

# Beyond Ordinary Learning

-The effects of Iederwijs education-

From the dutch: Buiten Gewoon Leren

You know,  
at Iederwijs I learned everything  
that is really important in life.  
And at the school I am now  
I learn the rest.  
-Marik, 10yrs-

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Iederwijs Lopik  
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## Summary

These are the results of a series of interviews held with students who attended Iederwijs Lopik for a longer or shorter period of time. Iederwijs Lopik was a form of education that differed from regular education in many ways. Children from 4 to 18 years of age were together in one school. They were completely free to choose their own activities to make up their day. Both conventional and unconventional classes were offered. Children were also free to spend their time doing their own activities. All decisions concerning the school were taken sociocratically and all students and teachers had an equal vote. After some time we sought out the students who had left the school and continued their education somewhere else and we interviewed them. They told us about their experiences on going (back) to regular education and also about the impact the time at Iederwijs Lopik had had on their lives. Quantitatively this study shows what schools children chose to continue their careers and the possible arrears or leads they faced (in school years, curriculum and personal development). Qualitatively it paints a picture of what aspects of Iederwijs Lopik made the biggest impact on the lives of the students.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study started in 2007. Iederwijs Lopik had started 5.5 years before in 2002. Lots of people were interested in what we did: children, parents, teachers, inspection bodies, politicians and the media. But there was always one question: what you are doing is great, but... what if children have to go back to a regular school after this? Will they be okay? Later when they work or study they won't be able to make their own choices, how will these kids handle that?

From what we heard back from former students there was no real problem. On the contrary: the picture we got was that they came out with stronger personalities and that they were very well equipped to make their next moves into society, but we wanted to know for sure. So we started a study of all the students that had left our school until then. Up to then that

I used my time at Iederwijs  
for awesome things  
Things that you will never learn  
at other schools  
*-Govert, 16 yrs-*

Iederwijs taught me I can still be a child  
But also character: how I deal with people,  
awareness, inner peace,  
and how I can help others  
*-Evi, 16 yrs-*

At Iederwijs  
we were always  
in the here and now  
*-Manja, 19 yrs-*

added up to 26 students. In 2008 the school had to close its doors for economical reasons. We all felt it as a great loss. In the months that followed, I interviewed 23 more students. The results are in this report. It will not help our school anymore, but there are a lot more people working on educational innovation and I hope this information will be of use to them.

## 2. MAIN QUESTION

### 2.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL

To understand the question of this study it is necessary to explain something about *lederwijs Lopik*. Most people in the Netherlands know the name from the paper and the television news. But few people have an idea of what it was really like.

*lederwijs Lopik* was innovation from the bottom up. Three primary school teachers started the school, because they were not happy in the school they worked and they felt that it must be possible to create a better working space for children and for themselves. With 8 children in an old farmhouse they started to work on the perfect place for everybody: teachers and students alike. Everybody had an equal say. Nothing was taken for granted. There was no view on exactly how a perfect place was supposed to look and they started building.

It turned out to be a school where you could make your own choices, and so create the best way to spend your day. It resulted in lots of different and surprising activities in the school. If you wanted to build huts all day you could, if you wanted to work on arithmetic all day that was fine as well. Most did a lot of different things on a day, from learning French to making soup from learning to write to psychology. To most people it didn't really look like a proper school.

In 6 years the school went from 6 to 44 pupils between 4 and 19. They were all together in the school, choosing their own activities and the people they wanted to do them with. The school had many different rooms: a large living room, a kitchen, a games room, two little study rooms, a smaller living room, a room to play *Dungeons and Dragons*, a space for younger children, an office and a conversation room. Outside space was also important: a garden with a lot of trees, a trampoline, a work shed, space to build huts and benches to sit on. A lot of time was spent outside.

We made *lederwijs* in the farm house  
All we consider normal now did not exist  
All details  
We worked it out together  
*-Pepijn, 15 yrs-*

To be able to play everywhere  
trampoline, taking care of the pony  
to make lots of noise,  
making witch soup ...  
*-Vonne, 11 yrs-*

It paints a broader picture  
of what a school can be;  
that you can learn in different ways  
*-Arjen, parent -*

## 2.2 RESPONSIBILITY AND RELATIONSHIP

There was freedom to make your own choices, but this freedom was always linked to a responsibility for the consequences of these choices. It did not mean that there were no limits. Limits were felt in living together with other people, because we agreed that we wanted it to be a good place for everybody involved. We chose not to make written rules but to let the limits become clear in the different relationships between people. One of the reasons was that every situation is different and there is no end to making rules. It takes lots of time to make and enforce them. We chose to spend our time otherwise. The result was that people worked things out between them, came to a solution that was okay for everybody involved. We became quite good at that. It also meant a society with no punishment. With that the fear of making mistakes disappeared and created more space for playing and learning.

We talked a lot. We discovered that in a conflict both parties are always right in their own way. If you listen well to the other you can see the longing that lies under someone's actions and the deeper values that moves a person. If you can see that, the conflict disappears. This way everybody took the space he needed and at the same time was considerate to others. It made the school peaceful and lively at the same time.

## 2.3 CURRICULUM OR 'WHAT'S UP'?

One of the starting points of the school was that you do not have to force people to learn. They will do it anyway. All children at some point want to be able to read, write and calculate, because if you can't, you have a problem and you are limiting yourself. All children are interested in what's happening in the world around them. As adults we can create a rich environment for them to draw from, and they may often use it in a way we do not imagine. It created a game of demands and offers. Sometimes the demand came first, sometimes the offer. In 6 years our own curriculum grew wild and we had to make a schedule so all the students could attend all the meetings they wanted to. We had 10 staff members, 9 experts and 44 students. 40-50 meetings or classes were scheduled each week. On average there were 5.2 students per meeting. Students were present at 7.9 meetings a week average (up to 12 years: 5.8, 12 years and up: 10.2).

For the first time in my life  
I enjoy going to school  
Safety for me is that you can be who you are  
That there is no judgment  
from other people  
*-Merel, 20 yrs-*

Realizing you have a choice  
and your own responsibility  
those are important lessons  
*- Ankie, parent-*

The urge to learn is back  
The soil is made ready  
Everything will grow on that  
*-Maria, parent-*

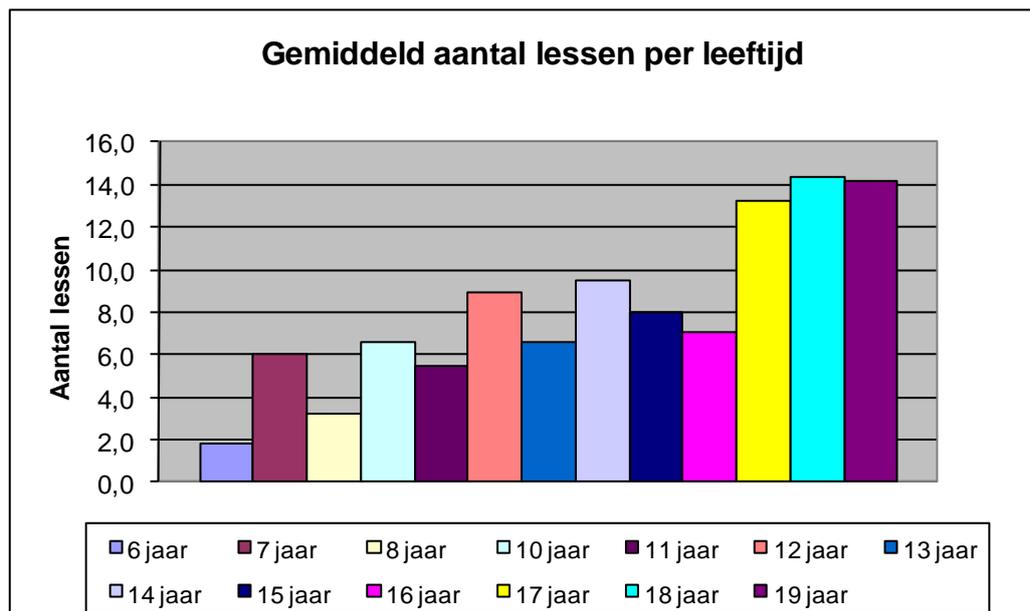


Figure 1: average amount of lessons in a week per age group, school year 2007-2008

Outside classes children also created other situations and opportunities to widen their horizons. Besides regular classes there were many meetings on the schedule that were not very conventional like: belly dancing, jewelry making, sword fighting, theatre-sport, playing Dungeons and Dragons, building a huge train track, discussing 'What the Bleep do we Know', researching conspiracy theories, re-planning the interior of the school, making lunch for the school, rope climbing the trees on the school grounds, etc.

## 2.4 MAIN QUESTION

All in all going to school at Iederwijs Lopik was probably a different experience than going to school was for pupils in regular education. But the time at Iederwijs was always temporary. So what happens if children go from a place like this (by some of them described as 'heaven on earth'), and continue at a regular school or college? How great is the shock and how do they handle it? Can children that were in an environment where their own choices were the source of their activities still function where others determine what should be done? And did those children learn enough, or the right things for their next step in society?

It feels I learned an awful lot  
Especially when I look back  
I am good with my hands  
And with fire  
And playing warfare in a good way  
*-Marik, 8 yrs-*

He has learned how to take up studying  
What had always been there  
came out in a nice and smooth way  
*-Hanne, parent-*

Things go easy now  
because of Iederwijs  
It made me who I am  
*-Benjamin, 14 yrs-*

Finally the following question was leading for this study:

How do children and parents look back on their time at Iederwijs Lopik and how did the transition to their next school turn out?

From this followed a series of questions for instance about the schools they went to before and after Iederwijs, reasons for departure, possible arrears or leads and for which subjects, if there were any problems with the structure and the culture in the new school and finally about the benefits of Iederwijs and of the new situation.

### 3. RESEARCH PLAN

To collect the information the choice was made to fill out a questionnaire during an interview. In this way there was the possibility to score certain tables and at the same time ask for background information and deeper motives. Basically the interviews were with the children and a parent. But sometimes only the child or the parent was engaged. Sometimes the children were too young and did not want to do the interview. Then I would talk to the parent and the child would sometimes add information. Most of the time the interview was with the student and a parent would add to their story. Most meetings were in the family home. A few were done by telephone.

There were two rounds of interviews. The first was in the winter of 2007/2008. Between December and March all students that had left the school before the summer of 2007 were contacted. The second round came in the next winter. Iederwijs Lopik had closed its doors in the summer of 2008 and a large part of the student body had switched to a regular school. It was a chance to almost double the amount of respondents.

