Educational Reception in Rotterdam and Barcelona

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This journey comes to an end. I must now ask myself what I have learned from it. This investigation set out to explain practices of educational reception, that is, the way secondary schools incorporate recently arrived immigrant students. In the preceding pages we have analysed the implementation of reception policies by schools, examining in particular whether practices comply with or deviate from policies. My search has been theoretically grounded in two rival explanations: the national regimes of integration and the implementation gap. I have used a comparison of reception programmes in Rotterdam and Barcelona in order to study the policy-practice gap in different institutional settings. My study has confronted two local cases embedded in nation-states with very different regimes of integration and of education. The central research question was twofold: to what extent do the reception practices of schools comply with the national guidelines on integration? And to what extent is there a gap between policy and practice?

Contrary to what the literature on integration regimes suggests, the present comparison of extremely different systems has shown striking similarities. In spite of being embedded in very different policies of integration (and programmes of reception), the schools in Barcelona and Rotterdam present considerable affinity in their practices of educational reception. In both cases practitioners prefer to receive newcomers separately from native students; however, this preference is endorsed by the policy in one case, but not in the other. The similarity in practices defies the differences in rhetoric and policy goals between national integration regimes in Spain and the Netherlands, and between programmes of reception for newcomers in Barcelona and Rotterdam.

However, the most remarkable finding of the present research – the existence of a policy gap in both case studies – emphasises the differences between the cases. The inconsistency between school practices and policies, the so-called policy-practice gap, has proved to differ according to the institutional framework of each case. In Barcelona the gap is larger, and responds mainly to the coping mechanism of discretion and to the immediate pragmatic requirements of the situation. In Rotterdam school practices are in general more compliant with the reception programme and

1 Logically, similar practices embedded in two very different policies indicate the existence of a policy-practice gap in at least one of the case studies.
path-dependent, but schools make use of a few discretional arrangements motivated by the wish to improve students’ educational opportunities. Hence, the gap is fundamentally linked to the institutional framework in which it is embedded. This also means that the similarity of parallel reception practices in the two countries is due, to a great extent, to the considerable gap in Barcelona.

In sum, the picture that arises from the comparison of reception schools in Barcelona and in Rotterdam is more complex than simply confirming the citizenship regime or the implementation gap theories. The findings reveal much more of a discrepancy than that assumed in the literature on integration regimes, showing a firm and institutionalised gap at different levels. Yet at the same time, the actual picture is one of more institutional congruence than that anticipated by the implementation gap hypothesis, since the organisational channels and the ideologies of the educational system conveyed in the field of reception increase the probabilities of certain courses of action and diminish others. Neo-institutionalist theories are applicable to the study of policies of educational reception, since not only do the practices comply with some institutional rules, but also implementation gaps are embedded in the institutional context. This allows us to say, echoing Emirbayer and Mische (1998), that ‘discretion’ is essentially relational in character, since it always operates in a concrete institutional context whether in relation to it or as a reaction to it. This means that practices are simultaneously shaped by institutions and exhibit a degree of agency in the form of discretional deviations from policies.

In this concluding chapter we will present the main findings of the research and discuss their main implications with regard to the theories provided in chapter 2. In the second section of the chapter we will analyse the implications of the study with respect to the relationship between the practices of actors and political institutions. In section three we will offer a preliminary heuristic model based upon the seven explanatory factors described in chapter 6. This model may prove useful for future studies: these seven elements of the local field of reception are expected to make a difference in the capacity of institutions to shape practices and therefore in the significance that the gap acquires in different cases. In section four we will discuss the consequences of the findings for the study of the reception of immigrant students. In which direction do reception practices influence the educational outcomes of newcomer students? And what future challenges will the reception of immigrant students encounter? Finally, as the findings also imply consequences for the study of policies of integration, the chapter will conclude in section five with a research agenda for the future.
7.1 Main findings of the study

Contrary to what the scientific literature on citizenship regimes conventionally presupposes, national policies of integration exert little influence over the reception practices of high schools in Rotterdam and Barcelona. A remarkable finding of this research is that school practices in both local cases are carried out quite independently of national integration policies. The broad goals and rationale of national integration policies do not directly shape the objectives prioritised by schools in the reception of immigrant children. Also, preferred patterns of organisation of national integration seem to have only an indirect relation to the instruments and budgets allocated to educational reception.

Inseparable from the first finding comes a second: both cases present a gap between policies and practices, indicated by the presence of discretionary practices which contradict the official goals of educational reception. Teachers and schools modify, bend, bypass or overtly defy programmes of reception in a number of ways. This gap is very significant in the two local cases, as it shows the high degree of institutionalisation of discretionary practices (meaning that discretionary practices are not merely individual actions but rather collective strategies). The importance of this finding relates to the very different conditions in the two cases with regard to discretion, leading us to expect more discretionary practices in Barcelona and fewer in Rotterdam.

