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The present chapter looks at policies for the educational reception of immigrant adolescents in Barcelona and Rotterdam. Educational reception programmes are geared to incorporate newly arrived immigrant youngsters into the educational system of the host country and crucially determine the first steps of the integration trajectory of newcomer students. The chapter describes educational reception programmes in both cities, with emphasis on the implementation of such programmes by high schools, and on the extent to which reception teachers interpret, selectively apply, or even contradict institutional norms. The discussion is based on interviews with policymakers at different levels of government, analysis of policy documents, and ethnographic observation in five schools.

Newcomer immigrant adolescents as a policy issue

Meet Maral, a 15 year-old girl from Pakistan. She has a British education, and speaks English perfectly. She is good, say her teachers, gifted. But she moved to Barcelona when she was in the 4th year, the final year of compulsory secondary education. “Older” students like her (15 years old or more) pose the worse problem, say teachers, because they have only one year left to learn both the language and the curriculum in order to complete their compulsory schooling and obtain a certificate. And

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that is almost impossible, even for highly talented students. As the law does not allow 16 year-old students to stay any longer in compulsory secondary education, teachers feel trapped in a dilemma. What to do? «You know that if you don’t pass her, her academic career in Spain is over». One teacher summarized his strategy thus: «What you do is try by any means to ensure she passes her junior secondary education, with homework, private lessons, etc. And once she passes, you must give her parents this advice: take her to the British school! Don’t let her continue in Catalan because she is going to fail».

Newcomer immigrant adolescents, those youngsters who migrate after having carried out part of their schooling in their home country, constitute a challenge for policymakers in receiving countries. They are a “nuisance” for policymakers, as they demand more intensive attention and often longer schooling, hence becoming costly for the public administration. Newcomer students also pose strong challenges to schools’ ability to cope with diversity, as well as dilemmas for teachers’ professional ethics. Youngsters who arrive after primary education, between 12 and 16 years of age take longer to learn a second language than younger children. But more importantly, adolescents who migrate at some point during their junior secondary education face a dual task in school: learning the host language and mastering the curriculum in order to obtain a certificate. This becomes particularly difficult for those who arrive in the final years of junior secondary education, as most educational systems establish working methods that limit teachers’ possibilities to respond to these challenges (such as age limits for completing compulsory education). Some, like Maral, are lucky as they possess the economic, social or cultural capital to by-pass difficulties and complete their studies successfully. The majority, however, are less fortunate.

In Europe, the history of educational reception can be traced to the end of the guest-worker era in the mid-1970s. With the clo-
sure of the borders following the oil crisis, Northern European countries were confronted with the consequences of guest-workers’ family reunification. Schools in the working-class neighbourhoods of large cities were overwhelmed with immigrant children who did not speak the host language and had been socialized in very different school traditions. In response to these challenges Northern European countries formulated policies for initial reception at schools. Back in the 1950s, Germany put into place a federal programme for teaching language and culture of origin to foreign students. Besides this, the reception approach has varied considerably between different Länder: for instance, in Bavaria, bilingual classes (Nationalklasse) are organized by grouping together pupils who share the same native language, while in Berlin foreign-born students are immediately included in regular classes alongside German students with support from special assistants.1 France developed its classes d’initiation and classes d’adaptation in the early 1970s to teach French to immigrant children in order to improve their integration in the school system. In the mid-1970s the Netherlands launched internationale schakelklassen in large cities, to teach Dutch to guest-workers’ children prior to including them in regular classes. In the United Kingdom, newcomer children were initially received in specialist teaching programmes separate from mainstream education – EAL (English as an Additional Language) programmes, later renamed ESL (English as a Second Language) – though since the mid-1980s newcomers have been directly introduced into ordinary classes, with ESL teachers present in classrooms to offer teaching support.2

Some decades later, following a migratory boom with resulting pressure on public policies, Southern European countries have also organized reception measures as diverse as the various approaches developed by their Northern colleagues. Three types of reception can be distinguished: “integrated”, “parallel” and “mixed” reception.3 In some places like Italy, foreign
students are directly included in ordinary classes together with the native-born students, with certain special assistance always provided ("immersion" or "integrated reception"). A second strategy commonly followed is to provide temporary, full-time reception courses prior to starting ordinary education ("parallel reception"), as in the case of Greece. There, before attending ordinary schools, newly arrived students are enrolled in two-year special courses during which they are separated full-time from their native-born peers. Finally, other places have launched a mixed approach to reception, like the Spanish regions of Catalonia, Andalusia, Madrid or Murcia. There, newly arrived immigrant students must follow temporary reception courses, in which they receive reception training only during a limited number of hours per week.

