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## **Does Vocational Education at Regular Schools Matter? – A Longitudinal Case Study of Students’ Experiences with Vocational Orientation Programs**

### **Abstract**

This contribution presents results of a longitudinal qualitative study of young adults with different career plans and transition pathways. The central question of this study focuses on the relevance of vocational orientation programs at regular schools for young people’s career plans and transitions. The first part deals with the organization and research about vocational orientation programs. The second part begins by giving an insight into the empirical design of the longitudinal study. It then proceeds to discuss how the methodological perspective of reconstructive research can provide deeper understanding of student’s perspective. Narrative interviews are used as the basis to investigate how the socialization contexts are relevant and interconnected. Through the deeper understanding of student’s perspectives and the role of different socialization agents, it is possible to highlight the relevance of vocational orientation programs at schools. The findings could prove useful for improving vocational orientation programs at schools. Currently, such programs are disconnected from students’ everyday life and show little regard for their perspectives.

**Keywords:** vocational education, school-to-work transition, social inequality, school careers, longitudinal study.

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## Czy przygotowanie zawodowe w szkołach ogólnokształcących jest ważne? Podłużne badania przypadku uczniów biorących udział w programach orientacji zawodowej

### Abstrakt

Artykuł przedstawia wyniki podłużnego badania jakościowego młodych dorosłych mających różne plany związane z karierą i ścieżki przejścia. Głównym problemem poruszonym w badaniu jest znaczenie programów orientacji zawodowej w szkołach ogólnokształcących dla planów zawodowych i ścieżek przejścia młodzieży. Pierwsza część artykułu dotyczy organizacji i badań nad programami orientacji zawodowej. Drugą część rozpoczyna omówienie empirycznego projektu badań podłużnych. Dalsze rozważania dotyczą tego, w jaki sposób perspektywa metodologiczna badań rekonstrukcyjnych może zapewnić lepsze zrozumienie punktu widzenia ucznia. Wykorzystano wywiady narracyjne jako podstawę do zbadania, w jaki sposób konteksty socjalizacyjne są istotne i wzajemnie połączone. Poprzez głębsze zrozumienie perspektywy uczniów i roli różnych czynników socjalizacyjnych można uwypuklić znaczenie programów orientacji zawodowej w szkołach. Przedstawione wnioski mogą okazać się przydatne dla podniesienia jakości programów orientacji zawodowej w szkołach. Obecnie, istniejące programy są oderwane od codziennego życia uczniów i nie uwzględniają ich perspektywy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kształcenie zawodowe, przejście ze szkoły do pracy, nierówność społeczna, kariera w szkole, badanie podłużne.

### Introduction

In the comparative social stratification research Germany, Austria and Switzerland are identified as having stratified educational systems and highly specialized vocational training systems which are well established (Schneider, Tieben 2011: 139; Masdonati 2010: 20). In comparison to other European countries they are identified as employment-centred transition regimes (Walther, Plug 2006: 87). In addition the rate of youth unemployment in Germany is low in comparison to other countries in the European Union, e.g. 8–7% in Germany and 56–50% in Greece (Eurostat 2015). On the surface the transition management in Germany is functioning well. However, debates about the improvement of vocational orientation programs, especially for regular schools, are contentious and ongoing<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In most federal states, children attend an elementary school together until the end of the 4th grade at the age of ten, at which time an achievement-based selection of the pupils takes place for the next school type. The subsequent secondary school system normally distinguishes between the eight-year "Gymnasium" and the lower qualifying school forms, the six-year "Realschule" and the five-year "Hauptschule", the former offering an intermediate-level, and the latter only a basic educational level. Students with all levels of education could try to get into vocational training, which in Germany is often provided by companies in combination with vocational schools. School leavers from the Gymnasium as upper

One central goal is to reduce the rate of students with a low level of education, because a lot of offered on-the-job training requires at least an intermediate graduation level (Schneider, Tieben 2011: 140). In the year 2013 in Germany 36% students left school with a higher educational level and 42% with an intermediate level. The percent of students with intermediate and higher educational levels increased. The amount of students graduating with a low educational level went down. In the year 2001 25% of all graduates achieved a low educational level and in the year 2013 it was 17% (Destatis 2014). However, a lot of companies still complain about a lack of basic skills among young adults (Schneider, Tieben 2011: 140). During the last few years the situation on the apprenticeship market shifted. While at the beginning of the 21st century only young adults searched for an apprenticeship, today many companies have to search for applicants too. In the year 2013 a total of 33.534 apprenticeships were unfilled. However, there were still 83.564 young adults with no apprenticeship and are still on search (BBB 2014: 11–12). The so called mismatch debate dominates the discussion about the transition to vocational or academic education after regular school. The fact that more applications are still necessary remains secondary. A call was made for more fitting graduates in both the academic and vocational sectors and a lot of orientation programs were introduced. In fact, both sectors have increasing dropout rates (Leuze *et al.* 2011: 348). In the year 2010 28% students quit their studies (Heublein *et al.* 2014: 3). In the year 2012 24% applicants dropped out of their vocational training (BBB 2014: 52). As well as this, one third of young adults starting university actually did vocational training before going to university (Heinrichs, Wuttke 2013: 38)<sup>2</sup>. These 'dropouts' and double qualifications are seen as problematic and a call for better vocational orientation programs at regular schools was made.