1 <sup>st</sup> Round	2 <sup>nd</sup> Round	Total
Dec 2007 – March 2008	Dec 2008 – March 2009	
26 interviews	23 interviews	49 interviews
18 families	18 families	34 families
1 family (4 kids) did not participate	1 family (2 kids) did not participate	2 families (6 kids) did not participate
4 teachers	1 school	5 scholen/teachers

Table 1: Overview of interviews and respondents

When the school closed about one third of the Iederwijs Lopik students went to De Nieuwe School in Culemborg. These students are not included in this study. This school had mostly the same starting points as Iederwijs (democratic, free choice) and therefore was not different enough to measure the effects of a transition.

I feel very positive about Iederwijs:  
experience, respect, attention,  
interesting people, contacts,  
focus on education and quality  
It was rich  
*-Marie-José, parent -*

I thought you did not learn much at Iederwijs  
It was too free for me  
*-Jyoti, 13 yrs-*

If people say you are a jerk  
You become a jerk  
Because of the self-confidence from Iederwijs  
He is doing great at his work now  
*-Elma, parent-*

When students enrolled in another school, we waited a minimum of 5 months before interviewing them. In this way they had enough time to get a clear picture of the things they encountered and the solutions they found in their new situation. A few students had left lederwijs several years before the interview. We have chosen to put the same questions to all.

After the interviews with the students there were a few interviews with teachers from the new schools the students attended. Not all schools were asked to participate. In the first round we approached the primary schools that had taken in multiple children from lederwijs or children that had been at lederwijs for over 5 years. Beside that there was one interview with a mentor of a secondary school. In the second round we chose to interview the dean of a secondary school. Four former students had gone to that school.

After the closing of lederwijs Lopik the main part of the student body went to a secondary school or a vocational school. Only 5 out of 23 went to a primary school. But when they went to a secondary school it was harder to get a good picture of how they were doing in the new system. The information was shattered over multiple persons and teachers only saw the student a few hours a week.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 RESPONSE

The response of this study was 89%. Most people really enjoyed cooperating and reflecting on the past. Only 2 families (6 children) decided not to participate.

Most participants were interviewed between 5 months and 1 year after transition. For one or two this time was a little shorter. Four students had left the school more than three years before the interview.

This thing he picked up at lederwijs  
he will never loose again, namely:  
how you can be treated  
respectfully

*-Margreet, parent-*

lederwijs has given me so much  
I am totally changed. I have:  
learned to be Me  
learned that adults can see children as equals  
learned that you can accomplish everything you want  
learned that you can pick up things fast if you are interested  
learned to look at information from all sides

*-Jillis, 12 yrs-*

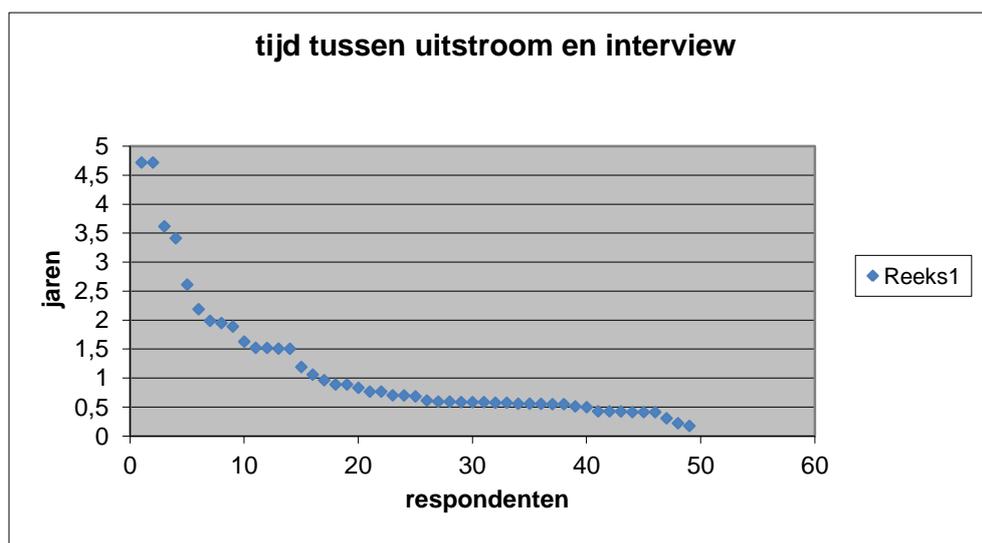


Figure 1: Time between transfer and interview

## 4.2 SCHOOLS

In this study we monitored 3 moments in the school career of the students. First there is the school they went to before coming to Iederwijs Lopik (herkomst/origin). Secondly there is the school they went to after Iederwijs (uitstroom/transfer). Lastly there is the school they attended at the time of the interview (vervolg/continued). A couple of the respondents for instance had already moved on to another situation after their first transfer school. This was sometimes because they did not like the school they went to, but mostly because it was time for a next step in their career.

### SCHOOLS OF ORIGIN

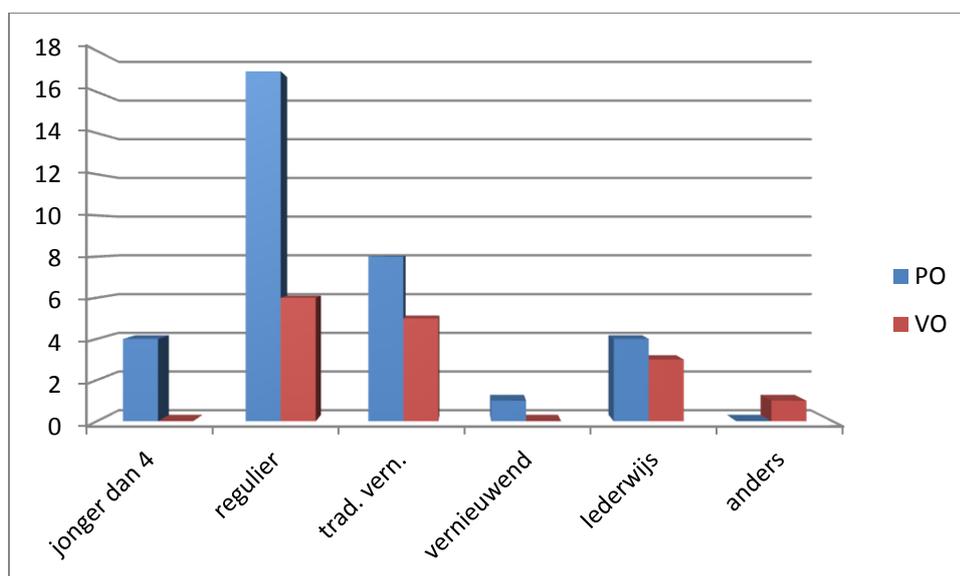
Almost 50% of the children that came to Iederwijs Lopik, came from a regular school. 25% came from a traditional innovation school like Steiner schools, Montessori, Jenaplan or Dalton school. 14% of the children came from another Iederwijs school or a similar democratic school. For a few children this was their first school. One out of 5 entered the school under 6 years of age.

Although it was not a specified question on the questionnaire, some of the parents mentioned they made the transfer to Iederwijs out of dissatisfaction with their former school. Children felt neglected, classes were too crowded, the regular system did not suit them and the traditional innovation schools, some parents thought, had strayed too far from their original path.

Iederwijs brought me good times  
School before that was no fun  
Teachers were not nice  
Iederwijs got me out of the dip  
-Mahad, 15 yrs-

After being bullied at my last school  
I have found my peace  
I have learned how to handle it  
I am no longer afraid  
-Kai, 11 yrs-

At Iederwijs everybody shows himself  
No being tough  
No power games  
-Joost, 13 yrs-



Figuur 2: Schools of origin (PO=primary, VO=secondary education, vernieuwend=innovative)

#### SCHOOLS OF TRANSFER AND CONTINUED EDUCATION

One of the questions in this study was to what school children went after lederwijs. Beside that we monitored how they continued, or were about to continue, after that if they were reasonably sure about their next step in the coming school year. All this information is taken into account in the overview presented here. In a follow-up study we will have to check if they proceeded as expected.

#### Primary Education (PO)

From the children that made a transfer to primary schools a large proportion went to a regular school, a traditional innovation school or a new innovation school. In attachment 1 there is a list of the schools counted under the different groups. In a later stage 3 out of 23 switched from a new innovation school to a traditional innovation school, because they thought the standard was not high enough. One family chose to home school their two children, because they could not find a school similar to lederwijs within travelling distance.

#### Secondary Education (VO)

In the group of students that made a transfer to a secondary school 35% chose innovative education. A few made the choice for the General Secondary Education for Adults (VAVO), schools where adults have the opportunity to get their high school diplomas. The students used it as a way to get into college or university without having to go back to a regular

What I like about a regular school  
is learning along lines  
that learning is compulsory  
and that I feel I can do it  
*-Freek, 14 yrs-*

I love all the information available  
broader than my own choice  
It's different knowledge than at lederwijs  
also things that do not interest me  
*- Benjamin, 14 yrs-*

It gets me a diploma  
but it feels like  
I'm doing time  
After that life starts again  
*-Govert, 16 jaar-*

school. Others picked a route to higher education through vocational education, with a possibility to do three years in one year. Some of the youngsters took the opportunity to do a few months travel or work, but all went back to school within half a year. See figure 3 and attachments 2 and 4.

