

## CHANGE IN PUPILS' ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF CLASSES IN FINLAND

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Classes with a special emphasis have become an important part of the Finnish basic education system since their introduction in the 1990's. Nowadays, an increasing number of pupils attend these classes, which, compared to general classes without a special emphasis, have more lessons in the target subject (e.g. music or languages) as well as the possibility to select pupils through aptitude tests (Seppänen, Rinne & Riipinen, 2012). Some researchers have been concerned about the effects that these classes might have on the equality of opportunity in the Finnish non-tracking basic education system but also potential positive consequences have been speculated.

Research on the Big-Fish-Little-Pond-Effect (BFLPE) (e.g. Marsh, Seaton, Trautwein, Ludtke, Hau, O'Mara & Craven 2008) grounds on the assumption that pupils' academic self-concept is influenced by comparisons to their peer groups' performance level. The theory predicts that equally able students have lower academic self-concept in a group where the average ability level is high than in a group where the average ability level is low. While the Finnish basic education system is known for its equality and small achievement differences between schools and pupils (Sulkunen et. al., 2010), classes with special emphasis have been seen to act like implicit tracks as they gather well-achieving children from affluent families (Berisha & Seppänen 2015). The common assumption that policy-makers and parents hold regarding those classes is similar with 'reflected glory effect' (i.e. it is expected that studying in a selective, well-achieving class would be beneficial for children's self-beliefs and motivation). Therefore it will be interesting to see whether BFLPE holds in the Finnish context.

Research questions: 1) Are there differences in the development of pupils' academic self-concept between pupils who study in classes with and without a special emphasis from grade 4 to 6? 2) Is the Big-Fish-Little-Pond-Phenomenon visible in the Finnish context?

This research is part of a longitudinal study from grade 1 to 9 in a large Finnish municipality. The data (N=1065) was collected by the Centre for Educational Assessment at the University of Helsinki and it includes several assessment points and tests. For this presentation, we use the academic self-concept scales and pupils' achievement test scores from grades 4 and 6. The participants (N=1025; 52% girls; mean age at grade four=9.60, SD=0.52) came from 47 classes, of which 11 were classes with a special emphasis (N=291). Of those classes, six focused on languages, four on music and/or dance, and one on sports.

The results were analysed with structural equation modelling in Mplus.

The preliminary results showed that classes with and without a special emphasis did not differ in the level of, nor regarding the change in, academic self-concept. However, analyses reveal that the Big-Fish-In-A-Little-Pond-Phenomenon also exist in Finland.