

‘Later I can always be what I want to be’

Status perception, self-esteem and aspirations of students in secondary education, with emphasis on the relative position of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO)¹ students

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Translated from Dutch: Thesis by Helena Christina Maria van den Bulk to obtain a doctoral degree at the Utrecht University under the authority of the Rector Magnificus, Prof. J.C. Stoof, following the decision of the college to publically defend the promotions on Friday, February 11, 2011
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¹ VMBO is the Dutch abbreviation of this type of education.

Foreword

The initial motivation for the subject of this thesis started about eight years ago, when I heard a comment of a sixteen year old boy about 'boys of the lower class', and in response to my surprise, he explained that with that he meant Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. I was completely perplexed and thought to myself: 'Does this still exist?'. After that I noticed more and more, for example in newspaper articles, that it was spoken in the same way about the 'underclass', when it came to low-skilled adults and VMBO students, often in combination with integration problems and school dropout.

Social inequality and class differences are the main themes of sociology, but these topics are mainly approached from the meta-level of society and there is little attention given to what happens at the micro-level of the individual. Especially in the sixties up to the nineties of the past century, the topic of social inequality was often associated with inequality in educational opportunity, but it possibly gets less attention because of the increase in educational opportunities. It was difficult to find recent literature on the subject, in relation to educational opportunities. This was all the more reason to approach the subject from the micro-level and in relation to education.

This thesis is a report about a quest regarding the experience of social inequality among today's youth and its significance for youngsters in a 'low' educational position. It consists of five parts. The first part comprises the problem establishment; in that I explain why it is important to study this problem. The second part is about the theoretical underpinning of the chosen research structure. The third part is devoted to the description of the structure and implementation of the study. After that the fourth part follows with conclusions and findings in relation to the research. And finally, the fifth part is a discussion of the topic in light of the findings, and presents a new question. The report of the quest therefore ends with a new destination.

I would like to thank some people. Firstly my supervisor Mart-Jan de Jong, who was immediately enthusiastic about the subject and continually supported me in a personal and involved way, and stood beside me in word and deed. I thank Hans Adriaansens for his role as promoter. I'd also like to thank Diny Roodvoets for the trust she put in me, and I thank the teachers and students for participating in the

research. I thank the photographer Joop Reijngoud for providing me with his beautiful pictures, and I thank those who selected the photos for their efforts. I thank colleagues from the CED Group for their contribution and advice and I was very happy with the friends who shared my enthusiasm, and lastly I thank my husband Emile for his support and care during this endeavour.

I dedicate this thesis to my sister Lieneke (1944-1995).

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Part 1 The problem

1 Inequality in an egalitarian society

In today's society, equality of opportunity is an important ideal. Simultaneously, the inequality caused by cognitive capabilities, and thus the related educational levels, are generally accepted. It is accepted that people with higher education earn more than people with lower education. Not only do they earn more money, but they also have a higher social status and gain more appreciation. We're talking about 'higher' and 'lower' or 'better' and 'less' in the classification of social backgrounds, education and residential environments. Even though the mobility between different social classes has increased, there are still differences and barriers that hamper mobility. These barriers are largely determined by educational levels. The educational level appears to be the basic requirement for admission to a particular class. The higher the class, the higher the 'desired' level of education (Dronkers, Ultee 1995). This combination of the ideal of equality of opportunity and equal valuing people, and the current meritocracy where people are valued by what they perform, with a high valuation of cognitive talent and education, leads to a paradoxical situation. A sociological question that arises from this paradox is: How do people, who are unable to get a higher education, and thus achieve a higher status, experience that in a society, where equality is the basis, they have fewer chances to achieve a higher status than others who are in a position to follow higher education? This question has led to the research presented in this thesis.

1.1 Stratification in Education

The Dutch school system is a stratified system. At the age of 12 years, students are distinguished by the different education opportunities that they have; Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), consisting of 4 pathways: the theoretical, mixed, profession-frame oriented and basic-profession oriented, Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO)²: Athenaeum, gymnasium). Admission to a particular level of education is based on the school advice of the elementary school, usually in combination with the results of the Cito final test. Within the education system, there is downward or upward shifting possible; 12 to 13% of students climb up to a higher level of education and over 11%

² HAVO and VWO are the Dutch abbreviations of this type of education.

drops down to a lower type (Dekker et al. 2008). Although the school advice and the starting level don't definitely determine what the final level of the pupil will be, they do have a big influence on the course of their school career and thus a major impact on the professional capabilities of the student. Not everyone can be a doctor or a lawyer, but at the age of 12 it becomes clear who will not be, most likely. Recent research shows that the school advice is most primarily linked to the performance of students, on language, reading and math, at the end of primary school. Background factors such as ethnicity and parental education do play a role, but only if they have influenced the performance of the pupil at the school (De Jong 1987, Onderwijsraad 2010).

The OECD-PISA-survey (2005) shows that in countries with stratified secondary education, as in the Netherlands, the spreading of study-result increases after the transition from primary to secondary education, while in countries with an integrated secondary education, the differences decrease. Here, the excellent-performing students do not perform worse, but the lesser performing students do cover up for the difference somewhat. Moreover, school dropout is the least in countries where there is a more egalitarian school system, such as in Norway (Wilkinson, Pickett 2009).

1.2 Unequal opportunities and the ideology of equality

The friction between the ideology of equality and the reality of unequal opportunities becomes painfully obvious when children and their parents seek a higher level of education, but cannot reach it, on basis of the performance level of the child. It makes a difference whether this happens in a situation where the parents are highly educated and have the necessary means to avoid the 'descend' in the social hierarchy, or when that is not the case (Dronkers Ultee 1995, Ganzeboom, Ultee 1996, Dronkers 2007). In the former situation, there is compensation for the 'disappointing performance' at the beginning of the school career in secondary education, so that every effort can be made to achieve a good position on the social ladder. In a situation where this compensation is not available, or where there are burdening factors, it is very difficult to rise up in the social hierarchy from a low educational position. Not everyone has the ambition to be a lawyer or doctor, and even children know themselves at a younger age whether they belong to the 'smart' children or not. And yet, it appears in conversations with youngsters, that they would have wanted to achieve 'something higher' than the Preparatory Secondary

Vocational Education (VMBO) diploma, or that they look down on the content and social level of their vocational education and the professions that they acquire because of that. These statements sound like disappointment.

Already in 1938, the sociologist Merton pointed out at the high friction between cultural goals and access to the institutional possibilities to achieve these goals, and introduced the Strain Theory. This theory assumes that when the distance between ambition and lawful means to realise this ambition, is too great for certain groups in society, it can lead to deviant behaviour. The question is whether this theory is still useful in the study of the current problem of youngsters who fail in education. The question that I want to answer in this research is whether the failure of some of the students in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO), is easier to understand when we consider the relatively low social status of secondary school and the distance between the ambitious goals of students and the real possibilities to achieve these goals. The social pain that may be caused by being 'inferior' and having fewer opportunities to use an education, so as to achieve a respectful place in society, in their own eyes, can contribute to that students in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) are less motivated to invest in their education, such that they quit sooner.

1.3 'Winners and losers'

According to Lenski (1984: 38) and others, maintaining or improving social status is the most important choice for people, after survival and health, although they rarely admit it. Certainly in our society, where equal rights and opportunities are important values, we cannot easily talk about positions on the social ladder, while there are clearly big differences in prestige, power and privilege among different populations, and there are large differences in the chances and opportunities to improve the status. The upward social mobility through education has become normal, and transcends the downward mobility (Dronkers Ultee 1995, Ganzeboom, Ultee 1996). Differences in pay, both material and symbolic, are often linked to the difference in education, and form a confirmation of the value of the individuals who rise. With more 'winners' than 'losers', the meritocratic selection system is perceived as fair, at least by the 'winners' (Erikson, Goldthorpe 1992, Swierstra, Tonkens 2010).

"Lack of respect, though less aggressive, can be just as hurtful as an insult. Perhaps the other is not offended, but gets no recognition either. He or she is not seen as a

complete person, who matters." (Sennett 2003: 13)

1.4 The perception of low-skilled youth

In a society where an increasing proportion of the population have a secondary or higher education qualification, and where the need for secondary and higher education in the labour market is growing, youngsters who are poorly educated are quickly labelled as failures and it can become difficult for them to find a respectful place (Raes 1997, Elchardus 1999). Low-educated youngsters from some migrant groups also have to deal with a negative social image and discrimination, which may have negative consequences for the development of their social identity and their position on the labour market (Dagevos 1998, Crul 2000, Coenen 2001 Oreopoulos 2003, Van der Steeg en Webbink 2006). Experiences of social exclusion and a lack of perspective can lead to youngsters in this situation excluding themselves, even before hand. Recent research shows that social exclusion leads to emotional pain, social insensitivity and self-exclusion (The Wall, Baumeister 2006). A negative perspective can result in that youngsters in this position are no longer motivated to undergo education, and that they seek salvation in an alternative career outside the normal social order (Sansone 1992, Van San 1998). Not only as a rational choice towards their livelihood, but as a strategy to avoid the low class position; to be someone who matters, who counts and who needs to be reckoned with.

2 School dropouts and relative deprivation

In this chapter we sketch an impression of the social and socio-psychological background of the problem that is central to the investigation. After a brief description of the current school problems, the concept of identity, social status and relative deprivation are briefly elaborated. For this, literature is used based on laboratory tests and meta studies (e.g. Festinger 1975 original from 1954, Argyle 1980, Tajfel 1981, Rosenberg 1986, Turner et al. 1987, Taylor, Brown 1988, Meertens 1991, Grusky et al. 1994, Worchel et al. 1998, Ellemers, Box 2000, Koole 2000, Leary, Tangney 2005, Kernis et al. 2006).

2.1 Dropout

“Every year around 40,000 young youngsters terminate their Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). Out of them, 15,000 start again, such that annually 25,000 are left without a diploma.”

(Ministry of Education Newsletter July 2006)³

“School dropout is often seen as a potential indicator of crime. The probability that a youngster without school diploma is suspected of committing a crime, even after the correction of other background characteristics, is almost 2.5 times as high as that of a youngster who has graduated. Those without a diploma are also 2.5 times as frequently present in the suspect-registration database, because of a violent crime, as youngsters who have acquired a diploma. The importance of this feature is also reflected in the contribution of variance, which is further underlined by this: besides ethnic background, age and gender, holding a diploma explains the chance of being registered as a suspect, more than all other background characteristics put together, as researched here.”

(Blom et al. 2005: 7)

³ 2.5% of the total population of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students leave school without a diploma, 5% leave with the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) diploma, 16% leave Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) without a diploma (Factsheet Premature Drop-Out 2006, min. OCW)

If we look at the group deviant youth, it becomes immediately apparent that it largely involves Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) or ex-Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (ex-VMBO) students without a diploma, often children of immigrant parents. Besides a greater chance of a marginal social position and deviant lifestyle, the risk of unemployment is greater, the earned income is lower and the degree of wellbeing and good health is less, whereas each year they stop with secondary education earlier (Oreopoulos 2003 , OECD 2005, Van der Steeg en Webbink 2006).

The social response to the problem of school dropout comprises the improvement of the guidance on impending school dropout, and an extension of the Compulsory Education Act in 2007, with a qualification requirement until the 18th year for youngsters who have no starting qualification for the labour market. The lack of internships and jobs at the bottom of the labour market is identified, and appropriate plans are made for improvement. In addition it has been noted that the low education level and limited social abilities of some youngsters will remain an issue in finding a suitable position on the labour market.

There is little known about the lack of motivation in the present risk-youth, the relationship between the investment of these youngsters in their education and the expected results they achieve for themselves, their perception of the future and dealing with low status position in relation to their goals and ambitions. It is clear that school dropout is relatively common among students from lower social backgrounds (low parental education), students from single parent families, students with disadvantaged secondary school entry (low final Cito test score), ethnic minority students and students from the big cities.

All these factors have independent influence on early school ending; a combination of these factors enhances the effect. The independent influence of immigrant origin has only a limited effect when the differences in parental education, in the final score of the Cito test, and other characteristics are excluded (Van der Steeg en Webbink 2006: 29).

2.2 Stacking of education

There is a large group of youngsters who, after Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO), sometimes successfully go over to Higher Vocational Education (HBO) or University, with Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) as an intermediate step; the co-called 'stackers'.

In the past, stacking of educations in higher education was often the only option for children of low educated parents to get to a higher education (Herweijer 2008). In the nineties of the past century, stacking of education was somewhat held back. There was a greater emphasis on efficiency of learning routes and assessing children at the end of primary school. It was more strongly sought to place students immediately in the appropriate educational level. The motto was 'the right pupil in the right place'. Stacking was seen as an expensive detour.

Meanwhile there is more attention and space for this alternative route. In part, this shift arises from the need to take full advantage of available talent, and partly from the realisation that for the vulnerable groups in society, it is often the only route to achieve a higher education (Herweijer 2008). This development is in line with the aims of education that have been agreed upon in 2002 at European level, and form further development of the strategy that was deployed by the European Council (Lisbon 2002). The increasing flow-through possibilities are also in line with the findings of the OECD (2005), that within the Dutch education students have to choose at a too young age, and at a too young age they are assigned to a particular educational level. This phenomenon is called 'early tracking' and it is particularly disadvantageous for minority youth who cannot fully exploit their capabilities because they often start with a language arrear, and need more time to show what they can do. The same applies to children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds; they also have to deal with language problems and difficulties in adapting to the school environment, because of which they get a slow start and often stay behind permanently.

The renewed vision for stacking is reflected, inter alia, in the quality agenda Secondary Education 2008-2011, which recognises that some students have to make intermediate steps to achieve a higher education, and that there should be possibilities available for it (Onderwijsraad,⁴2010).

Research into the extent of upgrading to a higher level of education, and the additional obstacles, shows that it is not always possible for the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) stackers to actually make it to High Vocational Education. Out of the group Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, who in 2003 stepped over to Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO), it showed in 2007, that 59% made it to higher education, of which a bigger part made it to Higher Vocational

⁴ Education Board

Education (HBO) (2% to University (WO). Nearly a fifth of the group eventually made it to Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) (nearly 10% with a Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) diploma. These students can still flow-through to Higher Vocational Education (HBO)⁵). from Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO). Nearly one in five students is not enrolled in regular education. A small proportion is enrolled in adult education or Secondary Education (VO) education. The mentioned barriers are: the poor connection of subjects, the lack of a second foreign language, and specific mathematics components (Dekker et al. 2008).

In the early nineties of the past century, attempts were made to suspend the division between profession-oriented and general education, for example in the form of undivided, heterogeneous Transitional Class (Brugklas) and basic education. This policy has not been successful and has been largely reversed. Heterogeneous Transitional Classers are practically gone; in 2002 it was only 4% of all Transitional Classers. The majority of Transitional Classers, 53% in that year, ended up in so-called 'roof tile' classes, in which children with Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO)/secondary school or Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO)/Pre-university Education (VWO)-advice studied together. 43% of the incoming students did not go into the Transitional Class anymore, but rather began right away with Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO), Pre-university Education (VWO), in homogeneous groups (Kleijer et al. 2004). Here, it should be understood that the heterogeneity is the highest in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). Besides students who end up in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) due to extra need for care or because of lower intelligence, the bigger part consists of students who can be considered as belonging to the mid level school talent (Van Daalen, 2010).

2.3 Unequal opportunities

Even though now there is an 'open' education system and there seem to be no financial barriers anymore, the environment in which people grow up, still influences the final level of education. For mediocre students, with parents who possess cultural capital, it is an inexhaustible resource. These parents provide a bringing-up environment where knowledge is passed over from an early age, for example in the extensive vocabulary and language experience they pass over to the children. They are also able to additionally tutor their children or assist them in doing their

⁵ MBO and HBO are the Dutch abbreviations of this type of education.

homework, if necessary. Children who have this resource will more easily get to a higher type of education than they would only on basis of their competency. Due to this parental cultural capital, the average competent students from the upper classes are often able to acquire a high level of education, in relation to higher competent students from a lower strata (Dronkers, 2007). The probability that an average student from a low educational environment reaches Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) is therefore bigger than for an average student from a higher educational environment. Due to the wide spread of talents in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), the average students from the lower educational environment function next to the least competent students. Due to this, the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) is wrongly given a lower status than it should get in terms of educational level.

In March 2010, the Board of Education came up with a recommendation to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, in response to criticism of the OECD. The Board of Education summarised the opinion as: No obliged postponement of selection for everyone, but rather improvements in the current system to deal with the existing weaknesses.

Firstly, it is recognised that the early selection of students, especially from lower socio-economic background, has a negative impact. It is noted that these students perform lower in early-selection environment, but that the causes of this are not entirely clear. Consideration is given to the 'belonging to a group effect'; groups of predominantly low-performing students rather than groups in which students can keep up with better performing students.

The improvements that are proposed in the advice are: earlier detection of arrear of students, doing something about it in an early stage, an extra year between primary and secondary education, mixed Transitional Classes (Brugklassen) for Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) to nurture and refinement of transfer opportunities and stacking of educations, to combat segregation through internal re-grouping or cooperation with other schools (think of common subjects such as gymnastics, cultural education, etc.), including profession subjects to include Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO), junior colleges and schools that achieve their own course at different reference levels (Education, 2010).

2.4 The status of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO)

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) was created in 1999 through a combination of the following forms of learning: Preparatory Middle-level Vocational Education (VBO), Preparatory Middle-level Vocational Education (LBO), MAVO and some forms of Secondary Special Education (VSO) (voortgezet speciaal onderwijs). Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) offers four learning programs in secondary education that lead to Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO). These programs differ primarily in the extent to which the practice has a place in education. The basic profession-oriented program (BB) is intended primarily for students who are practical minded. In terms of theoretical burden, this program is less important than the vocational education (KB). The examination for this program is less extensive and more practical than that of other programs.

The vocational learning program is strongly profession-oriented. The students are already working on an education that is in its entirety aimed at a function at profession-level (level 3 or 4 in Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO). The theory is linked to the practice.

The combined program (GL) is intended for students who have little difficulty learning, but also want to prepare or orientate for a specific occupation. The name 'combined program' means a combination of theoretical (general) and practical (profession-oriented) education. In terms of level, the combined program is equal to the theoretical program. In addition to general subjects, students choose a profession-oriented program.

The theoretical program (TL) has the highest level, together with the combined program, in terms of cognitive subjects. This program is not targeted to a particular profession, hence the name 'theoretical program'. The students do exams in six general subjects such as various languages, history, mathematics, and so on.

The theoretical program is most similar to the old MAVO. Just like the old MAVO, the theoretical program has no practical subjects. The basis and vocational program are similar to the old Preparatory Middle-level Vocational Education (VBO), but has more theoretical subjects compared to Preparatory Middle-level Vocational Education (VBO). Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) is not the end of education. Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) prepares students for further education (Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO). A higher practical level does not automatically mean a lower level. This is how, in principle, the vocational learning program, leads the mixed and theoretical program to the same level of further

education in Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO). In practice, students from the vocational learning program more often reach a lower level. The theoretical program connects better with Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO). Of all students in secondary education in the Netherlands, more than 60% is on Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). By joining Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB), Preparatory Middle-level Vocational Education (LBO) and MAVO to form a broad education focused on Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO), an unintended split is created; on one hand, Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO), Pre-university Education (VWO) for the 'better' students, and focused on Higher Vocational Education (HBO) or scientific education, and on the other hand, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) for the 'less good' students.

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) is regularly the subject of the public debate, often due to news that rarely or never consists of a positive message. A number of serious violent incidents have severely damaged the reputation of this type of education. But also due to the large number of dropout students, shortage of teachers and the fact that there are a lot of problem students in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), the result is that the media even relates to terms like 'waste pit' of education and a 'social problem area'. It can easily be said that Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) has been stigmatised as the type of education where violence and other behavioural problems are the order of the day (Kleijer et al. 2004, Paulle 2005, Swierstra, Tonkens 2010). In an article in the paper NRC Handelsblad (Vink 2007) about the low status position of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), it says that students from disadvantaged backgrounds hardly penetrate to higher education and that this is largely due to the division in Dutch education; promising students go to Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO)/Pre-university Education (VWO) and disadvantaged students go to Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) schools thereby become arrear schools and strengthen the arrear. This is a political taboo and contradicts the ideology of equal opportunities. In the article, there are three school administrators / directors who say:

"The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) are nobody's 'love baby'. We are not attractive enough for the upper level that set up our education. This upper level has no feelings for

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) or Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO), they never come around. They themselves often have Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) or higher, and their children go to Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO). As far as that is concerned, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) has become a kind of diluted version of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO)." (P. Boekhout, Chairman Albeda College, Rotterdam)

"I don't quite believe in the story that all students who go to Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) are doers and cannot keep up intellectually. Many immigrant children have to support their parents in the present society. That's quite a job for a 14-year-old. Do you see children of privileged parents do that? We are simply unable to recognize that these children have more to offer." (F. Schouten, Director Montessori School, Amsterdam)

"At twelve years of age, my students get the message: you're not a part of us. You must go to the lowest strata of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). They come discouraged by the secondary school, where they were often not even able to do a Cito test, due to a much too big arrear."
(S. Clancy, director Zuiderpark College, Rotterdam)

These quotes of insiders confirm the image of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) as being an education with a bad name. By gathering arrear students of this type of education, the burden only gets heavier and the negative image only stronger, and it results in the progression of arrear rather than the diminishing of arrear. By the early separation between privileged and underprivileged students, the unprivileged students are deprived of their chance to flow along with the privileged students. Students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) are therefore stigmatised; when you are on Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) then you automatically belong to the unprivileged. This applies just as much to native students as to immigrant students.

3 The equality paradox

“The propaganda of a social structure with ‘Equal Opportunities for All’ can be a strategy to legitimize the established order.” (Ellemers 1991)

Research done into school dropout is mostly from a social policy perspective; solutions should be found to reduce dropouts, or one wants to determine whether the applied policy has been effective. The approach that I’ve chosen is sociological. From a sociological perspective, the problem can be studied at a more abstract level and with a broader scope, in order to discover the underlying patterns and to better understand the factors that may be playing a role. The problem is studied from the perspective of the relevant youngster himself, rather than from the institutions that are part of the problem. The study is an exploration of the power-arena in which they participate, and the significance and consequences for those involved, this especially concerns aspects of unequal opportunities, origin and existence of social hierarchies. The sociologist Touraine (1977) argues for this approach when he proposes that the meaning of behaviour has to be explained from the social interactions of those involved, in relation to the norms and value system, the power-arena in which they participate. This is a dominant system in which, alongside social relationships, closed and hidden relationships exist, whereby personal interests are at stake. From this vision, the sociology has to take the individuals themselves as the starting point: ‘give a voice to those who have no voice’ and thus shed light on aspects that are (should-) not seen be seen. This chapter discusses the significance and consequences for those affected by the friction between the ideal of equality and the reality of unequal opportunities and the existence of social hierarchies; the equality paradox.

3.1 The ideal of equality

In the twentieth century, in countries with western culture, the ideal of equality has established itself in all walks of life, and the principles of equal treatment and equal opportunities are pursued in all institutions, in words at least. The egalitarianism, in the eighteenth century England, was primarily focused on limiting the power of the king and the aristocracy, to make room for the propertied class. The realisation broke through that all men are equal and that the king was also just a person, and not the divinely appointed guardian of the people. It was not about elevating the lower classes, but to bring down the higher classes (Bouter, 1994). Also in the class-

society of the past centuries, it was not impossible to rise in the social hierarchy through own performance. People of humble origin but with exceptional abilities could make it to being an admiral, such as Michiel de Ruyter and Piet Heyn. Or such as Pope Adrian VI, who, as the son of a carpenter, through study in a monastery in Leuven, became rector of the university, then became cardinal in 1522 and was then elected as pope. Nevertheless, even in later periods, the emphasis stayed on the social hierarchy, as if a divinely willed order, whereby it was even seen as a sin when someone compared himself with a higher level person. There was an existence of 'intrinsic' position awareness. Everyone knew his place and behaved accordingly. Thereby, the question may be asked, to what extent this situation was actually interpreted by the 'ordinary' people in the same way. Those who were in a position to establish these types of societal views, also had the most to gain from the survival of the social order, and may also have used these views to suppress the aspirations of the 'ordinary' people. The portrait of the class society as a fixed social hierarchy, in which each person knew his place, and was aware that there was no change possible, is more an ideal than a reflection of reality, according to historical mobility studies (Boonstra, Mandemakers in Dronkers and Ultee 1995).

Although mobility between different classes was possible, there remained big differences in what was considered appropriate or suitable, for the different levels of the population. In the nineteenth century, education in the Netherlands was as yet still divided into schools for the poor, meant for children of factory and farm workers, for less well off, intended for children of craftsmen, where a small amount of school fees was required, and civilian schools for the wealthy citizens who paid relatively high school fees. Under the influence of increased prosperity in the years 1860-1870, the advancement of the individual income, and increase in social opportunities, the existing ideologies regarding the usefulness of education in society strengthened. More and more children benefited from the offered education, and it was avoided that a particular group of children would thereby get left behind. In 1900, this resulted in the compulsory education for children between 6 and 12 years, thus gradually normalising education (Veld 1987). The law was also intended to address child labour. The act consisted of a clause stating that poverty gave no basis for exemption.

3.2 Self-Respect and inequality

An important aspect of an orderly society is that the differences in wealth and

opportunities are not so far different that they are perceived as offensive. The social inequality that exists in every society, should not be so large that the self-respect of the least advantaged is affected. Otherwise it may give rise to envy and rebellion (Rawls 1999). Each historical period has its own reasons, in other words, its own 'story', with which inequality is made acceptable (De Botton 2004). During the industrialisation and the emergence of capitalism, differences appeared between various population-groups, such that there was tension among them, regarding the perception of equality. The propertied class took advantage of the great mass of unpropertied workers, in order to multiply their property. Whereby, over the centuries, success coincided increasingly with economic value. De Botton (2004) calls this the moral dimension of money; the moral value of people is not measured by the 'goodness' of their personality or their behaviour, but by what people possess. The enormous contrast and poor working conditions gave rise to resistance and strikes, and the rise of the labour movement. In contrast to the feudal society for example, in which inequality was rooted in unequal rights and duties, and was seen as a natural process, all people were equal in the eyes of the law, in the civil society. This meant that flagrant sub ordinance and dependence were experienced as injustice and exploitation. Because of this large class contrast and the limited social mobility, inequality between different social strata was experienced more as a result of class position rather than the result of own actions. In the current meritocratic society, also inequality is individualised, and the arrear is much more experienced as a personal failure (Young, 1976, 1996 Neckel, Beck, Beck-Gersheim 2002, Swierstra, Tonkens 2010). As a result of the equality paradox, the ultimate responsibility for equality lies with the individual. With that, the conditions under which someone feels inferior, have not become less, to the contrary.

"The arrival of the formal equality of the performance principle as the central norm of modern society made it Possible to pose the problem or feeling inferior in comparison with others in a personal way." (Neckel 1996: 22)

3.3 Scientific relevance

This research can be seen in line with the tradition of the Anomie Theory of Durkheim, and the Strain Theory of Merton. Durkheim (1897) pointed out that in the rapidly urbanised and industrialised society, a state of anomie was created, and proposed that due to the strong deregulation, an individual can fall into deviant

behaviour. Because personal goals and desires are not limited externally, the individual will be chronically dissatisfied, and passionately go after relieving the constantly shifting needs. According to Durkheim, the offering of this regulation is one of the main functions of the community. At the macro-level, this theory points to the controlling force of society, at the micro-level the theory points to the increased pressure experienced by the individual. This increased pressure can seek an outlet in deviant behaviour. It is therefore both a 'strain theory' as well as a 'control theory' (Agnew, Passas 1997).

Merton assumed that groups in society, who have few opportunities to achieve socially respected goals in a legitimate way, will try to reach these goals in an illegitimate way, for example by means of criminal activity or other deviant behaviour.

"The American stress on pecuniary success and ambitiousness for all thus invites exaggerated anxieties, hostilities, neuroses and antisocial behaviour" (Merton 1938: 680).

In an 'egalitarian' society, cultural goals and success symbols apply almost in the same way to everyone, while for many people it is almost impossible to ever achieve these goals. People can react in different ways in different situations. He emphasises that it is not about the characterisation of the personalities, but about the types of reactions on roles in specific situations. The typology that Merton developed looks like the following (Merton 1938: 676):

	Culture Goals	Institutionalised Means
<i>Conformity</i>	+	+
<i>Innovation</i>	+	-
<i>Ritualism</i>	-	+
<i>Retreatism</i>	-	-
<i>Rebellion</i>	+/-	+/-

Conformity: People in this category conform themselves to the prevailing views and adapt their behaviour; Merton calls them the conformists. The social objectives are in accordance with the means to achieve these goals. This is the largest group in a society. Without this group, a stable society is impossible.

Innovation: Inadequate socialisation can lead to this response, whereby the institutional resources are released, but the goal, for example success and respect, stays conserved. People in this category use other ways than the usual, possibly illegal ways, to achieve their goals.

Ritualism: People cannot consider the goal important anymore, because they realise that they cannot achieve the goal, but still continue on the usual path.

Retreatism: This means the group of people are not actually participating in society but rather live in their own world, for example, seriously addicted drug users, homeless, seriously mentally ill, and 'quiet' dropouts, such as long term unemployed people, who have given up hope. They have no social goals (anymore) and do not make use of available opportunities.

Rebellion: This refers to people who resort to fighting and going on revolt, as a result of frustration about unattainable goals or the prospect of a marginal existence.

Merton points out that the high level of integration itself, whereby goals such as social success and high status position are completely endorsed, can lead to that people, who lack the capacity to meet these targets in an appropriate way, will try it in another way. This can be legitimate ways, e.g. with a career as an athlete or artist, or a non-legitimate ways that leads to deviant behaviour.

"It's Only When the full configuration is Considered, poverty, limited opportunity and a commonly shared system of success symbols, that 'we can explain the higher association Between poverty and crime in our society than in others where rigidified class structure is coupled with different class symbols of achievement.'" (Merton 1938: 681)

Based on these two theories, the Anomie Theory and Strain Theory, and various empirical studies, other complementary theories and criticisms have been formulated. Equally, Stouffer (1949) discovered during a study of American soldiers, that subjective satisfaction is not so much determined by the objective situation in which an individual was situated, but rather by the relative position of the individual in relation to other relevant individuals with whom he or she compares him- or herself. In 1942, Hyman (1968) described how an individual determines his status in relation to certain groups to which he belonged or wanted to belong. He called this the reference group theory. Runciman (1972) brought a distinction in 1966 between personal relative deprivation and relative group's deprivation. Relative group's

deprivation refers to dissatisfaction with the unfavourable position of an own group, in comparison with another relevant group. Whether it is about personal or group's deprivation; the personal frame of reference is crucial to the extent to which deprivation is experienced.

"This raises the question of the mechanics and degree to which social structures may lead to patterned perceptions. The implications are of paramount importance as far as the strains toward anomie and deviance is concerned. It seems obvious that the more the discrepancy [between goals and means] is felt as such by the people involved, the higher the degree of strain in a group or society. On the other hand, the subjectively experienced gravity of such discrepancies depends on one's specific goals and actual position in the social structure. These goals depend in turn on the frame of reference within which they are conceived." (Agnew, Passas 1997: 65)

The above theories emphasise the crucial importance of the social environment for the wellbeing of the individual. Not only in the sense that society is present or absent with its regulation of behaviour, but also the perception of the social environment and one's own place in it. Empirical research into the subjective experience of social status and one's own relative position in society is necessary to understand how these phenomena can affect the motivation for school, for youth with fewer opportunities.

A recent confirmation of these theories was found in a study of deviant behaviour of Moroccan Dutch boys (Stevens et al. 2009). One of the conclusions was that boys who attach more importance to social status and success, are more inclined to regard deviant behaviour to achieve that image, even though that 'image' is only of value in their group of friends and not socially accepted. In the research, there is no explicit link made to the education level of these youngsters. The question is whether the same boys would exhibit deviant behaviour if they would be able to gain the same image in a socially acceptable way, for example by having the prospects of a high level education and a good job within sight.

Part 2 Theoretical underpinnings

4 Social class and social status

This chapter briefly describes various sociological concepts and clearly explains why both social status and social class are considered important in the analysis of this problem.

4.1 Not good enough

Due to the increased social mobility, there is the concept that someone can escape from his low position in the social hierarchy if he is good enough. Conversely, it means that someone is not good enough if he cannot escape from his low position. It also means that someone from the lower class first has to earn his respectability, while someone from the upper class inherits it as a matter of course. This is an inequality that does not disappear by itself when someone rises to a higher class (Bourdieu 1984).

“Education covers, at the most abstract level the development of capacities within a human being. At the most concrete level. Education meant to the people we interviewed getting certificates for social mobility and job choice, and felt that American society parcels out the certificates very unequally and unfairly, so that middle-class people have more of a chance to become educated than themselves. But if the abstract is connected to the concrete, this means middle-class people haven more of a chance to develop the defence, the tools of personal, rational control that “education” gives. Why should one class of human beings get a chance to develop the weapons of self more than another? And yet, if that class difference is a fait accompli, what has a man without education got inside himself to defend against this superior power?” (Sennett, Cobb 1972: 25)

4.2 Social Status

Social status is a position in a hierarchy (stratification) based on social valuation of property, knowledge, origin, cultural baggage, consumption, lifestyle, physical beauty or whatever is deemed important in a society.

In part, this stratification is embedded in existing institutions, such as in education. In there, a reached position is established with a diploma that gives access to further education or a profession. For another part, the granting of status is variable, and

depends on the evaluative organisation. A characteristic of social status is that it must be recognised by others, it is a part of intra-and inter-group processes. Status survey is a known phenomenon in sociology. The social position is then usually defined on the basis of variables such as profession, income and education level, often in relation to a particular aspect, such as promotion chances (Berting 1969), political preference (Inglehart 1990) and occupational prestige (Goldthorpe 1980). Bourdieu made it clear that the social position largely depends on the amount of cultural capital and the associated lifestyle (Bourdieu 1984). These factors play an important role in the experience of one's own position in relation to the position of others, but these are attributions that don't have an equal value and meaning for everyone. The value of moving about in an equal social group comes from that people like to see the status that they have, confirmed by the recognition and valuing of others.