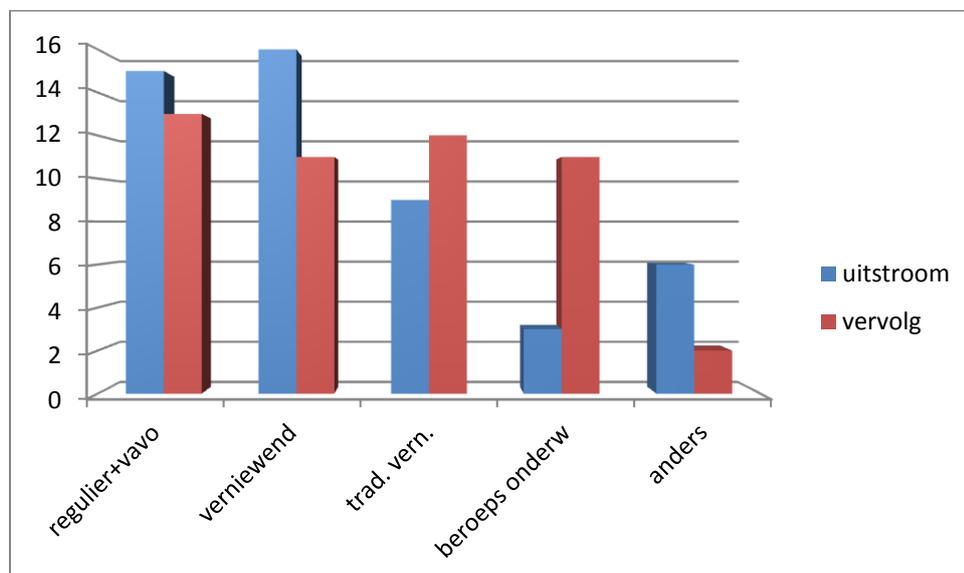


Figure 3: Schools students went to after lederwijs (transfer/blue) and schools they attended at the time of the interview (continued/red). (Vernieuwend= innovative and Beroepsonderwijs= vocational education)

#### 4.3 LAG IN SCHOOL YEARS

A question many people have is whether the choice for lederwijs renders a great lag in school years for students. If you look at the whole group of respondents, they attended lederwijs Lopik for an average of 2.5 years, which gave them a lag of 0.26 years. That equals 3 months. Further on it is explained how this is calculated. In the calculation a distinction is made between students that transfer to primary education and students going to secondary education, because significant differences were found between those groups.

I still have 'lags'  
but even with these lags I am fine  
I am surprised how easy it is to hitch on  
after a year and a half  
*-Elin, 16 yrs-*

Yes I do lag:  
In the ability to sit still  
and keep my mouth shut!  
*- Jitske, 10 yrsr-*

Students at my new school  
know less of everything  
They have less general knowledge  
Mine is a lot bigger  
*-Elin, 16 yrs-*

#### 4.3.1 CALCULATION

We started by noting if any of the students had ever repeated a year before coming to lederwijs. This applied for 25% of the students (behind at entry). A second point of reference was whether students started at the level conform their age at leaving lederwijs. At this we found that 57% of the students were accepted in schools one or sometimes even two years lower than would be expected considering their age. Two years was then counted double in the calculation (behind at transfer). The third point of reference was the class they were in at the time of the interview. There we noted that 6 out of 49 students (12%) had skipped a year in the years after lederwijs and that 3 students (6%) repeated a year in that period (behind at continuation). So if you want to calculate the years students lag in their school career due to their stay at lederwijs Lopik, you take the difference between the first two percentages ( $57\% - 25\% = 32\%$ ). This number then has to be corrected by the percentages of students that repeat or skip a class afterwards. That ultimately leaves us with a percentage of 6% less, bringing us to the conclusions that 26% of the students suffered a lag in their school career by choosing to go to lederwijs. That is an average of 0.26 years, about 3 months.

It has to be remarked here that only 1 out of 49 respondents had the feeling he had lost time by going to lederwijs. All others who were accepted in classes under their age level commented on this 'lost' time being 'well spent' or 'used for things I had never been able to learn anywhere else'.

In the end we see that 17 out of 44 students 'lost' a year or more by going to lederwijs and 6 out of 44 'gained' a year. We talk about 44 instead of 49, because 2 children went on to home schooling and 3 came from a school where they were not put into classes. Therefore either the class before lederwijs was unknown or the class after, excluding them from calculation

#### 4.3.2 DIFFERENTIATION PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

If the data are split into primary (PO) and secondary (VO) education we see the following:

	Behind at entry (%)	Behind at transfer (%)	Behind at continuation (%)	Lag at transfer (%)	Lag at interview (%)
<b>Tot.</b>	25	57	51	32	26
PO	20	65	65	45	45
<b>VO</b>	29	50	37	21	<b>8</b>

Tabel 2: Lags in percentages of a school year. Note: a lag of 2 years is counted double, 3 years triple.

*Question:* How do you understand that you are ahead on several subjects while doing hardly any classes in the last 7 years at lederwijs?

*Answer :* I want to know things. I think about things.

It is all about your attitude towards information

It is a combination of who I am and the freedom I felt at lederwijs to know things

I was not stuffed with what people think one should know

So that gave me lots of space to absorb things

-Marijn, 16 yrs-

We would like to note that in primary education almost 2 out of 3 children transferred to a class under their age level. If you make a correction by subtracting the children that already repeated a year before coming to Iederwijs, then it is almost half of all children. Generally these kids do not recapture that year later in their school career. This is different in secondary school. In this group more students who repeated a year before going to Iederwijs, but only half of them came out a year lower than could be expected. Beside that we see that most of the students who skipped a class later are the students from 12 years and up. That is why the final lag in years for secondary school students was only 8%, equal to 1 month. An extensive overview is to be found in attachment 5.

In the data we found no coherence between the lag in school years and the length of time spent at Iederwijs. Because Iederwijs Lopik was a school that went through a lot of changes in the 6.5 years it existed, we also checked for a connection between the lag of school years and the date of deregistration. No such connection was found, in the available data.

#### 4.4 CHOICE AND REASONS FOR LEAVING IEDERWIJS

For the question about reasons for leaving the school multiple answers could be given and most people did. A little over a quarter of all respondents indicate that they made the transfer because they made the choice for a more structured curriculum.

For 14 students the main reason for changing schools was the fact that the school ceased to exist. This reason applied only for students from the second round, because at the time of the first round closing the school was not a point.

15 Students stated that they left, because they had finished what they came to do at Iederwijs. The underlying reasons for feeling 'ready to leave' varied. For some it was clear that they wanted to get their high school diploma as fast as possible. They figured that that was done more easily at a regular school than at Iederwijs. Some indicated that they wanted more peers in their direct environment. Others wanted a clearer curriculum or were just curious how things work at a regular school.

In some cases the motive for transfer was the fact that parents and staff had different opinions on the best way to proceed. If they could not solve their differences parents usually decided to switch schools and if possible staff would help them find a more suitable school.

This new school is fun too and will not stop soon  
At Iederwijs it was always tricky  
If it would keep going and maybe  
you would loose your friends

-Neeltje, 8 yrs-

I will have my high school diploma in a short time  
And with that my freedom  
To do what I want to do

- Elin, 16 yrs-

It is the next step in my life  
A new enterprise!

-Manja, 19 yrs-

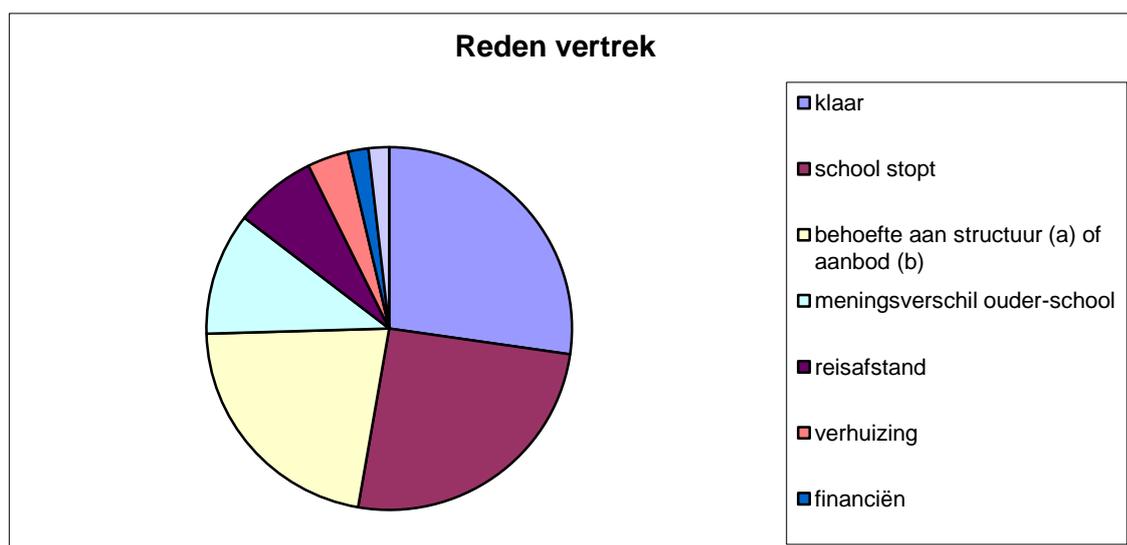


Figure 4: The most frequently mentioned reasons for departure (from the top: ready/finished, school stops, more structured curriculum, disagreement, travel distance, moving house, finances)

Sometimes people left because travelling to school became too much. For instance when people moved to another town or carpool possibilities were no longer available.

For teenagers there was the factor of other teenagers leaving. Some of them got restless when that happened and they started thinking about switching schools as well.

In attachment 6 there is an overview of all the reasons mentioned by students and parents. In almost 50% of the cases it was the student that took the initiative to look for another school. In 25% the parents made the decision. In the rest of the cases it was felt to be a mutual decision. In the group of older students the decision was taken more by the students themselves. With the younger ones it was often the parents. See attachment 7.

#### 4.5 TRANSITION PROBLEMS

In the questionnaire one could score three possible transition problems. It could be rated on a scale from effortless (1) to problematic (5).

The three fields were:

1. Level and curriculum
2. Structure and methods
3. Culture and etiquette

For all three fields there was lots of space for explanation, because it can not be caught in a few numbers. Students often experienced problems in one or two subjects, but not always the same problems. Problems around structure and methods were usually short-lived. On a cultural level a student could have a good relationship with the teacher but less so with the other children (or vice versa). We will look into that in the next paragraph.

##### 4.5.1 LEVEL AND CURRICULUM

On a scale of effortless (1) to problematic (5) there was an average score of 1.8 considering level and curriculum. Primary school students scored 2.0 and secondary 1.6. These numbers decline a little more in the time span from leaving *Iederwijs* and the interview, because the

majority caught up on most of the subjects they had partly missed. Most of them pointed out that the lags they encountered disappeared in 3 months to 1 year.

On average students experienced difficulties with 1.4 subjects of their new curriculum. Dutch was divided into writing (primary: longhand, secondary: essays), spelling, grammar and reading. Arithmetic is often mentioned as a subject that caused problems, but was also easily put back on track. Spelling is harder to pick up if you are behind. Grammar on the other hand is a matter of rules and is picked up easily. We did not hear many complaints about science and economics, but that might be because students from lederwijs often transferred in the last years of secondary school and in the early years they are of less importance. The students who chose to do their exams at lederwijs often did a study profile of Culture and Social Sciences in which the beta subjects were not so important.