Despite this call for improvement, students, and particularly those at lower and intermediate schools, still need more guidance about their options after school and more information about the kind of education level they need for different vocational or academic careers. Since the early 1970s technical gymnasias and technical upper secondary colleges have provided general schooling and university entrance qualifications (Schneider, Tieben 2011: 140). Alongside these options, this type of school offers pathways which lead to a basic vocational education level but not certification (Leuze *et al.* 2011: 348). Due to the low-level of qualification, many of the students emerge with; there is a lot of academic debate about the purpose of the low-level school form. School leavers with a low education level have more problems in finding on-the-job training and permanent work. To improve this, some federal states joined the-low and mid-level school forms or offer mid-level

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secondary educational level are allowed to go to university. During the last decades in some aspects the educational system and following vocational and academic tracks changed, which are going to be presented in the first and second chapter of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> In Germany during vocational training it is possible to get a higher gratification level and going to university is open. In addition those, who have practical experiences and an academic gratification are attractive for companies.

qualifications also at low-level school forms. However, for students who attain good grades and achieve the intermediate level, but attend the stigmatized low-level school form, entering the dual system can still be problematic (Walther, Plug 2006: 87). To enable them to compete against increasing competition with students from intermediate and upper secondary schools, many students at low-level schools continue school to improve their opportunities (Schneider, Tieben 2011: 140). Students who visited a low-level school and achieved an intermediate educational level are under researched. For this reason this article focuses on this group of young people. Empirical findings from two case studies are going to be presented. These case studies open up the opportunity to examine young adult's career plans and their experiences with vocational orientation programs. Initially, the main focus centres around the question of how vocational orientation programs could be relevant for the development of career plans. Before outlining the specific study design and empirical findings it is necessary to provide some background information about vocational orientation programs at regular schools and relevant research.

## **Development and organisation of vocational orientation programs**

In Germany the kind of vocational programs offered and at which type of school is down to the jurisdiction of each of the 16 individual federal states. Vocational education and vocational orientation programs are as much part of the curriculum as subject, teaching unit or additional activity. During the last twenty years most federal states changed the framework for vocational education and career guidance (Niemeyer, Frey-Huppert 2009: 4). In addition, several programs were established at a general federal level, e.g. School-Economy/Working Life (1999–2007), Jobstarter Connect (2010), National Training Pact (2004–2014). These programs are results of national education policies which are framed by policies and supporting systems of the European Union. During the last decades the policies of the European Union have become more and more relevant (BBB 2014: 68).

In the 1970s initial discussions about the standardization of vocational education and training (VET) were held at EU-level. During the 1990s the concept of lifelong learning evolved and vocational education became one element of general educational policy. In the year 2002 “The Copenhagen Declaration” was passed as a milestone for the improvement of vocational education in Europe (DecCop 2010). Similar to the Bologna Process, the development of standardized and transparent vocational qualification sets was on the agenda, e.g. the European Qualification Framework (EQF). Other main priorities were: a) strengthening a European dimension, b) transparency, information and guidance and c) quality assurance. Following on from this, regular meetings were held to review the progress and give advice on further strategies (DecCop 2010). In the year 2010 the communiqué from Brügge was introduced and set aims for vocational education and training till 2020.

