

*Educational Utopias*



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# Educational Utopias

Liber Amicorum

Prof. Dr. Alkeline van Lenning

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## Preface

### *Are We Prepared for the Future?*

*Society is challenged, and with it, we—universities—are challenged. Over the last decades we have seen a number of world-wide developments that have challenged, and still challenge the position and role of universities. How can we best act upon this? Are we prepared for the future?*

**A**s written in the strategy of the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences (2021), throughout the world we are facing a number of developments that all require tremendous societal changes to deal with. We see the effects of climate change all around us, requiring fundamental steps in the way we organize our society, economy, and (public) space, with more attention to the environment, and a rethinking of our use of energy, water, and materials. We see, in most of the Western world, an ageing population, which requires us to rethink our healthcare system, and put greater emphasis on healthy lifestyle and improving well-being, and which has a direct effect on the way we view work, income and pension provisioning. Changes in the geopolitical landscape require a rethinking about our safety and security, and puts the notion of freedom, which was long taken for granted in a country like the Netherlands, into a different perspective. There is a growing awareness that the existing structure of the economy, that has a primary focus on consumption and growth, is no longer the way to go forward. The organization of states and international institutions also needs to be reassessed in a world that is likely

to get less dominated by our Western worldview in which democracy and civil liberties are valuable assets. The increasing digitalization of society and economy and the impact of AI accelerates some of the above mentioned changes; polarization and increasing tensions between different groups in society are affected by the speed of zero-delay digital platforms, not to mention the rise and proliferation of fake news and the embracing and spreading of alternative truths.

In this landscape of profound societal changes and challenges, there is an important task for universities, as they provide the higher education to the future generations of citizens, such that they become responsible, emphatic, and decisive. Fulfilling this responsibility is happening in a time when the role of universities, of scientist or even science in general is questioned by populists voices. It is worrisome to see governments in many countries taking actions to decrease academic freedom; a recent survey (Kinzelbach et al., 2023) reports an increase in academic freedom in only 5 countries (accounting to only 0.7% of the world population), and a decline in over 20 mostly large countries (accounting to more than 50% of the world population). The Netherlands only takes position in the 30-40%-quantile.

The way universities perform their core tasks is increasingly affected by digitalization as well. Digitalization not only forces us to rethink the way we offer our education, that is, on/off campus, online, hybrid, or blended, but also challenges us in the way we interact with and evaluate the performance of our students. Think for example of the use of AI in writing assignments. In a now 10-year old essay (Harden, 2013), it was predicted that in 10 years' time most university offerings would be done via online platforms such as Coursera or EdX. Time has told us differently, fortunately. And although the pandemic proved to be an enormous boost to the use of digital tools in academia, it also underlined the value of live education and interaction among students and staff on campus; the notion of *Bildung* appears difficult to grasp purely digitally. However, this is not to say that we can (and should) just stick to our usual way of working.

The university operation is affected by globalization as well—in many ways. In the last decade, Dutch universities have welcomed

increasing numbers of international students and staff. This internationalization has brought advantages in terms of knowledge, new perspectives and experiences and mutual learnings. Yet it also requires extra attention and care, for example to make our classrooms truly inclusive, to address topics not just from a North-Western European perspective and to make everyone feel at home on campus, to mention a few.

With a history dating back some thousand years, universities are among our oldest institutions. Throughout the ages, especially when multiple bigger challenges occur simultaneously, universities have shown to be able to show resilience and adapt to new circumstances, thereby adhering to their core values. But when it comes to adaptation, universities sometimes show inertia. Being large institutions themselves, their maneuverability can be hampered by conflicting interests, historical contradictions or even political tensions. Where university staff is typically highly knowledgeable and skilled in objectively observing and explaining societal challenges and needs, applying these knowledge and skills on themselves can be quite challenging. Here the notional of ‘character building’ comes in, central to the Tilburg Educational Profile (Van Lenning and De Regt, 2017), which, among others, stresses the importance of being able to reflect also on one’s own behavior and acting.

