Cooling Out and Warming Up – Professional Strategies in the Education of Newly Arrived Migrant Students in Sweden

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Abstract: This study explores how school professionals manage the challenges of educating newly arrived migrant students (NAMS), with a focus on the transition from the Language Introduction Program (LIP) to a national upper secondary school program or alternative forms of education. We draw on the theoretical framework of Inhabited Institutionalism to understand how school professionals' interpretations and sense-making of external policy pressures and internal challenges of teaching a diverse group of students are shaped by social interaction. The study reveals that professionals are critical of the educational system and its consequences for NAMS' education, due to its rigid admission requirements and unrealistic timeframes. To mitigate the potential effects on students' educational trajectories, the professionals employ both cooling-out and warming-up strategies. The study emphasizes the significance of social interaction among school professionals in interpreting the educational system and its consequences and suggests that the outcome of negotiations among professionals regarding different strategies is likely to have a significant impact on the future trajectories of NAMS.

Keywords: school professionals, newly arrived migrant student, inhabited institutionalism, educational trajectory, cooling out, warming up

Introduction

The increasingly complex task of teachers, where they are required to balance quality and equity in education while encountering an increasingly diverse student body have been highlighted in research (Cuconato, du Bois-Reymond, & Lunabba, 2015; Svensson, 2019). This challenge is perhaps particularly pronounced when it comes to teaching newly arrived migrant students (NAMS) who comprise a heterogenous group in terms of educational background, language competencies, migration statuses etcetera (Pugh, Every & Hattam, 2012; Högberg, Gruber, & Nyström, 2020), and are at higher risk of facing multiple forms of disadvantage, including lower grade attainment and early school leaving compared to peers (Lundahl & Lindblad, 2018). The significance of introductory education for the social inclusion and educational attainment of NAMS is well documented in research (Sharif, 2017; Marekovic & Närvänen, 2022; Kaukko, Wilkinson & Kohli, 2022), underscoring the crucial

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role that teachers and other school professionals play in shaping their educational experiences and outcomes (Pugh, Every & Hattam, 2012; Bunar & Juvonen, 2022). However, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges that school professionals face in working with NAMS. They are often caught in a blind between policy and practice, that is reconciled by adopting strategies that often go beyond what is stipulated in the curriculum or their role as teachers (Kaukko & Wilkinson, 2018; Svensson, 2019; Högberg, Gruber, & Nyström, 2020).

Although the challenges related to NAMS are evident at all educational levels, certain transitional points and decision-making moments are crucial for their educational trajectories. One such transition is from compulsory to post-compulsory education or working life, during which structural inequalities may be exacerbated or overcome, as young people are sorted into different educational trajectories (Aaltonen & Karvonen, 2016; Emery, Spruyt, & Van Avermaet, 2021). For NAMS in Sweden aged 16-19, this transition occurs between the Language Introduction Program (LIP) and upper secondary school. The LIP aims to prepare NAMS for transition to a national upper secondary program or other types of education or training (Swedish National Agency for Education [SNAE], 2013). Particularly relevant to the LIP's goal is the negotiations and decision-making of school professionals in relation to grade assessment and progression, as the chances for transitioning to upper secondary school depend on it (Fejes et al., 2018).

While most research has focused on the experiences of NAMS (Sharif, 2017; Folke, 2018; Marekovic & Närvänen, 2022), recent studies have begun to explore how school professionals experience the challenges and dilemmas evident in introductory education (Svensson, 2019; Lee et al., 2021; Kaukko, Wilkinson & Kohli, 2022). A number of studies have emphasized the 'gatekeeping function' of teachers and other school professionals, who tend to prolong the time NAMS spend in introductory education. For example, Bunar and Juvonen's (2022) study shows how school leaders discursively construct NAMS as students with deficits, which must be remedied before they can transition to mainstream education. Consequently, students are being held back in the LIP, rather than allowing them to progress in their education. Furthermore, Emery, Spruyt, & Van Avermaet (2021; 2022) show how teachers' early assessment of NAMS' achievements and capabilities affects the sorting of students into different tracks. These processes tend to direct NAMS into vocational education rather than academic, lowering their expectations and ambitions which may lead to increased disadvantage and loss of potential of NAMS (see also Bonizzoni, Romito, & Cavallo, 2016).

