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## “GOOD” PARENTING: PARENTAL SUPPORT IN EDUCATION AS A FACTOR IN INEQUALITY

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### ABSTRACT

Parental support is generally considered as important, positive, and desirable for students' educational trajectories. As research in education has repeatedly proven, parental capital significantly affects students' educational pathways in terms of ambitions, opportunities, and outcomes. In this article, we investigate how teachers and parents in Slovenia view the role of parents in students' educational trajectories. We observe whether their role might mitigate or increase educational inequalities. We draw on qualitative data obtained through interviews with teachers and parents of ninth-grade students in Slovenia. The article shows that parents in Slovenia are very involved in their children's educational process; they have high educational aspirations that seem to be internalized by their children. Their engaged involvement can be newly considered as a factor in the social differentiation of children, as it covertly sanctions those parents and children who are unable or unwilling to create a supportive family climate.

### KEYWORDS

parental involvement; educational trajectories; educational aspirations; supportive parenting; educational inequality; social differentiation

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## Introduction

Growing up in contemporary European society is directed and arranged by three social contexts: family, school, and peers (Hurrelmann, 1990; Chisholm et al., 1995). With balanced participation in all three contexts, young people are able to overcome the challenges of becoming an adult, thereby developing a stable identity, preserving their mental health, and planning their careers and private lives (Arnett, 2015; Butler et al., 2022). Balanced participation implies that the family provides psychophysical and emotional care for the child, the school facilitates the further cognitive and emotional development of the child, and peer networks provide support and solidarity on the generational level, ensuring the proper differentiation between the emotional care given by the family and the productivity-oriented school socialization (Mollborn & Lawrence, 2018).

Although changes in the structure and course of childhood and adolescence have occurred in the past few decades, it continues to largely be a period of schooling, which is a source of many problems and pressures for young people. In contemporary societies, education plays a crucial role in the social integration of individuals. The contribution of education to social integration is no longer taken for granted, i.e., education in itself does not guarantee meaningful life opportunities for individuals (Bendit & Hanh-Bleibtreu, 2008; Côté & Levine, 2002). More strikingly, contemporary European societies demand early intellectual and behavioral adjustments from children and young people, often placing contradictory demands on them. This process can be observed throughout Europe, notwithstanding significant regional differences (Chisholm et al., 1995; Walther, 2006). In his studies, James Côté presented an identity capital model, offering a critical view of parental involvement in education. He argued that schools and parents act as guardians of access to various forms of educational achievements and levels of adulthood, instead of acting as sources of positive motivation for young people. Such positive motivation would be necessary to help young people achieve emotional stability and sensibility, be open to others, develop an ability to empathize with others, think critically, and use mature moral judgment (Côté, 2007).

The article addresses the discourse about parents as supporters of their children in education. It is not just about supporting the learning process, but about supporting the whole educational path upon which parents use their economic, social, and cultural capital to help their children. The article mainly focuses on home-based parental involvement and the (potential) inequalities that such parental engagement may entail. The main research question of the article is: How do parents and teachers perceive parental involvement in children's educational trajectories in Slovenia? The research

sub-questions are: Do parents perceive education as relevant? Why and how are parents involved in the educational trajectories? Does parental involvement have an impact on educational inequality?

### **1 Theoretical context: Parental involvement in their children’s education**

The social context of growing up in contemporary societies is affected by two significant changes: the new global risks and personal insecurities. According to Beck (2009), the global risks stem from environmental and technological changes and the flexibilization of employment. The growing individualization of life together with the shifting of responsibilities for planning the life-course onto individuals raises personal insecurities (Bauman, 2000). Both changes lead to the ever-increasing destandardization of life trajectories, meaning that people can freely design and choose their own life paths and that people also must assume responsibility for the consequences of these choices, including possibly wrong or adverse consequences (du Bois-Reymond & Chisholm, 2006). These changes are not easy, and they require that young people and their parents make additional efforts, rendering parenting an ever more difficult task. Therefore, a key factor in the social differentiation of today’s youth is the availability of parental support: does a young person receive such support and, if so, of what quality is it?