It is also remarkable that despite the fact that practices in the schools studied present a gap with policies in both cities, the characteristics of these breaches vary per city. My third result shows that while the two cases coincide in the presence of highly institutionalised divergent practices, they vary in their frequency, the type of discretion used, and the resulting style of school reception.

This does not mean, however, that political institutions do not matter. This takes us to our fourth key finding. Educational systems have a strong influence on reception practices, shaping them according to the dominant institutional logic in each country. Educational systems model individuals’ professional values and social representations of their work, but also provide the specific channels and resources for action. This means that each educational system increases the probabilities of certain courses of action and diminishes others. The Dutch educational ideology of selectivity shapes practitioners’ interpretation of reception. Likewise, although the Spanish ideology of comprehensive inclusion seems less successful, the organisational conditions of the Spanish educational system effectively restrict
practitioners to working in a certain manner. Also schools as institutions matter with regard to educational reception. My research demonstrates not only that schools play an influential role – specific to each system – but also that the specific dynamics of a given school can challenge the broader influence of educational systems and can certainly be a source of dissent from formal policies.

Moreover, the institutional influence of educational systems and reception programmes varies in intensity between cases. This fifth finding poses a paradox. Strikingly, the degree to which educational systems influence practices does not coincide with the different degrees of ‘statism’ of 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 than those in Barcelona (within a system of ‘governing by curriculum’) with equality goals. The Spanish comprehensive ideology conveys an obsession for mainstreaming educational structures to the point of impeding practitioners from calling things by their name. When what they do contradicts the comprehensive spirit of the educational system, unequal structures meant to produce equality are actually hidden behind a rhetoric of inter- and multi-culturality.

Also the influence of the reception programme seems stronger in Rotterdam than in Barcelona. Here, once again, the degree of ‘statism’ in each of the cases appears in opposite relation to the degree of influence of the reception programme. In the case with stronger regulation (Barcelona), practitioners conform less to the rules than in the case with a softer mode of regulation (Rotterdam). Paradoxically, the intention to regulate tightly produces less regulated practices.

7.2 The collective dimension of discrentional action

My study started from a profound interest in analysing the link between the practices of policy implementers at a micro-level and political institutions at a macro-level. In particular, I wanted to scrutinise the capacity of immigrant integration policies to shape the practices of the persons responsible for executing such policies. And vice versa, I wanted to investigate the extent to which implementation practices can re-shape policies.

My study revealed that the practices of teachers and school actors are constrained in important ways by the institutional context of the field of reception. The contextual conditions described in the previous chapter thus
conform to a milieu that favours certain actions over others. However, my analysis is at odds with a structuralist approach to political institutions that assumes that all actors placed in a similar position have an identical set of preferences and tend to develop similar strategies. Implementers of reception policies are also ‘strategic, seeking to realise complex, contingent and often changing goals’ (Hay & Wincott 1998: 954). This implies that, though institutionally embedded, political actors are seen as ‘agents of history’. Political institutions, as well as social institutions such as educational systems, can shape and ‘constrain political strategies in important ways, but they are themselves also the outcome (conscious or unintended) of deliberate political strategies of political conflict and of choice’ (Thelen & Steinmo 1992: 10). In sum, my cases echo historical institutionalism’s distinctive view of the relationship between structure and agency, which can be characterised as a ‘complex duality linked in a creative relationship’ (Hay & Wincott 1998: 956). My comparison emphasises that discretional practices of reception can partially transform the institutional context in which they are embedded. The question is, how?

An original finding of my study is the use of discretion as a collective strategy of schools, school departments, or groups of teachers. The literature has generally seen discretion as an individual characteristic and the collective results of discretional practices have been considered primarily as ‘individual actions’ which, ‘when taken in concert, add to agency behaviour’ (Lipsky 1980). However, practical dilemmas of reception can also be addressed with collective discretion as the result of explicit collective strategies and not simply as the aggregation and random combination of individual actions. Distinctive collective discretional strategies can be distinguished, just as there can be diverse individual stances.

Collective judgements and actions imply a greater level of reflexivity and problematisation of experience than individual ones. In principle, collective discretional solutions entail a sort of ‘enlarged mentality’, a capacity for abstracting from one’s own limited experience and for putting oneself in the position of everyone else and thus deliberating over the collective good (Kant in Arendt 1982). Potentially, collective strategies have a higher level of effectiveness in dealing with practical problems. Collective arrangements to respond to practical challenges at a school level are in principle more effective in modifying the dilemmas that impelled them in the first place; at the same time, collective actions are also compromises between the diverse positions of individual practitioners or groups of practitioners. Practical dilemmas of reception become a political issue or a question for collective decision-making.
An important lesson here is that insofar as it is granted responsibilities for organising reception education and it develops collective discretion strategies, the school can become either a channel for solving the dilemmas of individual street-level educators, or an impediment. In principle we can assume, as do those who advocate institutional rational choice, that collective discretion strategies stem from actions pursued by rational individuals who try to improve their circumstances by altering institutional arrangements (Bromley 1998: 252, Ostrom et al. 1994). However, we cannot assume a simple, direct link between collective strategies and goals, as a consequence of the politics of structural choice. As we find a hierarchy of various statuses/positions within any given school, the school as a collective actor may or may not adequately represent the interests of teachers in different positions. In any case, my analysis disproves that collective arrangements generate per se mutual gains as a result of positive cooperation between all parties in overcoming collective action problems.

