Early selection and education of the migrants in the Netherlands: A critical discourse analysis (national report for WP7)

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EARLY SELECTION AND EDUCATION OF THE MIGRANTS IN THE NETHERLANDS:

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

NATIONAL REPORT FOR WP7

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OVERVIEW OF WORK PACKAGE

This report presents data gathered within the framework of WP7, which focuses on high-level governance of educational transitions. We explored governance issues at more local (school) level within WP6 by interviewing a variety of actors, including principals, teachers, students, parents, and internal and external experts. In WP7, we turn our attention to higher level actors and seek to understand how policy is created, debated, enacted and commented upon. These processes are studied by focusing on two "policy frictions" that generate heated discussions within the Netherlands, and are at the same time central to the main themes of GOETE. As defined within the WP7 research outline, a "friction" refers to:

> "... an area of policy related to either or both of the educational transitions that has become identified publicly - in national local, official, media discourses - as a clear area of concern for certain policy actors and stakeholders; there is seen to be some kind of substantive issue that needs to be addressed and solutions are being (or should be) suggested, implemented and/or contested" (GOETE, 2011).

We selected "early selection" and "education of immigrants" as our policy frictions (the rationale for this will be described below). While analysing these frictions, we have not only focused on governance but also on other main themes of GOETE, namely, relevance, access, life course and coping. These frictions were studied by using two research methodologies: we organised interviews with 10 high level experts (including officials at the Ministry of Education, representatives of high level governing bodies of educational institutions, teacher unions, academics and journalists). In addition, we conducted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on policy documents relating to our frictions. For each friction, we selected three policy documents, and several other documents were used to expand our understanding of the general discussions around the two frictions. The fieldwork for WP7 started in June 2011 and finalised in December 2011.

In this report, we will first inform about the methodology (e.g. selection of policy documents and experts), and then proceed with the analysis of the frictions. Our analysis will focus on three aspects: 1) general policy background, 2) findings of the CDA, and 3) analysis of expert interviews. These will be followed by a discussion for each friction in order to engage the

outcomes of the CDA with findings generated via expert interviews. We will conclude with highlighting the main findings and pointing out some policy implications.

1.2. RATIONALE FOR SELECTION OF NATIONAL FRICTIONS

Our first friction is "early selection", which is one of the main defining characteristics of the Dutch education system, differentiating it from many other countries in Europe and elsewhere. Early selection implies that students in the Netherlands are selected into highly differentiated educational trajectories at an early age (around 12) based upon their perceived aptitude (national test and teacher's advice). Attempts to introduce more comprehensive types of schooling have failed (e.g. comprehensive schools). The issue of early selection and tracking is still on the political agenda though. Three of the central elements of this issue are: 1) the relationship between early selection and socio-economic and gender inequalities; 2) the relationship between students' achievements (and future labour market perspectives) and the different types of secondary schools, due to differences in, among others, the curriculum, teachers' expectations, teacher quality and student composition. Since early selection is central to transition into lower secondary schools, and pre-determines to a great extent students' educational career, it was almost a 'natural' and obvious choice.

"Education of immigrants" is selected as our second friction in line with the agreement among GOETE partners to have it as a common friction across participating countries. This topic is a highly relevant one for the Dutch policy context since education and integration of immigrants is a recurrent theme within political discussions since the 1980s (less so since the coming into power of the current right-wing government). The position of immigrant children within education system continues to be a great concern for educators because of their relatively low educational performance, poor participation in higher tracks of secondary education and in higher education institutions, and relatively high repetition and dropout rates (Karsten, 2010). Furthermore, high levels of educational segregation closely relate to this topic, and generate a lot of heated discussions within the country. In our document analysis, we particularly focused on school segregation as the complexity of this problem enabled us to engage with a range of problems that related to education of immigrants.

It is important to also mention that although these two policy areas will be discussed and analysed as separate "frictions" they are closely interlinked. This is because early tracking has more adverse effects on the education of students coming from lower socio-economic

background. The majority of immigrant students come from such backgrounds, therefore, early tracking closely relates to discussions on the opportunities of immigrant students to study at higher tracks of secondary education and in higher education. Furthermore, early selection policy leads to increased differentiation in social composition of schools, hence contributes to intensification of school segregation.

1.3. SUMMARY OF NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

In the past two decades, a series of large scale, system-wide reforms were introduced in the Dutch education system. Similar to many other countries around the world, these reforms were highly influenced by globalisation, knowledge economies discourse and neo-liberal policies (Karsten, 1999). Reforms were introduced in major policy areas from the content of curriculum to the organisation of the education system, from employment conditions to personal management and funding. Reforms can be broadly categorised into two groups: The first line of reforms aimed at addressing intrinsic educational issues, such as sustaining a smooth transition from one type or level of education to a subsequent one, improving co-operation between mainstream primary schools and special schools, reducing group sizes in primary education, stimulating the use of ICT, and introducing a new financing system for students who are in need of special care. The second line of reforms was related to issues such as financing, personnel management and conditions of service, and included a large component of deregulation and devolution of responsibilities (Verbrugge, 2009).

The overall trend in recent reforms can be characterised as an on-going process aimed at devolving responsibilities and problem solving capacities to a lower level, from central government to the organisations of employers and employees, to local authorities and to school boards. While central government retained its responsibility for providing direction within the education system (what public tasks must be fulfilled, the conditions for doing so, the funds), schools were given greater financial, managerial and educational freedom. Some of the major reform initiatives included harmonising and broadening early childhood education, increasing autonomy, deregulation and decentralisation in primary education, introducing block grant funding to schools, changes in weighting system, merging individual schools (for efficiency reasons) into big organisations that can be run by specialised managerial staff, and initiatives aimed at reducing drop-out. In addition, extended schools were introduced in order to bridge the gap between crèche, preschool and primary school and to provide after- school care for all children. This reform allows for more out-of-school activities and for parents (mothers) the

opportunity to work. While the extended school is almost universal for the primary sector, it is still expanding in secondary education (du Bois-Reymond, 2009).

When reforms were evaluated in retrospect, they were considered too many by politicians, teachers and the general public (see also GOETE, 2012a, chapters on Relevance and Governance). Hence, there are concerns that the education system was overloaded and burdened by too many change demands. The reform implementation process was also criticized in some other ways: there were arguments that the reforms were implemented without thorough preparation of the field and were withdrawn hastily when detrimental consequences became visible. Often no reliable evaluations of the long term consequences were made or could be made. For instance, the new didactic approaches, which advocated more autonomous and self-administered forms of student learning, were introduced without adequate preparation of the teachers (see also GOETE, 2012b). Moreover, the reforms were criticised for not only failing to achieve their objectives but also inadvertently creating new problems.

Education remains a highly contested and debated area among the Dutch public, as it closely relates to some other important societal issues such as employment, economic development, and competitiveness of Dutch economy, welfare, and integration. Different actors have made diverse diagnosis of weaknesses and failings of the education system, often reflecting their own interest areas, values, and positions within the system. For instance, decentralisation has been installed in several areas within education sector and the government establishes the central criteria. However, as it has fewer ways of exerting influence on schools than it previously had, this raises the question of whether the government still has enough significance in these educational areas. Besides, mergers of schools and governance of a few schools under the same board seem to have threatened the freedom of choice, a hallmark of Dutch education system (Education Council, 2009).

Additionally, there are concerns that as a result of recent education reforms, education has become a "business"; that too many responsibilities and tasks were allocated to schools and teachers, overwhelming their capacity; and overhead costs of schools have increased substantially as they have increasingly employed more staff to manage and administer the schools which have become quite large. In contrast to the expectations, mergers among schools have not also increased the economies of scale and did not improve the efficiency of the system (Verbrugge, 2009). In addition, eliminating segregation of the system alongside "black" and "white" schools, tackling too big school organisations, reducing bureaucracy, and improving educational achievement of non-Western students are viewed as important policy concerns.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 SELECTION OF POLICY DOCUMENTS

We first conducted a broad literature review on the two frictions: early selection and education of immigrants. This review included a variety of documents, including policy notes, academic articles, publications of organizations involved in education and editorial columns in the media. After reading through the documents, a general outline of the main discussions pertaining to these two frictions was defined. Afterwards, the documents for CDA were selected on the basis of the following criteria: 1) documents which had the largest influence on the discussions among politicians, academics or media, 2) documents that are frequently cited by these actors in their publications, communications or public discussions, and 3) documents which reflect the main opposing positions. In addition, the type of the document was also considered and we tried to involve different types in our analysis, such as a publication of an influential international organisation (OECD), publications of the main advisory institution in the Netherlands (Education Council), a letter from the current Minister addressing the Parliament, a newspaper column, and a document published by an interest group. Based on these considerations, we selected the following documents for early selection:

1. **OECD (2007).** *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education.* **Paris: OECD.**
   This document had a huge impact on Dutch policy makers and educationalists and revived the everlasting debate on the benefits and drawbacks of early tracking policy. Although it does not directly address the Netherlands, it (heavily) criticizes countries which have an early tracking system, such as Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The publication was seriously considered by the Minister (of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science) at the time, who later requested an advisory study by the Education Council. This document is also selected since it clearly outlines the rationale of those who are against early selection in the Netherlands. In fact, the report is often used by such individuals and organisations to strengthen their arguments. In fact, the majority of the documents published on the topic since the release of this report make reference to the OECD study. Ultimately, it did not lead to a system-wide change in the Netherlands but stirred up

substantial policy debates on the topic and contributed to the development of a number of policy interventions to compensate for the possible adverse effects of early tracking.

2. **Onderwijs Raad [Education Council] (2010).** *Vroeg of laat? Advies over de vroege selectie in het Nederlandse onderwijs* **[Early or Late? Advice on the Early Selection in the Dutch Education System]***.* **The Hague: Education Council.**

This is the report published by the Education Council after conducting the study requested by the Minister. It responds to the questions raised by the OECD document mentioned above, and advices a number of policy measures to the government. It is also a highly cited document, in fact one of the main reference documents for discussions on early selection within the Netherlands in recent years. Since the document does not support any system-wide changes, and disagrees with OECD recommendation to postpone the tracking moment, it reflects the position of those who are pro-early selection in the Netherlands. However, it still differs from the 'official' discourse since the document acknowledges equity concerns, but suggests responding to those concerns via a number of incremental interventions without delaying selection moment.

3. **Van Bijsterveldt, J.M. (2011). De brief van de Minister van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap aan de Voorzitter van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal [Letter of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to the President of the Dutch House of Representatives], March 13, 2011. The Hague: the Netherlands.**

This letter addressing the Parliament informs about the policy directions which will be taken after the advisory document of the Education Council was published. It is an important document as it indicates the priority areas of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and informs the rationale of the policy choices taken. It takes a strongly pro-early selection policy, and hints the current government's general tendency to avoid equity issues and focus more generally on education quality. This document is important as it illustrates the Ministry's viewpoint on the issue, hence, the official discourse on early tracking.

Furthermore, for education of immigrants, we selected the below mentioned documents for analysis:

1. **Onderwijs Raad [Education Council] (2005). Bakens voor spreiding en integratie [*Beacons for dispersal and integration*]. The Hague: Education Council.**

   This document responds to a Ministerial question on school segregation in the Netherlands, one of the most widely discussed topics in relation to education of migrants. The document not only specifically analyses a policy measure taken by a school in Rotterdam, but also informs about school segregation in general, and offers some policy suggestions. What is significant about this document is that it considers segregation an important concern, or a 'problem' that needs to resolved, and links it closely to the broader and rather significant issue of integration of migrants to Dutch society. These issues and concerns no longer rate high in the current political agenda. Therefore, the document reflects a rather different political atmosphere from just seven years ago. Since it is an Education Council report, it had a political influence on the topic.

2. **Volkskrant, February 7, 2011, 'Kabinet accepteert zwarte scholen' [Government accepts black schools]. Written by Robin Gerrits and Ron Meerhof.**
   This newspaper column outlines the official discourse on segregation issue, and more broadly the approach of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to education of immigrants. Since the column is based on an interview with the current Minister, it clearly indicates the policy directions and the rationale behind it. The column interprets the current government's policy of discarding segregation as a problem (or priority issue) as a major policy shift and a break from the policy lines of the previous governments. However, there is not much criticism offered on the policy.

