Educational Reception in Rotterdam and Barcelona
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6 Explaining gaps: Rotterdam vs. Barcelona

The previous two chapters offered a description of practices of educational reception in schools in Rotterdam and Barcelona. The present chapter sets out to compare the two case studies and explain both their common and particular traits. In this comparison I want to look beyond the practices themselves. In particular, I will compare degrees of institutional influence on school practices, which at the same time means comparing the discrepancies between school practices and official policies. A comparison of the influence of policies on practices and a comparison of the gap between practices and policies; these are the two sides of one coin.

The first section of this chapter will compare the local case studies with regard to the three institutional settings (national integration policy, educational system and reception programme) that present the most noteworthy features. Subsequently, in the second section, the chapter will propose an explanation based on three elements: a) mechanisms of discretion (coping or ethical), b) types of strategies (individual, collective, or venue-shopping), and c) the concrete application of mechanisms and strategies in each local context (field of practices). Finally, d) an attempt will be made to identify those elements of the local context which best serve to explain the gaps in each case study.

6.1 Comparison of cases

6.1.1 National integration policies

National integration policies do not matter much in the practice of receiving newcomer students in the high schools studied in Rotterdam and Barcelona. In Rotterdam, the objectives prioritised by high schools in the reception of immigrant children do not match the current national goals of cultural adaptation. It is true that schools are focusing more and more on basic linguistic reception, reducing the weight of other subjects besides Dutch in the curriculum. But it is also true that schools continue to teach other subjects, and even use complicated discretionional arrangements to do so. Most importantly, focusing reception increasingly on teaching the Dutch language responds more to the pragmatic need to cope with cutbacks and
school boards’ efficiency policies than to policy goals regarding the cultural assimilation of newcomers. Practitioners in the high schools studied still see equality of opportunities as the final goal of reception education. Learning Dutch is considered to be important, but the reason for this, first and foremost, is as means for successful incorporation into mainstream education. This view emphasises the role of language (and of reception training) in socio-economic integration, as illustrated by the shared assumption that students with different talents need longer or shorter periods of language training. We can also assume that if the emphasis on the teaching of Dutch were driven by the need to transmit Dutch cultural values, then practitioners would probably provide language training of a similar duration to all newcomer students, or different durations would respond to a categorisation of students in terms of proximity to/distance from the Dutch standard.

Also, the organisational patterns that are preferred by national integration structures have only an indirect relation with the instruments and budgets of educational reception. This is demonstrated by the fact that while integration policies in the Netherlands have shown dramatic shifts in orientation and organisational structure over the years (Scholten 2007, Bruquetas et al. 2011), programmes for educational reception have shown a resilient continuity since their birth in the mid-1970s. After the shift in the 1990s towards universalist integration policies, special schemes for ethnic minorities were in theory abandoned to favour the inclusion of immigrants and their descendents in mainstream social policies. This change in preference for general policies did not significantly affect integration policy in the field of education, compensatory programmes for disadvantaged students or their main instruments (reception training for newcomer pupils, Dutch as a second language, and intercultural education). Dutch educational policies to reduce the level of disadvantage to pupils have shown a considerable continuity in their goals over the years (Rijkschroef et al. 2005) and relative stability in their instruments. Only the scheme for mother-tongue education (OALT) was suppressed in accordance with the goals of cultural assimilation promoted by governments in the early 2000s. The attempts to modify those policy categories behind educational priority policy in order to adapt them to newer trends of integration policy have encountered considerable resistance in the field of education. In 2006, the government modified the criteria for distribution of extra resources to schools: a student’s ethnic background was replaced with the universalist criteria of the parents’ level of education (Uitwerking Leerplusarrangament Voortgezet Onderwijs 2005). However, the

1 Interviews with reception coordinators at Vermeer, Rembrandt and Van Gogh schools.
attempts by Minister Van der Hoeven to eliminate the ethnic factor from the compensatory policy were ultimately futile, leading instead to the use of replacement categories (De Zwart 2005) which in fact target more or less the same social groups. At present, schools receive extra funds for students residing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and for newcomer students (those without Dutch nationality who have lived in the Netherlands for less than two years).

In the case of Barcelona, the picture is more complicated. As we saw in chapter 3, Spain has a federal state organisation that establishes that the regions have the main policymaking responsibilities regarding immigrant integration. Accordingly, the regions – Catalonia among them – have developed their own integration policies. The practices observed in the schools studied in Barcelona contradict a crucial organisational tenet of the current Catalanian Integration Plan as well as of the LIC reception programme: the principle of mainstreaming. According to this principle, newcomer students should be placed in regular classes together with autochthonous students as fully and as soon as possible. Furthermore, structures to support newcomer students separately from their native peers must be kept as a temporary and part-time measure. However, we have seen that schools often contradict this principle, particularly by tracking pupils according to their level of achievement. The use of flexible groups or totally separate tracks in fact creates a more permanent segregation of immigrant students.

At the same time, school practices show a discontinuity with the formal goals of the Catalanian integration plan. The Catalanian policy of integration establishes equal opportunities as its main goal, but reception courses in practice deal mostly (and exclusively in many cases) with the teaching of Catalan. At the same time, the rhetoric of ‘interculturality’ is widespread among schools in Barcelona, largely as a principle of political correctness. Mirroring the rhetoric of the regional plan for Citizenship and Immigration 2005-2008, some mentor teachers refuse to speak of ‘integration’ of immigrant students, preferring to speak of ‘co-existence’ in order to emphasise the ‘two-way, dynamic process’ of ‘adjustments between immigrants and local inhabitants’ (Generalitat de Catalunya 2005: 161). However, the discontinuity between policy goals and rhetoric is part and parcel of Catalanian policy; the multiculturalist advocacy for (equal) respect for other cultural/ethnic identities does not translate into the recognition of the specific collective rights of immigrants’ cultures.

Nevertheless, practices regarding newcomers’ reception in schools in Barcelona are congruent with the Catalanian integration policy in one important aspect: the importance attributed to the Catalan language.
However, this practical correspondence with the policy goal of teaching Catalan probably has roots that cannot be traced back to the Catalonian integration policy itself. As we saw in chapter 3, in Catalonia the educational system establishes Catalan as the language to be used in all classes. We also referred to the priority given by the regional authorities to the goal of ‘normalising’ the Catalan language, which has been supported with abundant resources and dominant institutional structures such as the SEDEC department. Furthermore, this feature, rather than being attributed to the influence of the integration policy, is probably better explained by the social and political dynamics of language use in Catalonia. We can assume that in Catalonia there is ample social consensus about the desirability or legitimacy of supporting the Catalan language against the dominance of Castilian. And as a result, teachers and educators would probably avoid a discrentional practice such as deliberately not teaching Catalan to newcomer students, as doing so would probably imply the assumption of a symbolically marked position, with conservative Spanish-nationalist connotations.2

6.1.2 Educational system

The educational system, on the other hand, has a more influential effect on reception practices. Reception styles in the two local cases are congruent with the leading institutional logics and are shaped by the resources and channels that the educational system provides. This observation is in line with the conclusions drawn by other studies (Alegre & Ferrer 2009, Crul & Vermeulen 2003b, 2006, Thomson & Crul 2007, Van Zanten 1997, Osborn & Broadfoot 1992). In the case of Rotterdam, the ideology of selectivity shapes individuals’ professional values and representations of their work. Reception practitioners in Rotterdam interpret the main objective of reception education as to enhance equal opportunities among newcomer children, in the light of a differentialist concern with the development of individual potential. They understand that their responsibility is to help newcomer students reach their optimal level and place them in

2 Also, practitioners’ understandings of the most effective measures for integrating newcomer students play a role in supporting the Catalan language. However, the role of such understandings is also ambivalent, as they can support the teaching of Catalan to newcomer students (acknowledged as a requisite for increased labour opportunities and social mobility) as well as the teaching of Spanish (understood as the easiest channel of introduction to the social circles and neighbourhoods where these students live). The interviews offer plenty of examples of both.
the educational track that best suits their talents. In addition, all the informants who participated in the study explicitly embrace the Dutch educational ethos in general terms, which they understand to be the fairest possible system, and take for granted the social stratification this may imply. The Dutch ideology of selectivity and meritocracy also underpins the different treatment given to different student categories: practitioners from the schools studied in Rotterdam share a basic consensus on the kind of investment that pupils with different achievement levels deserve. Practitioners in the Barcelona schools have quite a different interpretation of equality of opportunity, which is universalist in essence, as it puts the emphasis on common entitlements for all and on fulfilling the same goals for every pupil. Hence practitioners in Barcelona understand upward social mobility in a broad sense (not compartmentalised nor targeting a specific educational position), and conceive their role in compensatory education as a matter of helping students to climb; this sometimes requires stretching the rigid constraints of a system that strangles newcomer students’ chances.

The organisational arrangements of each educational system also imply specific opportunities and constraints. For example, the type of personnel management makes a clear difference. The Dutch system allows schools to use more professional or specialised staff for reception functions, while schools in Barcelona usually have to work with less professional or motivated personnel, because Spanish public school teachers are civil servants who are randomly allocated to schools (often provisionally). The mode in which the reception programme is organised can also be understood as a prolongation of the organisational styles of each educational system. An illustration of this can be found in the amount and type of funding granted to schools, which

3 Interviews with reception coordinators at the Rembrandt, Vermeer and Van Gogh schools, with teachers of both schools, and with CED advisers.

4 This different representation of ‘equality’ in both systems (differentialist in Rotterdam, universalist in Barcelona) reflects the findings of Marilyn Osborn and Patricia Broadfoot and colleagues in their comparison of British and French primary school teachers (Osborn et al. 1992, 1993, 2010, Broadfoot et al. 1988).

5 However, within the LIC scheme an important effort was made to improve reception professionals’ training. In addition, most LIC mentors were either ex-teachers in the compensatory education programme or specialised in teaching Catalan as a second language. In the TAE scheme, a majority of mentors were interim civil servants, recently graduated and without teaching experience (interviews with Tino Serra, Isabel Almécija, Gene Gordo, Marisa Alonso, and mentors of several TAE units).

6 However, some of the programme’s features are reception-specific and need to be attributed to the political dynamics in the local field of reception.
considerably determines their capacity to receive immigrant students. The cash benefits (additional grants for reception) that Dutch schools receive per newcomer pupil give schools more flexibility to use those resources in a tailor-made way (although this can also open the way to abuse of the system).7

All of this indicates that the reception practices observed say more about the functioning of the general education system and the educational institutions than about the national integration regime and its integration policies. At an organisational level, the ISK programme is linked to the educational authorities and to the departments dealing with education policies, rather than with those dealing with integration. The main functional links have to do with the allocation of resources (funds, personnel, etc.), the distribution of students, and regulations which bind reception teachers and managers. This connection is reflected in the network of contacts and discourses of reception practitioners. In Rotterdam reception practitioners did not give priority to integration laws or policies in their discourse; rather they made reference primarily to education laws, which constitute the frame of reference for their actions. This is also true in the case of the TAE and LIC reception programmes in Barcelona. In that sense, practitioners do not relate the goals of the reception programme directly to broader issues of integration, but to the more immediate, concrete, palpable objectives of their work: the goal of the programme is to teach (and receive in the school) newcomer students and not to integrate them8 (which sounds like a broader, more ambiguous task).

Nevertheless, national educational systems function with different coordinating capacities in the two case studies. In particular, the relative influence of the guiding educational ideologies varies in intensity per case. The degree of institutional influence is stronger in the case of Rotterdam, where the ideology of selectivity strongly shapes individuals’ professional values. In Barcelona, by contrast, we find more exceptions to the principle of educational comprehensiveness, which is central to the Spanish educational regime. Spanish comprehensive ideology seems less successful, partly due to the co-existence of rival educational ideologies, and in part because of certain work conditions that constrain practitioners. Thus, despite the apparent

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7 Later in the chapter we will discuss other influential organisational traits of the reception programme: the material resources, the type of enforcement, and the level of autonomy that reception departments and practitioners enjoy.

8 This was confirmed in a funny way in the interviews in Rotterdam: whenever the first question of the interview was framed in terms of ‘integration policy’, informants would immediately start speaking about ‘civic integration programmes’ (inburgering). Some even said ‘we don’t deal with this, sorry, we focus on education [of newcomer children]’.
acceptance of chief goals and methods by school practitioners, practices follow pragmatic orientations and defy official educational principles. For instance, the taboo of ‘tracking’ students according to their abilities is apparently accepted by practitioners, but schools in fact still have either explicit or implicit tracking practices (mainly through the so-called ‘flexible groupings’). Strikingly, the degree of influence of educational systems over practices does not coincide with the different degrees of ‘statism’ (Jepperson 2002, Nettl 1968) in each case. Despite the soft regulation and broader autonomy of Dutch schools in a system of ‘governing by input’, the schools studied in Rotterdam complied more in their practices with Dutch long-term ideals or rationales of educational selection. The schools analysed in Barcelona, on the other hand, despite functioning within a system of ‘governing by curriculum’, exhibit a gap between policies and practices more often and with respect to more issues.