Rather, collective strategies are the result of politics of structural choice (Moe & Wilson 1994), since conflicts over power make opponents compromise in order to formulate common solutions acceptable to all parties. This means that collective arrangements only suppose a relative solution to individual demands, as the compromise reached may contradict some individuals' interests. Likewise, the school board may adopt certain postures that promote a fragmented, conflictive atmosphere, placing teachers in opposition to each other, or else it may have a joining effect, possibly bringing together, to the extent possible, the preferences of the different parties. Institutional arrangements in Rotterdam ensure more often a situation of the second type, in which there is less intrinsic opposition between positions and at the same time reception goals are protected. Barcelona's education-related institutional arrangements, on the other hand, propitiate confrontation between teachers and practitioners with different positions within the schools, with the corresponding risk to the reception interests of immigrant children.

Despite these elements of rational choice theory, the reception practitioners reflected in this study – either as individuals or as collective entities – are not correctly represented by the notion of the rational actor with a fixed and immutable set of preferences and access to extensive information. Neither are they purely self-interested in their strategies – as we have seen that the motivation to improve the educational opportunities of immigrant children is even present within coping strategies – nor can their motivations be attributed to the individual's essential character (whether more altruistic or more selfish), since we have seen that different institutional
configurations empower different actors and favour the exercise of either ethical or coping practices.

7.3 **Contextual factors: Towards a heuristic model for explaining degrees of institutional influence on practices and varieties of gaps**

The differences in the gaps in Barcelona and Rotterdam demonstrate that institutional arrangements have different capacities to influence practices in each case study. This raises the question of what conditions stimulate institutional influence over practices. I have already mentioned that the degree of influence that educational systems have over practices does not coincide with the different degrees of 'statism' of each case. If the degree of regulation/'statism' of a nation-state does not explain compliance, we need to search for other factors in the institutional framework that do explain it.

We could also approach this question from the opposite angle and ask which factors favour discretionable practices. Discretionable practices are more obvious in Barcelona – where schools diverge more from the reception programme – than in Rotterdam, where practitioners are more compliant with the programme. Discretionable practices in Barcelona are associated with imbalances between means and demand and the strict organisational constraints in a situation of particularly large-scale arrival of immigrant students. In this case it seems evident that coping is the principle motivation for discretion. This demonstrates, in line with the literature on street-level bureaucrats, that the actions of schools in Barcelona obey compelling requirements of practice, i.e. practical limits and concerns. Hence, the gap is generated by the contradiction between the logic of practices and the logic of policy (Lipsky 1980). Specifically, this study also demonstrates that a second mechanism of discretion – and a related motivation – is often at work, meaning that the actions of reception practitioners should not be understood to respond solely to external constraints and therefore to rational calculus and self-interest. According to this second possibility the gap stems partially from ethical motivations that seek to enhance the educational opportunities of recently arrived immigrant students. The ethical motivation is triggered when practitioners perceive that the policies lack social legitimacy or social justice. In this case the gap is related to the institutional plurality of society, and has to do with the under-determinacy (interpretability) of principles and the trade-offs between dominant principles in diverse spheres and institutional spaces (Vader & Engelen 2003).
The urgency of certain material and organisational constraints or the appropriateness of ideological principles can only be read in the context of the field. The field of reception sets the context for practices, in the ideological (symbolic) dimension as much as in the organisational one, even when these practices deviate significantly from policy regulations. Certain contextual elements facilitate the application of discretion (coping or ethical), but they do not work as independent factors. Rather, we need to think in terms of configurations of interrelated, mutually-influencing elements which work as units. Each configuration is the result of a particular historical process in which both contingencies and path dependency mingle to produce a unique situation. The constitutive conflicts of the field and its dominant policymaking style set the tone for subsequent actions that occur on this stage.