However, research also exemplify the deeply unsatisfying position of school professionals working with NAMS. Commonly NAMS are perceived as ambitious and dedicated with high educational aspirations, oftentimes aiming for educational alternatives that allow for tertiary education (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016; Morrice et al., 2020). Yet, the students often fail to achieve their ambitions due to strict regulations of the educational system (Högberg, Gruber, & Nyström, 2020; Emery, Spruyt, & Van Avermaet, 2022). Most research on educating NAMS has focused on the power of school professionals to influence the educational progression of the students through assessment and diagnosis, rather than through instilling motivation for their studies and learning.

The aim of this article is to explore how Swedish school professionals manage the complex challenges involved in educating NAMS between the ages of 16-19, with a particular focus on the transition from the LIP to a national upper secondary school program or other forms of education. As outlined, previous research has highlighted that school professionals are important actors in shaping the educational experiences and outcomes of NAMS and has

identified inherent dilemmas in educating this group. Despite these insights, there is still a gap in the literature regarding how school professionals interpret and employ different strategies to manage NAMS' educational trajectories in their everyday work, particularly concerning support and recommendations for future studies. This article seeks to address this gap by offering a new perspective on this important topic.

We argue that teachers are embedded in informal professional networks that include administrative, supportive, and teaching professionals, which need to be taken account to in the analysis. Teachers who work in introductory education collaborate closely with other teachers, guidance counsellors and school leaders (Bunar & Juvonen, 2022; Emery, Spruyt, & Van Avermaet, 2022), we employ the term 'school professionals' or 'professionals' to refer to this constellation of actors. We also argue that understanding how school professionals make sense of external policy pressures, such as steering documents and curricula, and internal challenges of teaching a diverse group of students, should be viewed as mediated in social and collegial interaction (Diamond, 2012). Therefore, we draw on the nascent framework of Inhabited Institutionalism to analyse how both external regulations and internal conditions shape and are shaped by interaction and sense-making in institutional settings (Hallett & Vantresca, 2006; Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021). Our analysis is based on in-depth interviews with 15 school professionals working with NAMS in LIPs at three upper secondary schools in a major city in Sweden.

Educating Newly Arrived Migrant Students

The issue of educating NAMS has gained significant prominence in the wake of the unprecedented immigration to many European countries, triggered by the so-called refugee crisis of the early 2010s. Many of the newcomers were of school age (SNAE, 2017), intensifying the achievement gap between immigrant and native students. This trend has been particularly pronounced in Sweden (Lundahl and Lindblad, 2018; Behr and Fugger, 2020). Educating this diverse student population poses several challenges, notably the absence of clear guidelines for implementing introductory education in schools. This has resulted in a wide variety of organizational approaches between and within counties (Meehan et al., 2021). In Sweden, local or even school-level authorities often determine organizational strategies (Nilsson & Bunar, 2016). This lack of clear guidelines and support complicate the conditions for school professionals working in introductory education (Norberg & Gross, 2019), and make room for local interpretations and enactments (Bunar & Juvonen, 2022).

In Sweden, NAMS between ages 16-19, are placed in the LIP. The LIP was, together with four other introduction programs, introduced in 2011 as part of a comprehensive upper secondary school reform, that marked a departure from previous emphasis on equality and homogeneity of educational tracks in Sweden (Alexandersson, 2011). The introduction programs are not part of the mainstream education, but open to students without sufficient grades to enrol in upper secondary school. Furthermore, the reform included stricter admission requirements for all students including NAMS, with vocational programs requiring passing grades in 8 subjects, and academic programs requiring passing grades in 12 subject areas (SNAE, 2013).