6.1.3 Educational reception programme

A third element that comes out of the comparison is the existence of a policy gap at the reception programme level. In both local cases, the schools studied show discrentional practices that adapt, bypass or contradict the official goals of educational reception. The presence of an implementation gap in educational reception in Barcelona and in Rotterdam shows that, although the reception programme clearly channels reception practices, it also leaves considerable room for agency and discrepancy. As we saw in the previous chapter, secondary schools in Rotterdam and Barcelona explicitly contest formal policies in several ways. In Rotterdam, schools adapt the official policy in at least three aspects: extending the target population, reducing the number of subjects in reception training, and making discrentional decisions on the transfer of pupils to regular education. Barcelona-LIC schools also diverge from the reception programme by discretionally handling the entry and exit of newcomer pupils to the training programme, diminishing the duration of the reception period, applying (semi-)parallel reception, and challenging the exclusive use of Catalan. In many of these examples, discretion is not simply exercised within the given formal limits of choice open for implementers (variations in practice) but often taken beyond this. Practitioners not only make use of the autonomy that they have been granted (granted discretion), but also use available loopholes in the system (taken discretion), or even create spaces in order to act discretionally (created discretion). In fact, many schools’ discretionational practices are divergent practices at the same time (practical adaptations): inconsistent with or openly contrary to the formal rules.
Observing the transition between reception programmes in Barcelona gave me insight into their ambiguous role, which simultaneously channels action in a certain direction and serves as reference for deviant practices. When the TAE programme was replaced by the LIC programme, schools’ practices did not simply accommodate to policy changes, but rather seemed to follow their own dynamic. Schools that previously had reception functions have maintained, to a large extent, their ways of doing things; the survey conducted in a sample of reception schools in Barcelona showed that four out of seventeen maintained a parallel or semi-parallel mode of reception like the one used in the TAE programme. But the resistance to adapt to innovations should not only be interpreted as the inertia of practitioners triggered by the higher costs involved in organisational change. Also, the reception styles of Tapies and Gaudí schools can be understood as cases of incorporation (Osborn & Broadfoot 1992), also known as appropriation (Woods 1994), because in both schools, practitioners have taken over the new policy and appropriated it in the service of their own concerns. The concept of incorporation/appropriation is also useful in analysing Rotterdam’s case, as it reflects the schools’ ambiguous relation with the reception programme. That is to say that schools are compliant in many ways with the programme (both the official frame and the bottom-up STER regulation), but at the same time they follow their own interpretation of the rules in important aspects instead of following them to the letter (for example, the discrentional practice of providing longer reception training to highly-talented students).

The relevance of the gap in both local cases is indicated by the high degree of institutionalisation of discrentional practices. My findings in the two cities reveal a set of consolidated discrentional practices that respond more to collective school strategies than to individual practitioners’ own principles and interests. Discrentional practices in Rotterdam are highly institutionalised in nature, as they are stable over time and involve formalised procedures applicable throughout the whole reception department. Such procedures are often shared by more than one school. In Barcelona during the LIC period we also find a considerable level of institutionalisation of practices within and across schools. Only in Barcelona during the TAE period was the degree of formalisation of strategies rather low.9

9 However, my findings still support the notion of a certain collective character to the discrentional adaptations agreed upon by the group of TAE teachers at the Dalí school. The case of the Tapies TAE unit constitutes an exception: there we can explicitly talk of collective strategies at the school level, as in the LIC phase or in Rotterdam schools (reception departments).
Moreover, in both cities collective strategies are the result of collective decision-making. In Rotterdam, even though the reception coordinator plays a crucial role in decision-making, discreitional strategies are shaped by the opinion of the rest of the teachers and by the limits set by the principal and the board of governors (for instance, in personnel matters). The case of Barcelona under the LIC presents a comparable decision-making pattern. In this case, reception arrangements need support from at least some of the regular teachers in order to function. We have seen that strategies initiated and led only by the reception mentor are weak and unstable, while collective strategies supported by a strong group have a greater chance of enduring (see, for instance, the Tapies school case). Also, the principals' leadership is essential in creating consensus and support for reception goals within the school.

6.2 Specific characteristics of the gap in Barcelona and Rotterdam

In spite of the importance of discreitional practices in the schools in both local cases, the gap is more relevant in Barcelona than in Rotterdam, where the influence of the reception programme on practices is stronger. Therefore, in this section we will scrutinise the specificities of discreitional practices in each local case comparing: their relevance/institutionalisation, the predominant mechanisms of discretion and schools' reception styles. Once again, the degree of 'statism' of the cases appears to be in opposite relation to the degree of influence of the reception programme, since practitioners conform to the rules to a lesser extent in the case of Barcelona, although it has a stronger regulation, than in Rotterdam, where there is a softer mode of regulation.

6.2.1 Relevance of discreitional practices

All the schools studied in Barcelona and Rotterdam diverge from the norms established in their corresponding reception programmes in one way or another. However, in each of the cities the policy-practice gap has a different character. To start with, the two cases differ in the relevance of discreitional practices. Schools in Barcelona (LIC) adapt the rules in more aspects than in Rotterdam. The range of schools’ discreitional practices is broader. Also, there appears to be more variation between centres in Barcelona, showing different implementation styles. In addition to those variations, which arise from the exercise of functions formally granted to schools for adapting
reception policy to their own needs, other practices appear that actually challenge the limits of policy. That is clearly the case in schools which use parallel training programmes for newcomers or in practices which challenge the priority of Catalan language training over other educational contents. Although the LIC policy is scarcely prescriptive and the formal limits to what practitioners can do are few, if we consider the informal limits established by policymakers, we can affirm that there are more deviating practices in Barcelona than in Rotterdam. Among the diverse school practices that deviate from the reception programme, some of them (concerning registration and the transfer of pupils) are endorsed by a majority of schools.

Otherwise, divergence in Rotterdam is less frequent, but practices that challenge policy are more consolidated and significant. Although schools and practitioners in Rotterdam comply more to the letter with formal and informal regulations than in the case of Barcelona under the LIC, the few examples of discrectional practices which challenge the norms in the LIC are extended to a majority of (reception) schools. An illustration of this is the extension of the duration of reception training for newcomers beyond the time subsidised by public funds, which takes place in three of the four schools. Such divergent strategies are more institutionalised in Rotterdam, as the standard ways of doing things in each school remains stable over time and is sanctioned by the school’s own funds. This is even more remarkable if we acknowledge that in Rotterdam, challenging the formal norms entails a financial penalty. For instance, schools deciding to extend the reception trajectory longer than a year must fall back on their own resources. This is true for the average two-year duration of the training that a majority of the schools permit to newcomer students, but even more so for the still longer reception trajectory provided to highly-skilled students in two of the schools.

In Rotterdam, discrectional arrangements imply a considerable degree of consistency in the practices of teachers within each given school/reception department. This does not rule out the possibility of discrectional practices exercised by individual practitioners outside the collective strategies. Nonetheless, the fieldwork did not establish significant cases of reception teachers discrectionally adapting policy (or adapting their school’s collective discrectional arrangements) according to their own preferences.10

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10 It is possible to argue that this is the result of an observational bias and that a more intensive and prolonged observation in the classroom might yield different results. However, in spite of its limitations, my ethnographic work allows me to affirm that individual discrectional practices which deviate from school discrectional practices are not widespread; otherwise they would have been detected in my fieldwork.
This individual conformity to policy was confirmed even with respect to the content of lessons, in which teachers’ interpretations of the content did not modify the school model in significant ways. Practices which did adapt the STER programme’s principles – e.g. reducing the range of subjects – were the result of collective decisions at the level of the department of reception. 11

Tables 29 and 30 synthesise the comparison of divergent practices in Rotterdam and Barcelona according to the number of schools in which they occur, their institutionalisation (indicated by years of implementation, additional costs at the school’s expense, and support within the school) and their deviation from policy norms. In Rotterdam (Table 29), practices that deal discretionally with the registration or transfer of pupils are generally endorsed by a majority of the schools that provide reception training in the city. Normally, these broadly endorsed strategies are also deviations from the formal limits of policy. These strategies are highly institutionalised; they have been in practice for a long period (some for twenty or more years) and entail related costs which are covered by the schools themselves. On the other hand, practices that are specific to only one or two of the schools

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11 When I talk about the ‘school level’ I limit myself to the autonomously functioning unit of the ‘reception department’. The whole school, in the case of Rotterdam, would comprise an organisation with several buildings and departments which interact, but also a multilayered hierarchy of decision-making which is too broad for the purposes of my analyses of practices and dynamics.
seem to be a more recent phenomenon, particularly those practices which have to do with reducing the number of academic subjects that newcomer students take.

In Table 30 we can see that Barcelona presents rather the opposite picture. Schools adapt policies in more ways than in Rotterdam (as the range of practices in the table also shows), but practices present a lower degree of institutionalisation. Also, more variations between schools appear in the responses to perceived challenges than in Rotterdam (Table 30 shows the most widespread practices). Practices which challenge the symbolic touchstones of the LIC programme are only endorsed by a minority, such as the use of parallel training programmes for newcomers or challenges
to the priority of Catalan over other educational content. In Barcelona, 
discretional practices are in general more recent than in Rotterdam, with 
the exception of curriculum adaptation. Parallel reception dates from the 
beginning of reception policies in the city, but then it corresponded to the 
official TAE programme and only recently has it constituted a deviation 
from the norms. This is logical, as we have seen that TAE practitioners 
complied more to the letter with the TAE policy, while LIC practitioners 
apply the reception programme more leniently.

If we compare the support that divergent strategies receive within 
schools, we see that practices in Rotterdam are strongly backed up while 
in Barcelona the scenario is much more fragmented. In Rotterdam, 
discretional strategies from reception departments receive either high 
support (compliance from reception teachers) or even very high support 
(from reception teachers and school board). None of the practices appears 
to be an individual strategy of the reception teacher (low support), or a 
strategy of the reception coordinator not backed by other actors (medium 
support).

The support that discretional practices enjoy in the schools in Barcelona 
varies greatly, from isolated strategies by reception mentors (low support), 
to mentor practices backed up by some teachers (medium support), to prac-
tices that receive the active support of the school board (high support). In 
Barcelona, the different positions of reception mentors, regular teachers and 
school boards translates into much controversy and division of opinions. 
In general it holds that the more support reception professionals receive, 
the more consistent their practices are, both internally and in coordination 
with ordinary education practices. Free-rider strategies are more prone to 
appear in situations in which the collective reception arrangement that 
the school defines does not reflect the professional or personal views of 
the reception teachers and/or their practical constraints. Yet, there are 
more possibilities than all or nothing: some strategies supported by the 
school boards are not backed up by reception mentors and regular teachers, 
others are supported by the board and the reception mentor but not by the 
regular teachers, etc. This indicates that school micro-politics result in 
various possible coalitions between school actors (mentors, boards, regular 
teachers) concerning reception issues and this, in turn, determines the 
relevance of discretional practices. Interestingly, we observe that the two 
strategies that seem to enjoy the most consensual support from all the 
school actors are parallel reception and its twin sister, tracked transfer. 
I will come back to this later.
6.2.2 Predominant types of discretion

Although the cases resemble each other in the two main types of discretion applied in educational reception (coping and ethical), they differ with respect to how extended each of these forms of discretion is. In Barcelona coping discretion prevails, while in Rotterdam ethical discretion appears more frequently. This suggests that each of the local cases presents a combination of conditions that is more fitted to the development of one of these two types of discretion. At the end of this chapter we will discuss what these conditions are.

6.2.3 Reception styles

The dissimilar mechanisms of discretion that prevail in each case shape the reception style of schools in divergent directions. On the one hand, we see that in Barcelona, a pragmatic style predominates which pursues minimalistic goals, focuses on language training only, and applies semi-integrated structures of reception (with varying degrees of curriculum adaptation for the newcomers). On the other hand, in Rotterdam, school practices constitute a compensatory style, broader in its goals and instruments – including other subjects besides language in the training programme – and complying with the official model of parallel reception. However, given increasing similarities in work constraints, both cases tend to converge towards the instrumental language training pole.
In Figure 6 we can see a diagram representing the reception style of the schools studied. Each school's position is represented by the cross of two dimensions of the style, e.g., the organisational structure and the goals of reception. The first dimension is represented by the vertical axis of the diagram, with positions ranging between parallel and integrated reception. Reception goals are represented by the horizontal axis, which ranges from the fostering of socio-economic equal opportunities (instrumental goal) to pure language training as a goal in itself (intrinsic goal). Schools situated close to the first pole apply broad integration schemes, with a variety of subjects, and tend to view language teaching as a means to foster integration of newcomers in the educational system. Schools close to the second pole tend on their part to see (Dutch/Catalan) language teaching as an integration goal in itself. Moreover, language teaching as an instrumental goal for equality tends to put more emphasis on teaching ‘cognitive academic language proficiency’ (CALP), while language teaching as an intrinsic goal is more limited to ‘basic interpersonal communicative skills’ (BICS) (Cummins 1989, Cummins & Swain 1986).

In Rotterdam, the discretional practices of schools tend to consolidate the emphasis on socio-economic integration as established in the official goals. Schools' adaptations of policy goals and instruments often set out to improve students' opportunities for socio-economic integration. In practice, Dutch meritocratic values mediate this equal-opportunities goal. So we observe that the work of reception is more diversified in practice than in theory (policy), as it applies the selective logic of post-compulsory secondary educa-
tion. Rotterdam’s municipal regulations for reception introduced different tracks (treatment) for students on the basis of their skill-levels, and the STER informal policy applied this same principle in its teaching methodology. Initiatives undertaken by reception schools to extend the reception trajectories of highly-skilled pupils are consistent with this way of framing issues.