All of this shows that the reception of newcomer youngsters has been a political issue in Europe for decades, an issue that continues to be very topical for school practitioners, even in countries with longer traditions of immigration and school reception. The reception of newcomer students continues to be an issue in spite of the application of reception policies, as the outcomes are far from positive and large numbers of newcomer students drop out before completing their studies or end up on the lowest educational pathways. These outcomes may partly have to do with the process of implementing reception policies. Implementation has been defined by some as the "black box" of policies, because what happens in the process of executing a policy often changes the policy goals envisaged by policymakers.

This chapter describes educational reception programmes in Barcelona and Rotterdam, with emphasis on the implementation of such programmes by high schools, thus comparing policies and practices. The analysis attempts to answer two questions: what are reception policies and reception practices like in schools in Rotterdam and Barcelona? To what extent is there a gap between policies and practices? The analysis is
based on interviews with policymakers at different levels of government, analysis of policy documents, and ethnographic observation (and interviews) of reception practitioners in five high schools. Implementation agents such as teachers and schools are the fundamental link between policies and policy outcomes, as they are the practical enforcers of formal rules and they may interpret, selectively apply, or even contradict institutional norms. Research on implementation provides policymakers with rich insights about which aspects of policies are the most difficult to implement, which clash with practitioners' professional ethics and which practical alternatives to policies are being generated by practitioners on the ground.

The chapter is organized as follows. In the following sections the two local cases of Rotterdam and Barcelona are presented, first describing the main regulations and features of educational reception in each local case, and then engaging in a discussion of the ways in which schools and practitioners actually receive newcomer students. Finally, the concluding section discusses the gap between reception policies and practices. It offers a list of seven interrelated factors that crucially influence educational reception in local settings, creating the conditions for different types of practices. The final remarks set out to provide policymakers with elements for reflection, as choices in each of these seven areas have proved to be crucial in the cases of Rotterdam and Barcelona.

Rotterdam

The making of educational reception programmes In Rotterdam, ethnic minority students accounted for 40.5% of the total student population in secondary education in 2003-2004 (14,112 students). Newcomer “1.5 generation” students, those who were born abroad and migrated to the Netherlands between the ages of 12 and 16, are only a small proportion of the former: there
were 808 newcomers in that academic year, of which around 200 actually attended reception programmes. In order to respond to the challenge of newcomer students in secondary education, the Netherlands launched *internationale schakelklassen* in large cities as far back as the mid-1970s, as described above. Rotterdam has adopted a clear-cut model of parallel reception: the “ISK” programme (Internationale Schakelklassen), which teaches newcomer students in separate classrooms for an average of two years. The ISK programme was built following a bottom-up process in which urban schools with high concentrations of newcomer students took the initiative. Those schools organized separate classes into which guestworkers’ children were placed full-time to learn Dutch before joining the ordinary curriculum. These initial measures were launched using schools’ own resources, but soon afterwards the schools involved started lobbying to obtain public support. A national organization (Landelijke Commissie Voortgezet Onderwijs aan Anderstaligen, LCVOA) was created to coordinate and represent schools affected by the issue and since 1977 schools with reception classrooms have been subsidized with national funds. In 1980 a policy note was approved, which politically sanctioned the parallel model of reception initiated by schools. 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 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 pragmatic in-house 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 schools’ quest for further stand-
ardization of the reception policy led to the creation of an informal municipal policy, the STER programme, through cooperation between the Municipal Department of Education and the four schools providing reception education. The STER programme established the content of the reception policy in terms of curriculum and teaching methodology. In particular, it established that beginners must start by learning Dutch language alone, with other subjects introduced at an advanced stage.