3. Kenniscentrum Gemengde Scholen [Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools] (2011) *Vluchten kan niet meer? Segregatie en het voortgezet onderwijs* **[Escaping is not possible anymore? Segregation and secondary education].**

This document is selected for analysis as it takes the opposite position of Ministry's discourse on migration and education, and particularly on school segregation. This document was prepared in a way as a reaction to the Ministry's policy of avoiding migration and education issues, and not seeing school segregation as a 'problem'. The document aims to demonstrate that offering quality education in segregated schools involve additional challenges. In addition, even if educational performance of these students reaches the national average, policy makers and educators should still be concerned about school segregation since it hinders integration of migrants into broader society. The document addresses a variety of actors within the educator sector, and attempts to mobilise them for action at municipal and school level. Therefore, the document is interesting in terms of illustrating how an interest group develops a counter argument to the official discourse and advocates action among local actors.

2.2 DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

After choosing the documents on which CDA will be conducted, the documents were first thoroughly read and notes were taken to highlight the main points. Afterwards, the documents were read again using the following 'orienting questions':

1. What are the problems that are being addressed? (In what genre(s) is the problem definition and solutions located in and how does this regulate the problem?)
2. How are the problems defined, represented, and legitimated? (What discourse or form of representation of the problem are presented and mobilised? Are there forms of intertexuality? What are the linguistic features of the text [metaphors, text structure, metaphors, and cohesion])?
3. Who is the reader? (What are the genre, style, and representation? How does this regulate the text?)

4. Is there a subject of the problem? (What style is used to urge the reader to accept the problem definition and solution?)

5. What solutions are generated to the problem? (Is the solution shaped by the field of reference? Orders of discourse? Are there obvious or subtle contradictions in the solutions?)

6. Are some possible solutions discounted? (What orders of discourse frame the problem and absences? What form of classification is being used?)

7. What patterns of language (collocations) are evident that locate the problem within a particular ideological framework? (What order of discourse frames the problem and the solution? Do equivalences and differences get mobilized and how?)

8. What alternatives can be derived?

In the presentation of the analysis, the text is structured alongside these orienting questions as much as possible. Furthermore, in order to adequately respond to some of the questions (such as "what alternatives are discounted?"), some other documents relating to the frictions were read and analysed. Obviously, CDA requires such broader knowledge of the topic in order to take a critical stance at the very documents analysed.

2.3 SELECTION OF POLICY EXPERTS

2.3.1 POLICY MAKERS, BROKERS AND COMMENTATORS

Policy experts were selected according to two criteria: a) their position as influential actors in the educational field and b) their expertise pertaining to the chosen policy issues early selection and integration. They represent a broad range of sectors and platforms in the field of education (see 2.4).

2.3.2 PROBLEMS/ISSUES WITH CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted between September 2011 and November 2011. All interviews took place at the offices of the experts. The interviewers were senior researchers and usually the

interviews took place on a one-to-one basis. Only in two cases was the interviewer accompanied by a junior researcher, and in two cases the interviewee was accompanied by another person from the organization.

Interviewee's were approached several weeks preceding the planned interview, which was necessary as high profile experts have very busy agenda's. Once an appointment was made, further contact was easy and all interviews were conducted in a pleasant and informal way. They lasted between one and two hours, were voice recorded and were later integral transcribed.

2.4 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT POLICY EXPERTS

Here, we provide very brief background information about the experts in order to protect their unanimity.

Mr. R.B. was chosen as a member of the national *Education Council*, a highly influential and independent body which advises the government on educational issues, solicited as well as unsolicited.

Mr. P.v.M. was chosen as a member of the *National Council of Higher Professional Education* and in charge of all levels of vocational education. The Council represents the whole sector of higher professional education and is their formal employer.

Mr. S. S. is the head of the board of the *Dutch association for the school boards and individual schools of secondary education*. The association is the main negotiation partner for the government and other authorities (including unions) in the sector.

Mrs. E.D. is member of the *Association of Dutch Municipalities* and represents in that organ the sector education. The Association is meant to support municipalities in their work and negotiate with the central government.

Mrs. A.V. is a *leading journalist* who reports about education issues in national press organs. She has written a highly influential book on the problems of "black" and "white" schools.

Mr. W.S. is member of the *teachers union* and from that position a critical voice in the educational debate, particularly concerning integration and early selection.

Mr. S.K. is a *university professor* and a widely recognized expert on educational matters, especially concerning educational policies (e.g. segregation, integration, school choice).

Mr. J.d.V. is a *policy officer* at the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, specifically in charge of drop-out problems.

Mr. P.O. is a *policy officer* at the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, coordinating research activities related to secondary education.

Mr. T. E. is the *author* of a highly influential research on early school leaving in upper secondary vocational education

2.5 DEVELOPMENT OF INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interviews were semi-structured, according to a check list which was slightly adjusted to fit the knowledge specialization of the interviewee but contained in essence questions which pertained to four major areas:

1. Broad view on education system and its relevant functions in general (knowledge economy/society) and more in particular to disadvantaged student groups (including migrants);
2. Interviewee's opinions about problems in education, particularly for disadvantaged students and their transition opportunities (early selection; opportunities for migrants);
3. Cooperation partners;
4. Solutions according to interviewee's vision and expertise.

3. FRICTION 1: EARLY SELECTION

3.1 POLICY BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Early selection is one of the defining characteristics of the Dutch education system. Unlike the majority of OECD countries which track children into different types of schools at the age of 15 or 16, in the Netherlands tracking takes place after primary education at the age of 12. Based on

CITO (a central exam test) results as well as advice of primary school teachers/principals (based on educational achievement, interests and motivation levels), children are eligible to apply to three different secondary schools: pre-university (VWO), general secondary (HAVO) and vocational (VMBO) education. Since such differentiation takes place when children are still at a young age, it is defined as 'early selection'.

Even though the policy is well embedded within the education system, it has stirred heated discussions among policy makers, educators, media and general public in different periods in the past. These discussions have resurfaced recently after an OECD publication in 2007 which criticised Dutch education system because of its early selection. The report argued that early selection reinforces inequalities within the Dutch society and limits opportunities of young people to study at higher education institutions. The report particularly makes reference to students with low socio-economic background (including a large share of non-Western immigrant students), and claims that their study opportunities at higher, non-vocational tracks of secondary education as well as progression to higher education is restricted because of early selection.

The incumbent Minister of Education, Culture and Science seriously considered OECD criticisms and initiated some public discussions on the merits and drawbacks of early selection. The Minister also requested a comprehensive study on the topic by Education Council, an independent, advisory body that advises the government on the main outlines of policy and legislation relating to education. The Council published its report in 2010, *Vroeg of Laat?* [Early or Late?]' Within the report, although the Council recognised the concerns, it maintained that postponing selection moment is not necessary; and the differentiation is required to maintain and improve the education quality. Hence the Council did not suggest any major system changes and only recommended some measures to expand the opportunities of students from lower socio-economic background to study at higher tracks of secondary education and to improve their educational achievement in general.

Both reports will be further analysed below as they constitute the central policy documents framing the recent discussions on this topic within the Netherlands. In fact, in recent years, a stream of national think thanks, pressure groups, academics, and 'high profile' commentators in the political arena and the media were involved in a wide national policy discussion. Their policy texts vary from maker, broker and commentator documents, and endeavour to influence the existing policy. The discussions in these policy texts can be characterized by sharp discursive differences and juxtapositions. What is evident is that there is

a lack of consensus on the effects of early selection. The different argumentations in these texts can be roughly divided in two contradicting discourses: anti- and pro-early selection.

3.1.1. ANTI-EARLY SELECTION

Anti- early selection discourses emphasize the inequalities which the Dutch education system creates and/or reinforces by early selection policy. They see the moment of selection as one of the most problematic issue, and therefore, put much discursive priority on systematic changes (to delay selection moment for a few more years) or modifications that would remedy the adverse effects of early selection for the disadvantaged students. Early selection is considered to have a negative effect on equity because it limits participation of students from lower tracks to study at higher tracks of secondary education and higher education institutions. Yet, unlike those who argue that early selection contributes to better quality, the proponents of this discourse are not convinced that there is such a strong positive effect on quality. Furthermore, early selection prematurely forces young people to make choices that would influence their life course for many years to come as they are selected into academic or vocational tracks at a very early age, and at vocational schools they are required to even make occupational choices.

This discourse is disseminated strongly by some non-state and former government policy shapers. The groundwork of this discourse that emphasizes equity-issues was laid by the OECD with their abovementioned assessment (OECD, 2007). For instance, the deputy secretary-general of the OECD confirmed (in 2010) the need for improving equity by postponing the selection age, having more heterogeneous groups at secondary schools, and offering stronger student guidance for the lower performing students. In line with the OECD, two prominent political actors - the previous Minister of Education (Plasterk from 2008), and the president of the Social Economic Council (SER) Rinnooy Kan (2007) advocated for ambitious education reforms to provide better educational opportunities for the disadvantaged students. They both argued that efforts to improve equity do not necessarily undermine education quality, but in fact such measures can go together with policies aiming at 'excellence'.

Furthermore, they promoted policies to improve the flexibility of secondary education so that transfer between different tracks would be more feasible in practice. Such measures would help to correct some 'under-advising' practising, such as students are being allocated to vocational schools even though their potential is higher. 'Under-advising' appears to be a case for more migrant students than native Dutch since at the age of selection their language

proficiency in Dutch is lower. Hence in CITO, it is their language skills in Dutch and not so much content knowledge in Mathematics or other subjects that is being tested. Statistical data supports such arguments: a relatively high percentage of immigrant children is placed in the lowest vocational track (VMBO), and also a relatively high percentage of students from this category are taking the long-route to go to higher education by making transitions from VMBO to HAVO, and from there to HBO (SER, 2007; Municipality of Amsterdam, 2008). Such long routes cost time and additional resources and indicates inefficiencies within the system.

A group of renowned Dutch education academics and knowledge centres tend to employ arguments that are even more in line with this discourse, though they too are reluctant to advocate structural reforms. For instance, a study at the University of Twente by Scheerens et al. (2011) points out that equity issues should be more prioritised, by at least improving the transitions between the three secondary education tracks. Some other scholars argue that the selection age of 12 is too young to determine children's brain capacities since they are not mature yet at that age. Based on recent neuro-scientific research, these scholars suggest that until the age of 15, the human brain continues to mature and some brains mature more slowly than others. This implies that the brain of a young person at the age 12 can still mature to a higher intellectual level in a later stage. Therefore the Dutch society is missing talent by not allocating students into academic or higher vocational tracks. Some systemic problems, such as high drop-out rates at vocational schools, relatively low levels of participation in higher education and higher participation of immigrant children in vocational tracks are attributed to early selection policy (Jolles, 2006).

3.1.2. PRO-EARLY SELECTION DISCOURSE

The pro-early selection discourse prioritizes quality issues rather than equality issues. Such discursive statements are disseminated, most notably, by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, by broker documents of the Education Council's report (2010) and the Central Planning Bureau (2011). These texts support preservation of the early selection policy as they argue that the studies indicating a negative effect on equality are inconclusive. Furthermore, particularly the Central Planning Bureau (2011) and the Minister of Education, Culture and Science (Van Bijsterveldt, 2011) suggest that quality is a more pressing issue for the Dutch education system at the moment and preserving differentiation and tracking soon after primary is therefore essential. The general pro-quality argument is that when talented students are mixed with much less talented students, their educational performance will decrease as they are not be

stimulated by their peers and they would lack teacher attention because teaching in a heterogeneous class is more demanding.