"The feeling of self-esteem is therefore based on both one's position in a series of evaluative dimensions, as on the value that is granted to each of these positions."
(Argyle 1980)

4.3 Social class

The concept of 'social class' is linked to the economic structure of society, it is a distinction in groups of people who have a corresponding labour market position; salary, income, unemployment risks (Houtman, 2000), qualifications in education or labour market (Goldthorpe⁶, 1980), and living conditions (Sørensen in Crompton et al. 2000). This is about objective facts, not taste or ratings. In a capitalist society, there is a fundamental and systematic stratification of property, education, occupation and chances in life in general (Crompton et al. 2000). It is normal practice that someone with a higher education in a 'higher' job earns more than someone with less education in a 'lower' job. From a structural-functionalist view, it can be argued that in this way, society ensures that the most capable and qualified persons are at the most important places. This way, society benefits as a whole; judging from this vision, the structured inequality is also in the interest of the less capable. The concept of 'social class' can also be seen as the name of social power. Viewed from the conflict theory, the various social classes have different interests, that stand

⁶ EGP-class- scheme set up by Erikson, Goldthorpe, Portocarero in 1970, and named after them.

opposite to each other in this capitalist society. Seeing it from the conflict theory, in the first place class differences are differences in power. Classes are conflicting groups in which those that have the most power can impose their ideas onto groups with less power. The distribution and regulation of inequality is a fact, seen from both sides, the legitimation is dependent on the ideology with which one looks at the division. The belief system or the ideology determines whether people accept or don't accept the distribution of inequality (Giddens 1973, Rawls 1999, Sennett 2003, de Botton 2004, Swierstra, Tonkens 2010). In this sense, Giddens calls the conflict theory the other side of the structural-functionalist medal. Looking at it from the structural-functionalism side, accepted structural inequality is a necessary condition for a peaceful society, from which both the weak and the strong benefit. Everyone in the place where he/she is at his/her best, and can therefore make the most appropriate contribution to the whole. Differences in interest or in power, play no role here, the order is in everyone's interest. The conflict theory is completely opposite to this, and emphasises that the inequality is in favour of the groups that have the most power and thereby it is also maintained by these groups.

4.4 Social hierarchy

The similarity between social status and social class is that they are both indications of inequality between people; together they form the social hierarchy. Social hierarchy is present in every society, in various forms and with different status symbols. A hierarchy can soon be observed even among a small group of children (Lippitt et al. in Wright 1995). We see this pattern also among other social animals (De Waal, 1998). A social hierarchy belongs to the basic features of social life. The internalisation of social relations on an interpersonal level is part of the socialisation process and necessary for the reproduction of society. This part of the socialisation process in a modern society is more complicated than in a traditional society because of the following factors:

- Unlike traditional society, where rigid dividing lines exist between different walks of life, there is a contemporary stratification coming from of a complex of elements, that cause status through different dimensions to merge into each other, and have a different meaning and a different value for different population groups.
- Due to the ideal of equality in modern Western society, the status differences are not openly acknowledged; there is a taboo on talking about differences in status and status process.

- By recognising and using codes, which are very subtle sometimes, people find others of equal status, and they know what someone's 'value' is. Differences in status are displayed, confirmed and legitimised by status symbols (Wright Mills in Veblen 1974: 22). These symbols can be copied, but then they are in fact no more than a package without content.
- In a traditional society, status symbols are tied to the property and power positions of different classes. In a modern society, luxury goods and status symbols like expensive designer clothes have acquired their own normative meaning, and they are sooner connected to self-chosen lifestyles.

4.5 Class Awareness

Social status and social class each represent a different aspect of the hierarchy. In 'The Black Coated Worker' (1989, first published in 1958), Lockwood makes clear that objectively seen, the economic position of lower office staff was equal to the position of the workers (low-paid, wage-dependent), but that their working conditions were more favourable, because of which they had a better position on the status ladder, and didn't feel associated with the workers in the factory. With that, the labour movement blamed them of false class awareness; it was hard to get the office staff into action because they felt associated with the management and senior staff. The class awareness does not have to correspond with the actual class position; they are two different phenomena. The conditions under which people work affects consciousness, and can make the difference between what a person believes his class position is, and the class position he actually holds (Tawney in Lockwood 1989). The class position is determined by facts: working conditions, deciding about one's own work, salary level, possession of means of production, possession of qualifications, and origin. The status position is derived from that, and is based on valuation of these facts.

Determining the social position, relative to that of someone else, is largely an unconscious process, it happens automatically. Signals emitted are sometimes very subtle, but are correctly interpreted by a socially skilled person, and cause an adequate reaction. Nonverbal communication in the form of behaviour, attitude, clothing, speech, etc., give an impression of the status, and the dominance sense of the person. In social psychology, these signals and mechanisms have been studied thoroughly, by Maslow (1977), Argyle (1980), Extra (1983), Kalma (1989).

When analysing the statements and opinions of the students in my research, it is

being noted whether they name a status hierarchy, or if they indicate class differences, and what these differences are based on. It is observed to what extent their statements are opinions related to their position in the educational hierarchy.

4.6 Socialisation in social hierarchy

In 'Learning to Labour' by Willis (1977) it is shown how the 'lads' acquire a certain status within their subgroup by breaking rules at the school. They develop a 'counter-school culture' and withdraw themselves further and further away from the formal school culture. The informal culture of the subgroup matched the culture in the workplace of the factories, where they hoped to find a job; the school became increasingly unreal and less important. Among the 'lads', and their parents who worked as labourers in the factories, there was little appreciation for theoretical knowledge, it did not contribute to their status within the class to which they associated themselves. In this way, the class awareness contributes towards the preservation of class position.

If we compare the situation that Willis studied, to the situation of the present day school dropouts, there are strong similarities in what is visibly happening: no motivation to learn, counter-culture whereby rule-breaking and violence builds a status, letting informal prevail over formal. Is this a question of a specific value orientation that helps these youngsters to linger in their low class position? The notion that value orientation plays an important role in the school motivation appears partly from research into the role of subculture and ethnicity at alternative survival strategies (Sansone 1992) and the role that the 'parent culture' plays in school success of Turkish students (Coenen 2001). A general impression that is often heard among teachers and youth workers is that youngsters just have high ambitions, higher than that of their parents, often higher than the level of education they attend. Judging from that, it could be concluded that class position doesn't play a role in school dropout; after all they choose professions that are not related to the social class of their origin, but which are clearly much respected. It may also indicate a strong need for mobility, as far away as possible from the low position of their parents. Or on an inadequate processing of social information, because of which they are insufficiently able to set goals that matches their abilities. Finally, it may also be so that the estimated outcome of low qualification in their view does not outweigh the effort that has to be put into it, in order to achieve that qualification (Oreopoulos 2003).

In countries with greater inequality, children have a higher aspiration level than children in countries where there is much equality (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). This could be because countries where there is more equality, occupations that require little education are more appreciated. The low-skilled work could be less stigmatised there, than in countries where having a high education, a great career and wealth, are strongly emphasised.

4.7 Difference in culture

Education has a hierarchical structure, which leads to different cultures among youngsters. On one hand these differences depend on the environment in which the school is; Pre-university Education (VWO) in a relatively poor part of town is, in terms of culture, other than a Pre-university Education (VWO) in a richer part of town. On the other hand, these differences are connected to the type of education. The differences are similar to the habits and tastes of adults from various social backgrounds, as we know from the reproduction theory of Bourdieu (1984). This way, education has a structuring effect and in that sense it is similar to the later labour market. Youngsters acquire their identities on the basis of the education they have received. The question is to what extent they are aware of it, and distinguish themselves from other graduates. Youngsters who are successful in the educational system, will feel more at home in a culture that corresponds to the educational system. Youngsters who have difficulty with education, and have little to expect from it, will more quickly focus on cultural elements that are disconnected from, or controversial to the education.

The education system is an extension of the dominant culture; the extent to which youngsters have knowledge of the dominant culture, attitudes and behaviour, determines their school success. The social background, or rather the attitude from which youngsters participate in education, is their cultural capital. If this does not correspond with the attitude in school, then it has a negative impact on their school success. The failure at school will take them further away from the dominant culture, they feel less and less at home, and seek an alternative status in cultural expressions that are rejected by the school (Bourdieu in Elchardus, Frank 2001: 208-209).

4.8 Status Mobility

There are different strategies recognised when it comes to status mobility (identity management strategies). First the individual strategy; this is about ensuring that you

meet or will meet the conditions for the higher status, for example by getting a proper education and by showing good (adapted) behaviour. Social psychological research shows that people only make every effort to reach a higher status group if they feel that it is really possible. In that case, social identification is directed at the level that they want to achieve (Ellemers et al. 2000). Someone can also accept that he/she remains in the low status group and make the best of it.

Another possibility is the collectivist strategy in which action is taken to place the low status group in a better position, as a group, due to which the individual rises along. Some examples are the old labour movement, women emancipation movement and emancipation-oriented migrant organisations.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) call social originality as another opportunity to improve the social identity, whereby alternative status dimensions are introduced for comparison factors (not being the smartest, but the strongest or the most brutal, etc.). This way, the need to improve status can be a motivation towards deviant behaviour.

A complicating factor in some ethnic groups is the negative image that they carry and the low position they occupy on the status ladder (Tesser in Dronkers and Ultee 1995). Even though many immigrants move to the middle and upper classes, most of the immigrants are still working at the bottom of the labour market, are often less well educated, live in poorer neighbourhoods and are associated with crime. The Muslim minority is also widely associated with radical fundamentalism and terrorism. Just being a part of a marginalised group (unless the marginalised group has an exclusive status, the happy few, the elite) is in itself sufficient to contribute to a less positive social identity (Brewer & Hewstone 2004). The consequences of low social status for immigrant youth, who get good grades in school, may be very different than for youngsters who cannot get good grades, due to lack of capacity, behavioural problems, wrong school, too little support from home, language arrear or other individual factors. The first group can climb to a better position due to a good education, while the second group has to be satisfied with a low status position, and at best, a job with a relatively low income and few prospects.

This research aims to gain more insight into the sociological and social-psychological process that occurs for youngsters with fewer opportunities in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), within the above-mentioned forces. The ethnic background is a factor that does play a role, but in this research it doesn't play the main role. It's about the low status position of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) itself, and its consequences for the youth who participate. When it

is deemed important, a relationship is established with the ethnic background of the youngsters involved.

4.9 Approach from the class paradigm

Central to this issue are youngsters who are alike in the sense that later they have a bigger chance of getting a relatively low position in the labour market, workplaces and social status hierarchy. These are three characteristics that indicate to a social class (Lockwood 1989). The approach from a sociological perspective, can lead to a different view on the issue. That way, underlying patterns can be discovered, and other factors come into the picture that possibly plays a role. The problem can be studied from a class paradigm, and from the perspective of the risk- youth itself, rather than from the institutions responsible for solving or reducing the problem, and which may play a role in the existence of the problem (Touraine 1977). From a sociological approach, the question is whether the phenomenon of school dropout should be seen as a response from youngsters who consider themselves hopeless or as a protest response to an unsuitable class position, or as a strategy for social self-image improvement (Neckel 1996, Wilkinson, Pickett 2009).

To answer these questions, it should first be clear whether there is any status and class awareness among youngsters at all. What kind of status-beliefs do they have, what is relevant to them in determining their own position in society? Does the difference exist in wearing trendy sneakers or designer clothes or do they see other things as important, and is that different for different groups of youngsters, and do they know that?

The increasing upward social mobility, and the blurring of boundaries between different classes, does not mean that the degree of inequality between population groups has reduced. The expectation is that forms of inequality, and responses to that, in different forms, will continue to appear (Foote in Ossowski 1969:100). A recent international study into the effects of inequality within societies shows that countries with the most inequality also have most social problems (Wilkinson, Pickett 2009). The researchers have compared official data of a large number of developed countries with each other. The degree of inequality was determined by the difference in income between 10% with the lowest incomes and the 10% with the highest income. Furthermore, comparisons were made between countries in terms of life expectancy and problems, of which it is known that they are associated with the socioeconomic situation of people: physical and mental health, drug use, obesity,

teen pregnancy, violence and school dropout. Without exception, it seems that in countries where inequality is the highest, these problems appear most frequently, and not only in the poorest part of the population, but in the entire society there are more social problems. This is not connected to the general prosperity level of a country. On average, rich people are happier and healthier than poor people in the same country, but if a comparison is made between countries, it does not matter if the people of one country are on average twice as rich as the people of another country. Differences between countries in average income and living standards of the entire population makes no difference; the difference is determined by the differences within a society.

Wilkinson and Pickett show two possible explanations for this phenomenon. The first is that the position that a person has, in compared to others, is of greater importance than the actual circumstances. The second explanation is that happy and healthy people will automatically rise up in the social ladder and thus occupy the best position. Their research shows that the first statement is confirmed. The extent of social problems in a country depends on the degree of inequality, and not on the general level of prosperity or the degree of social mobility.

When we approach the problem from the class perspective, we should look for shared experiences in the socioeconomic, social, psychological and cultural level. These are experiences of actual opportunities in the labour market, experiences of acceptance and exclusion, respect and disrespect, status and failure, expectation and disappointment, and of solidarity and identity.

This research should be seen as an exploration of status views and experiences of youngsters. In addition, the views and experiences of youngsters who have little chance to improve their position, is compared to the views and experiences of youngsters who have a better chance of a good social position. It's about the extent to which the social orientation of youngsters is coloured by one's own position, social identity and social interactions in which they are involved (Touraine, 1977). Hereby the term 'social status' is used as well as the term 'social class'.

5 Social identity, social status and relative deprivation

According to the 'social identity theory' (Festinger, 1975, Tajfel, 1981, Turner et al. 1987 and many others that have made additions thereto), it is about positively distinguishing oneself from others (upward drive) and about the strongest motivation of the 'social self'. The groups, to which they associate themselves, are reflected back on the individual. The social identity of an individual derives from it. Belonging to a socially valued group makes a positive contribution to social identity. Belonging to a less valued or stigmatised group makes a negative contribution to social identity. Experiments in laboratory conditions show that belonging to a high or low status group gives different reactions in different situations (Ellemers, Box, 2000). If someone belongs to a group with low status, he will try, if possible, to join or be admitted to a higher status group. But he'll only be interested in being a part of a higher status group, when it is actually reachable.

There is a question of relative deprivation, when someone feels that in principle he/she belongs to a higher status group, but is not admitted to it. If there is no possibility at all of getting to the higher status group, then there is less question of relative deprivation. The more reachable the higher status group is, the more likely it is that someone functions according to the norms of that group. The less accessible, the more they will focus on the acquisition of status within their own group. In the relative deprivation theory, the accessibility of higher status (linked to a reference group) is an important factor to determine whether or not one is satisfied with the current position. The concept of 'relative deprivation' was first used in a study called 'The American Soldier' (Stouffer 1949), and although it is difficult to define exactly, the sociologist Runciman attempt the following:

"But we can roughly say that A is relatively deprived of X when (1) he does not have X, (2) he sees some other person or persons, which may include himself at some previous or expected time, as having X (whether or not this is or will be in fact the case), (3) he wants X, and (4) he sees it as feasible that he should have X. Possession of X may, of course, mean avoidance of or exemption from Y." (Runciman 1972: 11)

To which he added that the qualification 'feasibility' is needed to exclude 'fantasy wishes'. Relative deprivation causes feelings of injustice and envy. It does not depend on the actual position that someone occupies; it's always about the comparison with

others in the reference-group.

5.1 In- and out-group

It appears from laboratory research into in- and out-group behaviour of individuals, that when there is less chance of achieving a higher status group, a stronger bias in favour of the in-group is perceived; the in-group is important for the improvement of social identity than the out-group (Ellemers, Box et al. 2000). This could play a role in the extremism of youth (or religious or political extremism, doesn't matter so much) and also in deviant behaviour in groups. Lack of confidence in the 'normal' society, to achieve something that is worth it, can lead to self-exclusion from the usual path, and a 'choice' of the alternative route (Sansone 1992, Leuw 1997, Van San 1998). The 'normal' society is then taken as the out-group, while the alternative route is regarded as the in-group.

The survey among Antillean boys by Van San, shows that boys who do reasonably well at school and come from a family that is materially well off, are less involved with the police than those who perform less well at school and come from homes that are materially less fortunate. The poor performances are often accompanied by behavioural problems at school and truancy; a self-reinforcing process that ultimately often leads to criminal activity.

Van San claims on basis of empirical material, that boys who don't come into contact with the police, have more often a more positive aspiration for the future than boys who do come into contact with the police. The boys with a positive aspiration are convinced that they manage to get a good diploma and later a good job. Problems such as discrimination and high unemployment encourage them to get a 'higher' qualification, and to do their best, while the group that does not believe in it, drops to truancy and to committing crimes.

Her research revealed that it was particularly the experience of disadvantageous position that played a decisive role in whether the boys became criminal or not. So, boys who were in disadvantage both objectively and subjectively, had the highest chance of quitting the 'normal' society and to be delinquent (Van San 1998). This corresponds to the phenomenon that is found in laboratory studies, namely that the greater the distance is to the out-group, the higher the preference is for the in-group. Youngsters, who believe they have a good chance at a good degree and a good job, have less reason to seek their salvation in groups that are outside the social order.

5.2 Need for esteem and self-esteem

People need to feel good about themselves. They distance themselves from others who clearly perform better than them. The need for self-esteem and self-respect is a universal human trait. In social psychology, it is called self-enhancement; increasing self-esteem for oneself, and in the eyes of others; a theme that is widely studied (Fiske, Taylor 1991, Leary, Tangney et al. 2005, Kernis et al. 2006).

The questions that are asked are: why do people have this need, what function does this characteristic have, and how does the mechanism work? When is it activated, when is it enough, too little or too much?

The study of the function of increasing self-esteem is characterised by four points according to Koole (2000):

- The belief of being able to do something good, contribute to a healthy mind and encourages the success of performance (Taylor, Brown 1988).
- A good self-esteem makes one feel like a valuable member of a meaningful universe (Greenberg et al. 1986).
- Self-esteem is conditional in the construction of oneself, relative to the other, the extent to which is determined by culture (Leary, Baumeister 2000).
- Increase in self-esteem serves towards the prevention of social exclusion, one feels like a part of the whole, and it ensures an adequate processing of disappointments, so that one has the courage to do it again or to continue doing it (Heine et al. 1999).

5.3 Threat to self-esteem and self-respect

Increasing self-esteem and self-esteem is needed to cope with a negative self-perception that may arise because others possess more, are 'worth' more, perform better, or to process and accept exclusion. It is a kind of optimism that makes sure that someone doesn't give up, continues to believe in a set goals, and when everything indicates that the target is difficult or impossible to achieve, changes the goal without loss of face towards themselves and others.

There are several ways to increase self-esteem. One way to maintain a healthy self-esteem or to increase self-esteem is the egotistical way; the phenomenon that people tend to link their failure to circumstances, and success to their personal qualities (Meertens 1991). They take more responsibility for their successes than for their failures. If one has received positive feedback on the performance of a task, then that task is presented as more important than when one has received negative feedback.

The same applies to the person or body from which the feedback is received. In case of positive feedback, one is more positive about the one who gave the feedback, than in case of negative feedback. Tesser and Campbell (1980) describe this phenomenon in the 'Self Evaluation Maintenance'-model. People, especially like those abilities and qualities that they themselves hold important. Negative feedback can be rendered harmless to the ego by dismissing it as unimportant, or by labelling feedback as being something else, such as an expression of discrimination.

There are several conditions discovered under which the opposite happens; the failure is attributed to oneself, and success to luck and circumstances. The conditions under which that happens, are dependent on the social context in which one is confronted with success and failure. It is important to note that it's not so much about the actual context, but rather the perception, assumption and expectation of the person in question. Below are some conditions where it was discovered that test-subjects attribute failure to themselves and success to external factors.

- When it is expected that the others have consensus on the reason for the failure or success, or if others similar persons achieve better results in a similar situation.
 - When others can find out that the presentation of matters is too rosy.
 - When it is expected that there is still the same task to be done. In a situation where self-confident statements can be refuted by a poor performance on a new task, one introduces oneself modestly (Meertens 1991).
 - Because people think that they seem honest and modest. This happens especially when one thinks that modesty is valued more than bragging. Then it is from self-presentation motive more convenient to attribute the failures to oneself, and to be modest about the success.
- (Rosenthal 1969, Hass 1981, Meertens 1991, Mecca et al. 1989, Deci, Ryan 2004, Kernis et al. 2006).

Someone who wants to meet stereotypical expectations, for example in order to appeal to others or to avoid criticism, makes less use of egotistical attribution statements, than when there is no need to take a stereotyping into account. This phenomenon occurs particularly when there is an unequal power relationship.

Women behave more modestly in an asymmetrical power relationship than men. Probably because they assume that that attitude is more appreciated (Gould, Slone 1982 in Meertens 1991). Socially afraid people take less responsibility for success, and make less egotistical attribution statements than people who are self-confident (Arkin et al.1980).

The way someone feels inferior or superior, depends not only on the social environment in which inequality is reproduced, but also the perception of themselves and others. Inferiority and superiority are themselves symbols of inequality, and their characteristics are constructed in social reality. Inferiority exists only when it is experienced. Nobody can be forced to find themselves inferior: it is a negative self-evaluation, independent of, but influenced by the situation (Neckel 1996). One of the main causes of this context, according to Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) is that a society, that is based on income disparities, places a greater emphasis on competition. This plays a role at all levels, but the need of individuals, to compensate for the experience of losing their face, is the hardest to satisfy at the lowest level. People from the upper and middle classes can compensate for disrespect or loss of face, for example, because they are supported by family or friends, or by success in another area; maybe they have a nice house, new clothes, a good job, a good education. For people who do not have this, it is much harder to maintain their self-esteem. That's why, in case of a greater inequality in society, and a stronger competitive force, the pressure increases at the lowest level, and people have more deviant behaviour.

5.4 Stigmatisation

Just like personal identity, social identity is not a static state, but moves as it were, with the situation where someone is. Feelings of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-respect are constructed in the situation. The contribution of the individual in the situation is a set of beliefs, values, attitudes and standards that are based on previous experiences (Ellemers, Box 2000, Crocker, Quinn Brewer, Hewstone 2004, Hoff, Pandey 2004).

Tajfel defined social identity as follows:

"Social identity is that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." (Tajfel 1978: 63)

An internalised stigma can affect the self-esteem of the individual and certain aspects in a situation can switch on the internalised stigma, as if a switch. Research has shown through testing that a reference to the stigma was sufficient for a stigmatised person, to perform under his/her normal level. Individuals may be stigmatised because they belong to a social group that is judged negatively. That makes them especially vulnerable to, and dependent on, the social context and characteristics of certain situations (Brown, Capozza 2006, Wilkinson, Pickett 2009).

A well-known experiment took place in India, where 321 students from a high caste, and the same number of students from a low caste, were asked to complete pre-drawn mazes. The students of the low caste performed slightly better than the students of the high caste. When they next performed a similar task, but they were first mentioned by name and their origin, the students from the low caste performed significantly lower than other students (Hoff, Pandey 2004).

When, due to a stigma, social identity is vulnerable, there is a stronger dependence on the opinion of others about who one is and what one is worth. There is greater sensitivity for respect, not only individually, but also as a group people are more sensitive to, and dependent on, the appreciation of others (Smith, Brown Mackie in, Capozza 2006). The need to maintain a positive self-image, the individual or collective self-preservation motive, is probably stronger in situations where the person has no opportunity to improve the situation, and where it is a forced situation, which is hard to escape from. These may be situations that evoke fear, are threatening or hopeless (Vermunt 1981).

5.5 Neutralisation Techniques

Social pain, due to differences in status and relative deprivation, is not tied to a particular class or group. It's not that this only happens with groups and individuals at the bottom of society. Between and within various other status groups, there may be differences that individuals experience as unjust or painful. Even within the highest status groups there is a difference in status and there are situations where it is painful for the individual to lose that status or not get the recognition he or she should get according to him or her. For a sort, whose powers derive from friendship, cooperation and justice, where identification is anchored with others in our psyche, it is clear that structures based on inequality, inferiority and exclusion, cause social pain (Wilkinson, Pickett 2009).

In the book 'Verzoening' (Reconciliation) Frans de Waal describes the reconciliation behaviour of different species of monkeys, while he draws parallels towards the social behaviour of people. One of his observations is that after a battle for power, status hierarchy stabilises again, because mechanisms go into force, which prevent the losing party from losing its face.

"A collective lie makes it possible to reach a compromise without that a clear winner or loser is established." (De Waal 1998: 241)

Such a collective lie can be made such that the winning party devalues itself, while the losing party glorifies itself. Such as parents that exaggeratedly praise their child, who can't have his way, as long as afterwards the child obliges to the wishes of the parents. The child knows that his 'good' behaviour is praised because he has adapted himself, but he gladly believes that he has achieved something special and he attaches values to the good relationship with his parents, so he accepts their 'lie'. Goffman describes these mechanisms under the term 'cooling the mark out' (Goffman 1980: 98-120). This is an American expression, used by gangsters and crooks for 'comforting' or 'misleading' the victim, so he/she won't take revenge. It comes down to letting the victim accept the lost cause; the disappointment and loss of face. These mechanisms are reflected in the way the social status hierarchy is 'sold' and 'accepted', and also within the school system. Goffman notes that in society, there are many similar situations where people have to process disappointment when reasonable or inflated expectations don't come true. This study examines whether there are manifestations of this neutralisation techniques reflected in the statements that youngsters make regarding their social status, and about the chances for a good future. It is assumed that when these techniques are more frequently used, there is more often a question of social pain, which needs to be neutralised.

Neutralisation Techniques for social pain caused by social inequality are:

- Glorification of the group to which someone associates him-/herself, in response to denigration and rejection by the opposition group (Merton 1967).
- Pretending that the lesser position, the unequal situation or subordination, are based on one's own choice.

- The unequal situation is only temporary, it will improve later. There are always new opportunities.
 - The disadvantages that are attached to the better position are magnified, just like the benefits to the lesser position.
 - Reduced position is otherwise appointed, so the situation appears no less.
 - The individual who loses his/her face quits and leaves the situation or continues for the formality. Loss of interest in the better position and the reduction of its importance.
 - Opposition to the situation, anger, protest.
 - Successes that do exist are magnified.
- (Goffman 1980)

5.6 Self-Esteem

One of the underlying aspects of the question how people in low social status position deal with it, is the degree of self-respect, self-esteem, self-confidence. In English literature, the term 'self-esteem' is used, but this involves more than the Dutch equivalent: 'zelfrespect' (Rosenberg 1986, Burn 1992, Laery, Tangney 2005, Kernis (ed.) 2006). In 'self-esteem', confidence and personal evaluation play an important role. When, in the Dutch thesis, I use the term 'zelfrespect', I do it in the broader sense, similar to the English term 'self-esteem'. It is precisely because of the fact that it can mean so many different things, that it is important to start with the definition. Below is the definition as formulated by Nathaniel Branden (1992).

"Self-esteem is the experience that we are appropriate to life and to the requirements of life. More specifically, self-esteem is...

1. *Confidence in our ability to think and to cope with the basic challenges of life.*
2. *Confidence in our right to be happy, the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert our needs and wants and to enjoy the fruits of our efforts."*

(Branden 1992: vii)

The term 'self-esteem' is used in different ways in research and literature. Below, there are ways given, of which all three fit within the construction of the term, but clearly have an own theory and substance.

'Global self-esteem', also known as 'Trait self-esteem', refers to a personal characteristic, a trait that a person has in to a greater or lesser degree. It has a

genetic component and is related to the temperament and nervous system.

With 'State self-esteem' or 'Feelings of self-worth', it is meant the sense of self-esteem that is related to certain experiences. It moves along with positive or negative influences. A promotion lets the 'State self-esteem' rise, and dismissal results in dropping.

Finally, there is the 'Self-evaluation' or the 'Domain specific self-esteem', this is related to the way individuals evaluate and appreciate their qualities and skills. These three contents are not separate from each other, and much research is aimed to find out to what extent, and in what causality these contents are interrelated (see for a recent overview Kernis et al. (2006). There is convincing evidence for the proposition that thinking that you are good at certain things, is not the same as having a high degree of self-esteem (Brown, Marschall in Kernis 2006). Self-confidence and self-respect are closely related with each other but are not interchangeable. Confidence comes from the belief that you are able to successfully meet a challenge or complete a task; the feeling that you are able to make happen what you are presented, despite possible obstacles. Self-respect is more about accepting yourself, about respecting your wishes and needs, about finding yourself a valuable person, about being satisfied with the kind of person you are, even if you acknowledge your weaknesses and mistakes (Rosenberg 1986). It is very well possible for each individual to achieve a positive self-image and a high degree of self-respect, regardless of actual income and circumstances, because the individual's chooses in what areas and what criteria he assesses himself. When an individual starts to attach more importance to social status and social success, it has a greater influence on his self-image and self-respect, whether he has more or less in compared to others. Rosenberg calls this the 'psychological centrality' of a certain aspect of the person (Rosenberg 1986).

The need for self-esteem is a universal and a dominant factor in the motivation system of people. The extent to which this factor plays a role in the acquisition of social status, is dependent on the importance that the individual is granted in social status, and whether the concept of social status of the individual is linked to educational level, occupational level, economic level, or is based on another dimension of comparison. Consider the dimension of behaviour: being 'streetwise', being dominant in behaviour towards others, asking attention, being admired for talent for sports, music or something else. Personal and social identity play an important role here, but also positive and negative life experiences such as feelings of pride or shame in certain situations. The self-concept is a reflection of what the

individual thinks of himself and who he thinks he is, not what others say he is. Self-respect is primarily dependent on self-evaluation and self-assessment, not the assessment of others. The self-concept is a fundamental reference system on which most activities, evaluations and reactions of people are based (Rosenberg 1986). The question is, to what extent, students in Secondary Education (VO) acquire part of their self-esteem from the education they follow.

5.7 The perception of social stratification

Social stratification is not only a sociological concept; it truly does exist as perception and emotion, as the answer to the need for rank-order in a social group. In the past, this ranking was very recognisable and institutionally divided, often determined at birth. Now it is all very different; less obvious and not the same for everyone. Now it is more often linked to lifestyle and group formation. Modern stratification is much more complex than the social hierarchy in the class-society, and is still determined, besides the rest of the still recognised differences in education and occupation, by consumption habits, cultural capital, social capital (e.g. how well you go with the time) and other aspects. Lenski (1984) emphasises that the acquisition of social status is a particularly strong force in human action. The need for equal-making (uniform pressure) is opposite to the performance need, which encourages the pursuit of superiority over others. Apparently, the need to dominate is present among many people to a greater or lesser extent. If people can dominate, there is more serotonin in the brains than when they cannot dominate (Frank McGuire et al. 1999). We get a kick out of it and we feel better. People, but also other organisms, need to have competence and personal effectiveness on their environment. There are many studies in psychology that confirm this. There is talk about the competency motive (Vermunt 1981) and 'effectance motivation' (White 1959). This requirement helps ensure that people try to reduce their uncertainty and increase their impact on the environment. It is clear that emotions play an important role here (Frijda 1986). The extent to which a person has this need, depends on the character, socialisation process and environment. Dominance also has to do with power; control over the behaviour of others and the power to do things according to their own view. Class and status are two phenomena, in which the distribution of power in a society can be recognised, according to Weber (1987, first published in 1922). Among others, Blau (1977) and Rawls (1999) make clear that an accepted rank-order or hierarchy is needed in a society to justify social inequality. An accepted rank-order

also ensures that each member gets the place that he/she 'deserves', in which he/she is respected and can respect him-/herself. Self-respect is a prerequisite for mental health and satisfaction, it consists largely of the respect that is given by other significant persons. Youngsters derive their self-esteem strongly from their position in the peer-group, against the background of society as they see it. The question is on what kind of people they orient themselves, with what they measure themselves and how much they differ from each other in it. It has to do with sense of identity, but also the relative position that someone takes towards (comparable) others, so the social hierarchy that one experiences and their own position in it. These are experiences that may be associated with the class position that they occupy, with the ethnic background and social identity (the complex of roles, attitudes and beliefs in which they recognise themselves) that they have. By researching how youngsters with different backgrounds and different chances and opportunities relate to each other, themselves, the society and their relative position within it, provides insight into the way youngsters accept their position or not, and justify it.

Part 3 Research

6 Research from the insider perspective

In a study about school dropout and problem youth, the concentration is often on the youngsters who fail or cause problems. When it is equally important to investigate why youngsters who are in low social position and have less chance of reaching a better status through a higher education, do not fall out and cause any problems. These youngsters have a socially accepted way to deal with it; they accept and exploit their opportunities from a 'lesser' starting position. From this approach questions arise such as: Is their level of ambition lower? Do they look differently at opportunities and constraints than students in Higher General Secondary Education or Pre-university Education? Which neutralisation techniques and collective statements do they use to accept the lower position without losing their face? Do they experience status-differences differently, and is social success more important or less important for them than for those in a higher type of education? Researching the vision of youngsters gives more insight into their perception of social reality on this point. From the insider perspective, factors are highlighted that play a role in the acceptance of the positions they occupy in society and the related opportunities for social success. These factors may also be of interest to youngsters who cannot accept that they have fewer opportunities to achieve high ambitions.

The question that is raised in this research is, in which way Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education students deal with their relatively low educational position and what role this position plays in the construction of their self-esteem and future expectations. Investigation is being done towards the question whether low-skilled youngsters experience a lack of status and respect, and whether they see enough opportunities to change that through a profession qualification. The choice has been a qualitative approach based on the insider's perspective, whereby the aim has been to find out about the subjective experience of the youngsters regarding their relative position. In the Netherlands, a few studies have been done that approach this problem from the insider perspective (e.g. Verkuyten 1984, Sansone 1992, Leuw 1997, Van San 1998, Nelis 1999, Coenen 2001, van Lieshout 2003, De Jong 2007, van Daalen 2010). Most studies have focused on displaying the results, developments and facts in the context of policy practice (oaVan Esch, Neuvel 2007, Herweijer 2008), or a combination of both (eg Crul 2000, Heyl et al. 2001, Severiens, Verstegen 2007), or depart from the school or teacher perspective (e.g. Kleijer et al. 2004). This

research focuses on uncovering subjective data: the perception of people in that particular situation, in the context of their own reality. It was chosen to make an approach from the standpoint of youngsters themselves, in the age period in which it becomes clear what they can or cannot reach.

6.1 Operationalisation of the problem

The central questions are:

How and to what extent does today's youth experience social status and how do they justify inequality, or do they reject it? How do students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education cope with the relatively low social status of their education and is there friction between their expectations and the assessment of their capabilities?

The sub-questions arising from the problem are:

1. How and to what extent does today's youth experience social status and how do they justify inequality, or do they reject it?
2. To what extent are there similarities and differences in their perceptions and reactions, and how and to what extent do these observations and reactions correlate with their educational level and social identity?
3. Are youngsters, who reach less high in education and thereby find themselves in a lower social position, aware of that position and do they see enough opportunities to change that through a profession qualification?
4. To what extent do they find that important? Is there a difference between the aspirations of students, and do these differences correlate with their education level or social identity?
5. Do students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education suffer from the relatively low social status of their education, and do they experience a friction between their expectations and estimates of their future?
6. Which neutralisation techniques and collective statements are used to accept the lower position without losing face?

The first question that arises during the operationalising of a problem is, what criteria we should perceive, organise, classify and measure to get answers to our research. This becomes more difficult as the complexity of the question increases, and the phenomenon which play a role are not clear enough to be distinguished (de Groot, 1994). The present research question is broad and complex, and there are

symptoms of a taboo, which makes surfacing the distinguishing features even more difficult.

The problem is operationalised into three parts:

- First it is investigated how today's youth, in general, look at people in different situations, and whether they do notice social status differences at all.
- Besides that, it is explored which future expectations and ambitions they generally have, and with which features they describe themselves in response to the question 'Who are you?'.
- Finally, by comparing images of society, self-image and future prospects of Pre-university Education (VWO) / Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students with those of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education, it becomes clear whether there are differences that might be related with the relative position and the nature of their education.