Some students mentioned they missed the skills to write things like book reports or essays, or information on how questions were asked in tests and how they were supposed to work out answers. After their first tests most had a clear picture of what was expected.

With some I discussed whether arrears were caused by their stay at lederwijs or if the problem would have occurred anyway, for instance through the child's character or a different learning focus like dyslexia. Both possibilities were named with equal frequency.

#### 4.5.2 STRUCTURE AND METHODS

For students coming from lederwijs working in fixed structures was a big change. In the last few years of lederwijs Lopik there was a broad curriculum, but students were always free to choose what they wanted to do. There was the possibility of not going to any of the organized classes or meetings and just following your own pursuits. The schedule was not there to fix what people had to do in a day. Its only purpose was to give as many students the opportunity to attend all the meetings they wanted. Some went to 2 meetings, others up to 20 a week. Beside those meetings or classes there was a vibrating society of playing, cooking, watching, thinking, talking about life and just enjoying being there together. Everybody went his own way, choosing his own activities. It is a big change for those students to go to a place where every half hour is time tabled.

Handling this change was not perceived as a big problem by the students. On the scale from effortless (1) to problematic (5) they scored a 2.2 when starting their new school, going down to 1.6 by the time of the interview. The younger ones found it harder than the older ones at the start, but adapted quicker. After 2 or 3 three weeks they had adapted to the new

My mother thought that I  
did not learn enough at lederwijs  
She wanted me to go to high school  
without any problems  
*-Jochem, 11 yrs-*

Most subjects give me no trouble at all  
Sometimes I wonder what the students of this  
regular school have been doing all these years?  
*- Ruth, 17 yrs-*

Math at lederwijs  
You do it while you play  
And then you remember the images  
*-Sil, 11 yrs-*

system. It took students going to secondary school closer to 2 or 3 months. A lot of them said that after the first week of tests in the autumn they had figured out how it worked. Some of the students told me they were really happy about the clear structure of schooling they found themselves in. Others told me more about the negative sides they experienced. The main themes are clashes with rules and regulations they feel are useless or stupid and that they have no say in the matter in a nondemocratic school. They have no way of influencing the politics that make the school. Many children miss being able to go outside if they feel the need or they struggle with the fact that other people decide when they eat. There is a complete overview in attachment 9.

Some mentioned that they were happy with the things learned at Iederwijs, because it is still helping them in their new situation. Examples were motivation and a healthy attitude towards learning or the insight that you are not your dyslexia and that there are many different ways people can learn. Also that you are a free human being, fit to make your own choices.

Some things were mentioned that people regretted not to have learned at Iederwijs. For instance: what kind of questions schools use for a test and how are you expected to answer? How do you learn a language from a book? How do you make a presentation or an essay? How do you mobilize working discipline if you do not feel motivated?

#### 4.5.3 CULTURE AND ETIQUETTE

Iederwijs Lopik was a non hierarchic organization. The students and the staff were at the heart of the school. Supporting this decision-making centre were the parents and the board. On all levels sociocracy was used to make decisions. Everyone's input was equally important, adults and children alike. Students did not want to have a say in everything, but the important thing was that they knew that they always had the right to give their opinion and that no decision was taken without the possibility for everybody to give or withhold consent. Children and adults were in a completely equipollent relationship.

Around 20 students expressed themselves in a more or less negative way about the attitude of the adults at the school they went to after Iederwijs. Statements such as: "They really don't listen", "They think students can not be in charge" or "I feel belittled by my mentor" were heard quite often. 10 children stated that they felt the possibility to create relationships with the adults around them similarly to what they were used to at Iederwijs. On the scale from effortless (1) to problematic (5) for culture and etiquette there was an average score of 2.2 for the time just after the transition. It decreased a little in time, but

At first it was very tiring  
not to follow my own flow  
but stick to the flow of the school  
and be directed by that  
*-Freek, 14 yrs-*

To work in another structure was difficult for 2 weeks  
It is slow and boring  
Tests are annoying:  
You have to know things for a moment  
And after that you forget it  
*- Benjamin, 14 yrs-*

After 8 weeks I found my way  
I knew where I stood  
*-Marijn, 16 yrs-*

not much. Students going to secondary school scored 0.3 higher than children going to primary school.

About one third of the respondents felt lucky with the teacher they got in their new school, the rest were not so positive. Students and parents remarked that sometimes there were problems with the adults because the students approached them as equals. Some were not amused and defined the students from Iederwijs as rude or troublesome. Others thought it was refreshing but not always easy. If students from Iederwijs had the feeling that a serious effective relationship was not possible they made sure they got what they needed somewhere else.

Other complaints were that the new teachers were strict, demanding, stuck on grades, judgemental and that they feel they have to punish you if you make a mistake. Only one or two students said they were happy with a demanding teacher.

Positive and negative statements were made concerning the relationship with fellow students. New friends were usually made quickly and they were happy with that. Sometimes children were bullied and that was not easy, or students felt that their peers were acting very childish or silly. Some ran into the fact that people were very judgemental towards students from Iederwijs. Students sometimes felt they could not be themselves in their new environment and that there was no real contact.

Some students mentioned that they had developed certain skills and insights during their time at Iederwijs, which helped them cope better with their new situation. For instance: staying assertive while facing authority, staying in touch with your feelings amidst all the rules, to be able to contemplate situations with a certain distance, eloquence, standing up for yourself, and awareness of equipollent relationships.

#### 4.6 BENEFITS OF THE TRANSFER

Students and parents were asked how they benefitted from the transfer to the new school. Why were they happy with the decision they made? The aspects most mentioned are in table 3, also noting how often a certain answer was given. The complete list is in attachment 10.

Contacts now are less personal  
Everybody only talks about school  
I evade conflicts and I look for people  
who do want to talk about interesting things  
*-Benjamin, 14 yrs-*

Basically I feel they do want to listen  
But the adults are also stuck in the system  
So they can't do anything with what I say  
*- Rob, 16 yrs-*

I miss the real contact  
Students here are so childish  
Especially the boys  
I was shocked  
*-Yana, 15 yrs-*

More scheduled curriculum	20
More peers	17
School friends live close by	8
Peace	8
Prospect of a diploma	7
To know what you know	7
New step into the world	6
Nothing (not happy with transfer)	5

Table 3: Benefits of the transfer to another school

The following positive aspects were mentioned about the curriculum of the new school:

- many classes on the schedule
- always lessons
- do not have to think about it or organize it yourself
- sometimes there is a lesson you would not have thought of yourself
- everything you need is there (for a diploma)
- it is fun learning in a group
- it is mandatory

When people first start at their new school they are generally very enthusiastic about the rich curriculum. Students from lederwijs enjoy that and they are aware that you can not take this for granted. They realize that there are people working hard to make it possible for them to attend these classes.

'More peers' means that students really enjoy having a larger group of peers to move around in. It means they have more choice in who they want to work with, who they want to become friends with and who they fall in love with.

The 'peace' people mentioned is practically seen in the advantage of a shorter travelling distance to the school, and not having to carpool anymore, or get up really early to get to school. For some it gives them peace knowing the school they attend will still be there next year and does not have financial worries. Sometimes it was that children felt tension in their age group at lederwijs and the school was too small to get away from it.

The list mentioned here shows a lot of similarity with the list of reasons for departure. We note that having 'more peers' is hardly mentioned as a reason for departure, but it is felt as a highly appreciated side effect. The same goes for children being happy that in regular education it is clearer what you know, because there is regular testing. For some this is a boost to their self-esteem.

I am happy with all the sources of information  
That there are experts for all subjects  
To tap for information  
I am glad with what I learn  
*-Marijn, 16 yrs-*

I made a giant step  
1 year of spelling in 2 months  
Self-confidence: knowing what I can do  
*- Jochem, 11 yrs-*

Happy there are more students my age  
The bond is not as strong  
but there are more smaller bonds  
*-Pepijn, 15yrs-*

Five children were not happy at all with their transfer to a new school. Some of them had not left Iederwijs voluntarily, but were forced to do so, for instance when their parents had different ideas about the proceedings at the school than the staff or because of practical difficulties. One or two had chosen for the transfer on their own accord, but were disappointed in the result.

Some mentioned that for the first time in their life they were happy with the weekends and school holidays. This may sound weird, but many people at Iederwijs were so content spending their time at school, that weekends and holidays were often felt as a disturbing and boring element of school life. When these students made a transfer to regular education they found that participating in this system cost them far more energy and that made them look forward to weekends and holidays. They now needed this free time to recharge.

#### 4.7 GIFTS FROM IEDERWIJS

The last question on the questionnaire was: "What did Iederwijs bring you and why are you happy you spent your years there?" I also asked them what pictures pop into their mind when they think of Iederwijs. In many cases this brought up a lot of emotions, in students as well as in parents: sparkling eyes, melancholy and passionate speeches. But also desperation about the fact that the school no longer exists. Even with parents who had consciously chosen to move to another school, there was gratitude for what Iederwijs had given them. If it were possible, a lot of the students would return to the school tomorrow.

In table 4 you see the top 5 qualities people say the school has rendered them and the number of times each was mentioned. The complete list is in attachment 11.

Social skills/social intelligence	20
Being yourself (or finding/staying yourself)	19
Respectful relationships/equipollency	15
Quality of friendship	15
The best time of my life	14

Table 4: Insights and skills people say they gained from their time at Iederwijs Lopik.

The years at Iederwijs were unforgettable  
I would not have missed that for anything  
I found myself  
I know who I am  
*-Natania, 18 yrs-*

Although it was not always easy  
I have learned to be more 'me'  
but in a different way  
*- Yana, 15 yrs-*

The people and dealing with conflicts  
And how I handle that  
Time for music and programming  
The best years of my life  
*-Govert, 16yrs-*

### *SOCIAL SKILLS*

Parents and children said that students from lederwijs make contact easily regardless of the age or the status of the other person. The following qualities were mentioned: curiosity, candor, not afraid not to know, asking questions when things are not clear, indicating needs, reading situations and relations, social intelligence, solving conflicts, having confidence in other people, listening to others, participating, cooperating, able to see a situation from different points of view, daring to take initiative, arranging things, being verbally strong, knowing how you can help others, feeling connected, going into the relationship when something happened, able to communicate what is happening to oneself, able to deal with children of all ages and being open to adults.