The LIP is open to all NAMS in the age-group, regardless of educational background, language proficiency, educational or vocational aspirations or migratory status which means that students in the LIP comprise a heterogenous group (Fejes et al., 2018). For example, the age distribution of the students spans from 15 to 20 years, and their national origins encompass all continents. Since the early 2010s, prominent nationalities have included Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq, though this composition fluctuates significantly over time. Likewise, the majority of students in LIPs are male, reaching up to 79% in 2016, but the composition varies from year to year (SNAE, 2017). The emphasis in the LIP, and the common challenge of the students, is on learning the Swedish language but it also includes compulsory school level subjects and courses. The autonomy of the schools organizing LIPs means that the number of and the specific subject areas that are offered at different LIPs will vary. For example, schools with vocational programs often offer only 8 subject areas, which means that NAMS placed at these schools will not be able to qualify for an academic track.

The length of time a student attends the LIP is meant to depend on individual circumstances and achievements. Yet, the LIP is supposed to be temporary, and time spent within the program should be restricted to allow for educational progression. In reality, students may spend up to three years in the LIP before they proceed (SNAE; 2017). Another obstacle is related to age. The year a student turns 20 years old, they are no longer eligible to attend upper secondary school and must turn to adult education to complete their schooling (SNAE, 2013). Consequently, time is limited if the students are to transition to a mainstream program before they 'age out'. The numbers on the educational advancement of NAMS in Sweden are gloomy. A comparatively low number of students, around one third, make the transition to a mainstream program within five years (Lundahl & Lindblad, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Our analysis is inspired by the emerging theoretical framework of Inhabited Institutionalism, which emphasizes interpretative practices and social interaction in the study of institutions and organizations (Hallett, 2010). Inhabited institutionalism was developed as a response to the macro-oriented focus of Neo-Institutionalism. In addressing this bias, Hallett and Vantresca (2006) sought to '"inhabit" contemporary institutionalism with social interactions' (2006:214) and theoretical insights of Symbolic Interactionism. This approach has the merit of capturing local meaning-making processes and negotiated orders while recognizing the impact of external institutional rules and logics. External institutional regulations, such as educational steering documents, are deemed significant for organizational processes but are subject to interpretation, adaptation, and transformation when local actors put them into practice. The focus on agency acknowledges that local actors construct multiple and competing meanings that enact the institutional environment, contributing to both institutional transformation and reproduction (Hallet & Hawbaker, 2021). We argue that this perspective is useful for analysing how school professionals, in and through social interaction interpret, contest, and reaffirm the external educational regulations that guide the LIP and the internal organization and composition of the LIP-classes, i.e., their meaning-making of the complex challenges involved in educating NAMS. This perspective is thus used as a tool to enhance our under-

standing of how school professionals interpret and make sense of the external steering documents, for example the national curriculum, which educational trajectories they perceive as achievable for the students, and which practices they choose to employ to manage these trajectories.

As our analysis pointed to the importance of practices employed by school professionals when interpreting and managing obstacles and opportunities for students' educational trajectories, two additional concepts served as sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1969), namely 'cooling out' and 'warming up'. The concept of cooling out was first introduced by Erving Goffman (1952). It pertains to organizational strategies employed to manage negative notifications or rejections of candidates or clients in a manner that mitigates loss of face. Burton Clark (1960) later developed this concept in the context of community colleges and the handling of students who fail their studies. Both Goffman (1952) and Clark (1960) suggested various organizational strategies to 'soften the blow' or redirect aspirations towards more feasible goals that serve the purpose of cooling out unqualified candidates. However, the conceptualisations have been criticised for being one-sided and scholars have developed a more nuanced understanding by introducing the concept of 'warming up'. This concept, as it is used by Deil-Amen (2006) refers to strategies to enable academic trajectories and raise the aspirations and motivations of students. Our analysis reveals various strategies that relate to cooling-out and warming-up processes and may thus potentially enhance and expand the conceptualisation. These strategies are specific examples of the processes of meaning-making in terms of adaptations, transformations, and negotiations, that take place within the institution between school professionals and between professionals and the NAMS.

