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School leadership : perceptions and actions
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It was during my studies in Educational Sciences at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) that I became interested in the topic of leadership. By then, I had met several school leaders, and had discovered that they all had their own way of running a school. I wanted to find out what makes a good leader, and whether effective leadership can be learned. When I graduated, Fons van Wieringen showed me some interesting PhD projects, one of which centered on leadership. The project tempted me, and though I knew I would like to work on a PhD project one day, I wanted to get some experience in a job outside the university first. I therefore became a policy analyst at the Ministry of Education, a job in which I learned a lot and which I really enjoyed.

After nearly three years, I received a phone call at work. I remember this call very well: I was sitting at my desk in an open-plan office and my boss, Joop Groos, was standing nearby. On the other end of the phone line was Meta, asking whether I was still interested in a PhD project. When I hung up, somewhat in a daze, I reported to Joop that I had just been asked to be a PhD student. Without hesitating, Joop told me I had to take the opportunity; a couple of weeks later, I started my job at the University of Amsterdam.

There was one person who was more exited than I was: my grandfather. For years he had been hoping that I would get my doctorate, and now his dream would come true. Had circumstances been different in his life, he would have gotten a PhD himself; now he could experience it all through me. Over the years, not a week went by in which he did not ask how I was progressing. Opa, to you I dedicate my thesis.

My first day at the UvA felt so good, as if I had never left. My officemate, Hester, welcomed me with a plant, and commenced telling me everything there is to know about being a PhD student. She soon became my ‘aio-goeroe’. Our (sometimes very personal) con-
versations and many moments of laughter are amongst the best memories I have from my years as a PhD student.

In the first weeks, I got a lot of help to get me started. Joachim, who had worked on this study before me, introduced me to the project and explained to me what he had already done and answered all of my questions. I also got a lot of support from Femke and Gerdy, who also participated in the research program. I have been really lucky with all of my colleagues. Being a PhD candidate can be an isolating activity; one spends day after day working alone at the computer. Thanks to my colleagues, I never felt lonely at all. There was always someone to talk to, to have lunch with, or to drink tea with. And a lot of tea too: at least 10 large cups a day!

Judith, Eva, Marlies, Floor, Corine, Sanne, Esther, Channa, Jantine, Debora, Anne, Anna, Sandra, Elsje, Marleen, Femke, Pascal, you have been warm and kind colleagues. As soon as I left the UvA, I missed you already! Peter Karstanje, I still think of you whenever I eat a ‘dropje’, and you are the most loyal and dedicated colleague I have ever met. To me, you do not only work in the Educational Science section, you are the section! Erik, we share our love for France and your postcards make me very happy. Your relaxed attitude towards writing a thesis has been eye-opening. You are honest, direct and good-humored. Needless to say: you have become more than a colleague to me. I just wish you had been more often in Amsterdam - you brought a little Brabant with you!

I not only enjoyed the personal interaction with my colleagues, but I also got a lot of support from them. Reyn and Louise, I enjoyed talking about education with you. Nienke and Gerben, thanks for helping me out with my analyses. Eric van Schooten, you are my multi-level hero! You did a terrific job with the analyses, but our conversations were just as valuable to me. Your cynical outlook could not be more opposite to mine, but it broadened my view. One afternoon with you and your jazz music left me with enough to think about for days.
The most important people, however, have been my team of (co)promoters. I was fortunate to have two promoters and one co-promoter. All three contributed in their own way to this thesis and I would not want to have completed this project without them. Fons has played an important role in my professional life; when I was twenty years old, I became his student assistant, which is where I took my first steps in research and became interested in doing it. Fons gave me a lot of freedom and encouraged me to make my own decisions, but he was always there when I needed help. He used to walk into my room, hand me an interesting article, comment on the building across the street or the poster on my wall, and utter some words of encouragement. He gave me the reassuring feeling that he was watching over me and that he would never let me down. When he left the room, it always felt as if everything was going to come together in the end. Fons, thank you for everything!

Peter Sleegers had a whole different approach: he was very critical, and explicit in telling me what needed to change. He noticed every flaw in reasoning, and often when I sent work to him I wished that, this time, he would find it good enough. Frustrating as it was, Peter was always right: it could be improved and it really was better the way he suggested. He invested a lot of time taking me to a higher level and, especially in the last weeks, he helped me in every possible way in order to successfully finish my thesis. Peter taught me how to reason sharply; without him, this thesis would not have been of the same quality that it is. I’m very thankful he was one of my promoters.

The last of three: my co-promoter Meta Krüger, whose door was always open, and who always seemed to know exactly how to structure my thoughts. Her remarks were constructive and stimulating, and she made me feel like we were in it together. I appreciate it a lot that we not only talked about work, but also about personal matters. In fact, Meta has been such a good promoter, that I nominated her for the ‘promoter of the year’ award. She is an amazing woman, both professionally and personally, and she set a great example for me. Meta, you are the best!
Finally, I would like to sincerely thank all of the school leaders and teachers who participated in this study. The data collection was one of the most fun and interesting parts of this project. I have learned an incredible amount during my conversations with the school leaders.

Writing this thesis has been one of the most intense experiences in my life. It was a delight to work on a single project for such a long period of time and to be able to go into depth and detail as much as necessary. From the first moment until the last, it has been a great pleasure to work on this study. However, the last months have been really difficult. After starting my job at CBE Consultants, I had only one day a week to finish my thesis. Every week, it took me half a day to pick up where I had finished the week before, and then I only had a couple of hours left to actually get some work done. Although my private life has always been very important to me, I have inevitably wound up working evenings and weekends as well.

This lifestyle became especially difficult when I became pregnant. Instead of buying baby clothes, decorating a baby room, and taking naps, I often worked until after midnight. I really wanted to deliver my thesis before delivering my baby. And I did. It was one week before my son was born that this thesis was sent to the Commission.

And I would not have succeeded without the help of some people: Welmoed, thank you for writing that letter for me five minutes before you left for vacation. Margarita, it's amazing that you corrected the first chapter while you were pregnant with your twins and right after giving birth to them - I learned a lot from your remarks. Rachel, you were very pregnant with your daughter and yet you managed to correct my whole thesis at a pace I would never have imagined possible - thanks for being so thorough. Herman, it was a great relief that you offered to do the layout - my figures improved incredibly and you saved me a lot of time. Hannelotte, I know I was
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either too busy with work to call, or too tired, but I am happy that it never got in the way of our dear friendship.

For five years my whole life revolved around this thesis, and writing it is one of the biggest things I have ever done; nonetheless, even during those years, there has always been something more important: family. Carlien, you are the best mother on the planet and I enjoy spending time with you. Your unconditional love, support and encouragement have made me a confident and very happy woman. Arjan, you came into my life during my first year as a PhD student and you brought along so much care, love and laughter. With you, I feel like a princess, and together we have produced something bigger than this thesis: Tiberius. I cannot wait to continue life with you and our petit prince.