Given the above, it is great to have a university college in our ranks, as a place of free thinkers, teaching students in a wide variety of topics, with a strong emphasis on critical thinking and (self-) reflection capabilities. University colleges and their liberal arts and sciences programs have a tradition of being more experimental, more interactive, more diverse and more daring than other parts of the university, and therefore, probably better prepared for change. And so it has been the case in Tilburg since its inception. The University College Tilburg is a thriving community, thanks to the many colleagues from different Schools that contribute, and the growing number of students from various backgrounds that are welcomed and served. Compared to other schools and universities in the Netherlands, the Tilburg University College approach is different in the sense that it aims to focus on out-

put excellence and student growth, rather than on input excellence as is almost exclusively the case elsewhere (Deresiewicz, 2014; Sandell, 2020). This approach gives our university college a special position in the landscape: that of a living example of diversity and inclusion. And it does deliver, as has been shown firmly in a recent international assessment. That does not mean, however, that we can stop thinking and adapting, but I do think that the overall set-up of our university college gives us a head-start into the future.

In the development of the UCT, the Dean Alkeline van Lenning takes a special role. Under her leadership, the university college has developed into a well-established and top-level university college, with an excellent and inclusive atmosphere, for both students and staff, that currently welcomes around 120 new bachelor students from around the globe every year, preparing them for a wide variety of master-programs three years later. One cannot easily overestimate how important the Dean's role in this has been, and how much energy and dedication has been put in by her. The faculty board of the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences, is extremely thankful to Dean Alkeline van Lenning for her endless efforts, care, firmness, thought, friendship and the hard, dedicated and visionary work, in making the university college what it is now: our own private educational utopia. As faculty board we are determined to continue our support to the University College Tilburg. Thank you Alkeline!



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## Introduction

On March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016, University College Tilburg (UCT) was officially launched with a festive celebration themed *Utopia: An Ideal Community*. Seven years later, in March 2023, University College Tilburg's Dean Alkeline van Lenning left as her legacy a 'good place' when taking emeritus status. This book, *Educational Utopias*, is a tribute to her work and personality.

The term *utopia* refers to Thomas More's book *Utopia*, which was first published in 1516. Etymologically, the term derives from two Greek words: *eu-topia*, meaning 'good place', or *ou-topia*, meaning 'no place' or 'non-existent place'. In his book, Thomas More meets an adventurous world traveler, who discovered and lived on the imaginary island of *Utopia*. The island hosts an ideal society. The islanders of Utopia hold and practice inspirational political, religious and social beliefs. The book has been a foundational text of European humanism and utopian thinking. Since More, the concept of utopia has been used and re-imagined in a variety of ways. Education has often been perceived as a constituent pillar of the ideal society. For this *Liber Amicorum*, a series of colleagues and friends have imagined their educational utopias.

Societal commitment runs as a red thread throughout the 40 years of Alkeline van Lenning's academic endeavors. Keywords that capture her academic profile include gender, feminist theory, emancipation and character education. She has been anything but an armchair scholar, but lived and worked according to her principles and convictions. This is reflected in the contributions of her colleagues.

In her position of Vice Dean and, since 2013, Dean of University College Tilburg, she translated the ideals of equality into the organization. Alkeline van Lenning built the house called University Col-

<sup>1</sup>Tom Willems prepared brief summaries of all contributions for this introduction.

lege Tilburg around the Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) program. She modelled the house, not after the traditional University College (UC) concept, but after her own vision, and turned it into a home for many. The University College aspires to be accessible, and attracts many first generation and international students. The UC is part of the Tilburg University community and encourages students to be responsible members of their respective communities. Alkeline, with the College's core staff, strives to support students to reach their full potential and develop holistically. Also at the university level, Alkeline has made important contributions, perhaps culminating in writing the educational vision of the university that promotes the growth of students' knowledge, skills *and* character (De Regt and Van Lenning, 2017).

