 8 moved to Finland from Russia when the children were 15 and 11 years old and both girls had been studying in Russian school. Hence, the mother draws the comparison on her own experience.

Another prominent topic in the narratives of the interviewees is teaching process per se. The parents deliberate on how it should be organized if pupils’ propensity to absorb new information differs. This topic seems to agitate the parents since most of them claim that their children study well. Consequently, parents are interested in teaching process that is oriented towards quick learners, i.e. pupils who are capable of acquiring extra knowledge in addition to official school programme.

Parents are generally rather cautious in their evaluations on how the class work should be organized. Their narratives suggest that, in tune with what Raveaud and van Zanten (2007) propose
in their study on middle class families, interviewees are trying to somehow reconcile their personal values (obligation to give as good education to their child as possible) with impersonal values (universal education for all). Although admitting the importance of universal values, they can hardly subordinate the wellbeing of their own children to general wellbeing of all the children in class (Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007).

Alisa (family 10), for instance, thinks that the difference in school progress between the classmates can decrease the amount of information a teacher presents in class. As far as her own children are quick learners, the mother would like them to be given extra material at school (personal values).

On the other hand, she believes that none of the pupils should be labeled “less capable” or be taught separately because “this can ruin pupils’ self-esteem” (Alisa, family 10). The mother suggests that the weakest pupils in class should just be offered additional help (universal values).

Some parents immediately connect the question of difference in school progress with immigrant pupils. The following quotation of Janna (family 7) contains the direct appeal to cultural capital and its shortage in immigrant families. The parent reasons that inability of immigrant parents to help their children with homework can negatively affect general progress in class:

“School progress largely depends on a class the child studies in. If, say, half of the pupils in class are Finns and another half are immigrants who lack Finnish language proficiency, then... Well, their parents’ education or education of other grown-ups in the family is rather weak. Consequently, these children cannot cope with the given tasks, and this generates problems.” (Janna, family 7)

Further on the parent reveals that it was “a hidden reason” for choosing the Finnish-Russian school where “educational background, cultural background and standards (of the families) are similar” (Janna, family 7). This relative homogeneity between the families is seen as prerequisite for successful studies, although the parent regrets that it restrains possibility for blending with different cultures and learn from them. The position of this parent illustrates how hard it is to balance personal values with impersonal ones (Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007), especially when wellbeing of your own child is at stake. In case of family 7 the preference was given to personal values (ibid.) by restricting social environment their children study in. The interviewee hopes that she will be able to fill the gap in cultural education of her children herself by telling them about other cultures and traditions.
Alternatively, one of the mothers recalls that her child has helped ethnic minority children in their studies. Dina (family 13) who is a single mother, tells that she was contacted by school authorities and asked for permission to let her daughter come and help ethnic minority children who experienced problems in studying. Dina adds that her former husband did not like the idea at all as he did not wish his child to be in a group with children whom he regarded as “not smart enough”. Dina is openly discontent with his position as she disagrees that help to disadvantaged pupils could be harmful for her daughter’s school progress. In this respect she could be compared to the group of parents Raveaud and van Zanten (2007) call “caring” and who preach liberal and universal values.

“*My daughter was kind of “support pupil”. Her father was very angry. He understood the whole thing wrongly, although teachers had asked my permission and I had answered “Yes, sure. I agree that she helps them.” And her father was furious, he told me: “My child speaks Finnish well! Why is she in this group?”*

An interesting strategy is described by Boris (family 6) who offers to alternate the “roles” of a child by placing him/her into different environments. Boris’ son, for instance, is doing well at school – in fact, he is one of the best pupils in his class. At the same time, the boy’s results in a sport section are quite modest. Such alternation, according to father’s view, prevents the child from becoming arrogant. On the other side, it does not damage child’s self-esteem. Boris hopes that his son would learn that each person has both strong and weak sides that he should not be ashamed of:

“*I would propose to alternate the situations and try to place your child into different environments: the one where he’s one of the most successful and another where he has to try harder to keep up with his mates. This alteration gives him chance to try different social roles and perhaps even keeps his motivation awake. <...> At least in our case, this works: he has to try hard in football and hockey sport clubs whereas he’s one of the quickest runners in his class, maybe because his classmates are not really into sport. <...> I would not like him to study with geniuses only. Otherwise he would feel really depressed.”* (Boris, family 6)

Apart from the parents who see no problems in their children’s school progress, two interviewees express doubts about the way teachers organize the lessons. They fear that systems introduced in their schools are unfavorable for the pace of learning.

