

Where the light was not: failure in education



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afscheidsrede
20 mei 2009

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Uittreerede in schriftelijke vorm uitgesproken op 20 mei 2009 door
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20 mei 2009

Mijnheer de Rector Magnificus,
Leden van het College van Bestuur,
Collegae hoogleraren en andere leden van de universitaire gemeenschap,
Zeer gewaardeerde toehoorders,

Dames en heren,

It is an old joke.

A policeman, walking through the city on a dark night, sees a man on the ground looking for something under a streetlamp.

"What are you looking for?" asks the policeman.

"My house keys", says the man.

"And where did you drop them?" asks the officer.

"Over there." answers the man pointing to the other side of the street.

"Then why are you looking here?"

"Because this is where the light is."

We are all inclined to go to "enlightened" sources when we are looking for something. And while we think the man in the story is foolish, we understand his dilemma.

Light

A valedictory presentation may be a simple summary of what has happened in the past with a few observations concerning the future. Or it can have a specific goal, an agenda for the future. Such is the case with my valedictory thoughts.

My goal is that having reached the end of this document you will be angry with me. By that I mean that you will share my anger and be willing to do something about the problem that I describe and perhaps work to implement the solutions that I shall propose.

But there can be a risk. In a book that I recently received there was an anonymous quote:

Tell people something they already know and they will thank you for it.

Tell them something new and they will hate you for it.

I am not terribly concerned that you will hate me for what I write because you already know that it is true. The real question is: What will you – *what will we* – do about it?

The case for failure

How much media attention in newspapers, magazines, television, Internet and radio must we have to accept the conclusion – we have failed to provide an educational system that meets the needs of our children, our grandchildren, and our society?

What are the features of this failure that we see in our students here at the TU Delft?

- Lack of mathematics skills
- Lack of society-related fundamental knowledge
- Poor written-communication skills
- Inability to concentrate
- Weak motivation
- An attitude that something is deserved that has not (yet) been earned

Further, these are not just “TU problems”. They can be found at other universities and institutions of higher education and in our daily lives as well. A small example is appropriate¹.



What does this mean exactly? While the expression “*helft sneller*” may be accepted in the Dutch language, does it mean twice as fast, half as fast, 150% faster, 125% faster?²

This is an example of bad math, bad language and bad communication. And it was on the front page of one of our leading newspapers.

This problem had not gone unnoticed. In February 2008, the magazine HP/de Tijd published an edition that focused on our current Dutch educational system. The cover of that edition is shown here. It was an edition dedicated to the topic of a national failure, our national failure.



The national fuss about education, however, was not new. It was preceded ten months earlier, in April 2007, by an NRC Handelsblad article in which high-school student unrest in January 2007 had led a leading member of the Tweede Kamer to call for government action³:

“Over deze methode, waarbij leerlingen minder klassikaal les krijgen en meer zelfstandig moeten leren, komen veel klachten, onder meer van leerlingen. Een scholierenprotest was in januari de aanleiding voor Tweede Kamerlid Mariëtte Hamer (PvdA) om voor te stellen een parlementair onderzoek in te stellen naar onderwijsvernieuwingen van de laatste twintig jaar.”

Notice that the catalyst for this government action was the protest from students—not from parents, not from teachers, and not from our leaders—but from students. The action requested by Ms. Hamer was, of course, a parliamentary committee to investigate the situation. So the complaints and demonstrations from our youth led in 2007 to a *Parlementair Onderzoek*.

A group of serious individuals who may, or may not, have been real experts in the field of education examined the developments of the past decades and made suggestions for the future. Their photograph, in black and white, was included in the report and, despite their best efforts, they could only be identified by those who were most at risk—students, parents, teachers—as people from “Den Haag”, The Usual Suspects.

¹ NRC Handelsblad, page 1, 21 April 2008

² The accompanying text was “*De besluitvorming over de aanleg van infrastructuur kan met de helft van de tijd worden bekort.*”

³ “*Vernieuwing in onderwijs onderzocht*”, NRC Handelsblad, 4 April 2007, p. 2.