In connection to the strategic framework “Education and Training 2020” broader main priorities were laid down, e.g. equity, social cohesion and active citizenship. Long term and short term benchmarks were set and yearly reports showed the progress of each country. The following benchmarks are relevant for the increase of vocational orientation programs: a) dropout rate from education and training should be below 10%, b) 40% of people aged 30–34 should have completed tertiary education and c) 82% of graduates should be employed within one, two or three years (ET 2020 benchmarks 2014). In Germany in the year 2012 early school leavers were estimated at 10%, the attainment in tertiary education at 33% and the employment rate at 90%. Alongside these statistics the number of students who started a dual tertiary program increased (ET Monitor 2014). So the structure of vocational orientation programs as part of the transition management is influenced by general policies on the EU-level but, as mentioned above, concrete guidelines and programs are set up by each federal state. Nearly all school ministries devised out a policy to manage the school-to-work transition for all lower and upper secondary school forms. This involved a lot of work as it means that nearly every school has to establish a working group consisting of teachers to conduct and offer vocational orientation activities in cooperation with companies and social workers. Low- and mid-level school forms offered a more detailed set of activities than the higher school forms. However, some form of transition school-to-work support is offered at nearly every school. For example, internships, as a traditional part of vocational orientation and a career choice portfolio are now widespread. In addition, visits from the Federal Employment Office to assist with individual career plans or job searches are common. At some schools a standardised analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of young people and matching career opportunities is part of the visit. The relevance of the latter is seen as ambivalent by students. At most schools, teachers give their students support in writing job applications or set up training for job interviews. In comparison to other countries, individual career guidance offered at different times, is not well established in Germany. At most low-level schools career counselling is part of social work.

## **Research about vocational orientation programs**

So far, this article has given background information necessary to understand the development and organization of vocational orientation programs at regular schools in Germany. Since the 1990s research literature on that matter consists of evaluation studies, policy analysis and transition research in general (Ule *et al.* 2014; Rauner *et al.* 2010; Walther *et al.* 2006). This review stresses main findings firstly from research about vocational orientation activities at school and secondly from research about the relevance of school in contrast to other socialisation agents. It is not possible to give a detailed overview above of all research referring to vocational orientation programs so a selection was necessary. Studies which take

the perspective of students into account are the main focus as they are supposed to be most fruitful for the empirical findings of this article. So the following findings should give an initial insight into the relevance of vocational orientation programs at regular schools for the development of student's career plans.

The latest research about vocational orientation programs indicates that vocational orientation activities are in general seen positively by students, teachers and their parents (Rahn *et al.* 2011: 301). Studies about the particular activities gave a deeper insight about possible effects. They focus mainly on internships which students take during 8th to 10th grade. On the one hand some studies show that internships are the most favourable vocational orientation activities (Herzog *et al.* 2006: 105). On the other hand some research made clear that, if students are not integrated in the real working process they could gain false impressions. Alongside this, it is also difficult for a lot of students to find an internship that fits their career plans (Beinke 2013: 267). The combination of a difficult search for an internship with negative experiences could lead to a general lack of motivation and distance to the field of work (Schittenhelm 2010: 134; Walther *et al.* 2006: 109). The internship could be a useful activity if it lasts several weeks and is supported by reflective activities (Ahrens 2007: 198). Furthermore, the quality could be improved if teachers attend extra courses and do internships in companies by their own. In addition, companies which offer internships should be sensitive about the orientation process, while not being judgmental about student's competencies (Beinke 2013: 268). Consequently, during the last years cooperation and connection to the regional context has become more relevant. Schools, which are situated in a region with a transparent structure of the potential partners for implementing orientation programs, could organize more specific activities in and outside school (Reißig, Mahl 2013: 351). The latter is important because of the heterogeneity of the support students need. Some students have fixed plans and need information about their concrete opportunities and some students have absolutely no orientation and need more guidance and counsel (Wensierski *et al.* 2005: 105). Therefore, not only job centre visits and techniques for writing applications are necessary, but students have to gain self-reflective strategies for finding out more about their skills and interests.

A qualitative study differentiated six types of student's career decisions and the relevance of vocational orientation programs. 72 in-depth interviews with young people were conducted and the biographical narrations were sequentially analysed (Wensierski *et al.* 2005). Type A named "insecure decision" is linked to students without a concrete career choice. They need vocational orientation activities and especially practical experience to widen their concepts about professions. Type B is called "pragmatic flexible decision", which indicates students with several career plans. For them being employed and earning money is more relevant than the work itself. With this type there is the assumption that these decisions are not biographically influenced or framed by their social milieu or specific background. Students of this type are open to vocational orientation activities but by compari-

son less motivated. Students with fixed career plans but without deeper reflections on those plans belong to type C, “random decision”. This type is more common amongst younger students who take information from their social context. Vocational orientation activities are seen useful, if they are related to their career plan. So activities with reflective units are necessary. Type D, “education oriented and planed decision”, is typical for students from upper secondary schools with aspirations towards academic education but open career plans. They need vocational orientation activities which could hone their aspirations and provide information about possible pathways. The type with the most students is type E, “biographical decision”. Students belonging to this type have clear and reasonable career plans. They made relevant experiences in their everyday life which motivate them. Vocational orientation activities are relevant if they are connected to the career field. Students of this type are interested in internships but want a better pedagogical guidance in the company. A little group of young adults already entered a vocational educational path and are linked to the type F, “dissatisfied decision”. These contrasting groups need support to think over their choice and to plan the next steps. Vocational orientation activities are necessary and individual guidance in particular (Wensierski *et al.* 2005: 105–117). A general finding from the study is that students with a lower educational background give school and vocational orientation activities a greater importance (Wensierski 2008: 158).

