

**Tracking and sense of futility: The impact of between school tracking versus within school tracking in secondary education in Flanders (Belgium).**

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It has been established since the 1960s that tracking yields negative consequences for students in lower tracks. As this research has been carried out mainly in the US and UK, the effects of tracking have been demonstrated in systems of within-school tracking mostly. However, in many European countries—such as Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands—tracking is commonly organized *between* schools. The question then arises whether the specific system of tracking, within-school versus between-school tracking, might affect the impact of tracking on students. In Flanders between-school tracking is the norm, but there are also a number of schools offering a combination of academic tracks with technical and/or vocational tracks, allowing for a comparison of both systems. Present study aims at investigating whether the association between feelings of futility and the specific track a student is enrolled in depends upon whether these tracks are organized between- or within schools. Sense of futility reflects the students' feelings about the possibility of functioning adequately in the school system. High futility means that students experience strong feelings that the school system is working against them and that they have to be lucky to succeed. Three-level multilevel analyses (HLM6) of students clustered in tracks, clustered in schools, are carried out based on the Flemish Educational Assessment (FIEA), data gathered in 2004–2005 from 11,872 3rd- and 5th-grade students clustered in 146 tracks in a representative sample of 85 secondary schools in Flanders. Within-school tracking

appears to have a greater impact on lower track students' development of feelings of futility than between-school tracking. So, lower track students who are directly confronted with higher track students in the same school, seem more likely to lose their faith in a meritocratic system, as they put luck above working hard or above merit.