The question of which conditions favour the exercise of discretionary practices thus needs to be complemented by the question of which contextual conditions (of the field) favour the application of coping or ethical forms of discretion in different settings. In the comparison of my cases, seven contextual elements were determinant within their configurations. These are: 1) policy demand, 2) resources, 3) enforcement, 4) policymaking dynamics, 5) consolidation of the policy, 6) educational ideology, and 7) the autonomy of reception practitioners. Within 'policy demand' I include the characteristics of the flow of immigrant students, such as: number, profile of the children (age, level of schooling, language and cultural background), pace (fast/slow), pattern of arrival (concentrated in the enrolment period/gradual and throughout the school year). By ‘resources’ I mean the relative adequacy of the material and organisational means allocated to reach the proposed goals (including policy goals), always defined in relation to the previous element, i.e., resources in relation to the given demand. As for ‘enforcement’, I refer to the degree and the forms of verification of policy execution, that is, the mechanisms available to control the access of students to the programme and their transfer to mainstream education. The ‘degree of consolidation’ of the reception programme is linked to the relative recentness or maturity of that policy, whereas the ‘type of policymaking dynamic’ corresponds to the bottom-up or top-down initiative followed in the initial development of the reception programme. By ‘educational and integration ideology’ I mean a ‘set of values and beliefs that frames the political thinking and action of agents of the main institutions of a nation-state at a given point in time’ (Van Zanten 1997: 352). Finally, the ‘degree of autonomy of reception professionals’ refers specifically to the capacity for decision-making granted to reception professionals, which depends not only on the general provisions of the educational system or the reception programme, but also on these
professionals’ position within the school. The amount of support that the strategies of reception practitioners receive from other colleagues depends more or less on micro-dynamics at the school level.

These seven elements can function both as motivation and a channel for discrentional action. They function as triggers for discretion inasmuch as they constitute conflictive dimensions for the implementation of reception policies. My evidence shows that the driving impetus for discrentional practice is conflict and problematic situations from the practitioners’ perspective. As Emirbayer and Mische (1998) make clear in their analysis of agency, conflicts increase social actors’ reflexivity. Practitioners gain more critical distance from habits when they perceive a problematic situation. Challenge and conflict spur creativity, and open the way for incremental change by creating alternative discrentional responses.

My comparison indicates that contexts which entail more conflicts and challenges stimulate the exercise of imagination, inventiveness and change. Diverse combinations of the seven elements already mentioned generate different degrees of conflict. The allocation of sufficient material resources to meet demand seems to be an indisputable source of conflict/confrontation in both cases. The room to manoeuvre (or lack thereof) that reception-programme staff have in order to carry out their job can also cause them much distress. Moreover, the degree of ideological incoherence between different institutional levels and sectors is another source of conflict, as seen for example in the competing meanings given to the principle of ‘equality’ in the integration and education subsystems and in programmes of reception. Also, reception programmes’ lack of internal consistency generates conflict for practitioners, as we see in the tenuous balance in Barcelona’s policy between goals of socio-economic integration, acculturation and social mixing.

At the same time these contextual elements function not only as triggers but also as channels of discretion, either by facilitating or by hindering the critical motivation. Different combinations of the seven components also lead to varying degrees of ‘agentic possibility’ or room for agency granted to reception practitioners. This means that different contextual configurations allow not only different degrees of reflexivity but also constrain or facilitate certain forms of action and mobilisation.

7.4 Challenges and the future of educational reception

What does the future look like? According to my research, a general convergent tendency towards parallel reception can be discerned on the horizon.
The case studies coincide in showing practitioners’ preference for teaching newcomer students apart from native ones. This indicates the prevalence of pragmatic interests among regular teachers in both systems, aiming to improve working conditions and reduce excess workload. The ideal situation for them would be teaching homogeneous groups of students. The cases also seem to converge towards a minimalistic reception style, limited to the basic teaching of language to newcomers. If we observe the developments in Barcelona and Rotterdam over the years, reception education is tending towards a superficial defence of equal opportunities, which ‘interprets equality in broad cultural and ethical terms, overshadowing the more important accent on rectifying socio-economic criteria’ (Favell 1997: 191). According to this tendency, promoting equal opportunities basically means teaching the host language to newcomers. In Barcelona, schools implementing the LIC policy are clearly sliding in this direction. In Rotterdam, although the compensatory style that provides newcomer students with an ample curriculum during their reception trajectory continues in practice – and despite practitioners’ attempts to defend this holistic reception – there is clear pressure to move towards a more basic, minimalistic kind of reception training.

Is it likely that this tendency to converge in parallel-minimalistic reception schemes exists in other cases besides Rotterdam and Barcelona? The EURYDICE survey (2004) corroborated that most European countries are adopting this linguistic, minimalistic reception strategy. This shift in reception education also calls to mind the general movement identified by Joppke and Morawska (2003) towards a convergence in minimal integration policies in Europe: civic integration schemes based on language teaching and basic liberal values. In any case, the apparent spread of parallel-minimalistic reception may be a reason for concern if there is evidence of a detrimental effect on the educational outcomes of pupils.