Some research deals with the influence of the school climate, peer relationships and classroom interactions (Walther *et al.* 2006: 24). Teachers that are accepting and encouraging could help motivate student’s occupational aspirations (Noack *et al.* 2010: 52). These studies also show that the effectiveness of programs could be higher if they were connected to the everyday life of students. However, studies that examine the perspective of the students are, by comparison, rare.

These kinds of studies investigate the students’ perspectives on the question from whom do they get the most support. Using standardized instruments, such research could give a sort of a ranking of the most helpful persons. Nearly all such studies rank parents at the top (Walther *et al.* 2006: 25). Then come people from the immediate social context, e.g. friends. The relevance of teachers has not been clearly worked out. But a study found out that teacher’s perceptions of ability positively predict student’s self-concepts and performance (Bergman *et al.* 2011: 7).

As the short review showed, vocational orientation activities can have positive and negative effects. But these effects are framed by the experiences students made in other socialisation contexts (Schittenhelm 2010: 126; Stauber 2006: 66; Walther *et al.* 2006: 30). The huge field of social inequality research shows how the habitus is relevant for school performance and the development of career plans during transition (Biggart, Kovacheva 2006: 53). More qualitative data and especially longitudinal studies are necessary to investigate the relevance of vocational orientation activities for the development of career plans in connection to socialisation contexts.

## Where to go after School? – Findings from a longitudinal study

This article contains case studies which were acquired as part of the data sample of the research project “Where to go after school?”<sup>3</sup>. The aim of the project is to examine the career plans and future aspirations of young adults and the role of school in contrast to other socialisation contexts. During the research process investigating the relevance of vocational orientation programs became a subtopic. This article contains the first results belonging to this subtopic. Research questions related to that are: 1) Which developments of career plans occur during transition? 2) What role do vocational orientation programs play in these developments? 3) What relevance do other socialization contexts have?

The project uses a qualitative longitudinal approach to determine the transition and development of career plans before and after graduation. Biographical interviews with 17 young adults were collected and analysed in two waves of data collection. Four schools that offer low and intermediate level pathways offered the possibility to get in touch with the students. Two of the schools were located in a rural region and the other two were located in an urban region. Furthermore interviews with teachers at regular schools and vocational colleges were collected to get some background information about the organisation of vocational orientation programs.

To conduct a systematic and contrasting qualitative sample a questionnaire was handed out in ten classes at the beginning of 9th grade. This questionnaire contains school and spare time related topics. Some questions were asked to get information about family background, e.g. educational level and work of the parents. In the year 2009 38 interviews with ninth graders aged 15–17 were acquired. In the year 2011 the second wave of data collection consisted of the same young adults who graduate after tenth grade aged 16–18. After the second wave of data collection the development of the career plans was the relevant criteria. In sum 17 longitudinal cases were collected. The sample contains cases with different transition pathways, e.g. vocational training, vocational college or without vocational education. In addition, the sample included a nearly equal gender mix and young adults with or without migration background. From the qualitative sample of 17 cases 8 cases were chosen with the strategy of a theoretical sampling for a detailed sequential analysis with the documentary method.

This kind of qualitative analysis is framed by the perspective of reconstructive research which is based on theoretical concepts of the symbolic interactionism,

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<sup>3</sup> The research project was funded by the Leibniz University of Hanover as part of the postdoc program “Ways into research”. From October 2011 till October 2013 the project was let by PhD Sina-Mareen Köhler. Daniel Heggemann as research assistant and two students were also part of the research team. In January 2014 a follow up study “Heterogeneous educational biographies and vocational orientation processes of young people at the vocational college” started and is still ongoing and financed by the German Research Foundation.