In the former case the Russian mother (Galina, family 19) has been living in Finland since her teens. Moreover, she moved to Finland without any knowledge of the language and was admitted to an ordinary school where all the lessons were in Finnish. As a result, she managed to learn the
language via direct communication and daily involvement with Finnish language environment. Her son whose both parents are Russian speakers has challengers in learning Finnish. That is why Galina feels skeptical about the way the teacher divided the class. Russian mother suspects that the main criterion for this division was ethnic background, so that all the immigrants were separated from Finns. According to Galina, “the best way to learn is to see and to listen... when you seat in the same class (with native speakers) and can look through a textbook.” Galina is convinced that this division prevents her son from progressing in Finnish language. This view has been expressed by Esser (2006) who points to the fact that separation at school hampers language proficiency necessary for assimilation.

When asked if she has ever discussed this issue with the class teacher, the mother admits that she has “never asked her about this system” (Galina, family 19). Position of this Russian mother reminds the outcome of the study by Laureau (1999) who has discovered that some minority parents (in case of her research – black parents), albeit feeling that their children might be put in a disadvantaged position at school, initiate no action. In a similar way Galina reasons that her son would have been more motivated if he studied with children from a “stronger” group. She backs up her reasoning by telling that before the division took place her son had had better marks. However, after the division his marks dropped significantly. The mother concludes that she does not know what to do. Thus, although identifying the problem and even having possible solution in mind, Galina does not initiate any dialogue with the teacher in order to transfer her son into another group.

Another mother – Anna (family 1) – is also dissatisfied with class division. According to her opinion, the pupils have been divided based on their nationality. Anna shows the pictures of her son’s classmates and lets me guess how old the children on the picture are. Then she points at some of them and tells that this boy is already 15 or 16 years old (i.e. 2 years older than her son), but he was left in the same grade for several years. Anna’s concern is not about the learning progress per se, but rather about general environment or “social interactions” in class or during the breaks:

“I am not that much worried about the school progress per se, but rather about his social interactions. Teacher is trying to present as much material as possible, and it’s pupil’s choice whether to learn it or to ignore. What I don’t like is that he communicates with them (elder classmates) during the breaks. I mean, teenagers who are 15 or 16 years... they are much older. They can abuse my son...” (Anna, family 1)

This mother’s reasoning interrelates with the type of values distinguished by Raveaud and van Zanten (2007) which they call “experience of social relations”. They are described as personal and
deal with immediate comfort of a child in school. Anna is stressing that she is afraid that her son can be violated by his elder classmates and feel discomfort in his school environment.

Many interviewees mention the practice or correction teachers in Finnish schools (“apulaiset” in Finnish) as prescribed by clause 16 of Law on education 628. Children from some families even have had experience of working with these teachers. Russian parents are generally satisfied with results of this work. Lena (family 14) tells that her son had additional hours with a correction teacher, and mother was happy as she saw improvements in her son’s school progress. She was interested in continuing these studies after they had been over, but was explained by the school officials that the boy did not need further help and could cope by his own. Other parents regard correction teachers as a useful tool to ensure their children’s progress at school since the difference between the pupils’ capacity to learn is eliminated by additional help to the weakest ones.

**Reflections on finding**

This Thesis is based on 20 semi-structured interviews with Russian-speaking middle class parents who have an experience of school choice on the local market in Helsinki metropolitan region. The main idea of this study was to look at interrelation between social class and immigrant background. I became interested in this topic because in academic literature on school choice immigrant parents are described as unprivileged actors whereas middle class families are believed to benefit the most. Since the interviewees feature both of these characteristics, I am trying to figure out which one has greater impact on school choice. Despite the small number of interviews, the present study contains some interesting and hopefully helpful findings.

The narratives imply that the interviewees have strong Russian identity. They speak Russian language as their mother tongue, prefer to communicate with Russian-speakers and, most importantly, they refer to themselves as Russians when sharing their experience. The parents interviewed also discuss about their immigrant position in Finland. This topic is raised in the context of Finnish language proficiency and difficulties that its shortage produces. In addition, they reflect upon their own place in the Finnish society, what problems they face and might face in the future and recall about their decision to emigrate from Russia. Hence, all the interviewees agree that they have particular assimilation challenges, school market included.

However, the narratives of the interviewees do not contain verbal expressions or other reasoning that would suggest that these Russian parents find it difficult to exercise school choice. According to Weekes-Bernard (2007: 4): immigrant parents “either downgrade their options prior to selecting
schools or verbally express choices that differ from the types of school their children are actually attending or are due to attend.” Moreover, the same study has uncovered that often this group of parents, albeit interested in schools with admission control (tests and entrance exams), find the process too difficult and decline to apply. In contrast to this, the interviews with Russian parents reveal that they actually apply to selective schools. One of the Russian mothers tells about the admission test to “the most prestigious school in Helsinki” that her son tried to pass. There are other families whose children had to complete admission tests. Hence, information obtained via interviews with Russian parents suggests that they aspire for selective schools and do not regard entrance complexity as a barrier.