As Dean of the University College and Program Director of its Social Sciences major, she has initiated, implemented and stimulated a large number of innovations at the course, curriculum and institutional levels. From re-adopting the course, Visual Culture and the Body, just seven months before retirement, to designing distance courses when online education was still a nascent phenomenon, her passion for education is renowned in the College and beyond. Alkeline opened up the program to society, involving herself in connecting the Liberal Arts and Sciences program to developments around the College. Strengthening students' capacity to criticize their own judgment in the context of the meritocratic society has been a recurring theme (Van Lenning, 2019). In promoting social innovation and professional practice in the curriculum, she also opened up society to the program: allowing LAS students to use their academic knowledge and skills in a professional context.

Two paragraphs cannot suffice to outline even the highlights of an academic career that spans four decades. The purpose of the above is hence not to list the many contributions of Alkeline van Lenning to Tilburg University and its University College. Indeed, many chapters in this book take a deep dive into selected milestones of her career, narrating from firsthand experience of the respective authors who worked with her. Instead, the purpose of the short and incomplete

bio is to show the College has big shoes to fill. Alkeline's academic friends need to investigate their own ideals that shape their educational innovations. Perhaps this book also serves to guide that process.

#### FROM IDEA TO BOOK

A series of meetings in 2022/2023, secretly called Project A, kickstarted what eventually culminated in this book. Project A commenced with an idea to compose a *Liber Amicorum* for Alkeline, an idea that immediately received broad support although some already had more realistic expectations than others about the collective efforts that would be required to turn that idea into a book. Parallels with Project X are not only imaginary, referring to a 2012 movie about three friends who wish to gain popularity by organizing an enormous party. Project X attracted copycat behavior in the real world, including a Dutch teenager who invited 78 friends and their friends to her hometown Haren to celebrate her birthday party – in the end leading to riots of thousands of youngsters showing up in the city. While the editorial board decided not to allow snowball sampling, the feature that made Project X run out of control, Project A proved to be a crazy endeavor as well. In line with the vision of the University College, an editorial board comprising nine core staff members was established – diverse in scientific disciplines represented and welcoming academic as well as support staff. The board long-listed possible authors, and soon found 36 colleagues and friends eager to contribute to the book. Each of the 27 contributions were peer-reviewed by a pair of editorial board members twice. Carly Willis provided excellent language support. The editors wish to express their gratitude to her and to Daan Rutten (LIS, Tilburg University), Violet S. Zagt and Thomas F. K. Jorna (JOTE Publishers) for their support in the printing process, and Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences and Open Press TiU for their financial support.

The first two contributions are included before this introduction. Boudewijn Haverkort, Dean of the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences, has kindly agreed to write the preface of this book.

Jet Rotmans has been so kind to design the cover. The image of the ‘excellent sheep’ combines paradoxical notions of herd behavior and excellence which the reader will recognize as underlying themes in some of the other contributions, across different levels. Students in the educational utopias included in this book strive to reach their full potential, but are also anxious not to stand out. Utopian lecturers and higher education institutions similarly aim to go to great lengths to facilitate learning, while they at the same time want to be compliant with external expectations. The courage to stand out and realize extraordinary performance is ill-matched with our inclination to mimicry in populations exposed to similar pressures.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The career of Alkeline van Lenning spans disciplines and countries, and led her to different roles in academia. The scope of her work as a professor is also reflected in the scope of this book. Contributions are organized in six sections, but readers are encouraged to find their own path as chapters relate in other ways than the one captured in the section structure. One implicit theme, to which we return at the end of this chapter, is why Liberal Arts and Science education is a fertile breeding ground for educational utopias, and potentially the environment in which educational utopias are best realized.

The following paragraphs present the six different sections of this book. Connections between contributions are highlighted and the editors’ brief summary of the contribution is presented.