social phenomenology and the sociology of knowledge (Bohnsack *et al.* 2010: 8). From this perspective reflective and recursive life stories are seen as constructions which could be found in biographical interviews (Bryman 2012: 490). Thus, the meaning of a biographical interview is rather found on the surface than in its deeper structure. “The documentary method aims at reconstructing the implicit knowledge that underlies everyday practice and gives an orientation to habitualized actions independent of individual intentions and motives” (Bohnsack *et al.* 2010: 20). With a strong root in the sociology of knowledge, the documentary method focuses on the conjunctive knowledge. Karl Mannheim conducted the key theoretical concepts of the documentary method. He viewed conjunctive knowledge as emerging during socialisation processes in several rooms of experience. “Mannheim differentiated in this context between communicative or generalized knowledge and conjunctive knowledge or experience” (Bohnsack *et al.* 2010: 22). Thus, the interdependency concept implies the connected relevance of several socialisation contexts and self-socialisation processes for peoples’ views and everyday practices (Krüger *et al.* 2008: 203). Furthermore the documentary method uses the habitus concept, which is well known through the theory and studies of Pierre Bourdieu (Schittenhelm 2010: 128). Hence, Mannheim’s and Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of the habitus have a common root in the theories of Erwin Panofsky about the collective meaning of cultural objects (Bohnsack 2010: 270–272). From the perspective of the documentary method, the habitus could be reconstructed as orientation pattern, which documents the conjunctive knowledge. A reconstruction of the habitus is necessary to gain an understanding of career plans and the relevance of experiences with vocational orientation programs in contrast to experiences made in other socialisation contexts. The habitus fundamentally frames people’s actions and perspectives.

In this context the term career plan encompasses all aspirations, images of work and wishes students have concerning their later working life (Thiessen, Blasius 2002: 51). In combination with the documentary method with its focus on the habitus, this study is set in line with biographical research about the development of career plans, which indicated the socialisation contexts or realm of experience (Ule *et al.* 2014; Schittenhelm 2010; Stauber 2006). This study does not follow a rational-choice approach, because the habitus as key concept set the assumption that career plans and transitions are formed by deeper meaning structures emerging from the socialisation context and self-reflections related to that.

## **Empirical findings**

This chapter is divided in two parts. The first part shows the career plans of two young women and their experiences with vocational orientation programs during 9th grade before graduation. The second part describes the development of career plans, further experiences with vocational orientation programs and the relevance

of family support after graduation. But before the two subchapters begin some biographical background information concerning the two cases will be presented.

Aylin Demir and Victoria Axt were classmates at a low-level school form and achieved the qualified intermediate level. They decided to continue school to enhance their educational level. After graduation both went to a vocational college with a specialization in economics. If they are successful, within three years they can attain the higher educational level, which enables entering a university.

The 16-year-old Aylin Demir left school in the year 2011. Her parents and her older sister were born in Turkey. Every second year her family went to Turkey for several weeks to visit relatives. Nothing is known about the levels of education of the parents, because Aylin could not answer this question. Several years ago, Aylin's father went into business on his own. Since then he let a transport company with its own garage for repairing cars. Aylin's mother is a housewife. Both Aylin's older sister and her older brother have attended a low-level school. In contrast to Aylin's sister, who successfully finished vocational training as a medical assistant, Aylin's brother got no training place. He now works in his father's company. The family lives in their own house where Aylin has a separate living unit with a small bathroom, but no kitchen.

The 17-year-old Victoria Axt graduated in 2011 and is still Aylin's classmate at the vocational college. Victoria's family consists of her parents and six siblings, three of whom live in the parental household. One of the two older brothers lives in Kiel and is still in contact with his family. Nothing is known about his career. Also nothing is known about the other older brother. Victoria's two older sisters visited the low-level school and are in apprenticeships. Only one of the older sisters still lives in the parental household. Victoria calls herself a second mother to her two younger sisters, who go to the low-level school too. When Victoria was six years old her family moved from Kiel to Gelsenkirchen, because they could not afford a sufficiently large and affordable apartment. Both parents graduated with an intermediate level and were in apprenticeships, about which nothing more is known. Victoria's mother worked several years in the office at Victoria's regular school. In the year 2008 she started to work in a drugstore chain. Victoria's father is off work due to incapacity having survived cancer.

### **Career Plans and experiences with vocational orientation programs before graduation**

In the year 2009 Aylin wanted to be a banker. Her broader aim was to achieve something in life. She was highly motivated and mainly focused on improving her school performance. During the entire interview she spoke more about her family and friends and less about her actual career plans. Only twice did she mention an internship at a fashion store as part of the vocational orientation program. She had

a lot of fun while working in the store. Beyond that, she talked precisely about her tasks during her working days, but she made no connection between her experiences of the internship and her career plans.

