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Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe

School staff's strategies to prevent early school leaving in a Flemish context

University of Antwerp
CeMIS
Lore Van Praag, Rut Van Caudenberg, Ward Nouwen, Noel Clycq & Christiane Timmerman
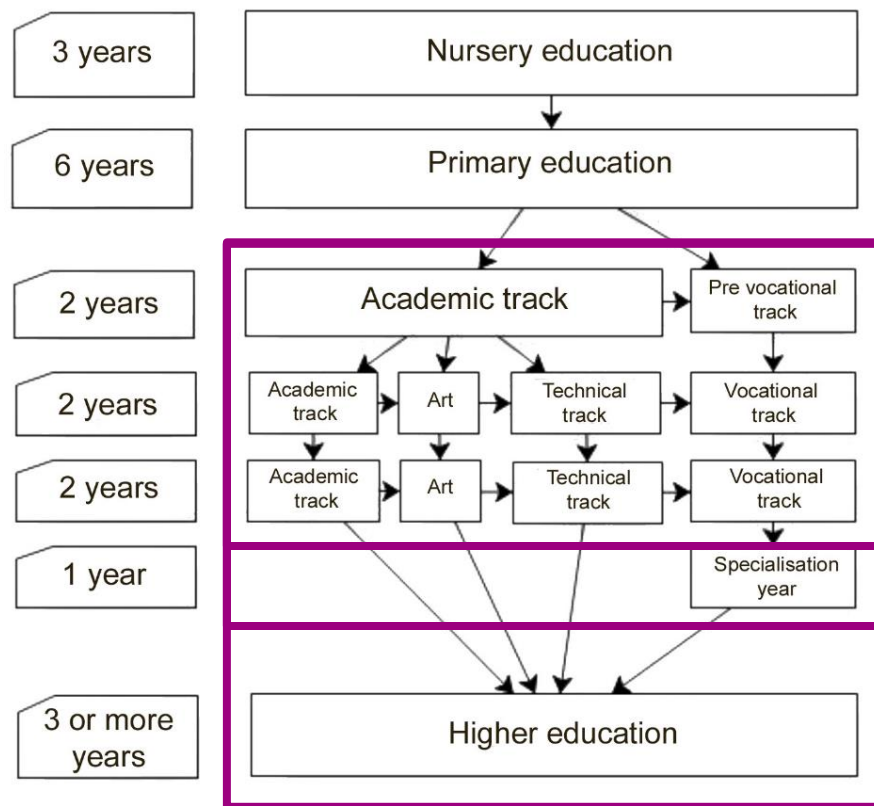
Introduction

➢ Focus reduction Early School Leavers (ESL)

➢ ESL is outcome of complex number of push- and pull-factors

➢ Schools as monolithic entities

➢ Lack of agency

→ Neglecting institutional culture & school staff's perspectives and strategies

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Methods

- ➢ RESL.eu project
- ➢ Outside mainstream education
- ➢ Focus on school staff

- ➢ Data collection: Theory-based stakeholder evaluation (Hansen &Vedung, 2010)
  - ▪ **Designers**
  - ▪ **Implementers**
  - ▪ Target group
- ➢ Data analysis: Principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

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Flemish educational system

Mainstream full-time education

Alternative learning arenas

3 years	Nursery education
6 years	Primary education
2 years	Academic track → Pre vocational track
2 years	Academic track → Art → Technical track → Vocational track
2 years	Academic track → Art → Technical track → Vocational track
1 year	Specialisation year
3 or more years	Higher education

→ Part-time vocational education and training (VET)

→ Part-time apprenticeship track

→ Secondary Schools for Adults

Sample (N=29)

Institution	Designers/supervisors (Interview):	Implementers (focus group discussion)
A: **Secondary schools for adults**	1 school principal (female)	2 teachers 1 teacher/learning trajectory counsellor 1 training coordinator 1 psychologist 1 care teacher (6 females)
B: **Secondary schools for adults**	1 school principal (female)	4 teachers 1 student counsellor (4 females, 1 male)
C: **Part-time vocational education and training (VET)**	1 School principal (male)	2 teachers 1 coordinator of employment 1 coordinator 'Project General Courses' 1 counsellor of student trajectories (2 females, 3 males)
D: **Part-time apprenticeship track**	1 school principal (female)	1 apprenticeship counsellor 8 teachers (5 females, 4 males)

Results

➢ Functions of education (Peschar & Wesselingh, 1995)

- Qualification

- Selection/Allocation/Differentiation

- Socialisation/Integration

BUT in alternative learning arena: outcomes of differentiation processes

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Integration

- ➤ Use of holistic approach
- ➤ Focus on:
  - Target group
  - Type of education offered

Management Secondary Schools for Adults (Program A):

*"So we have a group of people who, luckily, find their way to us, because there are a lot of them who don't. But **they do need a different approach or different care. A lot of support**."*

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Integration

- ➤ Re-engage students
- ➤ **First**: focus on pull-factors that cause ESL
- ➤ **Later**: actual educational training

Teacher and learning trajectory counsellor (Secondary Schools for Adults , Program A):

*'They also just enter [our office] to tell **'my cat died'.** Then I am like 'sorry but that does not interest me', but just because they say **'that actually has an effect on my learning trajectory** and I am able to tell you this, I will not tell it to all my teachers but..' just having **the relief of being able to tell it to someone matters**.'*

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Qualification

➢ Competition with integration

➢ Specific professional skills?

➢ Transferrable skills?

➢ Social competences?

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Qualification

➢ *Teacher A (Program B, Secondary Schools for Adults): 'Yes to a certain extent, I teach some of the basics of bookkeeping, but the demands on the labour market are a lot higher.'*

➢ *Teacher B: 'It depends on the courses. In the course informatics, I teach **online banking**.*

➢ *Teacher A: 'That is personal use, it does **not** really **apply to the labour market**.'*

➢ *Teacher B: 'They need these kinds of **skills to function in our society**, how to deal with E-purchases, etc. that is general education.'*

➢ *Teacher A: 'General education is necessary to function in society, technical courses need to prepare students for the labour market. **For many courses, there is no need on the labour market**.'*

Conclusion

➤ Functions of schooling?

- ■ No focus on differentiation
  - • 'Last resort'
- ■ Tension between integration and qualification
  - • 1st integration/socialisation, 2nd qualification
- ■ Diverging interpretations of qualification function of schooling
  - • Specialist vs transferrable skills?

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Conclusion

➢ ESL prevention?

- Focus on features vulnerable group
- Remedial approach to pull-factors: more attention to integration
- Focus on transition to labour market and particular educational qualifications offered

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Questions?

➤ Lore.VanPraag@UAntwerpen.be

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