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The myth of The Phoenix: progressive education, migration and the shaping of the welfare state, 1985–2015

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970s, many western welfare states have been subject both to increased migration and to a renewed interest in progressive education. The present article addresses the question of whether these two phenomena are related and how changing notions of the welfare state shape and are shaped by this relationship. To answer the question, we concentrate our attention on the case study of Ghent (Belgium), which from the 1970s onwards has been characterised not only by a growing ethnic diversity but also by a renewed interest in progressive educational initiatives. Drawing on oral history with key figures in the local educational field and research in school archives, this article indicates that progressive initiatives in the last few decades have indeed emerged as an answer to migration patterns. But whereas initial initiatives in the 1980s arose from an endeavour to cater for the migrant child, some recent initiatives arose from an attempt to exclude the same child.

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Introduction

In 2009, Tom De Coster, Frank Simon and Marc Depaepe noted a remarkable increase in the number of progressive primary schools in Flanders, Belgium.¹ Whereas in the period between 1970 and 1990 the number of progressive primary schools in Flanders grew by 0.88 schools per year, between 1991 and 2005 this number grew even more, by 4.56 schools per year. As such, a count of progressive primary schools “yielded 88 such schools”.² At present, this process still shows no sign of slowing down. On the contrary, a count conducted by us in September 2014 applying the same criteria yielded 143 progressive primary schools, corresponding to 4.14% of all the schools in the primary education system. During the period 2005–2014, the number of progressive schools thus grew at an unprecedented rate of 6.11 schools per annum.

In this striking development, the Ghent urban primary education system stands out as a Mecca of progressive education.³ After all, whereas originally characterised by traditional

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¹In this context, progressive schools are defined as schools that not only represent themselves as a (more progressive) alternative to the existing (traditional) forms of education, but are also recognised and labelled as such by the Flemish government.

²Tom De Coster, Frank Simon and Marc Depaepe, “Alternative Education in Flanders, 1960–2000: Transformation of Knowledge in a Neo-liberal Context,” *Paedagogica Historica* 45, no. 4 (2009): 646.

³Urban education in this context is defined as all forms of education that are organised by the municipal government.

schools solely, almost half of all urban primary schools in Ghent (i.e. 21/45) are currently claiming to provide progressive education. The history of this *renewed* interest in progressive education in Ghent can be divided into two phases.⁴

In a first phase (1985–2000), it was mainly the Pedagogical Centre of the city that established urban progressive primary schools. Since the 1970s, due to a continued influx of immigrants, some of the city districts had become truly ethnically diverse. In this phase, progressive education was recognised as a means to cater to the needs of *every* child including the immigrant child. Consequently, in this period, educational progressivism can be perceived as illustrative of attempts to realise every child's right to (qualitative) education and, hence, of the radicalisation of the welfare state itself.

With this radicalisation, we refer to the radical reading, as opposed to the minimalist reading, of the concept of equal opportunity that could be considered a “key goal” of education within welfare states.⁵ The minimalist reading defines equality of opportunity as no more than *equal access* for all children, regardless of social origin, while in the radical reading the concept is also conveyed as *equal achievement* for all children, again regardless of social origin.⁶ It is important to make this distinction, taking into account that the welfare state could be defined as a collection of programmes directed at securing and promoting the economic and social well-being of all citizens.⁷ In that regard, the welfare state is made up of five key mechanisms: (i) public assistance, (ii) social insurance, (iii) taxation, (iv) social services, and (v) social rights.⁸ The mechanism of social rights safeguards a citizen's access to other mechanisms, such as social services including education.

As such, the development of the welfare state in the twentieth century also entailed the concept of citizenship evolving. Whereas, in the early twentieth century, citizenship mainly comprised *civil rights* and *political rights*, the development of the welfare state establishes the initiation of *social rights* that can be called upon on the basis of citizenship status.⁹ In this sense, it is intelligible why the British sociologist Thomas Humphrey Marshall defined the “triumph” of the welfare state, this through the declaration of social rights, as “the subordination

⁴We deliberately speak of a *renewed* interest in progressive education for with Jozef Verheyen, Richard Verbist and the university experimentation school, Ghent University historically shows a strong link with progressive education. Moreover, we know of at least one precursor of urban progressive education in Ghent, as from the 1930s until the 1950s Frederick De Moor experimented with the Decroly method at one urban primary school. See Marc Depaepe, Frank Simon and Angelo Van Gorp, “The ‘Good Practices’ of Jozef Emiel Verheyen: Schoolman and Professor of Education at the Ghent University,” in *Educational Research: Why “What Works” Doesn’t Work*, ed. Paul Smeyers and Marc Depaepe (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 17–23; Karel De Clerck, *75 jaar pedagogische wetenschappen aan de Gentse universiteit* [75 years of educational sciences at Ghent University] (Ghent: Archief RUG, 2002); Richard Verbist, “Het hoger instituut voor opvoedkundige wetenschappen der rijksuniversiteit te Gent,” *Paedagogische Studiën* 39, no. 3 (1962): 97–115; Frederick De Moor, *L'école active par la méthode-Decroly programme avec deux centres d'intérêt développés* [The Decroly method and the active school illustrated by means of two centres of interest] (Brussels: Lamertin, 1930).

⁵See Anne West and Rita Nikolai, “Welfare Regimes and Educational Regimes: Equality of Opportunity and Expenditure in the EU (and US),” *Journal of Social Policy* 42, no. 3 (2013): 469–93.

⁶See for example Kenneth R. Howe, “Equality,” in *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. Joseph J. Chambliss (New York: Routledge, 1996), 178–81; Carrie Winstanley, “Educational Opportunities – Who Shall We Leave Out?,” in *The Philosophy of Education: An Introduction*, ed. Richard Bailey (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 113–24.

⁷Thomas H. Marshall, “Citizenship and Social Class,” in *Citizenship and Social Class*, ed. Thomas H. Marshall and Tom B. Bottomore (London: Pluto Press, 1992), 1–51; Michael B. Katz, *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare State* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁸See Katz, *The Price of Citizenship*; Maria Bouverne-De Bie, *Sociale Agogiek* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2015).

⁹Civil rights refer to the rights necessary for a person's individual freedom such as “freedom of speech, thought, and faith, the right to own property and valid contracts, and the right to justice”. Political rights comprise all rights necessary “to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such body”. Social rights include a whole range of rights, from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society. See Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 8.

of market price to social justice”.¹⁰ Educational opportunity, then, is both ensured and equal for all citizens on the basis of social rights rather than determined by market value.

In a second phase (2000–2015), however, when school boards of urban primary schools also established progressive initiatives – this mainly by transforming their traditional school into a progressive one – one can observe the reverse. Indeed, in this phase progressive education is mainly illustrative of the dismantling of the welfare state at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries; a process which, as opposed to the first phase, is characterised by the subordination of social justice to market price.¹¹ Educational progressivism became recognised as a means to fulfil personal desires, and progressive education became intertwined with the education market:

The education market (like all markets) is intended to be driven by self-interest: first, the self-interest of parents, as consumers, choosing schools that will provide maximum advantage to their children; second, the self interest [*sic*] of schools or their senior managers, as producers, in making policy decisions that are based upon their institutions thrive, or at least survive, in the marketplace.¹²

This marketisation, however, proved to be an impediment to the social rights of specific constituents. In particular, migrant working-class families were hit hard. When the market appealed to them as customers instead of citizens, and hence their access was no longer defined on the basis of social rights but on the goods they had to exchange, some of them lost access.¹³ Consequently, progressive education became disconnected from its former status as a public good that could be called upon by everyone on the basis of social rights.¹⁴ Ironically, the relative success of progressive education today is closely related to the very fact that it does not succeed, as was attempted in the previous phase, in catering to all children.

In order to show how the renewed interest in progressive education in Ghent can be seen as emblematic to both the welfare state’s radicalisation and its dismantling, this article focuses on Ghent, making an appeal to instrumental case research.¹⁵ The plan of this article is as follows. In a first section, we will provide a historical overview of Ghent and its migration patterns. In a second section, we will clarify the Belgian education system with regard to student allocation. In a third section, we will analyse the activities of the above-mentioned Pedagogical Centre regarding progressive education. In the final section, we will examine the transformation process from a traditional to a progressive school of *De Acacia*, the first school that did this, and which soon became a model for the other school boards with similar plans.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 40; See Katz, 2008, 2 on the use of the concept of triumph.