This discourse does not ignore equality problems; however, it offers only marginal changes within the system to compensate for those students who might be at a disadvantage because of early selection (e.g., non-Western immigrants or other students from low socio-economic background). The Education Council (2010) and the CPB policy brief (2011) suggest a variety of measures in this direction, such as mixed bridging classes after primary education. However, the current Minister, and the government in general, does not appear to be concerned with issues of educational equality that much. This has been a major observable change since the inception of the new government in 2010, not only in the field of education but in other areas as well, such as integration policies. Since pro-early selection discourses are advocated by those who are currently in power; this discourse is more powerful than that on anti-early selection.

3.2. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF KEY DOCUMENTS

3.2.1. DOCUMENT 1

OECD (2007). *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*. **Paris: OECD.**

THE PROBLEM WHICH IS BEING ADDRESSED

The main problem addressed in the document is inequalities in the formal education system in OECD countries. Equity in education is considered to have two dimensions: 1) Fairness, which entails that individual or social circumstances (e.g., gender, socio-economic background or ethnic origin) should not be an impediment to achieving educational potentials of students. 2) Inclusion, which implies that a basic minimum standard of education is provided to all students. These dimensions are closely interlinked, one reinforcing the other. Despite educational expansion in the last decades and improvements in educational equality, education systems in many countries fail to bring about a fairer society. For instance, although women have made dramatic increases in education (even surpassing participation rates of men in higher education in the Western countries), social mobility has not risen and in fact the gap between the rich and

poor has widened. The report links the equity issue to three policy areas in education: the design of education systems, practices in and out of school, and resourcing. Early tracking is discussed later in the report as a policy that hinders equity and reinforces existing inequalities within the society. This is because early tracking increases initial differences arising from socio-economic background.

HOW IS THE PROBLEM DEFINED/REPRESENTED/LEGITIMISED?

The report maintains that initial inequalities often increase with age, and the design of an education system can either reinforce or help to alleviate that tendency. It cites a number of scientific studies and international tests (PISA and PIRLS) as evidence, pointing to the fact that early academic selection poses serious risks to equality in education, particularly when it is coupled with school choice, as is the case in the Netherlands.

The report highlights the benefits of academic selection but at the same time outlines the ways in which it reduces learning outcomes of those who were not selected to the higher tracks, particularly at an early age. The drawbacks of the policy include the following: 1) *Poor quality education*: High quality and high status programmes and institutions are in high demand. When academic selection is used to choose entrants, those with initially weaker attainment will end up with lower quality education. 2) *Lack of benefit from peer-group effects*: Weaker performers are not able to benefit from the expectations and aspirations of stronger performers and thus improve their own performance. 3) *Stigma*: Sorting based on attainment tends to stigmatise those who do not meet the attainment standard, labelling them as poor performers and reducing their prospects in future education or in the labour market (e.g. VMBO schools in the Netherlands have a low status). 4) *Unreliable sorting*: Prior attainment levels, particularly at young ages, are a weak indication of future potential.

As a result of these factors, initial gaps in educational performance widen, contributing to increased inequality in educational outcomes. Many initial differences in performance are attributable to social background. Therefore, the differential impact of social background on life chances intensifies. In other words, both inequality of outcomes and the impact of socio-economic status on outcomes would increase.

The report considers the social separation of schools a problem reinforced by early selection because: 1) a sense of common culture and citizenship is most readily developed if children from different backgrounds are educated together. Yet, early selection results in

segregation in education systems, particularly in the Netherlands with free school choice. 2) Education systems with a high level of school separation have worse overall results in maths and reading. This is because the social composition of a school is strongly associated with school outcomes. 3) The concentration of disadvantaged children in certain schools increases the challenge of working in those schools (as our research has shown in Amsterdam and Rotterdam case study schools). Able teachers often avoid teaching in those schools which adds to the obstacles facing disadvantaged children and which is also the case in 'black schools' (see Karsten et al., 2006 for the flight of teachers from 'black schools' and higher levels of teacher absenteeism in such schools). The report concludes that as evidence of secondary education students from PISA, and primary education students from PIRLS suggest, early tracking is strongly associated with reduced equality in outcomes and also may weakens overall results.

SOLUTIONS GENERATED TO THE PROBLEM

The report states that a fair and inclusive system needs to manage the extent of differentiation by postponing tracking to at least the later teenage years and seeking to avoid social separation between different types of schools. It must remove dead ends, offer second chances, and provide guidance throughout the transitions involved. The report clearly suggests that early tracking and streaming should be limited and academic selection should be postponed. More specific policy recommendations include the following:

1. Early tracking and streaming need to be justified in terms of proven benefits as they very often pose risks to equality.
2. School systems using early tracking should consider rising the age of first tracking to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes.
3. Academic selection needs to be used with caution since it too poses risks to equality.

WHAT SOLUTIONS ARE DISCOUNTED?

The report suggests systemic changes to postpone the timing of tracking or streaming. Therefore, it discounts piecemeal measures to compensate for the adverse effects of early tracking on equity.

Education Council (2010). *Early or Late? Advice on the Early Selection in the Dutch Education System.* **The Hague: Education Council.**

THE PROBLEM WHICH IS BEING ADDRESSED

This document analyses 'early selection' policy in the Netherlands, the transition from primary to secondary education.

HOW IS THE PROBLEM DEFINED/REPRESENT/LEGITIMISED?

The Council perceives two major problems in relation to early selection. First, it states that the policy has some negative consequences for disadvantaged students (e.g. non-Western immigrant and other students from lower socio-economic background). These students have a relatively high chance of being allocated to the lowest vocational tracks since at the time of selection (e.g. the CITO tests and primary school performance) their language skills and educational performance in general might be lower than their actual capacity. This is because they tend to have less linguistic and cultural capital at home and less parental support. Furthermore, as these students are allocated to classes where students with similar backgrounds study they are not stimulated and their educational level remains low in such homogenous classes.

Second, the early selection leads to segregation within the system because students with similar socio-economic background are allocated to clearly defined tracks. Since most immigrants are coming from low socioeconomic background, there is overlap of segregation along the lines of ethnicity and socioeconomic background. These students study in schools that are physically separated from each other (e.g. separate VMBO schools, though there are HAVO and VWO tracks offered in the same school). Segregation, in turn, undermines social cohesion and inter-group interactions.

By doing so, the document highlights the drawbacks of early selection and acknowledges the seriousness of equality concerns. However, it also points to some advantages of the policy. This is mainly formulated as benefits in terms of improved quality, particularly for students who

are allocated to higher tracks. In fact, in the final analyses, the report suggests that the benefits of such differentiation outweigh the negative effects. Furthermore, the educational performance of Dutch students from lower tracks is relatively good at international tests (e.g., PISA), while performance of most talented students is considered mediocre. Therefore, the document perceives the education quality of students studying at higher tracks as a more pressing issue. After all, the lower track students still do well in international tests, even though the education quality they enjoy is low in Dutch standards.

These arguments resonate with a new global discourse on differentiation: In order to produce better quality learning outcomes, differentiation is imperative. Such differentiation is considered to be critical to improve competitiveness globally (Lawn & Lingard, 2002). The discourse on differentiation is closely associated with the discourse linking education to economic growth and competition in global markets. It subsumes equity concerns in favour of international competition. Hence, it also reflects general trends in education policy worldwide: the demise of concerns for social justice and equity, and ascendancy of economic imperatives in education policy making.

As van der Werfhorst (2011) suggests, within the document too much attention is paid to the average performance of students in the Netherlands while the most important critique of the OECD is on the negative impact of early selection on educational equality. The literature clearly demonstrates that inequality is intensified by early selection. The Education Council disregards this information by indicating that we cannot be sure. The approach of the Council does not appear to be valid in scientific terms as it discards a large number of studies establishing the linkages between early selection and the negative impact on social equality. In fact, scientific evidence indicates that there is little to say in favour of early selection, and a lot against it. If the education system would be constructed solely based on scientific evidence, the Dutch system would not select as early. Werfhorst (2011) also criticizes the Council's analysis by suggesting that it is too optimistic about the differences of types of education concerning the socialisation function of schooling. It suggests that Dutch students do not differ much from each other in terms of competencies relevant for citizenship (p.54). This conclusion seems premature though and is not supported by any scientific study. In fact, according to some recent research studies conducted by researchers at the University of Amsterdam, there is a big problem in early selection concerning the formation of active and engaged citizens (van der Werfhorst, 2011).

THE READER

This document presents the outcomes of a study conducted by the Educational Council at the request of the Ministry (involving a desk study as well as observations in schools, surveys with parents and interviews with experts). It was intended as an advisory document on the topic. It does not only address the Ministry and other high officials, but also speaks to all educationalists involved in education in the Netherlands. However, the specific recommendations are offered to government officials, municipalities and school governing bodies.

THE SUBJECT OF THE PROBLEM

The subject of the document is students studying at secondary education level. The specific groups within this general population are: 1) students who are considered to suffer from early selection policy (e.g. non-Western immigrants, and other students coming from low socio-economic group); 2) academically high performing students, who are allocated to higher tracks of secondary education as a result of early selection, and separated from their lower performing peers at an early age. Most of the textual attention is allocated to disadvantaged students as it highlights drawbacks of the policy. However, the document refrains from suggesting any structural reforms because of concerns that it might hamper educational performance of the talented students.

SOLUTIONS GENERATED TO THE PROBLEM

The document concludes that "There is insufficient evidence that a compulsory delay in the timing of tracking for all schools would lead to an improvement in school performance for all pupils" (p.9). It argues that various scientific studies conducted provide insufficient support for such a general measure. By making such a statement the Council appears to ignore studies which in fact indicate such a strong link. The selective use of scientific literature exemplifies 'policy based evidence' rather than 'evidence based policy', which most of the organisations involved in education claim to pursue.

The document also states that in international comparisons, the Netherlands performs reasonably well as the progression to higher education is around 50%, and participation rates of Dutch pupils with an ethnic background is approaching the proportion of the age group. The report points to the weaker elements within the system, the most important of which is identified as reduced opportunities of pupils from a lower socio-economic background and the

mediocre performance of the best-performing group. The Council suggests that these problems can be addressed without delaying the timing of tracking. Hence it advocates a tailored approach: some students can benefit from a longer orientation period and the option to defer their choice of secondary education, while other students benefit from making a clear choice earlier. In order to combat the weaknesses identified in the current system, the Education Council makes eight recommendations:

1. It is important to identify and eradicate learning deficiencies as early as possible. Poor readers in years 3 and 4 should be identified early and taught well. It is very difficult to catch up after falling behind at this point. Intensive remedial language classes for year 8 pupils have been shown to have beneficial effects. This progress should be made early in the school career.

2. An extra year of intensive classes, either at the end of primary school or the beginning of secondary school, has been found to be beneficial. The Education Council is an advocate of an extra initial year at the start of secondary school. An extra initial year would particularly benefit children who do have the potential (e.g. as shown by intelligence tests) but have failed to make sufficient progress because of language delays. Every local authority should be obliged to provide sufficient places. This could be achieved by linking the number of extra classes to the number of pupils in a given region.

3. Pupils in separate VMBO-TL classes (preparatory secondary vocational education, theoretical learning pathway) run the risk of underachievement. This speaks in favour of mixed bridging classes, with pupils from VMBO-TL and HAVO (senior general secondary education). In these classes, pupils would be taught in the assessed subjects on two levels, and assessed in accordance with VMBO-TL standards as well as in accordance with HAVO standards. A number of teachers in the assessed subject will need to have a HAVO teaching qualification. It goes without saying that the classes would actually have to include the two groups of pupils who have been advised to go to VMBO-TL and HAVO schools, respectively.

4. A strong aspect of the Dutch system is the opportunity to transfer to another type of education and to combine programmes of learning. This aspect should be cherished and, where possible, refined. Many secondary schools currently adhere to transfer requirements that hinder upward transfers (e.g. high grade average). It is important that the national government and the sector organisations address this issue with schools.

Transfer rules should, as far as possible, be formulated objectively and transparently. Furthermore, the opportunity to follow and take exams in subjects at differed levels – in particular at higher levels – should be expanded.