In the cases of Barcelona and Rotterdam, similar practices seem to push students’ outcomes in the same direction. In spite of practitioners’ genuine motivations, in both systems newcomer students have a high probability of ending up in a low form of education and finishing their educational careers with a low-level qualification. In Spain only 10% of immigrant students continue their studies after obtaining the basic certificate of compulsory secondary education (ESO) (López Peláez 2006), and those who continue are underrepresented (4% of all the students) in general academic tracks (Baccalaureate) and are overrepresented (12.8%) in programmes of Garantía Social, the most basic educational certificate for those pupils who were not able to pass ESO (CIDE 2006). In the Netherlands, pupils of non-Dutch
background are more likely to attend pre-vocational secondary schools (at 10.9%) than senior general education (4.6%) or pre-university tracks (2.8%) (Luciak 2004). In 2002-2003, 47% of non-Western ethnic minority students attended VMBO and 26% attended HAVO/VWO, as opposed to 30% and 42% for native students (CBS 2004). Despite the improvement in mobility to types of higher education, there is still a considerable educational gap between native Dutch and ethnic minority pupils (Dagevos et al. 2003, Tolsma et al. 2007, OCW 2009).

These scattered indications basically coincide with the findings of international studies. Research establishes that newcomer children have less access to social mobility via education than their second-generation peers born and raised in the receiving country (OECD 2007b). This difference is often explained with reference to newcomer children's language disadvantage, which would function as an additional bias, and this inequality is expected to gradually disappear as they become more acculturated. According to this argument, the remaining challenge of improving the educational opportunities of second and subsequent generations could be tackled adequately with the same policy tools used for disadvantaged native children. However, while there is ample evidence of the role of social class and the cultural capital of parents in the educational outcomes of students (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, OECD 2007b, 2010a), and many studies demonstrate that second-generation students have a lower level of educational attainment because their parents have a lower level of education (Van Ours & Veenman 2003), this does not help to clarify fully why first and 1.5-generation students score lower than peer students in similar socio-economic positions. Results from PISA show that, after controlling for social class, a substantial disadvantage remains to be explained, particularly for students of the first generation. Therefore, it seems that the concerns raised by the education of first and 1.5-generation immigrants cannot be dismissed as a temporary problem that will be solved with time, since the

2 Recent studies still register the higher probability of ethnic minority students attending lower tracks of secondary education (VMBO, and in particular in the lowest level, VMBO-B) than natives, although data also show a considerable increase in the participation of ethnic minority students in higher education (13% in HBO and 14% in university)(CBS 2010).
3 2007-2008 figures show an improving tendency, as 43% of non-Western ethnic minority students in their third year enrolled in the lowest tracks of VMBO (versus 27% native pupils), while 28% of minority students attended HAVO/VWO (vs. 43% of native students) (Ministerie Onderwijs, Cultuur & Wetenschap 2009).
4 Unfortunately, most studies in the Netherlands do not distinguish between the attainments of first and second-generation students. Some exceptions are Van Ours & Veenman (2003) and Tolsma et al. (2007).
educational gap cannot be solely explained by a social class effect. As some studies suggest, ethnicity continues to play a role, intertwined with parents’ education/occupation (Van de Werfhorst & Van Tubergen 2007, Tolsma et al. 2007). But some studies also suggest that institutional mechanisms are accountable for this inequality in final educational levels, particularly selection processes for secondary education. As Tolsma et al. (2007) say, ‘it might be that migrants themselves as well as teachers underestimate migrants’ chances in the educational career’ (2007: 336).

Moreover, in view of the relatively low educational achievements of ethnic minority students in these two very distinct institutional settings, we can speculate that certain practical styles of reception hinder the promotion of equal opportunities more than others, thus they could in fact restrict immigrant children’s right to education. The pragmatic approach of schools in Barcelona does not improve the educational opportunities of newcomer students. Rather, this pragmatic way of doing things limits the effectiveness of reception outcomes. Qualitative evidence from the interviews suggests that levels of persistence are very low, while the drop-out rate is remarkable. Interviewees also acknowledge that schools allow newcomer students to pass with insufficient preparation, according to the formal requirements of compulsory secondary education.\(^5\) An evaluation of the reception programme in primary education shows that the levels of Catalan attained after two years of (LIC) reception training is **good** in oral comprehension (75% of the students passed the test) but only **acceptable** for speaking and **poor** for writing (Vila et al. 2009).\(^6\) The results of the former TAE programme were not substantially better. As one of the mentors at Dalí school puts it, ‘out of the 150 [pupils] who have passed by here in the past five years, only two have **made it** [to post-compulsory secondary education]’.\(^7\) Nevertheless, given that the focus of the present study is not students’ outcomes, this evidence needs to be taken with the necessary caution.\(^8\)

If Barcelona’s reception practices do not seem to lead to successful outcomes, neither do Rotterdam’s. Although Rotterdam seems to better defend the interests of newly-arrived immigrant children in comparison