The first section includes three personal reflections which honor Alkeline and her work for the University College directly and serve as a solid foundation for understanding her as an academic leader whose work mirrors her personality. *Pieter Pekelharing* depicts Alkeline’s career in light of changing socio-economic circumstances in the Netherlands and beyond. Pieter’s personal approach casts light on various topics, including social hierarchies, the glass ceiling and gender inequality, thereby reflecting on both the society of today and tomorrow. *Willem Drees* explores the contemporary meritocratic society,

reflecting on the drawbacks which meritocracy can have for a system of education. This exploration is made in connection to the story of how Alkeline developed University College Tilburg and her visions on meritocracy. Through this, a vision of educational governance based on ambition and innovation is created. Third, *Petra Heck* looks back on the emergence of University College Tilburg and her cooperation with Alkeline in the program's nascent period. Through retelling the history of UCT, Petra reflects on lessons learned, as well as visions for the future of the University College. The three contributions leave an impression that is best summarized in Petra Heck's words: "you have not walked the easiest, but the most satisfying road". The Liberal Arts and Sciences curriculum in Tilburg reflects a program derived from a shared vision and supported by a team that finds a common purpose in innovative, international, small-scale education.

In Part I utopian topics take center stage. Ten contributions address the question 'what to teach.' Five chapters focus on responsible citizenship. In the first essay, *Teun Dekker* focuses on the importance of education for democracy, whilst simultaneously constructing an Aristotelian understanding of what 'a democratic utopia' looks like. He argues for the importance of highly qualified people for a well-functioning democratic society, and argues that "a proper understanding of democratic utopia" through high-quality education is one of the key ways in which such a democratic utopia may come to be. *Chris Chulos* approaches democratic values from a Liberal Arts and Sciences perspective, which he contrasts with the more economic and instrumentalist approach to higher education common in the United States. Through a historical investigation of and contemporary criticism on U.S. education, Chulos argues how the liberal arts "can serve as healing and unifying fibers to lessen contentiousness grappling with the purpose of higher education in contemporary society." The instrumentalist approach to education also serves as the dystopian view against which *Anandi van der Merwe* and *Jamie Wolvekamp* construct their vision of higher education. They employ the writing of Hannah Arendt to center their utopia around the development of the self and the pursuit of responsible citizenship. Not only do they reject the capitalistic view of

education as a preparation for the job market, but they also develop the stance that universities can – or perhaps should – play a valuable role in students developing into good citizens. If universities were to embrace Van der Merwe and Wolvekamp’s call, the subsequent question is what value-related education would look like and how the topics and values discussed in the classroom ought to be selected. *Tim Reeskens* and *Inge Sieben*’s contribution “Let’s Teach ‘Em Values!” clearly advocates value education. They argue how value-related education can contribute to students’ understanding, character building, and skills development. Reeskens and Sieben discuss the European Values Study (EVS): one of Tilburg University’s unique research projects which holds a prominent place in some of the courses at University College Tilburg. Their practical approach to the question of achieving their utopia focuses on the employment of the EVS in the present, whilst simultaneously looking forward to the future. The values a program intends to transfer to students also derive from the topics included in courses. In “History in the Making”, *Tessa Leesen* uses the developments in her course on European History as a vehicle to investigate the power of selection in history education. The question of which topics to teach and with what purpose stands at the forefront. Through investigating these questions, Leesen argues for an educational utopia “in which history professors and students carefully and collectively reflect upon the selection of historical topics and engage in a respectful discussion on history education.” The five chapters collectively support the personal impressions in the first section, which applauded Alkeline van Lenning’s translation of her educational vision in the Liberal Arts and Sciences curriculum. A strong curriculum conveys a set of values, which are more democratic in nature according to the authors than those conveyed in the dystopian views with which LAS was contrasted.