The career plan description of Victoria Axt is short because she is one of the rare cases, who does not mention any career plans or any experience of an internship or other vocational orientation activities during the first interview. Only one sentence is related to her career aims. She wants to get a good job. What that exactly means is unclear. It could refer to the economic aspect, because of her poor family background. Her general aims for the future are related to her peer relationships. So she hopes that the atmosphere in the class will improve and conflicts with her best friends will be solved. In contrast to Aylin she is less focused on her school achievement, but she wants to achieve the intermediate level.

### **Career Plans and experiences with vocational orientation programs after graduation**

During the second interview Aylin Demir talked about several experiences with internships. Again she mentioned the internship in a fashion store she did in 9th grade. Furthermore, she made a connection between her experiences during the internship and her career plan, which she did not in the first interview. She said that standing around and being on her feet all day long in a fashion store is not what she wants to do for the rest of her life. She argues that an office job is much better. If you recall her career plans from 2009, you may think that a job application at a bank could be a suitable career step. But her plan to work as a banker was long gone. She took on a second internship at an insurance company and then changed her ambition, as you can see from the following interview quote:

He [her supervisor, S.K.] talked to me and said you were very well suitable for this profession (.) if you would do a high school graduation or something similar (.) you could be very good with your second language in selling contracts (.) hearing that it made click in my mind (.) selling contracts (...) I don't want to sell at somebody (...) so I don't know where to go exactly (Aylin 2011)<sup>4</sup>.

During the internship she learned that she does not want to sell contracts. She enjoyed the office work and the atmosphere between her colleagues. During a career counselling she found out that working in a bank her task would involve

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<sup>4</sup> Transcription rules: [=overlapping voices; (.)=short break; (3)=3 seconds break; no=empathetic, accented; °okay°=spoken silently; someti--=abruption; [ ]=extern annotation; [...]=some left put parts; yes=yes=spoken rapidly; don't say=spoken loudly; ( )=not understandable; (do you want)=hardly understandable; ☺=short laughing; ☺(.)☺, ☺(2)☺=laughing, 2 seconds laughing; [takes a deep breath]=non-verbal sound.

selling contracts too. However, she had already ruled that out. At the point of the second interview she had no concrete career plans and felt under increasing pressure. To conclude, both internships and the career counselling were relevant for the development of her career plans.

To explain Aylin's choice of the vocational college it is necessary to reconstruct her future ambitions and aspirations. As mentioned during the first interview, she wanted to achieve something in life and put a lot effort into that. Thus, in a longitudinal perspective an achievement-oriented habitus could be found. This is the basis for her high motivation during transition, although she had no concrete career plans. In her case, since she entered the vocational college her family support increased a lot. The latter is underlined by the following interview extract:

Do something right (.) go to school go on (.) my brother said (.) now he works in our workshop without a proper education (.) I saw that and he is working overtime too much (.) I find that totally unfair and (.) I really want something else (Aylin 2011).

Aylin saw her hard working brother who has limited opportunities to work for the company of his father. This, as well as increasing family support is the basis for her achievement-orientated habitus. But her family has a hindering effect too, as following quote shows:

I know that I would definitely work in the office which is clear (.) I could imagine to do something like management or perhaps work as event manager (.) I've heard that they travel so much and often in other cities (.) my father doesn't like it when I'm out so very late and take these events until twelve o'clock or so (.) for that I don't know what to do (Aylin 2011).

Aylin took her father's wishes into account. Moving out of the parental household and making own decisions about the working hours is out of the question. Moreover, Aylin draws no comparison to her brother, who sometimes works very late. Gender or age could be seen as dimensions which lead to different possibilities for the siblings. Moreover, the support of the father is relevant. Aylin did not talk about her mother while discussing that matter and that documents the dominance of the father's view. As mentioned before having support and recognition from family members is relevant for Aylin's aspirations.

Having support from the family to upgrade an education level is not a new finding. Other studies show cases of family support for achieving a higher level of education where the family aspires to climb up the social ladder (Dormeier Freire, Giang 2012). What is new is that, in this case, the family support increases after

graduation and that no pressure before could be identified<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, Aylin's career aspirations were restricted. In fact, the family support is ambiguous. The pressure comes from Aylin too because she wanted to have a better working life than her brother.

In the year 2011 after two years Victoria Axt still mentioned no experience of an internship. Instead she talked about the search for an internship in connection with her career plans:

In the U.S. for example are many notified vacancies (.) in Germany the less- (.) in Berlin I could have start an internship as a photographer or in Belgium and Luxembourg (.) but we were not allowed from school (.) and here in Germany (.) there was an internship that would have been in Berlin and that would have been pretty far away for a (.) 15 years old [I: hmm] and then I said I'll do something else (.) I can look if I can find a training abroad when I'm a little bit older (Victoria 2011).