The goal of the ISK reception programme as established by the municipal regulation is «to prepare the pupil, as well as possible and as soon as possible, to be transferred to regular education». Schools are quite free to pursue the goal of educational reception in the way that best suits them, within a rather minimalistic set of policy regulations. National provisions for the educational reception of newcomer students basically consist of regulations for the funding of schools that provide reception. Students who fit the formal definition of “newcomer student” entitle schools to receive specific national funds. In 2008 schools would receive 4,212 euros per student a year, while in 2012 this was considerably reduced. The national regulation defines a newcomer pupil as one who: does not have Dutch nationality, has lived in the country for less than a year, and has legal status. Besides specific funds for reception, newcomer students may also entitle schools to receive funds for ethnic minority students, whether national (CUMI funds for ethnic minority students, later replaced with the Leerplusarrangement VO) or municipal (Equal opportunities educational policy).

Moreover, Rotterdam’s local authority also stipulates its objectives for educational reception in municipal regulations valid for an academic course. Local policies generally follow the sparse national policy framework, and the periodic national regulations that stipulate how funds for reception are allocated. However, some aspects of the national scheme have been modified, for in-
stance the target group, which in Rotterdam includes Antillean and Aruban pupils. Since 2004-2005 Rotterdam’s authorities have subsidized Antillean/Aruban newcomers, who are excluded from the target group at national level because they have the Dutch passport. This served to institutionalize the de facto inclusion of these students by schools in Rotterdam in reception programmes. Schools justify this by saying that the Dutch language level of Antilleans is usually very weak. Municipal funding plays an essential role in reformulating national policy to meet local needs, which has often been the result of a bottom-up initiative by schools. Currently four schools in the city offer full-time reception courses, with a common curriculum and textbooks. Enrolment and distribution of students among the schools is managed by the local authority. An office within the municipal Education Department is in charge of registering all newcomer students arriving in the city and assigning them to a school. The main criterion used for the distribution of newcomer pupils into schools is the type of education (lower or higher tracks) to which they are expected to transfer later, and only when possible is the proximity to the family’s residence considered. The four schools providing reception encompass higher (Rembrandt school) as well as lower tracks of secondary education (Vermeer, Escher, and Van Gogh schools) and public and semi-private schools (within the Protestant group of schools, LMC). To support schools in reception issues, the municipality created a department for education consulting, the CED (which has now been privatized).

School practices of reception Reception-programme professionals in Rotterdam have reached favourable working conditions in many aspects. The inflow of newcomer youngsters is limited, particularly during the period 2004-2008, and student/teacher ratios remain reasonably low. Not only do reception programmes
receive relatively generous funding in a context of decreasing demand, but they also obtain funding in the form of cash benefits, which lends schools considerable flexibility. Also, the centralized reception programme which keeps newcomer students spatially concentrated across the city has also meant organizational advantages for schools. Schools have used their broad autonomy in reception issues to organize independent reception departments with their own team of teachers and budget, which has guaranteed that reception goals are protected alongside other priorities within the school’s agenda. Schools can also cluster students by age and time of arrival, and provide training much better suited to their levels of knowledge. Curriculum and content can be adapted at convenience, and the reception trajectory can be longer and more intensive, introducing many other subjects besides language.

In this context of well-resourced and well-organized reception programmes, practitioners deviate little from policies and rules, and when they do, they are less often motivated by the need to cope with difficult working conditions. Moreover, school practitioners function in an atmosphere which is not fraught with politicization and tend to internalize the common goals nurtured by the bottom-up origin of the reception programme. In addition, as has already been mentioned, the municipality has played a crucial role in correcting imbalances and skews that could be a source of tension for practitioners. Nevertheless, schools in Rotterdam discretionally adapt the official policy in at least three aspects: reducing the number of subjects in reception training, extending the target population, and making discrentional decisions on the transfer of pupils to regular education.

Although adequate working conditions have prevented schools from adapting policies much, since 2006-2007 public funding for reception has diminished considerably and as a response, schools’ boards of governors are pressing their reception departments to cut back expenses and make reception training
more efficient. Some reception departments are responding to cut-backs by reducing the number of teachers and the subjects taught in their reception training. Such pragmatic adaptations of policy, aimed at coping with difficult work conditions, lack of resources or organizational constraints, are known as “coping practices”. Other reception departments are reacting to pressures in creative ways, attempting to both cope with the financial restrictions (and comply with the directions from their boards) and at the same time achieve ambitious reception goals, since they believe that reception training consisting of diverse subjects can better foster socioeconomic integration. An illustration of this is the “Learning in New Contexts” strategy developed by one of the reception schools, in order to continue teaching diverse subjects by using self-learning methodologies. While the majority of school hours are used to teach Dutch, students receive all other subjects in a free-choice study period twice a week, when students work on their own and a teacher is present to answer questions; this also allows the school to reduce the number of teachers employed.

