Differentiation in Education and Beyond
Introduction to the Special Issue in Memory of Jaap Dronkers (1945-2016)

Peter Robert

Schooling plays a crucial role in distribution of social inequalities. The important lesson, social scientist can learn from Pierre Bourdieu states that social differentiation, students bring into the school from home, does not diminish during the years they spent in education. In fact, schools compensate only a little amount of the deficit connected to pupils' family background. Instead, a hidden curriculum is in effect aiming the transmission of social norms, values and beliefs that regulate how people should properly behave in the society (Illich 1971, Bourdieu 1974, Giroux & Purpel 1973). Nevertheless, schools differ in the way how students with disadvantaged social background are handled or how educational achievement in schools is affected by students’ social origin. Among others, variation in this regard can be related to the public vs. private dissimilarities between schools in terms of the school environment, in particular to the social capital around the schools, e.g. the relationship between teachers and pupils and parents in state-run vs. church-run schools (Coleman et al. 1982. 1987). Given that school quality varies a lot, in terms of educational achievement and its relationship to school composition by pupils’ social background, access to better or worse education matters a lot. School choice is highly important; various forms of selections and self-selections are taking place in the decision process until students end up in one or another school (Hoxby 2003). Making the circle round, the various characteristics of social origin, a wide range of social and psychological conditions in the parental family largely influence school choice and educational decisions. These are the so-called ‘secondary effects’, following the term by Boudon (1974). Empirically, researchers can focus on various indicators and attributes of parental background and investigate how cultural and educational climate in the family is affected by parental

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education, financial conditions, family composition, e.g. the intact or broken character of the family.

Apparently, research on educational inequalities (or on ‘equality of educational opportunity’ – using the term by Coleman) cannot be restricted to the themes, I outlined above. I decided to emphasise them because these were the topics mainly investigated by Jaap Dronkers. In terms of a ‘catalogue’, he published hundreds of articles and book chapters on inequality of educational opportunities, school quality, educational system comparisons, effect-differences between public and religious schools, educational and occupational achievement of migrants from different origins and in various countries of destination, the effects of parental divorce on children – and nobility.2 His work career is also impressive; he worked from 1990 until 2001 at the University of Amsterdam, first as Full Professor in Educational Science (1990–1999), and later as Dean of the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Pedagogy. From 1999 to 2001, he was Full Professor of Sociology at the University of Amsterdam, too. Following a Professorship at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy (two consecutive terms: 2001–2009), he returned to The Netherlands and became Honorary Professor at the University of Maastricht until his death. As one of the important milestones during his career, I would like to mention, the project when he has been the Director of the European Forum “The Quality of Education and its Relationships with Inequality in European and Other Modern Societies”, during 2006–2007. This project has led to the edited volume Quality and Inequality of Education published by Springer (Dronkers 2010). Similarly worthwhile to refer to the two special issues on “Cross-National Studies in Student Performance With PISA and TIMSS Data” and “Education Markets and School Choice” for which Jaap has been a Guest Editor in the Educational Research and Evaluation. These days, scholars are evaluated by the impact factor they achieve with their major articles in peer reviewed journals. No doubts that Jaap had an impact in his field on the academic activity of his colleagues as shown by the citations of his work. In order to illustrate this in a quantitative manner, (as talking about a quantitative sociologist), I copy the data of his five best cited items from the Google Scholar.

Table 1. The 5 most cited publications by Jaap Dronkers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication title, authors, journal, Year</th>
<th>Cited by N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant children’s educational achievement in western countries: origin, destination, and community effects on mathematical performance, M Levels, J Dronkers, G Kraaykamp American Sociological Review 73 (5), 835-853 2008</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The effects of preoperative exercise therapy on postoperative outcome: a systematic review 2011</td>
<td>194</td>
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2This latter topic Jaap labelled as ‘hobby research’ and he studied the education of Dutch and European elites and nobility.
This table mirrors the variety of the research topics analyzed by Jaap, perfectly. One finds example of studying immigrant children, consequence of divorce on educational attainment, and difference in achievement by public vs. private sector of schooling. This table also reveals that Jaap used to work in team and enjoyed to collaborate with other scholars, co-authors. Personally, I am proud and honoured that I could be part of his European Forum project and we could work together on Hungarian state and religious schools (Dronkers & Róbert 2004).

The research activity by Jaap Dronkers had an impact on the Hungarian academic life and influenced Hungarian researchers dealing with pedagogy and educational studies, as well. Just one example is the Graduate School in Educational Studies at the University of Debrecen, organised and directed by Prof. Gabriella Pusztai. She has also been the editor of a special issue of the Hungarian language journal Educatio titled ‘Churches and Education’ in 2005 and edited important volumes on the relationship between religion and higher education in the CEE region (Pusztai 2008, 2010). In fact, she had a leading role in initiating this special issue, as well.

The portrait of Jaap Dronkers would be less complete without mentioning his active participation in public debates in the Dutch media, among others on the ranking of the secondary schools.³ Perhaps the best description on Jaap Dronkers is given by Patrick Wolf (2016:137) when characterizing him as a six-tool social scientist who had courage in his choice of topics, a firm grasp of theory, refined empirical analysis skills, strong writing ability in multiple languages, effective public speaking skills, and a delightful sense of humour.