### *BEING ONESELF*

Being yourself, finding yourself or being true to yourself was a recurring theme in the interviews. Students and parents considered this very important and often it was a tender topic. Some of the students felt they had found themselves again at lederwijs and were noticeably touched by that. They used the following remarks to express that: feeling that you know who you are, that you can/may be yourself, being in the driving seat, trusting your own frame of reference, feeling stronger than before, feeling that you are okay the way you are, feeling accepted, feeling part of a greater whole, feeling respected, knowing your weak and your strong points, self-confidence, feeling free to think, knowing you are your own, self-awareness, knowing where you stand and what you want, self-esteem, no longer afraid of change, valuing your individuality, being able to conform without losing yourself.

### *EQUIPOLLENCY*

The foundation of equipollence within the school colored the picture the students made of the world around them. They felt taken seriously at lederwijs Lopik and that led them to take responsibility for their direct environment. Parents remarked that this was also noticeable in the home situation. Children felt they could take a lot of responsibility and could be in charge of things. Frustration and indignation arose as most teachers in their new schools assumed this was only reserved for adults.

### *FRIENDSHIP*

Many remarked that the friendships at lederwijs Lopik were often profound and special. The teenagers did not have separated groups of girls and boys. Almost everybody found ways to get along with all others. The relationships were intense. There was a lot of romping and cuddling. They conversed for hours on end to exchange experiences and ideas. One of the

I am not so quiet anymore  
Or quiet in a different way  
First in a shy way  
Now in a calm way  
*-Jillis, 12 jaar-*

At lederwijs I learned to treat people in a gentle way  
Before I could be really harsh  
At lederwijs I realized this was not necessary  
The first half year was difficult  
The last year was great  
*- Elin, 16 jaar-*

students remarked that the reason friendships went so deep was because there was time and opportunity to work out profound disagreements and misunderstandings in the relationship. Because the group was quite small (around 20 students from 12 years and up), you could not really avoid people. A drawback of the situation was that they considered the group too small to start love relationships, which is important in that age group.

The children between 6 and 12 also remarked that friendships were special, but here the important thing was that things could be worked out while playing together. How do you play warfare in a fair way that is okay for everybody? They had to enter into conflicts and solve them and because of the small sized group they also had to do that with children they sometimes did not get along with. Solving things bred respect and friendship.

Parents also mentioned that they had experienced change while their child was at Iederwijs Lopik. For instance because they learned to look at their children in a different light and experienced new ways to relate to their children. This could lead to a reduction of tension in the family and sometimes patterns became clear that always led to confusion. Parents stated that they appreciated the invitation and support from the school to self-reflection on their parenthood and also that daily life at school sometimes functioned as a role model. The complete list of statements is in attachment 10. Almost all things mentioned have to do with developing autonomy and relationships. Skills come up in statements about people getting a broader view on how they (can) learn, how you can use your motivation and curiosity and being more aware of their wide general knowledge.

#### 4.8 TEACHERS

All the above results are mainly answers to the questions from the perspective of the students and to a lesser extent from the parents. To get a more complete picture I thought it would be interesting to know how the teachers of the new schools children went to experienced the touch of Iederwijs.

It was decided that I would interview the teachers who had several children from Iederwijs Lopik in their class or the teachers of students who had been at Iederwijs for more than 5 years. Table 5 shows an overview of all the contacts.

I know now I am my own  
Nobody owns me  
*-Jochem, 11 yrs-*

They can conform  
if necessary  
But they no longer loose themselves  
*- Jet, parent-*

I discovered new options through Iederwijs  
In relating to my children  
I look at myself  
Where do I stand? What do I want?  
*-Jop, parent-*

	1	2	3	4	5
<b>School</b>	Regular Primary (PO)	Regular Primary (PO)	Innovative Primary	Regular Secondary	Innovative Secondary
<b>Respondent</b>	Teacher 2nd grade	Teacher 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	Director of the school	mentor	Department coördinator
<b>Number of students</b>	1	3	5	1	4
<b>Time at Iederwijs</b>	5 years	1.5 1.5 2.8 year	0.8 1.9 2.0 5.1 5.8 year	2.3 year	3.0 3.5 6.5 6.5 year
<b>Grade</b>	2nd	4 and 5	Kindergarten. 1,2 and 5	1 <sup>st</sup>	1, 3 and 2x 4
<b>Time between Iederwijs and the interview</b>	10 months	7 10 22 months	5 15 (3x) 43 months	11 months	18 months

Table 5: Overview of the interviews with the teachers of the new schools

It is not possible to draw conclusions from these interviews. As one of the teachers said: each child is different. Beside that it is very difficult to make a distinction between effects caused by their time at Iederwijs and individual characters or predisposition. I will mention some things that were pointed out by more than one teacher and the remarks that might be interesting for future investigation. Details can be found in the quotes from the teachers in the back of this report.

- Students from Iederwijs Lopik are perceived as above average in social skills and conflict management. They are creative and verbally strong. Contacts between pupils and teachers are valued positively.
- In general teachers are content with how students manage their new situation. Possible lags are tackled and there is a strong drive to get good results. They have a motivated approach.
- A complaint uttered more than once is that the teachers would have liked more information on the students' cognitive development beforehand. Reports from Iederwijs Lopik generally gave a good view of the child's personality but were not very specific on cognitive progress. Usually there were no test results or treatment plans. This made it harder for the new schools to estimate if these students needed extra guidance.

They are serious and hungry  
They know why they are here  
*-teacher, secondary -*

No problems with students from Iederwijs:  
They always treat others  
with respect  
*- teacher, primary-*

Amicable to teachers  
But never resisting  
Not susceptible to authority  
But they never rebel  
*-teacher, primary-*

It has to be noted here that sometimes there were huge differences between schools. There was a secondary school where everything went really smooth because the students were bright and socially strong, but there was also a primary school where students went who still needed a lot of guidance socially and cognitively. Teachers therefore had different impressions of lederwijs as prior education and also different wishes for improving the contacts.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Before conclusions are drawn from the results it is interesting to consider some elements a little closer.

1. Perspective of the study
2. Differentiation between primary and secondary school age groups
3. The length of time students were at lederwijs
4. Underachievement
5. Preparing for the transfer

### 5.1 PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY

What conclusions can be drawn from the outcome of this study? The group of respondents was limited, but at the same time almost all eligible students were interviewed. The information is partly measurable and another part is a compilation of perceptions. The perceptions of the students were chosen as the starting point. This is consistent with the way we worked at lederwijs Lopik: everybody is the expert on his own life. So beside a few measurable facts this study is above all a description of how people have experienced this: students, parents and teachers. It is hard to catch that in numbers, so the value I see in this report is probably the larger outlines. Beside that there is the inspiration of the details.

### 5.2 DIFFERENTIATION PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL AGE GROUPS

In describing the results I have often differentiated between the age groups of primary and secondary education. This differentiation did not exist at lederwijs Lopik! All activities were always open for all age groups. This meant that an 11 year old did biology at 4<sup>th</sup> grade high school level and a 14 year old student was very happy that she had finally learned to tell the time properly. But in the rest of society the differentiation in age groups is important to people and because the results showed interesting differences between the groups, we decided to show the divergent outcomes in this report

Cooperation and coming to an agreement  
is very easy  
with kids that came from lederwijs

*-teacher, secondary-*

They come from a culture of dialogue  
And have great social skills  
A lot better than pupils  
from regular education

*- teacher, primary-*

They have covered the whole curriculum  
but they have not really mastered it

*-teacher, secondary-*

### 5.3 LENGTH OF TIME AT IEDERWIJS

It was remarkable that for students at Iederwijs Lopik changing schools was hardly ever seen as a problem. It was something to do when you had the feeling another place offered better possibilities for what you wanted to achieve. The average time the respondents spent at Iederwijs was 2.5 years. This was probably less than the average time students wanted to be at Iederwijs, but that is because 60% of the respondents from the second round of interviews left because the school closed. If you look at the first round you come to an average of near 2.5 years. Does that mean that Iederwijs was not a good school, because everybody leaves after a couple of years and almost no-one stayed in secondary school till the end? This conclusion would be too easy. The reasons for departure and our own experiences sketch another picture. What we saw is that children coming to our school first started out working on the things most important to them at that moment. Often it was catching up emotionally or socially. If then after a couple of months they had connected again to 'the voice within', the future started to come back into the picture. Then they would start experimenting. What meetings do I like? What suits me? What is a good way for me to learn things? What is a good daily schedule for me? How much time do I want to spend on classes and how much free time do I want? How do I handle aversion?

After some time it would become clearer for a student where he wanted to go, the goals he wanted to reach and the path he chose. And sometimes in this picture Iederwijs was not the optimal place to be. The fastest way to a diploma was usually through adult education. Vocational education is often better done at a specialized school. A more structured curriculum is far easier to realize at a regular school.

It was great to see that students at Iederwijs Lopik had the feeling they had the whole world to choose from and they could pick the place that suited them best. They did not have the feeling that that school career was already completely set out till further study. On the contrary: there was freedom in their thinking about the future and that was why they left Iederwijs. Not because it was not a good place, but they had come to see that for them at that moment in their life there was an even better place to be.

### 5.4 Underachieving

Some people fear that because of the freedom at Iederwijs children will tend to underachieve. What were our observations on that? In general I can say that some children tended to underachieve cognitively sometimes. Usually that was a very unsatisfactory time for them. Sometimes other developments were more urgent to them and sometimes the boredom of underachievement was a way to get a clearer picture of what they wanted in life. But more than that we saw that being at Iederwijs gave children a boost to start enjoying learning again. If the pressure from outside was gone there was space again for

Because at Iederwijs there were no things put in my head  
I had lots of space in my head. I talked a lot to people  
Sometimes discussions that did not seem important  
It was great to think about the world around me  
In my head I put the pieces together  
And made it a whole

- Marijn, 16 yrs-

I adjust to situations, but it is my own choice  
I give it my own twist  
Your life is not much influenced by others  
You make your own choices

-Pepijn, 15 yrs-

intrinsic motivation. We saw time and time again how these young people love to learn, although their curiosity did not always lead them to do the things highly regarded by society. All students took their own path, making their own story. A few examples; at the end of primary school one boy got the official advice to go to a special school for children with learning disabilities. After a year and a half at lederwijs he went to a regular high school. A girl that could not make it work in two different high schools was home for a year. After a year and a half at lederwijs she was accepted at secondary vocational education at level 3. Then there is the story of a 15 year old girl. After two and a half years at lederwijs she did a 3 year course in social studies on child care in 1 year. Her friend took the path of getting her high school diploma through one year at adult education. After that she did one year of study equivalent to college and is now studying Asian cultures and languages at university.