This indicates that coping strategies in Rotterdam schools are simultaneously practices responding to professional ethics, as policy is discretionally adapted to improve educational opportunities for students according to the principles of professional ethics. In spite of the relatively favourable working situation, practitioners in Rotterdam frequently face dilemmas of action in which they are trapped between contradictory goals (preparing newcomer students for regular education vs. providing cheaper reception training), inadequate resources or organizational constraints. Consequently, practitioners must apply coping strategies which are sometimes quite contradictory; for example, enrolling undocumented students in their schools while not being able to declare them part of their reception programme and thus not receiving subsidies for them. Yet, when schools include in the policy target other categories
of students excluded by the official reception policy, they are motivated partly by altruistic intentions and partly by pragmatic considerations, as they consider unprepared newcomer students – who have not yet passed their reception course – as a hindrance to mainstream classes.13

In Rotterdam, schools' adaptations of policy often set out to improve students' opportunities for socioeconomic integration. For instance, schools apply a compensatory style of reception, broader in goals and instruments – including other subjects besides language in the training – while complying with the official model of parallel reception. In fact, Rotterdam schools' discretional practices tend to consolidate the emphasis on socioeconomic integration as established in the 1980s policy goals, and the meritocratic values typical of the Dutch educational system mediate the way in which practitioners interpret the equal-opportunities goal. This is illustrated by the initiatives undertaken by schools to extend the reception trajectories of highly-skilled pupils. Practitioners in Rotterdam consider that highly-talented newcomer students need (and deserve) more support than less skilled peers, and several schools use their own means to fund an extra year of reception education for such students.14 According to this meritocratic ideology, a child can only effectively unfold his/her talents if he or she is placed in the “right place” (education track) and gets an adequate education for his/her abilities. This is remarkable if we acknowledge that in Rotterdam, challenging the formal norms entails a financial penalty: schools deciding to extend the reception trajectory beyond 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 schools offer newcomer students (beyond the period subsidized by public funds), but even more so for the still-longer reception trajectory provided to highly-skilled students in two of the schools.
Barcelona

The making of educational reception programmes In Catalonia, the so-called *nouvinguts* (newcomers) are estimated to form 4.9% of the total student body and 19.5% of all foreign students for the year 2010. Two major public policies have offered educational reception to newly arrived foreign students to Catalonia: the TAE (Taller d'Adaptació Escolar i d'Aprenentatges Instrumentals Bàsics) programme (1996-2003), and the LIC (Llengua i Cohesió Social) programme (from 2004 on). Both respond to the notion that the main barrier for the adaptation of immigrant students to the host educational system is linguistic. In addition, both take as a point of departure the idea that immigration challenges the Catalan language, representing a threat for the educational system and for Catalan society too. Accordingly, Catalan is the language taught in both reception schemes, following the linguistic normalization law which establishes it as the language used in education at all levels. In fact, TAE and LIC reception programmes are an extension of the 1980s Catalan policy of linguistic immersion, which included schools in an effort to compensate for the Catalan language's historical disadvantage vis-à-vis Castilian. This way of framing issues is characteristic of Catalonian bilingual society, where language is a distinctive trait of social class and status, and thus a relevant gauge of social inequality and of political struggle. As the upper classes speak Catalan, Catalan language plays an important role in upwards social mobility. But this perception of the problem can also be linked to the dominant role played by the department for “language normalization” (Servei d'Ensenyament del Català, SEDEC) in the question of immigrant pupils during the period 1996-2003.

At the same time, the two programmes present crucial dissimilarities. The TAE reception programme was more prescriptive in character, while its successor LIC devolved decisions in re-
ception matters to schools to a considerable extent. Moreover, while both programmes are examples of mixed reception, the TAE provided a segregated version (newcomer students were taught separately for the whole morning at a different location) which was substituted by LIC’s integrated version (students attend reception classes at various points throughout the school day). In the TAE programme, newcomer children from different high schools were grouped in area-based reception units. Starting in 2004, the area-based system (TAE) was substituted by school-based reception units (LIC) located in every school with a minimum number of newcomer students (10 students). In this way policymakers attempted to respond to criticisms about “segregating newcomer pupils” and “making a ghetto set apart from ordinary schools”.

