

Columns Newsletter 2022

January 2022

Opening party

On 19 May we are organising an opening party on the occasion of the Maria Montessori building. That will be one year after the official opening in May 2021, which was limited due to COVID.

We have already gained a lot of experience with the new building, albeit with fits and starts due to COVID. It is really a beautiful building and it is great that all staff and students now work and study in one building. However, there are of course also teething problems and we are working hard on that. Communication is important in this respect and our faculty tries to do this as well as possible.

An important challenge is to make good agreements between users, between employees themselves, between students themselves, and between employees and students. This concerns issues such as: Do employees have their own offices or not? Are we going to put up nameplates in rooms or not? Are the pantries only intended for staff members or also for students? If you share an office, where do you make calls? And what do you do if a guest wants to consult with you, where do you go to talk? Are the glass meeting rooms only for staff members or also for students? What about keys for rooms? Do we need a reservation system for study rooms? Many of these questions are about behaviour and expectations about it. The nice thing is, of course, that we have a lot of expertise in-house about behaviour, influencing and changing it, and about communication. In the coming months, supported by a few experts, we will try to make clear agreements about these kinds of matters. The starting point is: 'we'll figure it out together'. Against that background, I'm not a fan of the placards affixed to the entrance doors to the wings in our building just before Christmas. The text ('the work spaces and rooms behind this door are reserved for use by staff') is at odds with our ambitions to connect and be inclusive. If we make and communicate good 'who-what-where agreements' together, then these kinds of prohibitions are not necessary, we show everyone the respect they deserve, and together we can ensure good education and research. Have a beautiful 2022!

Michiel Kompier,
Dean

February 2022

How many boxes do you tick?

In his latest book, 'De 7 vinkjes' (the 7 ticks), journalist and writer Joris Luyendijk observes that a select group of men, the so-called '7-vinkers' (7-tickers), rule our country. These straight, white men born in the Netherlands have a highly educated parent and have a VWO and university diploma themselves. However, this group represents only 3% of the total population...

The book has already resulted in fierce discussion, because why does a white, older, highly educated man from highly educated parents lay a claim on the 'old' theme of discrimination and exclusion? That is a completely fair question. Luyendijk, however, came to this conclusion after he himself had worked at the Guardian in England. Despite his command of the English language, he did not understand the many finer points of the 'other group'. He experienced exclusion and being 'different' firsthand.

Many researchers within the FSS conduct research with groups that they probably do not belong to, and may not even come into contact with in their daily lives. Think, for example, of people with a low socio-economic status or people with an immigrant background. How do you reach and understand these groups that you are not a part of? How do you 'understand' their language, their wishes, and motivations? Primarily by meeting them and talking to them. The researcher has an arsenal of methods for this, often with English names, such as citizen science, field lab, living lab.

Diversity and inclusion are important themes in research and within FSS. It starts with an interest in and understanding of 'other groups' by entering into a conversation with them, or as a blind scientist once said during a congress on visual impairment: 'Don't talk about us. Talk with us'. Fortunately, now that the end of the corona pandemic is in sight, real meetings are more possible.

Bert Steenbergen,
Vice-Dean Research

March 2022

Only one can be the best....

It's buzzing: Heel Holland Bakt (the Dutch version of hit bakery TV show The Great British Bake-Off) has started again. What makes such a programme so popular? Is it the beautiful baked goods that inspire us? Is it the association with parties and good food that makes us feel good? Or is it mainly the competition element, as with so many talent shows? Moreover, this year even one of our students is participating. The idea is that after a careful selection process there will ultimately be one winner. Being voted the winner opens a lot of doors. Winners of recent years have all been able to quit their jobs to focus entirely on baking, but what about numbers 2 and 3? They were very good, weren't they? Why can only one be the best? I can understand when it comes to a programme like this, but what do we do? Numerous prizes are awarded every year, such as the professors prize, student prize, thesis prize, et cetera. These prizes are often created to stimulate something, such as prizes that offer women extra opportunities, the internationalization prize and the recently created Team Science Award. These kinds of procedures often cost a lot of time (and money!) and it still depends partly on chance which one person, out of all the good candidates, gets that one prize. Does that mean that all the other candidates are less good? I don't think you can just say that. Perhaps we should reconsider all those prizes

Evelyn Kroesbergen,
Vice-Dean Education

April 2022

Everything is possible again, so everything has to be done

*"You can do everything
You can go to school
So you have to do it
You have to have a nice job
You have to travel
You have to experience things
You have to look good
You have to exercise"*

- Spinvis, Layla; *Je Kan Alles [You Can Do Everything]*

This song by Spinvis en Layla came out four years ago, but I don't think it has ever been more relevant than it is now. After two years everything is practically back to normal. Although students are very happy about it and can enjoy it, I notice around me that the general mood is "tired". In this column I hope to give you a little insight into the head of a student now that the corona measures are as good as gone.

The days are fully booked. I am usually on campus from 9:00 to 17:00 working on my duties as an assessor and student. I also have a part-time job and I've been doing volunteer work since this month. In the evenings I meet up with friends, I have to do sports or I go to the pub every now and then. Since these things haven't been possible for a long time, I feel more pressure to get the most out of my student days.

As a student, you are regularly told that your student days are the time of your life. Some of that time has disappeared, so it feels like you are constantly trying to catch up on time. So what do many students do? They overschedule just so that they miss as little as possible. Everything is possible again, so everything has to be done.