This is the Dijsselbloem committee. From left to right: T. Dibi (GL), N. de Rooij (SP), B.J. van Bochove (CDA), J.R.V.A. Dijsselbloem (PvdA), H. Zijlstra (VVD), B. van der Ham (D66), C.A. Ortega-Martijn (CU) and M. Bosma (PVV). The committee's report⁴ was published on 13 February 2008 and its central conclusion was⁵:

“De overheid heeft haar kerntaak, het zeker stellen van de kwaliteit van het onderwijs, de afgelopen jaren ernstig verwaarloosd.”

Although the committee essentially limited its analysis to the 1990s—a serious weakness in my view as the causative agents can be traced back some 40 years—it correctly identified that there was a serious problem, that government involvement was a contributing factor, that those directly involved—students, parents and teachers—were ignored, and that educational goals were subservient to political goals and trends. I leave it to you to decide if the government neglected (“verwaarloosd”) education or was over-involved.

After publication of this report, we waited for the changes. But the response was instead: “A report has been written. The problem is solved.”

Lighten

Let me describe how I think we arrived at where we are and who was responsible. Notice that I prefer not the word “blame” but the concept of responsibility, a prerequisite for achieving change

It is “obvious” to many that if the performance of the current generation is not what it used to be, then it must be the fault of the current generation.

Who is responsible?

If the current generation is to blame, then blame the students! And be sure to blame them early when they are in the beginning stages of the educational process.

But has it really been their “fault”? On 15 January 2008, the NOS Journaal featured a news story about Dutch children attending schools over the border in Belgium. Approximately 19,000 Dutch children are involved and at many Belgian schools there are waiting lists for admission.

The discipline is strict, the curriculum displays rigor, and there is structure in the educational method. In the



⁴ Parlementair Onderzoek Onderwijsvernieuwingen, Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 2007–2008, 31 007, nr. 6

⁵ Samenvatting eindrapport Commissie Parlementair Onderzoek Onderwijsvernieuwingen,

broadcast we are told that parents are convinced that the quality of education is better. What do the children think? If we believe what the children say in the schoolyard when interviewed, then the children are happy with the quality, structure and discipline in the Belgian school they attend. The reporter concludes "... *de kinderen vinden het prima*". (The children think it's great.)

But what does Minister Plasterk think of this structure, discipline and rigor? He is quoted in that same HP/de Tijd issue of February, 2008: "*Wij moeten natuurlijk niet terug naar de jaren vijftig.*" (We should not return to the 1950s.)

Minister Plasterk was born in 1957; he was only 12 when the Maagdenhuis was occupied. I find it difficult to believe that he knows much of education in the '50s.

I was born in 1943 and spent most of my primary and secondary school education in schools in the 1950s, all of the 1950s. Were there serious differences between American and Dutch schools in the '50s? I doubt it; I recognize the images from Belgium as images from my youth. I recognize the structure, discipline, and rigor.

We know who our promising students are and we know which of them need extra attention. This led in 1980 to the following situation in California.

California had passed a law requiring all children at a certain age to be tested in order to determine if a child had special needs. "Special needs" also included gifted children. As a consequence of this my wife and I were informed that we were the parents of a gifted son.

They were wrong! All of my children are gifted.

And all of yours are too.

The responsibility that we share is to provide an educational system that challenges and nurtures those gifts.

If the problem is not with the younger students in primary education, then perhaps it is with the older students in secondary education. So maybe it is appropriate to blame the students but blame them later.

What of the older students? There is hope. Our own students know that something is wrong.

Wieger Hemmer, history major and journalist from the RUG, said in an NRC interview⁶:

"Al de betutteling van leerlingen die de leraren moeten verbeteren! Bij Idols is de jury juist heel streng en dat vinden we geweldig ... Ik heb vrienden die niet begrijpen waarom ze op de universiteit zitten. Mijn generatie weet helemaal niks ... Mijn bul is weinig waard."

In the television program Netwerk broadcast in 2006⁷, a secondary-school student named Jip said that even self-reliant students required structure as they always have "better things" to do such as sport. Jip indicated clearly that students need teachers to tell them what they must do. The Minister of OCW at that time, Maria van der Hoeven (CDA), had indicated that the "studiehuis" program was damaging for HAVO and VWO preparation.