Methodology

The study was conducted in a major city in Sweden with a relatively high number of NAMS. Three public upper secondary schools were approached to be included in the study. One of the schools only offers vocational programs such as the Business and Administration program and Child and Recreation Program. This school offers 8 subject areas for NAMS on compulsory school level and organizes basic as well as advanced LIP-classes. The other two schools offer academic programs such as the Natural Science Program and Social Science Program and only organize advanced LIP-classes. These two schools offer the possibility to acquire 12 grades. To gain access to the schools, the first author contacted the headmasters, and was invited to present the project to the staff. It was emphasized that taking part in the study was voluntary. For ethical reasons, the names of the city and the schools are not disclosed, and fictitious names are used for all school professionals interviewed in the study. The project has obtained ethical vetting.

For the purpose of our study, we conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with school professionals closely involved in educating and supporting NAMS (Bunar & Juvonen, 2022; Emery, Spruyt, & Van Avermaet, 2022). This included three guidance counsellors responsible for providing general information about the transition to upper secondary school and offering individual advice on career choices and future plans. Additionally, six tutoring teachers in LIP-classes who had daily contact with NAMS, two from each of the schools, were

interviewed, along with five school leaders representing the three schools with appointed responsibility for LIPs. Finally, one municipal coordinator in charge of the reception of NAMS and located at the vocational school, was also interviewed. In total, 15 individual in-depth interviews were conducted. All the participants were experienced professionals having worked in education for several years, however not exclusively with NAMS. All six teachers were specialized in Swedish as a second language, but their years of experience teaching NAMS varied between two and 25. During the interviews we covered themes such as the participants' experiences of working in the LIP, their work duties, cooperation with other school professionals and their experiences of how the students succeed with their studies. The interviews lasted between one and two and a half hours and provided rich material. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed before analysis.

Our analysis, following a thematic approach, involved initial close reading of all transcripts and memo-writing to familiarize ourselves with the data. This was followed by collaborative discussions and sorting the material into different headings and continuously modified codes into coherent themes (Brown & Clarke, 2006). During the analysis, we identified patterns that extended beyond the boundaries of the school context and professional group. This led to an across-case analysis, revealing commonalities across cases (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003). We employed an inductive iterative approach, starting with the empirical data but guided by the inhabited institutionalism-approach. Thus, emphasizing social interactions as described by the professionals (Hallet & Vantresca, 2006) and examining how these interactions are influenced by external and internal pressures in the context of the LIP. Additionally, we utilized the concepts of 'cooling out' (Clark, 1960) and 'warming up' (Deil-Amen, 2006) to explore the interpretative practices and meaning-making of school professionals in their daily work with NAMS. These sensitizing concepts served as valuable tools, progressively guiding, and organizing our analytical work, ultimately yielding new insights into the diverse strategies employed.

Challenges in Educating NAMS

One of the challenges that was evident in our analysis concerns the core purpose of the LIP – to enable NAMS to transition to a vocational or academic upper secondary program or other form of education (SNAE, 2013). It is the task of the teachers, guidance counsellors and school leaders to support educational advancement and assess each student's abilities and prospects for this transition.