In Catalonia, educational reception programmes have been elaborated in a technocratic fashion by high-ranking civil servants in the Regional Department of Education, with the support of relevant experts. Both the TAE and the LIC (and less significant initiatives such as the PAANE programme, Pla d’Actuació per a l’Alumnat de Nationalitat Estrangera) are the product of a top-down process. Reception measures in secondary schools took on a reactive and defensive character following the explosive increase in newcomer students from the mid-1990s on. Policymakers from the department responsible for the normalization (mainstreaming) of the Catalan language (SEDEC) took the lead in coordinating reception efforts, since the massive arrival of immigrant pupils was perceived as a threat to the Catalan language and culture. Later on, political shifts brought about a reshuffle of the main players and their relative forces within the Department of Education, allowing the issue to be framed in terms of social equality for immigrant students, in addition to the goal of defending the Catalan language and culture (LIC). 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. Nevertheless, schools have been allowed scant participation in decision-making, due to the strongly centralized top-down pattern of policymaking that prevailed until 2003.

School practices of reception Schools in Barcelona face much tougher working conditions than their colleagues in Rotterdam. Reception practitioners in Barcelona have to work against a background of massive and rapidly increasing demand, with students arriving continuously throughout the school year. The fast growth in the number of arrivals implies an added uncertainty for schools but also for policymakers, making it difficult to assess the resources required. Both TAE and LIC programmes provided insufficient resources relative to demand. The TAE programme was poorly funded as its student/teacher ratio demonstrates: too high for intensive language training, and increasing with each year. TAE mentors complained about the scarcity of teaching material, computers and audio-visual teaching support, as well as funds for teacher training. The LIC programme received considerably more funding, but established a rigid system of allocation that created large supply-demand mismatch. Since newcomer students are dispersed throughout the city, LIC funds need to translate into more personnel than if students were concentrated in fewer schools and an economy of scale could be applied. Also, the spatial dispersion of reception students throughout the city’s schools means that each reception classroom is completely varied in terms of the students’ ages, levels and situations, making teaching more complicated. Moreover, the increase in schools’ decision-making power under the LIC programme was not accompanied by schools’ budgetary autonomy or power to decide on the distribution of resources. Even in spite of the relative increase in school autonomy within the LIC programme, reception professionals are still quite pow-
erless. Schools have to be seen as spaces of struggle among diverse and often conflicting interests, and decisions are the result of a negotiation process between departments and teachers with unequal levels of power. Within this power structure, the support that reception issues obtain within each school is a matter of negotiations and coalitions. In most cases reception teachers in Barcelona occupy a rather weak, isolated position within the school. The personal attitude of the principal or the management team seems to have a crucial influence; if the management team plays a neutral role or is not pro-actively “pro-immigrant”, then the reception teacher has little influence against the powerful interests of the larger school departments. Therefore, when schools are granted more autonomy but are given scant resources for reception, as in the LIC case in Barcelona, they tend to use these means to improve regular teachers’ working conditions, often to the detriment of reception goals.

It seems evident that in Barcelona, coping is the main motivation for discretionary decisions. LIC schools adapt the rules in more aspects than in Rotterdam, above all, discretionally handling the entry and exit of newcomer pupils to the programme, diminishing the duration of the reception period, applying (semi-) parallel reception, and challenging the exclusive use of Catalan in reception. Discretionary practices in Barcelona are associated with imbalances between means and demand and with the powerlessness of reception teachers faced with a massive influx of immigrant students. In addition, reception practitioners have to work in a socio-cultural context of bilingualism, which further complicates matters. The weak position of reception bureaucrats within the LIC school structure produces a pragmatic reception style: doing whatever is possible with the available resources and within the given constraints. Teachers of reception classes apply individual coping practices as they are left alone with most reception tasks; but regular teachers, when newcomers attend their classes, also resort to coping strategies. Teachers are fre-
quently confronted with dilemmas of action; for example they have to choose between keeping reception classrooms overcrowded or transferring students who are not yet fully prepared for regular education. Consequently, they must make compromises between different goals and regulations or reduce ambitious policy goals to match the meagre means available.