Sophie van Lith,
student assessor

May 2022

A party ruined by a storm

Due to severe weather conditions, MariaLand could not take place. At the last moment, we had to cancel the festival for safety reasons. Only in the afternoon, when we had not yet started, there was a festival atmosphere and festival weather. All a great pity and a great shame. For all students and staff and especially for Anouk and her colleagues. They had worked out a wonderful programme and personally I was very much looking forward to the 'Maria Talks'. We will find a way to present those Maria Talks in a different way.

There was every reason to celebrate: the Maria Montessori building is alive and well. Our students make full use of it, and it is wonderful to see how the area around the building is becoming greener and greener, and how people have lunch and chat on the lawns around the building. The signposting has improved, more and more agreements are being made about the use and sharing of workspaces, and meanwhile we are looking at what else can be improved.

Architecturally speaking, the Maria Montessori building is of course a beauty, and that has not gone unnoticed: this week it was announced that this building has been nominated for the Nijmegen Architecture Prize, in no less than three categories: Architecture prize jury, sustainability prize, and public prize. We are curious to see if we will actually win a prize, but the appreciation for our new domicile is already great.

Michiel Kompier,
Dean

June 2022

Studying and working post-corona: a 'wicked problem' or 'wicked challenge'?

The sun is shining, the lawns around the Maria Montessori building are occupied by many students, as if there has never been a corona crisis and everything is back to normal. But looks are deceiving. What lessons have we learned from the crisis? Everyone promised each other that they would fly less, yet the airports are overcrowded again. Walking seems to be the new sitting. Digital education and digital meetings have developed at lightning speed and therefore appear to be an efficient alternative to 'live'. And yet our students have not quite found the corridor to the lecture hall and there are a striking number of dark rooms for employees in the Maria Montessori building. So it is certainly not 'business as usual' yet.

In terms of education: do we have to do everything 'live' again or is a form of 'blended learning' better?

Digital lectures followed by 'live' in-depth workgroups? In terms of working: there is enough space in the Maria Montessori building, but it might be useful to consider the workplace also primarily as a meeting place, combined with working from home?

Studying and working post corona seem to become a 'wicked problem' or 'wicked challenge', unique and difficult to solve due to the changing context. Some food for thought, but first: the holidays!

Bert Steenbergen,
Vice-Dean Research

August 2022

Connecting

Development takes the form of a drive toward an ever-greater independence. It is like an arrow released from the bow, which flies straight, swift and sure. – Maria Montessori

Wise words from Maria Montessori. Her goal was to give children a sense of independence, self-esteem and confidence to cope with a rapidly changing society. It is a noble cause. However, after the corona crisis, after enduring such a rapidly changing society, I wonder whether independence should be a goal. If independence is defined as 'not connected to' or 'not in need of help' I wonder if it is at all possible or desirable. The temptation is great to start an argument about the corona period and, among other things, the touch deprivation that almost everyone has (unconsciously) experienced, but I think that in the meantime we may have been thrown to death with corona stories.

I am writing this column in Grand Café de Iris during the introduction week. It's hard not to get excited about the lively and motivated new students. They are all busy making connections and making friends. They'll need each other later, too, for a summary, a fun night, or if only for a friendly face in a lecture hall full of strangers. Studying without others is an impossible task.

That's why I'm so looking forward to the MariaTalks on 7 September about connecting.

Gwendolyn Hermans,
student assessor

Sept-nov 2022 no columns have appeared

December 2022

On the way...

For as long as I can remember, I have been getting lost. As a toddler, I got lost when I followed a cat out of the playground while playing. As a student I got lost when I accidentally took the wrong exit at the Keizer Karelplein and last week I was almost late for a funeral, because I couldn't find where I left my car in the car park. Fortunately, I have a partner who is a great navigator and when I am alone, I still manage to reach my destination with Google Maps.

Even within the faculty, we are looking for the way; the way towards achieving our goals and implementing our strategy. In recent months, the faculty has been working hard on the 2023 annual plan. An annual plan describes where we want to go and is a tool to prioritise and make choices. When drawing up the annual plan, we asked ourselves the question: what do we want to achieve in 2023? When will we look back with satisfaction on the year gone by at the end of 2023? This led to great discussions and new insights. The annual plan includes what unites us as faculty.

Next year, leadership, recognition & rewards, social safety and sustainability are key points on our agenda. These themes are related to collaboration and behaviour, because we think it is important that everyone feels safe, comfortable and appreciated within the faculty. Next year, we will focus on the preconditions for achieving an optimal study and working climate and on facilitating excellent education and research. Given the themes in the annual plan, cooperation is essential. For instance, increasing social safety is only possible if we talk to each other about our behaviour. A remark or behaviour of one person may be unintentionally experienced as unpleasant by another. Only when we really engage with and listen to each other are we able to increase social safety.

Just as I don't always have to find my way alone and tools are available to navigate, the same applies to the path towards achieving our faculty goals. Let us set off together to reach our destination in the coming year. Perhaps we will occasionally take a wrong turn and need a partner to help us back on the right track, but if we put our backs into it together I am convinced that the destination is closer than it may sometimes seem.

Suzanne Boelens,
Management director

The 2023 annual plan is included in this newsletter and will be posted at the entrance and in several meeting rooms in the coming weeks. This is how we hope to reach every student and staff member to take steps towards achieving our faculty goals together.