Lanas (2019) Can performing happy childhood be an occupational skill required of students?

Abstract

School takes part in producing childhood through its requirements for students. Becoming a student takes place in the intersections of various power-related discourses. This paper explores how the idea of a proper student becomes discursively produced. It is based on how one Finnish girl's perception of herself as a proper student changed as her life circumstances changed. The paper concludes by suggesting that a significant occupational skill for a student may be the skill of performing happy childhood.

Keywords
Discourse, professional student, school, student behaviour, subjectification

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Can performing happy childhood be an occupational skill required of students?

Introduction

Over twenty years ago, Elina Lahelma and Tuula Gordon (1997) suggested that there is a profession, or an occupation for children, the occupation of a "pupil". This occupation is one to which children do not enter by a choice, but one in which they will remain for over a decade, and in which they are expected to succeed. Succeeding in the occupation requires acquiring and presenting a specific set of occupational skills in a fairly short time. Some of these skills are openly taught and even negotiated, while others are unofficially detected and learned. The students who fail to present the required skills for the occupation, are at a risk of becoming inscribed as problematic. Previous research suggests that becoming a good student takes place in the intersections of various power-related discourses, and that the position of a good student is not equally available for all (MacLure, Jones et al. 2012, Becker 1952, Ball 1981, Grant 1997).

In this paper I return to Gordon and Lahelma's claim. I am interested in what is required of a child wishing to become a successful, good, and proper student in Finland, how the idea of such a student becomes discursively produced, and who may become constructed as such a student. This paper locates within the so-called discursive turn, exploring "*those processes of constitution or construction by which phenomena come to be what they are taken to be*" (Hammersley 2017, 118). Thus, the focus is not on the experiences of individual children but on the discursive surroundings within which such individual experiences become formed. This paper contributes to research exploring how institutions produce childhood (Alasuutari 2009) by looking at how schools produce childhood through their implicit requirements for children.

The paper begins by explicating the conceptual toolbox from which the research questions of this paper emerge, making a case for the existence of a "proper student", an idea I will claim is rarely verbalized but commonly produced in school. The "proper student" is different from the "ideal pupil" (Becker 2952), and the "good student" (MacLure et al 2012), and refers to the locally naturalized yet ambivalent set of occupational skills that students are expected to possess, and that play out differently for different students in different contexts. The paper brings together and draws on existing research in order to look into the requirements for a proper student internationally, after which it focuses on how good and deviant students were construed by teachers in formal documents in the first two decades of Finnish comprehensive school (1968-1992), the context of this study. Against this framework, the analysis focuses on one remembrance interview which described how one girl's perception of herself as a proper student changed as her life circumstances changed. The paper discusses, through examples, how the idea of a proper student becomes produced, and how a student may subjectificate with the idea. The paper concludes by suggesting that a significant occupational skill for a student could be the skill of performing happy childhood.

Subjectificating as a proper student

When children enter school, they become subjects as 'students'. Such a becoming is not passive, but takes place as they read surrounding expectations to them as students and, as they to various extents negotiate and perform these expectations. In feminist poststructuralist thinking, this process is often referred to as *subjectification*.

The concept of subjectification construes *self* as a dynamic, never-ending process; it is always a practice of "becoming," always taking place in relation *to* something (see also Holquist 1990). Self, thereby, is a verb and a relation, a subject of a continuous process of being constituted, reconstituted, and reconstituting itself (Taguchi 2005). This perspective of self as a verb and a relation differs from humanist discourses, within which self or existence is located "inside" the individual. As Youdell (2006) explicates, whereas in humanist discourses people are who they are because they choose to be so or because of their inheritance (or some combination of both), in the discursive perspective, self is not pre-existing, self-knowing, and continuous, but rather an individual becomes a subject through her/his ongoing constitution in and by *discourse* (Youdell 2006, 35).