5. Undesirable negative effects of the current system, such as segregation of groups of students, should be combated by jointly organising the non-assessed subjects. Subjects such as physical education, life philosophies, and cultural education can be offered to pupils of differing school types. Schools could display a lot more creativity in this area, for example, by regrouping internally or by setting up partnerships with other schools.

6. The dividing line between general secondary education and vocational education should be less strict. This could be achieved by strengthening existing learning routes (from higher general secondary education (HAVO) to higher professional education (HBO), and from senior secondary vocational education (MBO) to higher professional education (HBO)), but also by combining general and professionally-oriented learning content

7. The Education Council proposes that experiments are conducted at 'junior colleges' to combine the best of primary education (independent learning, coherent subjects, and only one or two teachers) with the best of secondary education (depth of content and grown-up atmosphere). This could be achieved by stimulating development projects that could be taken up by school governing bodies in primary and secondary education. These projects would involve primary school year 8 and classes 1 and 2 of secondary schools working together. The junior college offers access to all types of continuing education.

8. A project for the longer term could include an exploratory study of the possibilities for education based on learning outcomes: a school for secondary education would teach a small, centrally approved core. In this variant, secondary schools themselves decide which learning pathways they offer. They provide the core curriculum – the compulsory subjects of Dutch, maths and English at various reference levels – and complement it with an elective offering that matches the capacities, the learning style, of the group and the individual pupil. Transfer agreements with the next level of education would have to be made.

According to some critics, the Education Council does not go far enough in search of solutions in the framework of the current system, and its recommendations are insufficient to compensate for the adverse effects of early selection on disadvantaged students (van der Werfhorst, 2011). Furthermore, the current government is taking stringent budget cuts in many sectors, including education. Therefore it is very unlikely that schools or municipalities would have sufficient funds to invest in the measures recommended by the Council (Bronneman-Helmers, 2011). The document also assumes that transition between different tracks is already well-established and functional and further reinforcement of these measures would suffice to eliminate the weaknesses of the system. However, although in theory such transitions are possible, in practice, they are very difficult to do. Higher tracks in secondary education increasingly demand higher qualifications, making the system rigid for transitions. In fact, there are several complaints that the tracks are "closed" (page) and drastic changes are needed (LAKS, 2010). More importantly, what is discounted as an alternative solution is a more comprehensive school system, such as setting up middle schools between primary and secondary education, or postponing the tracking for some additional years. Discussion about such system-wide changes are avoided in the document on the grounds that there is very little room for manoeuvre within the education system and because of its design and the legal, regulatory framework. Therefore, the Council discounts OECD recommendations for postponing the selection moment.

3.1.2. DOCUMENT 3

Van Bijsterveldt, J.M. (2011). Letter of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to the President of the Dutch House of Representatives [Brief van de Minister van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap aan de Voorzitter van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal], March 13, 2011. The Hague: the Netherlands.

THE PROBLEM WHICH IS BEING ADDRESSED

This document also relates to early selection, and addresses the following specific questions from the viewpoint of the Ministry: Does the Dutch education system select too early? Are additional measures required in order to optimise the system? Based on the advice of the

Education Council (the document analysed above), what directions should the Ministry take? The document is aimed at informing the Dutch House of Representatives on these questions.

HOW IS THE PROBLEM DEFINED/REPRESENT/LEGITIMISED?

The document first underlies that the discussions on early selection in the Netherlands are not recent. Since the 1950s, such debate is stimulated at different times by using different approaches to the issue. In order to provide a background to the policy directions of the Minister, the document first reviews the findings of the Education Council. It states that higher performing students benefit from early selection (particularly in subjects such as sciences) since they receive a more challenging education than it would be possible otherwise. The country as a whole benefits from the fact that higher performing students achieve better outcomes as a result of early selection. It is stated that early selection appears to have negative effects on the education of students coming from lower socio-economic background. According to the document, the causal link between early selection and lower performance of disadvantaged students is not unequivocal. By making such a statement, it defies the dearth of scientific literature arguing the opposite (such as the studies cited frequently in the OECD document).Yet, the document still refers to two possible explanatory factors: 1) peer effect (lack of higher performing students in the class contributing to lower educational outcomes), and 2) in an early selection system, it is more likely that students from lower socio-economic background might be allocated to lower tracks of secondary education.

The report then highlights that if the PISA results are analysed, we see that students who study at lower tracks of secondary education perform well above average internationally, yet the results of higher performing students are mediocre. Furthermore, the document refers to studies conducted in other early selecting countries by the Education Council (Germany, Belgium, Switzerland and Austria), and it reproduces the Council's conclusion that early selection should be analysed in a broader perspective by looking at other factors within the education system. The conclusion is that in the Netherlands, early selection does not have such a negative effect on the performance and educational opportunities of certain groups of students as it might have in other countries having a similar policy. For instance, it argues that compared to the countries mentioned above, primary education takes longer in the Netherlands; therefore it is easier to assess students' capacities. The document then repeats the general conclusion of the Council: there is insufficient evidence suggesting that imposing a policy on all schools to postpone the selection moment would contribute to higher educational performance for all students.

After the review of Council's report, the letter focuses on the Minister's reaction to it. The Minister agrees with the Council that a general postponement of the selection moment for all schools is not required. Early selection benefits the performance of talented students. To address the weaknesses of the system, a number of policy measures can be implemented without imposing systemic changes on schools.

THE READER

The Parliament is directly addressed in this document. Hence, it speaks to policy makers and politicians. The text aims to inform about government's policy direction and outlines the discursive legitimization for its policy direction.

THE SUBJECT OF THE PROBLEM

Students studying at Dutch secondary schools.

SOLUTIONS GENERATED TO THE PROBLEM

Similar to the Council report, this document concludes that the selection moment should not be postponed for all students through system-wide changes. It confirms a political decision taken against the recommendations of the OECD. According to the Minister, individual students can delay the timing of tracking by participating in bridging classes but such a delay should not be imposed on all students. The document takes a strong pro-early selection position and makes quality improvement a high policy priority. It refers to 'action plans' to improve educational performance at primary and secondary levels. By doing so, the document pays limited attention to equality issues.

The Minister suggests that some of the recommendations of the Council confirm the policies that are already in place, for instance, the identification and eradication of learning deficiencies at an early age. There is already a policy on pre-school education to support children to remedy their language deficiencies. The Minister pledges 50 million Euros more to support children who are most difficult to reach. The document states that some other recommendations suggested by the Council directly concern schools, such as organising bridging classes between VMBO-tl and HAVO, an additional year of study after primary or before secondary education, or offering ' accumulation classes'. The Minister maintains that the

schools have taken several initiatives in recent years in this regard; therefore, the Ministry sees little reason for providing uniform solutions or blueprints to schools. The schools are viewed as the most adequate level where the problems can be identified and creative solutions can be developed. By doing so, the Minister entrusts schools to take measures to remedy for the adverse effects of early selection and assigns a more limited role for the Ministry, such as supporting initiatives taken at school level. For instance, the Minister applauds the organisation of 'accumulation' classes (e.g. additional courses offered in the weekend or summer period to support students and enable them to study at higher tracks of secondary education). The Minister pledges 50 million Euros more to support such initiatives.

The document also comments on other recommendations of the Council such as revision of the possibilities of 'accumulation' and better admission of VMBO students in HAVO track, and even promises strong action for better codes of conduct. The general message is that no strong action will be taken by the Ministry, and its focus will be on improving the general quality of education. Such an approach is criticised by researchers and other experts on the grounds that it might be counter-productive (Bronneman-Helmers, 2011).

WHAT SOLUTIONS ARE DISCOUNTED?

The document discounts any system-wide changes to postpone the timing of the tracking at secondary level. Furthermore, measures recommended by the Council to improve education of disadvantaged students are given limited attention, as priority is placed on improving education quality. From the perspective of the Ministry, improvements in quality require differentiation; hence the preservation of the current highly differentiated education system is favourable. By leaving much autonomy to schools and delegating the identification of specific needs and development of solutions to lower authorities (the individual school or school board), the document discounts more sustainable solutions.

3.3 ANALYSIS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

The interviewed experts are conscious and knowledgeable about the problems of early selection in the Dutch education system. At the age of 12 pupils are selected in three streams: one vocational, one general for higher professional education, and one pre-university level. Even if they are critical about this early point in time for students to choose on the basis of test results

and teachers' advice, they won't go as far as advocating a fundamental revision of the system. Some would in fact prefer a comprehensive school, like the head of the board of Dutch secondary schools, but they all realize perfectly well that this is politically without any chance. The Dutch education system is highly decentralized and multi-layered, which means that the ministry for education, regardless which parties rule, cannot initiate drastic changes from above. Nor are the educational and other influential advice bodies able to do so. Our union expert strongly criticizes early selection and finds support with the chairman of the extremely influential Socio-economic Council, but to no avail. There is a deeply ingrained tradition in Dutch (educational) policy of compromising controversial standpoints; it is, as our expert from the Educational Council, an independent body which advises the government on educational questions, puts it always *a little give and take*.

Experts are also unanimous about loss of talent on account of such early selection: 12 year olds are simply not "ripe" yet to make such far reaching choices. Therefore experts opt for more flexibility and assistance to mitigate counter-productive effects of the system. One is intensive career coaching already in lower vocational education to prevent wrong subject choices or allow for more leniencies in changing subjects in senior vocational (MBO). Another strategy is for re-allowing building one's school career in a step-by-step way ("stapelen") instead of taking the shortest paths within the vocational or general tracks. In other words: make crossing from vocational to general schools easier.

More generally speaking, there are *two crucial transitions* implied in the system which need amendment: the transition from primary to secondary school, and the transition from lower to secondary (vocational) school. A nagging problem for the first transition are CITO tests already during and at the end of primary school, which discriminate particularly against students with language deficiencies – migrant students mostly, but not exclusively. And not only that: "test-learning" is highly disadvantageous for the development of a round personality, for intrinsic learning, and for such thing as civic education. The fixation on test-learning makes parents anxious that their children will not pass the test and lead to private schools and lessons – for those parents who can afford it as our union expert points out bitterly.

Another, but proximal problem is the different teaching approach in primary as opposed to secondary school: in primary much emphasis is laid on cooperative working, often with integrated subject projects; in secondary it is classical frontal teaching with strictly separate subjects. Many students lose their competencies acquired as primary pupils that way. There are some experiments with so called "kop klassen": one more year at primary and/or bridging classes between primary and secondary school in order to delay early selection and stimulate

more general tracks. But that does not solve the problem of the deep divide between vocational and general education which opens after primary school (education journalist).

The second crucial transition is that from lower to secondary vocational school (VMBO – MBO). Here too is the connection between VMBO and MBO flawed through different teaching (less individual) and restricted and/or wrong subject choices with the effect of many early school leavers. That evil was, according to our ministry expert, fairly successfully tackled by adapting an integrated approach on school, municipal and regional level. There must be, first, secure registration of all students who left school early, why they did so, and what measures were taken to prevent this. There must be, second, close cooperation between the inspection, the school, care team, labour market and a secure surrounding. Such an integral approach is necessary because the problematic of early school leaving is so complex, including learning problems, behavioural and psychic problems, problems of broken families, towering debts which might chase the student into the criminal world – and all kinds of accumulating combinations of these facts. He is proud to tell that the Dutch policy of combating early school leaving finds high approval in other countries, including the United States.

Recent years saw an aggressive strategy of pushing excellence; on all educational levels. This is a spin-off of a liberal market ideology with most attention given to the economic trade-off of education; a kind of backlash after the social-democratic era of the 1970s, as our university expert recalls. He is also critical about CITO: its predictive value is 40% which means 60% of possibly valuable talent may remain unused.

Although our experts have question marks about early selection, they do not oppose vocational education in general; knowledge economy does not only need highly educated work force but vocationally well-educated middle levels as well (ministry expert). At the same time young people must get instilled with the basic drive to keep on learning (LLL), be not content with just getting basic credentials – and that is something which is not self-evident for MBO teaching.