In Barcelona, the official discourse of the TAE was that of compensation via assimilation, i.e., compensating for the language disadvantages of newcomers by teaching them Catalan. In principle, Catalan was understood as an instrument to enhance not only newcomers’ socio-economic opportunities but also their acculturation; in practice, since it signals cultural adaptation of newcomers to the Catalan culture, Catalan language becomes also a policy goal in itself. TAE practices diverged from official policies and differed from one school to the next, but the official choices in terms of cultural adaptation, social integration with peers, and socio-economic equality were not contested in general. Nowadays, the official discourse of the LIC programme in Barcelona combines multiculturalism and equal opportunities. In practice, assimilation prevails: multiculturalism becomes window dressing, and the principle of equal opportunities is once again pursued as a secondary goal. Compensation is still pursued, however, by balancing the level of Catalan. Thus, variations between schools can be best represented along the axes of goals (instrumental vs. intrinsic) and instruments (separated reception vs. social integration) of reception.

The weak position of reception bureaucrats within the LIC school structure produces a pragmatic reception style which limits the effectiveness of reception education. Discretional practices – by mentors and teachers of reception classes, and by regular teachers when newcomers attend their classes – in Barcelona tend to correspond to a coping logic in which each actor seeks the best for immigrant pupils within the most convenient situation for themselves. Apparently, this translates nowadays into a tendency towards emphasising intrinsic language goals within integrated (mixed) structures of reception (Q4, in Figure 6), as the findings of the survey of reception schools in the city indicates (see Table 28). However, as suggested above, if we also count the schools that use tracking structures, what actually prevails is intrinsic language goals with parallel structures (Q2). Thus, the three schools investigated (Tapies, Dalí and Gaudí) follow the general tendency verified in the survey and occupy similar positions in the diagram (Q2, Figure 6).12

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12 Strictly considering its reception structures Gaudí school is situated in Q4; however, if we take into account its flexible groupings which function as ‘parallel structures in the shadow’, Gaudí is actually situated in Q2.
At present, a tendency towards reducing the curriculum to the teaching of Dutch (closer to the intrinsic language teaching pole) within parallel reception structures is discernible in Rotterdam (Q2 in Figure 6). The impact of introducing market standards of efficiency in education exerts a contrary influence on the predominant style of school reception and its emphasis on equal opportunities. Schools in Rotterdam face a trade-off between their equality goals (promoting the socio-economic integration of newcomers) and their efficiency goals (schools as economic actors). As a reaction to constraints in their available resources, schools' (and reception departments') discretionary practices currently tend to undermine the informal reception goals stated in the STER programme (particularly regarding the broad range of subjects in reception training). Schools make creative efforts to counterbalance this watering down of their reception objectives, which results in a curriculum that is less diversified but not less intense (in terms of hours). As we have seen, schools with a strong position in the local field of reception are better able to resist the consequences that cutbacks might have for their educational ideals (e.g. Rembrandt school, located in Q1 of Figure 6). Which is to say that the schools in a weaker position tend towards a reception trajectory which provides language training in Dutch and often reduces the teaching of content subjects to merely providing specialised vocabulary related to those areas of knowledge (e.g. Vermeer school in Q2).

This shows the present motivations of coping practices in Rotterdam. Divergent practices that challenge official policy try to counter the impact of the commodification of education on the equality of opportunities (saving practices), and incorporate a logic of compensation within the general ideology of meritocracy (additional schemes for the highly-skilled). The core of the current official policy, its segregated character and its assimilative character (due to the priority given to teaching Dutch in opposition to mother tongues) remain unchallenged by school practices.

6.3 Explaining gaps: Discretionary practices in Barcelona and Rotterdam

Up to this point, this chapter has compared, analysed and ordered the empirical material presented in previous chapters. After systematically comparing the cases and discussing the specificities of the Barcelona and Rotterdam gaps, we will move on to the explanatory part of the chapter.

Reception schools in Rotterdam and Barcelona present an array of reception practices which deviate from official policy. Schools in both cases
Educational Reception in Rotterdam and Barcelona

develop discretion in practices either as a reaction to material or organizational constraints (coping discretion) or to close the gap between ideological values and real outcomes (ethical discretion). Below follows a description of each of these mechanisms of discretion. Besides these two main mechanisms of discretion, schools apply one of three possible strategies which make practices either remain at a lower level of aggregation, become collective strategies or even trespass the school level and seize the most convenient venues for discretion in practices in order to fulfil their interests.

However, as we have seen, in each city either the first or the second of these motivations for discretion predominates (coping or ethical). Different degrees of institutionalisation and of collective action also prevail in each of the two cases. How can we explain why some mechanisms and/or strategies are more common in one city than the other? In order to understand the relative resemblance or difference between discretion in practices in Barcelona and Rotterdam, we need to put into perspective the application of these mechanisms and strategies in each local context.

My basic argument is that different contexts with specific institutional arrangements favour different motivations for discretion and the development of different strategies. Each context comprises a set of ‘contextual factors’ that simultaneously entails conditions of possibility and constraints. Discretion in practices are the result of the interaction between mechanisms/strategies and contextual factors. By ‘contextual factors’ I mean the institutional arrangements of the reception field (ideology, actors/policymaking dynamics, degree of consolidation of the field), the specific characteristics of the programme of reception (material and organisational resources, enforcement mechanisms and autonomy of the reception staff), and the characteristics of the demand. The contextual conditionings of each case study facilitate the application of the various mechanisms and strategies to differing extents.

Distinct configurations of institutional arrangements encourage different practices. The contexts mediate not only how agents perceive the problems (organisational patterns as constraints or possibilities and the interpretation of dilemmas), but also the solutions they come up with. Each case shows a specific configuration of elements that serves as a trigger, pushing actors to adopt coping strategies or else opening the way for ethical ones. This is why the discretion in practices in Barcelona are mainly coping in nature, while in Rotterdam ethical practices have more relevance.

All of this means that the main differences between the two cases can be associated with specific fields of reception (or local configurations of institutional arrangements). We need to understand such a field as the
direct framework of reference that practitioners use for their action. Broader institutional arrangements are only considered as they are conveyed through that frame of action.

6.3.1 Motivations and mechanisms of discretion

Coping discretion
As the existing literature (Lipsky 1980, Woods 1994, Hargreaves 1984, Van der Leun 2003) describes, the drive to cope with working conditions appears in the schools studied as a central motive to discretionally modify the reception policy. School practices that adapt formal policies in order to improve or ameliorate difficult working conditions are present in both local cases. These practices reflect what I label ‘coping discretion’, as practitioners use discretion motivated by their need to cope with structural constraints on their jobs. Consequently, the main drive behind its use is the attempt to ensure better working conditions for the school workers involved in reception.

The coping drive corresponds to a specific coping mechanism that works as follows: compelling material and organisational constraints generate certain dilemmas of action for practitioners, often in the form of trade-offs. For instance, in Barcelona under the LIC, reception mentors have to choose between keeping reception classrooms overcrowded or transferring students who are not yet fully prepared for regular education. New students arrive throughout the school year and the school does not hire more teachers to accommodate the increasing demand. These and similar dilemmas trigger a coping response, i.e., reception bureaucrats and schools adjust reception programmes in a pragmatic way. This means that the official objectives of reception become secondary to organisational priorities, and practitioners’
driving motivation is achieving acceptable working conditions. This can be understood also as a personal drive to ‘minimize the danger and discomfort of the job and maximize income and personal gratification’ (Lipsky 1980: 18). The coping strategy does not, however, mean simply ignoring considerations about the educational opportunities of students, as we will see.

Dilemmas normally take the form of a conflict between ideal and actual work conditions. Frequently, such conflict involves inconsistencies between ambitious ends and meagre means. Other dilemmas involve ambiguities between norms and regulations, as in the case of schools in Rotterdam that face the contradiction of having to accept undocumented students (required by the right of minors to education) and not being able to formally declare them part of their reception programme and thus not receiving subsidies for them (as national regulation excludes undocumented students from the policy target). Practice is trapped in a prisoner’s dilemma in which means and ends are irreconcilable and the only way out for practitioners is a compromise in order to achieve the ‘least bad outcome’.13 When practitioners work under conditions that overload them or subject them to psychological pressure, discretion is normally put to the service of improving bureaucrats’ quality of work.

The coping response entails the agent tipping the balance to favour his or her pragmatic interest in ensuring feasible, acceptable (tolerable) working conditions. In order to proceed in his or her work, the practitioner must make a situationally-based judgement. The practitioner needs to find a compromise between what is desirable (acceptable work conditions and reception ideals) and what is possible (available resources and given organisational constraints). One example is how a mentor at the Gaudí school (Barcelona) made the decision to transfer some pupils to regular education earlier in order to make room for new ones in the reception programme; in her choice she sought the best compromise within the given circumstances. Another example is the decision of Vermeer school (Rotterdam) to adapt to budget constraints by firing teachers or reducing the number of academic subjects.

Often the trade-off between ideal working conditions and given realities (resources, organisational constraints) implies a parallel trade-off between acceptable working conditions and policy goals. For instance, mentors in

13 A definition of this pragmatic solution is to be found in Thomas More, 1516, book I, p. 28. In his dialogue with Hythloday, More says: ‘You ought rather to cast about and to manage things with all the dexterity in your power, so that if you are not able to make them go well they may be as little ill as possible.’
Barcelona transferring students to make room for new ones acknowledged that the ideal goal was to offer them a longer reception training period; however, keeping them in the programme would entail an impossible, unfeasible situation for the teacher (large, heterogeneous group of newcomers). These practices modify the policymakers’ original intentions or procedures and adapt them to practitioner’s expectations, values and ideals of what working in a school reception programme should be. In fact, by choosing the pragmatic option, policy goals are watered-down.

Illustrations of this process at the individual teacher level appear in both local case studies, although the situation is more intense and frequent in Barcelona. A typical example refers to teachers’ efforts to give selective attention to students, which for the reception teachers of the Dalí or Gaudí schools in Barcelona was a real struggle. A similar dynamic takes place in Rotterdam’s Vermeer school, when students do autonomous assignments in big multi-level/multi-age groups and teachers must distribute their time to assist them. At the collective level, examples of school strategies triggered by this motivation appear both in Rotterdam and in Barcelona. In Barcelona the logic of coping is at work in the practices related to students’ registration and transfer, modification of the curriculum, and scheduling (reduction of the duration and the weekly hours of reception training) (see Table 28). In Rotterdam, reducing academic subjects in the reception curriculum responds to a coping intention.

The coping motivation is clearly manifested in two discourses. The ‘conservative discourse’ appears very bluntly among teachers of ordinary education in Barcelona, and to a lesser extent (and in a mild form) in Rotterdam. According to the conservative discourse, the goal of integrating immigrant children in the school system is extraneous to the functions of (regular) teachers. Thus, this ‘additional’ function must be externalised to other professionals who can give specialised attention to this particular educational ‘anomaly’. Newcomer students are viewed as a nuisance that demands additional work on the part of teachers and compromises the quality of the teaching for the rest of the students. Since dealing with immigrant children is a ‘reception teachers’ job’, regular teachers do not have ‘the moral obligation to speak Urdu or even English’, nor should they be asked to pay extra attention to immigrant children.¹⁴ Those who make use of this discourse advocate a parallel mode of reception that keeps newcomers apart from native students until the former learn the basics of the language of instruction. This discourse assumes the principle that

¹⁴ Interview with director of studies of Gaudí school (1), pp. 4-5.
student homogeneity is the ideal context for teaching, thus any element introducing heterogeneity justifies the application of coping reactions. In fact, practitioners making use of this discourse resolve the tension between educational goals (general vs. specific goals of reception) by prioritising the general ‘transmission of knowledge’ and dismissing the goal of ‘reception’ as ‘ours’.\textsuperscript{15} When taken to an extreme, this unilateral focus on general education leads to xenophobic attitudes that justify a more permanent segregation of newcomers, as well as relegating the beneficiaries of reception education to a secondary place because they arrived later, hence recognising that nationals have the priority.\textsuperscript{16}

Moreover, from the perspective of the reception coordinators and the principals, a ‘realist discourse’ emerges both in Barcelona and Rotterdam. This realist discourse accepts the role of the school in promoting equality of opportunities, but also assumes the non-attainability of ideal goals of reception. The major problem in the application of reception goals is that they have to compete with other educational goals. The realist discourse defends the notion that immigrants’ reception is ultimately a question of resource distribution. All schools have limited resources which have to be distributed among different educational goals on a zero-sum game fashion: ‘At the end, we distribute what we have among all [school] departments and reception [the department] gets something’.\textsuperscript{17} Also, teachers have to distribute their time and attention among students. Moreover, the reception classroom has to be constantly cleared of students because there are other pupils constantly arriving who also require reception. The realist discourse is used to justify all kinds of coping strategies. Advocates of this discourse are aware of the contradictions that their coping strategies imply, but they believe that they do ‘their best’ given the material and organisational deficiencies. Those who make use of this discourse in Barcelona complain about the insufficient public investment in reception and think that schools

\textsuperscript{15} ‘Ours’ refers to an implicit subject ‘We, the (regular) teachers’, as constructed against ‘the reception teachers/mentors’, who are symbolically connotated as ‘the Other’. Such discourse uses an analogy that naturalises the relationship between ‘teachers-Other’ and ‘Other-students’ (ethnically/culturally different).

