



Tracks and academic self-appraisal in secondary education: A qualitative study in Flanders

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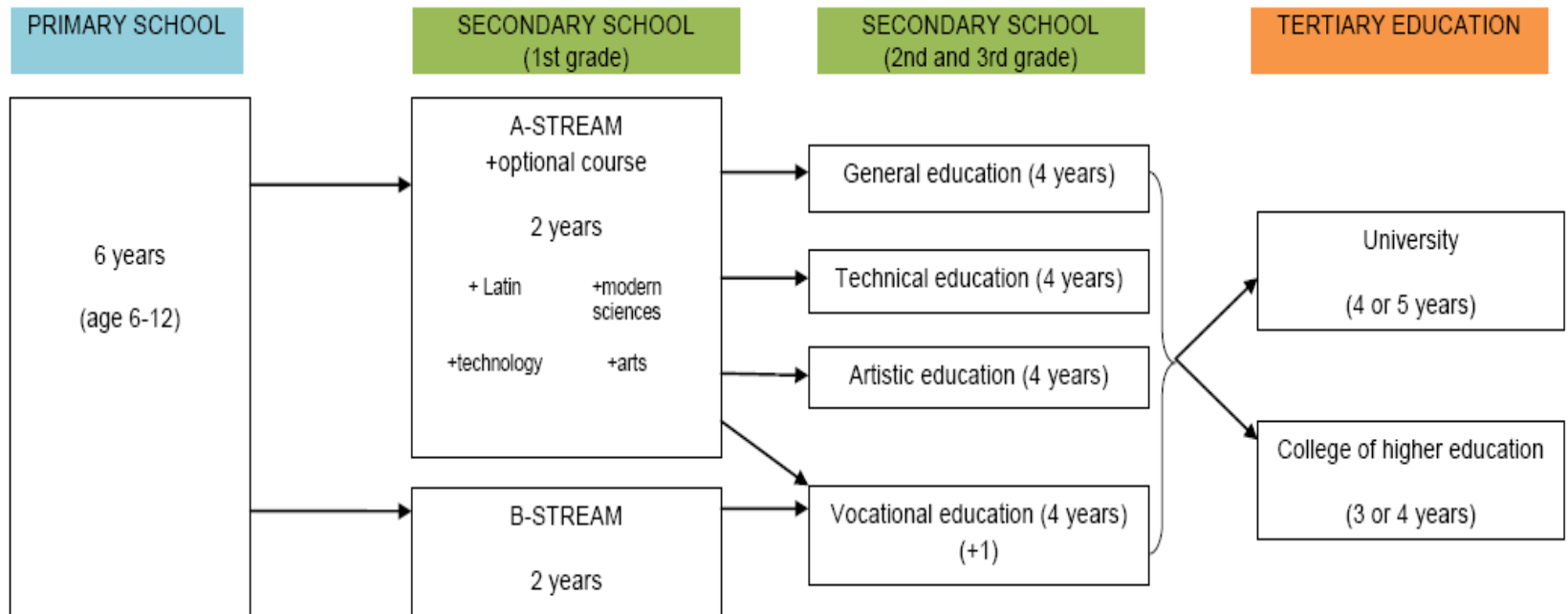
Explorative research

- Focus on educational success of (ethnic minority) students

Research methods

- ‘Participant as observer’ and semi-structured interviews
- Theoretical sampling:
 - School characteristics
 - 3 schools, 10 class groups, 129 students
 - Fifth year of secondary education, 1 post-secondary specialisation course
 - 16-23 years old

The Flemish educational system





Self-appraisal?



Level of study?