After a qualitative analysis of open answers and comments, they are categorised and compared to each other. Differences and similarities between students of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO), Pre-university Education (VWO) and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) are established, after which it is assessed whether, and to what extent, these differences and similarities are related to the educational level of the different groups of students and other personal characteristics such as ethnic background and employment status of the parents. Finally, it is researched whether the differences and similarities can be understood in light of social psychological and sociological knowledge about human responses to social inequality, and it is further seen whether Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education students demonstrate awareness of, or have problems with, their relatively low status in education.

The conversations and responses are analysed according to the following questions:

- Do youngsters experienced a hierarchical social order, and a social ladder?
- What indicators are used by youngsters in assessing the social status of others?
- Are these indicators based on (presumed) actual opportunities and possibilities in the labour market or are these indicators dependant on

certain culture-oriented evaluations?

- Do they make nuanced judgements or do they have a black and white approach? Do they name the aspects that have to do with acceptance and exclusion?

- Do they show a sign of solidarity with others, and if so, who are these others?

- What arguments do they use to explain and justify differences, what role do class position, ethnicity and religion play in these statements?

- To what extent are there differences and similarities in their perceptions and reactions, and to what extent do these observations and comments correlate with their education level?

- Is there a difference between the ambitions and self-esteem of students, and do these differences correlate with their education or social identity?

6.2 Study Population

These are students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education, Higher General Secondary Education and Pre-university Education (n =177) between 15 and 17 years of age, approximately equally spread in school type (vocational and theoretical), gender and ethnicity. The respondents are students at a school community in South Rotterdam, with different locations in Rotterdam and a location in Barendrecht.

The southern part of Rotterdam is characterised by a high percentage of immigrants, over 60% of students in secondary education is of foreign origin. The socio-economic status is generally low. The standardised average income (related to family size) is lower than in the whole of Rotterdam. This is mainly because a relatively large part of the population lives on social benefits or unemployment benefits, and due to the large proportion of non-Western immigrants, who often have a relatively low income. In Barendrecht, the percentage of residents from ethnic minorities is lower.

Moreover, there are a greater number of families with an above average income living there. That's why, the economic position of the residents is on average better than that of residents in South Rotterdam; average € 20,000 in Rotterdam South versus € 26,000 in Barendrecht. For comparison: In 2007, the standardised average income in the Netherlands was € 23,300, € 21,000 in Rotterdam, and in Rotterdam, including the Metropolitan Region € 22,400 (COS 2007).

In Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) in Barendrecht, where a part of the data collection has taken place, the proportion of immigrant students is also

about 60%. Many of these students are from south of Rotterdam. The municipality of Barendrecht is adjacent to the south of Rotterdam and is easily accessible from there. Students of the school community, who start at the Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) or Pre-university Education (VWO), but need to move over to a lower school, often arrive at this branch in Barendrecht. Parents choose this location for the school because the school is known as a solid school. By involving this Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) in Barendrecht into the research, it was possible to achieve sufficient differentiation and spreading in the background variables, such as ethnicity and socioeconomic environment of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students.

In selecting the study population, a search was done for a proportionate mix of background characteristics: different types of education (Pre-university Education (VWO), Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO), Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), both immigrant and native boys and girls, high and low educated parents.

By making a systematic comparison between students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), and students of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO), it is investigated whether differences in the researched groups are connected to educational levels or other personal characteristics such as ethnic background or socioeconomic status of parents. This study is not specifically about being the problem of being 'immigrant'. The characteristic of 'immigrant', seen as coming from a 'family that is not Dutch', is treated like any other feature of the youth in the study. It may be a factor that plays an important role, but it is not synonymous for deprivation and educational disadvantage.

6.3 Exploration of the problem

The basic form of the research is an exploratory observational study, completed with in-depth interviews and questionnaires with open answers. The observations are made after a stimulus, which is fully described in Chapter 9. The youth from the research group, respond to pictures of people in different situations, from all walks of life. The remarks, conclusions and grouping that are made in it, are taken up verbatim. The responses are categorised and analysed. In addition, by means of questionnaires with open answers, the youth indicate how they see themselves in society, and they describe themselves, their skills and future expectations. Finally,

there is an open interview done with a number of youngsters, in which their school experiences and future expectations are discussed. This combined approach makes it possible to examine whether, and how, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students follow the difference from those in Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) or Pre-university Education (VWO). In case of all students, attention is given to their statements about hierarchy, classification of people and the judgement criteria that they use, remarks about justice and injustice, differences in opportunities and possibilities of people, comments about the ethnicity of people and comments about their own position in society. The analysis of responses and self-descriptions are performed in the light of known insights from social psychology and sociology research regarding self-attitude, self-management and class awareness. It is noted, in what respects the reactions and self-descriptions differ or are similar, and whether Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students often use self-descriptions and show reactions, that can be recognised as neutralisation techniques for a low status position or class awareness. During the analysis of the observations and interviews, there is attention given to expressions of respect and disrespect, of admiration and contempt, hope and despair, expectations and disappointment. Recent sociological and social psychological research on processes and behaviour, which has to do with social status, was used to analyse the results (e.g. Raes 1997, Roe 1999, van Leeuwen et al. 2003, Brewer & Hewstone 2004, Brown, Capozza 2006, Kernis 2006, Deci, Ryan 2004).

6.4 Qualitative research

Central to this research is the perception of social inequality among youngsters. Perception is by definition subjective, and dependant on the social and material context in which the social actors are, and the psychological and emotional conditions that they carry with them. There are different actors, and they give meaning to a situation from different contexts, they argue from their own frame of reference. The relative position is the status that one experiences compared to others. Who these others are, depends on the level of aspiration that one has and the status he gives to others. This is subjective data that can best be named by the youngsters themselves. To be able to give one's own position, there should be a clear frame of reference, at the same time it should be avoided that an external reference framework is imposed, which is perhaps not relevant to the youngsters

themselves. The demand for reference groups and social comparison has a high level of abstraction. It's something people in everyday life don't often (or never) stop to think about. These are things that belong to the everyday common sense, and are mostly applied flawlessly without thinking.

Thus the research needs to obtain subjective data that is based on multiple realities and are dependent on several reference points. This is already a complicated task, and in addition, it is about processes and experiences that people are generally unaware of, that lie in the taboo area of our social interaction, and require much abstraction when people want to talk about it. The data that should be collected has the following characteristics, they are:

- 1 Subjective;
- 2 based on multiple realities;
- 3 from several reference points;
- 4 the result of unconscious processes;
- 5 subject to the taboo area;
- 6 with a high level of abstraction.

In a research whereby this type of data is needed, it is obvious to choose a qualitative approach. Observations and in-depth interviews can provide a good picture of opinions and attitudes, but to be able to make a comparison between different groups, it is necessary to streamline the observations and interviews, and to give them a certain shape. This makes me consider several methodological problems and considerations, which I describe in the next chapter.

7 Combination of old methods into a new research method

This chapter explains why it was necessary to create a new method, keeping three original and tested methods in mind. The methods that were partly suitable for this research are: The Self-Anchoring Scale (Kilpatrick, Cantril 1960), the think-aloud method (Hardop Denken Methode HOD) (Vermunt, Lodewijks, Simons 1986) and Who am I? or Twenty Statements method (Kuhn and McPartland 1954). Below is a description of these methods, reasons for deviating from it, and the final shape of the method used.

7.1 Self-Anchoring Scale

The Self-Anchoring Scale is a scale whose content is determined by the perceptions, goals and values of the respondents themselves (Kilpatrick, Cantril 1960). The highest and the lowest scores are named by the respondent. They fill in a drawn ladder with five steps, to show what is on the topmost step and what on the bottommost. The question is, for example: 'What is your perception about the happiest kind of life, and what is your view about the unhappiest kind of life?' The description of the happiest life is on the topmost step and the description of the unhappiest life on the bottommost step. This continuum, defined by the respondent himself, is used as a yardstick for his own position. The next question is: 'At what step are you at this moment?' The method was often used in studies of 'life satisfaction' and happiness. It concerns the measurement of subjective experience according to the dimensions and attributions that are important for the individual himself, and the determination of the degree of happiness. The principal feature of the method is that the reference frame is appointed by the respondents themselves. By dividing the distance between the extremes into, e.g. five positions on the ladder, there can be a number given to the level of experience of happiness, such that it can be calculated what the average degree of happiness is in a given population. There are several factors because of which the method did not satisfy the research-questions of this research. One of the research-questions is whether people believe in social hierarchies or not. Asking for a position on a ladder and naming the bottommost and the topmost step, in relation to social position or status positions, immediately removes the possibility to see if children of that age think in a social hierarchy 'on their own'. There has been chosen for the shape of a circle in place of a ladder, in order to avoid indicating a hierarchy beforehand. A circle can be

interpreted as a horizontal or a vertical surface⁷, there is no top or bottom if that is not named by the respondents themselves. The placement of the photos and the motivation thereto, indicated whether the youngsters made a hierarchical order or not.

The second aspect, because of which the Self-Anchoring Scale was not suitable in its original form, is that the naming of a topmost and bottommost step could lead to that the most striking distinction between people is chosen, such as money (more or less) or education (high or low), while more subtle or hidden aspects are not named. The Self-Anchoring Scale is mainly used for statistical comparisons between positions of different populations, such as value orientations. The method is in fact suitable for quantitative research (Lefcowitz, Wallston 1973). In a recent study on the value of using self-anchoring scales, it was established that there is a small but significant effect on the scores of the subjects, but that the difference does not outweigh the convenience of fixed anchor points. Only when a combination is made with qualitative methods, it can have an additional value, because the more qualitative information then indicates when the anchor points are given beforehand (Hofmans et al. 2009). In case of a qualitative research, it is more about insight and understanding, regarding the perception of interaction and the underlying thinking process, and less about finding statistical evidence. That, what has been taken from this method, is the idea of letting the respondents formulate the reference frame themselves, and after that let them decide a position for themselves.

7.1.1 Circle as a symbol for society

It was said about the circle, that it represented society, there was no further explanation given to the students. In the pictures (23), there are people in different situations, from different walks of life and various occupations. The task was to arrange the pictures in order, in, around or near the circle, in the opinion of the respondents. By letting them discuss it with each other, it became clear what considerations they were making. That is, what aspects they found important for the distinguish or grouping of people, what considerations they made when choosing a structure, while making a division, and what aspects they found more or less important. The conversation was recorded and later transcribed. The photographs

⁷ The use of spacious terms and metaphors is usual in the naming of social phenomena en structures. De term 'structure' is itself derived from spacious world: a spacious order of elements (Ossowski 1996)

were given always in the same order, one by one, to a different respondent each time, in a group of three. After that, the pictures were seen and described by the other respondents. If after ten pictures, there was still no division made, the respondents were asked to try to make a division. It was said that the division could be changed at any time when the rest of the pictures had become visible. This happened often. The division itself was not the main aspect of this assignment; it was more about being able to observe behaviour and considerations thereto. In addition, working in this way made it possible, within a few minutes, to let a group of youngsters talk to each other about an abstract subject, such as the social roles and functions of people in society, without stigmatising upfront or indicating a certain direction.

The 23 photographs were selected from a total of 80 photos by a panel of 17 persons. The panel members differed from each other in background, age and education. They were asked to divide the 80 photos on a schematic representation of the society, in the form of a matrix, in which a sub-division was made in level and dimension. The sub-division consisted of the three dimensions that were named as: economic dimension, cultural dimension and political dimension. Inside were four levels indicated: high, medium high, medium low and low. The photos taken by most panel members in the same dimension, or placed in the same social layer, were selected for the study (see Appendix 2). The purpose of this method was to acquire a more representative selection of photographs, than when only the researcher selected the photos. This does not mean that the selection was the best possible representation of society, but only that the subjectivity in the selection of the photographs was reduced and a validation could be made on basis of logical link (face validity) of the used photographs, with the subject to be examined.

The same photographs, but then smaller, and on stickers, were later stuck on a form (with a circle) individually by the respondents, with the explicit message that it did not have to be in the same way as in the group. The individual circle, combined with the statements and considerations that were made in the group, formed the reference frame at that point, within which the respondent gave answer to the question: where do you stand in society?

When categorising the answers, the answer of a respondent was evaluated in this context. The categories for recording the answers were partially named after the data collection had finished, when it became clear what kind of answers had been given.

The discovery of relevant categories, attributes and variables, is a part of the objective in an exploratory qualitative research (eg Swanbron 1981, Ten Have 2009).

7.2 Thinking Aloud Method (Hardop Denken Methode HOD)

This method is used for example in finding out regulatory processes in text study or calculation commands (Vermunt, Lodewijks, Simons 1986). These cognitive processes have no externally visible component for beginning students, besides measurable eye movements, and spelling and counting aloud. Because of that, in case of this research about these processes, often self-reporting is used by the learners. Processes that run automatically, such as memory and recognition processes, and processes that are automated through practice, however, are not available for reporting afterwards. The examiner asks information to which the test-subject has not given any conscious attention. The information needs to be retrieved by the test-subject from his long-term memory and be put into words. Because of this, there is a high risk of distortion of the report. By asking the subject to verbalise his thoughts directly while performing the task, a report of cognitive processes that take place is obtained. In this way, the theorising of the test-subject, about the learning process, is opposed, and the aim is to achieve, as accurately as possible, a representation of the process itself. It is important that the thinking aloud, the course, and structure of the cognitive processes, do not change. The investigator limits himself to explaining the task, the question about saying out loud what the subject is thinking, and, when carrying out the task, sometimes asks the subject what he is thinking, if there is silence for a while. All verbal expressions are recorded on tape and transcribed literally. The expressions are analysed and interpreted according to previously formulated protocols.

7.2.1 Deliberation as a form of thinking aloud

The thinking aloud method (Hardop Denken Methode HOD) was useful. The difference was that in this study, it was about surfacing opinions and reasoning on a subject, rather than surfacing a learning strategy. The task in which there had to be thought out loud, consisted of laying photographs in a circle, of people in certain situations. During a preliminary study in which 25 youngsters between 15 and 17 years participated, it showed that youngsters spoke much easier on the subject when they performed the task with two or three together. They clarified to each other why the photo has to be in a certain place and not another, or why the place was not

good. It made no distinction on whether the youngsters had language skills or not, nor whether they received a higher or lower type of education. The arguments they used were often surprising, but always understandable and related mostly to the social status, that they attributed to the person, and the context in the photos. It became clear that the evaluation of these photos suited them very well. When they were asked to put down the photos (one by one) alongside a 'ladder' with steps numbered from 1 to 7, with the information about 1 being the highest and 7 the lowest status position in society, they did so without difficulty, with the necessary arguments that arose spontaneously. As said earlier, a circle was later chosen instead of a ladder, in order to avoid that there is immediately a hierarchical order created, such that a different kind of ordering cannot be chosen anymore.

Sound recordings were made of the deliberations, that were, as much as possible, literally transcribed later, with notes about a person who passed a certain remark. This was not always easy to hear. At the beginning of the conversation, names were called out, so it was clear which voice belonged to whom. In case of nonverbal responses, while performing the task, it was asked what the meaning was. It was about a certain facial expression, a smile or a gesture. It happened frequently that another member of the group gave the explanation, after which the person in question himself gave further explanation about what they meant with it. It was often about a view where he/she was somewhat embarrassed by. One of the advantages of using the method in a small group context, is that opinions and considerations were often given uncensored and unpolished; they told each other in the first place, not to the researcher. This resulted generally, in a short time, in lively and frank conversations. A disadvantage was that the opinion of the group did not always have to be the opinion of each individual in the group. In order to overcome this somewhat, it was explained that after the interview, each one could stick the small photos in a small circle, in a way that may be totally different from the way the group had placed the photos. This possibility was used by 10% of the participants. They chose a different starting point to place the photos in order, then the starting point which was chosen in the group; for example, a hierarchy division, when this was not in the group, and they really placed them in a different order. The majority (60%) remained with the group opinion, though with some small differences in the location where the photos were just stuck. The group's division was removed before completing the individual circles and so they couldn't serve as an example. The remaining 30% diverted slightly from the group's division; for example by making a

different grouping, but in accordance with the starting point of the group's division. It was also noted in the report when initially deviating opinions were adapted to the group opinion. In cases where I doubted the sincerity of changing the opinion, I specifically requested for it. I held all the conversations myself, and have occasionally asked questions to learn more about the background of the answers. Sometimes, there was a conversation with the group after laying down the photos, whereby I myself brought up a topic by asking questions. The questions I asked and the conversations afterwards are also included in the interview reports, as far as they were present on the sound recording. The conversation reports were analysed by means of an encryption system, which was filled in per person.

7.3 Who am I? method

This method was developed as a tool for the investigation of self-attitudes. The self-conception of someone is formed by a long series of past experiences, events, socialisation processes and self-evaluation processes. It is not something fixed, but a complex continuous process of interpretative activity. It is a subjective stream of consciousness; both reflexive and non-reflexive, resulting in a structure of self-conceptions and self-attitudes (the self-reference system) (Gordon, Gergen 1968). The method was an attempt to study 'the self' as a set of attitudes. The Who am I? method was then used in various ways. The original way to use the method, is to count the number and kind of answers that the respondent gives to the question Who am I? A distinction is made between answers that are 'consensual' or 'sub-consensual'. 'Consensual' is understood as objective responses that refer to groups and classifications of which the meaning is unambiguous and known, such as 'student', 'girl', '16 years', 'living in Rotterdam', and so on. 'Sub-consensual' is understood as a subjective responses that can be interpreted in different ways, or where the respondent must give explanations like 'nice', 'a joker', 'too small', 'sporty' or something similar. The responses are scaled according to the principle of the Guttman scale in which the idea is that the items have an arrangement whereby the respondents with the 'best' answers get the highest score. Here, 'best' answers means answers that are objective and according to the explanation of Kuhn and McPartland: "places the individual in a social system". On a scale of twenty (there are twenty answers required) only the objective answers are counted. The greater the number of objective responses, the higher the score. In the fifties and sixties of the previous century, the Twenty Statements Method/Test was used in various ways. An

analysis system was developed based on the categories that somebody used to describe himself, or the grammatical time (tense) in which someone describes himself.

I have adapted the method to ten requested answers instead of twenty. Writing twenty things about themselves is a difficult task for many students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). During the test, it showed that ten answers were feasible. When analysing the answers, I used the original form; the objective and subjective responses scaled according to a Guttman scale. I also categorised the responses to positive or negative attributes and behaviour, personal characteristics including a distinction between private and social characteristics, and comments about religion or ethnicity. The idea behind this categorisation was that difference may exist in the experience of self-competence, identification focus (public versus private) and identification related to religion or ethnic origin, between the three evaluated subgroups: Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students.

7.4 View, discuss and determine

The choice to use photographs instead of descriptions is motivated by the clarity that photos offer on one hand, and the space they leave for their own descriptions and interpretations on the other hand. Visual images work directly on the association ability than mental images that are called up through language; for this reason there are often photos used when it comes to recognising emotions (psychology) or lifestyle (marketing). Another consideration was that the respondents have difference in abstraction ability and cognitive development; during a written description, this would, already beforehand, distort the interpretation and association possibilities. For many Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education students, reading a piece of text is often already a daunting mission, while viewing pictures is just as easy and simple as for Pre-university Education students.

7.5 Use of photos

Another aspect that justifies the choice of using photographs is the fact that photos show several dimensions at the same time, while in verbal descriptions, you need to choose a sequence in dimensions, and much less dimensions can be referred to, unless it is a literary story. On a photograph, for example, it is simultaneously visible whether the person is young or old, the status that their clothing exudes, the street

where they stand, their posture and the expression on their face, their cultural background, their colour, the activity that they carry out, the materials that they use for it, etc. In a verbal description, it would not be possible to present all this at the same time, without giving the description a pre-set sequence order. The photographs depict, as distinctly as possible, bits of reality which can be reacted upon. Important in the elicitation is that the investigator 'steers' as little as possible. But as with any qualitative research method, it is an interactive elicitation event; a result of an action of the investigator. The reactions of the youngsters were also determined by the photos that were presented. These are photos of more or less everyday scenes in Rotterdam in the period 2000-2008, made by a professional photographer, on request of the municipality of Rotterdam. They are generally well recognised by students of different educational levels.

The purpose of the pictures was to give the youngsters an image of 'society' to which they could respond. The society was represented by a circle (diameter of 31.5 inch). The photographs could be placed inside or outside the circle, according to their own choice. There was no further explanation about how the photos should be assessed or the significance of the circle. It was said that it was entirely their own decision. The photos were given one by one, each time in the same order. The students were asked to view the photo, and possibly discuss it with each other, and then to place it. I asked them to tell me why that location was chosen. The conversation was recorded and later transcribed. The position of the photos was noted with a brief mention of the 'why'. The statement on the order of the photos was derived from the interview report.

After all the photos were set out and explained, they were given the same photos in small size on stickers. It was made sure that the respondents could not look at each other's work. They could stick the stickers where they wanted on a sheet of paper with the same circle, there was a sticker with a blank circle on it. That sticker symbolised the students themselves, and the question was whether they could also give that sticker a place, and write underneath why they chose that place.

7.6 Small groups

The choice for working with small groups instead of individual respondents comes from the fact that youngsters focus strongly on others of the same age in determining their opinion. By placing them in groups to express their opinion, in the consultation form, the similarity with their normal situation becomes bigger, and

they speak more comfortably. The research method is similar to the field experiment, where the daily lives of people gets so manipulated that they will exhibit behaviours relevant to the investigation.

The researcher registers and observes, but does not join in the conversation. In this study, I, as a researcher, was neutrally helpful in carrying out the task, for example by helping the group get on their way. Sometimes I asked clarifying questions. The questions I asked were included in the report. In case of an individual approach, the respondent had to give her opinion to the researcher. This means that the respondent will give her opinion with those words and expressions (encoding) of which she presumes that the researcher understands and accepts them. By letting the respondent consult with her known peers, the pre-coding is skipped, which leads to a normal conversation on the subject, in the language that youngsters use among each other. Although a certain degree of self-censorship is to be expected, because there is an adult present, and there is a sound recording being made.

The influence that takes place, back and forth between the youngsters, is not a threat to the authenticity of the answers. In everyday life, where they usually determine their place, in compared to others, influencing each other is a normal occurrence. It is an aspect of their group identity, and for the individual respondent the group identity is an integral part of her personal identity.

During these small group discussions, something can become visible of the existing group's norms, to which the individual has to conform. After consultation with the peers, the individual respondent is ready to determine her⁸ own place in the circle. Because together it cannot be seen how the answers are being given individually, it is easier for the respondent to deviate from the group's view.

7.7 Summary of the method

The students made it clear to each other (groups of three persons) why in their view, a photo belonged at that particular place in the circle. Using the thinking aloud method (TAM) (Vermunt et al. 1986) revealed which considerations the students made when placing the photos. When all the photos had been placed, whereby they could be moved till the last moment, this section was closed. The result was recorded in support of the conversation-report and the analysis. The conversation was recorded and later transcribed as literally as possible, and linked to the person who

⁸ When referring to women, also men are referred to.

spoke.

Then each student was given a filled form with a circle and a number of questions. This circle had been filled with the same photos (on stickers), whereby the student was not required to take the previously laid photo-circle in the group into account. The students were thereby placed such that they could not look at each other's work. After that, they determined their own position individually in this circle and wrote down why they had chosen that place. The placement of the photos in the circle makes clear what the context of their self-chosen position is, and with whom they associate themselves.

Subsequently, they were asked on the questionnaire to name 10 things about themselves in response to the question 'Who are you?', following the Twenty Statements Test (TST) of Kuhn & McPartland (1954). The intention of this section was to gain insight into the self-image of the student; the way the student describes herself, makes something clear about her reference frame (personal or social focus) and her sense of self-esteem. This method was chosen because it leaves room for the respondent to name those things that are importance to her, the groups with which she identifies herself, and the dimension in which she looks at herself (in which she judges herself). There were no examples given. If students asked, they were told that they had to try to describe themselves and everything that they thought was alright. After this question, came the question: What can you do? Here too, it was said that anything could be filled-in and no examples were given. The idea behind this question was to get a picture of the degree of confidence of the learner, the type of activity that was named, and the domain in which confidence was experienced. The following questions were on the form: 'What do you want to achieve?' And 'What is important about it?' With the answering of the open question 'What do you want to achieve?', it became clear what the aspirations of the student are. The question is left open to make it possible for them to choose their own dimension. The answer could relate to education, occupation, life in general, to distant or near future, or to the level of ambition. The answer to the question 'What is important about it?' gave a picture of the extent to which the aspirations crystallised in actual plans and intentions, and how these plans and intentions related to education and an indication of educational motivation.

Finally, there followed a number of specific questions about the home situation. These questions were asked to get a picture of the socio-economic environment in which the student grows. The questions were short, and made with a checkmark

possibility. The question about occupation of father/mother, education of siblings was left open. The question of ethnicity was left out to prevent the respondent from feeling stigmatised. At the end, the student or the teacher was asked this question, barring the question wasn't asked during the conversation.

There was an open interview held with 20 Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education students, a few months after the examination, about their future expectations in relation to their educational level and the image they had of their relative position. There were also topics which corresponded with the topics regarding the above described conversations. This was done for the validation of the research method.

8 Analysis of the data

The organising and processing of qualitative data, so that subgroups can be compared, requires interpretation of the data; it must be decided to which category an open answer, an observation or statement belongs. A good coding system helps to quantify the observed symptom and analyse it; the observations are coded at a nominal level, and are suitable for frequency analysis, subgroup comparisons and processing of measures of association (De Groot 2004).

8.1 Validation and reliability

A check on the coding system and the subjectivity of the researcher can be reached by letting a second researcher code the same data, and after that, measuring the inter-rater reliability with Cohen's Kappa. This association measurement measures the degree of similarity between two assessors or raters. When the categorisation of the two raters matches more strongly, the reliability of the coding system increases. A researcher who was not involved in the investigation, performed a random snap-check on 30 cases. She did this based on the interview reports and completed forms. With a significant Kappa between 0.65 and 0.95, on all relevant variables, it can be determined that there is a reasonably strong similarity between the two raters. This means that the research material is reasonably reliable and verifiable.

In this exploratory study, it is about insight, not about statistical evidence. Based on the results, comparisons are made within the research group, and conclusions can be formulated that can give rise to further research and theorising. In an inductive way, there is a transfer from observations to ideas. The results of the elicitation are similar to the material which is acquired from open interviews and observations. During the 20 open interviews, there were issues discussed that had also been raised in the elicitation, and there was talked about the questions that were answered individually. In addition, in class-conversations in the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), after the research, there was attention given to the subject and became part of the results discussed with the students, and was tested for validity.

8.2 Qualitative analysis

During the qualitative analysis of the data, the answers of individual students were always assessed in relation to the group-conversations, and their contribution to it. All interviews were transcribed as literally as possible. During the analysis of the circles and conversations, there was no special attention given the shape of the

division, but more to the content and meaning of the order. It was checked which aspects of the photographs and of society were observed and named, especially it was checked to what extent and what way the students named the hierarchy and hierarchical aspects. As much as possible, it was noted which respondent gave certain turns in the conversation, the coding was done from the view of a combination of the conversation, and that which the respondent had entered on the individual completed form. Of each group, it was noted how the circle (numbered) photographs were presented. In case of some conversations, the recordings have been lost, in these conversations I relied on my notes. The findings were coded according to an encoding system that was made prior to the group discussions on the basis of the test study. This coding was later revised because some categories hardly appeared and others were missing.

The data was then analysed on the basis of the following questions:

- On what basis do youngsters determine which dimension is dominant in their perception?
- Does social status plays a role?
- What is seen as status-enhancing factors and what is status-lowering?
- Are there several factors considered or does one come immediately to an opinion?
- Is it considered decrying or benevolent?
- What is their vision of society, according to the placement of the photos and the motivation behind it?
- How have they placed themselves and with what motivation?
- How did it go with influencing each other?
- Are there differences in the above, between Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students?

8.3 Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analyses were performed using SPSS. Most variables are of nominal measurement level. There are frequency- and bivariate analyses done to determine the relationship between variables, such as education type and some type of answer categories. This is done by means of a crosstab with an independent and dependent

variable, and the correlation measurement Cramer's V. This is the most appropriate measurement to determine the strength of a relationship between two qualitative variables.

9 Description of the data collection

The research among Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students was done in the period 2008-2009 at a Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) location in Barendrecht, of a school community in Rotterdam south, final exams classes Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), profession-based level, sector commerce & economics and health care & social welfare. The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students that are doing the theoretical learning route (TL) are not involved in the research because the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO)-TL takes a middle position regarding level, and as far as that is concerned it looks like the old Mid-Level General Vocational Education (MAVO); between lower vocational education and Higher General Vocational Education (HAVO). The level and the focus of the students differ too much from the group Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students in the lower levels, to consider them as one group (Van Daalen 2010).

The survey of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students was conducted in a different location of the same school. There was a total of 32 group sessions held at the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) location, where there were 96 students involved, including 53 boys and 43 girls. At the Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO)/Pre-university Education (VWO) location, there were 27 group sessions held, involving 81 students, including 39 boys and 42 girls, equally divided between Higher General Secondary Education and Pre-university students. The total study population consisted of 177 students, aged between 15 and 17 years.

9.1 Group Sessions

The group session and completing the questions took about a 50 minutes lesson time. The students participated voluntarily in the study. The enthusiasm to participate was high, partly because the implementation was usually within the class time; the students were happy enough to be able to do something else outside the classroom. The fact that this could be done along with a few classmates made it more attractive. The principle of the school found the participation in the research, of valuable to the opinion-forming of the students, and therefore deemed it legitimate to accommodate it during class time.

The study was conducted in the form of a 'project' during social studies lessons. I

explained in class what the purpose of the research was, as follows: "Research into the way boys and girls of your age look at society. I show you all some photos and then I ask you to follow certain instructions. Then I ask you some questions about yourself." The students, who offered themselves, and got permission from the teacher, because they were 'present' with their work, went with me to a separate room for the assignment to be carried out. Most students (including the 'problematic' students) wanted to participate and also got permission from the teacher. The teacher of the students was asked to make a division into groups of students who felt comfortable together.

9.2 Atmosphere during the interviews

The atmosphere in the groups was usually good. In two interviews, there was underlying tensions (catty reactions, nasty comments about the similarity between what the photos showed and one of the respondents). Most interviews were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere, there was often laughter, sometimes about the photos, sometimes about the comments that were made. The conversations were always seriously implemented, the youngsters did their best to carry out the instructions to the best of their ability. The discussions and reactions, in connection with the photos, were authentic, often the reaction on photos went over into a conversation about real situations that the students had inserted themselves. Once a person on a photo was recognised as a colleague of the father. That resulted in, that the negative statements, that were made first with great certainty about the 'lesser people', were now weakened: it was now no longer about 'the other', but about someone who was well known, and was of the same level. This response made clear that assessing the photographs was probably done from a certain 'distance', because when it got 'closer', there was much less judgement, and less stereotypical reactions. Most students found it generally a pleasant experience. Afterwards, there was usually another conversation, and I asked them not to speak to other students about it and I explained why I asked that. This was well understood and I didn't notice that students influenced each other in advance. There was a gap of one week between the sessions with students from the same class, and when I picked up the students, there was reaction by those students who had already participated, like "Oh yeah, that one is with that photo". I think they simply didn't find it important enough to talk about it with each other in the break, just like they don't talk about the taught subject after the class. In all interviews, the students were seriously involved, and the assignments

were understood well by all students, sometimes after some additional explanation in the form of neutral questions, such as ‘What do you think when you look at the photos?’, ‘What do you notice?’, ‘What division would you make?’ ‘What differences or similarities do you see?’ I always emphasised that they could determine themselves, and that there is no right or wrong. The fact that a voice recorder was used was never a problem. I was frequently asked if I would really be the only one to listen it, and wouldn’t let a teacher hear it. Usually they’d forget within a few minutes that the device was on. The attaching of the photo stickers individually, and answering the questions on paper, always happened in complete silence and with the necessary concentration.

A group of girls from Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) did make it to the placing of the photos but refused to answer the questions, because one of them thought it was too personal. A group of Higher General Secondary Education school girls put all pictures in a pile in the middle of the circle with one of them commenting that they didn’t care how society looked, and they were concerned only with themselves. They did fill in a questionnaire. Three boys from Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) didn’t have sufficient time to fully complete the questionnaire, and promised to complete it after the lessons and deliver it, but this didn’t happen. Not even after I repeatedly asked them to do it. They did enthusiastically participate in the photo-session. The conversation, the division of the photos, and the comments that they made, are taken up in the analysis.

9.3 Asking Questions

During the assessing and placing of the photos, it sometimes happened that I didn’t understand certain decisions or motives of the students right away. In those cases I asked clarifying questions as neutrally as possible. Also sometimes, after the photos were placed, I inquired further about a particular topic that came up spontaneously, and was interesting in the context of this study. This is a legitimate method for qualitative research. The questions were asked by me afterwards, and didn’t have any influence on the way the photos were placed, and on the perspective that was chosen to make the division. I’ve listed the questions I asked in the interview reports. I replied to all questions of the students that all was well, and that they themselves could determine how they ranked the photographs. The result of that is that the divisions were made in many different ways, together as a group, and later individually on their own forms. On the following pages, there are a number of forms

displayed, to give an impression of these different views.

9.4 Instruction

At the beginning of each session, it was told: "The circle on the table represents society. I'll now show you some photos of people in all sorts of situations. The idea is that you view the photos and say what you see, you choose a place in the circle for the photos and you say why you chose that place." No further explanation is given. If an explanation was asked, it was answered that the purpose was that they would give their own interpretation and that they could discuss it among each other. "Every interpretation is alright, your opinion is important," was said. It was often asked what the 'bottom' or the 'top' was, and whether you could also place pictures outside the circle. I told them that they could decide that themselves, that there is no 'right or 'wrong', and that it is their view that I want to know. If a group found it hard to get going, I advised them to wait for some more photos, and I encouraged them to discuss the photos among each other; what do you see, what do you notice? In all group-sessions, the group came up with a solution. Regularly, the chosen division was discarded when more photos were given, and it was discussed how it could also be otherwise.

9.5 Interpretation of the circle

The circular shape was interpreted in the following ways:

1. As a vertical figure with a middle, a bottom and a top, in which the people in the photographs were classified according to income, education and/or social status, sometimes according to one of these aspects and sometimes a combination.
2. As a horizontal figure with a centre and a border inside which the people in the photos were classified. In this case it was about the degree of importance. The centre of society was seen as the most important, the photos with the less important people were closer to the edge, and beyond the edge were the people who do not really belong in society.
3. Sometimes it was just the reverse; the important people on the edge and the less important people, and the people who require care, in

the middle. The explanation was that the people who are important need to take care of people that are less important.

4. As a flat surface, within which parts were named that got their own meaning, such as leisure, mind labour, manual labour, things that you often see, things that you don't often see, good things and bad things.
5. There was no surface seen, but a continuous line. Sometimes this line was filled with photos, and a story-line with a certain order. Here too, it was the activities on the photos that were mainly considered.
6. The circle was conceived as a line, along which the photographs were placed in a hierarchical order, according to income, education and/or social status, sometimes according to one of these aspects and sometimes a combination.
7. Sometimes nothing was done with the circle, and the photos were arranged in a meaningful way without involving the circle.