Many studies on school choice within immigrant community (see Kristen, 2008; Weekes-Bernard, 2007) emphasize the “locality factor” that often outweighs other school characteristics such as teaching standards or school reputation. Kristen (2008: 499) links this tendency to inability to properly evaluate potential alternatives on the school market. In case of this study the parents attach little importance to the “locality factor”. The choice of a local school might be a feasible option when a child is still very young and parents have rigid work schedule. However, the majority of interviewees give reasons against local school choice. The most popular one is high proportion of immigrant pupils. Overrepresentation of these children is usually regarded in the context of segregated neighborhoods where immigrants cluster. White middle class families are believed to avoid such neighborhoods or, if staying there, enroll their children into other schools. (Weekes-Bernard, 2007; Boretman, 2012.)

When telling about the neighborhoods they are living in, the Russian interviewees usually describe them as peaceful places with predominantly native middle class population (often families with children). Sometimes they explain that they were initially searching for neighborhoods with no or very few immigrants or social house dwellers. Interestingly, relocation to such neighborhoods does not necessarily lead to enrollment into the local schools. Hence, locality factor is not really prominent in the narratives of the Russian informants. The exception is the Finnish-Russian school in Helsinki, and several families relocated closer to it. These participants openly admit that the area around the school is not prestigious at all, but they are ready to sacrifice this option in order to get other benefits (safe route for their children or easier logistic).

Kristen (2008: 507) concludes that often families might refer to a limited selection of schools or even a single school. This is very similar to the stories of some Russian interviewees: these parents value opportunity to study Russian language at school extremely highly. This option overshadows
other possible criteria for school choice such as reputation or proximity to home. I suggest that this position should not be viewed as limitation of parental school choice. Instead, I would rather use the concept of MacKenzie (2010) who distinguishes between “enabling” and “deciding” factors. The former are non-negotiable factors that parents would hardly give up (p.120). There is a group of interviewees in this research who are very loyal to the idea of speaking Russian with their children. As a result, they choose only among the schools with Russian language curriculum. This is a conscious limitation when other school options are given up in favor of the most valuable school characteristic.

“Deciders” are factors that make parents choose one school over another. Although MacKenzie (2010) notes that classification of factors might be subjective, the reputational factor among the interviewees bears this function. Russian parents are especially sensitive towards school feedback they receive from their Russian speaking friends or acquaintances. For instance, the interviewees will avoid a school if they hear that Russian speaking pupils are abused there. Some Russian parents are referring to reputation when explaining why they prefer one school over another. Moreover, they can even switch to another, previously unconsidered, school option if reputation of the chosen school is dubious.

Russian identity of some of the interviewees is expressed through Orthodox religion. In some cases this particular identity distance the Russian parents from particular national and religious groups, primary Muslims. Weekes-Bernard (2007) notes that faith has a significant meaning for some Black parents, and high proportion of children from these families can be found in faith-based schools. Similarly to this reasoning, some Russian interviewees justify their choice of the school with homogenous Russian environment by their Orthodox religion. These parents also admit that they would rather avoid schools with high concentration of Muslim children. This view is rather untypical for middle class parents and comes as a surprise, taken that the interviewees are highly educated individuals who have travelled and lived abroad.

On the other side, the narratives reveal that the Russian parents apply skills and use practices that are typical for middle class families’ school choice. Although I am using Bourdieu’s social reproduction paradigm as basis for this research, I find similarities with other studies on middle class families and their school choice. Boterman (2012: 15) reasons that homologies among school choice practices of the middle class in Western countries might constitute “a global class.”

However, Finnish context brings peculiarities into school choice process. Similarly to what Boterman (ibid.) says about Amsterdam context, absence of private schools in Finland undermines
the role of economic capital. As a result, Russian parents have to rely on their cultural and social forms of capital when exercising their school choice. The interviewees indeed speak less about economic capital compared to other forms of capital. They cautiously evaluate the privileges created by material means and, as a rule, look at what kind of families (in terms of education, occupation of the parents) enroll their children into a school. Parents in this research apply their cultural capital in order to ensure educational progress that helps reproduce their social position: they check the homework, discuss the school tasks or find other educational materials that could be useful for studies; they also generally monitor the school achievements of the children and contact teachers or other school representatives in case of trouble. The interviewees possess cultural means to approach school officials in a way that insures productive communication. Poikolainen (2011: 140) cites one of the mothers who, when faced with trouble on the stage of school access, manages to negotiate her daughter’s enrollment with school principle thanks to her general education as well as business experience. The narratives of the Russian interviewees also contain stories about both problematic and productive communication with school staff, be it a question of children’s discipline or teaching methods applied in class. One of the interviewees tells that her husband had to contact civil servants in charge of education to ensure a place in a chosen school. Other parents initiating steps aimed to improve Math and Finnish lessons in their schools.

Parental concern about school choice and education perspectives of their children might be attributed to families’ fear of dropping from the middle class, as introduced by Ehrenreich (1989). According to the studies, neither cultural capital nor general social position automatically passes from parents to their offspring. Proper education ensures or raises significantly chances for this perpetuation. (Ibid.)

