

## Paper 2/4 - The Aspirations of Native Dutch Pupils At-risk of Early School Leaving

**Talitha Stam (Erasmus University Rotterdam)**

Many studies into the subject of early school leaving use aspirations to explain school dropouts. By unravelling how aspirations are formed, this paper may contribute to understanding early school leaving. The aim of this paper that is based on a doctoral study is to understand how Dutch pupils (15-17 years), with native parents, develop study and work aspirations in the lowest levels of Dutch education. Their aspirations are, among other things, influenced by social interactions, educational performances, family backgrounds, previous (school and work) experiences, the structures that they are embedded in (school, society) and their own self-esteem and agency. This paper both describes and analyses the factors that play a role in the development of aspirations from the perspective of the pupils themselves. Central in this paper is the pupils' networks and their use of resources in order to understand how these influence their school practices and aspirations. By doing so, I analyse the effects of the background characteristics class, ethnicity, and gender on the formation of study and work aspirations among male and female pupils with native parents in lowest levels of Dutch education, which is vocational education, as a process over time with dropout as a potential outcome. The main method of data gathering is participant observation. I spent two days a week in two vocational education schools in Rotterdam, whereby I participated and observed in all school activities; including lessons in classes, lunch breaks, sports activities, getaways, parents meetings, staff meetings, and internship visits. Additionally, I conducted in-depth interviews with pupils, parents and school principals; and held focus group discussions with pupils and school staff at four vocational education schools in Rotterdam.