Among the various school practices that deviate from the reception programme, those concerning enrolment and transfer of pupils are endorsed by a majority of schools. One of the most difficult problems that schools face in reception matters is the constant arrival of newcomer students throughout the school year, which often leads to overcrowding of reception classrooms. In this situation schools are very much left with their own human resources as the Education Department does not assign additional reception teachers during the school year. To solve the reception classroom’s overcrowding, practitioners at Barcelona’s schools apply two coping strategies. On the one hand, when regular classes are full, new pupils are dismissed and sent back to the municipal registration commission (external strategy). On the other, when dismissal is not possible, reception teachers apply an internal distribution strategy which consists of transferring some pupils to regular classes sooner. Latin American students are often transferred sooner than speakers of non-Romance languages while older students are kept longer than younger ones. The school’s flexible tracking policy allows teachers to incorporate newcomer pupils earlier into mainstream classes, because if they need support they can get it in the lower tracks of Catalan language, which become a sort of prolongation of the reception classroom. Practitioners justify these practices citing the “educational needs” and “skills” of pupils. Regardless of the accuracy of this professional judgment, differential treatment in transfer serves as a strategy for coping with the overcrowding of reception classrooms.
Ostensibly, with the LIC programme semi-integrated structures of reception are the norm in Barcelona, as newcomer students spend most of their week in classes together with their native peers. However, if we observe actual practices we see that schools increasingly tend to offer separate reception, just like in Rotterdam. By incorporating the reception unit within each school with newcomer students, policymakers intended to maximize the integration of immigrant children with their native peers. Regular teachers, however, are very resistant to these ideas because, as one informant said, «How can newcomers possibly integrate when they cannot even communicate with the pupil sitting next to them?». According to our survey of reception schools in Barcelona, if we count the schools which use tracking structures, in fact parallel reception still prevails. Although students in Barcelona are normally not tracked by level for all their subjects, schools very often use so-called “flexible groupings”, or clusters of students for certain subjects only (typically for teaching languages and mathematics). Flexible groupings imply a form of “parallel structure in the shadows” as immigrant children are normally streamed into the lowest tracks and in fact continue to spend a substantial part of their school day in a segregated group.

Barcelona schools challenge the LIC programme’s reception goals for socioeconomic equality and multiculturalism. Within the TAE programme, Catalan was seen as an instrument to enhance both newcomers’ socioeconomic opportunities and acculturation; Catalan language became a policy goal in itself since it signals the cultural adaptation of newcomers to the Catalonian culture and facilitates social mobility. Nowadays, the LIC programme combines multiculturalism and equal opportunities as its main goals. In practice, cultural assimilation still prevails. Reception practices in Barcelona focus nowadays on Catalan language teaching (with varying degrees of curriculum adaptation for newcomers), although multiculturalist discourse is wide-
spread among practitioners as being politically correct. Equal opportunities are pursued as a secondary goal, compensating for newcomers’ linguistic disadvantages in Catalan. The narrowing down of the reception curriculum means the Catalan language has become the main instrument to social mobility, instead of boosting newcomers’ socioeconomic mobility through reception schemes with a variety of subjects.

Conclusions and recommendations

In both cities there is a gap between practices in schools and policies, but the characteristics of these breaches vary among the cities in terms of their frequency, the type of discretion used, and the resulting style of school reception. Schools and practitioners in Rotterdam generally comply almost to the letter with formal and informal regulations. Divergence in Rotterdam is less frequent than in Barcelona, but the few school practices which challenge policy are more consolidated, significant (some even contra legem) and are found in a majority of (reception) schools. Also, discretionial practices in the two local cases differ with regard to the main motivation behind discretion: coping (if practitioners adapt policy in order to cope with material or organizational constraints) or ethical (if practitioners perceive that the policies lack social justice and adapt them in order to enhance the educational opportunities of newcomer students).