Developments of all sorts give rise to societal concerns and education is a relevant part of society that has a role to play. As Section 2 highlights, education is a vehicle to transmit societal values to future generations. Conversely, however, education may also be a fertile breeding ground for societal changes. There is hence a never-ending conversation between education and other parts of society, for example



the economy, politics, or non-governmental organizations. Section 3 of this book discusses education and how it relates to a number of societal concerns. *Marrie Bekker* and *Ine Vanwesenbeeck* “celebrate [their] friendship and collaboration with Alkeline by reflecting on one of the biggest feminist utopias: women’s bodily freedom and autonomy.” In doing so, they construct a vision of how far modern society has come regarding this topic, and reflect on the role of education. Focusing, for example, on sex education, they argue that while the importance of such education has become more accepted, teachers need more support and education themselves. Without additional education, teaching may “remain stuck in the grooves of patriarchy and biologism,” according to the authors. There are lessons to be learned for education that relates to societal concerns other than bodily freedom as well: teachers who strive to address societal concerns, ought to be aware of their position in the debate and how this affects their teaching. *Murray Pratt* explores change and innovation in education, arguing through a reading of authors on the Anthropocene that “education for the mid twenty-first century should provide learners with spaces, activities and projects that challenge assumptions and seek new lessons.” The argument is made that the fate of one, the fate of others, and the fate of the planet as a whole should be central in learning and the evolution of our world. *Geno Spoormans* highlights the importance of personal essay writing as argued by ChatGPT. In a subversive and paradoxical move, this epitome of impersonal essay writing itself offers a series of educational and personal benefits of the practice of this “crucial aspect of academic excellence.” *Evelien Tonkens* and *Tsjalling Swierstra* investigate the contemporary focus on ‘social safety’ through three dimensions of issues; transgressive behavior, work pressure, and offensive terms, images and ideas. Power and power imbalances are explored as key concepts therein, as is the contemporary societal preoccupation with risk and safety. Perceptions on developments regarding these are employed to reflect on the state of the modern student and the possibility to “fight the wave of anxiety that is marring the lives of many young people today.” *David Janssens* and *Michiel Bot* have an epistolary exchange on the topic of atopia, ancient Greek for “without

place” or “deprived of place”. The authors mobilize the term – and its associated concept “displacement” – to ponder the current status of the university: is it a common space that stimulates critical thinking and radical questioning, or has it become a gentrifying iron cage cordoned off by turnstiles and a neoliberal mindset? The set of contributions discusses different answers to the question ‘what to teach’. Whether about teaching gender studies, climate change, technology, or the role of universities in stimulating change in each of these dimensions, the five contributions highlight the importance of considering what to teach jointly with the questions who teaches and who learns.

Part II of the liber amicorum takes up exactly these questions in three sections. Section 4 of the book focuses on teaching; Section 5 includes four contributions specifically about reading; and Section 6 includes three forward-looking contributions. The essays included in Part II spotlight a vehicle for educational utopias and explore in (some) depth how the vehicle is a central element in the authors’ ideal education.

Seven chapters revolve around utopian teaching. *Gerwin van der Laan* and *Anna Shekiladze* combine their respective – academic and support – perspectives on small-scale education. They identify the tension between efficient teaching on a large scale, promoting education for all, and personal teaching on a small scale, promoting diversity in pedagogies employed. They suggest that a different social contract applies to small scale and large scale education and propose a two-step education system in which large and small scale teaching are combined. Similar to Van der Laan and Shekiladze, *Aswin van Oijen* observes a gap between ideals of small-scale, science-based, relevant and synchronous education on the one hand and reality, which is at least to some degree oppositely characterized. Van Oijen promotes selection in who we teach, who teaches and what we do to facilitate focus on core tasks. *Ellen Dreezens* explores how authenticity in teachers can provide a role model that aids in the building of character in students. She argues that only by developing into self-actualized persons can students conceive of effective solutions for the societal issues of today, and that role models can help with this development. Teachers that reveal their process