3.4 DISCUSSION

As our document analysis as well as the analysis of the expert interviews showed, early selection is a highly contested issue in Dutch education policy. In both bodies of evidence, documents as well as interviews, the wide reaching implications of that educational policy is

fully recognized and the pros and cons are explicated. Documental and research evidence (PISA; OECD) is quoted and used selectively from both sides.

Arguments in favour of sticking to the present Dutch system of early selection, which is after 8 years of primary school and at the age of 11/12 years, emphasize that early selection works in favour of educational quality by grouping talented students to achieve in theoretical tracks and supporting less apt students to do the same in lower vocational tracks through various compensatory measures. No fundamental educational changes should be made therefore.

Arguments in favour of revisiting the present system emphasize that early selection is particularly disadvantageous for disadvantaged (e.g. migrant) students while mixing students within some kind of comprehensive school would not diminish educational chances for the talented. As opposed to advocates of early selection, their adversaries emphasize the principle of educational equality. The Dutch selective system should therefore be changed.

As the issue of early selection is so extremely controversial, it dominated Dutch educational policies and politics since many years and even decennia and attempts to find compromises largely failed in the past. Presently there are slight openings to at least mitigate the worst effects of early selection through thinking of the construction of educational bridges between the separated tracks. Such bridges would ease the transition of lower vocational students to higher vocational or general tracks. The Ministry leaves the matter to the individual school or school boards how to do that.

As to the interviewed experts, it is signifying that even those who are clearly in favour of later tracking tell that the chances in Dutch society and Dutch politics are close to zero to arrive at such changes, independent of the composition of parties in government. A main, though not the only, obstacle is the constitutional right of parents to choose the school of their liking. That right includes choosing at an early point in time. It is evident that this opinion is voiced by parents of higher social milieus while parents of lower and migrant milieus have less influence.

4. FRICTION 2: EDUCATION AND MIGRATION

4.1. POLICY BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

4.1.1. MAIN ISSUES IN EDUCATION OF MIGRANT STUDENTS

The number of young people in the Netherlands with a non-Western background has increased considerably over recent decades, as in many other European countries. In 2008 16% of young people (aged 0-20) in the Netherlands were migrants from non-Western countries. The four major groups include Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans, representing roughly 70% of young people from non-Western ethnic minorities. The socio-economic position of non-Western migrant families is generally lower than that of native Dutch families (e.g. income level, employment and housing). The non-Western migrants are concentrated in the Western part of the country, in the major cities, where they often live in deprived areas of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht. More than one in three inhabitants of these three biggest cities is of non-Western origin. This proportion is higher among the youth, reaching more than 50%. Consequently, there has been a growing phenomenon of residential and educational segregation in major cities (SCP, 2009; OECD, 2010). Integration of non-Western migrants into Dutch society has been an important policy issue in recent decades (much less so since the inception of the current government), and education and training is considered to play a key role in this process.

Migrant children have improved their achievement levels at primary and secondary levels, and increasingly participate in higher education. Second-generation migrant students are generally more successful in educational achievement than the first generation, and migrant girls and young women are more successful than boys and young men. Despite these advances, migrant students continue to encounter a variety of educational challenges at different levels. The main issues pertaining to their education include the following (SCP, 2009):

1. *Considerable language disadvantage in primary education:* When pupils are enrolled at primary education, those from non-Western migrant groups already lag behind native Dutch pupils in language skills in Dutch. Since, initial differences tend to persist as the school career progresses, at the end of primary, Turkish, Moroccan and Antillean pupils have a language disadvantage of two years. This problem is less present for pupils from

Surinamese background, since they are more exposed to Dutch at home. Such differences are much less in other areas, such as arithmetic.

2. *Referral to special education schools:* Children with non-Western background are more frequently referred to special education schools at primary or secondary levels.

3. *Lower educational achievement:* Migrant children perform lower compared to their native Dutch peers. For instance, in 2008 CITO test, native Dutch students provided correct answers to 75% of the questions in language and 73 % of the questions in Mathematics. The percentage for both subjects was only 67% for immigrant students (CBS, 2010). The low socio-economic status of non-Western migrants is an important explanatory factor for this, in addition to comparatively high percentage of single-parent families in some migrant groups. However, it is important to note that they have reduced the gap since the late 1980s. For instance, the arithmetic skills of migrant pupils have increased considerably and they made progress in language skills too. Such improvements are particularly salient among Turkish and Moroccan children.

4. *Segregation:* The Dutch education system is highly segregated alongside ethnic background at primary and secondary levels. For instance, in nearly 40% of the primary schools in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, the share of students from non-Western origin is 80%. This is caused by a combination of residential segregation as well as free school choice policy, which is a long standing tradition in the Netherlands (Karsten et al., 2006). Several studies have demonstrated that learning achievement levels in such 'black schools' is not high and even deteriorated in recent years.

5. *Underrepresentation in highest tracks of secondary education*: Migrant children are more frequently found at the lower levels, and are underrepresented in the highest two tracks which provide access to higher education institutions. For instance, although 47% of native Dutch students study at the highest two tracks, the figure for the Turkish and Moroccan students is around 22%. Transition to secondary education is governed by teacher advice and CITO test results taken in the final year of primary. Migrant students generally receive a lower recommendation than native Dutch students; as national data shows they are slightly more often given a recommendation below their CITO achievement levels.

6. *Higher repetition and drop-out rates at secondary level*: Migrant students often repeat grades and have a much higher drop-out rate than native Dutch students. The percentage of early school-leavers in the 15-24 age group in 2006 was 16.8% as opposed to 11.2% among native Dutch students.

7. *Less participation in higher education:* Increasing numbers of migrants participate in higher education, yet their proportion is still less than native Dutch students. It is important to note that migrant students increased their participation at higher level despite the fact that few of them are selected for tracks at the secondary level which provide direct access to higher education (HAVO/VWO). Nearly all migrant HAVO/VWO students go to higher education, and many more take the alternative long route to higher education via senior vocational education. For instance, in 2006, about 50% of Turkish and Moroccan students in HBO had come through the secondary vocational route, while this was only 30% for native Dutch students.

8. *Less success at higher education*: Non-Western migrant students more often experience delays or drop out without obtaining a degree. Whereas around 70-73% of native Dutch students graduate after seven years, only 50-55% of non-Western migrant students graduate in the same period.

4.1.2. EDUCATION POLICY FOR MIGRANT STUDENTS

One of the most important shifts within education policy for migrant students in recent years is from specifically migrant target group oriented policy towards general disadvantage policy in socio-economic terms, which is considered to be more in line with the actual disadvantage suffered by students. Hence cultural-ethnic background became a less important criterion in policies that aim at removing financial obstacles and guaranteeing accessibility of education for all children (e.g. free access to education up to the age of 18, grants for low income families to cover study costs, study finance from the age of 18 to cover tuition fees and other costs). At primary education level, the target group for disadvantage policy is now based exclusively on the education level of parents, not on immigrant background any longer. In secondary education as well, the criterion of country of origin was removed; schools receive compensatory funding based on the number of students who live in deprived areas. A direct consequence of this policy shift was that funds were directed away from schools with large numbers of migrants to schools with native Dutch disadvantaged students (SCP, 2009).

The following policies relate to the education of migrants as well as to students from low socio-economic backgrounds in general (SCP, 2009):

1. *Early school programmes*: These are offered to children who are considered to lag behind in language skills. The programmes are provided through collaboration between preschool playgroups and primary schools, and start at the age of 2.5 years.

2. *Induction classes in primary education*: This is a recent intervention at primary level. Pupils with language deficiencies are placed in a separate group and receive intensive language teaching for a full year, so that their language skills would match with their capabilities and enable them to make the transition to a higher track of secondary education.

3. *Policies to combat and reduce segregation*:   Since 2006, school boards, municipal authorities and childcare providers are required to consult each other in order to achieving a more balanced distribution of pupils across schools. The number of local authorities developing policy in this area has increased since the introduction of this legal requirement. In addition, the government is supporting pilots in seven cities intended to identify effective interventions at a local level. It is still too early to observe the effects of this new policy at the level of pupils and schools. The various parties involved (parents, schools, school boards) regard segregation as undesirable, but have difficulty in making the necessary concessions and accepting constraints with regard to free school choice and school admission policies.

4. *Combating school drop-out*: Reducing school drop-out by 50% in 2012 is an important priority area in secondary education, applying to all students but to migrant students in particular. The policy aims at creating a smoother transition between successive phases of secondary education, improving career guidance and better care through collaboration between schools and other agencies.

5. *Student support in higher education:* In order to increase the number of migrant students entering higher education and to enhance their study achievements, in 2005 the Ministry of Education and 21 higher education institutions agreed to a number of targets in this area.

6. *Recognition of diversity of cultural backgrounds*: Intercultural education has been compulsory in Dutch primary schools since 1985 to help students learn to live alongside other population groups and to alleviate prejudice and discrimination. In practice, it did not really get off the ground. However, since 2006, the requirement to take account of cultural diversity in society has been placed in the broader context of active citizenship and social integration. In primary and secondary education, a statutory requirement has been introduced to promote those tenets.

7. *Increasing the involvement of parents*: Parents from migrant groups are generally more difficult to reach and less involved in the education of their children than are Dutch parents. This is partly because of a lack of knowledge and skills, but also because of a deficient command of the Dutch language. The Dutch government is committed to increasing parental involvement, especially among parents from migrant groups. A special 'Ethnic Minority Parents Platform' has been created which takes initiatives to foster the involvement of migrant parents. In addition local platforms were set up in 30 large municipalities to promote activities designed to reach migrant parents at local level (e.g. home visits by teachers, parent rooms, parent information points in the school).

8. *Cooperation with agencies outside education:* To combat educational disadvantage, schools are increasingly cooperating with agencies outside school (welfare, social work, health and youth care, police, cultural and/or sports associations). The purpose of such cooperation is to offer pupils and students help with problems at school or in their home setting, as well as to promote their development by offering additional activities (culture, sport) with which they normally have little contact. In secondary education the support of students with problems is being provided by 'Care and Advice Teams' in which schools work together with agencies in other fields (youth care, police, etc.).

9. *Beneficial comprehensive policies*: Some general educational policies are particularly beneficial to non-Western migrant students. Promoting transfer to higher education through the vocational education route is an example of this, as is providing opportunities for the accumulation of qualifications in secondary education. By offering a 'second chance' to students who were initially not selected for secondary education tracks that prepare for higher education, both options constitute a correction to the

early selection in Dutch secondary education. Combating school drop-out is a third example of a beneficial general policy.

10. *Termination of funding of minority language teaching:* For a long time Dutch primary schools provided teaching in the language of the country of origin for the main migrant groups. The objectives of this teaching were maintaining contact with the country of origin and combating educational disadvantage. The funding of teaching in the students' own language was terminated from 2004. The emphasis on language in primary education has now come to lie completely on learning Dutch. The induction classes that were recently introduced in primary education are an example of this.

4.1.3. POLICY DISCOURSE

There are broadly two positions relating to education of migrants: the dominant official policy entails that there is no need to devise specific policy measures targeting migrant students. Instead the focus should be on supporting disadvantaged students, immigrant or native Dutch. The official policy, therefore, does not observe large differences in terms of educational challenges encountered by these equally disadvantaged groups. The discursive priority is on general quality improvements, perceiving no or little need for specialized policies for migrant children. In a TV interview, the current Minister of Education, Culture and Sciences stated that their focus is on improving education quality for *all* children, Western or non-Western (VARA, 2011). In addition, some studies have concluded that the problem of under-advising of migrant children after primary education in their transition to secondary education is not taking place anymore. Therefore, the talents of immigrants are not wasted (Driessen & Smeets, 2007). Such arguments strengthen the position of those who see no necessity to device special policy tools for the education of migrants.