Research on family patterns and parent–child relationships has confirmed that significant changes have occurred in parenting patterns (Biggart & Kovacheva, 2006). These changes are seen throughout modern societies and may be described as a shift from an upbringing family model to an emotional and supportive family model, known as a process of familialization (Edwards & Alldred, 2000) with a more equal power balance between the generations (Arendell, 1997; Leccardi & Ruspini, 2006). Today, the family frequently functions as a safe harbor from the outside world’s demands, which are becoming increasingly taxing in highly competitive societies.

Parents are becoming confidantes and counsellors of children in psychological or economic distress, and they are also becoming incredibly vocal advocates of their children in the public sphere through organized lobbying in which parents as a group apply pressure to cultural and educational institutions (Ule et al., 2016). Parental decisions regarding children’s education are closely linked to their expectations regarding their children’s future. Research shows that socioeconomic factors – the material, social, and educational capital of the parents – importantly influence these expectations (Weinberg, 2009).

Parental expectations and aspirations are a key element of their involvement in the education of their children. There is generally a positive correlation between parental expectations and aspirations and the level and scope of parental involvement in the education of their children (Epstein, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). This has led the term *parental involvement* to become extremely valuable in the last two decades in attempts to understand the role of parents in the educational path of their children as well as to explain the school–family relationship. This concept includes not just parents' involvement in the process of schooling their children within the family framework, but their cooperation with the school as well. Research into the concepts and practices of parental involvement in their children's education trajectories as well as their participation in making decisions on the future of their children has become popular with researchers of parenting. Parental involvement promises to lower the social, racial, gender, and cultural barriers in education, whilst including greater and better-quality parental cooperation with the school (Arendell, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Even though the concept of parental involvement is very well accepted, there has been criticism of systemic deficits and related educational practices (Bakker & Denessen, 2007; Turney & Kao, 2009). Attention has been drawn to inconsistencies in the concept's very definition, to the shortcomings of the tests and measurement methods applied, and to the socially and racially conditioned models of positive parental involvement. Critics have warned about overlooking the social context, which also importantly shapes the practices and levels of parental involvement in the educational path of their children (Bakker & Denessen, 2007). The parent-child relationship is importantly impacted by sociocultural changes in childhood, the level of parental involvement in the lives of their children, the ongoing care for their well-being, the educational process, and the care and planning for the future (Hodgkinson, 2010; James et al., 1998).

Some authors have depicted these changes with the concept of protective childhood. Sociocultural changes in childhood resulting in the intensification of protective parenting reflect a intense care for children and their welfare (Hodgkinson, 2010). Protective parenthood means the creation of a new discursive space within which children are perceived as individuals whose autonomy should be protected and maintained. At the same time, it involves the opposite process of distinguishing children from adults through increased control and protection (James et al., 1998). Certain surveys have revealed that a lack of parental support for their children is closely related to the early termination of schooling or children choosing a less difficult education path (Ule, 2016).

In their research of British children who terminated their schooling early (i.e., dropouts), Nicholas Foskett and Anthony Hesketh found that the

decision to terminate schooling was mostly made with the silent approval of the parents or within the framework of recommendations defined by their parents (Foskett & Hesketh, 1997, p. 308). Researchers in Slovenia also found that families who live amid difficult circumstances and whose children face difficulties within the education system can easily face blame for being bad students or bad parents. It is characteristic of these families that their educational options are debilitated or hindered by their socioeconomic, personal, relational, and social problems, or by a combination of these factors (Razpotnik, 2011). Disadvantaged families and parents from the margins of society often exclude certain schools, subjects, or careers as possibilities for their children, even though the children themselves could choose them and might succeed. In other words, parents exercise a veto on particular choices of their children (Ule, 2016).