Discourses are here understood as practices that constitute the phenomena of which they speak (Foucault, 1972). They are bodies of ideas and practices that emerge within and produce power relations and take part in producing social reality, setting boundaries around what can be said, thought, felt, and done (Foucault & Gordon, 1980). They open up and close off various subject positions for different individuals (Davies & Harré, 1990). Discursive repertoires become produced in multiple ways across spheres of social or professional life, for example in the everyday practices, spoken language, media, institutions, and literature (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Subjectification takes place as individuals make themselves subjects within the surrounding discourses. In order to become and remain intelligible as a subject within them, individuals must continually cite the rules of these surrounding discourses (Youdell 2006, 37). This means taking on the appropriate *discursive performatives*. A "performative" functions to produce that which it declares; it is the very act of designation that constitutes the subject (Youdell 2006, 36, drawing on Butler, 1993). For example, a student becomes a student when named as a student, and in order to be intelligible as a student, she or he must take on the performatives of a student (such as submit to teacher authority, raise hand etc). In order to work, performatives must *make sense*: they must be recognizable in the discourses that frame their deployment. Intersections of societal power relations, performed within educational settings, influence which performatives make sense to which actors, and which do not. Performatives that do not make sense in the discourses that frame schooling, or that are counter to prevailing institutional discourses, may fail or may act to constitute a subject outside the bounds of recognizability (Youdell 2006, 37). Put simply, in order to be recognized as a good student and not a bad one, an individual must be able - an in a position to - to interpret and take on the performatives of a proper student.

This way, subjectivities in schools are simultaneously both constituted and constrained by discursive performatives. Such "dual nature of subjectification" is hard to grasp, as Laws and Davies (2000) observe: one is simultaneously subjected and at the same time can become an agentic, speaking

subject precisely through such subjection. Individuals' possibilities of becoming speakers within discourses are dependent on their successful subjection as someone who can speak meaningfully within the available discourses. Laws and Davies (2000, 206) sum, "*we are at the same time shaped by forces external to us, and yet through that very shaping, gain the possibility of power and of agency*".

In conclusion, it is suggested that becoming a (proper) student is not simply a question of taking on *the role* of a student. Instead, the norms and truths which make up subjects are negotiated on a deeply personal level (Green, Reid 2008) and intertwine with personally experienced, intergenerational and socio-cultural-historically produced emotions which inform us of the desirable subjectivities (Zembylas 2008, 2010a, see also Devine 2002). For example, we have learned to feel disgust, shame, embarrassment when we witness or do something that does not fit the norms, feel pleasure when we manage to perform the norm, and admiration towards those who break and fit the norm in the 'right' ways.

Performatives of a proper student

Previous studies suggest that the performatives of a student have less to do with subject knowledge or study skills and more to do with identifying and taking up *the activities that characterize* the good student and avoiding the activities that characterize a bad student. In school context such an ability to identify and perform the right activities and conduct is commonly referred to as "student behavior" (Millei, Petersen 2015). Maclure et al (2012) list 'being kind', 'being helpful', 'joining in', keeping quiet, 'being sensible', 'sitting properly', 'good listening', 'sharing' and making the teacher 'happy' as such activities, Laws and Davies (2000) add to this the presenting of the right emotions, such as regret. These activities, however, differ between educational contexts, between schools, between classrooms, from one situation to another within classrooms, between the classroom and the playground, and from one child to another (Hempel-Jorgensen 2009, Laws, Davies 2000, Laws 2011, Koskela, Lanas 2016, MacLure, Jones et al. 2012, Ball, 1981; Becker, 1952; Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963; Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009; Koskela & Vehkalahti, 2016;). In order to become recognized as successful proper students, the students' task is to identify the available position and take on the right activities and conduct in their context.

Although the performatives of proper students depend on the context as well as on how the students are positioned in various intersections (these can be e.g. gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, livelihood, culture, geography) at least three general expectations for a proper student can be argued to exist based on existing research: 1) performing 'normal development', 2) performing the power relations between adults and children, and 3) performing the societal-historical power relations.

Firstly, becoming a successful proper student requires *performing a normal developmental course*— one of the strongest regulatory discourses of childhood (Burman 1994, Ryan, Grieshaber 2005). Children who are not seen to act in accordance with what is perceived normal and expected for children of their age are at risk of being judged a problem and become targets for various interventions (Maclure et al 2012, 449-450). Erica Burman (1994) has famously criticized these

normative discourses of development for detaching the children from their socio-political and historical context, and for providing homogenized descriptions of child development which pathologise children who do not fit into such normative accounts. In education, the idea of 'normal' imposes uniformity while, at the same time, individualizing and measuring the differences from the norm (Watson 2016). Such ideal of "normal" can be seen as "*tendencies to ignore and/or mechanisms to conceal variation*" (Sumara, Davis et al. 2008, 170).