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5. Interview with principal of Tapies school and with mentors at Dalí.
6. This study evaluated the results of a sample of 5,868 newcomer students in primary education, most of them aged 9-11 (77%). It is reasonable to expect that the outcomes of a comparable evaluation of students between twelve and sixteen years old would be worse.
8. Since the focus of this study is not the outcomes of policy, I did not collect data in my fieldwork to assess the extent to which practices are in fact influential on students’ future careers.
to Barcelona, the success of the *compensatory* approach in Rotterdam is only moderate. Interviewees report that nearly all reception students finish the reception trajectory and complete compulsory secondary education. However, informants also acknowledge that most students transfer to low tracks of secondary education, even those who were initially allocated to the higher-level reception track.\(^9\) This suggests a ‘gap’ between the actual skills of newcomer students and the type of secondary education that they get. Other studies prove that students in the Netherlands are unequally distributed among different tracks of secondary education, given the small differences in achievements between pupils in high and low tracks (Van de Werfhorst 2008, PISA Education at a glance 2006, OCW 2007, Forum 2007). These findings prove that in the Dutch educational system, opportunities are not granted according to the objective skill level of students.

My research demonstrates that schools’ discretional judgements and arrangements in Rotterdam and Barcelona affect the form and content that reception policy takes in practice. In turn, this policy-in-practice is very likely to influence the educational outcomes of students due to its high stability and consistency (as collective strategies of schools or reception departments). Above all, institutionalised discretional practices modify the formal policy of educational reception in important aspects, either by extending, reducing or adapting policy goals. Moreover, such practices include elements that are determinant for the future career of newcomer students, such as registration or transfer to regular education.\(^{10}\) Schools’ discretional strategies have clear effects in terms of enrolling certain categories of students in reception courses, transferring them earlier or later, or transferring them to one or another type of education. For instance, in the case of Rotterdam, schools’ strategies make a difference for Antillean pupils, who attend a reception course instead of passing directly to regular education. Another example is seen in Barcelona under the LIC, where Latin

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\(^9\) Interviews with present and former coordinators of reception at Rembrandt school, and with CED adviser M. Zweekhorst.

\(^{10}\) It is disputable whether the consequences of actually following reception training are positive or negative for the future educational careers of students. An improvement in students’ educational opportunities can be expected as they improve their language skills, at least. It could also be argued that by devoting extra time to reception they are reducing their available time for other subjects and this may have negative side-effects. Some newcomer parents in the Netherlands seem to believe that attending the ISK programme is detrimental for the students’ chances of upward mobility, as most ISK pupils are subsequently transferred to the lower levels of secondary education. The data collected by the present research are not sufficient to support or confirm either theory, but they do permit us to expect an alteration of students’ educational careers and therefore opportunities. It is conceivable that both effects take place simultaneously.
American students are normally transferred to regular education after a short reception period.

The behaviour of practitioners and schools affects the educational trajectories and final outcomes of newcomer students in other decisive ways. Practices of reception can compromise the effectiveness of reception policies and produce opposite effects from those desired, thus feeding inequality. Particularly in the case of Barcelona, our findings suggest that the potential equity offered by the Spanish comprehensive system of education in the end may be counteracted by the practical tendency to teach immigrant students separately from their autochthonous peers. This would suggest that newcomer students in Spain reach worse final educational outcomes than their native peers because they are treated with selective discrentional practices that bend the original compensatory intention of policies. This argument is congruous with studies that point out that more selective educational systems, which track students in secondary education between ability levels at an early age, produce more educational inequalities than comprehensive systems (Duru-Bellat et al. 2004, OECD 2007b, Alegre & Ferrer 2009).

The main effect that ability-groupings are found to have is the amplification and reproduction of the social class and family background of students, thus hindering the channels for upward social mobility that education could otherwise offer (Foster et al. 1996). This means that the educational underachievement of newcomer pupils can be associated with the lack of positive references (native middle-class students) and to the lack of higher educational stimuli experienced in the lower ability groups, but also to the lower expectations that (middle-class, native) teachers hold for them. My ethnographic research provides plenty of illustrations of newcomer students who live up to these (lower) expectations through self-fulfilling prophecies (Merton 1968), and end up stuck in less-valued levels of education, which decreases motivation. According to the literature, another possible reaction of students to differentiation and stigmatisation is the deliberate strategy of ‘defensive non-learning’ (De Vos 1992, Suarez Orozco 1987, 1989), and the development of reactive identities or group sub-cultures also described as polarisation (Lacey 1970) or resistance (Willis 1977). In my fieldwork I did not encounter examples of this, although informants from the Casal del Raval reported the tendency of certain ethnicities to follow this resistance strategy (for example, immigrants from the Dominican Republic).11 Just as

11 This is reliable information as Casal del Raval’s educators work directly in the re-education of a gang of Dominican youngsters engaged in soft drugs and petty crime. Many of them are students of Tapies school.
this process of differentiation is believed to disadvantage working-class pupils, who are overrepresented in lower ability groups due to the middle-class orientation of school expectations (Ball 1981, Hargreaves 1967, Keddie 1971), we can reasonably expect that this disadvantage becomes amplified for immigrant children. On top of the negative effects of ability streaming, newcomers have the additional burden of not mastering the language of instruction and lagging behind in content after having devoted one or two years just to learning the language. Although well-intentioned, teachers may believe that lower ability tracks are the only way for newcomer students to get an education and overcome their additional language disadvantages and curriculum delay, while in fact these groupings appear to work against the interests of newcomer students.