No one left lederwijs with a full high school diploma (some did state exams for 1 or more subjects), but all children had the feeling they were on the right path and not on a dead end street. They see the road they want to take and go.

Reviewing all evidence and shared experiences there is no proof for fundamental underachievement caused by the system of schooling chosen by lederwijs. Students sometimes put their priorities in a different area than the regular school subjects and so developed in their own way. It then depends on how you define and measure underachievement. Our perception was that children were always busy with something that was important to them. As an illustration the following quote from a 12 year old:

*Every day was precious. Not a day was not worth living. Even if I had done 'nothing', I had hung around, doing things in my head, thinking about things.*  
 –Benjamin, 12 yrs–

## 5.5 PREPARING FOR TRANSFER

If the choice for transferring to another school was made well in advance, there was time to prepare. Some students took 3 months till a year to do that. During that time they could practice with levels and skills that were going to be expected from them (like writing essays and book reports, or practicing testing), but not all made that choice. In the group of teenagers, friends leaving sometimes made others want to leave as well. Time to prepare for a good transfer was in those cases sometimes (too) short. The result was that not all children started their new school well prepared, and sometimes they spent a lot of their first months catching up.

I have faced some hard times at lederwijs  
 It led me to discover  
 some other sides of myself  
 It helped me grow up  
 –Yana, 15 yrs–

First I was really scared of changes  
 but not anymore  
 That really helps me now  
 in school, sports and work  
 –Louki, 17 yrsr–

At lederwijs there is freedom in time  
 You can make your own appointments  
 Make your own schedule for the day  
 It is not decided for you  
 –Sil, 11 yrs–

## 6. CONCLUSION

Generally speaking the transition from lederwijs Lopik to another school was not perceived as very problematic. The majority of the students did experience some gaps in their cognitive development or needed a few weeks to get used to a new way of working, but it did not take much to adjust to the new situation. Especially the students who initiated their own transfer did not mind putting some extra work into it. Everybody tried really hard in their own way to get where the rest of the class was. On the social side there were not many problems either. Students from lederwijs are socially skilled, ready to meet other people and apt to face new challenges.

A few students 'lost' a year or two because they chose to go to lederwijs, but no one felt it was a waste of time. There were also students who sped up their school career by going to lederwijs. In all interviews I had with students, regret was never voiced.

Looking back on the time they spent at lederwijs Lopik all parents and students see much growth and personal development. The absolute value of that is hard to measure, because people grow and develop all the time. What is notable is the fact that almost everybody highly valued and enjoyed this time of schooling, education and expansion. In that I think they deviate from the average student and their parents.

At lederwijs I became aware of my struggle with time pressure  
 At lederwijs you can breathe.  
 You did not have to bend over backwards to fit in:  
 Everyone took you as you were.  
 A man is just who he is.  
 lederwijs taught me to see things broadly and realistically  
 That you do not run away when times get tough  
 If you discover yourself by playing, you run into all your own shit  
 At lederwijs a lot more happens than you can see  
 -Manja, 19 yrs-

## ENCORE OF QUOTES

As a bonus there are quotes from the interview. They are sorted in different themes. The first five are about the situation at the new school. Numbers 6 to 10 are about Iederwijs Lopik.

### New school:

1. Methods
2. Social aspects
3. Relationship with teachers
4. Curriculum
5. Benefits of the transfer

### Iederwijs Lopik:

6. Reasons for leaving
7. Effects on (school)career
8. Intrinsic motivation/attitude
9. Social skills
10. Self-awareness

Blue sections: quotes from students

Orange-brown sections: quotes from parents

Purple sections: quotes from teachers

## 1. New school: methods

If I come home from my new school I'm too tired for homework, tired from accommodating and all the information I do not really want to remember. -Thijs, 14 yrs-

At the end of the morning I feel tired and dull; I never had that at Iederwijs, this weariness! Iederwijs sometimes feels like a dream. This new school is not so free. It feels like a prison. Everything here is complicated: taking a break, eating, sitting still. And the Rules! It is the 1-rule-school: so many rules that it is one big Rule. I think that is stupid, but I do not let it bother me too much. -Jitske, 10 yrs-

Not being allowed to make sounds and keeping quiet: that is weird and tough. -Floris, 10 yrs-

I hate it when other people decide when you should eat. And you only have 10 minutes. -Tess, 12 yrs-

First I was a little anxious: do I still know how to do it? With the first test I was nervous: should I learn everything by heart or just think logically? -Sanne, 18 yrs-

I am different from the others: I have not lost my curiosity. -Ruth, 17 yrs-

Adult education is not ideal for me. The people are okay, but I do not feel like studying. To learn things in social relationships is great; to learn a subject in class is no fun. -Adam, 20 yrs-

The internal motivation to learn disappears really fast in a regular school -Beverly, parent-

He does not care about grades, he just wants to understand. He often comes up with difficult questions. Other students find that weird. It is Iederwijs mentality. -Tjitske, parent-

Teachers are surprised that it is so easy for him to convert from Iederwijs to regular education; methodically as well as cognitively. Learning does not take much time if you feel the drive. -Maria, parent-

At First he found it hard not being able to play. He had no overview. But he adjusts easily. It is not a problem anymore. Waiting for your turn, postponed attention: it is a lot better now. –teacher, PO-

One of them fits in really easily; he is flexible and understands our methods. For the other one it is a lot harder; he does awkward things and makes unsuitable proposals. -teacher PO-

Only one child did not like the way we work here and it took him a long time to find the right motivation. Another child was rebellious for two days. There were no problems with the other children. Their attitude during working hours is the same as the other children. -teacher PO-

One of the younger children did not want to be forced to make a day plan. Actually they all had to get used to making a working schedule every day. -teacher PO-

I notice he flourishes in the new structure. -teacher VO-

## 2. New school: social aspects

At first the new school was difficult for me. People were bullying. Later I understood how that worked. I was different, not tough enough. -Melle, 14 yrs-

Now I have accommodated. I play my role and at the same time I try to stay close to myself. -Thijs , 14 yrs-

At my new school it seems not done to associate with boys. Everything is different: what you wear is important. I miss this feeling of being together. It makes calluses on my soul. -Tess, 12 yrs-

I check out the people who are like me: people who went back to school voluntarily. This is not a place where I am going to be very happy. -Louki, 17 yrs-

I do not like it that everybody is so competitive. Some people are already worrying about their exams 3 years from now. -Yana, 15 yrs-

At Iederwijs we did not differentiate between boys and girls. That is different now, but I don't really mind. -Pepijn, 15 yrs-

It is completely different. Students here are not open to other things. So I engage in small talk and try to find people like me. Because of this it sometimes really sucks to go to school. Sometimes I get into trouble if people do not accept me the way I am. I wish it was the school holidays. -Josephine, 15 yrs-

Students show no respect in how they treat each other. It is a real 'school'. I don't like it at all! I don't join in. I am not at this school for the other students. I differ from them, because they do not know that things can be different. I don't try to make them see. It won't help in this system. I think they would understand and they may even want to change things, but they would not know how to do that in this system. -Rob, 16 yrs-

The children came in without a label, but one of them has a tricky personality and was secretly bullied. When it came to the surface we talked about it. One of them is affected by gangs/bullying and children acting dominantly. -teacher PO-

One of the girls was affected by the crowds and also by people treating her differently, but not in a nice way. For the rest there were no problems at all with students from Iederwijs. On the contrary: they treat other children very respectfully. I am also happy with the parents from Iederwijs; they have no problems understanding the policy of the school. -teacher innovative school-

Two of the students found it hard to take initiative in the large group (class of about 75 students). But they are very good in personal contacts. -teacher innovative secondary school-

### 3. New school: relationship with teachers

There is more distance between adults and children. I don't get involved with the adults as easily as I did at Iederwijs. I go to see them when I have a question. They appreciate that. I have got used to testing now, but an unexpected test is still not fun. The teacher says: "just a little test for the feeling" Then I think: "what kind of feeling are you looking for?????" Now I think: bring it on (sigh)! -Jillis, 12 yrs-

If I stand up for myself I get into trouble. I can not say the things I think are important, even if they say I can. -Thijs, 14 yrs-

They still think that adults have more to say than children. For instance they think that children can not take charge. They think you have to be grown up to do that. -Sil, 11 yrs-

The rules are unreasonable, because there is no time to solve conflicts in any other way. -Vonne, 11 yrs-

You know a weird thing? At my new school there are separate rooms for grown ups! You can't go in there! -Marik, 8 yrs-

I hardly ever finish my day plan. I think I have done enough and the teacher thinks I should do more. -Jochem, 11 yrs-

The reason I sometimes don't want to do things is not because of Iederwijs, it's in me. I think: what's the use? If it is useful I do it, if not I go back to the teacher and explain why I am not doing it. -Elin, 16 yrs-

You have to get used to how questions are asked: 1 week and you know. -Benjamin, 12 yrs-

I like it when people tell me I have to finish things. -Joost, 14 yrs-

Within 2 weeks he knew the culture of C's. Homework means: seeing to it that you understand and knowing your teacher well, so you are able to estimate what you really have to do. -Beverly, parent-

She is considered rude if she holds teachers accountable for what they are doing. -Marja, parent-

At Iederwijs Lopik he came back to trusting adults who teach. The intimidation of hierarchic grown ups has disappeared. The new school is more formal, but he is still open to the adults. -Maria, parent-

He is used to a more open and free relationship with adults. Not always polite. More like buddies. He is amicable to teachers, but never in resistance. He is not sensitive to authority, but he does not rebel either. -teacher regular primary school-

The relationship between teachers and students does not differ much from Iederwijs. The distance is fairly small. -teacher innovative secondary school-

#### 4. New school: curriculum

The students from Iederwijs participate in all activities. One even tried to do more than that. The other worked hard but did not warn us when he could not cope. He underestimated it. Some need more structure than others. -teacher innovative secondary school-

He is very interested in the curriculum. He joins in effortlessly. He seems to understand a lot. -teacher, regular primary education-

One of the kids picked it up without a problem. He is very smart. The learning materials did not give him any problems, except for the spelling. - teacher, regular primary school -