\textsuperscript{16} Studies in Spain register an increase in intolerant attitudes towards immigrants. Recently, the discourse of the ‘priority of the nationals’ has become considerably widespread, as confirmed by the findings of opinion surveys and qualitative research based on focus groups and interviews (Pérez Yruela & Desrues 2006, Cea d’Ancona 2008, Cea d’Ancona & Vallés 2009). For instance, 78% of the informants in the IESA survey thought that autochthonous parents should have preference in choosing schools, before immigrant parents (Pérez Yruela & Desrues 2006).

\textsuperscript{17} Interview with director of studies of Dalí school, p. 1.
have been abandoned in reception matters. Additional means would be required to improve reception.

*Ethical discretion (or discretion based on professional ethics)*

Contrary to the predominant view in the literature, another impulse to discretionally adapt reception policy comes from the views of practitioners about the education of young immigrants. Teachers hold specific professional or personal views about the key goals of education for immigrant students and the best methods to achieve them. Individual practitioners and schools adapt reception rules to their values concerning educational goals and requirements. This includes: prioritisation (what is the goal of education? Are socio-economic or cultural goals more important?), general approach and pedagogy dealing with unequal opportunities, and teachers’ roles. While the coping motivation seeks to advance professional and personal values related to ideal working conditions, the ethical motivation generally aims to improve the educational opportunities of newcomer students. Hence, the main difference between these two motivations concerns the focus of interest of the discretional practice, whether it is the newcomer student (learning conditions) or the practitioner themselves (working conditions). Ethical and coping motivations concern both pragmatic issues and ideology as well as personal and professional values.

Although most ethical practices are prompted by the teachers’ genuine interest in improving students’ opportunities, the outcomes are not always positive. Practitioners also make negative pre-judgements about the potentials and skills of students, which may in fact function as self-fulfilling prophecies. Thus, in the analysis we must differentiate the motivation for action and its real consequences over the school career of students.18

The mechanism of ethical discretion is also triggered by a *dilemma*; or in other words, certain dilemmas motivate a discretional choice to adapt policy. Divergent practices are activated by an inconsistency between practitioners’ ideals regarding the education of immigrant students and the reality of policy. This disjuncture is, in these cases, provisionally resolved to favour practitioners’ ideals with respect to service provision (i.e., the equality of opportunities provided by reception programmes) instead of pragmatic demands for acceptable working conditions, as in the case of coping mechanisms.

18 To be clear, coping does not lead *per se* to negative outcomes and ethical to positive ones, although the consequences of coping are more often restrictive of rights and opportunities.
Sometimes the practitioner considers that the legitimate goal of providing equal opportunities for newcomer students clashes in fundamental ways with the officially stated goals of the reception programme. This represents a mismatch between the visions of school personnel and those of policymakers regarding social justice and the equality of educational opportunities. For instance, reception-programme workers in Rotterdam consider it unfair that undocumented or Antillean students are excluded from the target group as described by the official policy, and are therefore not formally entitled to reception training. Likewise, we have seen that a minority of teachers in Barcelona believe that really improving the educational opportunities of immigrant pupils requires teaching them the curriculum for compulsory secondary education (ESO) rather than mainly teaching the Catalan language.

At other times, what school workers question is not so much the official goals but rather the methods provided for achieving them or for implementing policy. For example, reception mentors in the Barcelona TAE programme perceive that the nine-month reception training prescribed by policy is insufficient for some pupils to reach the targeted minimum level of Catalan. In fact, school staff from both the TAE and LIC programmes in Barcelona questioned the sincerity of policymakers’ intentions, given the scant resources and inadequate implementation arrangements allocated for fulfilling the stated goals.

The commitment of the agent in question is crucial for triggering the ethical response. I define commitment as the self-perception that educators have of themselves as active agents who are socially responsible for children’s education. This may also entail a commitment to the achievement of social justice and equality through education. At a collective level, the ethical dilemma concerns the school and its role regarding those public policies aimed at compensating educational disadvantages. Some workers experience this as a moral obligation, like an informant in Barcelona who described her choice of undertaking a costly, work-intensive procedure of individualised reception as ‘a matter of conscience’: it was the best that she could do for students because ‘otherwise they would have only attended the reception class four hours a week’. Some experience this commitment as a political response: those educators with a progressive political or pedagogical vision often see themselves as active participants in the production of educational (and socio-economic) opportunities for students. In any case, whether it is a moral or a political issue, commitment is a structural

19 Interview with reception mentor in Gaudí school, p. 3.
property, partly shaped by the prevailing ideology of the social context in which the practitioner is embedded and socialised.

Clashes of values can be explained by the fact that individuals belong to multiple and diverse fields of practice, each of them with their own ideological/cultural values and *habitus* (Bourdieu 1993, Emirbayer & Johnson 2008). Societies are amalgams of subsystems and intertwined layers with different or even competing logics. Institutional arrangements within the same society normally present a diversity of values, a phenomenon which can be found across sectors, territorial units (regions, cities) and organisations. This implies that as teachers are social and political actors who belong simultaneously and successively to different socio-political spheres, the values that they hold correspond to different subsystems and sometimes collide with each other, leading to dilemmas of action. Furthermore, fields of practice are for their part embedded within diverse institutional arrangements, and as a consequence tensions between conflicting principles are intrinsic to them. Even within the same field there may be contradictory values in successive historical moments: practitioners may experience a clash between deeply accepted values and new policies. The multilayered and pluralist nature of contemporary societies is not the only source of inconsistency. Institutional pluralism implies that one single principle can have several institutional realisations (Bader & Engelen 2003) therefore there is not an exact fit between normative principles and concrete institutions. The meaning of basic values such as educational equality of opportunities – which in general terms is supported by all programmes of reception considered here – ultimately has to be interpreted within its specific institutional translations in each context.

In the case of Barcelona, competing educational ideologies coexist (i.e. progressive vs. conservative, nationalist vs. non-nationalist), dating from the origins of the democratic system of education. Here we should mention the presence of strong teachers’ movements (such as the ‘Rosa Sensat’ association), which promote progressive education and enjoy broad support among teachers. Practitioners and schools with this view may experience a tension between their preferences and the conservative style of the educational authorities (until 2003). Progressive teachers likewise clash with some old-fashioned teachers from the former BUP secondary education system, who try to protect their prerogatives and are very unwilling to cooperate with reception tasks.

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20 In the previous education model, BUP was the academic track of post-compulsory secondary education, starting after primary education at age fifteen and leading to university. See footnote 204.
In Rotterdam, the source of the ideological conflict that feeds ethical practices has to do with the vision of reception and of equal opportunity that underlies official policy nowadays. Schools still rely on the principles and spirit of the policy as it was formulated in the 1980s, when it was a more comprehensive programme with a clear compensatory intention aimed at improving the educational opportunities of newcomers both in the socio-economic and cultural sense. Two examples in which this conflict is made explicit are the differentiation of trajectories for different student profiles and the attempts to keep a diversified reception curriculum instead of giving in to political tendencies that favour a minimalistic, language-focused training programme. A second source of divergence in Rotterdam is the contradiction between the philosophy of the reception programmes (compensation) and the ideology that dominates general education (selectivity). Practitioners solve these inconsistencies by adapting reception to the general philosophy of education prevailing in the Netherlands. They do this, for example, by developing arrangements to extend the duration of the reception trajectory for highly-skilled students. Although the original spirit of the policy held that reception courses must be adapted to the different types (tracks) of education (Beleidsplan culturele minderheden in het onderwijs, 1981: 8), present financial provisions cover an equal duration of the programme (one year) for all students regardless of the education track to which they are expected to transfer. A subsidised time-span which is the same for all students corresponds to an ideology of equality in the application of compensatory teaching; unequal duration of the trajectories, on the other hand, implies a logic of selectivity which considers it fair to treat students differently according to their capabilities. Thus we can deduce that reception actors exercise a ‘selective’ approach to their duties.

In fact, the pragmatic concerns of practitioners go hand in hand with concerns that derive from their ideology or values. This means that in reality, the ethical mechanism does normally appear in combination with and is reinforced by the coping mechanism. An example of this is Rotterdam’s extension of the policy target. The broadening of the actual reach of the ISK policy in Rotterdam to other categories of students has been interpreted here as an example of ethical practice. The explicit motivation behind it – as registered in practitioners’ discourse – is the need for Antillean students to improve their Dutch. This also relates to a basic belief in the right of any newcomer student to receive reception training in order to bring their knowledge of Dutch and content subjects up to the level of their peers. Furthermore, schools have openly pleaded for the inclusion of those categories of students that are left out by the policy. However,
schools also have budgetary interests in enlarging the official target group, since unsubsidised students are costly for the schools. Besides, for public-run schools – like Vermeer and Rembrandt – which are obliged to accept all students, the most convenient option for regular teachers is to place newcomers in the reception programme. This double interest (practical and ideological), acknowledged by informants, indicates that in this case, the coping and the ethical character of school adaptations go hand in hand.

The ethical motivation corresponds to an idealist discourse, best represented by reception teachers, and by some regular teachers and managers. The *idealist discourse* defends the goal of equality of opportunities for immigrant children. Advocates of this discourse consider that it is possible and desirable to commit further to this goal. This implies coming up with additional resources from the school and from teachers’ own resources. However, it also requires being creative and innovative with the adopted measures. Fostering equality also means questioning the curriculum for newcomer pupils and seeking the most useful means to learn. In Barcelona, some supporters of this discourse emphasise the importance of learning Catalan, while others defend the need to diversify the curricula taught to newcomers by including content subjects and not so much (the Catalan) language (‘What these students need is to pass ESO...; ‘What they need is to obtain their school certificate!’).

This discourse justifies policy modification in order to improve the educational opportunities of newcomer students. However, since there are several routes to reach this goal, the discourse splits into several sub-variants. In Rotterdam we find a *‘selective discourse’* that introduces meritocratic principles within compensation policies. According to this discourse, newcomers must receive special treatment in order to allow them to reach the educational track that corresponds to their innate skills. High potential students deserve more attention, as it is more difficult for them to reach the right place (because they have to climb higher). Similarly, the *double-equity discourse* expressed in Barcelona assumes that schools have to facilitate the integration of immigrant students without damaging the educational opportunities of other students. This means that the school’s goal is to improve the life-chances of all students with particular arrears, and not to focus only on those with the most difficulties. As resources are limited, this goal implies a zero-sum game in which teachers have to

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21 Excerpts from interviews with the reception mentor and the director of studies at Gaudí.
22 Interviews with reception coordinators at Vermeer and Rembrandt, and with CED-adviser M. Zweekhorst.
distribute their time and attention. The measures which schools choose to adopt have to balance the support given to different categories of students, both immigrant and working-class native, both those who need help to obtain a basic degree and those who can obtain a better degree (‘We have to help the diversity from below without hindering the diversity from above’). Therefore, advocates of this discourse understand that the teacher’s duty sometimes involves helping disadvantaged students reach minimum standards, while at other times it consists of helping them reach the maximum level. Tracking and flexible tracking are defended as measures that help ‘protect’ the opportunities of those at an intermediate level (‘who are too good for vocational training, but not good enough for university’), who are considered a particular target group.23

6.3.2 Strategies or levels of discretionary action

Fragmented/isolated action

In some of the schools observed, discretionary practices remain at the lowest level of aggregation, basically as individual strategies carried out by reception teachers and mentors. These practitioners develop their reception functions in a hostile or indifferent organisational context that does not allow them to find support among other colleagues in order to discretional adapt the reception programme. This is clearly the case in the TAE programme in Barcelona, which scatters its workers into TAE classrooms that are located in ordinary schools, but are formally disconnected from those schools. Also, we observed that fragmented action prevails in the LIC Gaudí school (Barcelona), particularly in the early arrangements for reception.

At this individual level of action, practitioners have at their disposal two of the potential channels of discretion identified in chapter 2. The first alternative is to exercise the formal autonomy granted to them to interpret the policy within the given limits (granted discretion). For instance, mentor teachers in the TAE classrooms in Barcelona simply exerted their responsibilities vis-à-vis the curriculum when they adapted the teaching contents to the degree of advancement of each student.

However, reception teachers have limited formal autonomy. Thus, in order to advance goals other than the official ones, individual practitioners also use the gaps and loopholes in the system in order to introduce

23 Interview with director of studies at Gaudí school (I), pp. 4-5. For a reference to these practices, see chapter 5.
either coping or ethical modifications (*taken* discretion). As we have seen, practitioners face a broad array of rules and regulations that often contradict each other. School practitioners take advantage of the leeway created by ambiguity, confusion or omission of the rules to develop coping strategies. Here the coping and ethical drives are not necessarily expressed in direct opposition to the formal policies, but rather by means of ‘incorporation’ (Osborn & Broadfoot 1992) or ‘appropriation’ strategies (Woods 1994). This means that teachers take on the policy and appropriate it in such a way that it addresses their own concerns. This implies sometimes using ‘radicalised versions’ of widely accepted norms and principles (Bader & Engelen 2003).