¹¹Katz, *The Price of Citizenship*, 2.

¹²Sharon Gewirtz, Stephen J. Ball, and Richard Bowe, *Markets, Choice and Equity in Education* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), 2. While equal educational opportunity is a “key goal” of education within welfare states, it is not necessarily one of other forms of government. This is an important observation as many western welfare states have increasingly come under attack by what has been called “the right turn”. As has been argued by Michael W. Apple, this right turn is typified by both (i) a neoliberal logic characterised by processes of marketization and privatisation and (ii) a neoconservative rationale marked by the promotion of traditional knowledge and pedagogies. As this has changed “who we are and how we think about our institutions,” including education, this could lead to the dismantling of the welfare state as social justice is subordinated to market price. See Michael W. Apple, *Educating the “Right” Way. Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 8. See also Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015) on the construction of a *homo oeconomicus*.

¹³Maia Bloomfield Cucchiara, *Marketing Schools, Marketing Cities: Who Wins and Who Loses when Schools Become Urban Amenities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 211.

¹⁴David F. Labaree, *Education, Markets and the Public Good: The Selected Works of David F. Labaree* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁵In contrast to intrinsic case research, the focus in instrumental case research is not on the case itself. Rather the case is used as a tool to facilitate the understanding of a particular issue or phenomenon, here the blossoming of progressive educational initiatives in relation to migration patterns. See Gina Grandy, “Instrumental Case Study,” in *Encyclopaedia of Case Study Research*, ed. A.J. Mills, G. Durepos and E. Wiebe (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 473–5.

Historical overview of Ghent and its migration patterns

Unlike other cities in mainland Europe, the industrialisation of Ghent took off as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ As a boomtown, Ghent generated many new city districts and attracted a mass of people willing to work. For example, whilst in 1806 the population number of this city did not exceed 60,000, on the eve of the twentieth century it had risen to more than 160,000. Housing a number of large factories, Ghent soon became known as the “Manchester of the Continent”.¹⁷ However, the population of Ghent and its nineteenth-century districts did not continue to grow. In the period after the Second World War, Ghent faced unprecedented urban flight, resulting in a population drop of more than 20% in the next three decades.¹⁸ The exodus out of the city was nevertheless reserved only for those who could afford it financially.¹⁹ Nonetheless it soon became clear that white working classes would not be left to themselves.

From the 1960s onwards, increasingly more labour migrants came from Mediterranean countries to settle amidst the white working-class families (see Table 1 for an overview of migration patterns over time). This influx was facilitated by a specific national policy meant to compensate the shortage of blue-collar workers in some harsh and underpaying industrial sectors. Indeed, “beginning with Italy in 1946, and continuing with Spain (1956), Greece (1957), Morocco (1964), Turkey (1964), Tunisia (1969), Algeria (1970) and Yugoslavia (1970), the government pursued several bilateral agreements”²⁰ in which the employment of labour migrants – so called *gastarbeiders* – was settled.²¹ The influx of labour migrants in Belgium in the early 1960s was further facilitated by the Ministry of Justice, which “stopped strictly applying the legislation governing immigration”.²² In the inception phase, these migrants – who were put to work on low wages – were often actively recruited

¹⁶Herman Balthazar, “Groeit tot industriële grootstad” [Growth to an industrial metropolis], in *Gent: Apologie van een rebelse stad*, ed. Johan Decavele (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds Antwerpen, 1989), 155–83.

¹⁷Christophe Verbruggen, *De stank bederft onze eetwaren. De reacties op industriële milieuhinder in het 19de-eeuwse Gent* [The stench spoils our comestibles. Reactions to industrial pollution in 19th century Ghent] (Ghent: Academia Press, 2002), 11.

¹⁸This was mainly the result of a pair-off of Fordism with a specific national policy facilitating suburban living. For an interesting and concise discussion regarding the elements causing urban flight in Flanders and Belgium in the period after the Second World War see for example Christian Kesteloot, “Verstedelijking in Vlaanderen: Problemen, kansen en uitdagingen voor het beleid in de 21^e eeuw” [Urbanisation in Flanders: problems, opportunities and challenges for policy in the 21st century], in *De eeuw van de stad. Over stadsrepublieken en rastersteden. Voorstudies*, ed. Geert Bouckaert et al. (Brussels: Project Stedenbeleid, 2002), 15–40; Stefan De Corte et al., *Onderzoek naar de migratiebewegingen van de grote steden in de drie gewesten van België. Eindrapport* [Research on the migration patterns in the big cities of Belgium's three regions. Final report] (Brussels: POD maatschappelijke integratie, cel grootstedenbeleid, 2003); Peter De Decker and Christian Kesteloot, “De sociale roots van de anti-stedelijke politiek” [The social roots of anti-urban policy], *Alert* 31, no. 2 (2005): 71–80; Eric Corijn, “Breuklijnen in de Vlaamse stedelijkheid” [Shifts in Flemish urbanity], in *Mensen maken de stad: Bouwstenen voor een sociaalecologische toekomst*, ed. Dirk Holemans (Berchem: Epo, 2012), 98–116; Peter De Decker, Pieter Van den Brouck and Maarten Loopmans, “Van bewonersgerichte stadsvernieuwing naar stadsontwikkeling: 30 jaar beleid voor de stad” [From resident focused urban renewal to urban development: 30 years of policy for the city], in *Mensen maken de stad: Bouwstenen voor een sociaalecologische toekomst*, ed. Dirk Holemans (Berchem: Epo, 2012), 37–47.

¹⁹Kesteloot, “Verstedelijking in Vlaanderen” [Urbanisation in Flanders], 15–40; Peter De Decker and Bruno Meeus, “Achter de façade van de pretstad” [Behind the facade of the fun city], in *Mensen maken de stad: Bouwstenen voor een sociaalecologische toekomst*, ed. Dirk Holemans (Berchem: Epo, 2012), 14–36.

²⁰Eric Florence and Marco Martiniello, “Social Science Research and Public Policies: The Case of Immigration in Belgium,” *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 7, no. 1 (2005): 49.

²¹These treaties were not an exclusively Belgian phenomenon in post-war Europe. Also in neighbouring countries such as France (from 1947), The Netherlands (from 1948), the former Bundesrepublik Deutschland (from 1955), Luxembourg (from 1957) and the former Deutsche Demokratische Republik (from 1965) officials signed similar recruitment agreements. See for example Cüneyd Dinç, “From ‘Gastarbeiter’ to ‘People with Migration Background’: A Critical Overview of German Migration Sociology,” *Sosyoloji Dergisi* 22, no. 3 (2011): 253–80; Jan Lucassen and Rinus Penninx, *Newcomers: Immigrants and their Descendants in The Netherlands 1550–1995* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis); OECD, *Migration for Employment: Bilateral Agreements at a Crossroads* (Paris: OECD, 2004), 222–7.

²²Florence and Martiniello, “Immigration in Belgium,” 49.

Table 1. Migration statistics for the city of Ghent in the period 1959–1999.