The current issue presents three articles by distinguished scholars who were so kind to support the intention of HERJ to make a memorial publication for Jaap Dronkers. The first paper is an analysis by a team of Dutch scholars and, most importantly, this is a paper Jaap personally has worked before his death; so he is listed among the authors, namely Marlou J. M. Ramaekers, Mark Levels, Jaap Dronkers, Gerbert Kraaykamp. HERJ is honoured that the authors offered this piece to get published here. The paper investigates civic attitudes of immigrant children, aged between 12 and 17, studying in schools in Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Switzerland. Three types of attitudes are distinguished as dependent variables in the study: support for democracy, support for gender equality, and attitudes towards the country of destination. These attitudes can be

³ For details see: http://www.talkinbusiness.nl/2014/01/the-dronkers-list-an-important-assessment-of-school-quality/
regarded as elements of cultural integration of first and second generation immigrant children into the Western World. Apparently, an important explanatory factor of this process is religion and denomination of the children. Empirical findings confirm this assumption, in particular for the latter two opinions. The multivariate models, developed by the authors, also reveal that the essential driving force in generating civic attitudes is church attendance and the attitudes towards the influence of religion in society.4

The second article is written by Gary Marks, an Australian scholar who has played a key role in developing measurements in OECD’s PISA studies and published extensively on many aspects of educational outcomes and of inequalities in schooling. Gary was one of the invitees to the European Forum directed by Jaap Dronkers to come to the EUI, Florence and to work in the frame of the project. His current paper in HERJ deals with the causal influences affecting student achievement and educational attainment from a highly debated perspective, discussing and comparing the role of SES, socio-economic differences and of cognitive abilities. Already the title of his piece is provocative, stating that *Education is not about SES*. The article is a conceptual one without any quantitative empirical analysis but it contains an extensive literature based on studies applying survey materials and investigating the relationship between socio-economic measures, cognitive ability and educational outcomes. Gary Marks reviews the concept of cognitive ability by considering its genetic component, too – a highly sensitive factor from the perspective of political correctness. Socio-economic status is discussed both from a theoretical and a measurement viewpoint. The section on research conclusions, based on the empirical literature compares the findings on how SES and cognitive ability can predict various educational outcomes (student achievement, school tracking, and educational attainment). In sum, Gary Marks argues about the significance of cognitive ability in analysing and predicting educational outcomes, underlining its importance from the perspective of policy makers and stakeholders.

The third article in the collection is written by M. Danish Shakeel and Patrick J. Wolf from University of Arkansas. This paper returns to the subject of ethnicity but its viewpoint is more concrete and explicit, as it deals with a striking concern of the era, the terrorism. Nevertheless, the authors’ approach is fully in line with the tradition of the work by Jaap Dronkers on examining educational outcomes, when raising the question: *does private Islamic schooling promote terrorism?* Thus, the topic is studied in the light of public vs. private differences in schooling. Indeed, the Western World continuously tries to understand the motivation of terrorists and their criminal actions when the persons were born / raised / educated in Western societies where they commit their terrorist attacks. Experts tend to talk about the importance of parental background in terms of religiosity, traditional norms and values at home and their role in personal radicalisation

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4 The authors have carried out a large amount of additional analyses in order to investigate the robustness of their findings. HERJ could not publish all appendices they have originally submitted due to the limitations of the length of the papers accepted by the journal. Thus, supplementary analyses are available from authors upon request.
leading to terrorist actions. Apparently, education also contributes to socialisation of youngsters and these two factors, home environment and schooling, can even strengthen each other, namely family climate has an impact on school choice. However, the obvious expectation on this ground, assuming that (traditional) Muslim families tend to send their offspring to Islamic schools (school choice) and then these schools generate radicalism and socialize them to become a terrorist (education) is not supported by the article. On the contrary, results confirm previous findings on the role of private / religious schooling in producing civic values in contrast to public education. At the same time, low number of observations is a limitation the study; the authors label their work more explorative than causal. Still, when concluding about policy implications, they underline the lack of the empirical evidence for any connection between religious Islamic schooling and terrorism in the US.

As editor of this special issue, I am very glad to present the three articles to the readers of HERJ because of two reasons, at least. First, I am honoured that I could be part of this project “in memoriam Jaap Dronkers”. I am grateful to the fortune that we had an opportunity to work and publish together. Second, the issue presents three articles that deal with educational inequalities, a topic I am highly interested in. At the same time, however, these articles go beyond the usual approach of educational differentiation, go beyond the usual role of family background, the reproduction of cultural capital. Instead, they enter into a level where the real disputes on schooling begin these days. Two of them place schooling into a highly relevant frame of the era: migration and terrorism. The third one dares to raise an uncomfortable issue: the role of cognitive ability and genetics in the variation of educational outcomes. I hope, readers of HERJ also find these three papers to be interesting and inspiring for further debates.

References