Secondly, becoming a successful proper student arguably requires *performing and maintaining the existing power-relations between adults and children*. MacLure et al (2012) as well as Laws and Davies (2000) have argued that students are not only expected to submit to the hierarchy between adults and children in school, but also to actively take part in their own submission. The asymmetrical roles of teacher and student, and the instructional order of the classroom, are 'made happen' (MacLure, Jones et al. 2012, 451), and as proper students, children are expected to take part in this making. Laws and Davies sum up that "*the task of all students, is to show a commitment to maintaining the scene the way the teachers want it*" (Laws & Davies 2000, 209), and that sometimes the only purpose of a rule is "*for students to display their subjection, so teachers in their turn can recognise them as legitimate and well-adjusted students*" (Laws and Davies 2000, 214). For example, punishments do not work if the students do not take them up as their own by performing the right emotions, such as upset and regret. Such taking up of punishment is so taken-for-granted that it is virtually invisible (Laws and Davies 2000, 208), and only becomes visible if a student refuses to perform the expected emotions.

Thirdly, becoming a successful proper student requires, *if not successfully representing the existing power hierarchies in the society, at least submitting to them*. The performations of a proper pupil emerge within the broader societal power relations and thus must cite these. For example, Youdell (2003) and Gilborn (1990) have brought attention to the gendered, classed and racialized aspects of a proper student. They argue that teachers' interpretations of and responses to the behaviours of African-Caribbean boys sustained a "*myth of an Afro-Caribbean challenge to authority*" (Gillborn, 1990, p. 19). For instance, in Gillborn's (1990) research, a particular way of walking common amongst African-Caribbean boys in the school was interpreted by the school as a challenge to authority. Youdell (2003, 15) argued that blackness is censured within and through the discursive practices of the school organization. She argued that the discursive practices of Black youth/street culture are tacitly mediated through discourses that constitute these practices as inherently challenging to the school's (or individual teacher's) authority and, by extension, the broader White hegemony. In this way, the school tacitly constitutes interpretations of Black subcultural identities as intrinsically anti-school and a challenge to authority. In a similar vein, Lanas and colleagues (Lanas, Corbett 2011, Lanas, Rautio et al. 2013, Lanas 2011) found that in a reindeer herding village school in northern Finland, representations of the local culture became read as challenging the school's or teachers authority and, by extension, the hegemony of southern urban culture.

In school, performatives of a proper student are commonly conceptualized as "good behavior". As the extensive Ofsted study concluded, "Defining challenging behaviour, […] has always been an unsatisfactory enterprise." (OFSTED, 2005, 10). In research literature, it may refer to anything from

'talking out of turn' (Crawshaw, 2015; Infantino & Little, 2005) or 'non-attention' (Shen et al., 2009) to stealing, vandalism, violence (Dishion, Véronneau, & Myers, 2010; Vieno, Gini, Santinello, Lenzi, & Nation, 2011) or silence, talkativeness, family background, representations considered masculine or feminine, expressions of subcultural identities, (lack of appropriate) emotional representations or even handwriting, or simply failing to show commitment to keeping things as teachers want (Koskela & Lanas, 2016; MacLure et al., 2012; Youdell, 2003; Laws & Davies, 2000). How the various definitions of good or bad behaviour play out in practice depends on the particular social, cultural, economic, historical, material and discursive surroundings (see eg. Zembylas 2010b, 2012).

Analysing teacher descriptions of good and bad behavior on official student assessment forms in the context of this research, Finland, the author and a colleague (Koskela & Lanas 2016) found that the concept of 'behaviour' covered a variety of issues: student actions, emotions, skills, habits and even family situations: Mother's marital status or parents' occupation was often explicitly mentioned when describing behaviour. Overall, some descriptions were rather normative ("*Tomboyish*" for a girl, "*doesn't like other boys healthy wrestling games*" for a boy) and ambivalent ("*sharpens pencils constantly, both ends!!*"). Altogether, seven distinct categories of reported disruptive behavior were found in the study: physical absences, restlessness, aggression or other negative feelings, disobedience towards teacher, rule breaking, unsatisfactory participation in schoolwork, and unsociality. Of good behavior, six categories were found: eagerness to help everyone, diligence and carefulness, positivity and sociality, compliance towards the teacher, rule-obedience, practical or intellectual cleverness. It was also found that within the twenty years on which the study focused (1968-1992), there was virtually no change in how behavior was reported in the documents, despite the fact that during that time Finnish school system changed to comprehensive schooling.