Poikolainen (2011: 11) uses the same approach to justify the choice of schools with special curriculum among Finnish mothers in the City of Vantaa. In a similar way the narratives obtained from the interviews with Russian parents contain reasoning underlying the fear of dropping from the middle class. Russian interviewees reflect upon what kind of education and what kind of profession their children should aim for. Their ambitious plans are sometimes steered by parents’ own unsuccessful experience on labor market or during the economic crisis. These factors are seen as major challenges on the way of ensuring stable middle class position, and the interviewees are trying to eliminate them by up-to-date knowledge and extra skills obtained via school (sometimes in classes with special curriculum), gymnasiums and universities. At the same time, the Russian parents intentionally challenge their children to study harder (all school tasks are obligatory,
additional tasks from other sources etc.) in order to be motivated and keep up with fast paced social environment where social class preservation is hard.

Before I proceed to answering the research questions, I would like to reflect about possible improvements of this study and about the perspectives for further research.

The principal drawback of this Thesis is the absence of clear classification of who belongs to middle class in Finland. I have already explained that the same problem has been widely discussed in the theoretical literature on the topic (see Boterman, 2012; Ball et al., 1995: 77). I could have improved the study by asking the interviewees “Would you, please, evaluate to what social class you belong?” I did not come up with this idea at the beginning of my work since I was feeling a bit reluctant to pose any question concerning material wellbeing. I even developed the scale for monthly income, so that the interviewees did not have to name the exact figure. There were also cases when parents were surprised by some questions that, as they thought, had no connection with the topic of my study. For example, one mother was firstly displeased when I asked her to tell how and why they had moved to Finland. Her reaction was like: “Should I tell about this as well? I thought you are studying school choice!”

This cautiousness in money matters might be partly explained by the fact that I grew up in post-socialist society with transitional economy where wide income gap and extreme class division were a norm. Vera Dunham (1979: 4), for instance, notes that “middle class can have different meanings. It can indicate a statistical entity in the stratification of society by income, wealth, or occupation. In a society with dichotomous and extreme class division, it can identify a stratum between these two antagonistic extremes.” Dunham suggests that social class should be looked at from the position of life styles and cultural values that might crosscut differences in income, occupation etc. That is why the conception of social class is rather blurred. Remington (2010) who explores the middle class identity of the Russians explains that “(e)stimates of the number of people who consider themselves to be middle class vary considerably, depending on how the question is posed in surveys: what the alternatives are, for example, and what scale is suggested – whether by income, social status, housing, or some other marker. In short, the estimates of the size and composition of the middle class are consistently inconsistent depending on the criterion chosen to measure it.” On the other hand, all the parents interviewed have been living in Finland for quite a while and they could have left behind the social class ambiguity that exists in Russia.

As far as further research is concerned, the stories of the Russian interviewees within middle class can be approached as personal “life paths”. In a similar way Komulainen (2012: 60) distinguishes
several individual stories (single mother, a family that has been living in one place their whole life, and parents who have been living abroad and in several municipalities in Finland) and then compares their school choice and reasoning behind it. Therefore, parental school choice might be better understood in the context of individual life stories of every family. Also, I have received several letters and emails from Russian speaking mothers who wished to share their story of school choice but for some reasons did not want to be interviewed and recorded. This written material can be used in future research in order to better understand the role of ethnicity in the process of school choice.

**Conclusion**

The main question I aim to uncover while writing this Thesis is “*Does the immigrant background of Russian middle class families in Helsinki metropolitan area undermine the positive effect of their social class on school choice?*”

Before proceeding to this one, I would begin with secondary questions that help in structuring my findings. I was myself a bit surprised by the abundance of themes that emerged during the interviews. To tell the truth, I was sometimes struggling to make my analysis coherent and to decide which quotation goes for which theme. Therefore, the answers for the questions posed and topics they touch upon are interrelated.

The first of the additional questions asks: “*What school characteristics are taken into consideration by Russian middle class families?*”

A distinctive group of Russian parents who take part in this research have chosen Finnish-Russian bilingual school. Their main reasoning was to maintain the Russian language as a) the source for communication with Russian-speaking relatives; b) the linguistic capital that provides advantages on labor or educational market; c) the tool for getting acquainted with Russian culture; d) a psychological link between parents and children. Importantly, the access to Russian language is the only factor that can be firmly classified as “enabler” (MacKenzie, 2010) because the parents were choosing only among the schools with Russian language curriculum.