## **2 Empirical evidence: Good parenting from teachers’ and parents’ perspective**

The article analyzes data from the European project GOETE<sup>1</sup> that examined interactions between structural, institutional, and individual contexts of educational trajectories with quantitative and qualitative methodology. The project focused on the educational period between the end of lower secondary education and the transition to the upper secondary level of education. The project’s theoretical tool was a life-course perspective via which the main themes were analyzed: access to education, coping with educational demands, and the relevance and governance of education (Walther et al., 2016).

For the purposes of this article, we concentrate on selected qualitative data for Slovenia: on interviews and/or focus groups with parents of ninth-grade students (aged 14–15 years), principals, and teachers that took place between April and November 2011. In total, 18 interviews with parents, three interviews with principals, and nine interviews and three focus groups with teachers were conducted. The interviews were transcribed in Slovenian and coded manually. Following the guidelines proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), we identified the core themes across the data and merged them in three umbrella themes: high parental educational aspirations, parents

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<sup>1</sup> Governance of Educational Trajectories in Europe, 2010–2012 ([www.goete.eu](http://www.goete.eu)), EU, 7th FP. The project was carried out in eight European countries (Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, and the UK). For more information about the project and its results in an international perspective, see Walther et al., 2016.

intervening in teachers' work, and the pressure of good grades. Empirical data analysis follows the identified themes.

Since data for the GOETE project were gathered over a decade ago, we supplement the qualitative data with quantitative data from representative national studies on youth in Slovenia carried out in 2000, 2010, and 2020 (Deželan & Lavrič, 2021; Lavrič et al., 2011; Mihelj, 2002). For general national data on education, we rely mainly on data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SURS, 2021a, 2021b).

Compared to other EU member states, young people in Slovenia enjoy a relatively favorable position in terms of educational opportunities. According to the typology of education systems by Allmendinger (1989), Slovenia is ranked in a group with high standardization and low differentiation of the education system (Walther et al., 2016). In such highly standardized and comprehensive education systems, organizational differentiation and degree of selectivity are low since there are no transitions during compulsory education. Without transitions, the degree of selectivity and grouping of students by their characteristics (e.g., level of achievement, language proficiency) is considerably lower; such educational system has the most potential to providing more equal access to education and mitigating inequalities (Felczak & Julkunen, 2016). In addition, diversity in the support mechanisms is broadly accessible to students and their families both inside (a team of counselling professionals in each school: special pedagogues, psychologists, and/or social workers) and outside schools, especially in local environments<sup>2</sup> (Ule et al., 2015; Walther et al., 2016).

More equal access to education is reflected in the large share of young people who are integrated into the education system and the large share of those who, after they complete compulsory education, obtain at least basic qualifications. In the 2020/2021 school year, 90.9% of all young people in Slovenia aged between 15 and 18 years were enrolled in upper secondary education (SURS, 2021a): 35.1% of students were enrolled in upper secondary general education, 47.1% in upper secondary vocational/technical and technical education, 16.3% in upper secondary vocational training, and 1.5% in short upper secondary vocational education. An even clearer reflection of broad educational opportunities is accessibility to tertiary education. According to Eurostat data, in 2018 the participation rate of young people

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<sup>2</sup> Especially in the institutions found in local environments, such as the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth, the Association of Centres for Social Work, Employment Service of Slovenia, the Counselling Centre for Children, Adolescents and Parents, and the People's University.

ages 20 to 24 in tertiary education in Slovenia was 45.1%, almost 13% above the average of the EU-28 (Deželan & Lavrič, 2021). While this share has been falling slightly since 2014, when it reached around 49% of the 20–24 age group, it remains very high compared to other EU countries.

However, some research studies, such as “Life of young immigrants of the second generation in Ljubljana” (Dekleva & Razpotnik, 2002), showed that students who do not identify themselves as Slovenians (in most cases, they identified as being from another ethnic group from former Yugoslavia) enroll in lower, less demanding two-year or three-year programs more often than others and in gymnasiums significantly less. The same applies to those with a low family socioeconomic status (SES). The data suggest the SES of students is a crucial element of educational inequality: less demanding schools have statistically significantly more students with a lower SES, and students with a higher SES significantly more often enroll in more demanding schools that promise better future social positions (Dekleva & Razpotnik, 2002). This information is not available through official statistics because data about ethnic origin are not gathered.