The Netwerk reporter concluded that not much was left of *studiehuis*, the pampered child ("*troetelkind*") of Mw. Ginjaar-Maas. I will return to the role of Mw. Ginjaar-Maas.

But for now we may conclude that students in primary and secondary education are not to blame; they do not bear the responsibility for the failure in education.

⁶ "*Domme student*", Interview with W. Hemmer in NRC Handelsblad, page T10, 10 October 2007

⁷ "*Het huidige onderwijs in de bovenbouw is schadelijk*", NCRV Netwerk, 15 January 2006.

Who is responsible! - the politicians

Let us blame the politicians. Their names are frequently mentioned and HP/de Tijd was kind enough to provide us with a sort of School of Scoundrels.



It is easy to blame the politicians, too easy. It is cheap.

Instead we should blame society; we should hold society responsible for what has occurred. When you blame politicians, which is admittedly fun, you are really just blaming society because you—and I—elected them.

It started in the late 1960's with a movement to use the educational system as an agent for social change.

Professor Stanley Fish⁸, writing in 2006 in the New York Times⁹ argued:

"...college and university teachers should not take it upon themselves to cure the ills of the world, but should instead do the job they are trained and paid to do — the job, first, of introducing students to areas of knowledge they were not acquainted with before, and second, of equipping those same students with the analytical skills that will enable them to assess and evaluate the materials they are asked to read ... the moment an instructor tries to do something more, he or she has crossed a line and ventured into territory that belongs properly to some other enterprise.

It doesn't matter whether the line is crossed by someone on the left who wants to enroll students in a progressive agenda dedicated to the redress of injustice, or by someone on the right who is concerned that students be taught to be patriotic, God-fearing, family oriented, and respectful of tradition. To be sure, the redress of injustice and the inculcation of patriotic and family values are worthy activities, but they are not academic activities, and they are not activities academics have the credentials to perform."

But the Dutch system has evolved into education as an institution for "Social Engineering" instead of "reading, writing and 'rithmetic". We expect the *parents* to teach "reading, writing and 'rithmetic" because the schools are teaching—no, they are expected to teach—how young people should behave and function in Dutch society.

And what is the epitome of the well-functioning modern Dutch education? Networking and preparation for the job market!

The university is expected to be the nest for networking. Nowhere is this more evident than in Dutch participation in the professional Internet network "LinkedIn". Approximately 10% of the total Dutch population is networked via LinkedIn, the highest percentage in the world.

⁸ Stanley Fish is the Davidson-Kahn Distinguished University Professor and a professor of law at Florida International University (Miami) and dean emeritus of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

⁹ "Always Academize: Response to the Responses", New York Times, Opinion, 11 June 2006.

And jobs? The University is expected to be the source of highly specific, marketable commodities. In other words, the university is not for education (an essentially non-existent word in the Dutch language¹⁰) but an “opleiding”.

Who is responsible! - the bureaucrats

It's fun and easy to blame the bureaucrats. They are nameless and faceless so we are being politically correct.

An example of this can be found in the Netwerk program mentioned earlier. Mw. Ginjaar-Maas, former chairperson of the “studiehuis” steering committee, said on that same program:

“Het Ministerie heeft zeker helemaal niet begrepen dat je minstens tien jaar nodig hebt om een studiehuis to bouwen”



Mw. Ginjaar-Maas says ten years are needed to get things right and we must accept this. Ten years when we treat our children as unwilling participants in an experiment. Ten years! I have worked with lab animals; at the end of the experiment they are disposed of.

Our children and grandchildren are not laboratory mice. Did Mw. Ginjaar-Maas (or the bureaucrats) envision a re-education period for the experiments that failed ... and continue to fail? I become angry and emotional at their arrogance. Fortunately, I am not alone.

Prof. J. Imelman¹¹ expressed anger concerning Mw. Ginjaar-Maas' 10-year experiment far better than I. In that same program he said:

“Het is op het criminele af. Het gaat toch om jaargangen van kinderen. ... het onderwijs heeft zich al eeuwen lang op een bepaalde manier ontwikkeld. Waarom die felle ingrepen? Dat zijn felle ingrepen. Dat zijn breuken met een vak. Het is van een schandaligheid waar ik inderdaad geen woorden voor heb. Dus wat mij machteloos woedend maakt.”