Collective engagement at a school level
The potential dilemmas that working conditions pose for reception teachers are many and are not easy to resolve. Reception practitioners can apply individual discrentional strategies as a response to those riddles, but the impact of these individual practices on the classroom is limited. As a consequence, reception practitioners in both cities tend to engage in activities that allow them to enhance their levels of autonomy and discretion. Schools also want freedom to respond directly to reception challenges, especially because newcomers’ education has repercussions for the rest of the school. Although individual teachers may contradict school policies, the school as a whole seems to function as the main catalyst of discrentional practices. In this process, school discrentional practices become more than a mere aggregation or combination of individual practices, resulting in the particular discrentional strategies employed by the school with respect to policies designed at a higher level.

Elevating discretion to the school level can also create distinct conditions for the exercise of discretion. We have seen before that under working conditions which impose many limits on practitioners’ activity, survival strategies prevail. When pressure is relieved, practitioners can use discretion in a creative way in order to further their ideals of equality. Finding more convenient institutional venues – such as the school – can open the door for professionals to use discretion not so much as a protective and pragmatic mechanism, but rather as a form of advocacy or defence of specific educational ideals and values.

As observed in the case of Barcelona, in organisational environments that tend to isolate reception practitioners, the degree and direction of collective discretion depends on internal school micro-politics. In Barcelona’s hostile environment, the development of a strong reception coalition within the school ensures a collective, coordinated, and coherent reception strategy.
The more successful a reception mentor is in building a pro-reception coalition within the school, the more discretional strategies will be developed at a collective level (be it at the level of the reception department or the school).

In Rotterdam, the dilemmas that prompt discretional reactions clearly find solutions which are more satisfactory for reception practitioners when undertaken at a collective level. The extension of the target, including categories of students not covered by public subsidies, can only be systematically applied as a collective strategy if the school as a whole assumes the costs involved. As we have seen, the schools in Rotterdam offer reception training to unsubsidised categories of newcomer students (Antillean students or undocumented students) and accept that the reception department has a deficit in this regard, trying to compensate for that deficit through other means.24

As school practices require more collective organisation, they necessarily require a higher degree of awareness (and reflexivity) on the part of practitioners. Likewise, open political opposition to policy and to the decisions made by higher ranks of civil servants is more visible in collective arrangements at a school level or higher. We observed above, for example, that Tapies school does not admit some newcomer students when there are no vacancies in their reception classrooms, putting them on a waiting list as a way to pressure the authorities to provide resources for an additional classroom.

The consequences of collective organisation are particularly important for the exercise of ethical practices. Again, the exercise of ethical strategies is not merely a matter of commitment at an individual or school level; it also depends on the existence of favourable institutional venues. Certain dilemmas confront the practitioner with his or her own responsibility as an educator, requiring an active response according to his or her commitment to equality. However, the institutional channels available determine to a great extent the final response (equality-enacting or not), particularly when it comes to formulating collective solutions at the school level. Institutional channels may protect goals of equality from competing objectives within the school, as in the case of Rotterdam’s independent reception departments, or else channels may leave the treatment of newcomers in the individual hands of tutors working in the reception programmes. Ethical practices are often the result of collective action that bends the existing institutional channels to provide greater guarantees to students.

24 Interview with vice-principal of Rembrandt school.
**Venue-shopping: Moving upwards in the decision-making ladder**

Reception-programme schools and staff in Barcelona and Rotterdam actively engage in lobbying activities, identifying the most convenient institutional decision-making venues in which to defend their interests and preferences. This strategy has been labeled ‘venue-shopping’ in the literature (Baumgartner & Jones 1993; Guiraudon 2000) because actors seek the venues that are more beneficial for them, understanding that ‘the rules that guide each political arena favor different kinds of actors as they require different resources and call for different strategies’ (Immergut 1992 in Guiraudon 2000: 258). My study shows that in the two local cases under scrutiny, schools used strategies of venue-shopping to deal with the dilemmas of reception better. Partially as a result of this, we can appreciate a considerable increase in the decision-making ability of schools (in both cities) in matters relating to reception, which the schools use discretionally to adapt policies. Also as a result of the venue-shopping strategy, some discreitional practices that contradict formal policy in important ways have acquired a collective, institutionalised character at the school level.

Practitioners try to use the institutional venue that best serves their goals and preferences, in which the balance of forces is tipped in their favour. Venue-shopping by hands-on participants in the educational programmes does not necessarily entail attempts on their part to obtain more autonomy or decision-making power; sometimes, in fact, it may be more convenient for them to push for greater regulation and devolve some responsibilities to a higher level. In particular, the cases studied show that practitioners prefer to keep decision-making at the school level for financial and organisational issues (e.g. clustering students, schedule-making), but in the definition of the curriculum and teaching methodology, they prefer regulation and guidelines to come from higher levels. The standardisation of the curriculum has several advantages, such as making teaching materials available so that teachers do not have to develop them on their own, or facilitating the mobility of students between schools and types of education. This is why schools in Rotterdam strongly supported the STER programme. Otherwise, for organisational issues (enrolment, transfer and clustering of newcomer students), schools or certain school sections seem to be the most convenient venues in the opinion of reception-programme personnel. This impels concerned personnel to seek solutions at the school level, rather than leaving these matters to the discretion of individual teachers.

The venue-shopping strategy has coincided with other political shifts in each city’s system towards the devolution of more responsibilities to schools. A necessary condition for such a strategy is that practitioners have access
to higher venues, but this access can come as the result of being formally granted autonomy (from above) or else of taking it via bottom-up struggles. Both in Rotterdam and in Barcelona there are examples of bottom-up initiatives on the part of schools, which either result in the empowerment of schools or in the inclusion of their interests on the political agenda. Schools in Barcelona and Rotterdam tend to use their formal autonomy in a discretionary manner, sometimes overtly opposing the official boundaries established by the reception programme.

In Rotterdam, schools have engaged in venue-shopping strategies from early in the history of newcomers’ education. In the 1970s, those schools that opened reception classrooms organised a national federation with the aim of elevating the issue from the school level to the national political level. This search for regulation and funding was initiated by the schools themselves, on the basis of their own interests. Later on, in the 1980s, schools considered that decision-making about some dimensions of newcomers’ education (curriculum and teaching methodology) should be elevated from the school level to the municipal level. As a result, the four reception schools and the municipal department supported a standardisation of curricula and teaching methods among all schools (STER programme). But not all efforts have been in favour of more regulation and centralisation of policies; schools have retained considerable autonomy in financial and organisational issues. In particular, they have used this autonomy to concentrate (segregate) newcomer students within the school, a strategy favoured by regular teachers but which produced the unintended consequence of lending disproportionate power to reception-programme teachers.25

In Barcelona, venue-shopping efforts by schools date back to the approval of the TAE reception scheme in the mid-1980s. A few schools like Tapies, with extraordinary numbers of immigrant students, demanded permission to create a reception classroom within their school (instead of sending their newcomers to a classroom in the area). Essentially, this was a demand for more school autonomy in order to regulate the issue internally. Since 2003, the LIC programme has devolved some decision-making from the regional level to the school level. Schools can now, for instance, transfer their newcomer students from reception education to regular classrooms at will, and cluster them in the way they find most convenient. For tutors

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25 Reception teachers/departments in Rotterdam are more influential than those in Barcelona. Yet, they are scarcely influential at all if compared to other departments within Rotterdam schools: the fieldwork confirms that reception priorities are not strongly backed by the general board of governors.
in the reception programme this can mean better solutions to some of the inconsistencies in their work, elevating the issue from the isolated venue of the classroom to the more empowered one of the school. For a reception mentor in charge of an overcrowded reception classroom, it is very convenient that the decision to move some of the students earlier to regular classes depends solely on the school board\textsuperscript{26} and not on higher levels of the school system. However, in other cases, elevating the issue to the school level has meant disempowering mentors. The outcome of each shift for reception mentors depends on the school politics and the support that the reception programme receives within each particular school.

6.3.3 The local fields of educational reception: Mechanisms and strategies at work in the local contexts

\textit{Rotterdam}

The specific configuration of elements that make up the field of reception education in Rotterdam accounts for a limited presence of discretional strategies on the part of schools, among which the most notable are highly institutionalised ethical practices. The present configuration needs to be understood as a product of past historical processes shaping the field in both its structural and ideological dimensions. In the period between 2004 and 2006, the field in Rotterdam reached a stable, consolidated state, with well-established procedures in a context of decreasing demand. This stable phase is the product of a path-dependent process in which early choices have been reinforced by various sources of institutional ‘positive feedback’. This consolidation of policy is clearly reflected in the presence of fewer discretional practices and the strong institutionalisation of those that do exist. Some of these discretional practices have a clearly path-dependent character which can be traced to the original intentions of policy back in the 1980s.

In the Netherlands, the educational reception programme was built following a bottom-up process (see chapter 3). The initiative was originally taken by urban schools with high concentrations of newcomer students. Subsequently, the form and content that the official programme of reception eventually adopted was a direct translation of the measures that schools had pioneered prior to the existence of public policy on the issue. Such a pattern

\textsuperscript{26} Reception mentors have significant influence in this decision-making process. The mentor proposes that certain students be transferred and this is discussed in the school’s faculty meeting. Proposals are normally accepted.
of policymaking suited the interests of national policymakers back in the 1970s, when they were still reluctant to acknowledge immigration issues as a policy problem for the Netherlands. This probably helped keep the issue low-profile, allowing schools to maintain their own in-house pragmatic choices regardless of broader ideological or political connotations. Subsequent policy developments in Rotterdam followed the same bottom-up pattern and reinforced early policy choices. In 1993 the co-operation between the municipal Department of Education and the four schools providing reception education allowed for the creation of an informal municipal policy (the STER programme) that introduced a curriculum and methodological standards. The existence of such a programme, agreed upon by consensus and reflecting practitioners’ preferences, accounts for the high degree to which reception-programme staff identify with it, which in turn explains high levels of compliance.

Paradoxically, in parallel to this bottom-up development, the right of foreign children to be educated in their mother tongue was the topic of heated debate in political and academic circles (Lucassen & Köbben 1992). In the mid-1970s, the general opinion on this issue shifted from the assimilationist paradigm to the integrationist paradigm advocating the right to keep one’s own culture and the need for bi-lingual education. While in the 1950s and 1960s the first reception programmes for children of repatriates from the former Dutch Indies consisted in assimilating them into the Dutch language and culture, the massive arrival of Surinamese and Antillean children in 1974-75, along with guest workers’ children, was received with a very different spirit. Within this framework, some schools were already piloting mother-tongue courses by the end of the 1970s.

Nevertheless, the attention given to mother-tonguelanguages and bi-lingual education was not detrimental for the reception programmes that schools had set up to teach Dutch to immigrant students. On the contrary, early reception policy was reinforced thanks to its convergence with the broader institutional net of education. Bilingual education (OALT) was only relegated to a marginal place in the 1980 policy document ‘Cultural minorities in education’ (Beleidsplan culturele minderheden in het onderwijs 1981), which placed the emphasis on a general compensatory policy for children of low socio-economic status (Lucassen & Köbben 1992). The reception programmes for newcomers fitted well with the compensatory philosophy behind the national scheme for educational opportunities and its basic strategy of infusing schools with additional resources in order to overcome educational disadvantages. At the time, the option of establishing a separate educational system for newcomers was not interpreted as a racist
or segregationist action, but rather was seen in light of Dutch institutional corporatism. Separation had a positive connotation, as reception classes were seen as homogeneous social clusters meant to temporarily empower and support their members in their future participation in mainstream society.

Considerable financial support should be acknowledged as another form of positive feedback for the ISK programme. In general terms, since schools first obtained financial support from the Ministry for reception activities in the 1980s, there has been a growing provision of funds for reception in addition to those directed to regular education. Chapter 4 described in detail the additional funds per newcomer student that schools receive. Since the early 1980s the tendency has been towards an increase in funds and a decrease in the flow of newcomer students. This provision of funds, proportional to the demand, has ensured that student/teacher ratios remain reasonably low and therefore reception classes may be taught under feasible working conditions. Adequate working conditions reduce the drive to invent coping strategies. Moreover, funding in the form of cash benefits favours an improvement in working conditions as they lend schools and reception departments considerable flexibility, permitting them to respond to their most urgent needs. In addition, the financial conditions won thanks to the schools’ mobilisations have remained quite stable over the years. This permanence of funding together with a relative continuity of the policy has opened the way for a substantial stability of school practices.

Although the relative generosity and stability of funding has served to empower schools and teachers, funding in Rotterdam also has important prescriptive effects. This particularly affects reception programmes because of the political struggle over reception, and determines where and how discretion is applied. As we have seen, funds in Rotterdam are governed by strict rules of eligibility. In particular, rules establish a distinctive target for the policy, i.e. the types of students who entitle schools to receive resources. Schools have lobbied and developed discreitional arrangements to contest the boundaries of that policy target because of the inconsistency it creates between the number of students who are formally subsidised and the number that actually sit in the classrooms. School strategies both advocate extending the subsidies to students left out of the programme, and cope with the additional costs that including those ‘outsiders’ in their classrooms entail for the school budget.