The lists, even though they are based on archived material of more than two decades ago, are not very different from other similar lists produced in other studies in other contexts (e.g. Crawshaw 2015). These lists of good and bad behavior, when looked at from the perspective of the school, may seem reasonable and obvious. However, if the perspective is changed to that of a child, the listed demands look different. The categories show that, in order to act in ways considered good behavior and avoid acting in ways considered bad behavior, students need to be in a position to a) present positive emotions, (eagerness and positive outlook), and not present negative emotions (anger or depression), b) be active and take initiative in ways expected by teachers, and not be active in ways resembling restlessness, c) have the personal resources to work independently and the possibility to extend those resources to others by helping them, d) focus on school and prioritize school, d) present submission to the authority of an adult and the norms of the society, e) be socially fluent in peer relations and also with teachers. These requirements could be seen as existing occupational requirements for students, since they are what become officially evaluated as "behavior".

Although the above are prescribed as behavioral choices of individual students, they are not simply a matter of behavioral choices. A brief speculative discussion shows that meeting the above expectations requires specific life circumstances and, depending on their life circumstances,

students are in very different positions to meet the expectations: For example, presenting positive emotions may be a challenge for a child who is experiencing much negative emotions in life. Similarly, the personal resources one has for independent work and focusing on school require a situation in which all personal resources are not spent on other things and may be a challenge for children who have other important responsibilities. Furthermore, presenting submission to an adult may be easy for children who have experience of trusting relationships with officials and other adults, but it may be difficult, even painful to children who have do not have such trusting relations with officials or, who may have taken on adult responsibilities from early age. Also, the family community's take on childhood may be more equal and less submissive than the school's take on childhood. Being seen as socially fluent is similarly not often a child's choice.

When all the above issues are however presented as a behavioural choice of an individual child, there is a risk of placing responsibility on the child also for things the child cannot influence. Through the concept of behavior, any emerging problems may become located in the child's skills or choices, not to the broader societal circumstances of such choices or the discourses giving meanings to student actions. It has been argued that in the current educational discourse, young people who for a variety of reasons fail to thrive, tend to be constructed as deficit, as 'disengaged' and in need of 'fixing' (McGregor 2015, 2), and the reasons are sought within the psyche of the individual or the family rather than within educational institutions or the broader social and economic systems (Brunila 2014). Individual students are thus deemed to be in need of various combinations of punishment and/or therapy; they become 'the problem' (Finn, Nybell et al. 2010). Marginalised young people are not simply identified as being 'at risk', they are also constructed as 'the risk' (Brunila 2014, McGregor 2015, te Riele 2006b, te Riele 2006a).

To conclude, while the occupation of a student is one that all children are expected to take on, the position of a proper student is not equally available for all children. The implicit norms within which children become subjects as proper students may be invisible to those individuals who easily find subject positions within the surrounding discourses and have opportunities cite these discourses successfully. However, those students who struggle in citing the discourses help in making visible aspects which would otherwise remain invisible.

The study and results

This study focuses on the childhood memories of one woman, "Tessa", who begun her school career as someone who could easily meet the norms, and who, as her life changed, learned it was increasingly difficult to subjectificate as a good student. Tessa was 25 when she told her story as a part of a narrative research project looking into beginning teacher subjectivities, and she was speaking as a person who became a teacher wanting to change many of the things she had experienced as a child in school, only to learn that changing them is not that simple. During the longitudinal research process (reported in Lanas 2016), I noted that Tessa's account spoke to broader issues of power and student subjectification in school. For this research, Tessa's account has been analysed as a separate case, outside the scope of the original project.

Many poststructuralists and posthumanists shy away from concepts such as "data," "analyzing data," and "coding," arguing that such concepts embody a positivist approach to science (see for example St. Pierre, 2013). The "data" in this research can be seen as a process rather than as a static entity. Data generation was interwoven with the analysis and consisted of a personal four page essay in response to an open e-mail invitation, an 1,5 hour interview based on the essay, and a follow-up e-mail exchanges based on the interview. The entire process lasted one and half years. In her essay, interview and comments, Tessa went beyond the original interview questions, and talked about her childhood and school experiences as she struggled to appear as a proper student while experiencing problems in her personal life. Post-structural analysis is sometimes described as a process of "thinking with" theory or data (e.g., Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). In what follows, I analyse how Tessa's experience of struggle or failure became constructed. From Tessa's material, I have taken out "meaningful descriptions" (Heft & Kyttä 2006), and placed these in a theoretical framework. Through her story, I look into her subjectification as a proper student.