Consistent with previous research (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016; Morrice et al., 2020; Emery, Spruyt, & Van Avermaet, 2022), the school professionals in this study describe LIP students as highly ambitious and dedicated, with aspirations for tertiary education. However, according to the school professionals the likelihood to fulfil this goal is low for many students, as Karin, one of the teachers described: "Well, you must realize that not everyone will reach that goal [transition to upper secondary education]. It does appear very far-fetched for some." The school professionals did not primarily interpret their students' inability to successfully make the transition as a deficit in relation to their capabilities (c.f. Bunar & Juvonen, 2022). Instead, their interpretation was that the students' expectations on their educational prospects

were unrealistic in the context of the educational system's constraints. Learning a new language while simultaneously achieving 8 or 12 passing grades were seen as unlikely for most students. One teacher described it in the following way:

Well, it is not easy. […] I mean, how are you supposed to study 12 subject areas in one year? It's impossible! It is difficult even if you know the language. Monica (teacher)

This statement captures the school professionals' interpretations of the admissions requirements as almost unattainable for NAMS due to the circumscription of time, making it a significant obstacle to their educational advancement and a challenge for the formal task of the professionals working in the LIP. One school leader concluded: "Financial resources are not the problem, but time is. Some things take time. It is impossible to rush this [learning a new language], it must take time." (Peter). Time, particularly in formal education, is according to the school professionals a necessary precondition for these students, which is overlooked by the steering documents and the organization of the educational system and leads to failure for many NAMS. Hence, the meaning-making of the school professionals occurs through interaction with NAMS in their daily work which produces interpretations of the educational system as unfair and rigid. Consequently, this puts the professionals in a challenging position of having to abide to the constraints of the educational system while mediating their students' hopes and aspirations for future educational trajectories. To make sense of these tensions the school professionals employ different strategies to manage the educational trajectories of NAMS.

Managing NAMS' Educational Trajectories through Cooling out and Warming up

All schools had developed similar procedures to assess the students' progress and aspirations. The guidance counsellor had a central role in supporting the students, which included regular collective meetings with students to inform about the application procedures and different options regarding entry requirements, programs, and schools. The guidance counsellors also had at least two individual counselling conversations with each student to discuss ambitions and options and send in the application for the following year. The teachers are responsible for the daily provision of education as well as the subject assessment and grading. But our analysis shows that in practice much of the decision-making in relation to NAMS' educational trajectories is negotiated in collegial forums – so called recommendation conferences. At these conferences teachers, school leaders, guidance counsellors and sometimes also the municipal coordinator co-operated in discussions of each student's progression and aspirations, and in assessing their future development potential and educational options. The recommendation conference was a routine that all schools employed, and it was an important interactional arena where the professionals negotiated and made sense of the institutional regulations and how to manage the students' trajectories.

Revision, Detour and Deceleration as Cooling-out Strategies

One cooling-out strategy we identified as recurrent in the interviews is labelled *revision* and is comparable to Clark's (1960) concept of alternative achievements. This strategy aims to redirect the initial aspirations of the student towards goals that the professionals deem to be more feasible. The student is provided with an alternative to the oftentimes high-set initial goal and the professionals try to prompt the student to relinquish the plan for an academic program and accept the idea of applying to a vocational program.

At the beginning, many students have very high goals, they want to go to the best schools, the most difficult programs, and they want to become physicians and dentists. But later during the first year there are quite a few who will reconsider, because they understand that the requirements are tough. And then there may also be some pressure from the guidance counsellor. […] So, most of the time at the beginning of the first year, almost everybody aims to choose an academic program, but at the end of spring there are often quite a few who choose a program that is easier, a vocational program. Christine (teacher)

Some students will revise their aspirations, either at their own initiative or in interaction with their guidance counsellor or teachers. The teacher also points out that the guidance counsellor may try to persuade the student to revise the attempted trajectory. The revision is typically about changing the student's mindset from an academic to a vocational program, as the admission requirements are lower, and the study plans are considered easier. The recommendation conferences are important for noting whether a trajectory needs to be revised:

At the conference the teachers discuss the student's choice, and it will also be noted if a student is at risk of not passing a subject. That may have consequences. Because they need passing grades in 12 subjects. In that way you get an overview, […] especially the language aspect becomes more nuanced. Does the student understand the instructions in the different subjects? Are they equipped to pass courses on upper secondary school level? Are the language skills sufficient? […] And then you decide whether the student's choices are realistic or not. Or if you should call the student to a new meeting with the guidance counsellor. Margit (teacher)

The outcome of the negotiations between the professionals is described as crucial for the student's future trajectories. The decision not to recommend a student is justified by referring to insufficient language skills and to what is deemed realistic in relation to the student's expected progression in upper secondary school. In this way the professionals can come to an agreement and propose an alternative path they consider more suitable to the students' abilities and prospects, without implying a rejection of the student's aspirations (Clark, 1960).

A related strategy that we have identified is to advise the student to accept a *detour*. A detour is a softer version of revision as it is a way of not immediately giving up the aspired educational goal but to accept an educational path that is prolonged, but easier:

I have told them that if you want to become a physician you can choose another path [than the natural science program]. For example, you can choose the healthcare program and then go to adult education and study the additional subjects that are needed. Then your chances for better grades also increase because that program is much easier [than the natural science program]. Eva (guidance counsellor)

In this example the student's desired trajectory is renegotiated through interaction with the guidance counsellor, who proposes an alternative educational track. This alternative includes several steps, beginning with a vocational program, followed by adult education to complement one's diploma for potential admission to tertiary education, while still allowing the possibility of achieving the original goal in the long-term. Both revision and detour strategies direct NAMS towards vocational programs. They thus represent cooling-out processes, providing the students a chance to reconsider their choices and redirect them away from

academic programs. Both strategies can be viewed as a form of compromise (Goffman, 1952; Clark, 1960).

The third cooling-out strategy we identified is *deceleration*, which is about stalling the progression of the trajectory as the student must repeat the LIP and is held back in the LIP for longer than expected or longer than they wish. The school professionals argue for deceleration in terms of the student's best interest and as a necessary turn of events:

Some of them are not going to be able to apply to the national programs, most of them I think will not. […] it is impossible to learn Swedish in a short time – not impossible, there are students who do it – but it is unusual. If somebody wants to progress too quickly, you may try to slow down the pace a bit. It is not going to work that fast and if you are to tackle higher education, you must have a solid ground. So, there is nothing to gain if you let the students get to the next level too soon, they will only be disappointed when they realize that they won't succeed with the studies. Emma (teacher)

The teacher emphasizes the significance of language skills in Swedish for success in upper secondary school and higher education, noting that learning a new language is time-consuming. The teachers also stress the importance of building a solid knowledge base in various subjects to meet the educational challenges of upper secondary school. A deceleration of the pace of studies by repeating the LIP is justified in terms of preventing future disappointments and academic failures. The risk, which the professionals are aware of, is that many students will 'age out' and become ineligible for upper secondary school, making adult education a more viable alternative for many.

Many of them will by then [after repeating the LIP] be at an age where upper secondary school is not an option. A realistic goal for many of them [during the LIP] is to manage to get a diploma for compulsory school and then continue to adult education. Peter, (school leader)

Deceleration of the pace of studies appears to be a strategy to manage the discrepancy between the shortage of time and the goals of the LIP. Nonetheless, it functions as a cooling-out strategy in that it diverts the student from attending upper secondary school and stalls the movement towards the aspired goal (see also Bunar & Juvonen, 2022).

Adapting Teaching Practices, Strategic Choices, and Individual Recommendation as Warming-up Strategies

As previously described, the school professionals acknowledge the difficulty of simultaneously achieving compulsory school learning outcomes while learning a new language. In response to this, the professionals describe how they find ways to creatively interpret possible lines of action within the framework of the educational system, which we identified as warming-up strategies (Deil-Amen, 2006).

Adapting teaching practices to the level of language skills the students master while still making sure that the objectives of the curriculum are covered is a strategy practised by the teachers. Instead of following the curriculum in detail, they use it as a guideline and adjust their teaching to the needs of a particular class and to what they assess to be sufficient knowledge for upper secondary school.