It is quite obvious why practitioners in Barcelona resort to coping practices, given the substantial influx of immigrant students, imbalances between means and demand, and powerlessness of reception professionals. It appears less plain why practices of ethical discretion appear more frequently in Rotterdam than in Barcelona, where the fieldwork reveals that school professionals are often driven by altruistic professional-ethical motivations. The answer is that other features of Barcelona’s local context (such as the weak position of reception teachers within schools)
influence the pragmatic choice for coping practices. In other words, in each case-study the policy-practice gap is shaped differently by the local reception context. Such context consists of a set of political actors engaged in the school reception of immigrant students in a given local space, forming what we call the “local field of educational reception”. These actors are engaged in an ongoing struggle for control over a specific kind of capital, and at the same time, they share a particular way of framing the issues at stake and a common purpose. Each local field presents a specific configuration of elements, which will trigger discretion inasmuch as they constitute conflictual dimensions for the implementation of reception policies.

In particular, seven specific aspects of the local fields of Rotterdam and Barcelona entail potential conflicts for the implementation of reception policies:

a) policy demand: characteristics of the flow of immigrant students, such as number, profile of the children (age, level of schooling, language and cultural background), pace of arrival (fast/slow), or pattern of arrival (concentrated in the enrolment period/gradual and spread throughout the school year);

b) resources: relative adequacy of the material and organizational means allocated to reach the proposed (policy) goals;

c) enforcement and monitoring: degree and forms of verification of policy execution, particularly the mechanisms available to control students’ access to the programme and their transfer to mainstream education;

d) degree of autonomy of reception professionals: 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 the micro-power dynamics at school level;

e) educational ideology: set of values and beliefs which frames the political attitude and actions of agents of the educational system in a nation-state at a given point in time;
f) degree of consolidation of the reception programme: relative recentness or maturity of policy, and different strength of policy legacies;
g) type of policymaking dynamic: the bottom-up or top-down initiative followed in the initial elaboration of the reception programme.

Various combinations of these seven elements generate different degrees of conflict, and help explain differences in discretion between local cases. For example, the allocation of material resources to meet demand seems to be an indisputable source of 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. Also the degree of ideological incoherence between different institutional levels and sectors is another source of conflict, as for example in the competing meanings given to the principle of “equality” in the educational systems and in reception programmes. Reception programmes’ lack of internal consistency also generates conflict for practitioners, as can be seen in the tenuous balance in Barcelona’s policy between goals of socioeconomic integration and acculturation.

The local field of reception shapes the gap differently in each case-study, and favours one or the other modalities of discretion. Each field’s specific configuration of elements pushes agents to take on coping strategies or else opens 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 explain to some extent why schools in Barcelona resort fundamentally to coping strategies. What is more, discretionary practices are more likely to appear in a less consolidated field such as Barcelona, where a lot of trial and error is still taking place, and constant substitution of programmes and norms feeds confusion and ambiguity among practitioners. On the other hand, the selective educational ideology; the stability of the influx of newcomers;
the availability of generous public means; the bottom-up origin of policy, and the independence of reception departments all account for the presence of stable ethical practices in Rotterdam. This configuration also helps us to understand why practitioners apply policy more accurately, particularly as bottom-up policies tend to enact the concerns of those closer to practice. Rotterdam also proves that closer follow-up of practices concerning access to and exit from the programme ensures better compliance, particularly if financial penalties are applied for deviations, although enforcement alone is not enough.

What can policymakers do with this information? Policymakers need to focus on making reception policies more implementable, and this simultaneously means reducing certain sources of discretion. To put it bluntly, there are two types of discretion sources, avoidable and unavoidable. On the one hand, discretion is to a large extent intrinsic to the policy process. Intrinsic discretion has to do with the politics of structural choice involved in the formulation of most policies: policymakers must frequently make compromises with different agents, and the resulting measures are full of ambiguities, open to interpretation by the agents of implementation. Moreover, regardless of ambiguity, policies and laws are general rules, and their execution implies the application of general principles to particular situations, which necessarily require the practitioners’ interpretation. On the other hand, other sources of discretion are avoidable. Some elements that cause much distress for practitioners, stimulating coping responses, are susceptible to be influenced. Improving the enforcement of rules, providing sufficient resources for envisaged policies and involving low-level practitioners in policy design are three possible ways of reducing the policy-practice gap. Policymakers can easily work on these aspects to better implement reception policies.