Year (31 December) Country of origin	1959	1963	1966	1969	1974	1979*	1984	1989	1994	1999
Algeria	0	87	212	226	262	456	452	401	366	361
Greece	22	24	25	32	34	75	77	80	78	114
Italy	188	166	312	297	301	480	455	319	327	384
Morocco	0	2	144	293	664	1007	1332	1494	1623	1435
Spain	80	173	321	342	345	414	335	329	351	430
Tunisia	0	0	84	63	313	496	589	510	455	334
Turkey	1	0	479	902	3149	5302	6394	7656	8815	7691
Yugoslavia**	19	17	23	27	37	42	42	38	72	756
Neighbouring countries	2080	1884	2291	2068	2410	3404	2758	2290	2369	1692
Total migration	3243	3325	4967	5237	8544	13442	14570	15582	17423	17211
Total population	160265	155951	157048	151614	144130	241695	234653	230762	227447	224042
Percentage migrants	2,02	2,07	3,16	3,45	5,93	5,56	6,21	6,75	7,66	7,68

Notes: The numbers shown in the table are derived from data of the Ghent population register. Both the sudden increase of all numerical values and the drop in the percentage of migrants in 1979 can be explained by a nationally directed large-scale fusion of communes, which was carried out in 1977. In this fusion, 10 peripheral municipalities were annexed by the city of Ghent; **to facilitate comparability, in this context, Yugoslavia is at all moments interpreted as the territory of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia/Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

by factories as a strategy to avert the fate of de-industrialisation that in Ghent emerged as early as the 1930s.²³

This strategy proved to be relatively successful in the 1960s. However, the 1973 oil crisis made it crystal clear that calling on labour migrants was only a temporal salvation. In fact, from the second half of the 1970s, an increasing number of (Ghent) factories ceased to exist. Both immigrant and white working classes were losing their jobs. In order to avoid mass unemployment, the national government took action. From 1 August 1974, labour migration to Belgium was halted.²⁴ However, neither this declaration nor the fact that the number of blue-collar jobs decreased succeeded in stopping (Mediterranean) migration to Ghent.²⁵ Thus, from the second half of the 1970s, migration patterns were no longer tailored to the economy. In fact, in the following two decades there was a constant increase in the number of migrants, of which the Turks made up the largest group.

In other words, since the 1960s Ghent has been confronted with growing ethnic diversity. However, it is mainly the nineteenth-century city districts of Ghent – which are the most dilapidated and hence the cheapest – that have been transformed from relative homogeneous communities into ethnically diverse ones.²⁶ Before dwelling on the link between those

²³For example, some factories encouraged labour migrants to recruit acquaintances from abroad by awarding bonuses. Jozefien De Bock, 'Alle wegen leiden naar Gent'. Trajecten van mediterrane migranten naar de Arteveldestad, 1960–1980' [All roads lead to Ghent. Trajectories of Mediterranean migrants to the city of Artevelde, 1960–1980], *Brood & Rozen* 31, no. 3 (2012): 58.

²⁴Ibid., 67; Florence and Martinielo, 'Immigration in Belgium,' 50.

²⁵Florence and Martinielo, 'Immigration in Belgium,' 50.

²⁶For instance, on the eve of the new millennium the population of the *Brugse Poort-Rooigem*, one of the 25 city districts of Ghent – comprised 2259 people without Belgian nationality, accounting for 15.0% of the total district's population. This number is, however, a vast underestimate of the total number of immigrants in the *Brugse Poort-Rooigem*. This is due to the fact that the new Code of Belgian Nationality (established by Law since 28 June 1984), and its subsequent successors in the years following, not only simplified conditions and procedures to acquire Belgian citizenship but also strengthened the *ius soli* principle (i.e. the right of soil) in favour of the until then dominant principle of *ius sanguinis* (i.e. the right of blood). Consequently, numerous members of immigrant families became naturalised or acquired Belgian citizenship by birth. See Marie-Claire Foblets and Zeynep Yanasmayan, *EUDO Citizenship Observatory. Country Report: Belgium* (Fiesole: European University Institute, 2010), 5–6.

migration patterns and the development of progressive education, we first need to explain some particularities of the Belgian education system, for this provides information that is necessary in order to understand how migration patterns could affect educational policy.²⁷

The Belgian education system

For most of Belgium's history, education has been a national affair. It was only from 1989 onwards, when educational jurisdiction was almost entirely handed over to the communities, that Flanders became relatively autonomous with regard to educational matters.²⁸ Naturally, Flemish educational policy still is subject to the Belgian constitution, which is characterised by a high degree of freedom.²⁹ This freedom needs to be understood both in an active and in a passive way.³⁰

Actively, every natural or legal person in Belgium has the right to establish a school autonomously. One can therefore discern public schools (i.e. schools organised by public administrations such as a community, a province or a municipality) from private ones (i.e. schools organised by another body such as a diocese, a monastic order, a non-profit organisation, etc.). Culminating in a so-called First (1879–1884) and Second (1954–1958) School Struggle, it was not until 1958 that a compromise was found. On the one hand, the compromise dictated the right to establish a school. On the other hand, it also stipulated that schools need to meet legal and statutory regulations in order to (i) be publicly funded and (ii) receive the right to issue official diplomas. Because of these benefits, almost all private schools have voluntarily opted to meet these regulations (e.g. during the school year 2013–2014, 99.04% of all private primary schools did so). This has two main consequences. First, as a result of public funds, the private sector (mainly made up of Catholic schools) is strongly represented throughout Flanders (e.g. during the school year 2013–2014, 63.18% of all primary schools were organised privately). Second, as the imposed regulations, *inter alia*, relate to the refrainment from collecting registration or tuition fees, the process of school choice is less affected by financial means than is the case in contexts such as the UK and the US.

Passively, the Belgian constitution safeguards parental freedom of choice. This implies that parents are free to select a school in accordance with their personal beliefs, values and attitudes. Until recently, however, schools were also allowed to select pupils based on a particular admission policy.³¹ This changed in 2002 when the Flemish Parliament considerably minimised the grounds upon which school boards can disobey (specific) enrolment requests by introducing the “first come, first served” principle through the Act on Equal Opportunities in Education. The act nevertheless was modified several times in subsequent years. In 2005, the legislator decided to provide schools with opportunities

²⁷Compare Jacques F. A. Braster and Maria del Mar del Pozo Andrés, “Educating Immigrants in The Netherlands: Migration Flows and Educational Policy in the Twentieth Century,” *Paedagogica Historica* 37, no. 1 (2001), 87–106.

²⁸Since the first state reform of 1970 Belgium has been divided into three communities, at present named the Flemish, the French-language and the German-language community.

²⁹In fact, this freedom was enshrined in Article 17 of the Belgian constitution (at present under Article 24).

³⁰Paul Van Orshoven, “Het onderwijs is vrij: Het recht op onderwijs in het nieuwe artikel 17 van de Belgische grondwet” [The education system is autonomous: the right to education in the new Article 17 of the Belgian constitution], *Jura Falconis* 26, no. 4 (1990): 506.

³¹For example, some schools instituted aptitude tests that examined language levels or proper behaviour.

to implement a desegregation policy. Starting from the enrolment period for the school year 2006–2007, schools could choose to institute a priority enrolment period (with a specified number of places) for advantaged or disadvantaged pupils.³² It stands to reason that schools were only allowed to give priority to the advantaged students when these were considerably under-represented as compared with their relative presence in the city or city district. In its first year of implementation, 16 Ghent primary schools chose to institute a priority enrolment period for disadvantaged pupils, whereas 20 of their counterparts (under which *De Acacia*) chose to do the opposite. In 2008, the act was modified once again. Some cities, among them Ghent, were allowed to disobey the “first come, first served” principle and order enrolment requests on the basis of another fair and non-discriminatory system. Ghent chose to experiment with this system and rank children on the basis of the distance between their residence and the school.³³ In this case, the shorter the distance, the higher the ranking a student obtains. As such, the installation since 2008 of what were de facto catchment areas limited school choice to a certain extent.

Data and methods

Methodologically, we made an appeal to oral history, completed with research in school archives. With regard to the former, we call on interview data on a macro, meso and micro level. On the macro level, data were derived from interviews with the former Alderman of Education (2003–2012) and a founding member of the Pedagogical Centre of Ghent (1976–2004). On the meso level, interviews are included with (former) staff members of *De Acacia*. We interviewed a current teacher (1999–present), and both the former (2003–2006) and the current principal (2006–present). Finally, on the micro level, we call on interviews with white middle-class parents whose children were enrolled in the school during the school year 2014–2015 ($n = 20$).³⁴

With regard to the research in school archives, we particularly made use of data that enabled us to portray evolutions in the school population of *De Acacia* during its transformation process. Data on socio-cultural characteristics such as the number of students (i) following Islamic education as part of the Philosophies curriculum, (ii) whose language spoken at home is not Dutch and (3) of whom the mother did not hold a certificate of secondary education, were therefore incorporated into the analyses. These data were abstracted from diverse school files and analysed descriptively.