The role of the municipality in this local field has been crucial in sorting out imbalances that could be a source of tension for practitioners. This role is dual: it serves as a referee between the local partners of the policy network and also as a mediator between national policymakers.
and local practitioners. As a referee, the local authority has shaped the network of schools delivering reception training to mirror the pillarised model of equality in the national arena. According to this logic, schools from all socio-political pillars (Protestant, Catholic, public, etc.) are equally entitled to public funds for education. In Rotterdam, the entitlement to run reception schools has been granted to two boards of governors, one public (BOOR) and one Protestant-Catholic (LMC). In addition, the municipal Department of Education has been in charge of distributing public funds for reception among the schools participating in the programme, particularly since 1998, when equal opportunities policies were decentralised.²⁷ As a mediator between national and local actors, the municipality has injected additional funds to close the gap between the theoretical and the real policy target, and to cover the time lag between counting dates and the cashing of the subsidies.

Municipal intervention has managed to mitigate the gap between policy in theory and practical requirements by fulfilling the demands of school practitioners that had been disregarded by the Ministry of Education. Such intervention has contributed to the low level of conflict in the field and thus to the legitimacy of the official reception programme. The active role of the municipality in reception matters has made the local arena an attractive venue for schools. This has encouraged schools to take some of their concerns to the local administration rather than creating discretional solutions at the school level.

Rotterdam’s ISK programme consists of a parallel type of reception that separates newcomer students during their transitional training. An evident legacy of its origin, this centralised programme has been sustained by two self-reinforcing elements: its tendency to empower school practitioners and improve organisation. This full-time parallel programme keeps newcomer students more spatially concentrated than in Barcelona. The advantage of this fully separated programme is that schools can cluster newcomer students by age and time of arrival, and provide training much more suited to their levels of knowledge. Curriculum and contents can be adapted at convenience, and the reception trajectory can be longer (lasting an average of two years) and more intensive, introducing many other subjects besides language. All these conditions make for a win-win situation. Regular teachers are relieved of the additional burden of having to teach freshly arrived pupils in the same classroom as regular ones, allowing regular teaching to proceed at its own pace. At the same time, a specialised team

²⁷ As we saw in chapter 3, this role dramatically changed in 2006.
of teachers administers reception education, fitting it to the precise needs of newcomers. Newcomer students themselves have the opportunity to optimise their language skills and adapt to the Dutch education system. The low salience of the issue has given practitioners a free hand to opt for the most convenient solution according to their preferences. The flexibility schools are granted in organising reception training has prevented them from resorting (more) to informal discretional arrangements.

All these organisational advantages ultimately entail benefits in terms of enhanced decision-making power for schools. Schools have used their broad autonomy in reception issues to organise independent reception departments with their own teams of teachers, even locating them in separate buildings. This detachment of general education and reception functions was introduced to facilitate the work of both reception and regular teachers. Creating autonomous reception departments with their own budgets increased the decision-making capacity of reception practitioners. At the same time, it guarantees that the goals of reception have more weight within the school's overall agenda and thus can be protected against possible internal political struggles which would favour other priorities.

This reception scheme, which was established from the bottom-up and is well-resourced and well-organised, with ample autonomy of decision-making, has reached a mature phase of policymaking and a considerable degree of stability. This consolidated phase of the policy process, distinguished by inertia, continuity and self-reproduction of practices, can logically be linked to the small gap between policy and practice to be found in Rotterdam. In the period under study (2004-2006) reception-programme professionals in Rotterdam reached favourable working conditions in many aspects, particularly in terms of teacher/pupil ratios, but also in terms of decision-making and control over their own work. As we have seen, reception professionals in Rotterdam enjoy ample resources, stability of policy, a comfortable organisational framework for their work, and a high degree of autonomy of decision-making. The flows of newcomer youngsters are limited and gradual, without substantial peaks in the last five years, unlike the massive and constant arrival of students that schools in Barcelona have to face at present. Practitioners function in an atmosphere that is not fraught by politicisation and confrontation, and thus tend to internalise the common goals nurtured by the bottom-up origin of policy. The result of these conditions is that discretional practices happen less frequently, although when they happen, they are quite pervasive – e.g. the admission of pupils without subsidies, or longer reception courses.

Another consequence of these historical processes is that discretional practices are less often inspired by a need to cope than in Barcelona. Schools
set out more often to improve opportunities for students. The ethical mechanism is triggered when the school staff step in to defend what they consider crucial ideological points, despite the fact that ethical practices in Rotterdam sometimes entail economic penalties for schools.

On the other hand, in Rotterdam the coping mechanism is invoked as a response to cutbacks and top-down policy changes implying material constraints (either by the national administration or by the school board). Violating the informal STER policy does not have an economic consequence for schools, so it is an easier decision for them to make, despite the fact that schools still support the ideological principles behind STER. When cutbacks are imposed, softly regulated informal policy rules are the first to be abandoned. Schools are more reluctant to modify policies that contradict their ideological priorities when this choice would require costly deviant practices. In this sense, schools in Rotterdam confront strongly sanctioned official norms (such as those regulating the official conditions for funding) and accept the economic penalties when essential path-dependent ideological principles are jeopardised. Otherwise, schools prefer to comply with the financial conditions of policies.

In sum, schools in Rotterdam contradict informal procedures to adapt to reductions in the resources available (i.e. efficient behaviour) and contradict official regulations when these contradict the schools’ own views regarding their reception duties, regardless of the price (non-economic behaviour). Schools do not always respond to policy sanctions in a purely rational way but rather in a rationally-bounded way. Coping practices seem to be efficient and correspond to a rational-economic calculus, but ethical practices are rationally-bounded and may contradict economic logic when this is deemed necessary.

Costly expansionist strategies and cost-efficient restrictive ones may be read as complementary. Strategies to reduce the number of subjects and to include non-target students in reception classes should not be taken as isolated units within which a rational calculus is applied, but rather should be understood within the context of the general state of accounts as a sort of soft budgeting (Petmesidou 1996). Schools in Rotterdam belong to large educational companies with diverse branches, offering different types of education. The final state of accounts is the aggregation of the accounts of

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28 The concepts of soft budgeting and resource pooling refer to certain practices of accounting within families and households according to which each member of a domestic unit recognises that although he or she may spend more than what they contribute, some other member will be able to cover the financial deficit produced (Petmesidou 1996).
each department; therefore financially healthy ones can cover the deficits of others. Perhaps on a smaller scale, the same logic is applicable. Reception departments can afford costly advocatory practices such as extending the trajectory of highly-skilled students by saving in other ways, such as by applying cost-efficient coping strategies (e.g. reducing the number of teachers).

A last consequence of the stability and cohesion of this system is the fact that deviant practices do not challenge the system, but rather push to further its ideological premises. As we saw in chapter 4, practical variations between schools in Rotterdam can be explained to a great extent by the variations in the profiles of students attending them. The discrentional practice of extending the reception trajectory of highly-skilled students beyond average limits responds to the logic that I have called ‘meritocratic reception’. That logic conveys the ‘selective’ philosophy of the Dutch system according to which different participants deserve different treatment, as a function of their abilities. Since selective-differentialist values are path-dependent in character, a question arises about the meaning of ethical practices in Rotterdam, whether they should be understood as a means to change or to reproduce the existing system. Which is the ultimate motivation of reception programme workers when they choose a discrentional course of action: conscious ethics, or mere inertia and reiteration of routinised action?

**Barcelona**

The specific configuration of elements that make up the field of reception-education in Barcelona under the LIC scheme accounts for generalised discrentional strategies of schools, with a predominance of coping practices. Prior to 2003 under the TAE programme, the configuration of the field was different, and this corresponded to the generalised discrentional strategies of individual practitioners, with more room for ethical practices. Although Barcelona already began to develop reception policies in the 1980s, the field is at present very unstable, with growing demand and a changing political response. The shifting state of the policy process is clearly reflected in the broad variety of school responses and the experiments and pilot initiatives of policymakers still responding to trial and error.

In Catalonia, educational reception programmes have been elaborated in a technocratic fashion by high-level civil servants of the regional Department

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29 The flow of newcomer youngsters in Barcelona seems to be reaching its climax; last year’s figures for the first time show that fewer students arrived than in preceding years.

30 The question remains: what will policy look like when the field reaches a stable, consolidated state? In which ways will it resemble Rotterdam, and in which ways will it not?
of Education with the support of relevant experts. Both the TAE and the LIC programmes (and less significant initiatives like the PAANE programme) are the product of a top-down process. Reception measures in secondary schools assumed a reactive and defensive character following the explosive increase of newcomer students from the mid-1990s onwards. Policymakers from the department responsible for the normalisation (mainstreaming) of the Catalan language (SEDEC) took the lead in coordinating reception efforts, since the underlying assumption was that the massive arrival of immigrant pupils would represent a threat to the Catalan language and culture. However, the elaboration of policies also received some bottom-up feedback. During the TAE period a few schools were given carte blanche to experiment within certain limits; some of these pilot experiences inspired policymakers to formulate the LIC programme (Tapies school, for example). But due to the strongly centralised top-down pattern of policymaking that prevailed until 2003, schools have been allowed scant participation in decision-making. This mode of operation stimulates mismatches and incongruence between the theory and praxis of reception.

The two major programmes resulting from this policymaking pattern share some characteristics. Both appeared against the background of massive and rapidly increasing demand, comprised of students arriving continuously throughout the school year. The fast tempo and non-stop growth of the number of arrivals created additional uncertainty for schools and policymakers, making it difficult to assess the resources required. Also, TAE and LIC were created in a socio-cultural context marked by bilingualism. In Catalonian bilingual society, language is a distinctive trait of social class and status and thus a relevant axis of social inequality and political struggle (Ruiz Vieytez 2007, Zapata-Barrero et al. 2009, Garreta-Bochaga 2006, Hogan-Brun & Wolff 2003). Educational policies have been the basic tool in defending the minority position of Catalan, and as it is the official teaching language, both policy projects found it consistent to teach Catalan to newcomers. Finally, both policies provide insufficient resources relative to demand. Despite the massive and uncontrolled arrival of newcomer students in Barcelona’s schools and the strong reaction of the regional government, reception schemes were not backed up with substantial resources. The TAE programme was poorly funded, as its student/teacher ratio demonstrates: far too high for intensive language training, and increasing each year. TAE mentors complained about the stinginess of the teaching material, computers and audiovisual teaching support, as well as teacher training. The LIC programme received considerably more funding (see Table 20), but established a rigid system of allocation that created a large supply-demand
mismatch. Not only did the assignation of reception mentors to schools encounter a one-year time lag, but also schools could receive a maximum of two mentors (if they surpassed the twenty newcomer students) regardless of how many more students were assigned to the school. Also, since newcomer students are dispersed throughout the city, LIC funds need to be translated into more personnel than would be the case if students were concentrated in fewer schools and an economy of scale were to be applied.

The semi-parallel reception scheme outlined by the TAE received mixed support, soon making it a target of policy change. In spite of being under-resourced and poorly managed, the system received positive feedback due to several organisational advantages that it offered, derived from the concentration of newcomer pupils. During half the school day, relatively professionalised staff worked intensively with reception students, thus ‘liberating’ reticent secondary schools from this responsibility. As reception mentors worked in teams of two, they could split the group and teach at different levels of difficulty or accomplishment. Enrolment, evaluation, and transfer of pupils were also facilitated, as these functions could be standardised and applied simultaneously. On the other hand, the TAE reception programme also received constant criticism from progressive circles, which served as negative feedback. The main claim was that a parallel mode of reception would have segregationist and stigmatising effects for students. Detractors from the programme were given a voice in the media and public debate and the programme became politically controversial.

After elections in 2003 the new majority in power opened the way for a new advocacy coalition of top-level regional bureaucrats and experts critical of the TAE. The resulting reception programme (LIC) gave considerable autonomy to schools to design ways in which to fulfil the policy goals. This organisational flexibility suggested that the programme would open the way to practical adaptations. It was expected that schools would be content with their broader autonomy in reception issues, and that this would generate positive feedback for the programme. However, although the LIC programme has just recently been implemented, evidence shows that the apparent advantages of this scheme do not correspond to a lower degree of discretion.

The two successive configurations of the Barcelona field (TAE and LIC) paved the way for different patterns of discretion and compliance. The conditions of the field in the TAE stage account for the dominance of individual discretion. Discretionary practices were exercised as individual strategies or at most as collective strategies shared by the two teachers working in any given unit. Reception workers were granted relative
flexibility to adapt the policy with regard to content and methodological issues, and their actions and outcomes were barely monitored. Also, their working conditions were constant. As schools had very few responsibilities in reception matters, and reception units were spatially separated from the school, reception professionals were protected against interference from other interests within school micro-politics. As a consequence, coping strategies were less compelling and the conditions left more room for creative discretion in the interest of the students. However, the limited responsibilities of TAE reception workers and their isolated position relative to the schools meant that their diverging practices had a less relevant impact.

The implementation of the top-down, inadequately-resourced, bureaucratic LIC programme was accompanied by generalised divergence between policy and practice, and an increase in the frequency of coping mechanisms. In the LIC phase the extension of coping practices appears in connection with the demanding and contradictory working conditions that both reception professionals and regular teachers experience. The increase in autonomy and more ambitious goals with respect to the TAE programme, not accompanied by solutions for material shortages or for organisational rigidity, puts school staff in a situation in which it is very difficult to carry out their work. Such contradictions in the working conditions contribute to three main types of dilemmas that are faced by practitioners: those related to inadequate resources, to organisational constraints, and to ambiguities in the regulation. The LIC programme radically increased the budget for reception in comparison to the TAE scheme, but in absolute terms it is still insufficient for the existing needs, as the crowded reception classrooms in many schools demonstrate. Moreover, the allocation of funds is inadequate because it is subject to stiff bureaucratic norms that impede an equilibrium between demand and resources. The increase in schools’ decision-making power regarding reception issues has not been accompanied with budgetary autonomy or power to decide on the distribution of resources. The scarcity and rigidity of specific means for reception measures only reinforces the chronic lack of funds for education in the region (Ferrer et al. 2009).