However, some other policy actors, such as civil society organisations, knowledge centres and academics, highlight that the challenges for migrant students differ in terms of their nature and scope, and improving education of migrant students do require specific policy measures. They believe that the present shift of the government from migrants to 'disadvantage' in general might run the risk of further deterioration of educational achievement among migrant students. This discourse emphasizes on-going structural issues and the need for specific policies targeting migrant children. Structural issues include persistent lower academic achievement among migrant children, low language proficiency in Dutch (and even in their native language), underrepresentation in the two highest tracks of secondary education and

higher education, school segregation having a negative impact on social cohesion, and more frequent advice of migrant children to lowest tracks because of their deficiency in language skills rather than lower intellectual capacity. Hence, the supporters of this discourse suggest that tackling these issues require specific measures, such as additional language support at schools, improving parent-school cooperation, inclusion of modules in teacher training tailored for prospective teachers who will teach at segregated schools (VO Raad, 2011), improving the quality of teachers teaching at segregated schools, and increasing involvement of migrant parents in school decision-making process (Smit et al., 2007).

An important aspect of political debate and public discussions on education of migrants relates to school segregation, which will be the main focus of the discourse analysis. Segregation is not a new phenomenon in the Dutch education system, since primary and secondary schools have been segregated along denominational lines for many decades. What changed over the years though is the nature of the segregation. In more recent history, segregation became increasingly pronounced along the lines of socioeconomic status and more recently by ethnic background. Due to strong presence of religious segregation, little attention has been paid to socioeconomic segregation. Only in 1980s and 1990, segregation became an issue in political debates as socioeconomic segregation and segregation by ethnic origin strongly overlapped. The current debate on the topic is primarily concerned with two possible negative effects of segregation on 1) educational achievement and 2) social integration of different groups into Dutch society (e.g. An increase in stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination based on ethnicity; Karsten et al., 2006).

The outcomes of the studies on educational achievement appear to be not conclusive although several studies point to a lowering of standards and negative peer effects on cognitive achievement in schools where migrant students are concentrated (see Karsten et al., 2006 for a review of these studies). Some recent research, however, argues that the ethnically homogenous schools perform *better* than schools that have a diverse student population (Dronkers, 2010).

The current government does not perceive segregation as a problem and it does not plan to invest in measures to combat segregation. The alternative discourse emphasizes that segregation is a serious problem indeed, affecting not only the education sector and the educational opportunities of migrant students, but social well-being and social cohesion in general. The discourse suggests that segregation also threatens the competitiveness of the Dutch economy.

Before, proceeding with document analysis, it is also important to highlight that a number of concepts specific to the Dutch context are used in the discussions on education of migrants. These include the rather popular and widely used terminology of 'black and white schools'. 'Black' is used for non-Western immigrants, including Suriname, Moroccan, Turkish and persons of Caribbean origin. In governmental statistics, a school is defined as 'black' when more than 70% of students have are of non-Western immigrant origin. Schools with less than 20% of non-Western immigrant students are categorized as 'white'.

4.2. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF KEY DOCUMENTS

4.2.1. DOCUMENT 1

Onderwijs Raad [Education Council] (2005). Bakens voor spreiding en integratie [Beacons for dispersal and integration]. The Hague: Education Council. Education Council (2005). *Beacons for dispersal and integration.* **The Hague: Education Council.**

THE PROBLEM WHICH IS BEING ADDRESSED

This document was developed at the request of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science in 2005. The Minister approached the Education Council on the problem of school segregation. The request was specifically concerned with a primary school in Rotterdam which had been using dual waiting lists in order to avoid segregation. The school had one list for prospective students with immigrant backgrounds and a second list for students with native Dutch origins. According to the school authorities, the strategy worked very well. Therefore, the local authorities in Rotterdam considered making it a strategic approach for more schools to alleviate school segregation within the city. However, the waiting list was explicitly based on ethnic origin, which was defined as the country of birth of the parents. Therefore, it raised a number of questions, more specifically: are such dual waiting lists legal? Could they be considered discriminatory? The Minister approached the Education Council for a thorough investigation of the case and analysis of legal implications of such school policies. If the conclusion of the Council would be that the waiting lists are illegal, then the Minister wanted to know what kind of action in this area is possible and what not. In summary, the problem addressed in this document is

school segregation in Dutch education, but the broader problematic considered is integration of migrant populations into the Dutch society.

Integration is viewed as an important concern in this document. Increasing school segregation in Dutch education system is considered as an obstacle to integration since such schools undermine the development of social cohesion. The text explicitly refers to segregation as a regrettable phenomenon within the Dutch education system, and suggests that it is a prime responsibility of the education system to take necessary actions to combat segregation. Such strong focus on social cohesion, integration and anti-segregation policies within the document reflect broader policy concerns of a time in which integration related issues rated high on the political agenda and were discussed widely among the broader public.

Although the document problematizes segregation, what is mainly discussed and analysed is not linked to academic achievement. In other words, the document is not so much concerned with whether students do better in segregated or in mixed schools. It states that studies on this topic demonstrated different outcomes and are therefore not conclusive. Few studies have been conducted so far to demonstrate that dispersal measures contribute to integration or the improvement of education performance of ethnic minority students. However, educational achievement is not the only aspect of the discussion on segregation. The interlinks between segregation and integration (e.g. social cohesion and citizenship) are just as important, and this aspect is stressed in the document. The Council proposes that mutual contacts between the different population groups in the Dutch society are essential, particularly at young ages and within and via education. Learning about 'others' is difficult in the absence of the 'other'.

The document refers to some previous publications and advice reports of the Education Council and suggests that all those studies have confirmed that school segregation is detrimental to Dutch society and needs to be eliminated by appropriate measures[1]. Furthermore, the Council suggests that combating segregation at schools is an international

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[1] The documents referred to include the following: Vaste grond onder de voeten (Educaiton Council, 2002), Onderwijs en burgerschap (Education Council, 2003), and De buurt als belemmering? (Laan Bouma-Doff, 2005).

obligation as well since the Netherlands is a signatory country to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

THE READER

The Council documents address the members of the government and educational officials employed by the Ministry. However, the analysis and particularly the policy measures to combat segregation are aimed at informing a broader readership and public, including school boards, principals, teachers, parents and municipalities.

THE SUBJECT OF THE PROBLEM

The subject of the problem is migrant students in primary education. Since segregation is considered to be detrimental to social cohesion of the Dutch society, one might argue that the subject is ultimately all Dutch, whether migrant or not. *All* will suffer from the negative consequences of segregation.

SOLUTIONS GENERATED TO THE PROBLEM

The Council concludes that a waiting list or dispersal on the basis of national origin or ethnicity cannot be defended legally because the Netherlands is bound by international regulations which forbid such distinctions. Since the same international regulations require the Netherlands as a signatory country to combat discrimination, the Council suggests that there is enough leeway to take (binding) measures to eliminate segregation. Yet, these measures should not be based on ethnicity or nationality. However, it might be possible to use a waiting list based on language delays. The Council in fact suggests this as a possibly effective strategy.

The document highlights the difficulty to devise an all-encompassing solution to the problem since it is complex and involves a variety of dilemmas and contradictions. Therefore, it can only be tackled at local level, by trying and learning from experiences. Education stakeholders should develop arrangements which would be helpful to solve segregation problems, and they should work in consultations (e.g. between schools and local authorities). The Council proposes that legal space should be created to facilitate such local level tailor-made solutions. Hence, the government and the parliament need to define the legal boundaries for action.

The Council does not believe that isolated measures at the level of individual schools would be effective to de-segregate the education system at neighbourhood or city level. Any broader, strategic plans should include the following three measures:

1. Support for schools that are open to initiatives by parents, such as group registrations with a local 'black' or 'white' school.
2. Agreements relating to school accommodation. In the opinion of the Council, the legislator (government and parliament) must first ensure that the encouragement of integration and dispersal could be used as criteria for the allocation of accommodation facilities.
3. An agreement on how pupils with (language) delays can be distributed better across the various schools.

The document also highlights the importance of parental involvement and a better communication and information strategy among parents, school boards, principals and teachers.

WHAT SOLUTIONS ARE DISCOUNTED?

The document points to local level actors as the ones who are able to develop measures to alleviate the level of school segregation in the Netherlands. Therefore, it disregards policy options at central governance levels. Consequently, the document disregards a range of policies that might be initiated or facilitated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, such as direct interventions, controlled choice policies and school improvement policies (see Karsten, 2010 for an overview of these measures). Likewise, the document does not question the parental choice policy and refrains from suggestions that might substantially restrain it.

4.2.2. DOCUMENT 2

Volkskrant, February 7, 2011, 'Kabinet accepteert zwarte scholen' [Government accepts black schools]. Written by Robin Gerrits and Ron Meerhof.

The column in this newspaper refers to the main education concerns of the current minister and particularly explores her opinions on segregation at Dutch primary and secondary schools.

HOW IS THE PROBLEM DEFINED/REPRESENTED/LEGITIMATED?

The column considers school segregation as a problem. Based on an interview with the current Minister of Education, Culture and Science, it explains that for the current government, combating school segregation is not anymore an official policy or priority area. The column perceives this as an important policy shift because segregation has persistently remained in the political agenda of previous governments. By referring to the statements of the Minister, the column explains the rationale for this major policy change. Even the political party (CDA) of the current Minister pioneered some initiatives seven years ago in Rotterdam to mix schools and make them ethnically more heterogeneous. The current Minister, however, clearly states that "the quality of education is more important than the fact that a child is enrolled in a black or white school". The Minister confirms that a number of initiatives were taken at different levels to combat segregation in the past. However, the outcomes of these projects were not perceived as conclusive or very successful. They are no longer a priority for her. "It is good when people from different cultures meet, but for me, as the Minister, fighting segregation is not a goal".

She further argues that her disinterest does not stem from the strong opinion of the coalition partner PVV (a right wing party) on the subject (e.g. their disinclination to take action for integration or general measures to improve the situation of migrant families). She asserts that she is not convinced herself about the need for combating segregation. She claims that many scientists have also concluded that it has nothing to do with colour. There are well-functioning schools with students from different backgrounds. And there are also 'white' schools which are not good. As a Christian Democratic, she refrains from taking any action which might constraint free school choice: "I find it rather important that the families are able to choose the schools themselves".

The official discourse, as communicated by the Minister, appears to consider segregation an issue which is relevant only in terms of its possible effect on educational achievement and further educational opportunities of certain groups of students. It discards a whole range of other aspects that relate to the link between school segregation and integration (e.g. the discussions on social cohesion, identity formation, inter group interactions, formation of stereotypes and prejudices, xenophobia, and ethnic discrimination). Even when the linkage

between segregation and educational achievement is concerned, the Minister concludes that there are no such strong links, and the problem is education quality and not the student composition of schools. That is why, in various recent policy notes of the Minister, the issue of education of migrants is absent, and there is an emphasis on quality improvements with a strong belief that such improvements would suffice to improve educational achievement of immigrants (see for instance, three recent action plans: Actieplan leraar 2020 [Action Plan for Teachers 2020]; Actieplan po - Basis voor presteren [Action Plan for Primary Education, the basis for performance]; Actieplan vo Beter presteren [Action Plan for Secondary Education, for better performance].

It is important to note as well that within the discourse of the Minister, there is a specific reference to the mediocre performance of high-performing students studying at secondary level. As an example, she refers to the average grade achieved by VWO students (highest track at secondary schools) at nation-wide leaving exam, which was 6.5 last year. She considers this worrying, and views it as an indication that the ambitions of even the most talented Dutch students are low. Yet, the Far East is developing rapidly and surpassing the West economically; hence, the Dutch education needs to improve its education quality.

WHO IS THE READER?

The readers are educational stakeholders and the general Dutch public. Parents are particularly considered. The main significance of the broader audience as the discursive 'reader' is that they are also the 'voters' that need to be bought in to the Minister's discourse. The most directly involved voters, the parents, are the ones that need to be lured in or, at least, convinced not to oppose. The text therefore contains many signifiers that legitimize the Minister's actions and vision. For instance, the Minister repeatedly underlines (also in some other media appearances, see for instance, VARA, 2011) that she does not want to meddle with the 'free choice of parents'. In this way the Minister's political discourse becomes centred on 'the reader', who forms the majority. Minority (ethnic) groups in society are discursively underrepresented.

IS THERE A SUBJECT OF THE PROBLEM?

The subjects are all students of the Dutch education system.