³²With regard to the enrolment policy a pupil is characterised as disadvantaged when he/she complies with one or more of the following criteria: (i) is a member of the itinerant population, (ii) is temporarily or permanently residing outside his/her own family network, (iii) is a member of a family network which is living from an income replacement (later on replaced by: is living in a family that received a school allowance in the current school year or the year before that), (iv) has a mother who did not hold a certificate of secondary education, and (v) is living in a family network in which the common language differs from Dutch (later on replaced by: does not or only talks to a minority of family members in the Dutch language in which the total number of siblings are counted as one). In 2012, the fifth criterion that could characterise a pupil as disadvantaged was discarded (counting for enrolments from the school year 2013–2014 onwards).

³³This decision applies to enrolments from the school year 2009–2010 onwards. For enrolments from the school year 2011–2012 onwards, it was decided not only to order pupils based on the distance between their residence and the school but also on the distance between their parents' workplace and the school.

³⁴We consciously selected these parents because we wanted to explore the perceptions of this group towards immigrant parents and their children. With a view to the analyses, all interviews were audio recorded. Interviews lasted between 32 and 106 minutes and took place at an interview room at the authors' correspondence address or at the participants' home. Methodologically, all interviews were transcribed orthographically and later on were analysed thematically (conducted in NVivo 10 [QSR International (UK), Daresbury, UK]).

Phase 1: the initiation of urban progressive education, 1985–2000

As in other Flemish cities, the renewed interest in progressive education was spurred by the context of May 1968 and its ideals.³⁵ As early as 1969 some students at the State University of Ghent established the Working Group for Revolutionary Teaching (WGRT). This Marxist and anarchist group was aiming at combating (the common) authoritarian education that according to the founders reproduced and strengthened existing (educational) inequalities. In contrast, the group urged for emancipatory educational practices that could breach the status quo. At meetings participants were introduced to authors concerned with equality and emancipation.³⁶ Two of these students, Armand de Meyer and Luc Heyerick, later carried out a PhD study theorising the learning difficulties that immigrant working-class children were facing.³⁷ What they noticed was that, although traditional education did work for white middle-class children, for many immigrant working-class children it fell short, the net effect being social stratification. As de Meyer and Heyerick adhered to a radical reading of equality of opportunity, this situation was perceived as undesirable.³⁸

In the second half of the 1970s, this duo started practising their ideals when they were recruited by the city of Ghent to lead a newly established Pedagogical Centre.³⁹ As the aim of this centre was to enhance the quality of the urban education system, and hence to turn a two-decade-old process of falling pupil numbers,⁴⁰ de Meyer and Heyerick decided to start innovating the system. Whereas in the initial years de Meyer and Heyerick tried to tackle learning difficulties through the implementation of projects within existing schools, from the 1980s the duo realised that what was needed was institutional change.

³⁵For more information on this societal context see Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004). According to Sica and Turner, the context of the late 1960s – epitomised by the events of May 1968 – “permanently marked” the worldviews of college students. See Alan Sica and Stephen Turner, *The Disobedient Generation: Social Theorists in the Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

³⁶For participants this initiation led to an “awareness that there were educational systems out there, that very explicitly targeted inequality and that were emancipatory from the outset”. See Tom De Coster, *Wat is er in Vlaanderen met het progressief pedagogisch erfgoed gebeurd? Receptie- en implementatiegeschiedenis van “emancipatorische” opvoedingsmodellen in de neoliberale context van na de Jaren 1960* [What has happened to the progressive educational heritage in Flanders? A history of the reception and the implementation of “emancipatory” educational models in the neoliberal context after the 1960s] (PhD thesis under the supervision of Frank Simon and Marc Depaepe, Ghent University, 2008); De Coster, Simon and Depaepe, “‘Alternative’ Education in Flanders,” 645–71.

³⁷See Armand de Meyer, *Het lager schoolrendement van arbeiderskinderen als sociaal probleem* [The lower educational return of working-class children as a social problem] (PhD diss., Ghent University, 1976); Luc Heyerick, *De schoolse achterstand van arbeiderskinderen* [The educational backlog of working class children] (PhD diss., Ghent University, 1978). Due to the fact that both PhD studies were conducted in the context of Ghent, working-class children often comprised children of *gastarbeiders*. This is clearly illustrated in some of their publications. See for example Luc Heyerick, “Het ‘tutor’-experiment voor kinderen van buitenlandse arbeiders in het stedelijk onderwijs te Gent: evaluatie en conclusie” [The “tutor” experiment for children of labour migrants in the urban education system in Ghent: evaluation and conclusion], *Persoon en Gemeenschap* 31, no. 7 (1978–1979): 337–42; Luc Heyerick, “Problemen van migrantenkinderen en hun leerkrachten in het Vlaams basisonderwijs” [Problems of migrant children and their teachers in Flemish primary education], in *Buitenlandse minderheden in Vlaanderen–België*, ed. Albert Martens and Frank Moulaert (Antwerp: Nederlandse boekhandel, 1985), 103–15; Luc Heyerick and Armand de Meyer, “Een gesprek met Turkse migranten” [A conversation with Turkish migrants], *P.C.-krant* 4 (1983): 3–9; Pedagogisch Centrum Stad Gent, *Gastarbeiderskinderen in ons onderwijs* [Children of labour migrants in our education system] (Ghent: Pedagogisch Centrum Stad Gent, 1978).

³⁸As observed by de Meyer, the societal context of the late 1960s, characterised by a flourishing welfare state, an unstoppable (economic) “optimism”, and the rise of “critical thought”, certainly “was not without importance” for the way he thought and worked. See De Coster, *Wat is er in Vlaanderen met het progressief pedagogisch erfgoed gebeurd?*, 227. Compare with footnote 35.

³⁹The duo applied to lead this centre as they believed that this position would enable them to change and have an effect on schools. See De Coster, *Wat is er in Vlaanderen met het progressief pedagogisch erfgoed gebeurd?*, 227 pp.

⁴⁰Moreover, the pupils weakened the urban education system even more by taking refuge in schools that were organised by its historical counterpart, the Catholic school system.



Together with staff members of the Pedagogical Centre and some teachers, they therefore went on “a quest for a dream school” from the early 1980s onwards.⁴¹ On this quest members met to gradually “lay down broad guidelines for a *new* school”.⁴² These guidelines strongly favoured an experience-oriented approach, as it was believed that such an approach could expunge the learning difficulties of immigrant and/or working-class children and hence transform the school into an emancipatory mechanism for *all* children. Later on the guidelines were translated into a vision statement that was published in the *Onderwijskrant* (i.e. a Flemish seasonal journal on schooling and schooling policy).⁴³ In turn, this publication opened up a debate in the Ghent context as numerous conversations took place between the leading forces of the Pedagogical Centre and the former Ghent Aldermen of Education. These conversations proved fruitful since in 1985 de Meyer and Heyerick obtained permission to establish an urban primary school based on their vision. This *carte blanche* was granted by the city council despite the fact that many of its members opposed progressive teaching. However, due to the state of crisis in which the urban primary education system found itself, many if not all members of the formed coalition government in the city council eventually gave in to the idea, though for many it was with a certain distrust. As such, the school that de Meyer and Heyerick had envisioned opened on 3 September 1985 in the form of a first urban Freinet school,⁴⁴ named *De Boomgaard* (The Orchard). This first Freinet school “received a great deal of attention”⁴⁵ with the consequence that applications for enrolment were soon piling up.⁴⁶ Due to its success, more progressive schools were established in the following years.⁴⁷ In addition, more and more urban primary schools that were suffering from population loss were transformed into schools that provided progressive education. The city council granted permission, gradually perceiving progressive education as the panacea it had been longing for. As such, de Meyer and Heyerick were able to express their emancipatory ideas in an abundant way. It was assumed that these schools could breach the status quo, being a *de facto* achievement gap between white middle-class children on the one hand and immigrant working-class children on the other hand. By pushing forward equal achievement as a policy goal of education, these pioneers gave shape

⁴¹Armand de Meyer and Luc Heyerick, “Ter plaatse bekeken. Een school waarvan wij dromen” [Spot-checked. A school of which we dream], *PC Info* 2, no. 5 (1984): 12–23; Armand de Meyer, “Focus on ... the Freinet Schools in Gent,” *Children in Europe* 4 (2003): 20.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³Armand de Meyer and Luc Heyerick, “Een school waarvan wij dromen [A school of which we dream],” *Onderwijskrant* 36 (1985): 20–31; Luc Heyerick, “25 jaar freinetonderwijs in Gent: terugblik en perspectief,” in *25 jaar freinetonderwijs in Gent. Boek – colloquium – 20 November 2010* (Ghent: Departement Onderwijs en Opvoeding – Stad Gent & Freinetbeweging, 2010), 17–26.