Tessa's struggle to remain proper

In her remembrance narrative analysed here, Tessa is reflecting back on her own school experiences, 15 years after the experiences took place and sheds light on the implicit expectations for a proper student. Tessa begun her school career experiencing success in the profession of a student. She received good grades, she felt she was a 'good girl', and she liked her teachers. During Tessa's childhood, there was an economic depression in Finland, impacting the lives of many children. When Tessa was 11, her father's business went under, and the family was suddenly poor and in severe debt. They had to sell their house and move to another area, after which Tessa took a bus to her school[1]. Her father's drinking habit escalated, and he also started taking prescription drugs. Tessa, in turn, started taking on budgeting responsibilities in the family, and supported her mom emotionally. After this she increasingly struggled to pass as a proper student until she finished school at 16. Although she was successful in that she was allowed to remain in a regular class and her grades did not plummet, she repeatedly experienced that she was ambivalently deemed unsuccessful by teachers. She describes learning to hide unhappy elements of her life to meet the expectations for a good proper student:

There is no room to think about your life in school. For example, there are the desks - even if they are placed in the U-form, then a break, then the next planned session. There's no room for pupils to think about their own life. Instead, I know from personal experience that they learn how NOT to do it.

I asked her to explain what she means, and she continued:

For example, there's the morning circle where 'everyone can tell,' but you know what to tell and what not to tell. You learn to tell about happy things and invent them if you have none.

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[1] a public school

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You tell about the new guinea-pig or the weekend trip to a fare. You don't tell about learning to pay the bills or learning CPR, not about looking for your dad for the entire night because he has passed out in the snow somewhere, you do not tell about the worry or the fear. You tell about good feelings.

Tessa's account portrays class morning circles not as open spaces in which children freely told what was important and meaningful in their lives at the moment, but as forums in which happy, pleasant events and emotions were shared and negative emotions avoided. While it is ethically justifiable that traumatic issues are not brought up in a setting in which every student might react to them in surprising ways, this, as a 'side effect', produces silencing , especially in the lack of alternative forums for discussion. Tessa's story grasps the dual nature of subjectification well. The children were likely not explicitly told to avoid sharing unhappy stories, but "*you know what to tell and what not to tell*". The morning circles can be seen as forums in which performatives of a happy childhood were taken on. Tessa struggled to continue citing the rules of the surrounding discourses by taking on the appropriate happy performatives, even when matching experiences were lacking in her life. As Davies et al describe, we "*actively take up as our own the terms of our subjection*" (Davies, Dormer et al. 2001, p.1), and for Tessa, she felt an implicit pressure to share happy stories which was so strong that she felt the need to "*invent them if you have none*". The same took place also in regard to school assignments:

Then there are the 'My holiday trip' essays we always wrote. My family never went anywhere, so I wrote about other things. Then the teacher demanded to know why I had failed to do the assignment as instructed. So I learned to be creative. I listened to others' stories, to know how life is supposed to be, and I took bits and pieces from my friends' stories, colored my life a bit to satisfy the teacher in the assignments.

The presumption, for Tessa, seemed to be that everyone goes on a trip during the vacation. Such an implicit assumption, mediated by school through assignments, was so effective that when Tessa failed to describe such a trip, she felt the teacher took this as a sign of insolence. In order to re-establish herself as a non-insolent student and in order to remain intelligible as a proper student, Tessa worked at giving the teacher what she interpreted the teacher wanted: a narrative of a child who goes on trips during vacations. As Maclure et al (2012) noted, such interpretive processes are "*by definition retrospective: children must read 'back' from the adult's assessment to the behaviour which has earned it*" (MacLure et al 2012, 458-459). Reading back, Tessa did not try to explain the situation to her teacher. This was due to another interpretation she had made of an existing implicit rule: At another part of her story she mentioned "*everybody knew what was happening in my life*", and "*Not for 5 years did any of the teachers ask anything*". Tessa combined these into a rule that she should, like the teachers did, go on in school pretending her life had not changed.

This impacted how she felt about her teacher. There may be an implicit rule for 'good school girls' to, if not admire or like, at least respect their teacher. Tessa described loosing such respect, and this impacted her perspective of herself as a student: *"When I realized she will never address any of the changes in my life, I lost all respect for her. I thought 'You know what's going on; do you not have*

the guts to ask me how I'm doing? Are you afraid of the answer?" Interestingly, loosing respect for the teacher was another step in deeming *herself* a failure. Personal feelings of liking the teacher had connected her to and "us" of the school, and as she lost such feelings, she felt unconnected to the shared positive feelings.