of self-actualization through the full width of their authentic personalities, can inspire students and leave an everlasting impact on their lives. *Jenny Slatman* narrates from her personal experience how an educator develops. Absent required qualifications, teachers in higher education discover effective teaching through a process of trial and error. Combining these two contributions, the authentic teacher is not born as such but discovers the teaching style that fits her personality in interaction with the students. *Herman de Regt* takes More's Utopia as starting point and argues for the centrality of learning on More's island. Learning, De Regt continues, should be based on the scientific method. Applying this method and teaching it early on in university programs is a characteristic of the Tilburg LAS program he applauds. *Anna Huvos* focuses on the experience of learning itself, and argues for the importance of providing students a learning experience which fuels their curiosity and stimulates life-long learning. She argues that not all students will enter university with an understanding of learning techniques and a personal learning style, and after highlighting some of the important aspects of learning to keep in mind, constructs a vision of "a course built to teach students how to study, manage their learning, and cope with the stress of university." *Vikas Lakhani* uses the story of Arvind Gupta – an influential, yet humble Indian educator who emphasizes the joy of learning – as a departure point for an investigation of 'flow'; a key concept in positive psychology that represents "a sense of joy and effortlessness" whilst performing an activity "with intense focus and creative engagement." Through this investigation, Lakhani argues for the importance of positive emotions. Curiosity is a recurring theme in the contribution included in Section 4. Curiosity is a value that should be stimulated in students (Van der Laan and Shekiladze; Huvos) and teachers (Lakhani; Dreezens). Curiosity is also a driving force behind scientific progress (De Regt) and the development of teachers (Slatman).

The modern-day world, which is governed by digitalization, competitiveness and efficiency, leaves little room for reading books from cover to cover and appreciating the power of literature. Four contributions (in Section 5) advocate the (re)appreciation of literature and

turn to reading as a utopian vehicle for the enhancement of students' development. *Emma Cohen de Lara* suggests that modern universities might have become too one-dimensionally focused on the purely cognitive and quantifiable side of learning. Through a reflection on the meritocratic educational system and the predicaments of the modern student, Cohen de Lara advocates for the meaningfulness of reading for pleasure. She suggests schools and universities encourage students to read for pleasure, as this meaningful activity can contribute to the development of personhood, enchantment, new ways of seeing the world, and emotional engagement – an overall self-transformative experience. In *Dreaming of Reading and Reasoning*, *Sander Bax* maps the 'crisis of education.' Students seem to lack focus and display poor literacy skills. In response to this crisis, Bax explores the value of literature, literary reading and reasoning. He introduces the innovative educational method of literary historical reasoning. This method invites students to reflect upon literature as a historical construct, which operates within a certain cultural-historical context and enhances students' critical thinking skills. *Odile Heynders* supports the value of literature as a vehicle to stimulate the readers' flexibility, creative thinking and responsiveness. In order to enable and invite students to engage in a hermeneutic dialogue with literature, Heynders outlines different reading strategies that are helpful for this purpose and enhance the power of literature. *Suzanne van der Beek* attempts to break away from cynicism and imagines a place of hope in a time where, due to the threat of climate change, so little room for hope seems to exist. If the present invites so much pessimism, how may our education also include the future? In response to this question, Van der Beek suggests a future-oriented education of imagination. By changing the stories-we-live-by, and our lifestyle, we might be able to construct an eco-utopia.

While contributions in Section 1 reflected on the past – notably Alkeline van Lenning's career and the parallel development of University College Tilburg – Section 6 is more future-oriented. The three contributions present important elements of a future-oriented approach. *Tom Willems* and *Martijn Loos* construct a parable – a simple, moralistic (fairy) tale. The main character in their stylistic travelogue ventures through a variety of nations, each representing an important

period in the history of education, in search of the ideal education. Through the journey, a vision of (the value of) education for the future arises which borrows insights from the ‘nations’ of the past. In constructing an ideal education, Willems and Loos seem to argue, one can turn to the past to learn from the successes and failures of earlier attempts. The adoption of technological innovations to realize an ideal society is appealing. What potential does technology offer teachers and students to realize previously unattainable objectives or to make better use of scarce resources? *Claudia Egber* addresses the opportunities and threats of digital technologies in higher education, highlighting in particular the responsibilities of society, universities, teachers and students in properly implementing these technologies. Acknowledging both the positive and negative expectations of these technologies, Egber argues for some “changes and adjustments that will be needed to ensure the successful use of digital technologies in education.” *Monique Volman* sketches a utopia of higher education that is characterized by “a culture of research regarding the education that is offered.”, with a particular focus on questions of pedagogy. Through reflection on the ‘Scholarship of Learning and Teaching’ movement and the work of Biesta, Volman explores what this utopia might look like, and argues that University College Tilburg may show some early signs of this vision.