⁴⁴The Freinet method was an obvious choice for three reasons. First, as former members of the WGRT, de Meyer and Heyerick were already acquainted with the method of Freinet. Indeed, founding member, Jacques Dhaenens, had strong interpersonal ties with Fernand Oury and Fernand Deligny, both heavily influenced by, and exponents of, Célestin Freinet. Second, Freinet’s ideological standpoints strongly aligned with those of the WGRT in general and de Meyer’s and Heyerick’s in particular. As a communist, Freinet believed that traditional pedagogy was consciously tailored to the needs of the ruling class. Therefore, Freinet developed a revolutionary pedagogy that worked in the interest of the proletariat and that aimed at its emancipation. Third, it was not only believed that teachers working in this “dream school” needed an elaborated method to work effectively, but also that the Freinet method met this requirement. For more information on the Freinet method see Jan Devos, *De visie van Freinet* [The vision of Freinet] (Antwerp: Garant, 2013); Célestin Freinet, *Les techniques Freinet de l’école moderne* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1964); John Sivell, *Freinet pedagogy. Theory and practice* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1994); Victor Acker, “Celestin Freinet (1896–1966): A Most Unappreciated Educator in the Anglophone World” (paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society, San Antonio, TX, March 8–12, 2000).

⁴⁵Armand de Meyer, “Transition from Kindergarten to Elementary School: Experiences in Ghent” (unpublished manuscript, 2011), 8.

⁴⁶Heyerick, “25 jaar freinetonderwijs in Gent.”

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

to the radicalisation of the welfare state. Indeed, by subordinating market price not only to minimalist but also to radical readings of social justice, the duo crafted the welfare state by taking it a step closer yet to its triumph.

However, as de Meyer and Heyerick observed themselves, enrolment requests came particularly from white and highly educated parents.⁴⁸ Although progressive education was perceived as the means par excellence in effectively catering to the needs of immigrant and working-class children, few of these pupils were reached by these initiatives. The two pioneers tried to counteract this process by establishing or transforming schools in the nineteenth-century districts of Ghent characterised by a great number of working-class and/or immigrant children. In doing so, it was hoped that progressive education would include these children.⁴⁹ In other words, De Meyer and Heyerick tried to disintegrate the perceived “paradox of progressive education” by disentangling this form of education from its elitist status.⁵⁰

As a result, even before the new millennium was inaugurated, the Ghent urban primary education system hit a milestone by exceeding the establishment of half a dozen urban progressive schools. However, as it would turn out, this was only the beginning. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, urban progressive education expanded has more strongly than ever before through the creation of numerous Freinet, Dalton, Jena Plan and so-called experiential schools.⁵¹

How is it that progressive educational initiatives succeeded not only in standing their ground but also in burgeoning side by side with an increasingly dominant neoliberal paradigm, a paradigm that tends to put pressure on the welfare state by subordinating principles of social justice to market price? The question is an important one for it is clear that, for much of the twentieth century, progressive education has been on the side of social justice, not on that of the market. Indeed, in the initial phase progressive education was first and foremost employed as a lever to promote a radical reading of equality of opportunity.

⁴⁸Ibid.; de Meyer, “Focus on ... the Freinet Schools,” 19–21.

⁴⁹Armand de Meyer, in discussion with the authors, 3 October 2014. These initiatives were as much a success as they were a failure. On the one hand, some migrant families enrolled themselves in these schools. On the other hand, they were still significantly under-represented due to the strong interest of white middle-class constituents.

⁵⁰Susan Semel and Alan Sadovnik have eloquently grasped this paradox with the cynical slogan “democratic education for the elite”. See Susan F. Semel and Alan R. Sadovnik, “Progressive Education: Lessons from the Past and Present,” in *Schools of Tomorrow; Schools of Today: What Happened to Progressive Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 358; see also Susan F. Semel, *The Transformation of a Progressive School: The Dalton School* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 173.

⁵¹In the school year 2015–2016, Flanders counted 10 Jena Plan and 11 Dalton Plan Schools (i.e. the number of sites; administrative entities often count more than one site). Half of the Jena Plan schools are located in Ghent, most Dalton Plan schools are located in the Flemish province of Limburg (East of Flanders). Since in both cases Flemish schools work closely together with, respectively, the Jenaplan Association of The Netherlands (NJPV) and the Nederlandse Dalton Vereniging (NDV), more information on the applied pedagogy can be found on <http://www.jenaplan.nl/nl/english.html> and <http://www.dalton.nl/buitenland/english> (accessed 30 March 2016). From 1982 onwards, Kees Both, who was appointed staff member of the Stichting Jenaplan (Jena Plan Foundation), as the association was called at the time, contributed a lot to the theoretical underpinning of Jena Plan schools in The Netherlands, and as a consequence ultimately also in Flanders. Important in this regard is Kees Both, *Jenaplan: Jenaplanonderwijs op weg naar de 21ste eeuw* [Jena Plan: Jena Plan education on the way to the 21st century] (Amersfoort: Nederlandse Jenaplan Vereniging, 1997); German translation: Kees Both, *Jenaplan 21: Schulentwicklung als pädagogisch orientierte Konzeptentwicklung*. (Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag, 2001). On the history of the Jena Plan movement in The Netherlands, see Geert Kelchtermans and Ann Deketelaere, *De ontwikkeling van de Jenaplanbeweging in Nederland van 1955 tot 1985* [The development of the Jena Plan movement in The Netherlands from 1955 to 1985] (Hoevelaken: LPC Jenaplan/CPS, 1988); Ehrenhard Skiera, *Die Jena-Plan-Bewegung in den Niederlanden* [The Jena Plan movement in The Netherlands] (Weinheim: Beltz, 1982). On the implementation of the Dalton plan in The Netherlands, see also Piet van der Ploeg, “The Salient History of Dalton Education in The Netherlands,” *History of Education* 43, no. 3 (2014): 368–86. Experiential schools could be called the Flemish adaptation of an experience-driven strand in education going back to John Dewey, among others. For more information, see <https://vorming.cego.be/> (accessed 30 March 2016). From these websites, English papers can be downloaded.

We will argue that the answer to this question can be found in a combination of two factors. First, whereas earlier transformations were coordinated by de Meyer and Heyerick, from the year 2000 more and more school boards have been taking the initiative.⁵² Second, these school boards increasingly conceive of progressive education as a marketing tool instead of a tool for social justice. As a result, rather than contrasting a neoliberal paradigm, recently developed progressive educational initiatives seem to result from and give shape to it. As such, a peculiar coalition between de Meyer and Heyerick, the city council, and many school boards, which had gradually emerged since the 1980s, had now come into full bloom. In the next section, we will discuss the transformation process of one of these schools, namely *De Acacia*, which soon became a model for the other school boards with similar plans.

Phase 2: the expansion of urban progressive education, 2000–2015

As already mentioned, since the 1960s Ghent in general and its nineteenth-century districts in particular were subject to an influx of labour migrants. As could be expected, these changes were reflected in school populations.⁵³ This was also the case in the nineteenth-century district of *Brugse Poort-Rooigem*,⁵⁴ where from the late 1960s schools were increasingly characterised by children of labour migrants. Also in our case-study school *De Acacia* more and more immigrant pupils were enrolling from the 1970s. As a consequence, since the late 1980s the student body of *De Acacia* was, although as before characterised by a concentration of pupils economically at the fringe, furthermore characterised by a concentration of immigrant pupils. While reflecting on her initial experiences in the school, this is recalled by Sofie Strobbe, a former teacher and the current principal of the school:

I still remember doing an interim here in the late 1980s. At that time the student body comprised almost 100 per cent immigrants. You got a class with Mohammed and Ali and Somaya and John ... there was one boy called John in the class I got, and John was a real working-class boy. So a certain echelon of the population didn't come in here.⁵⁵

Since the 1990s, however, a growing number of white middle-class families had been moving to this city district. Whether they were tempted by the atmosphere, the housing prices and/or the proximity to post-industrial jobs, this gentrification process soon became visible. From 1998 onwards, city policy even nourished this process by the planning and implementation of an urban renewal project, named *Zuurstof voor de Brugse Poort* (Oxygen for the Brugse Poort), which had the explicit aim of creating a “social mix” in the neighbourhood.⁵⁶ Although the neighbourhood saw an influx of white middle-class families, schools, however, did not. According to a former teacher and former principal, Arseen Snoeck, in the late 1990s, 358 out of 360 pupils enrolled at the school were of non-Belgian

⁵²These schools are predominantly located in the nineteenth-century districts of Ghent, characterised by great ethnic diversity.