Prof. Imelman describes educational experimentation with children as bordering on criminal behavior. After centuries of development, radical changes are being forced upon us and he is powerless and angry.

Who is responsible! – the university

I once sat in a university meeting where the word “process” was used five times in two minutes. I actually counted and timed it. But the desired goal and the expected result were not discussed at all.

¹⁰ Every language has its blind spots. The English language sorely misses the word “gezellig”.

¹¹ Emeritus Professor in the Pedagogy, Universiteit Utrecht

This method of leadership has, also, not gone unnoticed. Prof. Frits van Oostrom, former president of the KNAW, in May 2007 exhibited the following terms to illustrate how Dutch universities described their operations and values¹²:

“Bedrijfsvoering, facilitair bedrijf, bedrijfsmatig werken, bedrijfscultuur, managementteam, onderwijsrendementen, outsourcen, capaciteitsgroepen, prestatieafspraken, ranking, targets, holdings, control, concern, stakeholders, projectmanager, output, procesmanagement, marketing, corebusiness, HRM-beleid, elkaar ergens op afrekenen, productieve onderzoekers, hersenen als grondstof, kennis als product”

This list contains many—too many—of the modern buzzwords and trends. To be clear, prof. van Oostrom was not happy with this development, one that I refer to as the “MBA-ing” of the university.

Who is responsible! – the university teachers

Too many of my colleagues are just “going through the motions”.

And why should they do otherwise? Everything that is essential to a successful career is based upon their research and their success at fund-raising (often called “management”) and not upon teaching. Accreditation is for research per professor but not for teaching per professor.

In the academic world, if we are to believe the provenance of the word, the primary responsibility of a professor is to “profess”, to “claim openly”, to *teach*.

And when we try to speak up we are usually ignored.

In November 2003, 12 TU Delft professors wrote and signed a letter to the College van Bestuur pleading for improvements to the educational system in Delft. They limited their suggestions to just two items:

- *“Het instellen van een bindend studieadvies aan eerstejaars studenten aan het eind van het eerste jaar” (binding advice at the end of the first year)*
- *“Het beperken van het aantal herkansingstentamens voor een vak dat een student kan afleggen tot twee.” (limiting the number of re-examinations of a subject to two)*

The authors of the letter included members of the Royal Academy of Sciences (the KNAW), TU Delft University professors, members of the TU Delft Raad van Hoogleraren, and winners of the TU Delft Leermeester Prize.

Six years later not one of these recommendations has been implemented. Not one. The proposals have been ignored to death.

Who is responsible! – the parents

The voices of our parents continue to echo in our lives.

My father, of blessed memory, used to give me a hard time about my grades.

“Why isn’t it a 10?” he would thunder when I came home with a 9.

“But no one got a 10. The average was 7.5”, I might reply.

“That’s no excuse”, he would say.

And when I finally came home with a 10, he would ask, “Why isn’t it an 11?”

“Because they don’t give 11’s!” I answered.

And what was my father’s response? “That’s no excuse!”

¹² “Markt en Ziel”, Jaarrede voor de Verenigde Vergadering van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 21 May 2007.

The commitment to, involvement in, and demand for quality education must come from the family.

Unfortunately, too many parents—and thus a non-negligible segment of our society—share the perception of Cor van der Geest, father and coach of a world champion judo topsporter. Commenting on 7 May 2009 on the popular television program *De Wereld Draait Door*, he said about “topsporters”:



*“Als topsporter moet je
of studeren of een beetje
werken.”*

In his perception studying is equivalent to a “little work”. In order for us to understand what this means, consider the observation from the recent, much-quoted book “Outliers”¹³. The author, Malcolm Gladwell, describes how his studies have shown that to become truly successful in a field one needs about 10,000 hours of training, not “a little work”.

That translates to five years of a 40-hour work week focused on just one thing whether that is judo, tennis, the violin, creative writing, carpentry, cooking or engineering.