From the above description of the interpretive possibilities, it appears that the circle itself does not evoke the thoughts about a hierarchical arrangement, and makes multiple interpretations possible. The same applies to the contents of the photos. There too, there is ample space for interpretation. That space was also accumulated. After this, the used photographs follow, in the order that they are displayed. The qualifications and interpretations are discussed during the description of the results in the following chapters. In that, the information which has been obtained in this study, is described and analysed, on basis of the research questions.

9.6 The photographs used



1 Man at the butcher



2 Students at career fair



3 Businessmen in plane



4 Women on the street



5 People at the office



6 Mayor on a square



7 Woman reading



8 General Practitioner



9 Postman



10 Man in sports car



11 Man at a machine



12 Greenpeace



13 Dancing girls



14 Couple on a street



15 Drug user



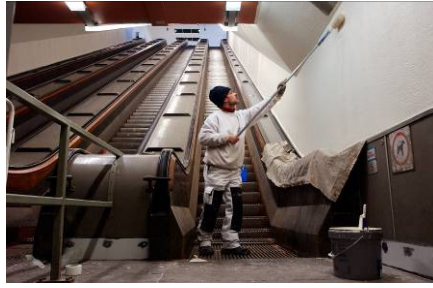
16 Teacher



17 Roofers



18 Coffee-house



19 Painter



20 Boys on a motorbike



21 Pepper harvester



22 Professors



23 Police

Naam: _____
 Klas: 4 h 1
 Datum: 4-6-08

1. Kies een plaats voor de fotostickers en plak ze daar vast. Het hoeft niet hetzelfde als bij de grote cirkel.

2. Kies een plaats voor jezelf en schrijf hieronder waarom je die plaats hebt gekozen.

Ik heb deze plaats gekozen omdat ik zelf ook taken kan uitvoeren of in ieder geval bij mijn

77

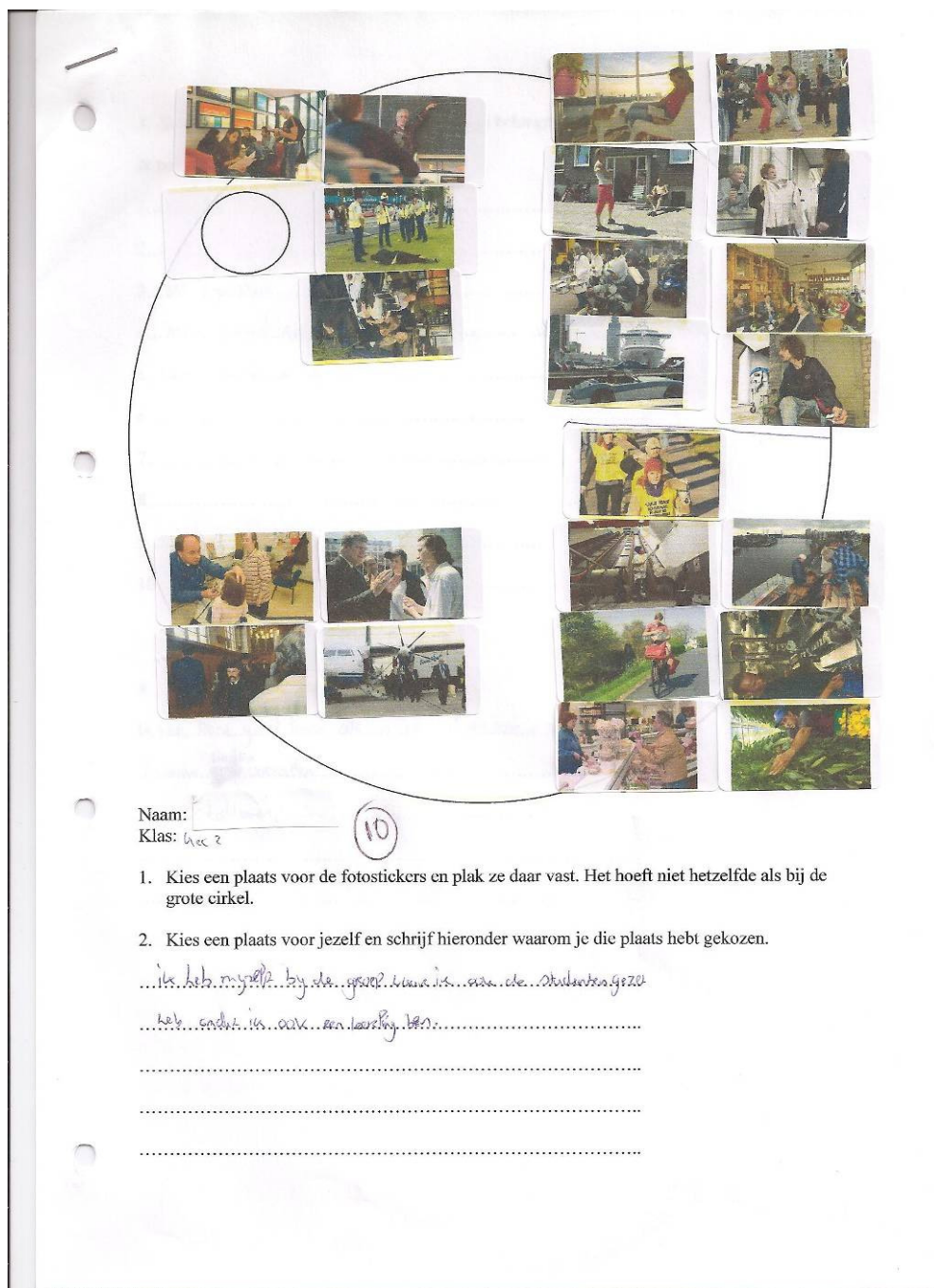


Fig. 3, respondent 10, VMBO: "I have placed myself where I have also placed the students because I too am a student."

131

Naam: _____
Klas: 4g2

1. Kies een plaats voor de fotostickers en plak ze daar vast. Het hoeft niet hetzelfde als bij de grote cirkel.
2. Kies een plaats voor jezelf en schrijf hieronder waarom je die plaats hebt gekozen.

...Dit is waar ik wil komen...
...Ik wil invloedrijk worden...
...en anderen helpen. Ik denk...
...dat ik nu nog sta tussen...
...de kring van minder invloed...
...en niet echt invloedrijk...
...en ik hoop naar "belangrijkste...
...personen" toe te gaan in de...
...toekomst

met echt meer
invloed rijk
minder invloed-
belangrijkste
personen
buiten de
samenleving

Fig. 4, respondent 131, gymnasium (VWO): "This is where I want to be, become influential and help others. I think that presently I stand between the circle of less influential and not really influential, and I hope to make it to the 'most important' people in the future."

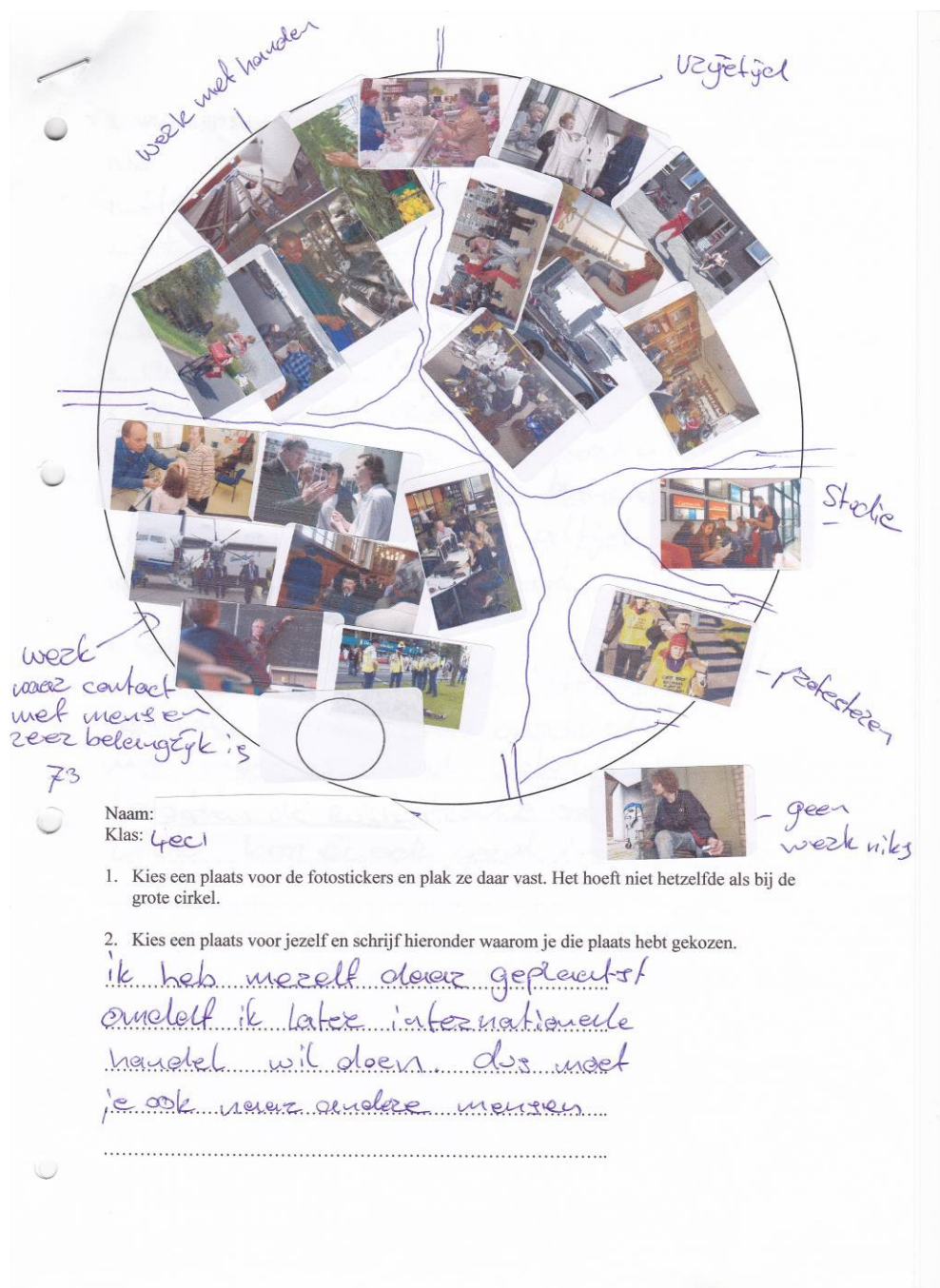


Fig. 5 respondent 73, VMBO: "I placed myself here because in the future I want to do international business, than too you have to go to other people." (his note near the circle about the section he choose: work where contact with people is very important.)

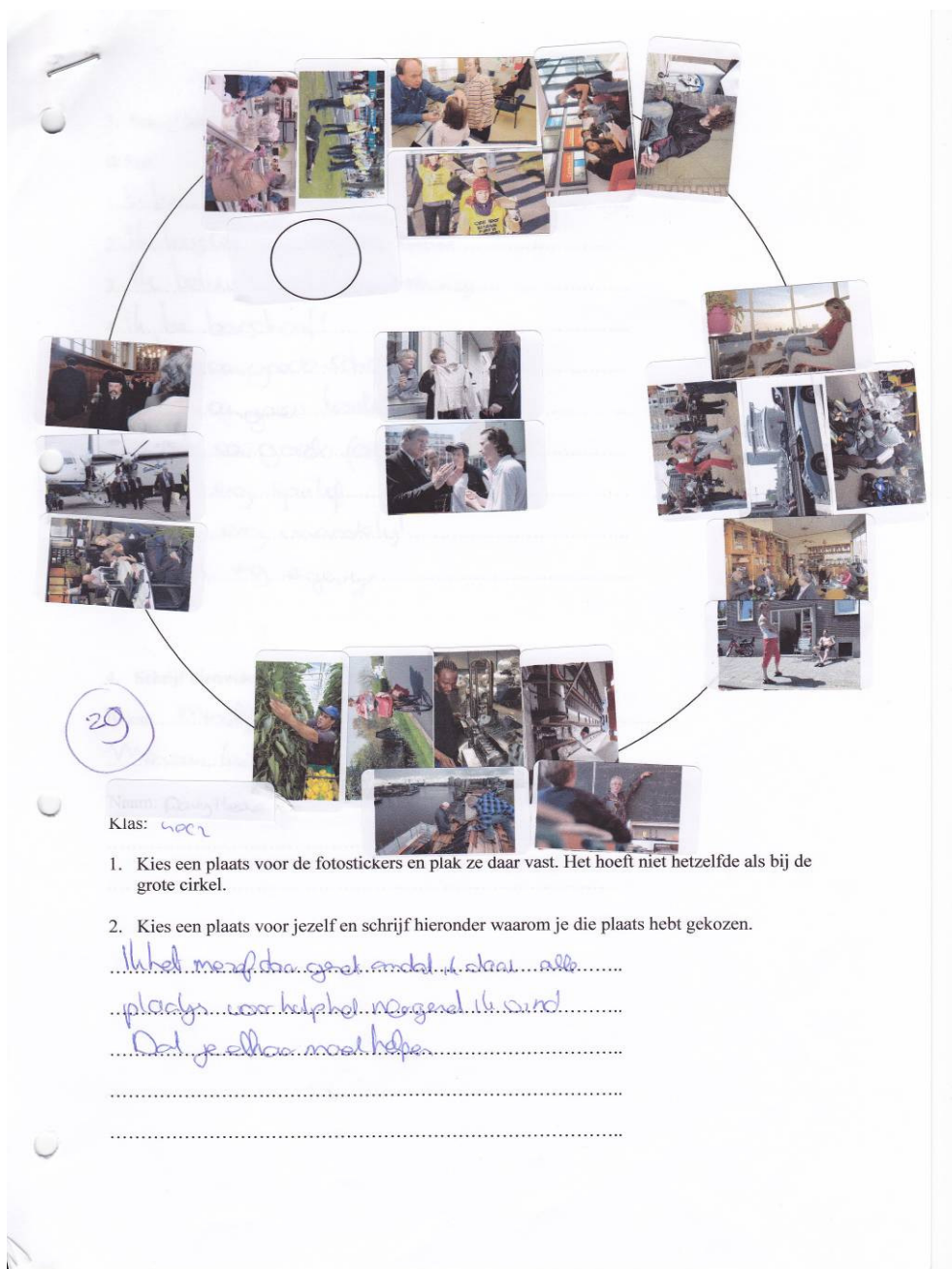


Fig. 6 respondent 29, VMBO: "I put myself there because I have put down all the pictures about helping. I believe we should help each other."

9.8 Explanation of the examples

The photos are classified according to a hierarchy by almost 60% of students. That is the case in figures 2, 3 and 4. These students often use hierarchical terms to describe their own position: elite, higher or lower education, important and less important people, rich and poor people.

For example, Figure 2, respondent 124 (gymnasium): "I also belong to those who are studying and want to climb the socio-economic elite, then I can also read a book with a beautiful view, drive around in a big fat car, and be addressed to with a title of honour ."

Figure 4, respondent 131 (gymnasium): "This is where I want to be, become influential and help others. I think that presently I stand between the circle of less influential and not really influential, and I hope to make it to the 'most important' people in the future."

Students in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) often refer to activities that can be seen in the photos, than to the level of social positions, in particular being 'student' or 'still studying' are popular. Figure 3, respondent 10 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) is one example, in choosing his position, he writes: "I have placed myself where I have also placed the students because I too am a student." During the group session, there were hierarchical terms used by him, to explain which classification was made: "The group that is doing nothing, the group that you don't have to learn well for, and the group that has a higher level. Roofers, there you need to know what you're doing, know about constructions, etc. Importance, there's a sequence in it, some are more important than others." (From 4th conversation).

Respondent 98 (Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO), figure 1, places the photos in a hierarchy, but uses them to tell his own story, in the position he chooses, he writes: "I have chosen this position because I also want to be a businessman, or at least important." Here too, we see an example of upward social mobility consciousness, when this boy, with a Turkish background, writes at the end of his photo story, about the photo of the mayor: "Your son will become mayor," and about the picture of the reading woman and the couple on the sidewalk: "and you'll have plenty of time for yourself." He has made a choice from the available photographs, most students used all the photos.

Figures 5 and 6 are examples of grouping the photos into occupations and not

according to a hierarchy. The photos are divided into categories such as work, leisure, people who help each other (Fig. 6), working with hands, study and work where contact with others is important. Respondent 29 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) says about his own position: "I put myself there because I have put down all the pictures about helping. I believe we should help each other."

Part 4 Findings and conclusions

10 Hierarchy

When students discuss and arrange the photos, do they see a hierarchy?

If yes, from what dimension; social status, education, salary?

When coding the research material, there was a distinction made between the various dimensions in which a hierarchy is named. The final division: social status, education and salary is based on the answers that were given. It was not possible to say beforehand what youngsters of this age would attach importance to. Categories, in connection with the test-research, that were in the first place used by me to categorise the responses, such as age, lifestyle/appearance and ethnicity, were indeed named by the students, but not to make a division.

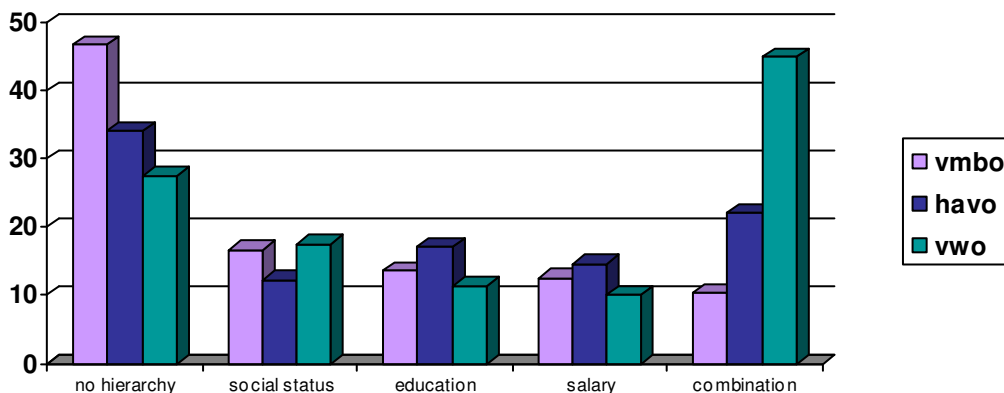
In the category 'social status' there were comments like 'he is worth more than him', 'has more prestige', 'is better listened to', 'those are the lesser people'. If during the conversation, hierarchy of different dimensions were given, then the combination category was chosen for it. If no classifications were made such as 'higher' and 'lower', 'more' or 'less', then it was coded in the category 'no hierarchy'. The photos were then arranged by the students using a different starting point, for example in the type of work or kind of activity that was visible on the photos (as in Figures 5 and 6). Sometimes the photos were used to tell an own story, as in Figure 1.

If no hierarchy is made and no hierarchical headings are used, then the students also don't describe their own position in this way. For example, they make a classification of activities or conditions, and then also refer to it when they name their own position. That's how respondent 31 says: "I placed myself there because I should be accepted by other people, because I come from a different culture, but I like peace, and I like to be on my own."

The analysis of the interviews, the placing of the photos in the group, and individually attaching the stickers, gives the following picture (Figure 1):

Figure 1

Division photos hierarchy (percentages of education level)⁹



10.1 Comparison between education levels

A significant relationship between students and their education level has been found, to the extent that hierarchical positions of individuals are named and used, to create divisions with the photos¹⁰. Almost half of the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students make no classification according to a hierarchy, unlike the Pre-university Education (VWO) students, of which slightly more than a quarter use no hierarchy to classify the photos. Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students take an intermediate position. Is this difference explainable by the difference in social insight, or does it point to a selective perception? To research the first possibility, a test was done among the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, showing that they knew very well what the social ladder means and what aspects play a role in the rise or fall on this ladder. When the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students were asked in this context, about their own position in society, the answers often referred to the status position in the hierarchy, while during the naming of their own position, in the context of the circle, it was usually not discussed in hierarchical terms.

⁹ For percentages, see appendix 1

¹⁰ Cramers V .27 sig .00 /Cohen's Kappa .65, sig .00

10.2 Selective perception

This difference may indicate that students from Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) would rather not see through a hierarchical view, if they have the choice. Perhaps it is easier for people, who are placed in the rank of a hierarchy, to look down from their own position rather than up. This possible explanation for the differences between the education levels in naming a hierarchy, when it is not asked for, may be the result of selective perception. The mechanism, that is described in social psychology as 'selective perception', serves the feeling of self-esteem. It means that you perceive things around you in a way, such that you benefit the most from it, or suffer the least damage (e.g. Gordon, Gergen 1968, Leary, Tangney 2005). Rosenberg (1986) even calls selectivity the main mechanism for protecting and enhancing self-esteem. It is quite understandable that mechanism plays a role in this outcome in the research. The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students have less interest in a hierarchy because it implies to their lower position. On the other hand, the Pre-university Education (VWO) students know that due to their high education, they will later belong to the top of the hierarchy; to them the hierarchy, in any case, is no threat to their self-esteem. The hypothesis of selective perception is supported when we see the results of the research, regarding the content and meaning of statements and comments.

Among the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, who did see a hierarchy, there were often comments of little appreciation, even hostility towards higher educated people in the photos. Negative reactions towards well educated people did not appear among the Pre-university Education students, and only occasionally among Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students. Among the Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students, there was also a large part (1/3) that didn't name a hierarchy. However, they did name it regarding the dimension salary and education. The Pre-university Education (VWO) students did often (72.5%) name a hierarchy. There was often a mention of political dimension; the degree of importance in society. As a new elite, the dimension is the most relevant to them. In addition, many comments were made about education and income, but almost always in combination with social interest of the people. The photographs were placed in a hierarchy in the circle, sometimes in layers over the width of the circle, where there was a top, a middle and a bottom, and at times, the photos were placed from the inside to the outside; the most important people inside, surrounded by the less important people, or vice versa. When describing the place they had

chosen for their personal sticker, there was often referred to their future position.

10.3 Inverted hierarchy

Among Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, there was often a question of reverse hierarchy. Some groups arranged the photos deliberately under an inverted hierarchy; the physical hard workers, who earn little and have little status, placed at the top, and people with higher education, who do physically 'easy' work, placed below. The argument was that the physical workers mattered more than those who just sit on their chairs and still make money. An example of such reasoning is given below.

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) (sector Trade & Administration) respondents T 39, P 40, Y 41

P: "He comes up, that's the mayor, after that they (businessmen)." Y does not agree with it. Y: "Why should he be there?" T: "He is just higher than them." Y: "I don't understand why. Better place that boy, who works hard (with machine), at the top." I ask why he is better. Y: "These gentlemen do nothing all day, just talking and stuff, he's really works the whole day." P still finds that the mayor should be at the top. T: "It depends on how you put it down. Look, it is about where you stand, the mayor is above him (machine worker). So then he (pointing to the photo with the businessmen) should be underneath, they walk in suits, and perhaps a private airplane. They are businessmen." P makes a hierarchical classification. He considers whether it is simple work or not. (...) ¹¹ Y: "This should go up, these others do something useful." P: "The teacher goes up too, he helps the students, so he goes there and joins the students. A painter, also not a special job, goes under the office." (...) T: "Man who reaps the peppers." Y: That is hard work too, isn't it? Goes under the man at the machine and above the office people." T: "He works hard." P: They just sit there making phone calls all day, nothing else." T: "If you look at it like that, it is not logical anymore, from hard work to someone who does nothing and earns more."

To the question that they answer in writing afterwards, about what they want to achieve, Y answers: "I want to be a real big businessman, who'll work in Turkey later, and become a nationalist. I want to have much power." P: "Something with

¹¹ (...) means that the conversation continues at this point, but because this part makes no contribution to the meaning, it has been skipped, for the sake of better reading.

computers, I don't know yet." T: "Do something in fashion and preferably something with drawing."

All three of them choose their position in the circle, and a place among the students. Y writes: "I choose this place because I am surely the future of this country as well, just like the other students." P writes: "Top-right, because that's the place for people who learn for the future." T writes: "Because I'm still in school, I consciously put myself among the teacher and students, later I can still be what I want to be."

10.4 No hierarchy

Almost half of the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students made no hierarchy while viewing and discussing the photos. There were also few or no hierarchical terms used in the description of people. But they did usually name the differences between people.

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), conversation 9 (Sector Trade & Administration) respondents St 25, S 26, D 27

St: "They are important people. They walk in suits. It can be a private airplane, if you work in a sandwich shop, you don't have such a thing." (...) D: "You know what it is, this is all business work and this is normal work." He points to the businessmen at the office and the group of workers. "But that's spare time. This is dirty work, the postman has peaceful work, he has no boss on top of him." I ask: "What is the similarity with the doctor?" (because he is in the normal labour group where you get dirty). D: "They all work, the doctor has learned more, but he too just works, just like the postman." St: "The guy at the machine, I find it harder work than that." St points at the workers in comparison with working in an office. The photographs are divided in the following categories: in the middle, the government, 'because they take care of everything.' Around it, at the edge of the circle, the category 'own opinion and stand up for your rights', these are the students, Greenpeace and the mayor. Then the categories of 'work that you get dirty from', 'work that you don't get dirty from' and leisure.

The statement that the social hierarchy is less well recognised by Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students than by Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students, because it is an abstract concept, was further investigated. To check this statement I conducted a test

on the theme of social differences in three Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) classes, after the completion of the investigation. It showed that these Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students (N = 58) were perfectly able to name what a hierarchical social ladder is, without that anything was said about it prior to it. They called as dimensions of inequality: power, status, origin, money and level of education. It was also referred to when, upon request, in this context, they described their own position in society. While during laying down of the photos, respondent 31 (Figure 5) refers to activities, and also names his chosen place in this way, he writes a short text about his position in society, after the social ladder have been named: "My position is currently under development. I am a Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) student, and I want to continue until I've finished Higher Vocational Education (HBO), so I can climb the social ladder." Respondent 17 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) also names no hierarchy in the photos, on his own, but when it is asked explicitly, he replies: "I think I'm in the middle of the social ladder, because I'm at school and I go to the Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO), and I have an odd job, and I want to rise." On the first place of his ladder it says, 'a lot of power, knowledge, rich, good job' in the centre it says 'job, well able to support family', under that 'poor, perhaps job', and further below 'unemployed, no money.' During the photo-session, regarding the question about what he wants to achieve later, he filled in himself: "A nice job, wife and children, nice life."

Also respondent 73 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) didn't name the photos in hierarchical terms, but he says about his position on the social ladder: "I think I'm now at the bottom of the ladder, but I'll continue to study, so I think I'll rise on the ladder." He wants to get a job in international trade. On his upper position it says: 'a top salary', under that 'job with many social contacts', further under: 'steady job, good education' and at the bottom 'unemployed'. On the form that he filled out during the photo-session, he answers to the question about what he later wants to achieve: "The international trade, go to people to talk about *bisnis*". And then to purchase goods and sell them in my own country."

These are just a few examples which I want to underline that it was well understood by Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students how the hierarchy of society works, and that it makes the difference whether the social hierarchy is a salient factor or not.

While defining the research group, there was consciously chosen for Preparatory

Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students from different professional directions, to prevent that the occupation choice itself, due to a difference in interpretation of the photographs by the students, would play a prominent role as an intervening variable in the comparison with the students of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO). I assumed that students, who choose a career in the commercial or economic sector, probably would have more affinity with higher professions, in which people don't do physical work. There was indeed a difference in interpretation of the photographs; at the section Department of Health & Welfare, there was more attention given to the social aspects of the photos than in Commerce & Economics. During the naming or not of a hierarchy relation, I found no difference in an inverted hierarchy and appreciation for physical labour. Below is an impression of a conversation by students of the Department of Health & Welfare.

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), conversation 49 (sector Health & Welfare) respondents E 148, T 149, D 150

E: "And yet number 4 (woman with clothes) stays on 1". D: "Police officers on 2?" E: "Yes that's right, it is important to help others. The man in the factory goes to 3. E: "I think it's very hard work and that he does not earn much, and he does it anyway." D. and T. agree. There is a sound of appreciation in her voice and I ask if it is meant as appreciation. E: "Yeah sure, amazing that people do that. Many people don't want to dirty their hands, or they find it too hard work, and yet there are people needed for it. And yet, the man you see on that photo is one of them." D and T confirm that. (...) The photos are placed in order of socially important and less important. The more social, the more forward, I ask why the photo of the general practitioner is on a place more to the back. T: "Yes, the doctor is very important, if he sends you to the hospital on time, perhaps he saves your life." E: "I think there are many GPs, where I live there are 4, and that man (behind the machine) , he does heavy work, and he (the doctor) just sit on his lazy ass. (...) E: "The doctor can look into your ear for example, oh there is nothing wrong. And that's another thousand euro's into the pocket, easy money. And that man (pointing to the man behind the machine) has to work hard all day." The others agree.

It appears from the conversations and from the way they describe themselves and their future, that they feel involved with others and see a place there reserved for themselves.

When asked what they want to achieve, which they answer in writing later, T gives the answer: Something in caring or something with children. E wants to cook or become a catering entrepreneur. D wants to work with autistic children (examine exactly what problem they have and why they have become like that) or become a dancer and set up a dance academy.

On the form with the circle, these students describe their position as follows: T chooses a place in the middle and writes about it: "In the middle, because I'm just a human being." D places herself next to picture number 1 and writes: "I find that I come under the group of people who help others and do fun things, relax." E places herself at the photo of the mayor with the words: "Because I also want to help people and want to explain things."

The above discussions are examples of conversations of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, which demonstrates solidarity with those who are less fortunate and have to work hard. The hierarchy was coloured by empathy. Among Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students, there was also a question of compassion for the underprivileged, but there was no feeling of hostility towards people with higher education, who had it 'easier', and it played no role in the way the photos were put down.

In case of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students, there was also a large part (1/3) that made no hierarchy, the photographs were then classified, for example in 'things you see every day around you, and things you don't often see', or 'leisure and work', 'inside or outside the city'. This is comparable to the divisions made by Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students.

Havo, conversation 51, respondents R 154, R 155, H 156, C 157

H: "We could do it like this; on the right side, common things in society, the left almost never, in the middle in between." They divide the pictures: luxury woman goes left; postman, woman on the street, butcher goes to the right; career fair in the centre, business men in the middle; mayor "don't see him often either, goes to the left"; doctor and office in the middle, "because everyone goes to their doctor sometimes or to an office." R: "A boat isn't that common, it goes left." O writes about the place he chose for himself: "I'm in the middle of society. On the left side are things that are quite common to me, and under and over me too. All those on the right side aren't really common in my society."

10.5 Hierarchy and contribute something to society

In cases where a hierarchy was named, it was often on the dimension of salary and education. Sometimes in combination with another criterion, such as work with stress and work without stress.

Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO), answer 54, respondents M 164, J 165, Be 167, Ba 166

Be: "If you're more educated, you can concentrate more on relaxation." I ask: "Is that so?" Be: "Yes, because you are sure of your work, you know what you will earn." M: "But you may also have stress." J: "Or a lot of work-pressure." Ba: "But you earn a lot, so work more on your holiday and your relaxation. You'll relax more than him (pointing to the pepper picker), because he has to work much harder to go on holiday." J: "Yes, that's true, if he can find no other job."

Ba writes at the place she chose for herself (with the businessmen and professors): "I chose this place because I want to be highly educated later. I want to achieve something in my life. And later when I am highly educated, I can relax.

Otherwise, there was a distinction made between rich and poor, in combination with contributing something to society or not. In the following example, there is a negative attitude towards people who are "rich" or take advantage of their improved position.

Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO), conversation 41, respondents T 117, A 118, M 119

T says: "O.K. shall we say that the people who sit in the middle contribute something to society?" M says: "He, not so very much (man in the butcher shop)." T says about the neighbour woman on the street: "They are really Tokkies (lower class people with anti-social behaviour)." I ask how she sees that. T replies: "If you stand like that on the street." M: "A bit of 'sorry' people." T: "No, not 'sorry' people, but 'simple' people." A, M and T about the business men: "Yes they do contribute (laughter). They too (people in the office). The mayor is a part of it." A: "But he doesn't do much." M points at the photo of the mayor: "This one does nothing." The other two agree laughingly. About the photo of the woman reading, T says: "That is such a rich woman, she's not allowed in." M asks: "She's not allowed in?" T: "Oh, sure she is." M: "She does nothing either, only eat up her man's money." T: "Postman, yes we should

still get our mail." About the man at the iron factory T says: "We still need iron." M: "But how?" T: "Look, that's what I don't like, some very rich man in such an American car." The others agree that he should be put at the edge, because he contributes nothing. (...) "What is this? A hobo, hey, look at those fingers." All three of them look disgustingly at the photo. He's not put in the circle. Teacher and roofers have come into the circle of people who contribute something, the painter too. About the professors: "They are very smart, they should be included. They are very important." M laughs a little. T: "Yes, they do nothing, but they are very important." "The arrangement will stay like this", say M and T. "No", says A, "I think the arrangement is not quite as accurate." I ask: "How would you arrange it?" A: "The people with a good education and enjoy life, rich, here, and there the poor people." T: "We need to make a bit of a separation; everything is too much together now." I ask M what she thinks of it. M: "I think it's alright like this." T: "I think it is not correct, here is a disabled man (man in the butcher shop) and here (next door) very smart people." M: "What she says is right, that they are the lesser people, mean less to society ... and you should leave some open space, and there the somewhat richer people, who have something to contribute." A: "Shall we put the poor ones here?" A: "Yes, give the rich ones to me" (to put them on the richer side of the circle). M: "But what is this?", she points at the postman and she decides that there should also be a middle group. T asks: "Are we still going to do what people add (to society) or not?" The pictures are placed in piles, but it remains a problem to combine the rich, middle and poor, with something to contribute or not. Such as the man in the expensive car. M says: "Yes he must have something to contribute; otherwise he wouldn't have so much money." T: "Exactly!" This position offers a solution. A: "Yes, then we'll put it at the edge (the important (rich) people)." Leisure (poor) and nothing to contribute in the middle. I ask if they want to describe the circle. A: "These are people who go to their study, this is more, yeah ... people who have a good education and really do something for society, police, doctor, teacher. The people without diplomas, so maybe to paint you need a diploma also. Basically you can earn a lot if you're a painter. And the rich who have grown rich because of their family. Their family has a career and they benefit from it. I think they've also been to the university. These are more the kind of men in family business, going from father to son, who received gifts from childhood."

T writes on her form: "I have placed my circle on people who work. The left side, that is." M writes: "I have chosen this area because I think I'm going to contribute something to society. On the outside I have the people who don't really contribute

anything. More and more towards the inside are people who contribute more.” A writes: “I put myself in the middle, and from there I stuck the stickers near those who stand close to me, and are also what I want to be.”