### *2.1 Parents’ high educational aspirations: Not all schools are good enough*

Parents in Slovenia show exceptionally high educational aspirations for their children, with 79.6% of parents wanting their children to achieve a tertiary level of education (Ule et al., 2015). The interviews with parents confirmed that they viewed education as the single most important factor in their child’s future life chances, especially those related to socioeconomic position and employment prospects. “Let him study and then, if he likes it, there is no problem. I am ready, he can study all his life. I’ll finance it, there is no problem. Only that he likes it and that I see he is doing well. To see that he wants it” (father of a ninth-grade student, Koper, 2011).

In line with the expressed highly valued instrumental relevance of education, parents voice concerns about the accessibility of further education, which is influenced by the child’s past and current school performance, for example: “It’s true we have a lot to do with his grades now when he is in the ninth grade and he has to strive for points and to either keep the grades he has or to improve them. In this sense, we parents control the learning procedure. We offer help with providing some lessons, like math, sometimes chemistry, and physics, he is not a type for natural sciences, and we also prepare exercises for him. His older sister is a math genius, and she helps him. We handle everything inside the family” (mother of a ninth-grade student, Ljubljana, 2011).

Generally, parents were not worried about whether the child would actually manage to pass a chosen educational program (given their individual capabilities and previous educational record), but they expressed concern



regarding access to the chosen program. This meant that figuring out how to enroll in a chosen program and how to collect enough points proved to be the biggest preoccupation of all actors engaged in the educational process: students, parents, and teachers. Several interviewed teachers, principals, and counsellors expressed the opinion that many children in Slovenia “overestimate” themselves and then experience the consequences of these misestimates later in life. One principal commented, “And this is also evident in enrolment in secondary schools, when they overestimate themselves and the parents unfortunately also support this somehow and we find almost all of them and tell them in a friendly manner that they will be disappointed. [...] Yes, concretely, this year 18 children enrolled in gymnasium, and more than half had overestimated themselves” (principal of a basic school, Murska Sobota, 2011).

One outcome of such overestimation or over-ambition is that some students later discover that gymnasium is too demanding for them. This leads them to either drop out (and generally switch to a technical/vocational program) or to work very hard and end up with a general education with no profession and no real options for continuing their education on the tertiary level. These kinds of transitions may be viewed as unsuccessful. Further, the students’ educational aspirations depend strongly on the cultural capital of their parents, especially the mothers. The importance of a family’s social position and cultural capital in a student’s educational aspirations was strongly confirmed in the GOETE survey, since differences with regard to the mother’s education level are substantial and statistically significant: the higher the educational attainment of the mother, the higher the educational aspirations of the student (Walther et al., 2016). In Slovenia, 83% of students whose mothers have a tertiary education expect to complete tertiary education compared with 60% of those whose mothers have an upper secondary level of education and only 42% of those whose mother has a lower secondary education (Litau et al., 2013).

This is also clearly seen in the low reputation of vocational schools<sup>3</sup> in Slovenia; enrolment in vocational schools is often considered as a failure. Given this low evaluation of certain vocational levels, we may assume that the choice of secondary schools is based on a negative selection. Moreover, transitions to vocational schools today may be considered as atypical transitions

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<sup>3</sup> Upper secondary vocational training and short upper secondary vocational education; not upper secondary vocational/technical and technical education – the reputation of technical programmes is growing, especially as these schools also offer a manageable path to university (especially in related tertiary programmes).

in Slovenia. “Fifteen to twenty years ago, children were happy and proud to enroll in vocational schools. And not because they were unsuccessful, but because certain vocations were already present in their families. Today, only unsuccessful students enroll in vocational schools” (principal of a basic school, Koper, 2011).