In one case English language was an enabling factor because grown-up children possessed no Finnish proficiency at all. However, English language by no means bears the functions ascribed to Russian language.
The balance between the languages (predominantly Russian and Finnish) turns out to be important for the interviewees. I make an attempt to explain their anxiety by using the notion of linguistic capital introduced by Bourdieu (1992). On the one hand, the Russian parents wish their children to become powerful actors on the dominant linguistic market in Finland. This desire might be propelled by their own semi-powerful position as non-natives. On the other, parents wish to preserve their children’s membership on Russian language market. I interpret this as a tool for both verbal and mental communication between the parents and their children. Otherwise, this communication might be disrupted as the parents and their children become agents on different linguistic markets.

Good teacher is another prominent factor that parents pay attention to. “Good teacher” is understood as motivating and sometimes even strict. Russian parents, based on the narratives, do care a lot about the discipline. They link discipline in class to school progress: those who behave do well at school and vice versa. In addition, a good teacher should keep contact with the parents and preach the same values. If this fails, Russian parents will react, as did one of the parents who was dissatisfied with teacher’s phrase that she was there for teaching the children rather than being friends with their parents. Also, Russian parents want to be as inclined in their children’s school life as possible and they welcome frequent email exchange between them and the teachers, parental meeting and individual appointments with the school stuff.

Russian parents in this research link school’s national composition, including race and religion, to general schooling environment. Whenever high proportion of national (especially Muslim) minority is present, the interviewees express dissatisfaction. Apart from perceived danger to Russian culture and Orthodox religion, the parents are concerned about social connections and gap in learning process among the pupils. These factors, in interviewees’ view, might negatively affect their children school progress. Some parents even name homogeneous environment of the school among the Appendixary factors that influenced their school choice. Apart from mutual language, similarities in values, education and occupation are mentioned. Overall, Russian parents in this research are looking for what is perceived to be “favorable” or “decent” social environment at school; this includes, first of all, homogeneity in cultural and economic forms of capital among the families of the pupils.

School reputation is evaluated quite controversially by Russian parents. Their judgments are based on two major sources of information, though of a distinct type. The rumors obtained via social connections represent “hot” knowledge whereas list of gymnasiums, issued annually by state
officials, could be classified as “cold” knowledge. Social connections do not prove to be of extreme value for Russian interviewees. The only case when rumors passed from friends or acquaintances are taken seriously is when bulling and violence against Russians are reported. Parents hardly ever risk their children’s comfort when issues of nationality are concerned. As a result, they prefer to avoid schools (mostly local) where, according to what they have heard, Russian children are bullied.

Although general feeling about the list of gymnasiums is positive, the interviewees point out at its shortcomings. However, they are quite pleased with the idea that their children might enroll into a gymnasium that scores highly in the list. The indifference of some Russian parents might be partly explained by the fact that their children are still too young, so the problem of gymnasium choice seems distant. In contrast, the mother whose daughter already studies in a gymnasium tells that they were interested in top 5, and the child’s exam results were good enough to get into a gymnasium with the highest scores.

The second minor question is: “What problems do Russian middle class families voice in their narratives when talking about their school choice?”

The most disruptive problems faced by the interviewees are those that stem from the fact that their cultural capital was acquired in the context that is different from their current place of living. Consequently, parents are not that familiar with Finnish educational system and are sometimes unable to react quickly. For instance, one interviewee is faced with challenging gymnasium choice since she has never heard about Finnish gymnasiums at all. The major concern, however, lies in the area of Finnish language fluency. Namely, the shortage of language proficiency, making the parents disempowered agents on linguistic market, might constrain their means for influencing decisions on the school market (Bourdieu, 1992).

Also, the interviewees do worry about how other pupils’ progress might influence their children’s studies. The majority of interviewees are against division between “achieving” and “less achieving” pupils. Some recall that this was done in the Soviet school. According to the interviewees, this practice might be destructive for a child’s self-esteem. Instead, they propose to distribute tasks of different levels between the pupils, depending on individual progress. This sounds a bit like a compromise, since rarely parents are ready to sacrifice their own child’s wellbeing to general wellbeing of all the children in class (Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007). However, the narratives illustrate that the interviewees have absorbed and support international values, and are trying to reconcile their personal values with impersonal ones, however problematic this might be.
There are other minor problems listed by interviewees such as, for instance, divergence in parental and children preferences regarding education. However, these challenges lie in the sphere of personal life, are very individual and depend on family characteristics. What personally I find interesting is that none of the interviewees interpret any of school authorities’ actions as violation of their rights or prejudice against their origin.

The third minor question is: “*Can any special school strategy be traced in the narratives of the interviewees or are they happy with a local school automatically appointed by the municipality?*”

Although difficult to generalize, some mutual trends might be traced in the narratives of the Russian interviewees.

The first trend is strongly connected to family’s linguistic capital. As presented above, the availability of Russian language curriculum has influenced the school choice of many interviewees. On the contrary, there are those who are strongly against this idea and avoid such schools. Hence, two antagonistic groups might be found among the interviewees. Also, there are those in-between who are rather indifferent to possibility to study Russian. Some parents admit honestly that they would choose a school with Russian language curriculum if other criteria were met (close to home, decent neighborhood etc.).