Among Pre-university Education students, there was often (73%) a hierarchy named, thereby usually mentioning the political dimension; the degree of importance in society. In addition, there were many comments made about education and income, but almost always in combination with the social interest of the people. The photographs were placed in hierarchy in the circle, sometimes in layers over the width of the circle, where there was a top, a central region and a bottom, and in some cases the photos were placed from the inside to the outside: the important people on the inside, surrounded by the less important people, or vice versa. When describing the place, which they had chosen for their personal sticker, there was often reference made to their future position. Below are some examples of conversations and descriptions of respondents as a motivation for the chosen location.

Pre-university Education students (Gymnasium), conversation 43, respondents M 123, R 124, A 125

M says: “I think we can make two layers, one layer with the rich let’s say, that’s where that and that will be (pointing to the photos of the students, reading women, doctors, professors).” R asks: “Do you want to put that with the rich?” He points to the picture with the students. M: “The oncoming rich let’s say, they are students.” R: “They’ll be between the rich and poor, perhaps.” M: “Meanwhile, we have these people, that is a paediatrician. He also earns loads of money. This one also makes lots of money.” He points at the man in the car. M: “This is a bit outside, it’s an old car. Then it should be there.” R: “I think the paediatrician belongs more in between. A paediatrician makes a lot of money, but he is not looking rich, he’s just looking poor really.” A: “Yes ... but not really, maybe not really.” M: “Okay, maybe not in the photo, but he is, so he should be in the top layer.” M: “These are the poorlings, so to speak.” R: “He should be at the top in terms of respect, in terms of occupation.” After some time I ask if they can describe how they have classified the photos. A: “We have divided roughly by income. In terms of income they should be here, but we have placed some of them higher in terms of looks” M: “That is the upper layer, the elite, that is the middle group and the rest.” I ask: “What do you call the rest?” M: “That is

the socially low layer." A: "But I think this butcher belongs in the middle group, he has his own company. M: "Because we've put the Turkish tent (photo of the coffeeshop) also in the middle group, which is perhaps due to the nationalistic feelings that surface." (All three are boys of Turkish origin). R: "On second thoughts, I think the Dutch butcher should also be in the middle group." M: "You can see it this way, these are the people who are not much educated and this is someone who teaches, these are people studying, you cannot actually make a group of them." He points to the lower half and says: "This does make sense; they are all people who come from the lowest rank of the socio-economic ladder."

This is what M writes about the place where he stuck his sticker: "I think that I belong to the group working with high regard, because I am studying at the gymnasium. Later I will play a key role in society, so I can arrive at the highest layer." When asked what he wants to achieve later, he writes: "Changing the world, rid the world of all negatives, and change them into positives."

R writes about the place where he stuck his sticker: "I too belong to the students who want to climb to the socio-economic elite, and then I'll also read a book with a wonderful view, drive in a big fat car, and be address to with a title of honour."

A writes about the place where he stuck his sticker: "I have placed myself in the majority of society, because we are not rich and I recognise my neighbourhood in some photos."

Pre-university Education students (Atheneum), conversation 40, C 113 respondents, N 115, R 114

About the photo of the women on the street, N says: "A bit of a low group." R: "Yeah, a low group that probably ..." C: "They're go shopping." R: "I don't think so, I think she's going to sell to the one with that cigarette." C: "That too is possible." N: "She looks a bit common, I agree. Shall we put her at the lower groups, anti-socials with three rings." N asks me, while pointing to the circle: "This is the society? So, the closer to the centre the better?" I give the answer: "You can decide everything yourself." C: "We can do that, or we put this is the bottom layer and this is the top layer?" C indicates the bottom and the top of the circle. N: "That you work with layers?" C: "Yes, you start here and keep going higher up." R: "We can even put the rich in the centre, and the poorer towards the edge." They choose the latter and place the photos in order. R: "This will not be too high though." C: "These a little bit lower, look at what they are look like, I think these have little more money than those." (...)

The photo of the mayor is difficult. C: "Look, he is actually the top, but not that drug addict, that is the lowest, so where should the photo go?" I say that they can choose themselves. C: "There is more on low than on high." R: "I find that low is dominating high. N, what do you think?" N: "You can also do it differently, look at that group of students, I would put that one in the middle because they get along well with each other, this solitude should go to the edge." C and R do agree a bit, now the photos are classified according to who is doing well with others or individually. There is more appreciation for getting along well with each other. C: "The business world is always a bit cold and distant with each other. This man is lonely, this one is in between, this man is on his own and yet not, businessmen are never that way with family life." (...) C: "What I did notice is that they are all foreigners that do low work." N and R don't agree. R: "The call centre is not the highest work there is either?" About the professors R says: "They look cranky and they think they are the smartest, they look arrogant." N: "But they are important for society." (...) N: "This one seems a bit higher than that one, but not too high." They look very carefully and weigh the images against each other. N: "We have classified them by what they contribute to society. People who have jobs come here, and dealing with each other is better. On the inside of the circle the most input and the most social."

C has stuck the stickers on the form, going from important to less important. She writes in the place she chose: "Slightly above the middle, so if you have two layers, in the upper layer in the middle. Because I think I make a big contribution to society, already now socially, and later financially." R places his sticker in the middle and writes: "Because I have a good education, I am social and still belong to the future of society." N places his sticker in the middle and writes: "I have chosen this area because I get along well with ethnic minority people, which pulls society closer together. I have a good education and many contacts."

There was more often a combination of different aspects made by the Pre-university Education students (VWO) than by Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. I think this difference has to do with their larger abstracting ability. When placing the photos, it was difficult to monitor multiple dimensions simultaneously and make a logical division. That was easier for the Pre-university Education (VWO) students than for Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students, and even easier than for Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. This aspect was sometimes named

during the conversation, but without elaboration or consequences, which can be read in the fragment below.

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) (Commercial & Administration sectors), respondents A 28, D 29, M 30

A says: "He should be in the middle, they are just employees (photo of people in the office). Here the highly educated, the doctor also." M wants to put older people at the edge. "The postman, it can also be done as an extra job," says M. He slides the picture of some older people to the edge of the circle. A proposes to hold a particular setup: leisure, work, older people. M protests, he says, "You have to make a specific order, from highest to lowest, and these elderly are quite different from work or leisure." Make groups or sequence? A and D want to make groups: "It fits better in the circle."

On his individual circle, M sticks the photos, in a hierarchy and writes about his own place (at the office, the teacher and students): "I am 3rd in the list because I am at school (a student)."

10.6 Conclusion

The answer to the question whether students in secondary education between 15 and 17 years perceive a hierarchy at all, when they discuss and organize photos, can be considered as positive, on basis of the research. The talks took place spontaneously. The topics that emerged during the talks were not forced, a hierarchy was not asked for. However, there is a significant difference in the extent to which the images have been hierarchically classified, as shown in Figure 1.

The significant difference is related to the education level of the students. The higher their education is, the more they make a hierarchy division. I suppose this has to do with selective perception. The Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students have a better starting position when climbing the social ladder than Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. They have to expect more of the existing hierarchy, which is largely determined by the educational level of people, than Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. The Pre-university Education (VWO) are already quite sure of a good place on the social ladder. They are also aware of it. This selective perception can also be seen in the description of the place that the Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students name for themselves. They

often refer to their education and their good future position. This assumption is supported by a student (respondent 60) from Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), who was confronted with the outcome after completion of the research. When asked why according to him students of Pre-university Education (VWO) placed the photos more often in a hierarchy classification order, than Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, he replied: "I think they think that because they are more educated, they will go higher than someone with a Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) diploma. That we also think: They will be making more money than us. We wouldn't put it that way, but for them it's the first thing they think of."

Outstandingly, the Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students are generally more careful about their statements than the Pre-university Education (VWO) students; it may go fine, but it can also go wrong.

The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students choose a place among the photos for their 'own position sticker' more often, where there is something visible about what they'd like to do, they focus more on the activities and circumstances than the social position of people in the photos. They refer often to these activities too in the description of their position. If they refer to their education level, it is almost always with the comment that it is not so high at the moment, but they are still on school, just 'student' and they can go in all directions.

You could say: The Pre-university Education (VWO) student *knows* that he or she will get a good place in society later, on account of their Pre-university Education (VWO) diploma, and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students *hope* for a good place in society *despite* the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) diploma. The Higher Secondary Vocational Education (HAVO) students take an intermediate position. I think based on these results the conclusion is justified that students in secondary schools are aware of their position in society and the opportunities associated with them.

When asked which dimension for the respondents plays the most important role, when a hierarchy is named, the answer, on the basis of this research can be given that there was no significant difference between the educational levels in the dimensions that were named. In some interviews, the emphasis was evidently on the economic gap between people, sometimes at the level of education and sometimes benefit for society. The cultural dimension (how people dress and their attitude) was mentioned quite often, and was also used as an indicator to determine the economic

level, but was not used as a factor for the classification of people. It was often concluded that you could see that they were richer or poorer, also whether they were important or not. But this aspect was then named as an incidental consequence, it was not important in itself. The classifications that were made according to a hierarchy were usually based on difference in salary, education and social importance. The Pre-university Education (VWO) students often made a combination of these three aspects; this may have to do with its difficulty. Sometimes the Higher General Vocational Education (HAVO) and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students tried, but after a few tries was chosen for one or two aspects, to make a classification. The laying of the photos in a hierarchical order in itself was not too difficult for Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, but then a dimension was chosen, e.g. the level of education or benefit to society.

11 Relative position

11.1 Determination of one's own position

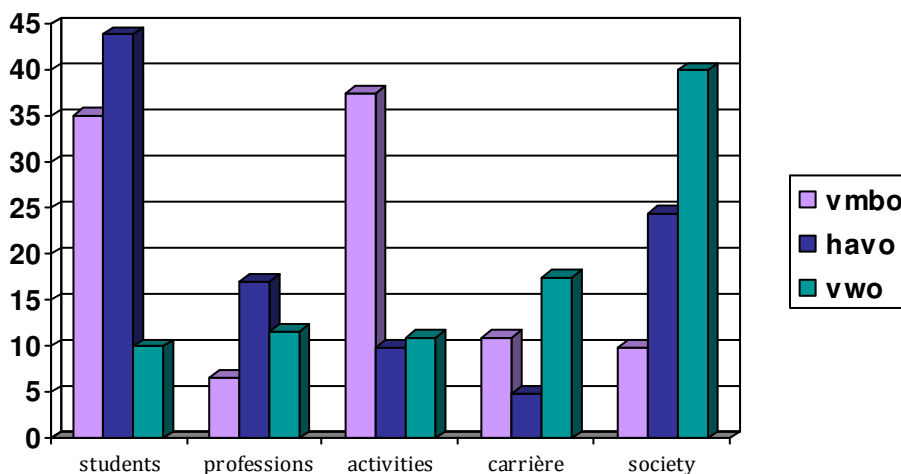
One of the components of the research was to determine one's own position. There was a partition made in a circle with the same photos, but now in small size on stickers. This assignment was carried out after the end of the group session. On the sticker surface there was a sticker with a small circle, which it was said represented the respondent. The students had to give themselves a place too in the whole, and write why that location was chosen. The purpose of this assignment was to gain insight into the social identity of the students and see what differences there would appear when the education levels are compared. With that we answer the following questions: Are students aware of their future position? With what do they associate and identify themselves?

The task was performed individually in a way that students could not look at each other's work. It appears from the descriptions of the respondents that this assignment is indeed an indication of the social identity of the respondent. There was always answered with "I put myself there (or pasted) because ..." The answers that were given were mostly in relation to the way the photos were pasted. They were comments about the choice of the place.

Figure 2 shows the answers to the question: Where do you see yourself and why?

Figure 2

Own position, in association with... (percentages by level of education)¹²



¹² N=172, Cramer's V .34 sig .00, Cohen's Kappa .77 sig .00, see appendix

11.2 Comparison between levels of education

It is immediately striking that Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students associate themselves more often with ‘students’ (photos 2 and 16) than Pre-university Education (VWO) students. Remarkably, Pre-university Education (VWO) students often give themselves a place ‘in the middle of society’. Through the analysis of the meaning and content of the motivations that respondents gave for their choice, a possible explanation for these differences can be found. In this case there is sometimes also reference made to what they are ‘thinking aloud’ during the group sessions.

Just like Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students often chose ‘student’ as a position, however, there is a difference in the motivation they give for that. These are small but meaningful nuance differences that can best be explained by means of examples.

For example, it was said by respondent 39 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO): “Because I am on school, I have consciously put myself between the teacher and students, later I can still be what I want to be.”

Or by respondent 41 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO): “I choose this place because I am the future of this land, like the other students.”

Respondent 49 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) says the following: “I’ve put myself in the middle at the school, because I’m at school and that is my future, after that I’ll decide where I end up.”

Or as respondent 68 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) put it: “Because I want a good job later, and I want to continue studying.” The main trend in their statements was that of ‘I can go in any direction, but for now I’m still a student’.

11.3 Identification with being a ‘student’

The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students identify themselves with students and feel that in the future anything is possible. Getting the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) diploma is the first step towards a distant destination. This perception of the students was also reflected in the way they often reacted to the photo of the man behind the machine (photo 11). It was said very often: “He hasn’t finished his school”, or something equivalent. The photo was seen by many of the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students as the reflection of the last stop; if you failed at school, a sort of doomsday scenario.

Besides one exception, this was said exclusively by Preparatory Secondary Vocational

Education (VMBO) students, whereas Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students did not react that way. It's as if the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students are more aware of the possibility of school failure and its consequences.

Vocational school sector Trade & Economics, group 8, respondents K 22, M 23, S 24
K says: "Mathematics Teacher, explaining to students in the class, he's looking in a strange way. He's explaining something." M adds: "I think he belongs here (the students) because here too they chose Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO)." The picture of the dark man at the machine is also slid in, with K stating that he didn't complete his school. And that they did finish their school and those didn't. I ask why they think he did not finish his school. K replies: "He is still quite young and you don't really need a diploma for a factory. Or perhaps he likes it, it can also be that he did finish his school." I ask: "Surely there are also educations for this kind of work?" S explains that she thinks that the other youngsters are students, and they still have a chance for a better future. S says: "They can have other, better things to do." K says: "This one looks old too (she points to the machinist) and I think he's been busy since long with his work, and they've been long on school (she points to the students)." They estimate the machinist to be older than the students, but not M, she says: "He looks older but I think he is not."

There are relatively many students in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) who come from a higher education type: they already know how it feels to slide down. Moreover, many Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students lack motivation and find it hard to be in school, 'failure' is a real possibility (Severiens, Verstegen 2007). Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) is the bottom step of the educational ladder; if it doesn't work out there, then there is no choice but a job that is not attractive. It is a result of the doomsday scenario perhaps that Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students value their position as 'student' or 'still at school' more than Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students. They are well aware that a good education can make the difference between success and failure in society.

After the research, the results were discussed with some students during an interview. I asked a Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) student: "Do

you remember the photo of the man behind the machine? You all often said, 'oh, he has not finished his school', while the Higher General Secondary Education students almost never mentioned that. Do you know why that is so?"

Respondent 60 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) replies:

"Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) is one of the lowest steps, and if you know what you can achieve with Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and then you see a photo, then you think you don't want to be even that with Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), a bit under your level. On Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) they don't really know what Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) is and what you can achieve with it. They think he needs a diploma but ... it's not something you need a diploma for."

Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students often said 'I'm still at school, so I placed myself among the students', 'because I study and the people in the photo are also students', or something similar. The statements were neutral and often combined with the mention of a certain profession they want to learn. Questioning Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) teachers showed that many students of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) fear a forced transition to Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), if they do not get enough marks. Parents often make a big issue out of it and look for another Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) to put their son or daughter. If that doesn't work out and the student 'has' to go to Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO, which is theoretical program in most cases, then it is a huge embarrassment for the parents and the student. A student with a non-western background said during an interview that he had managed to keep the downward transition from Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) to Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) hidden from the parents until after the summer holidays when the books arrived and it got clear that they were for the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). He had promised his parents that his family and his younger brother and sister would never find out. He could fully understand that, because as he said himself: "They would lose all respect for me." He kept up his appearances, and even when in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) he continued to 'decent', he was 100% convinced that he would later study using Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) and Higher Vocational Education (HBO).

11.4 Identification with occupations

Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students refer more than Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students to their later workplace, e.g. "I have placed myself at the people at the office, because later such I'll do the same."

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students refer more to the activities they see on the photos and rarely mention their future employment status. In most cases, this concerns activities that are not directly connected to a profession, for example, respondent 20 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO): "I choose relaxing, because I find it important that you get rest every day."

Or as respondent 29 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) put it: "I put myself there because I have placed all the helping photos, I think we should help each other."

Respondent 32 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) puts it: "... I get along with everyone, it doesn't matter to me where you come from. I have good relationship with my neighbours, friends, so I place (stuck) my sticker between multi-culture and neighbours."

Respondent 167 (Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) writes: "I want to be at No 4 (photo of the doctor), highly educated, because later I'll have much knowledge and become a pharmacist. That's why I have to study a lot and become highly educated".

Generally Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students are generally positive about their education level and their employment opportunities. More often than in case of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, their education and their future profession is referred to.

Respondent 80 (Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO): "I put it there because I still have a reasonably high level of education and I do not know what the future will bring. I want to be an army officer."

Respondent 83 (Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) chooses a place among the students and writes: "I am still in school and I want to become a teacher."

Respondent 163 (Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) placed his sticker at the teacher and writes: "I'm doing Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and that is a high education. I've have a high level profession because I'll do Higher Vocational Education (HBO), after which I'll probably go to the university, and so I belong to the centre of society."

11.5 Identification of position in society

The biggest difference is between Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students on one hand, and on the other hand between Pre-university Education (VWO) students. From among the Pre-university Education students, only a small part gives themselves the 'student' place. They often refer to their future employment status, and surprisingly often say that they are in the middle of the community, sometimes with reference to their high education. Strikingly, more than Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, Pre-university Education (VWO) students, while describing their chosen position, indicate that they want to 'contribute' to the community or 'improve' things later.

As respondent 112 (gymnasium) writes: "Not only do something for myself and those closely related, but also something for the rest, if I do not have to sacrifice too much. I want to become something useful.

Respondent 110 (gymnasium) writes about what he later wants to achieve: "Achieve a lot, something very difficult, but certainly not impossible, namely a better world. I can achieve this if for example, I would become prime minister, and I don't hide this ambition."

The transition from current state to the future status is a subject which is more common in the description of the relative position that the students have determined for themselves. At the gymnasium of the school community in South Rotterdam, there are relatively many students who are the first in their family to go to gymnasium or atheneum (pre-university education). They experience the difference between the two extremes of the social ladder. What is striking is that they stick their personal sticker generally at a more modest place than the place they describe. They refer almost all to their future position in their description, but place the sticker on their personal situation at present. Here are a few examples of these descriptions by Pre-university Education (VWO) students. I have mentioned the origin of the students because it is possible that the phenomenon has to do with the changing socio-economic status of students.

Respondent 123 is a Dutch-Turkish boy whose father is a driving instructor, his mother is a housewife, his sister is studying psychology. He says: "... because I am studying at the gymnasium (...) I can get even to the upper level." But he placed his sticker with the "normal workers".

Respondent 110 (gymnasium) is a Dutch boy with unemployed parents. He sticks his sticker somewhere at the 'bottom' and writes: "I'm doing a fairly highly education, gymnasium, ... I have no criminal record and I don't get in trouble with the law. It is expected from people like me that we are the future, so I try increasingly to work myself to the centre of society. My parents aren't well off, so it's going to be difficult."

Respondent 125 (gymnasium) has categorised the photos by the degree of respect, and a large proportion of the photos lay in the middle: "I have placed myself in the majority of society because we are not rich and I recognise my neighbourhood in some pictures." His mother is a cleaner, father factory worker. Two children of his Turkish family have graduated as an accountant, a third child is doing Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO). He wants to be a cardiologist or a dentist. What exactly he meant by that last remark becomes clear when we view an excerpt from the conversation of the group with whom he laid the photographs.

A (respondent 125): "You always bump into these people when you walk in the street (he points at the lower level and pointing at the upper level he says:) When you look out of your window. you won't often see one, you don't often see the rich." M

(respondent 123) explains: "These people are also in Rotterdam (pointing to the 'superiors'), but not in the neighbourhoods where we live. We live as ethnic minority, let's say, we live in the South, the West, and often in the North. But there is no place for us in places like Hillegersberg, Schiebroek and Kralingen¹³. That is not economically feasible for us. That's why we don't often see these people, because this is a black area, so to speak." A: "Here, in the upper layer, you see well-groomed people, but when you look at the lower layer, you don't see any well-groomed people."

11.6 Conditions and relative position

Below is an example in which a relationship is made with the good conditions in which a person is: (Respondent 94, high school) "I've placed myself halfway in the circle, a little to the right. To me, right was the side for the 'best conditions' and I live pretty well. And I had indicated how high or low, on basis of the economical state. And when I've done my gymnasium, then I'll be somewhat higher than normal. But now I'm still in school, so I positioned myself halfway." Her mother is a nurse and her father is a company doctor; she is not the first in the family with a high education.

¹³ Very well off neighbourhoods in Rotterdam

Her description of her position on the side of the 'best conditions' and a good life, probably has to do with that.

The opposite is also true for students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), who come from a family where the parents or siblings have a high education. Several Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students indicate during the investigation, usually with a deep sigh, that they feel 'stupid' because of that reason.

As it appears in the example given above, when determining their own position, students generally look at: Where am I now? Thereby sometimes there is reference made to the family of the student. Where do I stand in terms of education? What is my expectation for the future? Considering the way the students describe 'their position', it shows that when they stick their personal sticker with the circle, they really say something about the social position they experience or choose. They use terms like 'I am here' or 'I've placed myself there'. They stick the sticker in a field which they themselves have given a meaning.

The 'society' is divided into people who contribute more or less, make more or less money, have higher or lower education, perform certain activities, work with their heads or with their hands. The fact that they themselves have given a meaning to the 'field', in which they themselves also play a role, is of great importance. Because the significance of the positions that they choose, and the degree of self-esteem that they articulate, cannot be assessed without involving the value system, the background, vision and aspirations of the students.

The self-esteem system of people is particularly ingenious in the process of 'feeling good' about oneself. All sorts of mechanisms go into action and an 'objective' self-assessment is perhaps impossible. There is an estimate made of the possibilities and a choice made from the various options. The choice must be credible for themselves and for others.

"Few activities engage our lives so profoundly as the defence and enhancement of the self. The self-esteem motive intrudes on many of our daily activities, influencing what we say, how we act, what we attend to, how we direct our efforts, how we respond to stimuli. The individual is constantly on the alert, dodging, protecting, feinting, distorting, denying, forestalling, and coping with potential threats to high self-esteem." (Rosenberg 1986: 260)

By grouping the answers of different persons to the same question, to a limited number of categories, and to compare them to each educational level, a pattern has become visible that can serve as a starting point. But to best understand the reasons and mechanisms involved, we must zoom-in on what they have written and said during the talks. It mainly concerns the way something is said and what the background of a particular respondent is. During the quantitative analysis, statements and choices are perceived as isolated, countable elements, while in the qualitative analysis it is about placing back these elements to the whole of the context in which the specific decision or choice took place. This combination of quantitative (simplify, count and compare) and qualitative content analysis is applied and defended by Elias and Scotson (1976) et al. in their famous study of the tensions between two working class neighbourhoods: 'De gevestigden en de buitenstaanders' (The established and the foreigners).

"Sociological analysis is based on the assumption that each element of a figuration and its properties or characteristics is only what it is, thanks to their position and function within the figuration. In that case, analysis or separation of elements is not more than a temporary step in the research process, that needs to be supplemented by another step, by integration or synthesis of elements, just as the latter was supplemented by the first; here the dialectical movement between analysis and synthesis knows no beginning and no end. "(Elias, Scotson 1965, translation in 1976 Wouters, Van Stolk: 234)

Besides the differences between students of different educational levels, there were hardly any differences found between the students, not between ethnic minority and native students, or between boys and girls. The only significant difference that was found between boys and girls was that girls of Pre-university Education (VWO), more often than the boys of Pre-university Education (VWO), chose a place on basis of association with occupations (23% - 5.3%), boys associated more often with career and university education (21% - 9.5%).

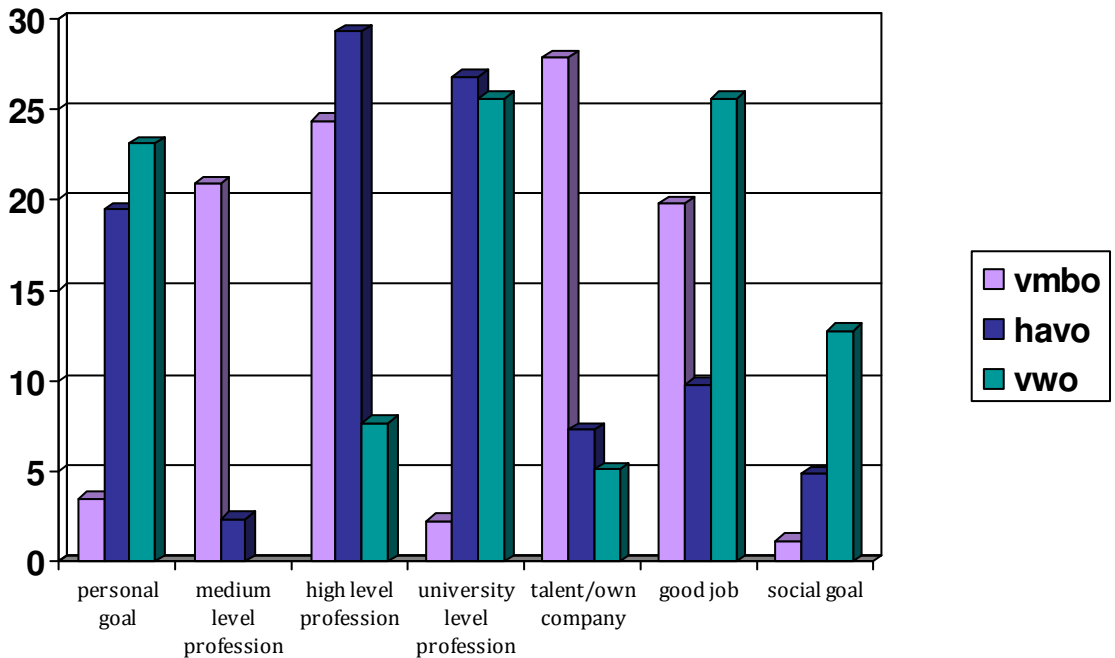
11.7 Difference in future perspective

It is not only the position that the respondent chooses that is important, the question is also what future perspective the student has. That's why one of the questions on

the questionnaire was: What do you want to achieve? In figure 3, a representation of the responses can be seen.

Figure 3

Future perspective (percentages by level of education)¹⁴



The question: 'What do you want to achieve?' is answered differently by the students of different educational levels. It is obvious that Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students often choose a job at Higher Vocational Education (HBO) level than Pre-university Education (VWO) students, and that Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students more often name a profession on Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) level, than Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students. Although it is striking how many Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students name a profession at Higher Vocational Education (HBO) level, they are hopeful and optimistic about the chance of achieving their goal, which appeared during the interviews. But there are other differences that we can ask questions about; why should Higher General Secondary

¹⁴ N=169, Cramer's V .32 sig. .00 Cohen's Kappa .95, sig. .00, see appendix 1

Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students more often name a personal goal or a social purpose than Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students? And why should Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students more often choose to start their own business or to develop a particular talent? Even if we leave out the choice for a profession at MBO and HBO level, there is a significant correlation between the answers and the education of students.

Before we discuss this result, first there is an explanation of the coding of the answers, so it is clear how the open answers are interpreted.

Under 'personal goal' there are phrases like 'a nice life, a family, etc.', 'does not matter what I'll do as long as it's fun,' or 'a job where I can get along well with nice people.'

Under the category 'talent use' among statements like: 'professional football player' or 'at the theatre', 'become a designer' the difference with 'normal' professions is that there is a particular talent need for it, other than cognitive talent, in order to achieve something. The category 'own business' speaks for itself: 'start your own business' or 'do something for myself'. In Figure 3, this category is joined to 'talent'. Those answers that fall under the category 'good job', include all answers that include aspects of a job, rather than nice and fun. It concerns the reference to the importance and status of a job. For example, 'I want to have a job with power', or 'a high level job'. But there are also references to making money, such as 'a job with which I can later maintain my family' or 'enough money' etc. In case of 'social purpose' there are references made such as: 'to help people (in Africa)' or 'I want to be Prime Minister', etc. It is the formulation of the answer if something like social purpose, personal goal or profession was encoded. While naming a specific profession, it was coded by the educational level required for that profession.

Why do Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students more often name a personal goal or a social purpose, when asked what they want to achieve, than Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students? And why do Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students more often choose their own business or to develop a particular talent?

Choosing a business or developing a talent can just as well be seen as a personal and a social goal. The difference is that Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students reason more from a position that they already have, which connects to a position on the labour market. While Preparatory

Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students say that they first have to reach a position for something they can be. They realise that it requires perseverance and initiative. Regarding the question about future vision: 'What is needed to achieve this?' Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students often give answers like: 'I give everything I got', or 'I do the best I can', 'take the right steps'. These are often answers in the personal sphere. Among Pre-university Education (VWO) students, it is often said 'that I get my diploma and study further'. This difference between the levels of education in what is found important, it is not significant, but the nuance difference is understandable in combination with the choice of their own position, whereby Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students often choose the position of student, and future position is more or less uncertain, while Pre-university Education (VWO) students often choose a place they occupy in the future. There appears to be more uncertainty in the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students, and a stronger awareness of their own effort and perseverance in their answers than in the Pre-university Education (VWO) students. The first group has often had to deal with all kinds of failures, such as a disappointing Cito final test, a low education advice, remaining in the same class or descending from a higher school level.

11.8 Conclusion

Based on the above findings, I come to the conclusion that there are significant differences between the students of the three levels in the perception of their relative position in society. Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students identify themselves primarily with students and feel safe 'because they are still at school'; they can still go in all directions, as long as they are on school, they're going in the right direction. In case of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students, that is especially in the direction of a profession, and in case of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, it is mostly in the direction of a higher education. Contrary to that, the Pre-university Education (VWO) student is much more convinced of her future role in society, and expect to be able to make a great contribution. In her mind, the Pre-university Education (VWO) student has already passed the stage of being a student, and already sees herself right in the middle of society. If the Pre-university Education

(VWO) student thinks of her future, she often chooses a personal or a social goal. The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students still have to struggle hard, and that seems to be the most important factor to them. Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students consider themselves in a middle; on one hand busy with the future profession and position in society, and on the other hand aware of the 'danger' of not making it in Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) level and needing drop down to Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). The circumstances in which the students find themselves, probably plays a role in the position they give themselves. It seems that students, who are busy with a high education, but come from a family background where that is not usual, give themselves a lower place than the students who are already in 'good' circumstances. Apart from these differences, that arise when a comparison is made between the education levels, there are few differences between the students. Boys and girls do not differ much from each other, except that Pre-university Education (VWO) boys often associate with a university education and career, while girls more often with certain activities that were shown in the photos. There was no difference found between native and ethnic minority students, in determining their own position and future prospects. Based on these findings, I conclude that for youngsters education probably plays a very important role in the perceived relative position: more important than gender and ethnic background.

12 Personal and social identity

If we look at the personal identity that emerges as an answer to the question and assignment 'Who are you, write ten things about yourself' we see a large degree of resemblance between the students of the three educational levels. In all groups, there is a strong emphasis on positive traits and behaviour. The responses generally indicate a positive self-image and relate mostly to a personal preference or personal characteristic, for example: 'I love football' or 'I'm nice'. In the *amount* of answers given by the student to the question 'Who are you?', there is a big difference between education levels.

12.1 Who are you?

Only 26% of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students give ten answers, compared to 68% of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students and 78% of Pre-university Education (VWO) students. Many Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students get no further than five answers (25%), compared to 5% of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students and 3% of the Pre-university Education (VWO) students. The difference in number of answers can be explained as the difference in the ability to put something into words, but also as an indication of difference in confidence and self-awareness. Filling in the answers to the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students took much more effort; they had to think about it more often and asked if it really had to be ten answers. Below is a random selection from the answers that were given to the question 'Who are you, write ten things about yourself':

Turkish girl	someone who laughs a lot
nice person	musical
always cheerful	a little bit aggressive
assertive	funny
happy in rich country	gymnasium student
thinker	$\frac{1}{4}$ German, $\frac{3}{4}$ Dutch
someone who writes poetry	Feyenoord fan
someone who is good with people	justice
devoted Muslim	doesn't care about the looks
someone who loves shopping	someone who harms no one

quiet girl	open to others
reasonably independent	a bit crazy
child/adolescent	optimistic
hard worker	not very tall
student	works in supermarket

Figure 4

Answers to the question 'Who are you?' (Percentages by level of education)¹⁵

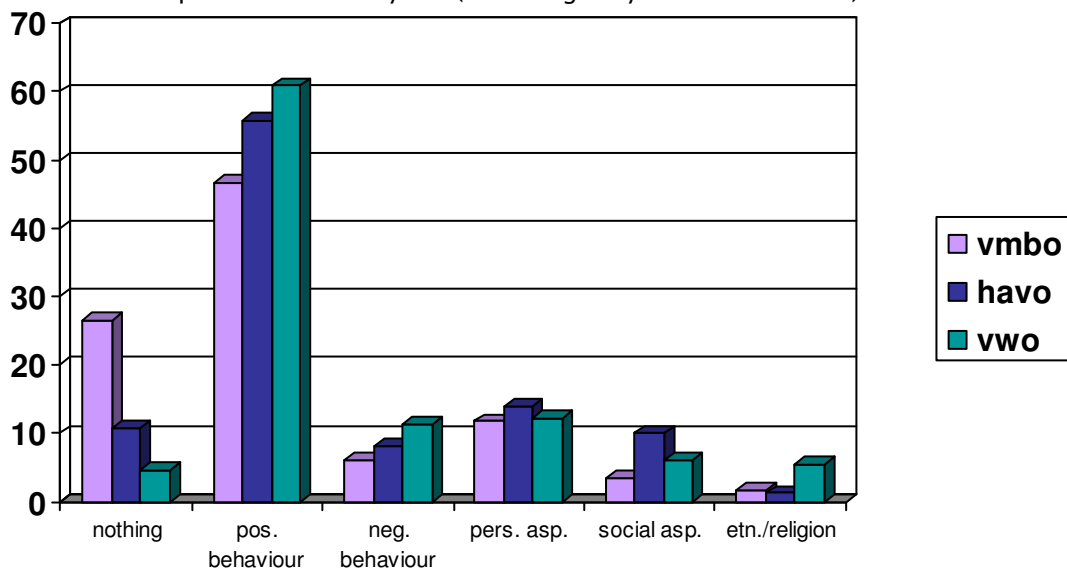


Figure 4 shows how these answers were divided over the education levels. Under 'positive behaviour' are statements that say something about how the person sees himself in character with a positive connotation: 'I am sweet, kind, patient', etc. It's what the person likes. Sometimes with an addition of 'I am nice to people, I can listen well to people', etc. Positive behaviour is also 'I love shopping, sports, computers' and 'I'm good at languages, computing, mathematics', etc.