A first recommendation that stems from our research is that, by distinguishing inevitable and avoidable sources of discretion,
policymakers can focus their efforts on those aspects of a policy which are top-down improvable. Implementation research can provide policymakers with insights about which aspects of policies are the most difficult to implement, or generate more opposition among practitioners. Practitioners gain critical distance from rules when they perceive a “problematic situation”. Hence, problematic situations need to be tackled in order to facilitate the practitioners’ jobs and working conditions as far as possible, which in turn allows goals to be achieved more effectively.

A second recommendation would be to enable and support bottom-up initiatives to set up new, creative strategies for achieving the policy goals set. Concrete alternatives generated by practitioners on the ground serve in some cases to improve the effectiveness of existing policies. Paradoxical as it may sound, this research indicates that contexts which entail more conflicts and challenges stimulate the use of the imagination and inventiveness. Precisely those schools with the highest percentage of immigrant students and the most difficult situations have proven to be the best laboratories for reception policies. Even the practices designed to cope with working constraints can lead in some exceptional cases to reinforcing the educational opportunities of immigrant students in ways that policymakers had not imagined. As a general rule, we must keep in mind that policy gaps and discretion are not an evil per se that must be defeated. As our research proves, discreional practices can have either beneficial or detrimental consequences for the policy beneficiaries. What policymakers can do to foster positive outcomes is to provide adequate resources and working conditions so that practitioners do not need to choose between “surviving” in their work and really working for the empowerment of immigrant students.
NOTES


5 Municipality of Rotterdam, Rotterdamse Onderwijsmonitor. Primair en voortgezet onderwijs in Rotterdam 2004, Dienst Stedelijk Onderwijs, Gemeente Rotterdam, Rotterdam 2004. The success of the reception programme in reaching its target group is moderate, as only 61% of potential students in fact attended a reception class (Municipality of Rotterdam, Rotterdamse Onderwijsmonitor, 2002-2003).

7 Staatscourant No. 7695, 4 May 2011, p. 6, available on www.avs.nl/sites/default/files/Leerplusarrangement%202011.pdf. Undocumented immigrants are one of the points of friction between policymakers and school practitioners. Following the turn towards more restrictive policies, undocumented students are no longer subsidized in their reception trajectories. However, schools keep schooling them and including them in their reception courses, in spite of the financial constraint that this implies for them.


9 The real names of schools have been changed to keep anonymity.

10 Since 2008 schools have been receiving growing numbers of Eastern European students, which is reversing the tendency in the period 2000-2008 of decreasing arrival of students.

11 Reception budget is being constrained in two ways: CUMI funds have been replaced by the Leerplusarrangement VO (which means a 50% decrease in funding according to the informants) and municipal funds for Educational Equal Opportunities have been cut considerably.


13 Schools in Rotterdam include de facto in their reception courses diverse categories of immigrant students left out of the official policy target, despite the fact that they are not eligible for national reception funding. As mentioned previously, since 2005 the local authority of Rotterdam has supplied additional funds to cover the expenses of Antillean students in reception schools. Undocumented immigrants still remain a contentious issue.

14 Also, Rotterdam’s municipal regulations for reception introduce different tracks for students according to their skill-levels.


17 During the TAE period, school-based units were exceptional, only allowed by educational authorities as a sort of political compensa-
tion in few schools with outstandingly high proportions of foreign students.

18 Within the TAE programme the maximum number of students for two teachers was formally established as 26 (in 2004). However, the fieldwork indicates that by the end of the year a two-teacher classroom reached 33 to 36 students.

19 The assignation of LIC reception teachers to schools encounters a one-year time lag. Schools can receive a maximum of two teachers regardless of how many more newcomer students are enrolled in the school.

20 In the school year 2005-2006 there were 41 secondary schools in the city of Barcelona with LIC reception classrooms.

21 For instance, those who have been working as civil servants for more years have the right to express a preference (desiderata) for certain subjects, days, times over those who arrived later, and those without permanent civil servant status (interim faculty) are the least influential in the decision-making process.

22 Practitioners surveyed in the TAE programme adapted policies to a lesser extent, but this situation changed considerably with the LIC programme.

23 Two teachers are the maximum assigned for those reception classrooms with more than 20 newcomers.

24 A municipal commission comprised of civil servants from different levels and agencies distributes immigrant students among schools based on their place of residence, order of arrival, and availability of school places.