I glance at the curriculum, and say good, this, this and that they need to do. Then I know that. And then I don't give a crap about it [the curriculum]! And then I think okay, that is what they should do, but what is it that they need? What are the minimum requirements they need in order to pass their upper secondary courses? And then we start with that. Christine, (teacher)

The demands of the curriculum are described as different from the reality of the classroom. The teachers adapt their instructions to what they assess to be a sufficient level of knowledge for the students to be able to complete the courses within the given timeframe and still equip them with enough subject knowledge to manage the demands of upper secondary school courses. This strategy thereby points toward enabling future studies in upper secondary school.

Another warming-up strategy aimed at facilitating transitions involves *strategic choices* regarding NAMS' education. This strategy addresses the inherent inequality within the educational system, where NAMS compete with students from the Swedish compulsory school system. To mitigate this injustice, the professionals have identified subject areas that they interpret as 'easier' to pass and thus equip their students with more credits to compete with. Mother tongue tuition is one such subject where students can take an examination, receive a final grade, and add credits to their certificate. There are also other subject areas that are pointed out as 'easier', and schools sometimes include these in the study plan for the LIP:

I have added geography [to the LIP study plan]. Geography is not offered at our programs. But we feel it is…it is an easier subject for them, to understand the Swedish language and get a passing grade. Social sciences, history and religion demand more debate and understanding…geography is just geography in a way. […] And sometimes we offer music, it is also easier for some… It is not about cheating with the grading, but these are subjects that do not involve as deep a mastery of the language. Rolf, (school leader)

Strategic choices are made by the schools with respect to including subject areas that enable NAMS to acquire enough grades to apply or even compete for admission to national programs. Strategic choices can also be employed in relation to individual students. The school professionals recognize that many NAMS are not familiar with the way the educational system works in Sweden. Even if they are given all the relevant information, it may still be difficult to make informed choices about their education. The guidance counsellors, for example, use this strategy to advice the students to extend their applications for upper secondary school to include not just one option of program, but several. In this way they will enhance the chances for a successful transition. Also, the teachers can aid in making strategic choices in relation to the study plan.

You also need to help them with strategies. If someone is far from passing English, perhaps on the level of the second grade, should you put a lot of effort into that subject now or is it better to put extra effort into Maths, where the person may be on the sixth-grade level? In that way you will pass at least one of them. You need to help them with the tactics, which subject to go for. Emma, (teacher)

The teacher describes how she can help to strategically organize the study plan and guide individual students to enhance their chances of progressing academically. This warming-up strategy is thus a way for the school professionals to compensate for some of the disadvantages of the educational system that they have identified in relation to NAMS.

The third warming-up strategy we have identified again points to the crucial role of recommendation conferences. In this case the professionals make use of the possibility to admit certain students to national programs on a so called 'free quota' [fri kvot], here labelled *individual recommendation*. Free quota means that schools can accept a limited number of students for priority due to special circumstances. The student must however meet the requirements of 8 or 12 passing grades but does not have to compete with students from compulsory school for placement. The assessment and negotiation at the conferences is crucial for suggesting a student to be admitted on a free quota:

The student needs our approval, that we believe that he or she has a good chance of getting through the program. It is through that process they will get a chance at placement because they do take up a spot from someone else. So, we try to make sure that he or she has a reasonable chance of getting through [the program]. Christine, (teacher)

Individual recommendations from the school professionals carry significant weight, as it may mean that a student will be considered for a, often prestigious, upper secondary school. This excerpt highlights that the professionals are thorough in their recommendation for free quota placements, where good grades alone are insufficient. The student must demonstrate consistency in their schoolwork, maintain high attendance, and show a willingness to work hard. The free quota placements are thus conditioned but still offer students a pathway to realizing their educational aspirations.