⁵³Compare Braster and del Mar del Pozo Andrés, “Educating Immigrants in The Netherlands,” 89.

⁵⁴The city district Brugse Poort-Rooigem will be further referred to as “Brugse Poort”.

⁵⁵All citations are translated by the authors. Sofie Strobbe (teacher 2004–2006 and principal 2006–currently at *De Acacia/De Feniks*), in discussion with the authors, 2 October 2014.

⁵⁶As demonstrated by several scholars, a discourse of “social mix” is more often than not used to disguise and achieve goals of gentrification, which in continental Europe is used as a pejorative term. Indeed, according to Elvin Wyly current urban policy is paradoxical in the way that “a friendly language of community and inclusion” is “used to justify policies that threaten exactly what they name – social mix and diversity”. See Gary Bridge, Tim Butler and Loretta Lees, *Mixed Communities: Gentrification by Stealth?* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2012). This is being buttressed by Neil Smith who describes gentrification as a neoliberal urban policy strategy aimed at “the class remake of the central urban landscape”. See Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996), 37.

origin.⁵⁷ That some white middle-class families were aggrieved by this situation is clearly illustrated by an incident that happened at a community meeting in late 1998. This meeting, organised by *Opbouwwerk Steunpunt Gent vzw* (a publicly funded community development organisation) but commissioned by the city, was intended to actively involve residents in the development of the neighbourhood by giving them a say on 12 themes.⁵⁸ It was exactly when reference was made to the topic of education that tempers ran high. The question was raised by a group of white middle-class families as to “why their children couldn’t go to schools located in the neighbourhood”.⁵⁹ With this question, participants were neither referring to possible enrolment problems nor to any practices of affirmative action. Rather they were pointing out the situation by which the majority of schools located in the Brugse Poort were characterised by a concentration of immigrant pupils. Participants perceived such a situation as unacceptable, which in turn led them to reject schools located in the neighbourhood.⁶⁰

A few months earlier, over a hundred people headed by *Opbouwwerk Steunpunt Gent vzw* had gathered in small groups to discuss and to propose measures regarding those 12 themes.⁶¹ With regard to education, eight measures were proposed of which two are particularly interesting in this regard. First, it was advocated that schools located in the neighbourhood would only enrol a maximum percentage of immigrant pupils. Second, it was suggested to make schools located in the Brugse Poort more attractive for “autochthonous” residents.⁶² As may be expected by the proposed measures, these participants who voluntarily registered for the gathering comprised mainly white middle-class families. Thus, it can be stated that white middle-class families had organised themselves in an attempt to exert influence on local policy and local institutions such as urban schools.⁶³ As a matter of fact, families not only defined a situation in which schools were characterised by a concentration of immigrant pupils as “problematic” – a situation to which they themselves contributed – but also proposed solutions that would affect the school experiences of immigrant pupils.

The school team of *De Acacia*, however, was also disgruntled by the existing situation. Providing education to immigrant pupils was felt to be “very hard”.⁶⁴ Moreover, the feeling prevailed that no support could be obtained. This situation is described in fiery fashion by the formal principal:

We have never been able to call upon the Pedagogical Centre for any help with regard to the hopeless situation we found ourselves in. Someone from this Centre came and asked us “What

⁵⁷Arseen Snoeck (teacher 1988–2003 and principal 2003–2006 at *De Acacia/De Feniks*), in discussion with the authors, 13 November 2014.

⁵⁸*Opbouwwerk Gent vzw, De wijk in perspectief. Brugse Poort – Malem. Het resultaat van de LENS-methode* [The district in perspective. Brugse Poort – Malem. The result of the LENS method] (Ghent: Opbouwwerk Gent vzw, 1999).

⁵⁹Isabelle de Poorter (teacher at *De Acacia/De Feniks* since 1999), in discussion with the authors, 2 October 2014.

⁶⁰As such, the question raised can be seen as a process of “white victimisation” in which white middle-class families remodelled their status of “causers” of school segregation to one of powerless “victims”. For more information on the concept of white victimisation see David Gillborn, *Racism and Education: Coincidence or Conspiracy?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).

⁶¹*Opbouwwerk Gent vzw, De wijk in perspectief.*

⁶²*Ibid.* We deliberately placed the word autochthonous in quotation marks to highlight the dubious usage of the concept in which we are engaged. Indeed, rather than characterising “the present inner-city population as a natural element of their physical surroundings”, we want to recognise the pre-existing immigrant population residing in the city. In fact, this population in a lot of ways can be perceived as more “indigenous” than incoming white middle-class citizens. Thus, in order to remain credible when using the concept, it is necessary to accentuate the relativity of it. See Neil Smith, “Gentrification, the Frontier, and the Restructuring of Urban Space,” in *Gentrification of the City*, ed. Neil Smith and Peter Williams (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 16.

⁶³These groups were even formalised into action groups such as *Aktiegroep “Groene Vallei groen”* (Action group “Green Valley Green”), *BuurtContactComité* (Neighbourhood contact committee), and *Buurtraad* (Neighbourhood council), which had a series of subgroups, each concerned with a specific theme. See *Opbouwwerk Gent vzw, wijk in perspectief.*

⁶⁴Arseen Snoeck (teacher 1988–2003 and principal 2003–2006 at *De Acacia/De Feniks*), in discussion with the authors, 13 November 2014.

is the problem? All right, I'll look into it at the office and I will get back to you afterwards." And the only thing we got was a booklet ... So, we didn't receive any real support. Why? Because they didn't have the people who were competent in these matters.⁶⁵

In this context, both the school board and the teachers were yearning for what was called "an ethnically mixed" student body.⁶⁶ Nevertheless the team realised this idea was no more than wishful thinking due to two factors. First, in the early 1990s, the percentage of white middle-class families living in the Brugse Poort was still relatively low. Second, the school board felt that both the character and the student body of the school disenchanted these families.⁶⁷

At the end of the 1990s, however, the first factor had gradually evaporated as a consequence of the aforementioned gentrification process. The school board also observed this phenomenon. As a consequence, the board had felt that a certain momentum had occurred.⁶⁸ However, the school board of *De Acacia* still needed to find a way to entice white middle-class families to apply for a place at the school. To circumvent this problem, it was decided in 2000 to establish a progressive school within the school building of *De Acacia*, named *De Feniks* (The Phoenix). This new school was marked both by a different character and by a yet to be defined student body. As the Jena Plan pedagogy corresponded most with the school's vision and moreover was felt not to be "completely fixed", this pedagogy was deliberately selected.⁶⁹ In other words, whereas the pedagogy of Peter Petersen in particular was selected because of its perceived compatibility with the pedagogy already implemented, progressive education in general was chosen because of its capacity to entice white middle-class families. The latter is clearly illustrated by the former principal:

We said "look to all those Freinet schools [cf. Phase 1], everybody suddenly wants Freinet education and we are located in a neighbourhood with a lot of potential *clients*, young people who are educated and so on". Hence we thought "let us also establish a progressive school".⁷⁰

Thus, as a response to a context in which little support could be obtained for teaching working-class and immigrant children, the school board consciously started to develop a policy that was attractive to and served the interests of white middle-class families.⁷¹ Indeed,

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Sofie Strobbe (teacher 2003–2006 and principal 2006–present at *De Acacia/De Feniks*), in discussion with the authors, 2 October 2014.

⁶⁸Arseen Snoeck (teacher 1988–2003 and principal 2003–2006 at *De Acacia/De Feniks*), in discussion with the authors, 13 November 2014.