In the same way, as she struggled to continue with her studies, she perceived her task was to act as if there were no struggles:

Then there are the study materials and reading tests. Not all kids have the mental space to study at home, and if a string breaks on their instrument, they do not have the money to replace it. My instrument had a broken string for a month before we could afford to replace it from the next month's budget. Weirdly, it was seen as a sign of my lack of motivation. It wasn't like "Tessa's instrument is broken and she's still trying her best, she's so motivated", but "Tessa isn't motivated enough to even replace a broken string". And I was ashamed. You don't play well with a broken instrument.

The broken instrument lead to a sense of shame in Tessa, as if it was somehow representative of *her* - her skills or motivation. In Tessa's narrative, the string seized to be a circumstance to which she had no power to influence, and it became an element of *her*. As she struggled, Tessa felt that the problems she was experiencing were at the risk of turning *her* into a problem. Thus, Brunila's (2014) Finn, Nybell, and Shook's (2010) and McGregor's (2015) argument above about marginalised young people being constructed as 'the risk' (McGregor 2015, see also Devine & Cockburn 2018), resonates in Tessa's experience. As her changing life impacted her ability to take on the performatives of a proper student (as she interpreted these), she felt she was *turning into* the problem of her circumstances.

Discussion

Tessa's story sheds light on how implicit and unofficial assessments may turn into student subjectification in the everyday practice of school, as students read back from individual events in school. One's subjectivity as a proper student may be at stake as a consequence of challenges in one's personal life. Tessa's story shows that her subject position as a student was intertwined with her life situation, and that in order to take on the performatives of a proper student, she felt she had to exceed her circumstances - as if they did not exist. If she failed, she felt that her properness as a student was at stake. As Tessa struggled to maintain her image of herself as a proper student, she learned, in the process, that the standard of a proper student was made for someone not experiencing problems in personal life. In short, Tessa's home life was not happy, and this made it difficult for her to present herself as a proper student.

Tessa's position potentially provided her with a unique perspective. As Maclure et al (2012, 464) argue, in order to successfully perform the proper student, children must be able to recognise something of themselves and their experiences in school. Tessa had, for the first 5 years of school, subjectificated as a successful student, and she had recognized herself and her experiences in

school. Tessa had subjectificated as someone who can speak meaningfully within the available discourses. Challenges emerged as her experiences rendered her an unrecognizable student with unspeakable experiences. For her, the contrast was stark between the successful student she had previously been and the problem student she did not want to turn into.

It is notable that in Tessa's story, there were no teachers forcibly demanding anything. Instead, the demands Tessa felt so strongly emerged from *silences,* namely silences regarding unhappy events or unpleasant emotions, as described above. The force pushing her was not an "active" force with a goal, or a force personalized in any teacher, but rather, as Davies and her colleagues (2001) describe, the "hard work of becoming appropriate(d)" as a schoolgirl, it was ingrained in her subjectification as a proper student. It was not done to her *by* anyone. It happened as she read surrounding implicit expectations, struggled to cite surrounding discourses and pursued to take on the performatives of a good proper student.

As depicted above, becoming a proper student may require performing the societal-historical power relations. Tessa's story, there seems to be an implicit assumption that in Finland, everybody has an equal opportunity to study in school. This assumption emerges within a specific national discursive context, in which equality is emphasized, and there is a common shared discourse of equal national education. It can be seen as a question of national pride: in Finnish educational discourse equality is portrayed as something that has already been achieved, attested to by exactly the success of the Comprehensive School Reform (Sitomaniemi-San 2015, Koski, Filander 2013). As Koski and Filander (2013, 592) argue, "*When institutional and individual equality had been proclaimed as the aim of education, these equalities became self-evident starting points and final arguments*". The social and cultural differences have, according to popular conception, been abolished (Koski & Filander, 2013). For students who experience poverty or other privatized social problems, there may not be a framework for recognizing or validating such experiences. The problem of broken instruments or unstudied tests may become located in individual students.

Based on this study I suggest that, in school, the responsibility is placed on the child to present him or herself as a proper student who successfully feels positive emotions, who has personal resources and trusting relationship with adults, and who can prioritize the teachers wishes to those of one's own. Tessa's subjectification says something new about school as a discursive context in which she subjectificated: a central aspect of becoming a proper student is performing happy childhood. If an educator was to pursue to rewrite these discourses, this could take place by acknowledging and accepting that such discourses exist in school and impact people, and opening the discourses up for open discussion. As Tessa said *"For years I was ashamed of something I had no power over. I wish the economic depression and its impact on lives were discussed in school. There must have been so many of us thinking it's our personal shame".*

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