Vocational schools are hence chosen by students with both lower school performance and lower social markers, by those who do not identify themselves as Slovenians, most likely also those whose mother tongue is not Slovenian, by children of economic immigrants (Dekleva & Razpotnik, 2002) and by persons with special needs or lower intellectual and learning abilities. Parents’ expectations and aspirations are an important element of parental involvement in the educational transitions of their children. Other surveys showed a positive correlation between parental aspirations and the level of parental involvement in the education of their children (Weinberg, 2009). Since education is perceived to be the only or the most important way of ensuring a ticket to a prosperous or even different future (especially where parents have lower social markers), parents worry extensively about their child’s success. Parents generally expect their child to achieve education one level higher than their own or at least the same level. For example, as one mother stated: “Let me put it this way, I want my children to achieve a high education, alright? If they decide to pursue further education after that, even better” (mother of a ninth-grade student, Koper).

Both children and their parents give different reasons for attributing such importance to education. At the forefront is the idea of preserving or enhancing their social status in society, providing security, and creating a feeling of being successful in life; education is expected to generate this. The following statements are typical in this context: “This is an important matter, not only because of some academic title, but purely because it makes you advance in life, it makes you widen your horizons. It means to go on, to hear from people who know more, to learn something, to exchange opinions and share your knowledge” (mother of a ninth-grade student, Koper). Parents seem to believe that in today’s competitive society the most they can do for their children is to give them as much education as possible, for instance: “I told her: [name of the child], take the book and go study, I do not want you to become a cleaning lady!” Children are not aware until they become mature, they are not aware that it would have been better if they had studied at school” (father of a ninth-grade student, Ljubljana).

The extent of the perceived relevance of education is perhaps most visible in the participation rates in non-formal education, which have been rising rapidly in the last decade, for example in the fields of culture and the arts, professional skills, and foreign language (Deželan & Lavrič, 2021) Unlike formal education, non-formal education does not lead to publicly valid

educational certificates and is not cost-free for students.<sup>4</sup> Increased participation in non-formal education is primarily a sign of the perceived importance of education attributed by both students and parents, but specifically by the parents who are increasingly willing to pay for such training. It also indicates somewhat less trust in formal education certificates as a sufficient guarantee of future employment. This has no doubt been propelled by the difficulties young people have faced in their transition to employment since the economic recession in 2008. It is also a sign of the increase in formal and non-formal, public and private education programs that promise to close the gap and ease the transition to employment. Further, as the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed, much of the education and training can take place online, which considerably expands the offer, availability, and accessibility of various courses, trainings, and workshops. Nevertheless, when additional payable education is seen as urgent for individual life paths, another pathway is instantly opened to (re)producing another form of social inequality because such education is generally available only to middle-class and upper-class families.

### *2.2 Parents intervening in teachers' work*

In order to ensure the educational trajectories of their children are on a track perceived by the parents as the right one, many parents become strongly involved in their children's educational activities and schoolwork by intervening at the school when their children do not achieve the desired results. Teachers in other European countries included in the GOETE project complained about the lack of cooperation from parents; teachers in Slovenia complained about parents intervening and interfering in their work. This is a typical statement by a teacher in Slovenia: "The parents love to interfere in the professional work of teachers. I don't know, they cannot even imagine what our profession and work look like. Despite this, they think they simply know more than us. I don't know, they would say 'oh, this here could be done differently, and that there could be done differently' and they somehow attempt to influence our professional work. They try to influence the way the lessons are conducted, they want to influence the final grades, they want to influence the oral exams, or the work itself, just about everything" (ninth grade teacher, Ljubljana, 2011).

Teachers often complained about pressure from parents, viewing parents as degrading their professional authority and autonomy. This in turn saw the number of conflicts between parents and teachers rise: "What parents

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<sup>4</sup> A great majority of students attend public school at all educational levels; such schools are state funded and are cost-free for students.

want is one thing, but what their child is capable of is another. And then they look for faults, saying which things we do not do well. I mean, it is very difficult for us because parents interfere in the learning process even regarding matters where teachers really ought to have autonomy” (ninth grade teacher, Ljubljana, 2011).