He was never behind in arithmetic, only in the way he put things on paper. He has caught up in Dutch as well. There are no gaps anymore except with reading. Spelling was hard. But he is catching up. He made no mistakes at all in the last dictation. -teacher, regular primary school-

There are arrears in reading, but they are catching up fast. For instance when they realize what they have already achieved. Language stuff is picked up easily, only spelling takes more time. - teacher, regular primary school -

Arithmetic and German were hard, social sciences no problem. -teacher, secondary school-

In arithmetic he was more than a year behind. He has a strange twisted way of thinking. In grammar he has missed most exercises. - teacher regular primary school -

There were no problems specifically related to Iederwijs. And that is due to the students, to who and what they are. - teacher innovative secondary school -

There are no problems: his level is all right. He is managing well. He is very loyal. -teacher, secondary-

For one student it was hard to assess what he could handle. We have considered testing him, but in the end we did not. –teacher secondary school-

Math was difficult, because we used a different method. I also noticed that the math was not automated enough to keep up with the pace and move on to the next step. They had done everything, but it was not ingrained. - teacher secondary school -

## 5. New school: benefits of the transfer

The benefit of the transfer is that I meet other people than lederwijs people and that I learn to relate to them as well. But they are not really my people, so I will get my diploma and then I'm gone. -Josephine, 15 yrs-

The benefit of the transfer is that I am continuing on my path. It has become clear what I want to do and what I am capable of. -Renee, 17 yrs-

I enjoy seeing how others experience "school". -Ruth 17 yrs-

I have got the feeling that I'm continuing my development. All students here have the same goal and the goal is clear. -Pepijn, 15 yrs-

I love my internship: experience with children. Great working place, nice supervisor. I have clicked with my fellow students because of the work and because we share the same passion. -Sanne, 18 yrs-

The benefit of the transfer is the proof that she can do it. -Renée parent-

## 6. lederwijs: reasons to leave and knowledge gaps

My parents wanted me to get a diploma, but I did not have the self-discipline to do that at lederwijs. - Adam, 20 yrs-

I was behind in arithmetic. But I caught up during the summer break and now I'm okay. I still have to learn a lot on writing essays. -Yana, 15 yrs-

I had lags in: arithmetic (caught up), sitting still, keeping quiet, writing (spelling and longhand: still behind, I write slowly and I have not practiced spelling yet). -Jitske, 10 yrs-

I switched schools, because I was afraid my education would linger at too low a level. The call to play was too loud for me. I sometimes found it hard to keep my appointments. And beside that a lot of my friends were leaving school –Kai, 11 yrs-

The way to answer a question is something that you have to learn; I am not the only one who does not know how to do that, so actually I have no arrears. I thought it would be harder. -Ruth, 17 yrs-

I wanted to work and do something else, something with travelling; there was nothing more lederwijs could give me. -Manja, 19 yrs-

I was simply finished. I was too old to be in a school like that. I was ready to go because of my age. If not so many older students had left, I might have stayed a little longer. Because of a long term illness I had only just started thinking about my future. -Merel, 20 yrs-

She had never practiced longhand. At her new school she felt embarrassed because of that. Beside that she had never given a book presentation. -Wim, parent-

Picking up the cognitive part gave a boost to his self esteem. I think that would not have happened at lederwijs . It could have become a big blockade. -Erik, parent-

As a school you have to find out where the students from lederwijs stand. I think children with lesser learning abilities might miss the boat at lederwijs. In a regular school testing would have started a lot sooner. -primary teacher-

You could facilitate the transfer to regular education by providing books beforehand. Now he has to do it step by step during lessons. Another idea would be for a child to meet his new teacher beforehand. That can help him to trust that everything is going to be alright. Socially and emotionally he is a 4th grade student, but cognitively he is a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader. I wonder where life will take him. -primary teacher-

I think children need to hear every now and then, where they fail and the demands they have to live up to. It would be nice to see test results when they come from lederwijs; things on paper. Then you know where to start. Thanks to my dealings with lederwijs I realize again what the use is of all the paper work. Especially when there is a learning problem, it helps you see long term developments. If I had known more about one of the pupils, I would have wondered if we could deal with him. -primary teacher-

At the time of the transfer we got information from the parents, but we did not get information from the school. We would have liked more information: how does this child function? Style of learning? Socially and emotionally? I could advise lederwijs about direction versus autonomy. For instance: what do you do when reading does not start? Is it not better to direct children to get them over a threshold? This is also our struggle. When we do it we see that it speeds up their development. But you really have to look at the child. In some cases you can make it easier for them. -primary teacher-

I would recommend other schools, without any doubt, to accept students from lederwijs Lopik. -secondary teacher-

## 7. lederwijs: career steps

I picked and arranged my own school to continue my education. Thanks to lederwijs. -Renee, 17 yrs-

From lederwijs Lopik I take that I can follow my own path and live it, so dreams can come true. -Yana, 15 yrs-

When I went to the next school, I skipped a year. Things are going great, especially the internship. -Evi, 17 yrs-

At lederwijs I discovered how the world turns and what I want for my future. -Josephine, 15 yrs-

Arrears? Absolutely not: I was ahead of others! Because of lederwijs I know about economics and social sciences and it is easy to understand how things work. Social sciences in my study are not about knowledge, but about understanding from the heart. For me that is easy. I do that intuitively. I was born with that intuition, but lederwijs taught me to handle it. -Sanne, 18 yrs-

I am glad she went through this experience; it gave her a better picture of what a school can be. She realises you can learn in many different ways. She knows now that all these rules are not really necessary to get somewhere with a group. -Arjen, parent-

## 8. lederwijs: intrinsic motivation and work attitude

Ever since lederwijs working with deadlines is easier for me: you just do the best you can and that's what it is. It does not define who you are. If it turns out not to be good enough you can make another choice. -Manja, 19 yrs-

lederwijs makes you pigheaded. You keep asking questions. You only adapt out of free will. You control your own life. -Pepijn, 15 yrs-

She caught up through her own drive. Studying is her own choice now. She is focused in her search, making plans for the future. The source for that is lederwijs. -Marie-José, parent -

At lederwijs Lopik 'wanting to learn' has returned. He learned to understand his choices. Now in first grade he is already thinking about his future. lederwijs helped with that: especially working together with the older students. It inspired reflection. The ground was prepared, a tapestry of orientation points. Later everything will fit in there. Building bridges will be easy. He knows now that he can achieve his goals in different ways. At lederwijs Lopik he learned to plan ahead, to keep things organized and to feel responsible. -Maria, parent -

His healthy working attitude started at lederwijs Lopik. He does not have to fight for his freedom anymore: he knows what it is. He is finished with rebelling. At lederwijs he learned to make choices. -Hanne, parent-

They are interested in a wide range of things and they have the drive to achieve. They know why they are here. At first they were more fanatic than the others, especially for social activities like the student council and internships. Now they are more like the others, more realistic, but still strongly involved. Their interests surpass the exams. Also their drive for getting a diploma differs from other students. -teacher secondary-

He works hard, tries hard and is very motivated. -teacher secondary-

Skills like listening, focusing and learning: it all went better than I thought it would. Basic principles he applied in his own way (e.g. writing on the right hand side). I also noticed that he does not mind NOT knowing things. -primary teacher-

One of them used his last months at lederwijs to prepare for the transfer and getting to the required level. He picked up the books we use and he came to practice German conversation. One of the others estimated himself too high and was not so apt in asking questions. He ran into trouble with that in the first year. But he decided to transfer at a later stage and did not have much time to prepare. -teacher secondary-

You can not really make a general statement on this; every child is different. But generally speaking: kids from lederwijs that come here are doing fine. When they come here they come for the 'hard' side, for the cognitive side. They know why they are here. Social skills are already well developed. -primary teacher-

## 9. lederwijs: social skills

I have grown stronger: physically and mentally. I am braver now. During the time I was at lederwijs Lopik I always felt accepted. That feeling still continues. I know things can be different. -Jyoti, 13 yrs-

From lederwijs Lopik he brings social intelligence; a cunningness in contact, for instance with teachers. Learning is relationship and because of lederwijs he has a toolbox full of tools. -Jet, parent -

Socially he is far ahead of all his peers. He knows how to express himself, he is articulate and doing great. He has got a good foundation, also in relationships with older children. -Nancy, parent -

Because of lederwijs Lopik she feels self-assured and motivated to learn. It also gave us easy teenagers, because they felt that we are willing to listen, even in their decision to switch schools. Socially and emotionally they are no longer vulnerable, but strong confident teenagers. -Wim, parent -

He is very mature, but he is also still a child. Verbally he is very advanced for his age. –primary teacher-

He picks things up faster than others. He is very articulate. In scientific thinking he is ahead of others. He has a good and positive self-image. Lots of creativity. –primary teacher-

He is verbally strong. Wide interests and good general knowledge (also part of his character). –primary teacher-

It is striking how articulate the children from Iederwijs are. They can express very well what they want and what they think. They handle crises very well. They come from a culture of deliberation and have great social skills; a lot more than students from regular schools. One of them, who spent a long time at Iederwijs is very good at mediating conflicts. –primary teacher-

## 10. Iederwijs: self-awareness

Iederwijs Lopik was a place and a time to find (part of) myself: to become a social being and to create and maintain relationships with other people. -Adam, 20 yrs-

Now I know I am mine and not somebody else's. I can express my feelings and say what bothers me. I think that is one of the most important things in life. -Jochem, 11 yrs-

About pressure: I am sensitive for stress, I fall ill easily. At Iederwijs people did not expect you to be omnipotent. I learned not to mind if I felt I could not do something. In the future I want to apply the ideas of Iederwijs Lopik more in my work: listen to your body, be realistic about your own pace and take the liberty to work accordingly. It will make you happier. In this way you can reach the same goals as when you keep on running: the same range in the same time. -Manja, 19 yrs-

At Iederwijs I could do what I really wanted to do. It gave me self-confidence. I could be myself all the time. I am going to write a book and give it to all the teachers in the world. Most will be about Iederwijs: how you can be yourself. And I'll be organizing workshops, so everybody can learn to do that. -Vonne, 11 yrs-

I just miss it immensely. Freedom. Being on the trampoline. The people. I liked it there. I could really be myself (as to adapting now). -Tess, 12 yrs-

Iederwijs Lopik is the best school in the world! Being free. Friends. Enjoying going to school. The motivation to learn. -Freek, 14 yrs-