And five years is the length of our Bachelors/Masters program at the TU Delft—if you work 40 hours per week at it.

Who is responsible! – you and I

We must blame ourselves. You (and I) watched this all happen over the past 20 or 30 years and we did ... nothing

It is not a small group that has promoted this new agenda for education that is responsible. It is the rest of us, who have let them get away with it, who are to blame.

Enlighten

When I was a child everything was better. Or perhaps you prefer the variant, when I was young everything was better. The expression “Everything was better”, however, is not new. It has probably been found as graffiti on walls in Rome...in Latin.

Wilhelm von Humboldt was pivotally involved in the founding of the University of Berlin¹⁴. Two hundred years ago, in 1810, he described a university based on three principles: unity of research and teaching, freedom of teaching, and academic self-governance¹⁵

In 1852 John Henry Newman wrote¹⁶:

“A University is a place ... whither students come from every quarter for every kind of knowledge; ... a place for the communication and circulation of thought, by means of personal intercourse. ... the place in which the intellect may safely range and speculate. It is a place where inquiry is pushed forward, ... discoveries verified and perfected, and ... error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and

¹³ “Outliers”, Malcolm Gladwell, Little, Brown and Company, New York, 2008.

¹⁴ “What are universities for?”, Boulton, G. and Lucas, C. LERU – League of European Research Universities, September 2008

¹⁵ “Über die innere und äussere Organisation der hoeheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin“, Humboldt, W. von. (1810). In Leitzmann et al., eds., Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Schriften. Band X. Berlin 1903–35

¹⁶ “The idea of the University“, Newman, J.H., Notre Dame University Press. 1852

knowledge with knowledge. ... Mutual education, in a large sense of the word, is one of the great and incessant occupations of human society. ... One generation forms another."

The notion of university education has developed over hundreds of years. As Prof. Imelman pointed out, the notion of education, in general, has an even longer history.

We send our children to be educated—starting at very young ages—because we have hope for the future and our children are one source for that hope.

Can the problem be solved?

The problem must be solved! For me this is a “given”.

There is a greater need than ever for a well-educated society. This has become obvious as we compete increasingly with countries like China and India not just in the economic marketplace but in the intellectual and philosophical marketplaces as well.

Further, due to pure demographics, using whatever measure you wish, both China and India have more students in the top 1% of *their* children than The Netherlands has children¹⁷.

Whose value system will dominate and guide the world through the next 200 years?

Solving the problem – more rigor

There must be more rigor. We must return to the basics because they are just that, basic.

A carpenter knows how to use his tools *before* he goes to build a house. A graduate of a university—a world-class technical university—must be professionally and intellectually literate if she is to lead universities, businesses, or governments in this century. Further, that graduate must have mastered a significant number of basic skills because the specific techniques that she has learned will be obsolete in 10 years.

Solving the problem – more demands on students

Roelof Vos, TU Delft student in aerospace engineering, won a Fulbright fellowship. In a TU Delft interview in 2007, about his experiences at the internationally-friendly University of Kansas, KU, he said¹⁸:

"Delft should copy KU's mandatory homework policy. By having to complete regular homework assignments, you automatically keep up with the class and there's not this huge load of work to study when exams come. ... Delft can already compete with top US universities. I can only speak for the TU's Aerospace Faculty, but in terms of education [TU Delft's] definitely as good as [KU] - although the teaching methods are better here [at KU]. I'd like Delft to have students do more independent research in labs. At KU, undergrads are doing projects, competing in nationwide competitions, and this really makes them skilled engineers."

The bottom line for Roelof Vos and for me is not networking but *net learning*.

Solving the problem – more demands on staff

There must be more demands on the academic staff – UDs, UHDs, and Professors

- Averaging three hours a week of lessons for four months is not enough.
- Teaching only at the M.Sc. level is not enough.
- Programmatic evaluation of educational programs is not enough.

¹⁷ Source: <http://www.nationmaster.com/>

¹⁸ “Dutch Fulbright on the prairie”, TU Delta, 39:6, 8 August 2007

Taken together, these are symptoms of a lazy attitude on the part of the individual and an unacceptable permissiveness on the part of the university. To be accredited as an institution where our children and grandchildren may go to learn, we must be accredited as competent to teach.