⁶⁹Ibid. Freinet and Jena Plan were considered to be "more open" as compared with Steiner and Montessori while Dalton schools derived their organisation from Montessori and included certain forms of individualisation. See Ad Boes, "Affective Education in The Netherlands," in *Affective Education: A Comparative View*, ed. Peter Lang with Yaacov Katz and Isabel Menezes (London: Cassell, 1998), 116–25 (here: 121). On the relation between Freinet and Petersen, see Rouke Boersma and Freek Velthausz, *Petersen & Freinet: Jenaplan & Moderne School* [Petersen & Freinet: Jena Plan & the modern school] (*De Freinetbibliotheek*, no. 3) (Valthe: De Freinetwinkel, 2008); French translation: Rouke Boersma and Freek Velthausz, *Le Plan d'Iéna et l'École Moderne (with an afterword by Philippe Meirieu)* (Mayenne: Les Amis de Freinet, 2011). Because of this relation, and since the school did not feel supported enough by the "Freinetian" Pedagogical Centre (cf. footnote 44), Jena Plan appeared to be both an obvious and a negative choice.

⁷⁰Arseen Snoeck (teacher 1988–2003 and principal 2003–2006 at *De Acacia/De Feniks*), in discussion with the authors, 13 November 2014.

⁷¹The fact that progressive schools are attractive to and serve the interests of white middle-class families has been buttressed previously in empirical and theoretical research. See for example Lieven Viaene, "Alternatieve basisscholen in Vlaanderen. Doorlichting van het rekruteringsveld en exploratie naar keuzemotieven van de ouders" [Alternative primary schools in Flanders. An audit of the recruitment and an exploration of the choice motives of parents] *Persoon en Gemeenschap* 45, no. 8 (1992):289–317; Jerissa de Bilde, Bieke De Fraine and Jan Van Damme, *Methodescholen in het Vlaamse basisonderwijs: Een overzicht van onderzoek naar de werking en effecten van methodescholen op basis van SIBO* [Progressive schools in Flemish primary education: an overview of research on the operation and effects of progressive schools based on SIBO] (Leuven: KU Leuven, 2013). Theoretically, this ascertainment has been elaborated by Basil Bernstein who suggests a number of reasons why different kinds of pedagogies cater to different groups in society. See for example Basil Bernstein, *The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse: Class, Codes and Control*, Vol. IV (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 63–93.

through the implementation of progressive education, the school board aimed to attract desired *clients*. As such, rather than from a social justice impetus, the school board's interest in progressive education was driven by a market rationale. This rationale runs directly counter to the one driving de Meyer and Heyerick in the first phase. As a result of the aforementioned coalition, however, the school board could execute this plan unimpeded.⁷²

In fact, the city council perceived the plan as an opportunity for the urban education system to strengthen its market share. In turn, the pioneers perceived it as a way of bringing progressive education to immigrant and/or working-class children and hence facilitating their emancipation. Moreover, this initiative could be conceived of as an effort in knocking progressivism off its pedestal of elitism. While we distinguished different phases and corresponding rationales in the development of progressive education, the actors involved did not. Thus, from the school year 2000–2001, two schools operated in the same school building. As the entrance doors swung open on the first of September 2000, one could observe that the plan, as outlined by the school board, had a fair chance of succeeding for, due to the interest coming from white middle-class families, the first two class groups of *De Feniks* were crammed.

Action, however, was not limited to providing progressive education for the school board took three additional and highly related measures. First, it was guaranteed by the school board that in the first newly established class groups of *De Feniks* only 30% disadvantaged (read immigrant) pupils would be admitted.⁷³ Second, the pupils comprising this 30% group were sophisticatedly “selected” on their perceived “threat”, “approachability” and “economic status” so as to prevent white flight.⁷⁴ Third, for one and the same reason, in the inception phase of the project student bodies of both schools were kept strictly separated. This not only led to a peculiar situation in which the respective pupils of both schools took up position in a different part of the hallway but also led to a situation in which both student bodies ate and played separately. It is clear how this market rationale, which aims for a desired clientele, loses sight of social justice objectives. This has already been indicated by Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe who assert that a market rationale “creates pressures which drive management decision-making within schools toward *commercial* and away from *educational* or *social* considerations”.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, marketing strategies are often highly effective for their intended use. It was no different in this case. As a matter of fact, white middle-class parents appreciated the measures taken: 19 out of 20 interviewed white middle-class parents *explicitly* expressed that they would not have selected a school characterised by a high degree of immigrant pupils (such as is the case in the remaining schools of the district). According to some of these parents, too many immigrants would plump for the general

⁷²Arseen Snoeck (teacher 1988–2003 and principal 2003–2006 at *De Acacia/De Feniks*), in discussion with the authors, 13 November 2014.

⁷³Isabelle de Poorter (teacher at *De Acacia/De Feniks* since 1999), in discussion with the authors, 2 October 2014. For a definition of disadvantaged pupils, see footnote 25. Before 2002, the school board could easily refuse enrolment requests through a specific admission policy. Since the Act on Equal Opportunities in 2002, the school board was obliged to deploy the “first come, first served” principle. Nonetheless, the strong interest of white middle-class families in the new initiative easily ensured the presence of 70% of advantaged pupils. Moreover, from 2005 *De Feniks* took advantage of modifications in the Act of Equal Opportunities for the school started instituting a priority enrolment period for advantaged pupils. This was possible due to a combination of two factors. First, *De Acacia* was characterised by many disadvantaged pupils. Second, although *De Acacia* and *De Feniks* were de facto separate schools, *de jure* they were still dealt with as a single school. As such, *De Feniks* took advantage of a desegregation policy to ensure its student body would not reflect the population of the city district.

⁷⁴Sofie Strobbe (teacher 2004–2006 and principal 2006–present at *De Acacia/De Feniks*), in discussion with the authors, 2 October 2014.

⁷⁵Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, *Markets, Choice and Equity*, 92.

Table 2. Evolutions in the student body of *De Acacia/De Feniks*. Percentage of pupils (1) who are taking Islamic religious education as part of the Philosophies curriculum; (2) whose language spoken at home is not Dutch; and (3) of whom the mother holds at most a certificate of lower secondary education.

Indicator (%) Year	Islamic religious education*	Language spoken at home not Dutch**	Mother not highly educated***
2001–02	76.38	85.26	.
2002–03	79.03	.	.
2003–04	78.90	.	.
2004–05	76.92	73.43	72.86
2005–06	68.60	.	.
2006–07	64.10	.	.
2007–08	55.83	.	56.94
2008–09	53.96	.	.
2009–10	50.00	37.07	47.47
2010–11	47.74	32.44	41.82
2011–12	42.50	28.53	36.27
2012–13	40.55	26.42	34.72
2013–14	39.73	.	.

Notes: *Due to the fact that Philosophies are only implemented in the curriculum from elementary school, the percentage of pupils following Islamic religious education relates only to pupils enrolled in elementary classes of *De Acacia/De Feniks*; **the language of a pupil at home is not Dutch when the pupil does not or only talks to a minority of family members in the Dutch language; ***the mother of a pupil is not highly educated when she holds at most a certificate of lower secondary education.

“educational level”, while others argued that in such a context their children would be at risk of (i) “unlearning the Dutch language”, (ii) not receiving equal “attention” compared with their immigrant counterparts, and/or (iii) becoming subject to “discrimination”. However, 18 out of 20 parents also proclaimed to have positive attitudes towards *some* degree of ethnic diversity. In all instances this was mainly because parents perceived such a context as a positive environment where their children could learn “to deal with diversity” – a competence that was found important in a globalised world. Nonetheless these parents rejected situations in which the student body would comprise a majority of immigrant pupils.