In fact, it is not so much the parallel reception of newcomer students that seems to be detrimental per se for their future outcomes, but rather its combination with certain elements of the local field like the bilingual context or with a minimalistic style of reception. Particularly negative is the combination of minimalistic reception that teaches only language in parallel structures of reception, especially the tracking of newcomers into lower types of education (VMBO in Rotterdam) or into the least able groups (‘D’ in the flexible groupings in Barcelona) after their reception period. We need to put this in the context of the heated debate about the consequences of discretion by street-level bureaucrats, whether they are positive, negative or both. The results of my study show that discrentional arrangements can modify policy in ways which either benefit or prejudice immigrant students. Potentially, discretion is neither good nor bad in itself (Evans & Harris 2004), as practitioners may use discretion in a variety of ways: (Lipsky 1986) to fill in the gaps in public policy (Ellis et al. 1999: 277), or to undermine official policy (Baldwin 1998).

My findings also suggest that global trends external to the local and national contexts exacerbate a shift to a practical style of reception that curbs equity. In particular, a global process that is described in detail in the literature is the neoliberal tendency towards the commodification of education (Ball 1990, Tomlinson 1997, Bonal 2003). Education has moved from a Fordist to a post-Fordist form, which means the deregulation of public education and increase of schools’ autonomy and school-based management, greater emphasis on parental choice, and competition between specialised forms of provision. In Rotterdam, the impact of market standards of efficiency in education exerts a contrary influence on the ‘compensatory style’ of school reception characteristic of the city. Schools in Rotterdam face a trade-off between their equality goals of promoting
the socio-economic integration of newcomers and their efficiency goals. We have seen that as a reaction to constraints in their available resources, schools' (and reception departments') discretional practices tend to obviate the equity goals stated in the STER programme.

But there is still room for optimism. The neoliberal tendency to thwart equal opportunity policies and favour educational policies which improve the quality and selectivity of education has been identified as a global movement. However, the fact that schools across the planet will have to face this global pressure does not necessarily mean that all schools will respond in the same ways. On the contrary, we can expect a variety of reactions. First, because there are national-specific ways of combining educational equality goals with market ideologies (Jordan et al. 2003). Second, because we have learned from this research that discretion reacts differently in diverse contexts, according to the level of conflict that practitioners encounter. Third, because we have also seen that the schools themselves matter. Schools and practitioners have varying degrees of agentic capacity, depending on their autonomy, available resources, and the support that reception personnel enjoy among their colleagues. This is to say that schools in a weaker position tend towards reception styles which provide language training alone. But, as observed, 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.

If my study proves something, it is that change comes hand in hand with discretional strategies informed by professional ethics. My study shows that under certain conditions, those collective practices motivated by the drive to enhance newcomers' educational opportunities may develop alternatives to counter the pressures of commodification. In Rotterdam, schools make creative efforts to counterbalance the watering down of their reception objectives, resulting in a curriculum which is less diversified but not less intense (in terms of hours). Divergent practices which challenge official policy try to counteract the impact of the commodification of educational goals and to defend equality of opportunities, incorporating a logic of compensation within the general ideology of meritocracy (for example, through additional schemes for the highly skilled). In Barcelona, we have also seen some brilliant strategies to keep all the balls in the air: for instance, the earlier transfer of some categories of students while simultaneously including them in lower flexible tracks for language so as to offer them some additional hours of Catalan.

Yet the promise offered by pro-immigrant school practices must overcome many obstacles in order to generate results. The potential for partially
reversing what may be a general trend towards commodification is there, in the hands of schools. But as we have seen, ethical collective arrangements which oppose the global forces eroding compensatory educational schemes depend on quite specific conditions. My cases indicate that discretional reactions of a coping nature are more generalised and ethical practices are less widespread, as they often have to overcome many obstacles just to emerge.

7.5 Research agenda

At the end of this research journey many important questions remain unanswered, constituting a relevant niche of research for the future.

A first line of inquiry concerns research on the effects of integration and citizenship regimes. The main conclusions of this study have important implications for research on immigrants’ integration in host societies and research on integration policies. If what holds for Barcelona and Rotterdam is applicable in other places, it would be of little use to resort to policy regimes alone in order to explain the practices of reception in schools. Familiarity with an abstract model does not help to predict the ways in which schools in a given country are likely to apply their corresponding policy to receive immigrant children. In line with what other studies have found, integration regimes are useful for describing discourses and the rhetoric of integration, but not for understanding policy programmes on the ground or the actual procedures and practices developed by implementers (Bousetta 2001, Favell 2001, Alexander 2003a). Likewise, a direct link between certain regimes and certain outcomes can no longer be taken for granted. The theoretical debate about which model of integration is best in terms of integrating immigrants therefore seems futile when it comes to practices and outcomes.