One of the more striking findings of the interviews was that counsellors in Slovenian schools only played a minor role in the decision-making processes concerned with educational transitions, despite the well-established and broad network of counselling experts working in and outside schools (Ule et al., 2016). In primary and lower secondary schools (basic schools) and in institutions related to schools it is possible to find several experts whose duties include counselling on how to select a proper educational program that fits individual capabilities, talents, motivations, and aspirations. Although this professional knowledge was available and accessible to all students in Slovenia, the important educational choices were mostly made in the family environment. Teachers and principals confirmed this finding, stating that the role of the family and parents in educational trajectories was (too) strong and that the influence of experts on these decisions had been decreasing in recent years. “Counselling takes place [in school], but our role here is not as important anymore; the parents’ role has become more important. Parents have become so powerful and ambitious for their children that they do not allow the school to suggest anything. So, here we have loosened up, but it was the only way for us” (principal assistant in basic school, Murska Sobota, 2011).

The strong influence parents exert on their children’s educational transitions is also due to children themselves choosing their parents as their first advisors and as trustworthy individuals who will always take care to ensure their best interests are being considered (Ule, 2013a). A previous analysis of parental involvement according to GOETE data showed that, at least on the declaratory level, parents believed that their children had to choose their educational path by themselves, that the parents should not (directly) interfere, and that parents were generally and largely supporters of their children (Ule et al., 2015). Still, even in the absence of a direct influence, there are many subtle, even unconscious, ways of influencing the child’s choice. For example, the choice can be affected through familial, cultural, social, and economic capital and their influence during the child’s development and growing up, or via expressed values, likes, preferences, tastes, and approval or disapproval of particular professions or institutions throughout childhood. However, one can also find parents who are more directly involved in their children’s choices, ones that act as gate-keepers (for example, preventing the child’s choice of school) and those who act as way-keepers (for example, guiding the child by informing them about other options or explaining if a desired option is better not pursued due to, for instance, the child’s physical limitations)

(Ule et al., 2015). Such active, direct, and continuous parental involvement in children's educational paths fits well with the tendency to prolong the children's dependence on the parents; this tendency has been observed everywhere in the developed world (Nelson, 2010). Unfortunately, this involvement prevents children from directly facing life's problems and developing their own strategies for resolving them. In addition, such a parental orientation may block the educational and career choices of their children. Parents make decisions instead of their children and project their own wishes onto them, often believing that "this is all for their own good."

### *2.3 The pressure for good grades*

In the interviews, parents expressed their strong desire for their children to become successful, for example: "I hold this view that a child must have good grades already in basic school. Although I'm holding myself back, it seems to me as if I unconsciously sent such signals to them, but both of them are very competitive and they want excellent grades. So, I don't know if I have burdened my children with this. It seems to me that I have already done damage" (mother of a ninth-grade student, Ljubljana, 2011). "She has no other obligations when she comes home. She only has to study. That's all" (father of a ninth-grade student, Ljubljana, 2011).

Parents' expectations can be channeled in different ways, not only through explicit demands for a desired level of education. For instance, the parental view on the relevance of education and school performance can be present in children's everyday life and everyday claims, values, and discourses. GOETE data has shown that 79% of students claimed their mother has always or frequently told them it is important to do well in school (Litau et al., 2013). Everyday conversations and values easily translate to internalized expectations and values. It appears as if children in Slovenia have internalized the desire to succeed to such an extent that sometimes even their parents have to stop them: "She tries really hard, but she says that she ought to be even better, even though I have told her that I am satisfied" (mother of a ninth-grade student, Murska Sobota, 2011).