She tried to find an internship as part of the vocational orientation program. But she did not found a company. The school headmaster did not allow her to go abroad. That was the only part of the interview with a relation to a vocational orientation activity. In her case vocational orientation programs played a negative role. More support in her searching activities could have been useful. Furthermore, the quote documents how Victoria dealt with her career plans. Her search for internships and applications remains quite superficial. The same pattern was found for other career plans, as following quote shows:

So I want to do (.) something which has to do with music (.) like I had said (.) or something in the media designer or so (.) make advertising or make posters (.) or as photographer (.) but the jobs are limited (.) working as a banker or so is more realistic (.) because you actually can always find a job in that area (.) or here I do only the economic (.) and then let's see (.) maybe I go abroad as a photographer (.) if not I'll be here searching a training in the economic area (Victoria 2011).

Parallel to the vocational college she wrote two applications for the same training of visual marketing. She did not give up her plans but avoided searching for functioning pathways. Despite that she did ambiguous argumentation related to her interest in economics as specialization of the vocational college. So during some parts of the interview she said that she could imagine to work as a banker and at other parts she clearly said that she does not want to work in the commercial field.

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<sup>5</sup> Aylin Demir gave Interviews and attended group discussions with her friends at 5th, 7th and 9th grade, which were originally acquired for the research project "Peer groups and selection processes" (Krüger *et al.* 2011). During the group discussion at 5th grade she mentioned that her father forgot the registration for a comprehensive school and visiting the low-level school was the only option left and not her wish.

In the longitudinal perspective you find out that she is still motivated to get good marks and that the vocational college is more the continuity of regular school than the first step into a vocational career. In her opinion in the commercial field it is always possible to find a job. Her reason for choosing the vocational college is to have something safe as backup. This indicates a secure-orientated habitus as relevant basis for the development of her career plans. The family played a great role in that, as is shown by following quote:

So (.) my parents (.) would wish when I finished (.) if I get my high school graduation successfully (.) and not with poor grades (.) but they said that's my decision (.) when I want to be (.) a florist or seller (.) that would have been my thing (.) they had tried definitely everywhere to support me as they can (.) except in the field of music because my dad has said there is no real job security [I: hmm] maybe later when I can stand on my own (.) I pick it as a challenge for myself (.) it all depends on me (Victoria 2011).

Victoria started with mentioning her parents as a unit and included her mother. However, like in the second interview with Aylin the father is the one with the relevant opinion and Victoria took his wishes into account. In contrast to Aylin she holds on to her career ambitions, but shifts them to an undefined future. This shift made searching for concrete alternative career plans necessary. The secure-orientated habitus is hindering her search for a career plan, which involves her music interests. The shift of the career plan which includes her interest in music hinders a deeper searching for other interesting occupations. Victoria could stand for a young adult with flexible career plans. This could be assumed only on the surface. Interpretations of the sequences in which she mentioned other career plans like photographer or designer showed a lack of detailed knowledge concerning these professions. In addition, vocational orientation programs play a negative role in hindering the necessary internship in another city. The question why Victoria did no internship in the mentioned career fields in her hometown is still open. Maybe she needed support for a better searching strategy or she was not motivated enough. However, she needs guidance to find a path into a career she could be interested in and which fits to her need for something secure. Like Aylin she concentrates on the aim of achieving the higher level of education. But she feels a lot of pressure und talks about the missing peer support.

## Discussion

For discussion it is helpful to stress similarities and differences. First of all the two young women have a similar formal school career and as classmates shared an organizational context. That means for both the offered vocational orientation

programs were identical. During 8th grade they did a one-day internship and during 9th grade an internship for two weeks. In 10th grade a career counselling session was offered as an option. The presented case reconstructions show that both talked more about vocational orientation activities especially the internships, and linked it with possible career plans, after graduation. Furthermore, both have uncertain career aspirations and choose to continue school to improve their educational level. The young women had several career aspirations but ruled them out, while taking the opinion of their fathers into account.