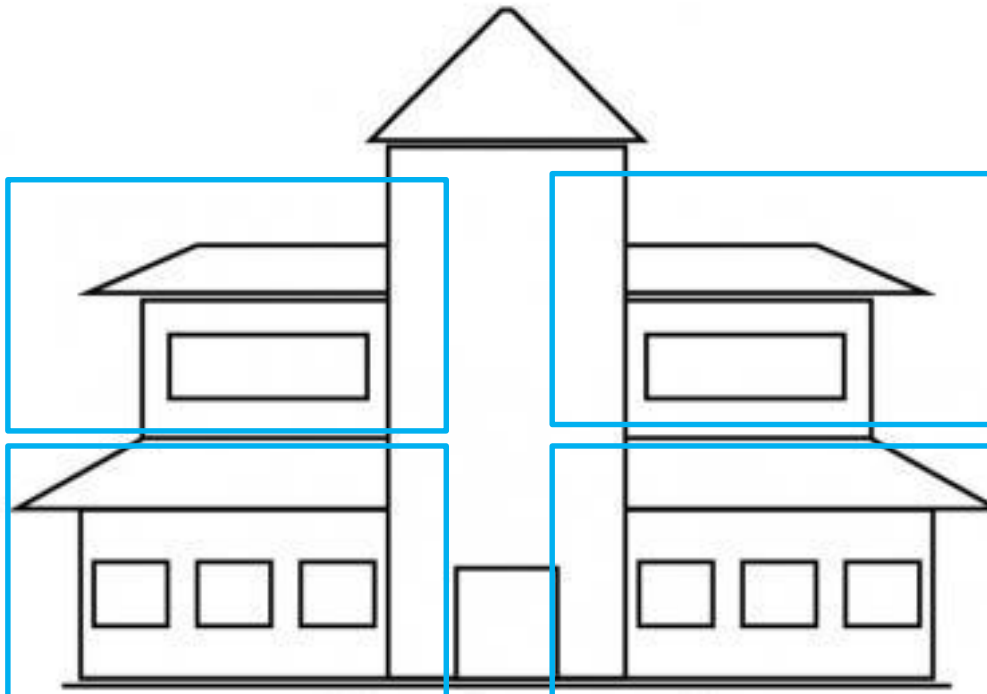


Level of study?

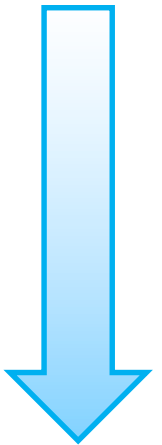




Tracks



Academic
Artistic
Technical
Vocational





Track comparison

- Between-track comparison?
- Within-track comparison?
- Interplay within- and between-track comparisons?
- Variation across tracks?



Appreciation of tracks

Sander (technical track) :

“I would send my children **first to the academic track**, and see where they end up (...) so they start in the highest [track], and if they want to, they have still the opportunity **to drop down**. Because, if you start in the middle [technical track], you can’t go up again”



Personal evaluations of success in **academic** tracks

Researcher: “Do you think you are successful in school?”

Nafia (academic track): “Well, we are now currently enrolled in the fifth year of secondary education and the fifth is like...look at what we have accomplished, everything that preceded and then...**‘Aaaah! I am in fifth grade!’ It’s probably because we are here at a good spot.**”

Sidika (academic track): “I am at a good spot, I am satisfied and I do my best at school”

Nafia (interrupts): I am satisfied too. We are in fifth grade and it’s more difficult but you also realize ‘I did it!’, because in your first year, we were always like ‘Oh shit, I probably won’t make it because ASO is too difficult and those exams will be too difficult and I will probably get confronted with some racist teachers. But when I look at myself, sitting here in fifth grade, I think it’s a big step, like it’s something else: **sitting in fifth grade of the academic track!**”



Personal evaluations of success in **vocational** tracks

Between-track comparison is negative:

Bahar: 'I did not want to go to Sales because it's more like...you are *low*'

BUT positive self-appraisals of academic success:

Plant: 'I am performing well, like, I do my best but I am not a *Blokko* [egghead] who studies five hours every day, but I am satisfied with my grades.'

= contradictory?



Other criteria of success

Researcher: 'what do you have to do to succeed in school?'

Shania: 'To succeed in school? It is important to do your best'. (...)

'school does not interest me at all, I really do not do a thing and **I could not care less**'

Researcher: 'Do you think you are successful in school or not?'

Wassila: 'I have a lot of **friends**'



Upgrade vocational tracks

Elvis: “Yes, **I feel a different approach**, the way they look at you although they don’t know you. There is a small kid at school, who is constantly saying things like: ‘**I am enrolled in the academic track, so I will have a better job** and blablabla’. **But that’s not true!** If you don’t finish your [secondary] school, then... then your job will be worse than mine and at least, **I like my job**. So for me, that’s not a job, it’s more a hobby for which I will get paid.”



Dissociation

Elvis: “Most people, like in my previous school, they knew me. I was...like I said: I was **too smart for those enrolled in BSO**. (...) Most people that are enrolled in BSO are not stupid, they’re just **lazy**.”

Researcher: “What does it mean to have **no success** in school?”

Arnoud: “Like my buddy, he knew that he would not pass. He had the same results for PAV [general course] and other theoretical subjects but in the practical subjects, he was not worth a thing. He did not care a thing. The only thing he cared about was ‘Wow, a car, finely tuned’ or ‘Oh, it is a V motor, it has that many Horsepower’. We all know that! But you know, with car freaks like us, we say ‘our bougie [stark plug] is broken’ and he asks ‘What is a bougie?’. **Someone who really cares about cars does not only has to know the outside, but also the inside. A normal car freak is like us**, we try to know how to set up a car. If you want a special colour for your motor, we get the motor out, take all the different parts out, pssht, we paint it, put the motor back and it is finished. He goes to the garage and asks ‘Can you do that for me?’. We do it ourselves.”



Conclusion

- Academic tracks
 - Between-track comparison = favourable
- Vocational tracks
 - Between-track comparison = less advantageous
 - BUT: in search for ways to evaluate oneself as successful:
 - Other criteria of success
 - Putting vocational tracks in a more positive light
 - Dissociation from negative stereotypes (within-track comparison)



Questions?

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