This is confirmed by youth research data emerging over the last two decades. The data show that school plays a central role in the everyday lives of young people, especially or precisely because school grades are very important for their parents. A survey conducted in 2000 among Slovenian ninth graders revealed some surprising data: 62.9% of students were dissatisfied with their school grades. Even those with excellent grades and very good grades were not satisfied with their school success. Among those dissatisfied with their school success, up to 70.6% were dissatisfied only because they thought they could have achieved more (Miheljak, 2002).

The students' dissatisfaction with their school success meant they often were afraid of failing at school. Up to 38.5% of the respondents felt a great fear of school failure. A further 45.7% felt the fear of failing at school was a moderately big personal problem. Even 27.9% of students with excellent grades responded that such fear was a very big personal problem for them. In the survey, fear of failing was assessed as a considerable burden by students who were dissatisfied with their school success due to pressure from their parents (73.7%), as well as those who expected that their achieved grades would make it difficult for them to enroll in a secondary school (62.9%). Further, 49% of children perceived the excessive expectations of their parents as a great problem. Children clearly assumed the responsibility for turning these expectations into a reality (Ule, 2013b). It seems that warnings about children being overworked, which are based only on time spent working, are wrong only insofar as they overlook the psychological burdens that arise from constant attempts to be successful. Nonetheless, data from 2010 showed that parents were not that demanding, since almost 61% of parents stated they were satisfied with their child's academic achievement thus far (Litau et al., 2013). However, 35% of parents were not satisfied; they believed their child could achieve more. This is an important share of parents, who we expect to also be demanding parents, holding high educational aspirations and in turn exerting pressure on their children and possibly also on the teachers.

Data on students support these results. On average, students did not consider their parents to be demanding too much of them given that 50.2% of them in 2010 and 57.3% in 2020 (strongly) disagreed that their parent was too demanding; these responses were below the average score (Deželan & Lavrič, 2021). Yet, 15.2% and 16.6% of students agreed that their parents were too demanding. A large share of students were undecided on the topic, which could again signal the internalization of parental expectations and the struggle to meet the parental and consequently their own expectations. Nevertheless, the analysis showed the most significant parental pressure on school performance was seen with students with a lower educational attainment (Deželan & Lavrič, 2021).

### **3 Discussion: The contradictions of parents' involvement in educational trajectories**

It is beyond doubt that parents in Slovenia today have a very important role when it comes to monitoring the educational and professional careers of their children. They provide assistance and support for education of all kinds, including supplying important information on available options and useful networks and contacts (using their social capital) that might prove beneficial

for further study and professional careers. Parents permanently affect their children's attitude to education. This influence is linked to specific moments and transitions in a child's education and is ongoing throughout childhood and young adulthood. More supportive parents facilitate the well-being and confidence of their children, thereby affecting their psychophysical development. They also cooperate in a better and more efficient manner with the school and help to solve the learning problems of their children. In comparison, children who do not receive enough support from their parents find it more difficult to overcome the stresses caused by their school failures. They are less confident and more prone to social behavioral problems.

Simultaneously, many analysts have warned that the education of the parents is important since it very subtly influences the school success of their children (Ule et al., 2016). Parents who are better educated argue more effectively in support of their children and better represent them at the school. Research shows that teachers provide significantly more attention to children whose parents come to school more often and who more clearly articulate their care, demands, expectations, etc. At the same time, teachers interpret the rarer visits of the less educated parents as a sign of neglecting the schoolwork of their children (Ule, 2013b). Research shows that, on average, less educated parents less frequently visit their child's teacher and that this is not an indicator of their negligence of their child's schoolwork but more of their feelings of incompetence.

In Slovenia, parents are strongly involved in their children's education and have great influence over their children's educational decisions and plans. The great majority of Slovenian parents' rationale could be best described as "Only the best for my child!" Slovenian families are, in most cases, child-centered; they invest immense amounts of effort, time, and money in their children's education and in planning their futures (Ule et al., 2015). Parents thus play a protective role and at the same time place a great amount of pressure on their children, burdening them with high demands (enrolment in general upper secondary programs) and sometimes even taking on the decision making about their children's future and relieving them of making these decisions themselves.