This also implies that to research integration policies, the study of integration ideologies as an abstract enterprise is sterile, as is the study of practices as pure means-ends reactions. Nowadays many European countries converge in increasingly assimilationist ideologies and rhetoric; the programmes for civic integration which have mushroomed in many countries are a clear signal of this tendency (Joppke 2007). But as Kymlicka (2003) notices, civic integration programmes can also be at the service of multicultural ideologies, as the Canadian case shows. Hence, these and other ideologies must be studied as working logics in specific policy fields, and in relation with the conflicts that structure that field. Putting ideologi-
cal principles into practice is often fraught with contradictions that impede a direct and univocal application of such principles. Practitioners must necessarily interpret, deal with ambiguities and make choices. Discourses and practices must be faced as independent objects of study. At the same time, studies must clarify their interrelations and this must be done in specific historical-spatial conjunctures.

The local field of reception does matter and therefore research must address different policy fields of integration, their actors and structures. Consequently, a debate emerges regarding which policy fields favour which type of integration practices, but also what type of fields are more beneficial for the integration of immigrant persons. An effort needs to be made to differentiate the specific consequences for various categories and groups. Studies should set out to discern the net of institutional structures that come together and the specific interrelations of these elements. The logic of a given policy field must be taken as the result of a specific interrelation of broader institutional spheres related to that field. The interrelations between institutional arrangements crucially determine the capacity of these institutions to influence practices, whether this leads to ‘reinforcing’ or ‘contradictory’ effects among them. Compliance in my case studies depended greatly on the lack of ambiguity and the good coordination of integration regimes and reception programmes on one hand, and on the coordination of these with education systems on the other.

A related line of research concerns work on the implementation of policies, and particularly, the study of the discretional practices of policy implementers. Here we must concede that institutional influence is a given in spite of discretion, and this has to be seen as embedded agency. Hence, as Peter Evans says (1995: 10), the appropriate research question is not ‘how much’ influence do state institutions exert, but ‘what kind’ of influence. Studies must focus on those kinds of political institutions that shape practices of integration and on the mechanisms of influence that they apply.

The embedded character of discretion implies that more research is needed to reconstruct the particularities of agency and discretional implementation of policies by street-level bureaucrats in diverse spatial-temporal settings. The developments within the case of Barcelona show that the extension and kind of discretion in a given spatial-temporal conjuncture is subject to change. Transformations in contexts imply changes in discretional practices, as conflict and agentic possibilities may vary. This means not only that discretion can increase or decrease, but also that reflexivity
can increase (problematisation of experience) or decrease (routinisation). Also, the degree of collective institutionalisation of discretion may vary over time, as may the content and consequences of individual practices and collective strategies. This means that we cannot give a definitive and satisfactory answer to the disputes about the character of discretion, whether it is restrictive and discriminatory or empowering and serves to expand students’ rights, as answers will vary for different spatial-temporal settings.

Because discretion as ‘embedded agency’ can manifest itself in a variety of ways, reconstructing the diversity of discretionary practices in different cases within their respective contextual conditionings is not the only relevant empirical question. Most importantly, we must reconstruct the specific gradation of freedom, and the structure-agency interplay in each case study. It is important not to take such interplay for granted because changing conceptions of agentic possibility are related to structural contexts. Also, the existence of collective discretionary arrangements implies the need to broaden the focus when studying discretion. Future studies on the role of individual policy implementers need to reconstruct their actions in the context of micro-politics within their organisations.

From the comparison of my cases, seven elements of the local field of reception appeared as crucial in defining the extent of discretion or compliance with the rules and the type of discretion exercised. Whether these factors apply in other socio-political and spatial-temporal conjunctures is another relevant empirical question. More research is needed to determine whether the elements identified as influential in this study also play a key role in other places and policy sectors.

Finally, research must approach the specific impact which different practical styles of receiving immigrant children in schools have upon outcomes. Much research concentrates on solving the riddle of the failure to integrate the second generation. The 1.5 generation – those born and schooled in their country of origin until they migrated with their parents – constitutes quite another problem. Their educational careers allow us to get a closer look at the impact of the practices of policy implementers on students’ outcomes. Often their weaker educational results (in comparison to their second generation peers) are attributed to causes directly relating to the migrant condition (having a different mother tongue, being socialised in another culture and educational system). This would help to explain why dissimilar reception programmes lead to similarly poor educational outcomes. But to what extent can the inferior educational outcomes of 1.5-generation students be linked to school strategies of shortening reception trajectories? How closely are they linked to strategies that limit recep-
tion to basic language training? To what extent can unequal results be associated with the tendency of teaching these students separately from other students? To what extent do differences depend upon the migrant condition? All these empirical questions remain beyond the reach of my study. Future research should address these important issues.