Furthermore, in the LIC programme there is a contradiction between the relative autonomy granted to schools and the strict, bureaucratic constraints for decision-making. The spatial dispersion of reception students throughout the city’s schools means that each reception classroom is completely

31 Although my limited observation cannot rule out the possibility that in other TAE units, discretionary practices could be more adequately described as coping mechanisms.
heterogeneous in terms of the students’ ages, levels and situations. However, the given organisational rules limit the range of alternatives available for dealing with such diversity, as each school is granted but one reception mentor (exceptionally two). What is more, students arrive in large numbers throughout the school year, as the registration of newcomers per school/reception unit has no formal limits.

Moreover, practices that attempt to extend LIC policy goals or to modify them in order to improve newcomers’ opportunities seem to be marginal. The limited number of collective ethical strategies has to do with the weak position of reception mentors within schools. Reception choices depend on the internal decision-making of schools, and this depends on the micropolitics of the particular school and the ability of reception staff to rally support for their goals among their colleagues. But reception staff members are structurally in a position of disadvantage within the school, as their function is perceived to oppose general interests, and because they are a new minority, they are often seen as outsiders within the school’s staff. Therefore they are rarely able to build strong support. The increase in school autonomy has not been directly translated into an enhancement of reception goals because these have been subordinated to broader school politics and have to compete with other interests of the school staff (Carabaña 2006).

The appearance of pro-immigrant coalitions of teachers within schools allows reception teachers to carry out ethical practices in combination with coping elements. An example of ethical-coping practice is the semi-parallel scheme at Barcelona’s Tapies school, which simultaneously allows the school to offer an adapted curriculum for newcomer students and also to optimise the hours of language training, minimising the disruption which newcomers might cause in regular classes. The ethical character of this choice is shown in the high commitment of the team of teachers who participate in the reception programme: many regular classroom teachers contribute to it and devote time to discussing and adapting its content and teaching materials. The parallel reception scheme administered by the Tapies school is a legacy from its past, reinforced with positive feedback over the years, thought to be a win-win situation (pragmatic and ethical) and supported by a strong pro-immigrant coalition within the school.

32 The conflict between reception goals and general goals within the school can be seen in various areas. The function of reception mentors and coordinators is to ensure preferential treatment for newcomer pupils within the school without having enough resources to support this special policy.
6.3.4 Seven contextual factors that shape practices of reception

The former discussion indicates that, although in both cases there is a policy-practice gap associated with coping or ethical mechanisms, the gap is shaped differently in each case study by specific contextual factors that favour one or the other modalities of discretion. Practitioners from both cities share dilemmas specific to their structural position as street-level bureaucrats, but such dilemmas are interpreted in light of their different cultural frames and specific structural position. Although in both cases practitioners’ concerns can be clustered under three groups of dilemmas (organisational constraints, shortage of resources and ambiguities of norms), these concerns fit differently within the organisational culture in each case. The contexts mediate not only how agents perceive the problems, but also the solutions they devise: coping strategies in Barcelona, coping but also ethical strategies in Rotterdam.

Each case shows a specific configuration of elements that serves as trigger, pushing actors to take on coping strategies or else opening the way for them to make ethical choices. In short, the concentration and constant arrival of newcomers, the shortage of means, and the weak position of reception teachers within schools all contribute to explain why schools in Barcelona resort to coping strategies. On the other hand, the differentialist-meritocratic ideology, the stability and even reduction of the influx of newcomers in the period under study (2004-2008), the availability of generous public means, and the independence of reception departments seem to account for the presence of stable ethical practices in Rotterdam. Likewise, the different ideologies at work in the two cases plausibly explain to what extent practitioners interpret something as ethical or not (and therefore close the gap between ideal and real). Differentialist ideology in Rotterdam (students with different skills deserve different treatment/tracks) helps justify practices of coping by selection, and facilitates the combination of coping and ethical practices. In Barcelona, the ideology of equality based on comprehensiveness (all students deserve equal treatment to reach equal opportunities) hinders teachers from finding a balance between altruistic and pragmatic values.

These contextual elements that to differing extents facilitate the exercise of (coping or ethical) discretion do not work as independent factors. Rather, we must think in terms of configurations of interrelated, mutually influencing elements that work as wholes. Each configuration is the result of a particular historical process in which both contingencies and path dependency mix to produce a unique situation. Seven aspects of that con-
configuration play a crucial role in explaining the differences in discretion between Rotterdam and Barcelona, namely: 1) demand, 2) resources, 3) enforcement, 4) autonomy of reception-programme staff, 5) educational ideology, 6) consolidation and 7) the policymaking dynamic of the field. These elements are crucial in shaping practices, and therefore in defining to what extent practices comply with the rules or diverge from them, and the type of discretion exercised. Diverse combinations of the seven elements already mentioned enable different degrees of conflict for the implementation of reception policies. At the same time, different combinations of the seven components also dictate the degree of agency that reception practitioners are granted. This means that different contextual configurations allow not only different degrees of reflexivity but also constraint or facilitate certain forms of action and mobilisation.

Characteristics of the demand and problem-pressure
From the analysis of the two institutional configurations, we can infer that the arrival of newcomer students triggers policy responses, but also many discrentional strategies by schools. The process has been as follows: schools began to receive a number of foreign students who could not speak the language of instruction. Such newcomer student population needed supplemental attention from the school in language training and in order to compensate for the possible lack or difference of content acquired in prior schooling. The emergence of this demand corresponded to the development of policies of reception but also to discrentional practices, mostly of a coping nature.

Some characteristics of the demand, like the ethno-cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of newcomer students, can produce specific modalities of reception. In the case of Barcelona, students in the TAE programme received disparate treatment depending on their mother tongue. Also, many schools nowadays interpret the LIC programme differently for Romance-language speakers than for the rest of the students.

But the size and the rate of increase in the influx of newcomers were nonetheless, by far, the most influential aspects of the demand on schools and the responses generated by policymakers. The two case studies represent two different dynamics of response corresponding respectively to moments of intense, uncontrolled, constant arrival of students or to times of gradual, reduced flows. Barcelona's policies reflect a period of massive arrivals and Rotterdam's reflect a stabilised flow of newcomers.

According to the characteristics of the incoming flow of newcomers, schools and practitioners are put under differing degrees of pressure.
Problem-pressure is not only a matter of figures; rather, the pace of arrivals (fast vs. slow, sudden vs. gradual arrival) and the pattern of their arrival (constant arrivals throughout the school year/arrivals concentrated in the enrolment period), as well as the immigration profile (level of schooling, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity), are influential elements that determine the amount of additional workload that newcomer students entail for schools. In Barcelona the conjuncture leads to a more changeable, improvised and sometimes poorly-organised response in which schools and policymakers are engaged in trial and error. Massive and continuous flows also impel more drastic and indiscriminate discreetional strategies in the spirit of coping ‘just to get by’ or even ‘to survive’, using informants’ terms. In Rotterdam, the stable flow allows practitioners to adapt changes more thoughtfully; for example the reduction of funds in recent years has produced not only coping responses, but also has left room for some ethical solutions. The well-organised, well-funded response is also the result of three decades of policymaking and reception in practice. But in the 1970s and early 1980s, the sudden and massive arrival of immigrant children to Rotterdam led to improvised reactions, just as is now the case in Barcelona.

The demand also supposes a different degree of conflict, in combination with certain features of the receiving context. In Barcelona the bilingual cultural context, in which Catalan and Castilian play different roles, is decisive, as is the ‘normalisation’ policy to promote Catalan via the educational system. In this context, the arrival of Latin American students en masse has significantly modified the power balance between languages and cultures in the school context and consequently in society. This implies a much higher degree of conflict for Catalonian schools and policymakers than a comparable flow of students would imply for Rotterdam’s counterparts.

**Material and organisational resources**

The extension of coping practices among practitioners seems to be directly related to the adequacy of public means provided to meet the policy demand. Material resources allocated for reception and (related) organisational arrangements need to be considered in relation to the size and characteristics of the demand. An inadequate provision of means and channels to implement the reception policy puts school practitioners under stress, overcrowding reception classrooms and making it impossible to comply with ideal standards for reception training (duration of the training programme, student/teacher ratios, etc.). The generalisation of coping practices
in Barcelona under the LIC appears connected with the work constraints that practitioners experience, both reception professionals and regular teachers. Discretional arrangements in enrolment/transfer of students can be interpreted as a reaction to problem-pressure in the face of a limited and rigid allocation of resources.33 In Rotterdam, conditions for reception workers are more favourable for two reasons: the substantial allocation of funds and the creation of organisational channels that protect reception goals. Newcomer students in Rotterdam are more spatially concentrated than in Barcelona and follow a full-time parallel programme, which means that (financially) independent reception departments can be organised, facilitating the work of both reception practitioners and regular teachers.

Moreover, the degree of mismatch (and thus conflict) between demand and resources relates to the fundamental question of the applicability of the reception programme.34 My cases reveal that the least applicable programmes, such as Barcelona’s LIC, are associated with extended discretional practices of a coping character, while the most applicable programmes, like Rotterdam’s ISK, correspond to a reduced exercise of discretion. ‘Applicability’ summarises two sets of potential conflicts regarding the nature of policy goals (ambitious and contradictory in Barcelona; modest, concrete and very schematic in Rotterdam), and the investment of means (scarce in Barcelona, sufficient in Rotterdam). My comparison also reveals that the most applicable programme (i.e. ISK) is a tailor-made product of a bottom-up initiative that advances the practitioners’ perspective, while the less realistic programmes (i.e. TAE, LIC) are both top-down products designed by high-level civil servants.

Forms of enforcement and assessment
Schools’ practices and procedures are difficult for policymakers to monitor, and individual teachers’ strategies in the classrooms even more so. In both cases, Lipsky’s notion that assessing street-level bureaucrats’ work is intrinsically difficult holds, meaning that bureaucrats have in fact considerable freedom to act. A case like that of Barcelona, with a high degree of statism,

33 Several studies point out the detrimental effects of the budgetary deficits of educational policies in Catalonia, particularly for immigrant children (Garreta Bochaca 2006, Albaiges & Valiente 2009, Carabaña 2006).
34 Analysts of the implementation gap in immigration policies have pointed out that the size of the gap depends first and foremost on the policy goals at stake, and whether they are realistic enough to be achieved (Sciortino 2000, Zolberg 1997). Also diverse scholars in the field of implementation have concluded that the coherence of policies is essential in narrowing the gap between goals and outcomes (Brodkin 2000).
shows that, paradoxically, overregulation produces less regulated practices. The excess of rules (governing the curriculum, the assignation of teachers, etc.), which often contradict each other, produces a high degree of ambiguity and therefore makes their enforcement more difficult. Nevertheless, the degree and form of policy enforcement also correlates to different degrees of compliance in the practices in each case. In reception education, enforcement mechanisms are mainly provided to control students' access to and exit from the programme.

A crucial difference between Rotterdam and Barcelona is that the former applies financial penalisations for deviations from the policy in certain aspects, such as the conditions of entitlement of reception students, while in the latter, the allocation of reception funding is not conditional upon the observance of the essential rules of the programme. In addition, the educational inspectorate plays a less prominent role in overseeing reception education in Barcelona, merely participating *ex ante* in the even distribution of immigrant students among schools through the municipal commission of enrolment. In Rotterdam, the inspectorate checks the attendance of newcomer students at schools by means of on-site visits; the allocation of funds per student is based on the number of students in attendance.

Verifying that the programme ends at the established time is also more efficiently controlled in Rotterdam than in Barcelona. Although no formal enforcement mechanism is provided in Rotterdam for the financial rules which establish the maximum period of reception, schools' governing boards use internal controls to ensure that newcomer pupils do not remain too long in the reception department after the subsidy ends. As for the LIC programme in Barcelona, the LIC liaison – in addition to his or her role as pedagogical adviser – exercises control over the whole process of reception. However, the actual capacity these civil servants have to prevent or correct certain school practices is rather weak (particularly because the rules that they must enforce are technically mere 'recommendations') and varies considerably from one liaison to another, as well as from one school to another. Let us say that despite the physical presence of the liaison in relevant decision-making moments (for instance, in meetings to decide students' transfer to ordinary education), the school always has the final say in the decisions.

All in all, we can say that the softer enforcement in Barcelona opens the way for more widespread discretionary practices while the efficiency-oriented, closer follow-up of practices concerning access to and exit from the programme in Rotterdam ensures more compliance with the rules. Hence, differences in the degree of influence of the reception programme over
practices appear to be related to the modes of enforcement and assessment of policy implementation provided in each system. Nevertheless, this is not a sufficient condition in itself, and needs to be taken as part of a configuration of interrelated elements.