Those who complain about this are complaining about what it means to have (freely) chosen this academic life.

Mark Chavennes wrote in the NRC Handelsblad in June 2008 (in another context¹⁹):

“Dit land laat zich gijzelen door een irrationele, eenzijdige feel good-verlamming”

This translates to: *This country allows itself to be held hostage by an irrational, one-sided, feel-good, inability to act.*

His observation applies to education as well.

Solving the problem – the body politic and Dutch society

We must put an end to the “student as victim” syndrome, an insidious and pervasive concept.

Permit me an anecdote that illustrates this:

Several years ago I was invited to attend an evening meeting about university education organized by one of the Dutch major political parties. The format was a “debate” between the Tweede Kamer expert from that party and Sijbolt Noorda (who is now chairman of the VSNU). The proposition was that students should receive coupons that they could use at any university to follow academic subjects, receive credits, and finally graduate. The chairperson thought she could hammer out an agreement among the participants.

At one point, however, I asked from the audience, “If the coupons are the solution, what is the problem?” “The problem,” she replied, “is that the students need more freedom.”

The subsequent response from the audience ended the meeting and the concept.

The “poor student” needs more freedom? I have never—never—seen a university system where the students have so much freedom. They are not the “poor victims” of “heartless teachers”. They, like us, are stakeholders in the success of their education.

In the 1970s a stakeholder was interpreted in the broadest possible context to be the entire society – employed and unemployed, educated and uneducated, “first” world and “third” world. Today, the term stakeholder is more likely to be interpreted in the corporate context with the corporation being Nederland BV and with the chairman of the board being the Minister of Economic Affairs.

Consider a third interpretation.

The past and the future—not the present—are the stakeholders of a university. Our standard of living, our cultural heritage, and our very life expectancies are the inheritance of what universities have done for us over the past 800 years. We are indebted to the universities of the past.

Our children and our grandchildren expect much from us. We are indebted to their future. We have no debts to the ephemeral visions of ministers or chairmen of the boards whose wisdom is distorted by the current or next round of political coalition-forming or quarterly earnings.

Then there is the matter of money – ministerial funding to be specific. Hans van Luijk, past president of TU Delft, said it well in an interview in the Volkskrant²⁰. Let me paraphrase him in one sentence: “Waar zijn ze, het ministerie, in hemels naam helemaal mee bezig?”

¹⁹ “Kernenergie blijft de olifant in de kamer”, NRC Handelsblad, 21 June 2008, p. 18

Thomas Friedman suggests tax breaks for teachers²¹ and President Barack Obama wants teachers to be rewarded for quality work²², “merit pay for good teachers”. I agree completely with both proposals.

But not for you and not for me, not for the higher-education community.

We should begin with the primary level of education, *basisonderwijs*. If there is money left over we should continue to secondary education, *voortgezet onderwijs*.

If the problem is not addressed at the primary and secondary levels then it cannot be fixed at the university and vocational (MBO, HBO) levels.

Further, we need to place both responsibility and authority for education in the hands of those that have as a primary (and ambitious) goal the implementation of no less than the finest educational system in the world.

A country of the scale of The Netherlands can both seek and achieve this goal. In 1991 The Netherlands was cited in Newsweek magazine for having secondary schools with the best language and the best mathematics teaching in the world²³. Whatever was being done then should be revived and applied across the spectrum of our core curricula.

We need to embrace the idea that without a solid foundation in fundamental skills, learned in the earliest phases of the educational process, we will cede our future to others.

Finally, I think we need the whole-hearted support of the Royal Family. They are above politics, the Queen is the Head of State, they are involved with national issues, and they can bring considerable influence to bear on those who need convincing.

Opportunity

We are at a strange time in history – the economy is in a severe crisis, cheap energy eludes us, the baby-boomers are about to enter “late middle-age” with all the associated health needs, and the sea level is probably rising.

To quote the late president of MIT, Dr. Jerome Wiesner, “We are surrounded by opportunities.”