Concluding Discussion

This study shed light on how school professionals make meaning, interpret, and employ multiple strategies to manage the complex challenges of educating NAMS, with a particular focus on the transition from the LIP to a national upper secondary school program or other forms of education. The Inhabited Institutions-approach (Hallet & Vantresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010; Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021) has contributed to deepen our understanding of how school professionals interpret external regulations and internal conditions and transform them into daily practice through meaning-making and social interaction. Our study shows that the day-to-day experience of interacting with NAMS made the professionals contest the core idea of the reform and its consequences for NAMS' education, pointing out the rigid admission requirements and the unrealistic timeframe. The inhabited institutionalism's emphasis on social interaction highlighted the inherent dilemma in education NAMS, i.e., that the professionals are to cater to students whose aspirations are seen as unachievable in the context of the system. Our findings thus lend support to Hallett's (2010) argument that institutional rules can be highly constraining to action despite local resistance. This notwithstanding, our analysis showed how the professionals make sense of these tensions by creatively engage in developing practices to mediate the potential effects of the educational system on the students' educational trajectories.

We identified cooling-out strategies (Goffman, 1952; Clark, 1960) such as *revision* of the students' initial aspirations from academic to vocational tracks; proposing a *detour* via an easier but longer educational trajectory; and *deceleration* of the pace of study by repeating the LIP. Similar forms of sorting practices where immigrant students are allocated to non-academic tracks have been identified in previous studies (Bonizzoni, Romito, & Cavallo, 2016; Emery, Spruyt, & Van Avermaet, 2021; 2022) and have, similarly to our findings, been shown to be made with the student's best interest in mind. However, our results also highlight strategies aimed to encourage and enable the student's advancement and aid them to achieve their aspirations, labelled warming-up strategies (Deil-Amen, 2006). Our analysis expands the concept by pointing to three different strategies: *adapting teaching practices* to meet the students' needs; helping with *strategic choices* by pointing out priorities in subject areas for individual students, or organizationally by adding 'easier' subjects to the study plan; and

making *individual recommendations* by proposing specific students for placement through the 'free quota'.

Our study thus highlights the co-occurrence of cooling-out and warming-up processes in daily practices in schools and the significance of social interaction between school professionals when it comes to interpretations of the educational system and its consequences (Diamond, 2012). The cooperation and the interactional arenas that the school professionals point out as important, i.e., the recommendation conferences, are situations where common understandings of the students' progress and future opportunities are constructed 'out of practical reasoning' in which the professionals also construct possible future trajectories for the students (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000:97). The different strategies constitute a form of prospective sense-making where the school professionals negotiate different options through an interpretative process in interaction with others (Everitt, 2013; Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021). Although we propose neither that cooling-out strategies inevitably entail a sorting of students into non-academic tracks nor that warming-up strategies preclude it, the outcomes of the negotiations are likely to have an important impact on the students' future trajectories.

Our findings thus contribute to deepening our understanding of the consequences of the educational system and the conditions in introductory education for NAMS' educational opportunities in Sweden. Our analysis suggest that school professionals' interaction and sense-making play a crucial part in how strategies concerning the transition to mainstream education are negotiated and chosen, as the inhabited institutionalism-framework posits (Everitt, 2013; Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021). A limitation of our study is that in-depth interviews alone do not fully capture the micro-level processes of interaction and meaning-making, particularly in collegial conferences, or how the choices of strategies are negotiated. Future research would benefit from a wider use of ethnographic and longitudinal approaches to explore more fully how institutional rules are transformed into practices and how they in turn impact on students' prospects and futures. Our study did not show any variations between local settings or professional groups, a reason for this may be the relatively modest sample of participants and school contexts. To extend the research and include a variety of local contexts and schools that organize introductory education could also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the situation of NAMS. An extended research design could also permit a detailed comparative analysis of how different categories of school professionals choose strategies for managing NAMS' transition to mainstream education.

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