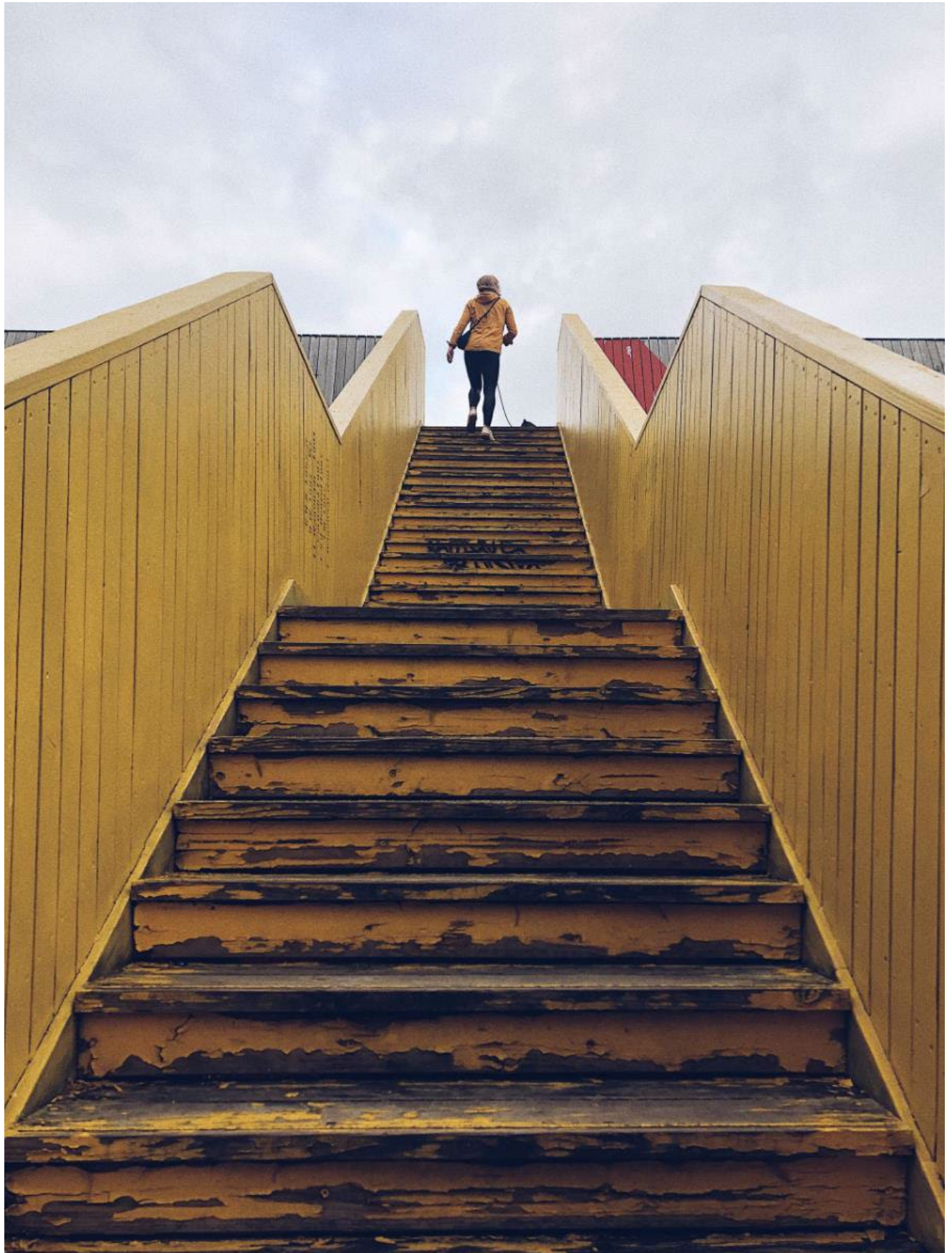


Pride, Prejudice and Pioneers: a Teacher's Perspective on Recognition and Rewards



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Together with Ruth Graham and the Dutch Recognition & Rewards network, the ComeniusNetwork organised two webinars on recognising and rewarding teaching in universities. These webinars, with inspiring contributions by speakers from the Netherlands and abroad.

These webinars were attended by a large number of ComeniusNetwork members and other university teachers. This is understandable, as the subject is close to many teachers' hearts, not only because it affects their career opportunities, but also because an effective recognition and rewards system is key to improving the quality of higher education.

In this contribution, we will approach recognition and rewards from a teacher's perspective. This may seem obvious, but in the discussions about teaching excellence, excellent teachers do not always speak out. Inspired by the presentations and discussions at the webinars, we want to call for a proactive attitude and encourage teachers to contribute to shaping recognition and rewards at their institution and beyond.

A starting point for teachers is a restoration of educational pride. It is a pity that many academics with a passion for education still tend to downplay their achievements to their bosses and colleagues, or seem to accept an underdog position in the academic pecking order. For rewarding teaching to succeed, it is crucial to create positive teaching identities and to show pride in the impact educators can have. There is room for a variety of role models and talents at all levels and in all disciplines.

Pride also means acknowledging that teaching excellence should be approached in a way that suits the job. Teaching is a team sport par excellence. Recognising teaching excellence requires an appreciation of teamwork, e.g. by stimulating coaching roles and foregrounding contributions to collective educational efforts. Recognising team work also implies embracing heterogeneity. Highly performing teams harbour members with different profiles and strong intrinsic motivation. This demands a broad and flexible recognition and rewards systems, in which teachers can build a personal and consistent development path, and have a clear say in the ways in which their educational and research accomplishments are being weighed.

In academic institutes, educational pride may still encounter prejudice. Although rewarding teaching excellence is broadly supported by the ministry of education, executive boards of universities and national academic networks, there still may be some scepticism or resistance within faculties and departments. This is where the real

difference has to be made. Mid-level leadership and cultural change will be needed to make educational quality a standard element in departmental meetings and annual appraisal talks, and to support, boost and reward individual career paths of educational talent. The first professorships and associate professorships with a teaching emphasis are now being created in universities all over the Netherlands. These pioneers can, together with the already established academics with a heart for education, take the lead in foregrounding teaching excellence, balancing promotion committees, and coaching juniors with a passion for education. Furthermore, they can contribute to making teaching-oriented careers nationally and internationally respected, by designing and sharing educational research and innovations in their disciplinary and interdisciplinary networks. They can serve as respected role models and contribute to an academic system with shared notions of teaching excellence and ample opportunities for national and international teacher mobility.

At the closure of the webinars, Pieter Duisenberg stated that executive boards of universities should 'walk the talk'. In our opinion, academics with a heart for teaching should join the walking and the talking. They should make themselves heard, individually and collectively, and contribute constructively to the pioneering work of shaping local frameworks, policies and practices. Teachers should not only view themselves as the happy and rightful recipients of recognition and rewards policies, but also as active co-constructors of those policies, if not for the sake of their own careers, then for that of their colleagues and students.

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