They will get there! Studies on educational performance of immigrant youth in the Netherlands

van Welie, E.A.A.M.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (http://dare.uva.nl)
A sense of the whole*

When I started the endeavour to write a thesis, my only certainty was my ambition to add to a better understanding of the school success of pupils of immigrant descent. I am forever grateful to Joop Hartog, who guided me in such mysterious ways that only now, in hindsight, I begin to understand how his intuitive, thoughtful and wise guidance made me find my own way in this journey. Although we appreciate system dynamics and nonlinear processes differently— as a highly respected Economist, Joop feels less inclined to this way of thinking than I do as an Ecologist— I intend to honour him by saying that he demonstrated system dynamics at its best: a strong image of the complexity of the entire process of writing a thesis, without being distracted too much by the intricacies of every step I had to take.

Biological time flows unevenly

Motherhood is the fundamental fulfilment of my life and largely surpasses any other endeavour I undertook; getting children is an all-overwhelming instant

change of purpose. My talented and beautiful son and daughter, Felix and Bérénice, taught me what transcendental love is, which only has the well-being and happiness of the other in mind. Through them I could more profoundly direct my work to the aim of enhanced equity in educational opportunities for all young people.

*Flip into another state*

Both at the scale of creating the research institute TIER, and similarly in her creativity in finding a way around all sorts of bureaucratic impediments that seemed to block my way to the project of writing a thesis, I admire and respect Henriette Maassen van den Brink for her perseverance, faithfulness and friendship. *Noblesse* comes to mind in her presence.

*Innovation undermines bureaucratic rule-making and stability, but induces greater resilience*

In my last conversation with JanKarel Gevers, before he so sadly passed away, he once more demonstrated in his beautiful eloquent style how deeply he believed in academe, and how any bureaucratic impediments simply had to be moved out of the way of education and research. Those who have known him will remember that typical inquisitive look he could have, with his head a bit tilted. He looked at me in that way when he said: "I do not know exactly how this came about, but great men, with insight and wisdom, always seem to watch over you and guide you; you need never to worry." Pepe Gines Mora, Roel in't Veld, Fons van Wieringen and Jaap Dronkers were a source of inspiration for the most part of my career in education. Koos van der Steenhoven always believed in my endeavour to add to equal opportunities for all pupils; he created the solid ground I could stand on while working on this thesis. He pushed research-based policy making at the government level over the tipping point; however complicated such changes may be, there will only be ever more research basis for policies, there is no way back.
The shift from one set of scales to another

Every once in a while I stumbled, and doubted whether I could ever successfully complete my research; at all those moments Hessel Oosterbeek not only prevented me from falling, but also gave me at first sight casual suggestions, to try another approach, read an article that just seemed to come to his mind, or "use less words and think deeper". All his advice turned out to be exactly right, at exactly the right time.

Understanding slow variables

Countless researchers, students and politicians are indebted to Hank Levin at Columbia University, I among them. Hank dedicated a lifetime of work explaining to the world that the return on investment of education is always positive– and should be calculated over the lifetime of individuals, not by the mere costs of one year of schooling per individual.

Growing numbers of children of immigrant descent have entered the school system over the past decades and there have been times that I was deeply worried about the tone of the public debate about migrant pupils. I have always believed in the University and its academic members as good sui generis. At this point I want to acknowledge the work of Herman van de Werfhorst and Maurice Crul, who in the best tradition of academe described the steady progress of pupils of migrant descent, and herewith opposed the negative debate on migrant pupils with sound research, tirelessly. They strengthened my hope that indeed they will get there.

Adaptiveness is at the heart of understanding

No text survives sloppy editing; each time Juli Behrendt sent back my writing, her editing skills surpassed my expectations. Apart from her expertise in matters of style, she demonstrated time and again her profound understanding of my work. Under her watch I learned to design my papers more clearly, and express myself in better English. Most of all I valued that I could count on her at all times, as if no time difference existed between Auckland, in New Zealand, and Amsterdam.
**Adaptation to faster levels**

I could never have succeeded in translating my research questions on the educational success of migrant pupils into sound analyses, without Ilja Cornelisz, Bregje Zwaan, and Adam Booij. With creativity and great mastery of statistical analysis they supported me in getting out of the data what indeed lay hidden inside them. My visits to Ilja at Columbia University were very inspiring and great fun, especially our discussions about our joint research paper in the library of Columbia University—silent and solemn realms in other places—where a sign at the entrance says that debate is explicitly encouraged. As if we needed that encouragement.

**Adding another dimension**

I devote an important part of my life to music, literature, and poetry; on many bleak afternoons over the few past years, however, when I got lost in the complexities of understanding my own data properly, it seemed as if all the Muses had left me. In hours like these there was always Sebastiene Postma; she could inspire me instantly again with her vast knowledge of the beauty of language and literature.

**Transfer and storage of experience**

I value the experience that I had to struggle, like many pupils of migrant descent, with bridging two cultures: the world of school practice and of academe. At times I felt as if I was unable to express myself clearly in either world anymore. Lex Borghans and Inge de Wolf taught me how to build that bridge; not by compromising, but with identifying the best of both worlds.

**Avete atque valete** ("Ave atque vale", "Hail and Farewell", Catullus 84-54BC)

My father and mother—who both passed away at the beginning of this millennium—and I, had no easy life together. Although I was well aware of the tragedies that struck them when they were young children, this did not help me to
have a more understanding view, in hindsight, on sadness and loneliness during my childhood.

Maybe writing a thesis forces you to deeper understanding— it seems the most challenging episode in my working life— but for the first time I could think of my parents with profound kindness and gratitude: these are my mother's genes, which planted the idea that there is no realm where I would not be entitled to enter, and my father's genes, which enabled me to complete this grand intellectual odyssey.