The Minister argues that when the general quality of education is improved, the disadvantaged students will automatically benefit, and their performance will also improve. She suggests that if all schools are good, all children will get a good chance. She adds that some specific measures for disadvantaged children will be taken (e.g., based on parental education level), and this will also directly relate to the education of immigrant students. However, she refrains from making a difference between disadvantaged native or immigrant students in her discursive representation of the problem.

Furthermore, the Minister emphasizes the importance of developing the connections between VMBO and MBO schools, since she believes that this would enable disadvantaged students to proceed with their education until they get the basic qualifications required to find employment. She is planning to develop an educational bill to enable every MBO to connect with a VMBO school. Such VM2 projects already exist; 4,200 students are enrolled at such schools.

Moreover, the Minister suggests that segregation is not an integration problem that needs to be addressed within the education sector. Issues relating to integration are seen as the responsibility of the government, not the task of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. She further argues that desegregation would imply a change in school choice policy, which is one of the most defining characteristics of the Dutch education system. She states that limitations to the freedom of school choice are against the majority of the parents whose concern is education quality. According to her view, there can be policies to integrate neighbourhoods (hence to desegregate schools), or parents and schools might continue to take initiatives to alleviate school segregation. Such interventions will be supported by the Ministry as long as they are within the framework of legal regulations (voluntary arrangements between schools and parents for double waiting lists). However, the Ministry will not take action to force schools to desegregate. She does not for example advocate post-code policy (registering children to schools in accordance with their post-codes). She believes that such a policy does not work, and even motivate parents to move out from specific neighbourhoods.

This reflects Christian Democratic approach which supports school autonomy and rejects top-down government involvement in parental and school level decision-making processes. The Minister employs strong metaphors and argumentative backings to rhetorically consolidate this position in her TV interview: "From our ivory tower in The Hague, we are not going to mingle in local affairs (...) 86% of all parents are pro free choice of education and pro quality" (VARA, 2011). If 'black schools' are not functioning well, she believes that the Ministry

needs to ensure that they function well and provide good quality education to their students. The Minister trusts that immigrant students can follow a 'career path' and be successful. In this way they will integrate in the labour market and society in general.

ARE SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS DISCOUNTED?

The official discourse discounts policies that directly target immigrant children, although a number of current policies aimed at disadvantaged children include immigrant groups as well (such as, language support in pre-school education programmes). Furthermore, on the main issue of the above analysed column, the segregation issue, the government clearly expresses that segregation is no longer a priority area, or not even viewed as a 'problem'.

Consequently, the official discourse does not consider a wide range of desegregation measures that have been considered in different contexts. These include direct interventions (e.g. 'bussing' non-White children from poor neighbourhoods to predominantly 'white' schools in the USA or mandatory assignments of students by local or regional authorities, improving the housing situation and creating more mixed neighbourhoods, strategic planning of new schools, and student transfers), controlled choice policies (e.g. voluntary agreements between schools on quotas and acceptance policies, centralised information for parents, the use of parental advisors who try to influence the parents' choice and introduction of magnet schools), and the school improvement approach (e.g. improving education quality in schools attended by migrants, attracting excellent teachers) (see Karsten, 2010 for an overview of desegregation policies).

The official discourse instead suggests that through improving the quality of education in general, teaching and learning at segregated schools would also improve and the educational performance of migrant students would be higher allowing them to study at higher tracks of secondary education and expand their possibilities to study in higher education. However, even if education quality would be improved in segregated schools through general quality improvement measures, this would not necessarily eliminate school segregation. In fact, although educational achievement of migrants improved in recent years (CBS, 2010), school segregation intensified in major cities, e.g. in Amsterdam (Municipality of Amsterdam, 2010). Therefore, migrant students will remain studying in highly segregated schools. Consequently, their integration into the Dutch society and more specifically to the labour market will remain limited (Ladd et al., 2010; also see the analysis on the next document).

Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools [Kenniscentrum Gemengde Scholen] (2011)
Escaping is not possible anymore? Segregation and secondary education [Vluchten kan
niet meer? Segregatie en het voortgezet onderwijs].

THE PROBLEM THAT IS BEING ADDRESSED:

The document aims at drawing attention to the urgent problem of segregation in Dutch secondary schools, e.g. concentration of immigrant students in certain schools, particularly in large cities. This issue is closely linked to the broader issues of emancipation and integration of immigrants into Dutch society.

HOW IS THE PROBLEM DEFINED/REPRESENTED/LEGITIMATED?

The complexity of issues surrounding segregation is illustrated by using a case study of a 'black school', historical analysis of the developments and discussions, reference to the highlights of a recent official publications on the education of migrants (CBS, 2010), and by outlining developments at regional level, by use of the case of Amsterdam.

The document first introduces a case which demonstrates the current problems of segregation in Dutch secondary schools. The case is an anonymous 'black school' offering HAVO and VWO education in one of the big cities of the Netherlands. In this school, the majority of the students are Moroccan (more than half) and Turkish (40%). Three years ago, the school was overwhelmed by the scale of the problems it had to face. However, with the change of management and after initiation of a number of measures, the safety at school (which used to be a big concern) and education quality have improved considerably. Teachers who wanted to leave the school three years ago, want to continue working there now.

The specifics of the school indicate that a 'black school' faces other challenges than a 'white school'. For instance, students need more individual attention, teachers need to invest more in their relationships with students, additional lesson hours are required to remedy learning difficulties (e.g. arising from language deficiencies). The recent measure taken at the

school demonstrate how a variety of specific investments are needed to deliver quality education in a 'black' school.

Thanks to the efforts of the school management, the school offers good quality education, and the educational performance of the students is above national average. Despite these successes, the school still fails in terms of emancipation of its students (e.g. acquiring an independent position irrespective of ethnic, social background) and their integration into Dutch society (e.g. participation in social life, labour market). The school took a number of actions in this regard, such as additional training, offering longer lesson hours than required by the Ministry, organising workshops on various topics, and exchanges with 'white schools'. However, the school management feels that these efforts are insufficient to facilitate integration. At the end of the school day, they go back to their own traditional home environment. Due to residential segregation, most of these students remain in a closed culture and lack contact with native Dutch children outside of school. Such contacts only take place at higher education levels or at work. Consequently, closed cultures are strengthened via school segregation. The principal of the school states that he is very concerned that the students in his school will be increasingly influenced by Islamic orthodoxy; they develop philosophies and ideologies that are highly anti-Western. This is viewed as a serious risk for the school but also for the broader society. The school case is used to illustrate the problems that similar school around the country encounter.

In addition to the case analysis, the document builds its argument by an historical analysis of segregation issues in Dutch education system. It states that segregation is not a new phenomenon and that for decades the education system was segregated alongside socio-economic background. Clear differentiations also existed because of religious denominations. After the arrival of immigrant workers and later their families in the Netherlands (starting in the 1960s), ethnicity became the defining characteristic of school segregation. Since the majority of immigrants followed secondary education at VMBO level, such vocational schools became 'black school', and higher levels (HAVO and VWO) became predominantly 'white'. While previously several educationalists and policy makers assumed that as performance of immigrant students increase, they will more frequently follow education at higher levels of secondary education, and the segregation problem will be automatically resolved, in recent years immigrant students have indeed achieved better results, but unlike expectations, segregation was not diminished because of 'white flight'. This has led to the emergence of black vs. white HAVO/VWO schools, and segregation persisted. Through such historical analysis, the document argues that the persistence of school segregation is not only due to differences in terms of educational performance between migrant and native students. In other words, the

linkages between socio-economic background and educational achievement (e.g. migrants perform low since they mainly come from low socio-economic background) does not explain the whole story. The case study school also confirms this, since even if the educational quality is above average, the school still fails to attract native Dutch students.

The document also looks at regional level, and highlights developments in one of the regions where segregation has been continuously increasing. In 2008-2009, half of the secondary schools were mixed in Amsterdam (e.g. immigrant enrolment rate was between 20 and 80%). One third of these schools was 'black'(more than 80% was immigrant) and 15% was 'white' (less than 20% of students was immigrant). According to the research conducted by the municipality, segregation has intensified since 2002. Further analysis of the developments in school segregation indicates that for immigrant students proximity to school plays an important role in selecting school. But for native students, school characteristics are more important and they do not mind travelling longer distances. One of the criteria for native students is student composition, and the phenomenon of 'white flight' is one of the most important explanatory factors for intensification of segregation in Amsterdam.

Later, the document discusses the consequences of the segregation by making reference to two major issues: 1) school segregation has an adverse effect on the educational achievement of immigrant students, 2) social interaction of migrant students who study at segregated schools is much lower since they hardly have contact with native-Dutch peers. Does this eventually has a negative effect on mutual acceptance and image formation about the 'other' groups? The document states that there are not sufficient scientific studies to verify such possible consequences. However, the observations and impressions of researchers and persons who are involved in educational practices confirm the adverse effects of segregation in these two areas. By doing so, the document aims to reopen a conceptual debate on school segregation in a policy environment that scientifically devalues the problematization of segregation.

Finally, the document attempts to draw attention to a number of issues, including the following: 1) In the current system the immigrant talent is underutilised. This needs to be reconsidered by policy makers and educators. 2) There are more challenges to teaching and learning in segregated schools (e.g. lack of language proficiency in Dutch). 3) Segregated schools need to undertake more effort to attract students coming from families with a high social mobility orientation. Yet, both ambitious immigrant and native parents often avoid such schools. All these issues are linked not only to social but also economic imperatives. It states that segregation cannot be afforded in the Netherlands, particularly in the current global knowledge economies.

WHO IS THE READER?

The document addresses a variety of educational stakeholders within the Dutch education system, e.g. government officials, municipality officials, school boards, teachers and other educationalists. The document calls for cooperation among these actors to develop collective solutions to segregation problem, particularly those at the local level. In the recommendations section, local level actors are specifically addressed.

IS THERE A SUBJECT OF THE PROBLEM?

The subjects are migrant students, particularly those studying at segregated schools. By making the migrant students the main subject, the text aims to point to the sense of urgency demanded by school segregation issues. Furthermore, the subject is ultimately all the citizens living in the Netherlands, since school segregation is analysed as a problem not only adversely affecting education and well-being of migrant students, but also as a phenomenon that has negative consequences on social cohesion of the Dutch society and the economic competitiveness of the Netherlands in global markets.

SOLUTIONS GENERATED TO THE PROBLEM

The document clearly sees segregation as a serious problem, and an urgent issue to be resolved. It states that since the current Minister does not perceive school segregation as a priority, it is highly unlikely that the Ministry will develop policies to alleviate school segregation in Dutch education system. Therefore, educators at local level (municipal and school level) need to be mobilized to discuss the issue and develop intervention measures. Particularly persons involved in management of schools at local and regional level are considered as important actors who can take action in this area. Another important reason for pointing to the 'local' as the level where the complexities of the problem should be defined and resolved is that segregation differs from region to region. This is because of the differences in the supply of secondary schools as well as due to differences in the demographic make-up of the regions.

The document suggests that local actors should begin with exchanging their opinions on the following issues:

1. Relevant local developments, including segregation. Is there school segregation in the region? If yes, how can the segregation be characterised?

2. Assessment of the situation, problems, challenges and developing a general policy direction.

3. Developing relevant intervention measures (e.g. improving education quality at secondary schools, informing parents and students about school choice, offering more flexibility to students to facilitate transitions between different levels of secondary education, professionalization of teachers, improving exchanges between principals and school boards of different schools so that they would collectively assess the problems and develop solutions.

Two legal regular meeting structures can be utilised for this purpose: 1) Local Educational Agenda, which is an annual meeting of municipal officials and school boards to discuss a number of education related issues, including alleviation of segregation, integration, access procedures and so on), 2) The meeting structure between school boards and Regional Plan of Educational Facilities. Nevertheless, the document also highlights that segregation was not considered a pressing issue in Local Educational Agenda meetings of half of the municipalities. The document also highlights that the success of such measures would also depend on the extent to which the government will support and facilitate the interventions developed at the local level.