It seems that Slovenia follows the parental model described by Côté (2007) in which schools and parents act as "guardians of access" to various forms of educational achievements and levels of adulthood, instead of helping them to become young adults, achieving positive emotional stability, critical thinking, independence, and sensitivity to other people and society and using mature moral judgement (Côté, 2007). Young people need precisely these psychological and character traits to attain the psychological vitality and capacity to successfully understand and manage the social, professional, and personal obstacles and opportunities that everyone faces in life.

## Conclusions

The great significance of parental involvement in schoolwork and children’s educational trajectories makes it a newly recognized factor in the social differentiation of children. The new trends in the patterns of family socialization and upbringing have a more covert normative side that sanctions those parents and children who do not know how, or are unable, to create a supportive family atmosphere. This negative sanctioning instills guilt in parents for the real or measurable as well as the assumed socialization shortcomings of their children. The children, on the other side, feel guilty about their educational shortcomings and failures.

The actual core of these guilty feelings is, however, overlooked – the existing social differences that push certain groups of people into disadvantaged life conditions. As a result, social inequality is transformed from an interclass inequality into an intraclass inequality. This does not mean that interclass inequalities are becoming any less important; on the contrary, it simply means that an additional significant form of the social differentiation of young people is emerging within social classes. For a young person, intraclass differentiation is often even more painful and challenging than interclass inequality. Children and young people are thereby divided into privileged and underprivileged individuals, not only through the social or economic position of their families, but also with respect to how supportive their parents are and if they possess enough cultural and social capital to provide the necessary educational support to their children at home and appropriately communicate and represent them at the school (Živoder & Ule, 2020).

Jeremy Rifkin ascertained that in the process of economic liberalization many substantial social rights were replaced by rights of access (Rifkin, 2000). This trend was caused by both neoliberal interests and the diminishing power of national welfare states. It seems as if increased globalization and the greater complexity of self-responsibility in the activation and policy of lifelong learning are expressions of the embarrassing admission of state institutions that are no longer capable of assuring their sovereignty in the form of the social inclusion of their citizens. Within this framework, the right to equal and universal access for all people to various educational levels is manifested as a moment of individual choice regarding one’s own life and career path, which does not ensure the social integration of individuals. While it is true that in the actual circumstances of the labor market and capital distribution, the individual includes, engages, and enters into various forms of socio-economic relations, they hardly, if ever, reach a more permanent and stable social role.



In transition countries with a weak economic basis and feeble democratic tradition, like Slovenia, these forms of uncertainty mostly affect young people from socially deprived groups and environments. These are young people who most often choose less prospective or more socially stigmatized educational and vocational paths. However, the rest of the young generation, who choose educational paths with supposedly greater prospects, often cannot find themselves in their school achievements and certificates and instead lean on random and mostly temporary opportunities for self-confirmation. In these cases, the education system as an institution for the social integration of young generations turns into an institution of social segregation.

Hegemonic discourses of good parenting and corresponding practices are often adapted to the middle class. They ignore the social, economic, and political obstacles as well as the inequities that create the norm of responsible “good” parenting that is unattainable for families from deprived social backgrounds. They also blame marginalized parents for their children’s low school achievements (Lareau, 2003; Turney & Kao, 2009). For various reasons, such as unemployment or precarious jobs, migrant status, health problems, and divorce, not every family is able to deliver adequate support. Therefore, discourses on good parenting in education are suited to well-functioning, middle-class parents, which many families, especially those with lower cultural and social capital, cannot meet. Hence, parental involvement plays a dual role in the social differentiation of children. On one hand, it reproduces the existing interclass inequalities through the available capitals of families leading to less prospective educational choices for socially and economically disadvantaged children; on the other, it produces new interclass and intraclass differences despite the emotional and supportive practices in education. Parental support is thus one source for the reproduction of social differences and a mechanism of social exclusion.

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