'Negative behaviour' includes statements that say something about how the person sees his character with a negative connotation: 'I'm too impulsive, I can be very (or a little) impatient. Often there is a diminutive word used, or there's a 'too' placed

¹⁵ N=170, Cramer's V .31, sig .00, op 1e antwoord, see appendix 1

before the word to show that a little of a certain trait or behaviour is okay, but in this case it's a bit too much. It's about what the person himself doesn't find right, or what the person doesn't do right. It does not matter what it is. Negative behaviour is also 'I do not like ...' or 'I'm not good at ...', etc., unless it is meant positively, for example: 'I don't like lying, being lazy', etc. There is often a negative sound after the summing up of positive sounds, as if the respondent thinks: 'I better say something negative too about myself, otherwise it sounds so boastful. 'Personal aspect' includes: name, age, boy, girl, comments on brothers / sisters / parents, possessions, appearance, etc. The term 'social aspect' includes: student of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) / Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) / Pre-university Education (VWO), residence, school, work, etc. The term 'ethnic origin and faith' are statements like 'I'm a Dutch Turk, I am from Turkey', etc., and faith.

12.2 Identification according to Twenty Statements Test

There are numerous variants written about the 'Who am I?' method or Twenty Statements Test (TST), (see Gordon & Gergen 1968). The number of objective answers determines the 'locus score' of the individual and gives an indication of the degree of social attachment of the individual in society; the higher the score, the more the attachment, says Kuhn and McPartland (1954). The finding of Kuhn and McPartland, that people often primarily name social roles, and only then name characteristics and personal circumstances, does not match the outcome of this research. This may have to do with the fact that these are youngsters who are perhaps less aware of their social roles than adults. In addition, the difference may also be related to the stronger individualisation since the fifties of the previous century, in which this method was developed.

Besides the comparison of the content itself, the answers of the respondents described above, have also been compared to the use of the TST original encoding. Examples of objective responses are: I am student, name, address, age, other roles and conditions. Comparison in this way, there was also little difference in answers between the levels of education, and even less between native and ethnic minority students. The differences are not statistically significant. Below is an overview of the number of objective responses per respondent, divided by level of education.

Table 1: Answers in TST (in percentages)

	No objective answers	1 to 4 objective answers	5 to 7 objective answers	8 to 10 objective answers	Total
Vmbo	48	42	6	4	100
Havo	39	39	17	5	100
Vwo	42	43	11	3	99

The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students gave much fewer answers on a total, to the question ‘Who are you?’, (average 7), than Pre-university Education (VWO) students (10 answers) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students (average of 9 answers). The list of answers was often completed with general objective answers.

12.3 Personal answers

We can see that generally all students give very personal and individualistic answer to the question: ‘Who are you?’ Pre-university Education (VWO) students refer more often to their ideals and social involvement. But surely from a clear individual standpoint, for example “I am an individual who will do his best later to improve the world” (respondent 123, Pre-university Education (VWO) school). Self-confident individualism, in which an individual looks with an open mind at what she can do for society, is perhaps the best attachment in today’s society.

It is not the case that Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students couldn’t get to no more personally-oriented, subjective answers; these answers were favourite also to the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, but were related to their own lives and immediate surroundings. The answer ‘helping people’ that was given a few times by Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, can also be seen as referring to a role in the society outside their immediate environment. Examples of answers include: ‘Always on time, abide by the rules, good food, my football career’ (respondent 1, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), or ‘fortunately, I don’t use drugs, I don’t smoke, I know what I want, I think about what I do’ (respondent 2, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), or ‘nice, ruthless if it comes to money, business, neat, patient,

someone who goes for it, spontaneous, peaceful and quiet, restrained (respondent 6 Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). The most common features are: nice, helpful, quiet, funny, cheerful and good with people. Furthermore, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students often replied 'I don't smoke, I don't drink, I don't use drugs, I'm not easily aggressive'.

Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students take in that respect objective/subjective position in between position, and give both very personal and neutral objective answers. The answers of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students are also more extensive than that of the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, and in that respect seem more like the answers of Pre-university Education (VWO) students. For example: 'I am/may be a nice person, am reliable, can be/make good friends, am 9 out of 10 times honest, I don't do more than necessary, I'm very happy or a bit down, I'm good at hiding feelings/emotions, I'm a good listener, a less good speaker, I can occasionally be a bit cocky (respondent 162, Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO). The difference in writing ability between the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO)/Pre-university Education (VWO) may be playing a role here. As mentioned, the answers of the students barely differ in terms of content.

There was also little difference between the answers of boys and girls. Even the most tough-looking boys filled in the answer that they were nice and sweet. Also the ethnic background indicated little differences between the students. This in itself is a factor that is worth mentioning. In discussions about social problems, politicians too easily use 'cultural differences' as an argument. It is a symbolic approach that is independent of the actual community.

"In the political discussions which concern the immigrants and their integration in Dutch society, the political participants do not stop to speak about the 'communities' of the migrants, about their 'cultures' and about their 'collective identities' as if those concepts refer to an existent cultural and social reality, but without providing evidence that this reality really exists. This tendency is strongly reinforced by those persons who put themselves in the foreground as 'representatives' of the interests of those 'communities'." (Berting 2009)

12.4 What can you do?

We see a similar outcome regarding the question 'What can you do?'. When filling in the answers to the question 'What can you do?', a few times Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students replied by asking with a deep sigh if they could fill in what they *cannot* do. They also said 'Madam, I can't do anything', to which another member of the group responded by saying that he too cannot do anything. The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students clearly had difficulty filling in something, and generally couldn't give more than two or three answers. This question didn't particularly require ten answers. When they asked me to give an example, I didn't, but instead said that everything was alright. The students were not allowed to say out loud what they filled in, or what they were considering filling in. Most answers include the mention of positive behaviour such as 'I can listen', 'good with people' or 'I can learn well'. Many Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students added to this latter answer: 'If I really have to', 'if I do my best', 'if I want', etc. The statistical comparison is performed on a portion of the cases: 137 instead of 170. The reason is that the questions of the first 34 respondents are slightly different from the other 137 cases. These first respondents were given the assignment: 'Write below what you're *good* at.' These were Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) student, and because there was so much trouble to fill in the question, I later changed it to 'Write below what you can do', I thought maybe it was too difficult to write about yourself what you do 'good'. The altered question, by omitting the word 'good', made no difference to the filling. In a qualitative research directed at the exploration of a certain topic, it is permissible to adjust the questions, if it is expected that it will result in acquiring more information (Babbie 1975, Swanborn 1981, Ten Have 2009). This is not permitted for data used for quantitative analysis, that's why the cases with the first version of the question were not included in the statistical comparison.

To the question: 'What can you do?', the naming of positive behaviour is the favourite answer, 34% of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students name positive behaviour, while in case of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students it is 46%, and among Pre-university Education (VWO) students it is 58%. Very few students name negative behaviour, sports and hobbies are named slightly more by Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students, and a school subject is named more often by Pre-

university Education (VWO) students (18%) and less often by Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students (11%), and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students (12%). Here too, the main difference is in the number of answers given. From among the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, 29% filled in not more than two answers, whereas among Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students, almost 90% gave a third answer. Onward the third answer, the difference in the number of responses between the education levels is significant¹⁶.

There is not much difference in the kind of answers, although among Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, the category sports and hobbies is favourite, and a school subject is mentioned less often as something the student can do. Some Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students answer that they are good with their hands, or that they are better in 'making' things than in 'learning'. The answers are formulated somewhat more cautiously, often not using 'good' in addition, unlike in the case of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students. This indicates a less positive self-image among Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students.

Contrary to the earlier mentioned variables, this variable shows a small significant difference between students with a Dutch or an ethnic background¹⁷. This difference is not caused by the number of answers given; the native students give somewhat less answers than the immigrant students, but in the *kind* of answer. Out of the ethnic minority students, 8% named a negative behaviour as a first answer, nobody does that among the native students. Answers were coded as negative behaviour, such as 'I'm a good liar', 'I get angry very easily' or 'I can be very annoying'. Furthermore, among immigrant respondents, there is more often an answer given in the category 'good behaviour' and less often in the category 'sports' and 'school' than by native students.

Further analysis of the answers does not provide any unusual details. It involves a small number of students, and the negative behaviour that is mentioned, can be considered normal adolescent behaviour.

A student mentions that he was arrested by the police and another student says he is good at dissing¹⁸ people. This point was also raised during the photo-session, and he

¹⁶ N= 137, Cramer's V .26, sig.05, Cohen's Kappa .89 sig.00 (see appendix 1)

¹⁷ N=137, Cramer's V .30, sig.03 (see appendix 1)

¹⁸ Dissing: Slang for challenging and disrespectful behaviour.

called it 'survival' in the street and would give no further explanation. His next answers to the question were: 'good thinking', 'good learning', 'good drawing'. When asked how one can rise or fall on the social ladder, during the lesson about social status, he replied:

"He can rise through his personal talent and he can fall due to his behaviour, just like it happened to me." (Respondent 44, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO))

12.5 Ethnic background

One of the aspects that play a role in the identity is the extent to which youngsters are aware of their position and how they handle it. An important aspect of this position is that half of Rotterdam persons come from families that were born elsewhere. Many youngsters belong to a marginalised group. The question is: How do they deal with it? And how do the native people deal with it? To what extent do these groups differ from each other, and in what issues are there similarities? How do these differences relate to the differences in education levels?

There are few answers at all educational levels, to the question 'Who are you?', that refer to social aspects, and hardly any references to ethnicity or religion. This fact aroused some surprise. The references that were there, were slightly more common among Pre-university Education (VWO) students than among Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, and more often among ethnic minority students than among students with a Dutch background. When questioned during the interviews, about *why* there wasn't reference made to ethnic background and faith more often, it was firmly answered: "Isn't it about *who* you are, rather than *what* you are?" Or, "If that's what you wanted to hear then you should have asked what religion you are, or where does your family come from?"

These answers had a reproachful undertone, they indicated fatigue and annoyance, as if it was said, "Are we going to talk about that again, wasn't it about me?" The ethnic youngsters clearly showed that they were absolutely fed-up of being addressed to about their background by the natives.

After the photo session and completing the questionnaire, in a conversation with T (respondent 63, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO)) I ask him why, in his list of answers to the question 'who are you?', he didn't write that he was an

Afghan, something that had been raised in the discussion about the photos. He replies that he has written who he was from 'inside', and that 'descent' did not matter. Then he walks away a little offended. To the question 'Who are you?' he wrote: "a person who can listen well, a person you can talk to, who sometimes easily gets offended, who likes to sport and move about, who you can laugh with, a person who likes to go out, who has a lot of fun, a boy."

I believe that the background of this reaction is that faith and ancestry are obvious to the respondents. It is an important part of their identity, but it is of no difference to their self-perception, self-esteem and self-respect. They don't like being repeatedly addressed to or being assessed. Not even if it is meant positively. A Surinamese Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) student N (respondent 106) gave the example that she had felt insulted when a doctor at the hospital made the comment that she was a smart girl because she did Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO). She adds: "He wouldn't have said that if I had been Dutch."

Bearing ethnic minority is on the one hand a sensitive issue, and on the other hand, it is for the individual the most normal thing in the world. The only botheration is caused by the reaction and the assessment by others, in the sense of being assessed, but also in the sense of *their* assessment *of* others. That's how the same girl said that she had always thought that Dutch people with low jobs, had themselves chosen to do that work, but were educated, or that it was an odd job. "White people is an equivalent to 'we are educated', so to speak." About photo 11 (machinist), she says: "If it's a white man then you expect that it's an extra job." Another girl in her group (A respondent 105, Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO), half Dutch and half Surinamese, says: "I work at the supermarket as a cashier and then you notice that sometimes white people go to a row where there is a white girl as a cashier. Not that they are racist or anything, but sometimes there are many people in that row but they keep waiting in that row. I do notice it, and that's how it is." They have noted that in both cases it has to do with being biased, but that it has a different effect. A says: "Yes, but that is not bad, it's good for white people. But it's in our disadvantage and in their favour."

As mentioned earlier, in this research I have deliberately chosen not to refer to ethnicity or to ask about it, just to find out what students come up with themselves, and whether they call it a characteristic of their identity. Research shows that people who belong to marginalised groups, who are socially not well established, perform less well only at the mention of this marginalised group factor (Ellemers and Box,

2000, Hoff, Pandey, 2004). The switch that 'triggers' the stigma as it were, can in that way influence the answers of the students of ethnic minority. Interviewing youngsters based on their ethnic background, would by definition deliver a distorted picture. They will then respond from the disposition that comes with their ethnic background. The ethnic origin becomes at that moment a salient aspect of their identity, and that colours their answer. To avoid this, at no moment was there any reference made to their ethnic background during the research. Only 14% of all students named the ethnic background to the question 'Who are you?', as one of the ten personal characteristics that are asked. Usually, it is not mentioned in the first three characteristics. It seems that being ethnic minority is less relevant to these youngsters.

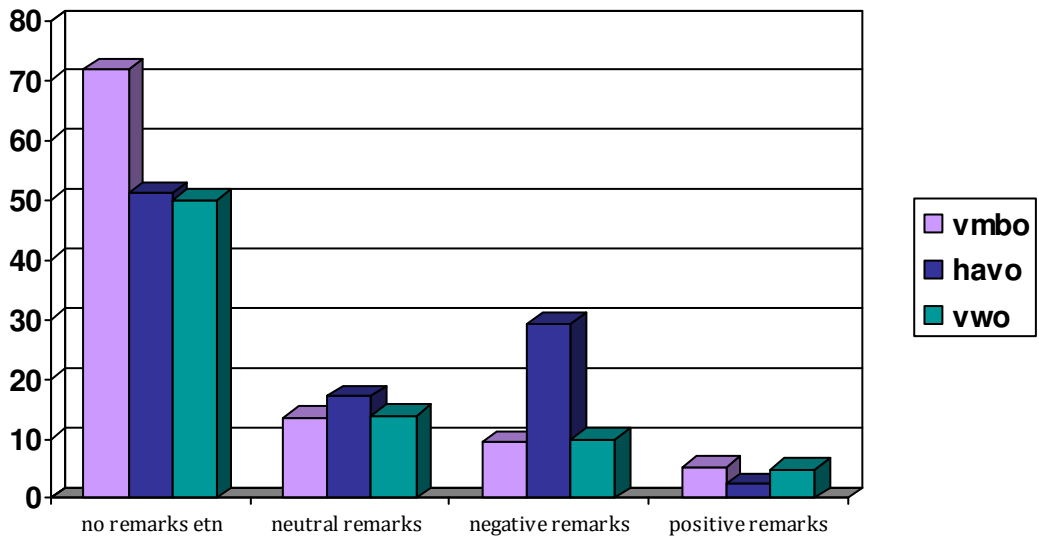
In the research, there were hardly any differences noted between native and ethnic minority students, the difference was greater between educational levels. The small ethnic differences that were found are:

- Native Pre-university Education (VWO) students described themselves slightly more often as 'in the middle of the community' than ethnic Pre-university Education (VWO) students (46% - 33%).
- Ethnic Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students place themselves more often on basis of association with occupations than native students (44% - 27%).
- In determining their own position, some ethnic students of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students refer to a university level profession, native Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students don't do that (15% - 0%).

Even when viewing and discussing the photos, most students made no mention of whether it was about ethnic minority people or not. Interestingly, there was a small significant correlation between the different educations, and in the naming or not of the ethnicity of the people in the photos, see Figure 6. There was no significant difference between native and ethnic students.

Figure 5

Notes on ethnicity (percentages by level of education)¹⁹



This ratio is probably different in schools with fewer ethnic minority students. The *research population* at all educational levels comprised an equal proportion of ethnic and native students; this is a normal reflection of the population in south Rotterdam. The *actual distribution* of students across the educational levels is not half ethnic and half native students, but in the research regarding Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) it was 60% ethnic and 40% native, regarding Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) it was 40% ethnic and 60% native and regarding Pre-university Education (VWO) (atheneum and gymnasium) it was 30% ethnic and 70% native. As generally known, in Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO), there are comparatively fewer ethnic students, and they form a minority. The youngsters are accustomed to getting along with each other, though in the breaks and after school they preferably mix with other youngsters of similar backgrounds. As one student remarked: "It's easier, you know how it is in someone's house, you look like each other." Also in the classroom the ethnic students are more separated. This was more noticeable at Pre-university

¹⁹ N=177, Cramers V.23, sig .00 (see appendix 1)

Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO); there, the students sat together in identifiable groups. It is expected that a certain feature is more striking, and the carrier of the trait is more salient, in a context that is dissonant, than in a context where the feature is more or less consonant (Rosenberg 1986). Members of ethnic groups tend to name their ethnic identity more strongly in a context that is dissonant, than other people (McGuire et al. 1978 in Rosenberg 1986). We see this phenomenon confirmed in the outcome of the self-reported characteristics and properties. There is a significant correlation between education and the mention of the ethnic background. 12% Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students names the ethnic background, among Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students it is 5%, and among Pre-university Education (VWO) students 28%²⁰.

12.6 Intercultural relationships

There is no animosity between the different cultural groups or rejection of certain groups, within the school where the research took place, though you do see that students with similar backgrounds seek friends among their own types. The clustering together of ethnic groups comes from preference and proximity; they are in the same social environment outside the school, they have cultural or religious experiences with each other and know each other's family. It is not the case that at school there are only ethnic groups. Indeed native students and ethnic students also hang out with each other's groups. It can be compared to groups based on style and fashion preferences, sports and hobby preference. It is also not the case that only native students pass comments about ethnicity, or name that aspect, when viewing the photos. There is little difference between students with a Dutch or ethnic background in naming ethnicity or giving comments, whether positive or negative. The small difference is that ethnic minority students more often identify the ethnicity of people in the photos. This difference is not significant. Below are some examples that illustrate how these comments were made.

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), conversation 9, respondents S 26, D 27,

²⁰ Considering that there are more Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students involved in the research than Pre-university Education (VWO) students, the percentage for the whole research population is 14%.

About the photo of the boys on the motorbike with the marching band, D says: "Smoke dope chill-out! I think they just dropped by, and these are doing something. Look they have a bag with stolen goods." I ask why he thinks that. D says: "Because they are Antilleans." S says that D is a racist. D admits it. (D is a boy of Moroccan origin and S of Turkish origin.)

Pre-university Education (VWO)-gymnasium, conversation 43, respondent M 123, In the first photo of the butcher. M says: "How should we place the lady? The ethnic and the Dutch? I see a Dutch butcher, by the clothing of the worker, and the products, and the sign at the back, because a Muslim doesn't write all that correctly." They laugh loud about this comment. (M is of Turkish origin and the two other guys in the group too.)

Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO), answer, 51, respondents O155, C 157, About the photo of the man at the machine. The photo is placed by O on the left side, in the category of 'what you don't see so often.' I ask why he put the picture there. C responds: "Yes, people who work in a factory are still quite normal? O says: "But it is an Antillean, you don't see them so often in a factory." I ask what he meant. O says: "They often don't finish their school, and to work in a factory, you do need a diploma." (R and C are of Moroccan descent.)

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), conversation 22, respondents T 63, A 64, S 65

About the picture of the dancing girls, S says: "People having a party and making music," T says: "Just enjoying." I ask if they go there sometimes, when they see such a celebration on the street. S says: "I see nothing but black people. I think I don't belong to that group." A says: "It is an Antillean party." All three say: "We don't get involved in that." T says: "If it was an Afghan party." I ask: "Do you come from there?" T confirms it, and so does A, S says that he comes from Turkey, but he was not born there. A says: "They are having a party of their culture." T says: "I don't like those kinds of parties." S says: "Not with drums and stuff like that."

In all the above examples of ethnic youngsters, there is question of prejudices towards other ethnic populations. This makes it clear that it is not only the majority group, which is afflicted with bias. It also makes clear how unjust (and painful) it is to

consider ethnic minority as one group.

In some interviews, the relationship between natives and ethnics was discussed as a subject. The fragment below shows a little about the process that is going on among youngsters who are from ethnic minorities, and youngsters who are not. On the one hand, there is recognition of the problem that is attached to being 'ethnic', and on the other hand it is seen as something that will fade away, and have no effect on personal lives in the future. The conversation is with three students of the gymnasium, M and B are of Moroccan descent and V is of Dutch origin. The conversation is about the opportunities that people have in society, in connection with the photos.

Pre-university Education (VWO)-gymnasium, conversation 42, respondents M 120, B 121, V 122

M says: "When you're ethnic, that also plays a role." I ask: "What do you mean?" M: "Look, for example, the Moroccans are given a bad name, which also has affects at the companies." I ask, "Did you also suffer from it?" M laughs, "Yes, but I have work now." V. says: "M, I think that you should see it as something of the previous century. The media only highlights this happening and that happening, but I don't think of that when I see you. I'd like to see on the news: this is M, M is on Pre-university Education (VWO) and M has kids and M will be a good citizen. But they don't show that on the news." M says: "They only show the bad sides." I ask: "Does that bother you all?" B says: "We too are considered accountable for things on the news. We too notice how other people react to each other. Al Qaeda, terrorism and things like that." V mumbles something and I ask what he said. V replies: "If I was M, I'd get angry and I'd start hitting."

M writes about himself, as characteristics, in the first place 'always cheerful', in the second place 'active' and in the third place, he writes 'ethnic', the list goes on: 'self-assured, an employee, a student, short temper, a Moroccan, a sporty person, someone who does not quarrel easily'.

B writes: "I'm B, I'm 16 years old, I am sensitive sometimes and sometimes not, I'm Libra, I'm a boy, I'm a Muslim, I'm an optimist, I'm not jealous of other people's stuff, I 'm spontaneous, I am who I am."

V writes: "I try to be good to my family, I try to achieve something, I try to have a lot of fun, I try to make the best of it, I can get angry easily, I can be quiet, I try to be social, I try to be happy, I'm not easy, but I'm doing my best. "

In the following fragment, during laying down the photos, a conversation starts about racism and about not wanting to be Dutch.

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), Sector Health & Welfare, conversation 50, respondents C 151, E 152, M 153

G says: "I don't understand, all these people together, and yet it's just a society? Should you then divide them into separate groups? That isn't right, that's racism."

I say: "You can decide yourself how you put the photos down, there is no right or wrong, you may do as you please." E says: "Then we'll put everything in a pile." G

says: "No, wait a minute (she puts the photos on different stacks), this is a normal person, and this is a normal person, and this is also a normal person, and this is a normal person. M says: "He too (the postman)." G asks: "A postman? Do you think a postman is a normal person? Would you want to be a postman? Those two are junkies (the people on the sidewalk) we'll put them far away." After a while I ask: "How did you make the division now?" G says: "People with jobs, junkies, people who might be rich and youngsters." The others agree. About the photo of the man at the machine G says: "That is a whole new group." I ask: "What do you mean?" E says: "No, that's racism." G responds: "No, that's not racism, he's at work." I ask: "Why are you thinking about making another group?" G replies: "Because he's a foreigner, but I don't mean it in a racist way." I ask: "So, what do you mean?"

G says: "Well what can I say; they are people who aren't really Dutch, let's just say. I too belong to another group, I'm not entirely Dutch." I ask "What are you then?" G says: "I am part Indonesian." M says: "And I'm a quarter French and a small Turkish part." I ask: "Does it make much difference to you? You seem like real Dutch girls." G reacts strongly: "Well well well, I wouldn't want to be considered as that. Everyone simply knows I'm foreign. I am proud of it, I have no need to go further in life as a Dutch person. Yes that's true, because then you really get less respect." I ask: "If you're known as a Dutch person?" G says: "Yes, because they think they can just jump on you" I ask: "You mean the boys?" G: "Yes, that's what I mean."

12.7 Conclusion

The main differences between the students, is that the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, unlike Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students, clearly have trouble answering

the questions 'Who are you and what can you do?'. There are significantly fewer answers given by the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. There is not much difference in the sort of answers given; most answers are subjective and personal. The character and behaviour of the individual play a central role during the answering, and less attention is paid to objective facts and social roles.

The results of this research give the impression that youngsters of ethnic origin find it obvious that they love being ethnic, they feel at home with it, and they won't deny that they are Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese or whatever, they see it as a birthmark, and they have no problem with it, they are who they are. Except when they are confronted by others, and their origin is seen as a feature that defines their personality. That's when they feel devalued as a person, because they are much *more* than Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese, etc. Moreover, a Turk doesn't want to be compared with or taken for a Moroccan or an Antillean and vice versa. It is an integral part of their identity, which they do not want to lose, or would not want to change. From how they see it, they differ more from someone whose family comes from another country, than from Dutch people. The Netherlands is the connecting link. Besides the fact that they come from another culture, they are connected with Dutch culture, and have largely grown up in the same environment as children of Dutch origin. They are individuals with their own preferences, their own good habits and bad habits, like all other youngsters. This is confirmed in the answers they give to the questions, there is no significant difference in the answers.

In a psychological explanation of the differences in the actions of persons, in a given situation, the emphasis is on the interaction between people and the situation; *which characteristic of an individual* determines that he reacts in a certain way, in a certain situation. A sociological explanation focuses particularly on the aspects of the social structure, which can explain the differences in action; *which properties of the system* cause individuals to differ in their responses (Cohen 1972).

If we look at the results of this research from a sociological point of view, and ask ourselves what characteristics of the social system cause that ethnic minority students dropout more often than native students, we can conclude that the school dropout is not an integration problem but rather an educational problem. The ethnic youth, who have participated in the research are culturally well integrated, they hardly differ from their native peers within the program they follow. Not even when it comes to seeing hierarchical differences, naming aspects of labour, naming ethnicity

or choosing their own position.

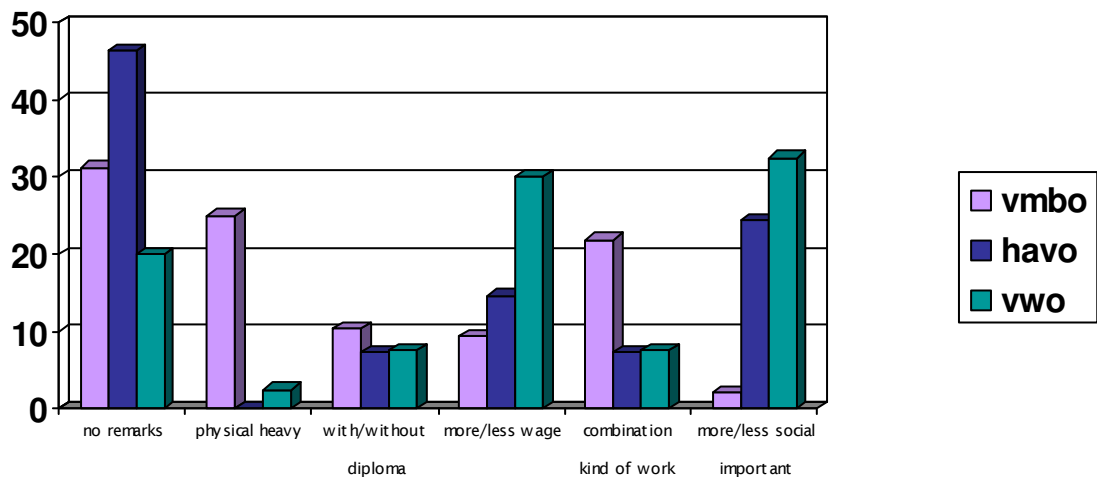
If we compare the results between the education levels, then there are indeed differences, without that these are connected to the ethnic background of students. We may wonder whether and what properties of the education system cause that students in secondary education differ in connection with education level. It is impossible to verify whether these students differed from each other already at the beginning of education, or whether they have started to differ due to the difference in the education they got or get, or by the different positions they were assigned to in the school. A longitudinal follow-up research could show that.

13 Labour Orientation

13.1 Aspects of Labour

The research question was: When the students see the photos, which aspects of labour do they name? Is there a difference between the three groups? Indeed, there appears to be a significant difference, which is connected to the level of education. This difference is consistent with the hypothesis of selective perception, which was assumed to play a role by naming the hierarchy or not. The chart below shows which aspects were named by the students. The categories were made after analysis of the conversations. It also includes a category ‘no remarks’, because it was not a topic of conversation in all the conversations. During the talks, it was left up to the students to start a topic ‘on their own’.

Figure 7
Aspects of Labour that are named (percentages by level of education)²¹



²¹ N=177, Cramer's V .41 sig .00 (see appendix 1)

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students name mostly issues that concern process such as 'working with the head or hands', 'light or heavy', 'inside or outside'. Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students make fewer comments about the type of work; they take a middle position on the dimension 'wages and social importance'. Pre-university Education (VWO) students pay most attention to the dimension 'social interest' immediately followed by 'level of salary'. Here too, we see that students observe and discuss the dimensions that are most relevant to them. The type and level of future work is often uncertain for Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. They can end up in different categories. It makes a significant difference to them whether they work with their hands or with their head later. These students often pass comments about the physical effort these people have to put into it, the circumstances in which it happens, and what the advantages and disadvantages of different jobs are. There is often talk about whether or not a diploma is required for a certain kind of work. This may be due to the fact that long before Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO), students have to choose a certain segment of the labour market when choosing their education direction. It can also be caused by uncertainty about their future position in the labour market, and the fact that they have higher risk of leaving school without a diploma or professional qualification. Among the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, when looking at the photos with the low-skilled (heavy) work, there was often the remark: 'That one hasn't finished school'. That was rarely mentioned by Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students. Among Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students, it is already set what category labour they'll be doing later. Most likely, they won't be doing any heavy physical work, and their occupation will involve some physically comfortable work. During an interview I presented this proposition to Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. One of them (respondent 46) answered as follows: "I think it's like this, ..., of course I come from Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and I want to keep learning. I think the kids of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) have a better picture of the future. They already start at a higher level. They are already higher at that level. Because they'll go directly to Higher Vocational Education (HBO)."

There is a third explanation for the difference between students of different educational levels. It may be the consequence of the assumed practical nature of

these Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, which is why they look at the photos more practically. In a subsequent research, this statement can be researched by using photos that have nothing to do with work or status positions.

13.2 Heavy and less heavy work

It is certainly not the case that all Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students would rather work with their head than with their hands. Several students pointed out that working with your head is not all there is. The difference between heavy and less heavy work is a frequently recurring topic among them. This factor was hardly mentioned by Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students. Also, the subject about mental exertion at work was raised by Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students far more often than by Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students.

Below are some examples from the photo sessions, whereby these subjects were raised.

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), answer 12, respondents M 34, R 35, J 36

M says: "This is harder work than that." He points at the photo of the man at the machine as the heavy work, in contrast to the lighter work of the doctor in the photo. The girls J and R arrange the photos in a different order. "Butcher is heavier work than that?" (M points at the picture of the man at the machine), M asks the girls. "Do you know how hard it is to work with metal? I think the doctor has the easiest job, and then these men" (M points at photos of people in the office) J answers by saying: "They get headaches, they are mentally tired."

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), conversation 16, respondent B 45 L 46, T 47

There is a classification made by the group: 'Outside work and inside work', 'voluntary', 'heavier and lighter work', 'work where you need or don't need a education for'. T says: "You can join the office jobs." The doctor isn't a part of that according to T. B says: "That's not an office but a practice." "And yet, it belongs to it," says T. B disagrees. T asks: "Is this work heavier?" He points to the office jobs. "No,"

says B, "office is mentally tough, I swear, and this is physically demanding, but that's really tough mentally. They are equally hard". L agrees with B. I ask what they would choose. B says that she prefers something that is physically hard to do, such as saleswoman. She says: "If you are mentally exhausted, you cannot go on, but if you are physically exhausted, you can go on in your head." L agrees, but would prefer to work in an office. T wants the same and says: "Or the police, that's a bit of both. You are outside and also at the office, some variation."

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), conversation 26, respondent T 74

T says about the sequence that they want to lay down: "I think, best earning professions in the middle, and then you go a little like that. I think she has a husband who earns a lot (the woman reading a book)". The doctor and the man in the fancy car, and then you go a little to the odd jobs, the normal jobs: the butcher, the teacher, the painter, in a factory, students. Then go to the professions that you wouldn't want to be, nobody wants to be on a roof or do picking in a greenhouse, you don't want to be a postman. Not if you can choose."

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), conversation 23, respondent St 66, B 67, S 68

B says: "Look, they are the higher people, well, not the higher people. These work with a diploma." St says: "That's ten times harder (pointing at the roofers, etc.) than that (pointing at the office workers and businessmen)". B says "yes, that's true". S says: "That is more thinking and that is more practical knowledge." St says: "These start their work at 7 am, and these just sit on their lazy ass." S says: "For this you have to study only two or three years, and for that you need to keep studying for much longer. This is even more necessary for society (administration)." I ask: "What do you appreciate more?" St says: "For this one" she points at the group photos of the roofers, etc. S says: "Actually both, because you need both of them. This one for your house and this one for all sorts of things." I ask: "What would you choose?" B points at the photos of the roofers etc. S says: "They didn't ended up there because they chose for it. And it is also very dangerous work, it is really life-threatening work."

The striking part of the talks with the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students was, that the way they arranged the photos, was often based on

categories such as 'work and leisure' and types of work 'light or heavy work', 'hand or head work', and education: 'much or little', 'with or without qualifications'. Fewer divisions were made according to the amount of salary, the importance of people or social status. These kinds of divisions did come up during conversations, but in most cases this was not the perspective while making a division.

13.3 Salary and social importance

In conversations with the Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students, the topic of conversation was often the level of salary and the social significance or importance of the social professions.

Students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) look differently at the photos. The students pay more attention to aspects that are important for their own position in the labour structure. The social identity of students in secondary education is partly determined by the place they occupy in the educational hierarchy. Among other things, this was apparent from the reactions of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, when they heard that the research was also being carried out in Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO). In summary, these reactions indicate: "They'll surely do it much better than us." When I asked why that would be the case, she didn't know what to answer, and just replied 'I just think so'. One of the students suggested during a class conversation, during the discussion about the results in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), to hold a kind of discussion between students of Pre-university Education (VWO) and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), at the end of the research, in which they could talk about why 'they think they are better than us'. I asked if he thought that they (Pre-university Education (VWO) students) thought so. The whole class supported that, and almost everyone responded fiercely: "Sure they think that."

When I look at comments that Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students made during reviewing and arranging the photos, I have to agree, in part, with the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. When viewing the photos, it appears that in case of Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students, education does reflect wealth, and the extent to which people 'contribute' something to society, sometimes there is talk about the 'lesser people' without education or

qualifications. On the other hand, there is recognition and appreciation for people in 'lower' occupations, because 'you simply need them too, to keep society functioning'. It is certainly not true that Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students speak only condescendingly about people with lower education.

I think it would make a difference when the same research would be carried out in a residential area, and in a school where the majority of students came from an environment where a high education is the norm. As mentioned earlier, many Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students who participated in the research come from families with parents who have had secondary or lower education. According to a rough estimate, based on information provided by the students themselves, about what their parent's occupation is, 18% of the parents are highly educated (university or Higher Vocational Education (HBO), 44% have done Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO), 12% are entrepreneurs (own business) and 26% are less educated (no occupation or profession). The distribution by education level of the students does not differ significantly, but there is a slight difference; 31% of Pre-university Education (VWO) students have higher educated parents, compared to 15% of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students and 12% of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students. During laying down the photos, the children of parents with secondary education, least considered social status differences, 12% versus 25% of higher educated parents, 23% of less educated parents and 22% of parents in the category 'entrepreneur'.