In sum, the integration discourse and the role for education and local governing bodies is strongly pursued in this document. It highlights that segregation persists because of 'white flight' in addition to some other reasons. However, 'all education stakeholders should be responsible to counter segregation: escaping is not possible anymore' (p. 17).

ARE SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS DISCOUNTED?

The document suggests actions to be taken at local level by school boards, municipalities, principals and so on. Therefore, it discounts policy options to be developed and initiated at higher levels, e.g. the Ministry level. The rationale is that the current government does not see segregation as a problem and will therefore not take action anyhow. However, for interest groups such as 'Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools'(the publisher of this document) putting pressure on the government and advocating prioritisation of segregation problems on the political agenda is a relevant option Yet, it is fully discarded, as nothing seems to change the current government's policy orientation on this issue.

The document does not offer concrete policy solutions itself but promotes collective efforts on the part of local actors. It particularly highlights that there must not be a blueprint solution to all schools, since the nature of segregation, its scale and dynamics change across regions. Due to these considerations, the document does not align itself with a particular solution, but refers to the measures suggested by Education Council (the first document analysed for early selection).

4.3 ANALYSIS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

In the Netherlands, with many different migrant groups, schools have to deal accordingly with different student populations. An issue discussed over the years is how to integrate children with ethnic-cultural backgrounds different from native Dutch-born children into schools. As freedom of school choice is anchored in the constitution, parents as well as schools and school boards have some means at hand to influence the composition of the student body. That in combination of segregated neighbourhoods leads to the phenomenon of "black schools" in deprived city areas which attract more migrant families than Dutch ones. Our educational journalist is the most outspoken expert on the matter. Already in primary school migrant pupils find out that they have lesser opportunities than Dutch children and are often labelled by other kids and teachers as less intelligent.

Language deficiencies endanger the school career; CITO test is more language based than is good to estimate the capacities of many migrant students who as a consequence are transferred disproportionally into lower vocational schools. It is also a problem that in "black schools" less qualified teachers work.

In as much as the lowest tracks of VMBO decrease in favour of the higher tracks which prepare students for secondary general – as such a positive development -, the remaining lower tracks are even more populated with migrant students and become proportionally less attractive for gifted students. Schools which face that drain are in acute danger of deteriorating further and further.

Although there has been progress with the school careers of migrants, still much has to be done and there is still the problem of giving too low school advice to these groups, as our expert of the Association for secondary schools suggests. More tailored teaching and flexibility would allow for a step-by-step climbing up the educational ladder ("stapelen", see also above section) and would help further integration. But the sitting ministry (right liberals) is oriented

towards efficiency and not for prolongation of educational trajectories. And while "black schools" and integration matters have long dominated the political agenda, this is now not any longer the case.

Experts consent in their opinion that much migrant talent is wasted but signal at the same time another development: migrant students catch up, if slowly, with the rest of the student population whereas that is the case to a *lesser* extent with low educated Dutch students. Both groups would profit from integrated pre-school facilities at an early age (2-3 years). The Education Council gave that advice two years ago but the then sitting (Christian democrat) minister opted against it and advocated education at home. Now, with still not enough crèche places and rising costs, such far reaching integration ideas are even further put off. Crèche places are offered by the private sector which fears to lose this prosperous sector.

Although perhaps no longer taking a top position on the political agenda, it is fact that problems of integration tower high, particularly in the big cities like Rotterdam and Amsterdam with substantial proportions of migrants. The matter is aggravated by a development of "white flight" which empties black and deprived neighbourhoods of white middle class families as well as migrant families who can afford it.

Our expert of higher professional education expects huge labour gaps in the social service economies in the future which will have to be filled with workers with migrant backgrounds. It is then paramount that children at school learn to live with different cultures to safeguard tolerance and an eye for cultural assets. *You should dive deep into the cultural backgrounds, where do you find the stimulating conditions in these families,* our expert of The Board of Higher professional education asks himself and the educational community with concern.

The union expert is desperate about segregation in schools. He thinks that much too much emphasis is put on performance and efficiency, with detrimental effects for early learning together. He points to the recent development of putting more public money into the education of the *highly gifted* and take it away from the less gifted and the special schools.

Our university expert, being well aware of the detrimental effects of school policies geared to efficiency and economically paying-off function of education for integration, holds at the same time the opinion that you do not do disadvantaged (migrant) students a favor if you do not qualify them for this type of society. Problem is that too many inexperienced teachers teach in "black" schools. It is very difficult for a teacher to distinguish between a gifted migrant student with language deficiencies and a not gifted student with language deficiencies. Even

more problematic than "black schools" are mixed schools as a recent study (Dronkers, 2010) has found out. In mixed schools teachers are even more uncertain how to deal with all different groups of students. The problem is aggravated by recent education policy to dissolve special schools and insert those pupils into regular schools.

What then is the solution to segregation? *I do not know*, our university expert says who has thought about the problem since many years and has done research on the matter. Mixing is very difficult because of free school choice, and even in mixed classes you see that the kids of the same social milieu flock together. In the long run migrant students make progress; each following generation more and at the end of the day social class will tell more than colour. But that only works if there is a certain level of welfare in society.

4.4 DISCUSSION

Discussions about "education and migration" are as fierce as are discussions concerning early selection. And obviously the two are linked to each other. But while in the first case the debates evolve around the opposites "quality" vs. "equality", they now take on a larger frame of references. Migration problems concern the whole society and supersede school issues as they touch the (im-) possibilities of social integration.

As the document analyses and the expert interviews show, the existence of "black" and "white" schools reflect the general segregation in Dutch society. Therefore, the problem cannot be laid on the table of just one ministry, that of education, but must be tackled in a much broader way. But it is not so much the ministry and the minister of education who demonstrate awareness of the complexity of the problem. The present minister rather retreats to a defensive position or even denies the urgency of the problem. She argues: it is educational quality which counts and for the preservation of which I am responsible, not integration. As long as a school produces good attainment scores, be that in black or white schools, everything is alright. That opinion, quite bluntly uttered, as the respective documents prove, mirrors a fundamental change in Dutch integration policies. Until the late 1990s, integration was an integral part of Dutch policy. One of the main aims of integration policy would have to be to channel resources preferably to schools with high amounts of migrant students and support all kinds of measures to enhance their educational opportunities. Nowadays, with shrinking financial means and neo-liberal ideology on the rise, educational policy has redefined needy target groups by

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disregarding the factor of migration. Presently, *all* needy children must be supported, and immigrant pupils are only one among many other groups.

This policy shift disregards, as many experts and researchers claim, the juxtaposition of migrant and social-economic position. It also discards the adverse effects for integration and social cohesion of educating children and students of different cultural-ethnic and national backgrounds apart from each other.

As Dutch education politics and cultural traditions, particularly the right for freedom of school choice, make radical solutions of school integration impossible, promotion of better integration is restricted to a variety of middle-range measures. The document which gives a blueprint for a *regional approach*, taking contextual particularities into account, is a promising step in the right direction. But one should not – and the experts do not – underestimate counter-developments. There are many interest groups, not least status-conscious parents, which are rather in favour of segregated schools (and city quarters) than work at solutions of integration.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This report has analyzed two important policy issues in the Dutch education sector: early selection and education of migrant students (with a focus on school segregation). This is done by conducting a critical discourse analysis of select policy documents for each policy issue and conducting interviews with policy experts. In total, six policy documents were analyzed and ten experts (involving ministry officials, journalists, academics and representatives of a teacher union) were interviewed.

The analysis has demonstrated that both policy issues are highly contested in the Netherlands, not only in recent years, but already for decades. The official discourse on early selection is in favor of maintaining the system (selection at the age of 12) on the grounds that it has significant quality benefits. This discourse suggests that the drawbacks of the policy can be compensated by some intervention measures to expand educational opportunities of disadvantaged students whose education appears to suffer more because of early selection. The majority of the experts we interviewed acknowledged that early selection has serious shortcomings and does injustice to students coming from lower socio-economic background. Despite their convictions on the 'evils' of early selection, they did not offer system-wide changes either, arguing that such large-scale change is rather difficult in the Dutch education system at the moment. This is partly because it

is very decentralized, and the schools (e.g. school boards) enjoy a high degree of autonomy. There is also a strong resistance, even within the education system, to comprehensive schools (e.g. resistance of high track secondary schools).

A similar pattern is observed within the discourse on education of migrants as well. The official discourse has changed radically in recent years, classifying migrants under the broader category of disadvantaged students (defined as low socio economic background, particularly low parental education). Furthermore, the official discourse does not even recognize school segregation as a problem, and suggest that the actual problem is education quality, not the student composition of schools. This discourse looks at the issue from the perspective of educational performance, and discards a range of other issues that relate to segregation, such as inter-group interaction, integration and social cohesion. Again, the majority of the experts who shared their opinions with us believe that segregation is and must remain a big concern for the Dutch education system as well as for the government and broader public. They highlight possible consequences of school segregation and express great concern about it. Nevertheless, when possible solutions are enquired, similar to the early selection issue, no comprehensive solutions are offered. Such solutions would inevitably call for restrictions on parental choice, a constitutional right in the Netherlands, and few dare to question the merits of free school choice.

In relation to the discourse on segregation, it is important to note the absence of any discussions on the concepts that frame the discourse. As explained earlier in the document, 'black' and 'white' schools are widely used in all sorts of publications (including academic ones) or in public discussions, 'black' denoting non-Western immigrants from countries such as Surinam, Morocco and Turkey. It is striking that this terminology is very common in Dutch debates and applied without any sense of shame in the press and public at large. We observed the use of the same terminology in every document we analyzed, both the documents opposing segregation or the ones in which segregation was not perceived as a problem. In the newspaper interview (Volkskrant, 2001), the minister even talks about 'black and white kids' (black refers here to all students with a non-Western migrant background) and 'black and white neighborhoods' (again, a black neighborhood implies high non-Western migrant concentration). It is puzzling (to say the least) that very few in the Netherlands even contest the use of these terms, and suggest that the very concepts that underlie segregation discourse needs to be questioned.

Another interesting dimension of the discourse relates to how scientific literature is used selectively by policy makers and others to legitimize one's opinion. For instance, the minister makes reference to scientists in the newspaper interview, and claims that scientists also confirm the fact that the 'color' of the school does not matter. Which scientists one would ask, as there are such

opposing views on this subject among them. In some other documents analyzed, we have also observed how scientific literature which would strengthen the arguments put forward by the organizations are selectively used, and the literature having a different opinion on the issue is ignored. The policy makers often assert that they make evidence based policies. In other words, they argue that they develop education policies in line with the recent educational research. However, the realities of policy making reflects a tendency for *policy based evidence* rather than evidence based policy.

Furthermore, the increasing role of international tests (particularly PISA) and the OECD publications in general in national policy formulation (Martens & Wolf, 2009; Figazzolo, 2009) was recognizable in this study. In the case of early selection, OECD criticisms were taken seriously by Dutch policy makers and a process of reflection and rethinking on early selection was initiated afterwards. Eventually, no systemic change or postponement of early selection moment was suggested, but other ways of compensating for the drawbacks of early selection were considered. In several documents we analyzed, we have observed reference to PISA results (e.g. the performance of low achieving or high achieving Dutch students in those tests). The PISA results are used to legitimize policy directions. For instance, since the performance of low achieving students was above average in PISA, and the performance of high achieving students was mediocre, the minister argues that the attention should be on the latter group and should be on improving education quality.

The discussions on both policy issues suggest that the Dutch education system is resistant to large-scale educational reforms on early selection and school segregation. This stems not only from internal dynamics within the Dutch system, but also general policy changes in the world in the last three decades. There has been a general shift away from equity driven reforms to competitiveness based reforms (focus on education quality, efficiency, differentiation) in the world (Carnoy, 1999). This trend is also reflected in the discussions on early selection and segregation in the Netherlands. The official discourse on both policy areas reflect the primacy of economic considerations. In such a socio-political environment, the ideals of social justice and collectivism appear to be exchanged for a global discourse on competitiveness, productivity and efficiency.

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