Open mind: with an Iederwijs-view you see more (if I do not want that, how can we solve it? And being free to always form your own opinion). The teenagers from Iederwijs are still my best friends. This friendship runs really deep; a lot deeper than other friendships. Age does not matter. -Sanne, 18 yrs-

If he had not gone to lederwijs lopik he would have never have gone back to school. Because of lederwijs he knows who he is. He found himself, knows what he is capable of, his self-confidence is back. He works out of motivation and not external pressure. It is an enforcement: it is possible and it works. -Tjitske, parent -

lederwijs gave my children the space to discover who they are or to rediscover that. It gave them the base to explore and figure things out, instead of living by external standards. -Jet, parent -

In the long run I do not see any drawbacks from his time at lederwijs Lopik, rather advantages. He prospered there. We gave him a hard time by changing schools. Starting him up at a new school nearly took a year. Maybe I am sorry we took him away from lederwijs. -Margreet, parent -

The community and how you associate with others. I am glad my child picked that up. Feeling strong in yourself, trust. Working together. -Nancy, parent-

She also had some difficult times at lederwijs. Sometimes it costs a lot and that makes it valuable. -Renée, parent-

## POSTSCRIPT

Iederwijs was a small school which started on the 1st of February 2002 on a small farm just outside Schoonhoven. The school was very different from the image that people usually have of a school. It was an extraordinary place, but above all: it was an extraordinary group of people. The founders of the school were Bas Rosenbrand, Eefke Eijgenstein and Jochem van der Padt. I feel an immense gratitude to those three people who put into the world a place for children and adults where dreams could come true. The faith of Yolanda Eijgenstein and Toon Vermeulen in this project was the financial basis for the school for many years; without that we would not have played, built and unfolded.

Iederwijs inspired many people and in the years that followed many Iederwijsschools were started all through the country. I found Iederwijs during this first wave of publicity. First as a possible school for my own children, but quickly enough as a co-founder of an Iederwijs school in Utrecht. When that school closed its doors in 2005, I found my place at Iederwijs Lopik as a staff member and a teacher. This was the school where Iederwijs started, but which had moved from Schoonhoven to Lopik. I touched down in a unique situation. There was freedom intertwined with a strong feeling of responsibility. There was equality for all people there regardless of age or role in the school. There were no written rules. There was a common goal (creating a good environment for everybody involved) so decisions were taken sociocratically. It fizzed and bubbled. It was a lively place where people felt invited to show themselves regardless. We learned a lot, as a group as well as individually. Afterwards I tried to fathom out why we experienced so much space to learn at Iederwijs Lopik. The results of those ponderings is published in an article in the conference book of Management en Organisatie (M&O 2010) and is titled: "Iederwijs van Binnenuit" (Iederwijs from the Inside).

We were a licensed school for primary education and in 2008 also for high school, but the media and politics were not easy on us a lot of the time. In 2008 we had to close the school for financial reasons. It is not easy to survive as a school without public funding especially if you go for high quality and a low threshold. It's the loss of a piece of heaven in educational wastelands. But it is what it is. If I reencounter people from Iederwijs we still talk about it. Only the people who were there know how valuable it was.

Beside the privilege of being there at the right time, it was courage and stamina that got us through. Most people who made this choice, had to make do without the understanding or affirmation of the people around them. Especially for the students it was hard that even people close to them could not understand the value Iederwijs had for them. Concern and distrust always popped up. That was not easy. It's hard to stick to your own path when that happens. It made us a close group. At the same time: the critical notes from the outside world kept us sharp, because we had to keep on checking if we were still on the right track. This survey is a result of that.

I want to thank Esther for bringing Iederwijs to my attention. I am glad she has always been somewhere near during all my Iederwijs adventures. I also want to thank the people who read all the draft versions of this report: Angele, Bas, Peter, Dineke, Sanne, Eefke, Alice and finally my father and my sister for the finishing touch.

I want to thank all the children and parents who helped building this school, for their courage and their friendship. The school as an institution may no longer be there, but the connection is. Thanks also to my inspiring, challenging and loving colleagues of the staff (named the Toverstaf which means Magic Wand): Eef, Bas, Jochem, Bob, Jasmine, Bodo, Tamara, Ria, Dirk, Barry, Margreet, Marijke, Floor, Miguel and Jop.

I want to thank my daughter Sanne, who had the guts to choose for lederwijs at the age of 15 and who has followed all my writings critically during the entire process. I also want to thank my son Aron, who had the guts not to choose for lederwijs and by doing so kept me balanced in my judgments. Last but not least I want to thank Peter, my partner in life, for his confidence and his immense heart.

Evelien Prins

June 2010

Translation: October 2011

NB. More information can be acquired at: [delachendepelgrim@gmail.com](mailto:delachendepelgrim@gmail.com)

Dit zijn de dagen van je leven.  
 Je ontvouwt je in de wereld.  
 -neem je ruimte-  
 Je bent daar samen met anderen.  
 -laat je aanraken-  
 Dit is het moment.

These are the days of your life  
 You unfold into this world  
 -take you space-  
 You are here together with others  
 -be touched-  
 This is the moment.

## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: Classification of schools

Category	Schools	
Regular education	Subsidized traditional education	
Traditional innovators	Montessori, Jenaplan, Steiner schools, Dalton	
Innovative education	Subsidized recent innovators: Hof ter Weide, de Bras, Unic, Amadeus, Vathorst	
Iederwijs	Schools similar to Iederwijs Lopik: (sociocratic/democratic and usually not subsidized) bv: Iederwijsschools and De Ruimte Soest	
Homeschooling	none	

### Appendix 2: Transfer and continued education (students per category)

Primary School Students		
	Transfer	Continued
Regular Primary Education	7	7
Traditional Innovators	7	8
Innovative Primary	7	4
Homeschooling	2	2
Total	23	21
Secondary School Students		
	Transfer	Continued
Regular highschool	3	5
Traditional innovators	2	4
Innovative highschools	9	7
Adult education	4	1
MBO (vocational education))	3	6
HBO (higher professional ed.)	0	5
Work	2	0
Travel	1	0
Homeschooling	1	0
TOV (reintegration program)	1	0
Total	26	28

**Appendix 3:****Distribution of students coming and going**

	Primary Schools (PO)	Secondary Schools (VO)
Origin	33	16
Transfer	23	26

**Appendix 4:****Percentages of students: origin, transfer and continued (education)**

Primary + Secondary Ed.	Origin (%)	Transfer (%)	Continued (%)
Under 4 years of age	8		
Regular + Adult Education	47	31	27
Traditional Innovators	27	18	25
Innovative Education	2	33	22
Iederwijs	14	36*	
Convocational		6	22
Other	2	12	4

\* The 36% at Transfer is calculated from the number of students that decided to switch to the Nieuwe School in Culemborg when Iederwijs Lopik closed as a percentage of the total number of students at that moment in the school. The rest of the percentages follow from the interview data.

**Appendix 5:****Gain or loss in school years for Primary and Secondary School students**

<b>Primary</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>+1</b>	<b>+2</b>
At time of transfer		3	7	10		
At time of interview (continued)		3	8	8	1	
At time of application at Iederwijs (origin)		1	2	17		
Transfer minus Origin			9	11		
Continued minus Origin		1	10	8	1	
<b>Secondary</b>						
At time of transfer	1	1	7	15		
At time of interview (continued)	1		9	11	3	
At time of application at Iederwijs (origin)		1	5	18		
Transfer minus Origin	1		5	15	3	
Continued minus Origin	1		7	11	3	2

**Appendix 6:  
Reasons for transfer**

Reasons for leaving lederwijs	Times mentioned
School stopped	
Curriculum	
Want more structure	
Time for a new start*	
Diploma	
Disagreement parents-staff	
Other students leaving	
Travel distance too much	
Finances	
Social safety	
Moving house	
Not a good work atmosphere	
Want to experience normal education	
Want to travel	
Needing peers	

**Appendix 7:  
Responsibility for the choice to switch schools**

	primary	secondary	total
Student	6	17	23
Parents	10	3	13
Both	7	6	13

**Appendix 8:  
Amount of students mentioning arrears**

	Prim.	Sec.
Arithmetic	9	9
Writing	6	7
Reading	6	1
Spelling	5	1
Grammar	1	4
Geography and History	2	3
French		4
German		2
Physics and Biology		2

**Appendix 9:  
Positive and negative experiences new school**

<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>
I like it IIIIIII	Homework II
Eagerness to learn	Return of performance anxiety
Homework II	Others deciding when you eat and drink IIII
Holidays	Not being able to go outside IIII
Silence when working	Does not suit my character
Clarity	Stupid rules IIII
	Whole day requirements
	I can not feel what I want anymore
	Being quiet III
	Postponing questions II
	No freedom of choice II
	It's all about achieving the highest grades
	A five day school week
	Not my own flow, but the schools flow
	What use is this to me? II
	Tiring II
	Tests III
	Unannounced testing
	Culture of C's
	Too boring and too slow
	Set curriculum

**Appendix 10: Advantages new school**

More peers	IIII IIII IIII II
Peers live closer	IIII III
Easier (practical)	IIII
Less insecure	III
More curriculum	IIII IIII IIII IIII
Diploma	IIII II
Nice teacher	III
Clarity of the path to follow	II
Taking big steps	II
You know what you know	IIII II
Self confidence	III
New step into the world	IIII I
Experiencing regular education	III
None	IIII
School holidays	II
Enjoying life	I
Matter of fact/professional approach	I
Clothing	I

**Appendix 11:**  
**Personal gain from Iederwijs Lopik.**

Social intelligence		20
Being or finding yourself		19
Respectful relationships/equality		15
Friendships		15
Golden Age of my life		14
Making your own choices		12
Self-confidence		12
Motivation to learn/curiosity		10
Peace/fun/enjoying life/free air		9
Learning in different ways		9
Finding/following your own path		9
Stronger/less fear		9
Freedom of thought		8
Self-esteem		8
Self-understanding/reflection		7
Wide general knowledge		7
Knowing you are able		7
Knowing who you are		6
Family/ties/community		5
Age mix		5
Learning to play/ being a child		5
Listening to others/adapting		5
Positive approach to life		
Non-judgmental environment		
Verbal strength		
Conflict management		
Mature/independent		
Able to express feelings		
Critical attitude		
Healthy relationship with adults		
Feeling responsible		
Handling changes		
Planning		
Feeling okay about not knowing		
Feeling alive		
Feeling skilled		
Taking initiative		