Comments about the value of people in relation to their education also occurred among Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. In this case, there were no significant differences between the education levels, it happened less frequently.

A consequence of the meritocracy process is that the moral evaluation of people is strongly associated with their economic position, or their educational level. Unlike in cases where social position is passed-on at birth, in the meritocracy positions it is earned. This implies that people with a good position are even more 'worthy': they possess praiseworthy qualities that people in lower positions don't possess, or possess less of, and receive more 'love from the world' (De Botton 2004). In this respect, the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students clearly have disadvantage in building their self-esteem, compared to the Pre-university Education (VWO) students and, to a lesser extent, compared to Higher General

Secondary Education (HAVO) students.

13.4 Conditions and prejudices

Here are some of the differences that did exist: 42% of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students noted the conditions of the people in the photos, compared with 29% of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students and 25% of Pre-university Education (VWO) students. These were expressions like 'he cannot help it that he ended up there', 'he may not have much money'. Especially the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students of the Care and Welfare section looked at the photos compassionately. Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students talked most about the social importance of people: 44%, compared to 26% by Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students and 25% by Pre-university Education (VWO) students. Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students also made most of the comments that were coded as bias: 51% versus 33% of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, and 33% of Pre-university Education (VWO) students. These are comments like 'you don't often see Antilleans with such a job, because they usually have no qualifications' or 'he works for black money'.

All in all, there is little difference between students of different levels when it comes to assessing success and failure. Among the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, there is a bit more attention to the circumstances in which people end up, without that it is their own fault, or without that they are to blame for it. Comments on the photo of the drug-addict tramp are almost always very intense. It is a prototype of serious failure. Almost everyone is convinced about it, but the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students show most compassion. Below are some comments and observations of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students in the photo of the tramp.

Vmbo, call 11, respondent S 31, O 32

S says: "These people are doing something together, they are visiting the neighbours, they seem friendly, they get along well with each other (about the photo of the women on the street). The tramp, a bit lonely, he should be accepted. He should join the others, look, if he goes along with others, he might get accepted." The photo of the tramp is first separated from the other photos, and S puts the photo closer to the photo of the people who stand comfortably together. 'All together', 'leisure' and

'alone' are the main criteria. O explains: "This is how people interact, this is with each other, these know each other (the doctor), this is more with people who you don't know. These are different cultures, but they are also doing something together. Multicultural, if only we put this down, there should be a Dutch person added."

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), conversation 18, respondent M 51, P 52, A 53

About the photo of the tramp M says: "He clearly has no career. He's sitting next to a building, he is homeless, he's probably scavenging. P asks: "What makes you think he's a tramp?" M says: "By his attitude and his position." P says: "It could be that he's just smoking outside." M "But he doesn't look well groomed." P: "Well, that could be." M: "He has a beard, has not shaved and his hair is messy and he has a joint in his hand." P is putting up a bit of a struggle. M: "And his coat is very dirty, and his pants, and he's sitting next to a container!" P says: "Maybe he's come from his work, maybe he works in a garage." M laughs "No way." P says: "It may well be someone who is just outside smoking a cigarette." (...) P says about the photo of the painter in the Maas tunnel: "A painter in the bicycle tunnel, he's feeling cold because he's got a woolly cap on, he's working hard, all alone ... I'm not sure if I should be proud of him or have pity." I ask what he means. P answers: "It's a great big wall, I would have a breakdown if I would see it unpainted, but I would be very proud if I'd be finished with it." A says: "That man will also be proud when he's done."

13.5 Conclusion

The above quotations illustrate the involvement of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students with those who are less fortunate. In general, it was the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students who could best place themselves in other's position. This quality should more often be named when it comes to Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. There is almost exclusively spoken about what they have 'less' than Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) or Pre-university Education (VWO) students, it would be good to research what they have "more".

Outstandingly, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students often name aspects of work, especially those aspects that have to do with the implementation. Among Pre-university Education (VWO) students, the economic and social aspects are named most often, Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO)

students take an intermediate position. Also in this subject, we see that the dimensions that are most relevant to the students, are observed and discussed. The remarkably frequent mentioned difference between mental and manual labour among the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students makes clear that this is a salient aspect for them, while for the Pre-university Education (VWO) students, it hardly plays a role. Among the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) student, there is more awareness for physical exertion in certain occupations, and the conditions under which people work. They also often talk about whether there is a diploma required for some occupation or not. The possible causes of these differences may be related to the fact that Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students are more occupied with the work situation; they already had to choose an occupation direction that they later wish to follow, although the Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students also had to choose a direction, during the choice of their profile. Perhaps Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students feel insecure about their future position in the labour market, and they are more aware of the value of diplomas, and the risks of leaving school without a diploma or a good occupational qualification. Another possible explanation for the difference is that Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students look at the photos in a more practical way, because they are more practical minded. Among Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students, there was more attention given to the level of salary and the importance to society. The latter was particularly the most important aspect of labour among Pre-university Education (VWO) students. This may be related to their expected future position as leading and influential citizens; the new elite.

All students saw a link between the level of education, the salary and the importance to society. Among a number of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students it was clear that this fact triggered inner tensions. This manifested itself in the previously named 'reverse hierarchy', the great appreciation for the 'hard workers' and the group solidarity, the 'us-them' thinking, when it comes to lower and higher educated people.

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students name mostly issues that concern process such as 'working with the head or hands', 'light or heavy', 'inside or outside'. Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students make fewer comments about the type of work; they take a middle position on the dimension

‘wages and social importance’. Pre-university Education (VWO) students pay most attention to the dimension ‘social interest’ immediately followed by ‘level of salary’. Here too, we see that students observe and discuss the dimensions that are most relevant to them. The type and level of future work is often uncertain for Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. They can end up in different categories. It makes a significant difference to them whether they work with their hands or with their head later. These students often pass comments about the physical effort these people have to put into it, the circumstances in which it happens, and what the advantages and disadvantages of different jobs are. There is often talk about whether or not a diploma is required for a certain kind of work. This may be due to the fact that long before Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO), students have to choose a certain segment of the labour market when choosing their education direction. It can also be caused by uncertainty about their future position in the labour market, and the fact that they have a higher risk of leaving school without a diploma or professional qualification. Among the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, when looking at the photos with the low-skilled (heavy) work, there was often the remark: ‘That one hasn’t finished school’. That was rarely mentioned by Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students. Among Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students, it is already set what category labour they’ll be doing later. Most likely, they won’t be doing any heavy physical work, and their occupation will involve some physically comfortable work. During an interview I presented this proposition to Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. One of them (respondent 46) answered as follows: “I think it’s like this, ..., of course I come from Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and I want to keep learning. I think the kids of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) have a better picture of the future. They already start at a higher level. They are already higher at that level. Because they’ll go directly to Higher Vocational Education (HBO).”

There is a third explanation for the difference between students of different educational levels. It may be the consequence of the assumed practical nature of these Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, which is why they look at the photos more practically. In a subsequent research, this statement can be researched by using photos that have nothing to do with work or status positions.

14 Answers to the research questions

In this chapter, the findings are clearly discussed on the basis of the research questions. The basic form of the research is an exploratory observational research, completed with in-depth interviews and questionnaires with open answers. The aim of the research was to determine whether differences exist between students from the three levels of education, and to what extent these differences can answer the central question in the research: How do students Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) cope with the relatively low social status of their education?

14.1 Identity, hierarchy and socio-economic background

a. 'Personal identity', operationalised with the question 'Who are you', shows no differences in content between the education levels, but it does in terms of the number of given answers, there are significantly fewer answers given to this question by students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) answers, than by Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students.

b. 'Social identity', operationalised by determining one's own proper place in the symbolised society (the circle with photos), is also related to educational level; Pre-university Education (VWO) students choose a position 'in the middle of society' relatively often, and refer thereby often to their higher education, students of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) more often chose their position as student or pupil, whereby Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students more often refer to a future occupation than Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students.

c. 'Observance hierarchy', operationalised by letting the students discuss the photos and place them in a circle. A hierarchy is used significantly less by Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, when placing the photos. They don't relate their own place to a position in the hierarchy if not asked. When they are asked, they often refer to the fact that they are still in school and can climb the social ladder. Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students often mention having a diploma or not, when viewing the photos. They seem to be more aware of the difference that diplomas can make, and see unattractive labour as a doomsday scenario if no diploma is acquired. Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and

Pre-university Education (VWO) students don't mention (and fear) this doomsday scenario.

d. 'The ethnic background' plays no significant role. The ethnic background makes no difference in the kind of answers and the number of responses. Even when discussing the photos, the ethnic background made no difference. The socioeconomic status of parents also played no significant role in the outcome.

14.2 Attitudes with regard to social inequality

How, and to what extent, does today's youth experiencing social status, and how do they justify inequality, or do they reject it?

To what extent are there similarities and differences in their perceptions and reactions, and how, and to what extent, do these observations and reactions correlate with their educational and social identity?

In chapter ten, it is described how the youngsters differ in the research regarding social status, when they place photos in the circle. They name differences in education and salary on the economic dimension, and influence and significance on the political dimension. The cultural dimension is also often named, and they respond on it with a clear preference or dislike, but for placing the photo in the circle, there is usually a link made to the financial or occupational position of the people in the photos. For example, it is then said, 'This man is driving a big fat car, he must be having a good job, or at least he has a lot of money', or, 'If this woman had a job she would not have to wear second-hand clothes'. Also when naming the cultural dimension, the students make a link to economic and political dimension. Many students, within the three education levels, make a link between 'have honour' and 'more power', 'more to say' with higher education and a higher level job. If not specifically asked, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students make a hierarchical division significantly less often than other students. The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students more often observe aspects that deal with working conditions and show more sympathy and understanding for circumstances and situations of the people in the photos. The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students more often make

negative comments about people who have studied, Pre-university Education (VWO) students don't do that, and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students do it sometimes. In conversations about the topic 'inequality', it shows that most respondents have accepted that there is inequality, but Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students often indicate that they find inequality unjust. There is acknowledged though that the tasks and roles should be divided, and that this is in relation to education, but the better jobs are seen as 'better', from a different perspective; jobs that are less physically heavy and the work is under favourable conditions. They find it unreasonable that in addition they earn high wages and earn more respect in these jobs.

The choice of one's own position among the photos that are stuck, again shows a significant difference. Pre-university (VWO) students often choose a place 'in society' or among the 'important people', often stating that they choose that place because they are doing a high education, and in the future they'll be a part of the upper class or the 'elite'. Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students often choose the 'student' position, where Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students often indicate what profession they want to achieve. Students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) indicate more often that they are still on school, and that later they can be whatever they want to be, but they don't additionally attach a particular occupation to it. Sometimes they add something along the lines of 'I belong among the students too', or 'I am the future of the country too'.

The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students are well aware of the difference that diplomas make. This appears partly from the responses to the photos; they make a clear distinction between people who have or haven't completed their school; something Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students hardly notice. These differences between the education levels give reason to suppose that social identity is partly determined by the education that is done. There are hardly any differences between ethnic and native students, when it is checked on education level. The same applies to differences in socioeconomic background. The significant differences that are found between the students are always in conjunction with their education. In this respect, one can say that it is a class difference that becomes apparent.

14.3 Awareness of social position

Are youngsters, who get less high in education, and thereby find themselves in a lower social position, aware of that position, and do they see enough opportunities to change that, by means of an occupational qualification?

To what extent do they find that important? Is there a difference between the ambitions of students, and do these differences correlate with their education level or social identity?

Based on the results, I can say that the students participating in the research are aware of their education position, and that their education position has a major impact on their social identity. The students in the higher education sector are aware of their good prospects, and the students in the lower sector, are fully aware that if they want to 'achieve' something, they'll have to work very hard to go through Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) to Higher Vocational Education (HBO), because you don't get anywhere only Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). They are aware that they are already behind in their studies, in compared to students in higher education sector. They are also less confident about their future role in society. They are much more aware of the risk of 'failure' if they don't finish school. They are more aware of the value and importance of diplomas, while they put less emphasis on hierarchical relationships in society. The students in the higher sector of the education generally see the hierarchy as something obvious, without that it's asked about. Students in the lower sector do also see these relationships, but generally only if it's asked about, or when it is pointed out, not on their own. The explanation may be that the observations are being done selectively; things that contribute to the feeling of self-esteem are observed sooner than things that do not contribute (e.g. Gordon, Gergen 1968, Leary, Tangney 2005, Rosenberg 1986). There is a certain difference in ambition between the educational levels. Students of Pre-university Education (VWO) name professions at university level more often than Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) or Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. Among the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, there is more talk about the ambition to climb the social ladder without additionally attaching a certain occupation to it, such as in case of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students.

It can be concluded that considering the consciousness of their lower starting position, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students are generally more involved with the climb itself, than with what they would like to be, and their personal needs and interests. Only 4% of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students mentioned a personal goal, such as 'a happy life', if asked about the future, whereas among Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students it was 20%. A personal goal, like a 'happy life', is perhaps too much of a luxury for Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students; first you need to work hard to achieve a good social position, and after that perhaps think of happiness. There is a greater distance between their ambition and reality. It is not that Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students are unhappy or feel that they are in a pitiful position. There are many Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students who enjoy going to school and have no problem with the education or status of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). For a large part, the stigma that Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) has, as a collection of problem-students who hardly ever spend time on education, is a result of negative media attention, but in fact it isn't all that bad (van Daalen 2010). The students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) are not so 'different' from Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students. A comparison of answers to the question 'Who are you?' showed no significant differences, but there is a difference in the *number* of answers given. Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students gave on an average much fewer answers than Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students. It was harder for Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students to think of several answers to the question. The difference may be caused partly by a difference in the ability to think of something, partly due to a lack of confidence, and situational self-esteem. During the talks, in relation to the photos, students from Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) generally didn't have more trouble 'thinking their own things' than students of Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO). The students from the lowest level Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) were initially somewhat cautious and started talking only after they were encouraged. After that, there was a lively and original conversation about the different aspects in the photographs. This suggests that it must have been also possible for them to think of several answers to a fairly simple

question. If an explanation was asked, I told them that whatever they would write would be alright: 'It does not matter, just write ten things about yourself'. I gave no examples, and I also made sure that they didn't tell each other. So, apart from the number of answers to the question 'Who are you?', the answers that were given, had many similarities, within and between different educational levels.

There is no reason why Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students would differ from Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) or Pre-university Education (VWO) students in that part of their self-esteem or self-respect (global or trait self-esteem), which is seen as an innate trait and developed by bringing-up, but it is understandable that they have less domain-specific self-esteem (or state self-esteem). This makes them more fragile and susceptible to negative treatment and lack of respect. During the research, they were smart, active and funny, and there were often clever observations expressed, but in a certain way, they were often vulnerable and insecure nevertheless. Confidence was usually quickly recovered when they noticed that they were quite capable of meeting the requirements of the assignment. Their education, or the existing imago of that education, contributes less to their self-esteem and social identity. Due to this, their self-esteem is more dependent on recognition on other domains, and the respectful behaviour of others. In case of (social) exclusion and negative treatment, they are more likely to feel the need to defend their self-esteem (Leary, Tangney 2005). This corresponds with the emphasis that they lay on their future perspective for the development of a particular talent, other than cognitive talent, and the need for their 'own business'. To excel in a particular field, or being their 'own boss', can be seen as attempts to improve their own chances, because there is no 'high' degree of education required, and you can still be important or successful. It also corresponds with their often hostile response to highly educated people in the photos, who get more respect in society, earn more and have the most comfortable work too. During the group conversation in the class, about the topic 'social ladder', the solidarity of the students, for belonging to the less educated group, was clearly noticeable. They were fully attentive, there was pin-drop silence, and in one group there was even applause at the end. It was clearly a meaningful topic for these students, in which they are strongly involved.

14.4 Friction between expectations and capabilities

Do students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) suffer from the relatively low social status of their education, and do they experience friction between their expectations and the estimates of their future prospects?

The interviews with students revealed that many, but not all, students suffer from the low status of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). In the previous chapters, there are several examples of this. This became apparent also during the interviews, whereby the question was repeatedly asked how they felt about the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) advice given by the primary school, or how they felt that they had sometimes ended up in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) from Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) or Pre-university Education (VWO). It was often felt as degrading, and a (sometimes shameful) disappointment. The friction between the low social starting position and their future dreams is eliminated or resolved by shifting the dream to a later time. Sometimes this was expressed as a personal rehabilitation; I'll show them what I'm worth! It is easy to imagine that the future dream becomes a nightmare for deviant youngsters who, due to behaviour problems or circumstances, find it increasingly difficult to pursue an education. The future is a frightening adventure without guidance and without a glimmer of hope.

The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students often associated themselves with the photo of the students (see Chapter 11), whereby, especially among Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, the views echoed that you're okay as long as you're still on school, that way you can go in any direction on. The surprisingly often mentioned lack of a diploma, with regard to 'lower' jobs, indicates the great importance that Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students attached to a good education, with good future prospects, and the horrible thought of leaving school without a diploma. Nobody wants that. If it still happens so often that students drop out, or go out of control, what is it then that goes wrong? Perhaps students have little confidence in the idea that the education, that is offered to them, will take them to what they have in mind. This is an assumption that can be researched among Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) who lag behind. This is a common

complaint especially among students who come from a higher type of education and end up in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). They experience the time at school as lost time, and if they are punishment due to disruptive behaviour, and they have to sit somewhere else, outside the classroom, it goes from bad to worse. The boredom and the feeling of time lost, takes away the last drop of motivation.

Respondent R 62 (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO): "You sometimes had to sit up to 4 hours; you filled a few hours doing nothing. Sometimes you missed entire lessons. I learned nothing, just sitting around doing nothing. Waste of time, waste of life." This is what an interviewed student told me about the many hours of punishment he received because he always argued with the teacher. He had started as a gifted student at the Pre-university Education (VWO), who said that it was impossible for him to sit still all day, and then go home to do homework too. When, after the divorce of his parents, he ended up in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), he could only match himself with the teachers. He says: "Miss X was a good teacher she is the same as me, if she starts to argue with me, I start to argue with her. And then we keep on going until someone wins. But there isn't really a winner, because if I win the argument, I get sent out. That's how I've been sent out about 6 times."

Another possibility is that early dropout is in fact the result of neutralisation techniques to eliminate emotional and cognitive dissonance. This too can be researched within the group of dropout students. In the research, there are several of these neutralisation techniques observed. For students who stand slightly less firm on the ground, and/or receive less support from home, these techniques can escalate into oppositional and defiant behaviour, and truancy. This behaviour is seen as a harbinger of school dropout (Severiens, Verstegen 2007).

14.5 Dealing with lower status position

Which neutralisation techniques and collective statements are used to accept the lower position without loss of face?

The most common explanation I came across in the research is the statement that they were themselves to blame, because of laziness, not doing your best, or annoying behaviour. These are statements that fit into the category 'self-made-

handicaps', that people can create for themselves and their surroundings, to disguise something they are not good at. The major drawback of these statements is that they have a flywheel effect; they hide the perceived flaw, but also strengthen the counter-productive behaviour, such that the need to maintain the 'self-made-handicap' only increases. 'Self-made-handicap' strengthens the likelihood of failure because people create obstacles in their behaviour and attitude, as an excuse or explanation in advance, for the experienced or expected failure. It is a strategy to protect one's self-image and self-esteem against the views of others, regarding their lack of talent (Kolditz, Arkin 1982, Dweck 2000, Deci, Ryan 2004, Leary, Tangney 2005). The statement by the students was often extended to group level: 'That's how we Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students are'. It can be seen as a collective statement, which is also confirmed by the negative image of the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students in the media. Such a statement is popular even among the teachers of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). Many teachers believe that it is hard to work with most students, and that they cannot expect much results (Van Daalen 2010). During the Kohnstamm lecture in 2008, Pieter Winsemius told about his trip through Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) schools, and interviews with Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) teachers and directors:

"At the office of director Sean Clancy, formally employed at the Rotterdam Zuiderpark College, there is a piece of paper, which is coated in plastic so it can withstand the test of time. It says: 'If children have no perspective, it is because we have not afforded it to them.' Such a philosophy places a heavy burden on the teachers for whom it is already hard, in an environment characterised by strain from their students. When we asked Clancy about his Christmas Wish – the one he would want granted, to combat school dropout – he said: 'A curriculum developer, because we have nothing to offer them'. The 'overburdened low-achiever' is bad at learning perhaps, but they do understand, that already at the age of twelve, they are practically written off by their environment, and that they are in fact in a storage facility, until they are relieved of their compulsory education. If you do not have perspective, you don't feel like learning, and you're not a part of the scene'. 'And', said Clancy, 'in addition to our daily affairs, we as teachers do not have the energy anymore to design a curriculum, to "seduce" them to it.' (Winsemius et al., 2008)

Teachers do their best, and they are proud when the students receive their diplomas. During the graduation ceremony at the school, where the research was conducted, each student was cheered by the teachers. There's a lot of effort put into it, and that makes it all the more difficult to accept that Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) gets little social appreciation, and get a lower status than the Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) or Pre-university Education (VWO). The question is whether the emphasis teachers put on the limited capabilities of the students, is a neutralisation technique, to accept the lack of 'result', and the limited social recognition, without loss of face.

In my contacts with the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, I haven't really noticed any lack of motivation or understanding. It was sometimes difficult to get students of the lowest level to start talking, but it usually worked out after some encouragement. It can be derived from the quotations in this thesis, that much that was well 'understood'. An average or lower cognitive ability does not have to mean that their own experiences and personal observations are not understood. The research of Severiens and Verstegen (2007) shows that such students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), gladly enter a discussion with each other and with the teacher, and like to talk about their ideas and experiences. It is even one of the factors that contribute to reducing school dropout.

14.6 Collective stigma

Because it concerns a collective stigma, it has a major impact on the atmosphere in the group, and it puts pressure on the diligent student to not boost, if he or she wishes to be a part of the group. Students who come from higher levels of education, are viewed differently by teachers, and are sometimes called 'intelligent' exceptions in the classroom, which classifies the rest of the group as 'not intelligent' (Van Daalen 2010). It is meant as a compliment and an encouragement, but probably has the opposite effect, on both the 'good' students as well as on the 'less good' students. People generally don't like to be exceptions, and can feel uncomfortable with a compliment that simultaneously involves the disqualification of the others.

"The performance-based learning at school results in a selection, of which the 'victims' do not question the legitimacy, because they - precisely because of the alleged objective rationality of the school's suitability and performance demands - attribute their failure to individual shortcomings, when students, who are intended

for better jobs, see confirmation of their individual quality in it. The students are not alone in this: teachers stigmatise and label in a similar manner.” (Wesselingh 1985: 41)

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students can possibly achieve far more, if they experience themselves as ambitious and successful students. The quality of education in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) will have to give the students that feeling. The first requirement is that teachers and policy makers are also prepared to see it in that way. The question is how policy makers and teachers can change the image that the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students have about themselves.

14.7 Specified causes of ‘failure’

Besides the mention of their own laziness, bad behaviour and other statements about ‘own fault’, there were other reasons given by students towards the explanation of their failure in education. These reasons were circumstances such as illness or family problems (divorce of parents), but also the atmosphere at school, or the conduct of teachers, was given as a reason, meant both positively and negatively. Below is an excerpt from an interview with one of the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students in the research (he is now on Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO)).

Respondent S 26 (vocational school now Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO))
“I now have a teacher who really goes for it. He makes his own maths lessons. He’s busy when he’s on holiday too. He tells a lot and he’s doing a good job. This makes me do my best. It wasn’t so nice with the previous teacher. Everything according to the book, and much punishment. I could not do my best. I couldn’t get good marks. When a teacher does his best to explain something, then I also want to do my best. And that shows on the report. I’ve already learned a lot more.”

S fetches the example of a lesson from his room, to show me how well it’s working out. Not only is he enthusiastic about the lessons and the teacher, but the feeling that someone puts so much effort into it, also fills him with pride, and gives him the feeling that he is worth something, and in return he wants to do his best for the teacher.

Teachers have to earn it, that students do their best for them. This way, the student

passes the responsibility for his school success onto the teacher. I observed this attitude often among Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. They say it as though it is not their fault that they are less good students, but that the school or the teachers are also to blame. The question is whether this is really the case, or whether it is an excuse for the perceived failure.

14.8 Loss of motivation

In an article in the NRC on 19 March 2010, with the headline 'New Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO): get lesson, learn nothing', a student of Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) learning to be a secretary, that she's taught insufficiently, and that she thinks she should give up her dreams about going to Higher Vocational Education (HBO). Due to all the fuss surrounding competency-based education, she has lost interest. As far as she is concerned, they can keep it. Many Regional Education Centres (Regionaal Opleidingencentrums ROCs) are stuck with problems, and a number of Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) students are regarded as very weak by the Inspectorate of Education. I heard such talk also in interviews with students of this research, who have now gone to Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO). They start at the Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) with the dream of climbing up to Higher Vocational Education, but the level of the lessons turns out very disappointing, making them feel that they are wasting their time. The information they received during the introduction, turns out to be wrong sometimes, classes get cancelled, fellow students make good teaching and good learning impossible, internships are boring and do not encourage them to learn. The competency-based education is very complicated for both teachers and students, and the dream to climb up goes further away than ever. This is not always the case. It's better when the quality of an educational track is higher and more focused on 'real study' from books, with clear assignments and regular tests.

"A successful prevention of school dropout starts with a tight structure: clear rules, strict enforcement, clear study goals, hard work, and no lame excuses. Teachers need to give some slack when that is possible, but students need to do some sweating too. Structure alone is not enough. It is also about a community feeling. Students should notice that people at the frontline actually care about them. They need to know: I am somebody, I have value, I'm a part of the scene. Such feelings of connectedness lead to better school performance and reduced dropout. Especially

risk-students stand a better chance, if they have a warm and meaningful relationship with at least one adult, such as a teacher who they trust.” (WRR, 2009:11)

It remains a long road with many obstacles, with a large amount of perseverance and endurance demands for the students.

One of the interviewed (former) Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students (respondent S 38) has a disappointing experience with her choice of Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO). She has chosen for facility service education (Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) level 2), because it comes with such a big set of books. She expected that she could achieve something with it, but the offered lessons turned out disappointing.

She says: “I wanted to get into tourism but that wasn’t possible because I had a too low grade from the (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) exam. For tourism, you need to get level 3. My marks were eights and nines, and a pair of sevens, no sixes or such. This was the only way to get into tourism; do the one-year education facility service. I do internship every Thursday: Serving and making food. I do like it but it’s monotonous. I’ve been doing it since 5 weeks. I do the same thing every day and it’s not fun. You start by putting fruit in a basket, 5 pieces, 3 pieces along with a note, anyone can do that We can all put 5 pieces of fruit in a basket and we can all make sandwiches.”

S also says she doesn’t like it that it’s so busy in her class. I ask if it affects her behaviour. She says: “Yes, don’t feel like going to school, call in sick, stay home ... I don’t like practical lessons, only theory. I just like to get into books. Real lessons in which everyone keeps his mouth shut. Here, they even talk on the phone in the classroom, and that’s no fun. I can’t follow the lessons.” Her plan to achieve something, is completely frustrated by a wasted year in which they do not learn much. The lessons are disappointing because the teachers can’t get the classroom quite. She has great appreciation for a teacher, who at least attempts to give lessons in such a noisy classroom, because at least a few students do want to learn.

In conversations with these students, it becomes increasingly clear how important they find it to be taken seriously, in their efforts to study, and to achieve something in the future. This is further expressed by students who have positive experiences in Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO), only they have the feeling that it will become reality due to the education. The quality of the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) or Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) can make

the difference whether they drop out or not, especially when it comes to students who are 'overloaded' by problems at home or by other environmental factors, such as poverty and lack of good role models.

14.9 Good intentions

Below is an excerpt from the interview with one of the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students (respondent P 12), after she got started with Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO). She felt that she had not used her time well on the elementary school and on Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO).

"At the school where I am now, they pay a lot of attention. I'm now trained at Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) to be a secretary, 'Albeda' is a good education. When we started with the education, a few of us girls agreed: we're behind in our studies, because we've done nothing there all these years. We narrowly managed to get a Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) diploma. On the open day, at a presentation, I thought: if I have to learn all that! Then I'll be busy quite a while. It went quite well the first weeks, we learnt in a playful way, and we did many repetitions. I also do my best now. When I'm done, I'll have reached level 4. During the initial interview, they did say that they were giving me a chance. I am really pleased, because normally, with a Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) diploma, I would end up in Level 3. That man really wanted to help us. It does make a difference, it motivates you, gives you even more of a positive response. I now have something that people believe in me, and I can show them what I can do. ... Another 2 years after this year, and I'm done, I'll be 19." I ask: "Do you want to start working?" P answers: "I just want to wait and see, I could start working, but I want to see if I can do my Higher Vocational Education (HBO). I don't want to go to the university, I'm too old for that, but I want something higher, Higher Vocational Education (HBO) perhaps." I ask her: "What chance is there that you will actually do that?" P replies "I think more than 80% chance."

In the above excerpt, there is clear indication of the awareness that there is a lot of hard work ahead. I noticed that in virtually every interview; up to and including Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) it is seen as 'lost time', and Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) is a new opportunity, to still get a good job.

The trust that is put in her, by placing her in a higher level than she actually had the 'right' to, has strengthened her motivation. I think this is an important aspect that could be better used in strengthening the school motivation.

There could be more done about the 'urgency' felt by the students and the need to work hard to reach a higher level. It is understandable that a messy, weak Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) education achieves the opposite, and erases all good intentions. It leads to frustration and boredom, and the likelihood of dropout increases.

14.10 Development opportunities

The ability to choose and to develop oneself as an individual is not evenly distributed. The students who have participated in the research are certainly aware of this, though Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students are less likely to admit to themselves or others. Among Pre-university Education (VWO) students, there is far more confidence about the future, they often literally say that due to their high education, they stand a good chance to get a meaningful and important position in society. On the other hand, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students don't say that because of their low education, they will get a lower position in society. In fact they say: 'I'll make sure that I get a position that counts. They emphasise that they are willing to make sacrifices to get a good position, and that they will have to give all they've got, that they will go on trying and persevere. They don't call their low education a stumbling block, but not a springboard either. The fact that they are far more likely to choose their own business, or the use of a particular talent as a future goal, than Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students, suggests that they realise they'll have to manage on their 'own'. It is similar to the 'innovative' category, which Merton used in his classification of reactions to the distance between end and means, to achieve the highly valued goals (Merton 1938). When there is another possibility in the vicinity to become successful, such as an active and accessible criminal gang, it becomes an obvious option (Sansone 1992, Van San 1998, Young 2007). Especially when someone is part of a maligned or less valued group, such as 'Moroccan youth', the dissatisfaction due to the inaccessibility of the target, is expressed in dissident behaviour, or 'rebellious behaviour', to say it in the terminology of Merton. The 'conformists' have another solution for the incongruence between self-esteem and social recognition. They recognize that success is

equivalent to obtaining a 'high' degree, but because they cannot get it, they put the 'blame' on themselves; better to say that they're lazy, then to say that they cannot meet the level. The latter would be a proof of incapacity, and produce a negative effect on their self-image. They conform themselves to the social reality and maintain their honour.

The awareness of a disadvantage surfaced also in another way among the students. During the photo sessions, students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) paid much more attention to circumstances and working conditions than Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students. Remarks such as 'this one won't become a hundred' about the painter in the Maas tunnel, or 'nobody does that by choice' about the photo of the roofers, were much less heard from students who know they will end up somewhere 'good'. They rated the photos much more from the financial or education position that was visible on the photos, and gave a value in the form of a hierarchical classification.

14.11 Response to social inequality

The view that the current meritocratic hierarchy is not really fair, appeared in a number of conversations with the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students. The Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students barely mentioned it. However, it was acknowledged in most conversations, that mental labour is valued more than manual labour, but this is not always perceived as a problem. In a few conversations with Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, it was indeed mentioned that mental labour and responsibility can also be heavy work. They also believe generally that mental labour or manual labour is in their own hands, and that their choice or their behaviour can be the deciding factors. They also mainly see their position in education as something that they are themselves to blame for.

To lay down the photos in an inverted hierarchy, and the degrading and hostile remarks towards more highly educated people, that were frequently expressed, mainly by Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, as well as the idea that Pre-university Education (VWO) students looked down on them, can be understood as expressions of threatened social identity. In line with the social identity theory (Taifel, Turner 1986), we see that the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students behave like the in-group (the less educated), relative to the out-group (the highly educated). They defend their social identity by

emphasising the value of the group they belong to, at the expense of the valuation by the group that they are outside of. There is a clear presence of an 'us-them' thinking, when it comes to confronting higher education. It is about two concepts according to the social identity theory. The first is the need for a positive self-image and self-esteem, both individually and towards the group to which they relate themselves. The second is the need for a positive comparison to others, individually or in groups. Experiences of exclusion and discrimination have an impact on the self-image of the individual or the group, and provokes this type of reactions. If we observe this kind of reaction among the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, then may we assume that the experiences of exclusion and discrimination were pre-set? It is very difficult to talk directly to others about this kind of experience, because the recognition of these experiences and feelings shut down self-defence. People will avoid it because it makes a positive evaluation of oneself, or of the group, to which one associates himself, almost impossible. It hurts to be the 'lesser', and to acknowledge it. People who have experienced it for years, that when compared to others, they usually receive lower rating, receive less praise, and see others rewarded with better future prospects, have probably become more vulnerable for it. It's better to blame themselves for laziness or indolence, and to show disinterest for that which they have come to believe they are not good at. The motivation to learn becomes less and less, and may result in a self-fulfilling prophecy. The challenge for people to maintain a positive self-image, no matter what, can lead one's exclusion from the 'educational-playing field', such that when another opportunity arises, an important role on another theatre may be the next best alternative. For youngsters growing up in the vicinity of criminal activity, this can be that attractive alternative (see Van San 1976, Sansone 1998, 1992, De Jong 2007). A youngster, who is on Pre-university Education (VWO) and has a good chance at an 'honourable' and well-paid job in society, is less likely to be seduced towards the criminal path, than someone who feels that there is no 'honour' to be gained through education.

Below is an example of a conversation at the end of a photo-session, whereby there is appreciation shown for people who have studied and earn more money, and awareness of their own position. The inferior position as a Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) student, is made acceptable by moving the problem to the future (if we keep learning and do our best, we'll get there), and by blaming the inferior position on their effort (we are lazier than gymnasium students), rather than

to their 'lower' possibilities. These are arguments that can be recognised as neutralisation techniques to relieve social pain, frustration, channelising (Rosenberg, 1996, Goffman 1980, Greenberg, Pyszczynski 1985) and protection of one's self-esteem (e.g. Mecca et al. 1989, Fiske, Taylor 1991, Kernis et al. 2006).

Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), answer 20, respondents D 57, L 58, N 59

The students look for the right division at the end of the photo-session; people who do normal work, mayor and business men together too. L says: "I think these should be together (doctor, mayor, professors), because they are smart people, who can offer guidance, for example if you have problems with your teeth, how to brush your teeth." D says: "These businessmen are at the top of the company, and these students are still at the bottom." L says: "The doctor has also made it." N asks: "Then what does this photo have to do with it?" Pointing at the photo of the professors. L says: "They give advice to people who have learnt less." L says: "These office people also give advice." D says: "That's not advice, that's just advertising. They tell only the good things, not the bad things, their product is the best." L says: "They tell you this product is better than that, and they give their real opinions (the doctor, the mayor), they've studied for it, they give good advice and they (the people in the office) just want to sell the product." (...) "There are the scholars, and students are part of that. This is the lower work (roofing, painting, postman)." L says: "This is somewhat less than that." N says: "This work deserves better than that other." D says: "This is more the gymnasium side, and that is the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) side, what we are, basic." (there's some laughter). I ask for clarification: "You said basic?" D says: "What we do. They have done Albeda Zadkine²² Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO), not really difficult, they earn less" (he points at the lower occupations). I ask if they find it fair. L. and N. say yes, and D. says no. D says: "Yes, I am also basic, so ..." L says: "I do find it fair, they have to study much longer." Pointing at the lower group I ask: "If these people had also studied longer, could they also earn that?" L: "Yes, only it would take them longer to do it, there are people who are smarter. If you start right away at Pre-university Education (VWO), you are already much ahead. He can also reach it, if he goes on." (L refers to the group 'lesser occupations') D says: "Not a good idea, because you need these people for the

²² Well-known names of Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) schools in Rotterdam

everyday things. If all of them didn't exist, you couldn't live." L says: "But you have a lot of these people, if this man is gone, there will be another one." I ask: "Is that also why these occupations pay less?" L says: "Yes, because anyone can do that, even kids on holiday can do that. I think you need no qualifications for it. If someone explains it to you, you'll know it right away. That picking, even kids could do that, but not what the doctor does." N says: "They have to learn much longer." I ask what would happen if everyone would earn the same, would people then study for it too? All three answer: "Yes, why else would you want to do hard work?" L says: "You would have too few doctors, everyone would do this (the easy work), If I would earn the same, then I would prefer to do this work, answer the phone and so on, than what the doctor does, help people." N disagrees: "A man who has studied gets a better place, he has more to say than a man behind such a bar, picking or something. He is an educated man, his word counts." L does not think so: "The doctor might have learned about the human body, but he (the pepper picker) knows more about fruit, if you want to ask someone about metal, you better ask him (machine worker), he is not smarter about everything." N: "But these people (pointing at the lower occupation) are many more than those (higher occupations). If a doctor says something, everyone's listens seriously, not when you're picking something." D. finds that those who earn more should not have to pay more tax: "They have studied one day maybe (pointing to the lower occupations) and they up to 8 years, with all kinds of Latin stuff. Their earnings may be 2 euros, and perhaps their 100 per hour. They have learnt for 8 years." N says: "They should not have to pay taxes because they have worked hard for it." L says: "It's your own choice whether you want to earn more, and if you stop after Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), then you go no further. You can also go to Higher Vocational Education and become a doctor." To grasp the scope of this comment, I ask: "If you're not so smart, will you still get there?" L says: "Everyone can learn, only then it will take longer. He can learn (points to his mate), and I can learn, but it takes some people longer. If I'd get a test tomorrow with someone from gymnasium, regarding a subject that we both know nothing about, I can get as high marks as him. Only he will spend an hour perhaps, and perhaps I'll spend 1 ½ hour or 2 hours." N says: "If you learn more you can get the same as a professor or a smart student. You'll have to put some effort into it." L says: "We just have to try harder, I think those people are a bit lazy (pointing to the lower occupations)." Because I want to know why he calls these people lazy, I ask: "But don't they work hard?" L says: "When they were young like us, they were a little

lazy, so they didn't learn (pointing thereby at the 'important' people) they just kept going on with the study, and now they made it."

In a short text about his own position in society L writes: "I think I'm somewhere at the bottom, because I have no job and no qualifications. But if you're at the bottom, it means you can rise."

It appears from the above quoted interview that these Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students have a clear picture of the economic laws of society and also support them. They accept their relative position as a temporary position that can improve by their efforts, and see reasonableness in it; if you do your best, and learn better (much to invest), you can achieve a lot (you get a higher reward). They also said that a Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) student is not less able to learn, but takes longer to learn the same as a Pre-university Education (VWO) student, and that people who have studied are not smarter in everything. In these last two remarks, it becomes evident that Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, although they recognise that some people are smarter, they do not want to be underestimated, and they think they are basically not 'less worth'. It is also said that Pre-university Education (VWO) students are already ahead, and therefore in a better starting position. The last comment of the quotations, points at the 'own fault'; the people in the lower occupations were (formerly) lazy, 'just like us'. This points at neutralising the question of losing your face, which is linked to the relatively low position of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). Actually, it is said: "We can do it, but we are lazy and that's how we are here, and not on the Pre-university Education (VWO). It's our own doing, we choose to be lazy."

14.12 Conclusion

The fundamental question of this thesis is: How do people, who are unable to get higher education, and thus earn a higher status, experience that in a society of equality as a basis, they have fewer chances to get a high status than others who are in a position to get higher education?

The above quote is a nice illustration of the answers found in this research. The answer can be summarised as follows:

Students in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) are aware of their lower position, and they accept that if they want to achieve a higher status, they'll

have to work hard for it. They blame it on themselves that they have a worse starting position, but intend to achieve a better position in the future. They attach great value to going to school, and achieve good qualifications; the starting position is lower, but there is a strong incentive to climb the social ladder. In compared to Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students, the social hierarchy is a less striking factor in the perception of social situations and in identifying their relative position. They have more eye for to the circumstances in which people are situated, and pay more attention to labour issues and activities. Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students give a much less detailed description of themselves and their abilities, than Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO) students. This may indicate a less well developed and less situational self-esteem. There are few substantive differences found in the description which students give of themselves; Pre-university Education (VWO) and Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) students often mention their social ideals, and add that they see a role for themselves in it. Pre-vocational students give slightly more objective description, but the personal subjective descriptions are more dominant even among them. Generally, there are few differences between the students. The differences that were found were always between educational levels. This indicates the effect of secondary socialisation or peer-group effect. In a future research, it could be studied which role these aspects play in school dropout, and what strategy can be applied to improve these aspects.

Part 5 Discussion

15 Reflection on the research and outcomes

15.1 Reach 'Higher'

The research has shed new light on the question of the social hierarchy. It appears that most youngsters in the research population consider hierarchy to be something obvious. In their opinion, a place in the hierarchy is largely determined by the educational, economic position and social significance of people. The cultural dimension does get recognised, but it is not used as an independent distinctive factor. It has been observed that the higher one's own position is, the sooner the hierarchy is recognised and seen as something obvious.

Due to the new method of investigation, remarkable differences between these students have emerged. These are differences in social perception, self-esteem and future prospects. The differences are related to the education of students, and not to ethnic background, gender or socioeconomic status of parents.

I can answer the question affirmatively about whether youngsters are aware of class positions in general, and their own position in particular. Youngsters are well aware of this. The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students demonstrate high ambitions, but they realise that they are a lot further away from their goal than the Pre-university Education (VWO) students. The assumption was that among Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students, the dissatisfaction due to the low status, could lead to school dropout; I did observe this dissatisfaction, but not to the extent that it supports this assumption. The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students generally accept the situation as it is, and hope that their efforts will enable them to climb 'higher'. I think it plays a role in school motivation and school dropout, but then in a later stage, when it appears that getting 'higher' isn't going to be so easy. To get more insight, school dropout among Intermediate Vocational Education (MBO) would also need to be investigated.

15.2 Method

The use of photographs, combined with the open questions and the stimulation of the think-aloud method, has proved to be a very suitable method for an exploratory research, the new method has also raised further questions that could be dealt with

in a follow-up research. Now that the combination of new and known methods, that has been used here, is new, it may be useful to investigate whether the results found here would deliver the same results in other countries, with a broader test and other series of photos.

The expectation, that in this method, by with their own words, students would show something about the way they are in society, and how they look at others, has fully been met. Choosing the circle instead of the ladder, when placing the photos, made it possible to show that there is a difference in perception and response between students of different educational levels. By not asking about the ethnicity, it could be shown that ethnicity makes no difference in the perception or in self-descriptions by the students. By letting the students think about their own idea about society, without steering them in a direction, it appeared that students differ in the way they give their ideas a certain shape, and how they give themselves a place.

15.3 New research questions

Besides giving answers, this research also raises new questions, critical questions in response to the found situation. For example, whether students in secondary education differ from each other in this respect, *because* they occupy another position in education. In other words, is it the difference in position, which causes the differences? Are there other reasons that cause students to develop differently? At what age do the differences develop, or was the difference always there? Are the differences due to the experiences that children undergo during their school career? There are certain aspects worth naming in the education system, which may play a role in the experiences that children encounter during their school career. The spread in educational performance increases when students are distributed among the educational levels. The question is whether the difference in behaviour and motivation, grows between students of Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO), Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) and Pre-university Education (VWO). To what extent does the performance-oriented education, the early selection, the cultural differences in education, and the negative image, play a role in the development of students? In the next chapter I will briefly go into it.

16. The education and differences between students

16.1 Socialising in stratification

Every open social system, where stratification plays an essential role, must have some way to accommodate the subjects in a peaceful manner. Education is a way of training people and socialising them for their place in society; a place that best suits their talents, knowledge and skills, but also in the area of social skills and acceptance of their role and position. In education, people find out who they are, what they can do and what opportunities they have in the future. From group one onward, children are compared to other children and must meet a national standard. Results are equated with performance, and are not linked to the effort made by the children. Of course the results are important, but the assessment of a child, should always be accompanied by the evaluation (and appreciation) of the effort and the performance that the child has made, for and about himself, taking into account their aptitude (cognitive and non-cognitive) (Covington 1999). Children are not the owners of their own learning process; the pace, content and expectations come from outer sources. A part of the socialisation process is that children learn to abide with the fact that some children are better, faster and learn easier, and are even more appreciated. It prepares children for the stratified society where some people have better jobs, opportunities and development possibilities, more autonomy, higher salaries and more prestige than others.

The education system is a part of society; it supports and perpetuates the way society functions. A performance-oriented education fits in a performance-oriented society. The individuals with the best performance get the best rewards and the most favourable conditions to improve that performance. The emancipatory power that comes from education is not that relationships in society change, and we grow into a classless society, but that due to the increase in social mobility, also youngsters from lower social backgrounds get access to higher positions. Success in our society is still linked to school success and qualifications, barring exceptions and 'stardom' (for an analysis of these exceptions see Pels, in Swierstra, Tonkens 2008).

16.2 Connection between living space and education

When a kid comes to school, he is confronted with a world that fits more or less with the situation at home. Bourdieu introduced the concept of "symbolic violence" to clarify how the school, or any other social institution, imposes its values and

meanings on individuals that function in it. The school is a reflection of the values and meanings of the dominant class. In our society, it is the highly educated class. Children of educated parents are therefore more likely to feel at home on school, and are more able to develop there, than children who come from a different cultural environment. The school is a different world for that kid; he would first need to get adapted to the customs of the school, before he is able to feel at home. They are already behind in their studies, and they find it difficult to catch up, and the gap sooner increases. The 'symbolic violence' originates from that uneven start, and the continuous difference between two worlds, are not recognised, but obscured. It is seen as legitimate that one environment is placed above the other environment, also by people who do not belong to the dominant environment. Children don't really know what is going on, and think they are themselves to blame for being behind in their studies. This makes the effect even stronger. It is an insidious powerful form of oppression, because people do not realise what is happening. People who fail in education are the first to blame themselves, and say they had been stupid or lazy (De Jong 1999). Maybe it is during their school career that they became lazy and uninterested, due to disappointing results, lack of positive feedback and interest of the teachers. Maybe with such statements, they mask their shame about the lack of ability, which they experienced for many years due to the system of tests and comparisons. It is not difficult to understand that students, who always belonged to the lower performing group, and rarely move forward, get fed up at a certain moment, and decide to turn away from that 'other world'.

16.3 Peer-group effect

Socialisation is never really completed, there is always the possibility to internalise new attitudes and perspectives and change the existing ones. Berger and Luckmann call this the secondary socialisation, and describe the process as the internalisation of institutional or institutions-based 'sub-worlds', partial realities with their own knowledge stock. In contrast to the primary socialisation, which creates an obvious objective basic consciousness, the secondary socialisation process produces a subjective sense of reality in which identity plays a role (Berger, Luckmann 1974). Besides sub-worlds of the 'youth' in general; think about fashion, music and entertainment, there is a sub-world linked to education level. The differentiation based on the cognitive abilities at the age of 12 years, creates a sub-world for the child, to which he relates a part of his identity. It is not unusual that children are

talked about as typical Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) kids, or a Pre-university Education (VWO) kid. What it means is that a child in that environment at that level, 'fits' best in terms of cognitive skills and attitude. Intellectual ability and attitude are seen as a static factor: either you have it or you don't. Once the student is allocated to an education, then the secondary socialisation takes place within the sub-world of that level. The educations differ from each other not only in curriculum but also in terms of teaching approach, atmosphere and the educational level of the teachers (Hattie 2009). As the lowest level education, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students have to deal with a bad reputation, partly due to the relatively larger numbers of ethnic youth, and youngsters with learning difficulty and behavioural problems. It is often forgotten that a large group of talented students are also on Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). The spread between what students can do is biggest on the Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) and smallest at the Pre-university Education (VWO) (van Daalen 2010).

16.4 Motivation to learn

We are motivational and cognitive fully equipped for our development. Whatever talents an individual has, will emerge slowly. But to make that happen, there is optimal support and challenge required. We are not only equipped to develop our capabilities, we are ourselves involved in our development. A good relationship with another person, from whom we want to learn, is necessary. (Stevens 2002). A lack of motivation may arise as a way to avoid failure, or because the material that is offered, has nothing to do with the perception of the student. There are many different ways used to encourage children to do their best, the most important one is the grades given to them. Students are encouraged to get good grades, not just by teachers, but parents find it important too. Children themselves also want to get a good grade or, if they think they can achieve this, want to be 'the best'. Because good grades are so important, they have great influence on the self-esteem of children.

"Given their significance, grades easily become equated in the minds of the youngsters with a sense of worth; in effect, many children come to hold themselves to be only as worthy as their school-related achievements, despite the fact that the

grades have nothing to do with whether one is a loving, good, or courageous individual for example.” (Covington 1999:10)

There must be something in education that is perceived as a reward. The best reward is the intrinsic reward; the pride that the student feels when a job is well done and the student has gone beyond his expectations. When a student feels that he is helped at school to be able to show his best abilities, and to improve on fields that he himself finds important, that's when education has really served its purpose. Besides using good grades to encourage students to do their best, and to tell them how well they have done an assignment, good grades are also used to allow students to select and distinguished.

16.5 The need for competence, autonomy and relationship

The principle of motivation can be explained in three basic psychological needs: the need for relationship, for competence and for autonomy. This means that students are motivated to show what they can do (competence), they want to show that they can do it themselves (autonomy), and the teacher should be available, and should love them a little (relationship) (Stevens 2002).

Stevens points out the paradoxes that come in the way of 'feeling like learning'. It starts with the assumption that children can go through the offered material in the same time, and achieve the same minimum results at the end of the ride. The system thus ignores the principle of diversity. Even gifted students often have a problem with this. They are frustrated by the slow pace and low challenge. This too can lead to problematic behaviour and school dropout.

“He, who ‘lags behind’ in what is expected of him, is the most affected, because he comes into conflict with the need to show what he can do, he is rather showing what he can't do.” (Stevens 2002: 14)

This factor emphasises the basic need for competence. The need for a good pedagogical relationship is overshadowed because performance is assessed comparatively. Performance is measured carefully and in a reliable way, and placed in a hierarchy. A higher position in the ranking means more prestige, since good grades are considered a compliment; 'well done'. Low grades means a moment of shame,

'not well done'. The need for autonomy is affected by it because effort is disconnected from results. Smart children achieve the best results with little effort, average level students need moderate to reasonable efforts to achieve the desired goal, the children who are lagging behind, need to put a lot of effort into it, and will never achieve the high results that other students can achieve with such little effort. It is highly demoralising for these students to still make an effort, and they don't experience the autonomy and the sensation of 'independent learning', the kick of 'managing on your own'; the autonomic and 'willed' learning process has become subordinate to the results. The same applies to the teachers, who are 'judged' by the results they achieve, not the effort they have to put into it (Stevens 2002). If we look at the problem of the dropout students, with the relationship between the education system and motivation principle in our mind, then it is clear that a part of the problem is caused by the education system itself.

16.6 Performance-oriented Education

Today's society wants to be an egalitarian society, but cannot escape from selection and stratification of opportunities and possibilities. Does the acceptance of this system start both by the upper classes as well as the lower classes, in the performance-oriented education?

Imagine that in education and beyond it, we had not learnt or experience that there are children that are less able or more able to do certain important things, and that being 'better' also results in better rewarded, for example, by the attention and appreciation of the teacher, through a higher grade. And once we have grown up and taken our position in society, would we then accept that there are differences in rewards, rights, freedoms and appreciation, depending on the 'badge or ability', which you got in the education system, and which you yourself started to believe in? This 'badge' entitles you to certain possibilities. According to Sennett and Cobb (1972), society is about the struggle between two classes: 'the many and the few'.

"The selves of the many are in limbo, the selves of the few who have performed win respect. But the few need the many: individuals exist only so long as a mass exist, a point of reference consisting of others who seem pretty much alike." (Sennett, Cobb, 1972: 67)

The popularity of TV programs like X-factor and Idols, and the disappointment of

many parents and children, when the result of the Cito final test is lower than necessary, to get to Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) or Pre-university Education (VWO), reflect what is meant here. The average level is good, but to stand out and to be or become someone of significance, you need to give more than an average performance. That's why Covington (1999) calls the education system 'the ability game'.

A society with permeable boundaries between the classes, make upward mobility possible for any individual, provided he or she has the right skills. This fact emphasises that those who are left behind are left behind rightfully. Apart from the emotional impact and the effect on self-esteem of the individual, there is also the reality of poorer social opportunities and choices. With a Higher General Secondary Education (HAVO) or Pre-university Education (VWO) diploma, you can choose from several attractive jobs, than with a Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) diploma. One of the respondents of care, welfare and information education (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) writes about what he wants to achieve, that he wants to become a doctor, and that's why he chose this direction. It will be very difficult for him to achieve that. The same applies to other students who want to use Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) as a starting point to become a lawyer, or have some other profession at Higher Vocational Education (HBO) or university level.

16.7 Competition

In principle, every child wants to learn and can learn, and wants to be praised for what he or she has achieved or has learnt. For the child, this should be independent from what another child has achieved. Education is a social process in which cooperation and competition are natural elements. Competition in itself is not bad. If we would see the competitive element in education as a game to challenge the students, then that in itself can be fun and exciting. But competition, that is going on constantly, and is taken very seriously, whereby it is the same people who are always among the winners and the losers, takes away the fun for the less well-performing students. The loser may feel disqualified by others, and in response disqualify himself. For those groups of students, who feel less valued by the school, it can result in that they develop an anti-school culture, which keeps them from adapting and from performing well. By identifying themselves with the group, and by group pressure, the students entrap themselves in a downward spiral (Willis 1977).

17 New Perspective

17.1 A life-long learning

The exploration that is described in this thesis, has mainly shown that Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students have a different position in society, in various ‘different’ ways, than their peers in Pre-university Education (VWO), and to a lesser degree than Pre-university Education (VWO) students. The Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students generally have significantly more difficulty in telling something about themselves. They are aware of their low educational position, and are particularly focused on improving their position. Pre-university Education (VWO) students make a confident impression and often place themselves in the middle of society. They are convinced that a good and influential future awaits them. In terms of ambition, the motivation to climb higher, and personal characteristics, which they name, Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO) students don’t differ from Pre-university Education (VWO) students. The desire to get the best out of themselves is indeed present, and is linked to a successful future. It seems that appreciation for their abilities, and confidence in their intentions and efforts, can help develop their skills and boost their motivation. He, who is seen by the education system or by society as a ‘Mr. incompetent’ or ‘Mr. sluggish’, disqualifies himself in advance, to avoid being disqualified by others. This reaction can occur at a young age when it appears that others can do it much better, and are also more appreciated for it. Students, who start to look at school-success and intelligence as something static, get disillusioned sooner than students who believe they can develop their abilities (Dweck 2000). This offers a new perspective on the problem of school dropout.

In an era, where ‘lifelong learning’ is a must, ‘learning’ should be accessible and rewarding for every student. The quality of education should be measured by the extent to which it is capable of teaching all students, and making them enjoy learning.

17.2 The Equity Game

An example of education, whereby the above is pursued, was developed by Martin Covington (1999). He calls it ‘the equity game’, as a counterpart of traditional education: ‘the ability game’.

“Equity game: Dynamic in classrooms in which the rules of achievement reward students for self-improvement, diligence, and making progress – yardsticks of success that are open to all.” (Covington 1999: 120)

If we view education as a playing ground, it's all about the 'the Ability game'; the assessment of results, and comparison with other students. The disadvantage of this is that students identify themselves with the ranking, and the hierarchy that results from it. This is not only detrimental to the students who get 'poor' grades, but also for students who get 'good' grades. The students with low grades do not build self-confidence, they become convinced that school is not for them, and they lose interest and natural curiosity. Students with high grades become dependent on good grades to feel 'good' about themselves. The learning process is not important anymore, children go for good grades, or they lose the motivation to make an effort when good grades are not achieved. The final goal of 'the ability game', the way it is experienced by the students, is in achieving success and avoiding failure, the joy of learning thus fades into the background. In 'the equity game', it's not about winners and losers, but about learning itself. The 'reward' that is linked to it, to encourage children to optimise their efforts, is equally accessible for every child, and depends on the degree of effort, control, curiosity, progress, originality and different skills (not just cognitive). The commands that are given include sufficient space for children to choose how they want to accomplish a certain task, and the rewards can include many things that are relevant for the students. The rules for giving the rewards are explicit and clear, so that it is clear to students why a particular reward is deserved or not. During the assessment, there is a link made to what a student has achieved, in compare to previous performance, 'first you could do this, and now you can do that already'. In this way, the students remain involved in their own learning.

17.3 Education aimed at equal opportunities for development

The paradox between the ideal of equality and the reality of inequality can only disappear when the realisation breaks through that a prosperous and happy society, in which people learn lifelong, can only exist if *all* individuals get a respectful place, and can develop to 'the best of their ability'. The aim is not merely a population of highly educated people, but the disappearance of the distinction between high and low, and that which is seen as the most important and less important. Education cannot change that, but education is gradually changing society. In the past, it was

normal for children to work, and only the rich kids got education. Now, that would be unimaginable. Now, every child has the right to education, and origin itself plays only a limited role. The next step is that every child can develop according to his or her abilities, without any value judgement attached to it. Even though it is not possible to create a whole new reality; under the influence of the new social (economic) needs, and the associated moral development, society changes, and so does education. Equality that is actually realised in education is the next step in our civilisation-process.

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Appendix 1

Percentages graphics

Figure 1, Guide to photo's hierarchy

opleidingsnivo * indeling foto's hierarchie Crosstabulation

% within opleidingsnivo		indeling foto's hierarchie					
		geen opmerkingen over hierarchie	sociale status	opleiding	salarissen	combinatie status, macht, opl. sal	Total
opleidingsnivo	vmbo	46,9%	16,7%	13,5%	12,5%	10,4%	100,0%
	havo	34,1%	12,2%	17,1%	14,6%	22,0%	100,0%
	vwo	27,5%	17,5%	10,0%	10,0%	45,0%	100,0%
	Total	39,5%	15,8%	11,3%	12,4%	20,9%	100,0%

N= 177, Cramer's V .27 sig. .00/ Cohen's Kappa .65 sig. .00.

Figure 2, Own position

opleidingsnivo * eigenpos1b Crosstabulation

% within opleidingsnivo		eigenpos1b					
		student	associatie met beroep	associatie met bezigheden	associatie met carrière	midden in de samenleving	Total
opleidingsnivo	vmbo	35,2%	6,6%	37,4%	11,0%	9,9%	100,0%
	havo	43,9%	17,1%	9,8%	4,9%	24,4%	100,0%
	vwo	10,0%	17,5%	15,0%	17,5%	40,0%	100,0%
	Total	31,4%	11,6%	25,6%	11,0%	20,3%	100,0%

N=172, Cramer's V .34 sig. .00/ Cohen's Kappa .77, sig. .00.

Figure 3, Future perspective

opleidingsnivo * bereiken1b Crosstabulation

% within opleidingsnivo		bereiken1b							
		persoonlijk doel	beroep mbo	beroep hbo	beroep universiteit	talent/eigen bedrijf	goede baan	maatsch doel	Total
opleidingsnivo	vmbo	3,5%	20,9%	24,4%	2,3%	27,9%	19,8%	1,2%	100,0%
	havo	19,5%	2,4%	29,3%	26,8%	7,3%	9,8%	4,9%	100,0%
	vwo	23,1%		7,7%	25,6%	5,1%	25,6%	12,8%	100,0%
	Total	12,0%	11,4%	21,7%	13,9%	17,5%	18,7%	4,8%	100,0%

N=169, Cramer's V .32, sig. .00/ Cohen's Kappa .95, sig. .00.

Figure 4, Percentages of answers to the question: Who am I?

	not filled in	positive trait /behaviour	negative trait /behaviour	personal aspect	society aspect	Ethnic background /religion
vmbo	26,5	46,8	6	11,8	3,5	1,6
havo	10,7	55,8	8,2	14	1	1,2
vwo	4,5	60,9	11,4	12	6	5,5

N= 170, Cramer's V .31, sig .00 (Cohen's Kappa not possible due to unfilled categories). The percentage is calculated on the average of 10 answers.

12.4 Percentages 3rd answer to the question: What can you do?

	no answer	pos behaviour	neg behaviour	sport	hobby	School work
vmbo	28,6	30,4	7,1	5,4	17,9	10,7
havo	9,8	63,4	2,4	4,9	7,3	12,2
vwo	10	57,5	5	10	7,5	10

N= 137 Cramer's V .26, sig .05, Cohen's Kappa .89 sig. 00

Figure 6, Percentage comments on ethnicity during the viewing of the photos.

	no remarks	neutral remarks	negative remarks	positive remarks
Vmbo	71,9	13,5	9	5,2
Havo	51,2	17,1	29,3	2,4
Vwo	50	35	10	5

N= 177 Cramer's V .23 sig .00

Figure 7, Percentage students that named certain aspects of labour.

opleidingsnivo * soortwerk Crosstabulation

% within opleidingsnivo		soortwerk					
		geen opm	hoofd/handen /licht/zwaar	met/zonder diploma	meer/minder loon	combinatie	meer/minder soc belang
							Total
opleidingsnivo	vmbo	31,2%	25,0%	10,4%	9,4%	21,9%	2,1%
	havo	46,3%		7,3%	14,6%	7,3%	24,4%
	vwo	20,0%	2,5%	7,5%	30,0%	7,5%	32,5%
	Total	32,2%	14,1%	9,0%	15,3%	15,3%	14,1%
							100,0%

N=177, Cramer's V .41 sig .00, (Cohen's Kappa not possible due to unfilled categories).

Appendix 2

Photo selection

Performed in January, February 2007

To achieve an objective selection of the photos, to give a global picture of our society, there were 90 photographs presented to 17 persons of different ages and social backgrounds. They were asked to divide the photos in a certain scheme comprising high, medium-high, middle, and low levels, and further economic, cultural and political divisions. The 23 photos that were placed at a certain position in the arrangement by most of the people, with regards to the content, were used for the photo-sessions with the youngsters.

	Economic dimension	Cultural dimension	Political dimension
high	professors general practitioner businessmen	man in sports car	mayor
mid-high	teacher people at the office	woman reading	students at career fair
mid-low	postman roofers butcher	coffee-house dancing girls couple on pavement	police and man on the grass
low	painter pepper harvester man at a machine	drug user women on the street	boys on a motorbike

Data panel members:

Age: 19, 19, 19, 22, 23, 30, 36, 43, 47, 47, 49, 52, 54, 55, 56, 59, 60.

Gender: 8 men, 9 women

Education / Profession: multimedia designer, lawyer, web designer, sociologist, student pedagogic, social cultural worker, student pedagogic, student pedagogic, economy student, philosopher, sociologist, technical department, education assistant, horticulture employee, housewife, carpenter, production worker.

Appendix 3

Summary

Later, I can always be what I want to be

Status, self-esteem and aspirations in secondary education, with a focus on the relative position of pupils in non-academic tracks

In traditional societies, everybody remains in the same social class as his parents. Modern societies are more open. There is strong support for the ideal of equal opportunities, but inequality as a consequence of differences in cognitive abilities and educational attainment, is also widely accepted. Modern societies attach a higher value to cognitive talents and academic skills than to other talents and practical skills. How do intellectually less gifted pupils cope with this paradox? What is the difference in perception (or experience) of social equality between youngsters in pre-vocational schools and youngsters in higher levels of secondary education?

To reveal deeply hidden patterns of social processes and factors that play a role here, this study explores the problem from the insider perspective. How do youngsters cope with the experience of social inequality and limited educational opportunities? Do they have fewer ambitions and lower aspirations than pupils that are successful in school? Do they have a different view on chances and opportunities? Are they using cognitive techniques to counter the realisation that they are attending schools at the lowest level of secondary education? Do they have a different view at status hierarchies? Studying these questions from the insider perspective renders a better insight in the factors that play a significant role in the way teenagers accept or reject their present and future social position.

The research group consists of 177 girls and boys. 96 pupils attend VMBO (pre-vocational secondary education) in Rotterdam; 41 are students of HAVO (higher vocational general secondary education) and 40 from a VWO (pre-university education) school in Rotterdam. The students we interviewed come from a variety of social backgrounds. In general, there is strong tendency for VWO-schools to attract pupils from the middle classes whereas VMBO schools attract children from lower

classes. The study is executed at schools with a socially and ethnically mixed student body.

The new method that was used is based on observation, supplemented with in depth interviews and questionnaires with open-ended questions. The new method meant that students had to comment on photos of people from various social classes and ethnic backgrounds, who find themselves in distinctive social situations. The assignment was to arrange them in a circle, representing society. The comments, conclusions and classifications made by these pupils were transcribed and analysed.

We found a significant difference between the students from the three school types or educational levels. Almost half the VMBO-students (47%) don't construct a hierarchical order. For HAVO and VWO students these percentages are only 34 and 28. Is it possible to interpret these variations by a disparity in social awareness or does this hint at selective perception? To check the first option, we did a test among VMBO-students, which revealed that they were very well aware of the existence of social hierarchy. It is arguable that the distinction between the students of the three educational levels is produced by selective perception. Social psychology describes selective perception as a mechanism that helps maintaining or enhances one's self-esteem. VMBO students have little to gain from social hierarchies, because they know that they follow a type of education that is in low regard and will not lead to a highly respected profession. VWO students, on the other hand, know that their educational status opens up good opportunities to achieve a high status position in adult society. They have nothing to fear from the existence of a social status hierarchy. The selective perception hypothesis is supported by the outcomes of the study regarding the content and meaning of the assertions and remarks made by the students. VMBO students who referred to a hierarchy often made remarks that showed little respect for or even strong animosity against persons that appeared to be highly educated. A few groups consciously arranged the photos in a reversed hierarchy; they made clear that manual labourers with tough physical jobs deserved more respect and a higher status than the people with university degrees and an apparently easy job.

VMBO-pupils most often mention aspects related to the execution of work, such as work with your brain or your hands, physically heavy or light, inside an office or outside in the open air. HAVO-pupils talk less about work and its social function.

VWO-students focus on the social importance of jobs and, secondly, on the level of payment. These patterns can be related to issues that are most relevant for these three categories. For most VWO-students it is already quite clear that they will do well and become successful. Many VMBO-pupils are in denial that their perspective on a good job and a high income is bleak. Moreover, for them it is not quite clear whether they will end up in a cushy job within an office or in manual job that demands physical hardship under all types of weather. These pupils more frequently make remarks about the physical hardship demanded by certain types of jobs. They also often mention that you need diplomas to attain a good job that doesn't require hard physical labour. When looking at a photo depicting manual labour they often made the assumption that this person hadn't finished his education or did not have any school diploma. We did not register similar kinds of remarks with HAVO and VWO-students. Maybe, because they don't fear that they might end up in such a job.

To investigate the way pupils locate themselves in the social spectrum, pupils were individually given the same series of photos, now in the form of small stickers. They were asked to arrange them again and put a specific sticker, representing themselves, on the sheet. They were asked to write down why they placed themselves on that particular spot. This revealed how they envisioned their own social position, now or in the future; with which group, class or type of people they associate themselves and to what degree they are aware of their social position.

The striking outcome is that HAVO and VMBO pupils associate themselves more strongly with being students than VWO-pupils (photo 2 and 16). It is also striking that a lot of VWO-pupils locate their future 'in the centre of society'. For example one respondent (39) (VMBO) said:

"Because I am still at school I deliberately placed myself near the teacher and the students, for later I can still be what I want to be." The strongest trend in the statements of VMBO-pupils is "Later I will still have many options, now I am still a student." They like to identify with students in higher education and see getting their diploma as the first step towards further and higher education. This perception of still having many good options was also reflected in the way they reacted to the photo with the man behind the machine (photo11). They often assumed that this man had not finished his education with a proper certificate. For them this photo depicted a doomsday scenario – it foretold them what would happen if you completely failed education. There was only one non- VMBO-pupil who reacted in the

same way. This is because VMBO pupils see many examples of educational failure and dropouts. Research shows that this is a statistical fact. Moreover, there are quite a few VMBO-pupils who have experienced educational failure the hard way, by being demoted from a higher level of education. For VMBO pupils, failing school is a very realistic image (Severiens, Verstegen 2005). They know that VMBO is the lowest level of secondary education. If you fail here, you really are doomed to land on the bottom of society. So it is understandable that they want to look in the opposite direction and strive for upward mobility. They fully realise that the only route in that direction is by further education, by prolonging their career as a student. VWO-pupils don't share this fear. They take it for granted that they will be successful in higher education.

The conclusion of this study is that adolescents are aware of the phenomenon of social stratification. In their view, the level of education and the degree to which people add something to society are the two dimensions that are most important. Cultural differences and differences in lifestyle are deemed to be less significant and if mentioned, then always in connection to economic position and social status. The study showed that there was a significant difference in the way students from different types of school in secondary education approached and valued social stratification. VMBO-students classify people in hierarchical ways less frequently than HAVO students. And the latter do this less often than VWO-students. This holds true when VMBO-students describe their position. They appear to be stronger focused on what people do and under which circumstances they find themselves. This is probable caused by selective perception and the proclivity to maintain one's self esteem.

Appendix 4

Curriculum Vitae

Lenie van den Bulk (1953) graduated in 2003 as a sociologist at Erasmus University, specialising in Social Issues and Policy. Before and during her sociology study, she fulfilled various leadership roles within the socio-cultural sector. From 2004 till 2007, she worked as project coordinator employed at INHOLLAND. During that period, at the request of a consortium of 12 educational organisations, she started a project aimed at socially activating children and youngsters. Since 2007 she has been a manager of the Research and Development unit of the CED Group, an organization for school improvement in Rotterdam. In her current part-time job as unit manager, she has coordinated several researches and projects, regarding various educational topics, such as the use of tests for the transition from primary to secondary education, school fear, homework assistance, social internship and reading in Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (VMBO). Since 2005, she carried out this promotional research in her spare time.