Within these similarities the in-depth interviews showed a divergence when it comes to the relevance of vocational orientation programs. Victoria mentioned internships in the second interview only. She talked about her searching activities for internships and applications. Thus, the internship is more a step to get a foot into the door than to find out which occupation could fit. Her career plans are ambivalent because she took a pathway, which is secure but does not fit her interests. She has a secure-oriented habitus, which is framed by experiences in her family. In contrast Aylin took a pathway, which is seen as a key to success and step to achieve something in life. Aylin's entering the vocational college sets the family support free and her actions influence the habitus of the family as a collective, which indicates a self-socialisation process. The reconstructions of the biographical interview indicated an achievement-oriented habitus. This kind of habitus fit to Aylin's transition pathway. For Victoria the secure-oriented habitus could be a risk factor, because the interview shows mismatching aspects. Victoria expressed ambiguous feelings regarding the vocational college. Concrete career plans, which reflect her interests, are not suggested yet.

The stressed empirical findings indicate that both young adults need ongoing vocational orientation programs. But the vocational college offers a decreasing amount of career guidance and it is optional. Furthermore, the empirical findings showed that vocational orientation programs could be relevant. Aylin liked her internship at the insurance company, but the relevant information about her later professional role made her change her career plan. Finding that out protected her for choosing a mismatching apprenticeship.

## Conclusions

With the help of a longitudinal perspective the relevance of vocational orientation programs at regular schools was found out. To conclude, offering practical experiences in connection with individual career guidance could have an impact on the career choice process. Aylin had fun during her internship and got her supervisor's recognition, but she found out the general aim of the occupational field which did not match her ambitions. The career counselling helped her to reflect that and draw conclusions for her career plans. In contrast Victoria did not mention any experi-

ence of internships. In her case it is possible to identify a lack of support. Therefore, the necessity of vocational programs, which focus on functioning searching strategies, is apparent from this study. The in-depth interview showed a tendency to shift career aspirations into the undefined future, because of the secure-oriented habitus. Dealing with this kind of behavior should also be part of vocational orientation programs (Masdonati 2010: 28). Teachers and professionals should have the competence to notice the complex correlations and sometimes ambiguous career plans and their habitualized basis (Wensierski 2008: 153). Conversation is necessary and time is needed for that. Possible working units could contain students practicing self-reflection related to their biography and the biography of the parents.

There is a widespread call for early vocational orientation programs and in parts of Germany activities start during 7th grade when students are aged around 13. Making practical experiences, getting information and reflecting on one's own competencies and interests could prove useful, but have to be framed with sensible pedagogical guidance. Like Ahrens (2007: 196) points out, vocational orientation programs should be portrayed as school work as little possible. In particular orientation activities should not be evaluated with grades. Instead, feedback focused on the next steps for exploring and reflection on necessary progresses is helpful. It is important not to forget, that at the age of 13 the puberty is ongoing, which is a youth specific moment not to be underestimated (Heinrichs, Wuttke, 2013: 38).

Both presented cases had not yet decided, which career fields they are going to enter and the opportunity to go to the vocational college gave them more time to find out. In connection with the study of Wensierski *et al.* (2005) it is impossible to clearly assign each case to one of the types is. Aylin and Victoria could represent type A "insecure decision". This underlines the need for more career counselling. Moreover, the young women show aspects respective to other types. At first glance Victoria could stand for type B "pragmatic flexible decision", because she decided pragmatically to take a first step into the economic field. Yet, her interest for other professions made her unsure. Wensierski *et al.* (2005: 108) stated that young adults of type B are more interested in earning money than in the work itself. Another explanation could be that young adults of Type B, like Victoria, altered their career interests, for her the necessity of security is crucial. Aylin's achievement-oriented habitus and her concentration at school work bring her near to the type D "education oriented and planned decisions". Students of this type show an open career choice like Aylin. Compared to type A this openness is less seen as problematic (Wensierski *et al.* 2005: 110).

As many studies stated before, the family plays a great role in the career orientation process. Furthermore the influences of the young adults on the collective habitus were shown in Aylin's case. The families of both have supportive and hindering effects and play an ambiguous role. This should be part of further re-

search and with focus on the relevance of the father and the mother. This could give more details of gender specific career plans. Most literature on family support describes several capital formations. Related to that, reconstructions of biographical interviews gave a detailed insight into the micro processes. Especially the view of the father is taken into account. Some would perhaps suggest that this is the first step into self-silencing, which could reflect the way women specifically deal with barred career paths. Other social contexts are relevant for reflection and creating other (gender) perspectives (Stauber 2006: 73).

Compared to the family, less attention was paid to the peers as a relevant socialization context. For both cases a direct link to their career plans could not be made. Despite this the peers are most relevant for maintaining motivation for school success (Krüger *et al.* 2008). Further research should keep in mind, that vocational education has still school related parts and having a good social climate is relevant for achievement. In addition most students experience social change of their relationships and have to cope with that too.

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