Another trend is connected with classes with special curriculum or impetus on particular subject. Russian interviewees are interested in this type of classes because they hope that in-depth studies would facilitate the path to higher educational institutions. In addition, studying there might create favorable conditions for social networking and motivate the pupils. These motives support the general paradigm of social reproduction introduced by Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), according to which different social fractions use different strategies to ensure its social position. Middle class families, who have risen to their position thanks to cultural capital attained primarily through education, tend to invest actively into schooling. Meanwhile, the interviewees reason that it makes sense to enroll their children into such classes during the transition from primary to upper secondary school (usually after the 6th grade). By this time children are, according to parental view, old enough to travel longer distances and to bear the pressure of in-depth studies.

Additionally, there is a minor trend concerning keeping balance between Russian and Finnish language. For instance, many interviewees explain that they chose municipal kinder garden in order to develop Finnish language, especially because children used to communicate mainly in Russian with their mothers. There are stories about attempts to transfer the children into Russian speaking
kinder garden that had a negative effect on children’s language proficiency. The interviewees describe this experience negatively, and proceed with explanation that ensuring Finnish language proficiency on pre-school level allows choice of school with Russian language curriculum later on. At school, the balance between the languages is kept thanks to various sport sections and clubs.

Also, the Russian parents in this research show propensity to modify their initial choice strategy if dissatisfaction with school experience of the elder sibling occurs. This detail suggests that the interviewees might be quite flexible in their school choice if needed.

As far as local schools are concerned, Russian parents who have chosen this option are minority in this research. Moreover, some of them stress that this might be temporal decision, and later their children might change school for one with special curriculum. Also, there are cases when a local school was chosen only after children had been refused a place in a preferred school. A passive position similar to “satisfying model” (Adler et al., 1989) when, given all other criteria are met, parents choose the local school, is voiced only by one interviewee. Contrary to this, there is a rather critical rhetoric about local schools, mainly about bulling or violence towards Russian children, and parents by no means want to enroll their children into these schools.

I finally arrive to the main question of this Thesis posed in the Introduction chapter. So, does the immigrant background of Russian middle class families in Helsinki metropolitan area undermine the positive effect of their social class on school choice?

Based on the narratives attained and then carefully analyzed, I suggest that immigrant background of the Russian interviewees does not seriously undermine the privileges created by their middle class position on the local school market. Although ethnicity has particular implications regarding school choice of the Russian families in this research, its effects do not overshadow the influence of middle class membership. The interviewees express their Russian identity through particular choices on the school market (primary, the Russian language curriculum at school). However, the way they express their perception of school choice as well as their general view on education suggests that their actions are steered by generated cultural capital and middle class values described in the academic literature on education.

Huge amount of academic literature on the topic stress that immigrant populations enroll their children into local schools as they do not have means to make other choices. Nor they have resources to move to a better neighborhood with decent school, contrary to middle class families who frequently adopt this practice when choosing a school. Informants who are both immigrants
and middle class representatives do have opportunity to move closer to a school they wish to apply to. Others who are happy with their neighborhoods do not see travelling far away to school as problematic and enroll their children into schools located in other locales. Also, the narratives illustrate that Russian interviewees care about the locality they are living in and connect quality of the area with quality of the local school. As a result, they tend to avoid neighborhoods with particular types of housing, primary the social one, as they are a bit selective about the families that choose the same school.

Most importantly, the narratives of the interviewees address that they see education as the primary and one of the most important mechanisms to maintain and reinforce one’s membership within middle class. Consequently, the interviewees are eager to invest materially, morally or even socially (engage in various school activities) into their children’s education and other things, connected to it. Parental commitment to education are expressed in their narratives in various way: for instance, plans for obligatory higher education, careful assessment of schools curriculums, parental meetings and daily homework checking as well as additional tasks taken from various sources (tutors, literature etc.). The interviews contain both direct and indirect social class connotations: for example, the interviewees care about cultural and social background of their children’s classmates; they openly link education to future professional success, economic benefits included. On the other hand, they do not ascribe as much importance to economic capital as they do to cultural capital.

In case of Finnish-Russian school many parents are regarding this single school as the only option for their children. In this sense, their strategy seems similar to immigrant parents who, according to Kristen (2008), make no school choice at all. However, the absence of other school alternatives in my research is explained by other factors rather than lack of resources for school evaluation. On the contrary, these Russian parents are capable to evaluate the schools, but they intentionally constrain the pool of options due to their own ideas on what school they wish their children to go to.