Degree of consolidation of the reception policy

Even when a high degree of ‘statism’ and strong enforcement mechanisms prevail, a recent policy issue leaves much more margin for manoeuvre. The case of Barcelona is an illustration of this dynamic. In the early years of the TAE programme and later on, at the start of LIC programme, schools were granted more formal discretion for improvisation. Policymakers have not completely developed an approach yet, and therefore profit from occasional innovations introduced by schools (as in the case of Tapies school), or even by intentional pilot projects.

In addition, practitioners have not yet internalised recent norms, especially if these have undergone rapid changes in a short period. The fast substitution of policies in a trial-and-error fashion creates confusion and ambiguity, and also undermines their legitimacy as it seems that ‘anything goes’. The shifts in orientation that policy follows in its early moments can be annoying for practitioners, inciting them to ignore the changes. Discretionary practices are more likely to appear in cases in which reception policies are still recent, and thus very malleable and unstable. This means that when policymaking is in its phase of problem-definition, the high level of ambiguity opens room for practitioners’ discretion, and opens the way for some of the actors to influence the orientation that the policy will finally take (Blau 1955).

Yet, at the same time, a more consolidated policy field/policy does not per se imply fewer discretionary practices; rather, it depends on the degree of conflict that remains structural to that field. The discretionary practices that appear in such a consolidated field, as in the case of Rotterdam, are probably more strongly institutionalised, as the contradictions at the origin of such discretionary responses are structural and not so much related to the undecided state of policies.

Type of policymaking dynamic

The degree of consolidation of a given reception policy appears to be associated with discretion, but combined with other characteristics of the local policy field of reception: particularly with its power structure and its degree of conflict. As the local policy field is the result of a specific historical process with particular power struggles between actors,
distinct types of policymaking dynamics become intrinsic to that field. Such dynamics of policymaking reproduce the historical legacy in terms of empowering certain actors and disempowering other (distributional effects) and favouring the permanence of a particular point of view on reception issues (framing effects). The type of policymaking dynamics at the origin of the programme, whether formulated from the top down by high-level civil servants and politicians or devised by school practitioners from the bottom up, is inseparable from certain actors and institutional channels.

By definition, a top-down policy will favour an essentially different way of framing issues (and providing instruments for their execution) than a bottom-up policy. The TAE and LIC programmes are examples of the first, which privileges philosophical or ideological principles and neglects pragmatic considerations. A bottom-up policy like the ISK, on the other hand, tends to privilege the concern for its applicability and implementability: consequently, it tends to enact the concerns of those closer to practice and give form to more flexible policy schemes, susceptible to adaptation to local specificities. The parallel model of reception adopted in Rotterdam exemplifies this; the concerns of schools and regular teachers in the 1970s gave birth to the main strategies of concentrating newcomer pupils in a few locations and offering them intensive transitional courses. Indeed, the bottom-up creation of the programme seems to grant it greater legitimacy and coordinating power. Practitioners in Rotterdam undoubtedly identify themselves with the basic framing of issues inherited from the ‘founding mothers’. Far from this, implementers of the top-down TAE programme in Barcelona feel abandoned by their superiors who, in their opinion, ‘don’t know what it is like to be here’. Obviously, the kind of reflexivity introduced by each of these relationships between the implementing agent and the policy is radically distinct and would open the way for very different motivations for transformative agency (i.e. for discretionary practices).

Partly an unintended consequence of the model of educational reception chosen, stronger levels of reception-practitioner autonomy can be associated with the bottom-up origins of the policy. Concentrating newcomer pupils led to devising independent reception departments within sizable schools, and this in turn led to the departments’ relative autonomy of

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35 Given the predominance of women working in the education sector, I reckon that most of the persons fighting for the reception issues in the early years were women. To be more precise, we should probably speak of founding mothers and fathers.

36 Interview with mentors in the TAE programme, Dalí school.
decision-making and collective discretionary strategies. The bottom-up ISK programme developed in Rotterdam by schools brought along higher levels of autonomy for reception professionals than the top-down TAE or LIC programmes in Barcelona. The question is thus not so much ‘how much autonomy does a programme grant?’ but rather ‘how much autonomy did the constitution of the policy field grant?’ and ‘to whom is that autonomy granted?’

Educational and integration ideology

Ideology is generally invoked as a mechanism of reproduction and self-reinforcement of institutions (Broadfoot & Osborn 1992, Broadfoot et al. 1993, Wuthnow 1989); this was also evident in my case studies, since the educational ideologies – as reflected in each local reception field – had strong, self-reinforcing positive feedback effects. At the same time, my cases prove that ideology can provide input for reflexivity and elements to problematise experience (and therefore for institutional change) in three situations: in critical junctures, in institutionally dense environments with competing ideologies, and in highly conflictive contexts. The literature indicates how the path-dependent nature of ideology can be reversed in ‘critical junctures’ (Collier & Collier 1991), special choice points in which a change of paradigm is possible. Critical junctures require practitioners to accommodate the organisational and ideological basis of the reception field when changes are introduced in one or another dimension of policy. My research highlights two such critical junctures. In Barcelona, the shift from the TAE programme to the LIC one – despite the continuity of the goal of teaching the Catalan language – signified a huge shift in philosophy, rhetoric and instruments. In Rotterdam, despite the fundamental continuity of the ISK instrument, in 2006 national policymakers introduced changes in policy rhetoric and funding systems. Although egalitarian goals still prevail and the values of teachers remain the same, modifications in the conditions of funding imply a recalibration in the hierarchy of policy goals implicit in the ISK programme.

My findings demonstrate that ideology can also become a source of reflexivity and discretion for practitioners in institutionally dense environments in which competing ideologies coexist. In general, due to the pluralist and multilayered nature of society, practitioners belong simultaneously to different social spheres and institutional subsystems. They are social actors that belong to a specific social class, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and family networks. They are members of large organisations, such as public authorities, as well as small organisations or communities, such as schools.
They may also belong to certain teachers’ unions or organisations or to political parties. They are also political actors to the extent that they put in place policies designed by higher levels. In fact, they are policy implementers of several policies and rules simultaneously (general education policies, integration policies, etc). This complexity means that practitioners must make discreitional judgements in their everyday activities, to deal with competing principles and trade-offs between principles across diverse social spheres.

In particular the degree of discretion employed by practitioners depends on the specific degree of congruence between different institutions, within what North (1990) calls the ‘interdependent web of an institutional matrix’. In the present research, the extent to which reception philosophy matches general educational ideology is particularly important. The more they clash, the more chances arise for divergences in practice. In Rotterdam, the clash between the general ideology of meritocracy and the specificities of reception policy leads to advocacy practices in favour of the highly-skilled.

In Rotterdam, educational ideology is more uniform and there are fewer divergences, while in Barcelona it is more fragmented. In the first case the goals pursued by discreitional practices are taken from the mainstream educational ideology (Rotterdam), while in the second they stem from an array of alternatives to the system (Barcelona). If practitioners endorse educational ideology (and reception philosophy) to a large extent, as is the case in Rotterdam, discreitional practices and formal policy arrangements start off from the same principles. In ideologically fragmented contexts, as in Barcelona, practitioners’ ways of problematising experience will be based on certain ideological views which contradict official educational ideology, whether from the old BUP ‘dinosaurs’ or the progressive movement in defence of equal opportunities.

Another crucial connection in this institutional matrix is the match between the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of integration. My cases show a practical tension between socio-economic and cultural dimensions of integration in the educational field. Although in theory socio-economic and cultural goals can be complementary, in practice they can also be opposed and conflicting. Duyvendak et al. (2008) have shown how different policies assume a specific relationship between these two dimensions of integration. In my cases I found a trade-off between attempts to provide newcomer students with equal opportunities and to culturally assimilate them. In Rotterdam, this trade-off is solved in favour of the primacy of the socio-economic goal; the cultural goal, although it has dominated the
discourse in the national arena since the turn of the millennium, remains a secondary goal, instrumental in achieving the societal integration of immigrant students. In Barcelona, the coexistence of socio-economic and cultural policy goals with equal status is a source of practical contradictions: it is up to practitioners to accommodate both in a feasible way. This leads to much tension and many inconsistencies in practice.

Finally, ideology serves as a basis to problematise experience and look for alternatives in contexts with a wide inconsistency between practitioners’ views of the world and the reality of the daily practice of reception. Ideology can also be a source of change in contexts in which the dilemmas of action that practitioners face hobble their ability to perform their job. Ideological principles serve as a bedrock for the transformation or adaptation of policies, particularly when they coincide with the defence of satisfactory working conditions for professionals (reception professionals and also regular teachers when directly affected, as in the case of Barcelona).

Different ideologies can favour more or less the adoption of a reflexive attitude regarding how to carry out reception in schools. Depending upon the ideology which predominates in each city, practices are more or less likely to be interpreted in light of professional ethics. Diverse ideologies may also approve or disapprove divergences in policy implementation. In Rotterdam, differentialist ideology (which holds that students deserve different treatment) justifies coping practices based on selection, and facilitates the combination of coping and ideology. In Barcelona the ideology of equality based on comprehensiveness (equal treatment for all students) hinders teachers’ ability to make compromises between altruistic and pragmatic values.

**Autonomy/support provided to reception professionals**

The degree of compliance with or divergence from the rules is also related to the autonomy of decision-making that schools and, particularly, reception professionals have. The level of autonomy that schools and practitioners enjoy depends not only on the general provisions of the educational system, but also on the characteristics of the programme and on the historical process of formation of the reception field. However, practitioners’ degree of autonomy does not explain *per se* the degree of compliance or divergence

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37 Reception programmes make a difference for practices inasmuch as they entail different degrees of autonomy for schools and school-level practitioners. But we also need to see autonomy as a property resulting from the historical process: we just mentioned above that different policymaking dynamics that empower different actors imply more or less autonomy for reception practitioners.
of their practices. The evidence from the case studies does not support the argument that ‘the greater the level of autonomy, the greater the discretion exercised by practitioners’ put forward by those who claim that discretion is essentially granted (Howe 1991). Although reception professionals in Rotterdam are more professional than those in Barcelona and therefore have a greater margin to make discreional decisions, the former ultimately exercise less discretion than their colleagues in Barcelona (under the LIC programme).

Rather, it is the specific combination of autonomy and other features that seems to account for more or less discretion. In particular, the presence of adequate resources and reception professionals’ autonomy is crucial for a particular type of discretion (coping discretion or ethical discretion) to prevail and for a particular degree of collective action to emerge. When schools are granted more autonomy but are given scant resources for reception, as in the LIC case in Barcelona, they tend to use this decision-making capacity to improve regular teachers’ work conditions, often to the detriment of reception goals. High levels of decision-making power in combination with serious material constraints leads to contradictions. In particular, the lack of control over budget and personnel constraints indirectly affects schools, no matter how broad their autonomy is to decide over reception issues, as their ways of organising reception depend upon the availability resources and their capacity for human resource management.

An increase in schools’ autonomy when it comes to decisions about reception matters cannot simply be equated with greater autonomy for reception professionals within those decision-making processes. If, as in the case of the LIC programme, schools are granted greater autonomy in managing reception but reception mentors still have a weak position within the school, then coping strategies often work against the interests of official (ideal) reception goals and the quality of education for newcomer students is sacrificed. Thus, autonomy (for the school) does not necessarily lead to a more tailor-made organisation of reception training, better adapted to practitioners’ needs and hence to the elimination of discreional practices by individual practitioners. Rather, it institutionalises certain discreional practices at the school level.

The analysis also indicates that increased autonomy for reception professionals within schools in combination with more resources opens the door to ethical practices. The case of Rotterdam exemplifies this well. If we conceptualise discretion as a scale of freedom to make decisions, a considerable amount of autonomy in combination with ample resources allows practitioners to focus such freedom on issues other than improving their own working conditions (student/teacher ratios, etc.). In spite of their struggles to cope with personnel cutbacks and shrinking student numbers,
the reception departments of Vermeer and Rembrandt schools in Rotterdam have devoted considerable time and energy to organising the extension of the reception trajectory for students perceived as particularly talented. This implies creating spaces in which to act discretionally for the improvement of the educational chances of newcomers.

Finally, the sub-case of Barcelona under the TAE seems to exemplify the null hypothesis (i.e. no relationship), with the lowest levels of autonomy for reception professionals (less professional, isolated position within the school) and scarcity of resources. However, some of the organisational peculiarities of the TAE programme seem to reverse the restrictive effects of lack autonomy on discretion, corroborating Lipsky’s thesis which maintains that powerless street-level bureaucrats enjoy a greater margin for agency. As schools did not have autonomy in reception matters during the TAE period, reception professionals were protected against interference from other interests within the school micro-politics. In addition, the working conditions of TAE professionals, although far from ideal, were more constant. The units had a maximum number of pupils so, in principle, it was not possible to keep receiving students throughout the year above that limit.38 As a result, the coping practices of TAE mentors were less overt, since there was less conflict between the defence of mentors’ working conditions and goals relating to the defence of newcomers’ education. Evidence shows that there was even room for some ethical practices. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that, although discretion appears within spaces with little autonomy, it is kept low-profile and mostly exercised at the individual level. This is why the isolated position of TAE reception professionals entailed a lower impact and lower institutionalisation of their discretionary practices.

38 We have seen that the formal limit was often surpassed; however, the few extra students in TAE classrooms are not comparable to the ‘open gates’ of LIC classrooms.