This thought lives on. The Chief-of-Staff to President Barack Obama, Rahm Emanuel, said shortly after the November 2008 election²⁴:



“You never want a serious crisis to go to waste...an opportunity to do things you could not do before.... America in 1973...missed the opportunity to deal with the energy crisis. Our energy policy came down to cheap oil.”

Similarly, our Dutch educational policy comes down to cheap education. Will we let *this* crisis go to waste?

²⁰ “Den Haag moet ophouden”, Interview with Ir. Hans van Luijk, Volkskrant, 1 March 2008, p. 7.

²¹ “Tax Cuts for Teachers”, Thomas L. Friedman, New York Times, 11 January 2009.

²² “Obama calls for education changes”, International Herald Tribune, 10 March 2009.

²³ “The Best Schools in the World”, Newsweek, 2 December 1991, pp. 38-44.

²⁴ “Rahm Emanuel on the Opportunities of Crisis”, Rahm Emanuel, Wall Street Journal Digital Network, 19 November 2008.

Enlightenment

Education for everyone is one of the triumphs of the Enlightenment. This was explicitly stated in Delft on 11 January 2002 by prof. dr. K. Osterwalder, Rector of ETH Zurich, on the occasion of the TU Delft's 160th birthday²⁵.

When we provide nurturing education that allows all of our children to exploit their God-given talents to the fullest, then we are serving a higher purpose.

This was shown in a most profound way in the play and film "Man for All Seasons" written by Robert Bolt. In the 1966 film a discussion is shown between Sir Thomas More (played by Paul Scofield) and Richard Rich (played by John Hurt).

It is Britain in the early 16th century. The obsequious Mr. Rich, who went on to become the First Baron Rich, Lord Chancellor of Britain under King Edward VI visits Sir Thomas to seek a position.



Sir Thomas:
"Why not be a teacher? You'd be a fine teacher, perhaps a great one."



Rich: "If I was, who would know it?"

Sir Thomas:
"You! Your pupils, your friends."



Sir Thomas:
"God. Not a bad public, that."

"Not a bad public, that." But Richard Rich does not follow Sir Thomas' advice and the rest, as they say, is history. Baron Rich was selected in 2005 by the BBC History Magazine as the 16th century's most reviled Briton²⁶.

²⁵ "Whither European higher education?", prof. dr. K. Osterwalder, 160^{ste} Dies Natalis TU Delft, 11 January 2002, p. 13.

²⁶ See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/uk_news/4561624.stm

My influential teachers

Do you remember your teachers from your primary and secondary years and the later years of your life? And of the ones you remember, how many do you remember as having influenced your education and your life for the good?

To honor my teachers, I remember:

- From my primary education – Mrs. Reid
- From my secondary education – Robert Brown (music), Harry Clair (mathematics), Rhoda Fritzshall (social studies), Fannie Kovitz (English and journalism), Helen Prindes (English literature) and Ruth Skolnick (biology)
- From my university education – Amar Bose
- And from my teachers in later life – Robert Levisson, David Lilienthal and Awraham Soetendorp

Learning must be a continuing process for to stop learning is to begin dying.

Light

It is education that brings light to places that are in darkness, whether it is to fully exploit our gifts ... or simply to find the misplaced keys to our house.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right because their words had forked no lightning, they Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay, Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight and learn, too late, they grieved it on its way, Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men near death who see with blinding sight, Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay, Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

*And you there on the sad height, Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray. **Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.***

After Dylan Thomas' Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night

Ik heb gezegd

Dankwoord

I thank my parents, Seymour and Ethel Young, *alayhem hashalom*, who played the role I have outlined here today: the needed enthusiasm for education coupled with love and discipline.

I thank my children – Heather, Aaron and Michael – and my grandchildren – Tobin, Yael, Jack and Casey – from whom I continue to learn.

And I thank Mieke for the collaboration that has been my life, her life, our wonderful years together.

I thank the Rector Magnificus Jacob Fokkema, Dean Karel Luyben, Professor Lucas van Vliet and Professor Hans Tanke for the examples they have been, their friendship, and their kind words on the occasion of my afscheidsrede. We go back many years and their words reflected this.

Finally I thank my colleagues and students with whom I have worked for so many years—a career—in the group PH/QI in Delft. At the risk of having missed someone, they are:

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