Not surprisingly, contributions often refer to University College Tilburg and its Liberal Arts and Sciences program. UC Tilburg and LAS are either considered a source of inspiration for educational utopias, a place where elements of a utopia are present, or a context in which a utopia may be developed. Since, as Section 1 established, UC Tilburg embodies the values Alkeline van Lenning holds dearly, we end this introduction with reference to the role of Liberal Arts education in the context of educational utopias.

Part I of this liber proposes that education is value-driven. Teachers should, perhaps in cooperation with students, select topics that transfer values of good citizenship, including democracy, to future generations. Interdisciplinary programs are well positioned to explicate value transfer. It is unavoidable that values are transferred in the process of education. Interdisciplinary programs transfer the values

of multiple disciplines and therefore need to explicitly attend to the potentially different values dominating the disciplines included in the program. Since value conflicts often underlie complex problems, LAS programs are among those suitable to train students to address such problems. As several contributions in Section 3 suggest, education has indeed affected society, and societal trends demand a response from education.

Vehicles for realizing educational utopias, as presented in Part II, often revolve around curiosity: curious students who want to understand contemporary problems, and curious teachers who strive to make their teaching more effective. Programs in which flexibility is built into the curriculum and policies unleash curiosity. The connection between utopian vehicles and Liberal Arts and Sciences (in University College Tilburg) appears reasonable. In a Liberal Arts and Sciences curriculum, students have considerable freedom to shape their own education. They are allowed to discover where their curiosity takes them. In the Tilburg vision, this freedom is not endless – programs cannot be blind to the need to qualify their students for some broadly defined roles in society – but offering students choice does equip them with self-actualizing skills that are valuable beyond graduation. Similarly for teachers, curiosity as to what makes teaching effective is unleashed if experimentation is encouraged in how educational activities and assessments are employed to meet learning objectives. Alkeline van Lenning has promoted experimentation throughout her career and ‘her’ university college is rightly perceived as a place where teachers with an interest to renew meet and are encouraged to try out new didactics or technologies.

This book is a tribute to one of the driving forces behind initiatives that stimulated students to reach their full potential by tapping into their hunger for knowledge. It is a tribute to one of the driving forces behind a culture and organization of educational innovation. It is a tribute to Alkeline van Lenning, whose career has been devoted to empowering students and teachers to realize ideals they themselves sometimes did not think possible.

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*Personal Reflections:  
A Career in Retrospect*



## The Dutch Couple

*Seeing the World through the Lens of Gender*

**T**WENTY years ago, Alkeline and I decided to give a talk together at a conference in Thessaloniki. I can't remember the content of the paper, but it had something to do with gender and the culture of the body. When we finished our talk someone in the audience stood up and said he had a question for 'the Dutch Couple'.

We liked that. So much so that the reference to the 'Dutch Couple' became an anecdote we regularly told our friends when they came to visit. After Thessaloniki, Alkeline continued to give courses on the culture of the body. But when she became Dean of the liberal arts faculty the focus of her attention shifted elsewhere.

Issues of gender, however, never lost her interest. On the contrary. Alkeline was, and still is, a passionate feminist. She started campaigning on feminist issues from early on. She began her academic career in the Department of Women's Studies and was on the editorial board of the Dutch Journal of Women's Studies for many years.

Naturally, this had consequences for the Dutch Couple. Although living together had made us acutely aware of our class backgrounds - she was the daughter of a shoemaker, I the son of a diplomat - "women's lib" came before class. The visible and invisible forms of the unequal treatment of women, the discovery that our culture - in books, films, science or economics - was marked by what Carlota Perez aptly called "a female shaped absent presence", the impact this had on women's