As such, it seems that the school board had touched on a sensitive subject among white middle-class families. Moreover, the board was willing to cater proactively to these needs, even if this generated costs the immigrant working-class families had to bear. By strategically opening up to white middle-class constituents, their wishes and concerns, while at the same time restricting access for immigrant working-class families, the school board policy impeded the realisation of even a minimalist reading of equality of opportunity, defined as *equal access* for all children, regardless of social origin. The consequence of this was the subordination of social justice to market price and hence the conscious or unconscious dismantling of the welfare state. Indeed, as indicated by Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe “[w]hilst the market might foster a greater degree of responsiveness to parental desires and preferences, it is only the preferences of particular groups of parents which effectively ‘count’”.⁷⁶

Hence, in the years following the initiation of the experiment, *De Feniks* became highly valued within white middle-class circles. This led the school board to open up more and more classes in *De Feniks* while at the same time closing classes in *De Acacia*. This process continued until the 2010 summer holidays when *De Feniks* took over the last class of *De*

⁷⁶Ibid, 143. Indeed, “school marketing strategies are increasingly being founded upon a twofold categorization of consumers. In the first category are those families which schools desire to attract because they are viewed as an asset to the school. In the second are those who are considered ‘undesirable’ because they are seen as a liability.” Ibid, 138–9. See also Katz, *The Price of Citizenship*, p. 2 on the usage of the concepts first- and second-class citizens.

Table 3. Overview of the student bodies of all primary schools located in the Brugse Poort during the school year 2012–2013.

	Homeless		Itinerant *		Mother not highly educated **		School allowance ***		Total disadvantaged students	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Traditional Catholic school <i>'t Klimrek</i>	0	0.00	91	40.44	194	86.22	71	31.56	210	93.33
Traditional urban school <i>De Piramide</i>	2	0.80	3	1.20	186	74.10	168	66.93	221	88.05
Traditional Catholic school <i>De Boomhut</i>	3	1.27	10	4.22	166	70.04	150	63.29	204	86.08
Progressive urban school <i>Het Eiland</i>	0	0.00	3	4.23	36	50.70	50	70.42	59	83.10
Progressive urban school <i>Het Kriebelhuis</i>	0	0.00	0	0.00	22	52.38	19	45.24	29	69.05
Progressive urban school <i>De Feniks</i>	3	0.78	2	0.52	134	34.72	136	35.23	182	47.15
Total	8	0.66	109	8.99	738	60.89	594	49.01	905	74.67

Notes: Table based on numbers of the "Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten" [AgOdi]. See Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten, "Overzicht basisonderwijs 2012–2013," Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten, <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/wegwijs/agodi/cijermateriaal/leerlingenkenmerken/default.htm> (accessed 30 March 2016). *The pupil is characterised as "itinerant" when he/she is a member of an itinerant group; **the mother of a pupil is not highly educated when she holds at most a certificate of lower secondary education; ***the probability that a family is eligible for school allowance is dependent on its income related to its household composition. As such, the variable "school allowance" can be perceived as an indicator of the economic situation of families. However, to be eligible for school allowance, the pupil needs (1) to have Belgian nationality or, (2) to be an EU citizen living in Belgium for at least five years on a continuous base or, (3) to have parents who are citizens of a member country of the European Economic Area and at least one of whom (a) works or has worked in Belgium for at least 12 months in a 32-hour week system or more in the last two years or, (b) is registered as self-employed at a minimum for the past two years. This additional criterion could explain why relatively few pupils in the traditional Catholic school *'t Klimrek* are eligible for school allowance whilst many are members of an itinerant group or have a mother who at most holds a certificate of lower secondary education.

Acacia. As a result, *De Acacia*, established in 1899, ceased to exist. As could be expected (and also was foreseen by the school board), this process changed both the socioeconomic and ethnic composition of the population residing in the school building (see Table 2). Consequently, at present the student body of the school does not seem to correspond to the population of the city district (see Table 3). Whereas, during the school year 2012–2013, 74.67% of pupils enrolled in a primary school in the Brugse Poort were (1) homeless and/or (2) members of itinerant groups and/or (3) had a mother who did not hold a certificate of secondary education and/or (4) lived in a family that received a school allowance in the previous school year, this percentage was only 47.15 in *De Feniks*. Compared with the other five primary schools located in the Brugse Poort at the time of measurement, *De Feniks* has taken the lead in having the lowest number. Hence, it looks as if *De Feniks* has become an "elite" institute in an ethnically and socio-economically diverse city district.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the renewed interest in progressive education since the 1970s in Ghent (Belgium) can be related to migration. Particularly during the period 1985–2015, migration patterns spurred progressive education in two different ways. Initially, progressive education emerged as a solution to the learning difficulties that immigrant children were facing. Educational progressivism was conceived as an adequate lever for the emancipation of *all* children. As such, it also shaped the welfare state's radicalization, this by pushing forward equality of achievement as a key goal of education. That being said, it soon became clear that this goal was not met, as progressive schools mainly enticed white middle-class families. Since the year 2000, this awareness has been tactically deployed by school boards operating in districts with a high percentage of immigrant pupils. By seizing the label of

educational progressivism these boards tried to “bleach” their school by tailoring it to the needs of white middle-class families. Rather than bringing educational progressivism to the doorstep of immigrant and working-class families, results indicate that these schools were first and foremost focusing on bringing white middle-class families through its doors, this through the implementation of progressivism. This concern not only diverted attention away from efforts to radicalise the welfare state but also ran directly counter to it. By an exclusive focus on “valuable customers”, progressive educational initiatives run the risk of even disregarding the principle of equal access, thereby contributing to the dismantling of the welfare state.

As such, progressive education has been deployed both as a means of embracing and of displacing immigrant children. This evolution, however, suggests that progressive education is subject to transformations by school boards, as those are searching ways to thrive or survive in the educational marketplace.⁷⁷ As a consequence, the most inclusive schools today are those labelled as “traditional” (see Table 3). At present, it is therefore traditional schools that implement the emancipatory agenda which characterised educational progressivism in its first phase, making a clear-cut distinction between traditional and progressive schools hard to maintain. On the eve of its 30th anniversary, it thus looks as if progressive education in Ghent has become what its pioneers fought so hard to avoid, namely an embankment used by school boards and white middle-class families against the “menacing waves of immigrants”.⁷⁸

Notes on contributors

Cedric Goossens is currently working on a PhD under the supervision of Prof. Dr Angelo Van Gorp at the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy at Ghent University (Belgium). His study entitled “Urban Education as a Lever towards Community Building: A Historical Perspective” critically focuses on the *raison d'être* of progressive education in Ghent in the period from 1985 to date. In this, much attention is paid to the peculiar relationship between progressive education and gentrification and to its consequences for democratic learning and social citizenship. Cedric Goossens holds a MA in Educational Sciences from Ghent University (2013) and a BA Teacher Training in Secondary Education from University College Ghent, Belgium (2010).

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⁷⁷It is important to stress that this study relates to the context of Ghent, hence conclusions cannot be generalised to other contexts. Nevertheless it is possible that progressive educational initiatives elsewhere are also encapsulated by the logics of the market. In fact, a review of Flemish newspapers in the period 2000–2015 made clear that there are at least a dozen primary schools in other Flemish cities that made an appeal to educational progressivism in an attempt to market themselves among white middle-class families. Moreover, also in countries such as the US and The Netherlands scholars have made similar observations. See for instance Ineke van der Veen and Charles Felix, *Veranderingen in het marktaandeel openbaar onderwijs in Rotterdam* [Changes in the market share of public education in Rotterdam] (Amsterdam: SCO-Kohnstamm Instituut van de Faculteit der Maatschappij- en Gedragwetenschappen, 2006); Michael J. Petrilli, *The Diverse Schools Dilemma: A Parent's Guide to Socioeconomically Mixed Public School* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2012); Jennifer Burns Stillman, *Gentrification and Schools* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). As such, the Ghent context could be emblematic of a larger phenomenon (see footnote 15 on instrumental case research).

⁷⁸Compare with the image of the “massive waves of immigrants” in Susan F. Semel, “Introduction,” in *Schools of Tomorrow, Schools of Today: What Happened to Progressive Education*, ed. Susan F. Semel and Alan R. Sadovnik (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 5.

Research Association (2005–2011) and was a member of the LOC and the scientific committee of ISCHE31 at the University of Utrecht (2009). He also acted as project manager of the first Histories of Education Summer School in Ghent (2010) prior to his current role as summer school lead (since 2014). He has been a member of the editorial board of *Paedagogica Historica* since 2005. His main topics are: progressive education in relation to urbanity; (educational) film as a resource for educational history; and the relation between cultural learning and heritage. He is supervising doctoral research on progressive education, the framing of poverty, and Belgian refugees during the First World War.