On the other side, there are some implications resulted from immigration background of the parents. For instance, when the interviewees tell about feedback about schools they have been receiving from their networks, it becomes clear that they were getting these feedback predominantly from their Russian friends. As a result, they have heard lots of negative feedback about schools where, according to rumors, Russian children are bullied. Usually the interviewees showed high level of concern about such rumors and preferred to avoid “problem” schools. The feedback was thus rather one-sided, attained from limited sources and was not even checked (none of the interviewees neither talked to the stuff nor went to see these schools).
Under the influence of such a feedback as well as under the general fear of exposure to bulling, a substantial part of the interviewees were choosing the school with homogeneous – in terms of nationality – environment. Although this characteristic is not the main choice reason, Russian parents openly celebrate this homogeneity. Moreover, some interviewees intentionally isolate their children from particular groups of immigrants. The main reason for this hostility is neither race nor ethnicity but religion. Some parents who take part in this research have strong Orthodox identity which they oppose sharply to Muslims. Some Russian interviewees see representatives of this diaspora as poor, uneducated and plunged in various social troubles. These judgments are based on rare unpleasant episodes in daily life or on media depictions.

Finally, my interviewees admit that they have outdated dogmas and views they have inherited from their Soviet past. For instance, one of the interviewees recalls that her life in the Soviet Union was divided into separate phases that followed one another and rarely intersected: namely, graduation from school, university studies and afterwards career. She reasons that in Finland studies can be successfully united with wage working and is trying to become more flexible in her views on her children’s future.

Regardless these minor peculiarities, the general principles of school choice exercised by middle class families stay prominent. The narratives address that interviewees see education as the primary source for social success and apply their cultural capital in order to ensure proper education for their children. Parental active position, be it the communication with school stuff or homework checking, are prominent themes in their narratives. Regardless minor shortcomings in interviewees’ cultural capital resulting from their immigrant background, they still possess means to overcome the problems they might face. For instance, they switch to English if teachers or other parents do not understand them, or draw additional sources for learning if feeling that school curriculum is not enough or structured in a way they dislike. Although extremely concerned with school progress of their children, interviewees prefer to discuss with their children rather than force them into choices parents prefer themselves. They are expecting their children to see studying as natural and apply their skills with “the competence of connoisseur” (Bourdieu, 1986: 65) rather than mechanically. Finally, the perspective of higher education is not even questioned by the interviewees in this research. They state quite proudly that their children have grown up with the idea that they should graduate from university.
References


Appendix

A letter to Russian parents (Finnish version)
distributed in Finnish-Russian school

Hävää _____.


Haastattelen tutkimuksessani perheitä, joissa molemmat vanhemmat ovat venäläisiä tai joissa yksi heistä on venäläinen. Haastatteluja suunnitellaan tehtäväksi syksyllä 2012 (venäjäksi), mutta vanhemmat (vai Te?) voisivat (voisitte) itse päättää sekä haastattelun ajasta että paikasta.

Te saatte tämän kirjeen koska on mahdollista, että Te haluaisitte osallistua tutkimukseen. Liitteessä on lomake, jota täytätte jos haluaisitte osallistua tutkimukseen.

Kiitos etukäteen.

Ystävällisin terveisin,
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Helsingin Yliopisto
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### Part 1

**Background (done as a form and given at the end of the interview)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1) Year the child was born and the place of birth</th>
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<td>2) Child’s gender</td>
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<td>3) Year when your family moved to Finland</td>
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<td>4) What is your official civil status in Finland (citizenship, residence permit)?</td>
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<td>5) Are there other children in your family? Please, list their gender and age</td>
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<td>6) Parental marital status</td>
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<td>7) Parental level of education (I assume that informants graduated in the Soviet Union, thus the list used here is adopted from this educational system)</td>
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<td>8) Would you please scale your family’s month income</td>
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<td>9.a) Mother’s mother tongue</td>
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<td>9.b) Father’s mother tongue</td>
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<tr>
<td>10) What language(s) is spoken at home?</td>
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<tr>
<td>11) How would you evaluate your proficiency in Finnish language?</td>
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<td>12) What is your child’s overall success in school (overall grade, for example)?</td>
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<td>13) How would you evaluate your child’s</td>
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1) Speaks as a native
proficiency in Finnish language?  
1) Knows the basics 
2) Speaks fluently, only rare difficulties encountered 
3) Generally understands, but may be confused in unfamiliar situation 
4) Cannot speak at all 

14) For how long has he/she been speaking Finnish (in years)?

15) Was he/she attending any courses?  
1) Yes (what kind of courses?) 
2) No

16) The child in question lives with  
1) Mother 
2) Father 
3) Both parents 
4) Somebody else not listed (who?)

Part 2

Living conditions

1) What are the reasons that made you move to Finland? How long have you been here?
2) What are you doing here (in terms of occupation)? What were you doing (in terms of occupation) in Russia?
3) Where do you live now? In which sort of apartment?
4) On what criteria was your choice of this neighborhood based?
5) Is it your first place of residence in this city? If you have previously lived in other districts/neighborhoods, could you name them? What were the reasons for your relocation?
6) Do you like it here? What are the things you like/dislike?
7) How would you describe the people living here? Are some “problem” groups living here?
8) With whom do you mostly interact here in Finland? From which nationalities do these people come from?

Part 3

Local school(s)

1) What school was appointed by the municipality for your child? Does he/she attend this school?
2) Had you asked someone’s opinion about this school before you moved here?
3) Are there other schools in your neighborhood? Have you heard something about these other schools?
4) Is there a school with “emphasized” classes in your neighborhood? Do you possess any sort of information about what kind of specialization this school provides? Do you know the admission procedure adopted by this school?
5) How do you see your school choice possibilities in your home town (here in Finland)? Have you ever compared Finnish schools with Russian ones?
6) How important is the trip from the school to your house? How long is the trip from your home to the school your child currently attends? Would you say this trip is safe enough?

7) How do you feel about the peer group in your local school?

Part 4

Free choice and School strategies

1) Which were the schools you discussed/considered as potential?
2) How many schools have you observed before choosing your school?
3) With whom did you talk and who did provide you with information about the choices you considered as relevant?
4) How much your spouse was engaged in the process of school choice? How long did it take you two to decide on the preferred schools?
5) Do your older children (if any) attend the same school?
6) Were there any problems with the admission procedure? Was it easy to follow the rules? Would you say that it was complicated or, on the contrary, well-determined and precise?
7) Was your child’s opinion taken into consideration when selecting a school for him/her? If so, how does his/her current school reflect these wishes?
8) Was there a school providing specialization on your list? What kind of specialization did this school provide? Why were you interested in in-depth studies of this particular course? Where from did you get information about this emphasized course?
9) Did you see a need for private tutoring for your child before entering the school? What about after?
10) Do many of your child’s friends attend the same school he/she attends? Are there some children of Russian origin in your child’s class/school?
11) What do you know about your child’s classmates? Do you know where they live or where their parents work?
12) What would you think if your child studied in the same class with children of different background?
13) If you had a chance, would you prefer your child to study in a class with social mix or homogeneous ethnic structure?
14) Do you have an experience of non-admission? How did the authorities explain the fact?

Questions about the transition from elementary to high school:

1) Have you made up your mind about your child’s high school (in case of forthcoming transition)? Do you make any kind of preparations for the transition? What kind of preparations do you make?
2) Does your child’s school have any sort of agreement about a simplified transition procedure with some high school? Were you aware of this fact when choosing an elementary school?
3) Are there any exams your child has to pass? How does he/she get prepared for these exams?

Part 5

Learning/teaching
1) Does your child have any personal characteristics (or traits such as shyness or over activeness) to which special attention should be paid?

2) Do you think that your child needs some extra-attention from the class teacher? For what reasons does he/she need it?

3) Do you think that the class teacher gives him/her this needed attention? Would you agree that your school possesses enough resources for your child’s successful development? If not, what additional resources are needed?

4) Don’t you think that extra-level of attention to particular student might influence negatively other children’s learning?

5) What do you think about teaching pupils of all levels in the same classroom? How should special education be arranged?

6) How would you describe the kind of friendships your child has? Has he/she ever had any conflict with some of the children?

7) What language as A-1 does your child study? Does he/she study A-2 language? Why did you choose this language(s)? Do you think that this language(s) is of particular importance for your child? What is your child’s native language? What language is determined as his/her native language at school?

8) Does your child attend some “emphasized” (specialized) courses? How will it influence, in your opinion, his/her future prospect?

9) Have your child ever changed the school? If yes, for what reason?

10) Are you planning to change your current school? For what reasons?

Part 6

Parental involvement in school life

1) Do you help your child with his/her homework? How much time, approximately, do you spend helping your child with the homework? Do you wish you could spend more time helping your child with his/her studies or do you feel you spend enough time? Do you feel you have enough knowledge and skills to be useful for your child when helping him/her with homework?

2) Do you attend every meeting organized by the parents in your child’s class? Do you actively participate in the discussions and express your opinion on the topic freely? Do you feel being heard by other parents? Is your opinion taken into consideration when the final decision is made?

3) Have you taken any part in specific class activities? Have you ever organized any excursions or extra-curriculum courses for children from your child’s class?

4) Would you express your negative opinion in case you are not satisfied with teaching process in your child’s class? Have you ever expressed your dissatisfaction with teaching process in the school? What was the result?

Part 7

Projections for the future
1) How do you see your child’s future in the nearest ten years? Do you see him/her studying at the university or college? Do you see him/her working? Do you see him/her having his/her own family?

2) Do you think that in ten-year period you will still have to support your child materially?

3) How important is the fact that your child has a prestigious profession in the future? What qualities or qualifications are needed for this profession? Do you think that education is of primary significance to get this job?

4) Do you think your child currently has enough free time? Would you think he/she’d better have more free time to spend with friends?