



Jeroen Bron and Eddie van Vliet work for the National Institute for Curriculum Development in The Netherlands.

# Democracy, participation and identity

## A curriculum proposal for Dutch education

Given the ongoing discussion about the future of Citizenship in the national curriculum, international comparisons become even more useful. **Jeroen Bron** and **Eddie van Vliet** consider curriculum developments in the Netherlands and how this alternative model might help us think about how to build on our own practice.

**T**his article consists of three parts: firstly, an outline of the curriculum content; secondly, a table presenting the main goals of Citizenship education in The Netherlands; and thirdly, teaching ideas and practices.

But we will start with some background information. In the Netherlands schools are obliged to promote active citizenship and the social integration of learners in Dutch society. The government, however, neither prescribes content nor how schools should implement citizenship education. Nevertheless, schools are accountable to the inspectorate for the way citizenship is offered (Inspectorate of Education, 1996).

The Dutch Ministry of Education commissioned the National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO), to develop a curriculum proposal that can inspire schools in making their own curriculum choices. Also, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested SLO to integrate human rights education (HRE) into the citizenship curriculum (Bron & Vliet, 2012), although HRE has no official status in the Dutch education system (Bron & Thijs, 2011). SLO's curriculum proposal, completed in 2012, is not prescriptive but meant to be inspiring. It contains recommendations that allow for interpretation and control by schools. The proposal is mainly

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written for primary education and the first phase of secondary education: learners from 4- 16 years of age.

### Content

In the curriculum proposal SLO has adopted and worked out the views of the Council of Europe and the Dutch government. The Council of Europe states that citizenship and human rights education should be about "democracy, human rights and the rule of law as well as (...) the prevention of human rights violations" (Council of Europe, 2010). The Dutch government emphasizes the need for integration and participation in the Dutch society : people living in the Netherlands have the right to develop and experience their own identity but should also identify themselves with the Dutch society as a whole (Cabinet, 2008). In its curriculum proposal SLO has developed three domains in consultation with stakeholders: Democracy, Participation and Identity. Each domain is divided into attitudes, skills and knowledge. We think that the development of attitudes is central to citizenship and human rights education. Skills and knowledge are important in relation to attitudes. We must note, however, that in a democracy learners are allowed to take advantage of their skills and knowledge to develop their own attitudes.

By combining the domains with attitudes, skills and knowledge, we have created a table with nine aspects of personality that citizenship and human rights education should cover (see page 34). We will briefly outline what they contain. In the table we have summarised the main goals for the first phase of secondary education.

### I. Democracy

*Attitudes: problem-solving people*  
Because it is the very nature of democracy that there are different interests and dif-

ferences of opinion, it is crucial that learners are willing and learn to solve conflicts without using violence. Therefore they are prepared to take responsibility for a social climate where learners can express themselves freely, feel secure, equal and respected (see table A1).

### Skills: informed people

In a democracy there is freedom of expression, which supposes that learners are encouraged to develop their views reasonably and communicate them with others from the principles of raising awareness of the origins of their views, the possibility of learning from others and their developing skills to convince others (see table A2).

### Knowledge: democratically literate people

To successfully apply attitudes and skills about the principles of Democracy and the Rule of Law. They also discover the underlying Human Rights about living together freely, safely and responsibly and what it means to live without democratic principles and the Rule of Law (see table A3).

### II. Participation

#### Attitudes: active people

To prepare learners for active participation in society they are encouraged to develop their willingness to contribute to the enhancement of the social climate in their schools and daily environments. In a broader sense, they should be enabled to internalise the view, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 29.1), that "anyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible" (see table B1).

#### Skills: social-communicative people

A requirement for learning to participate effectively is to enable learners to develop and

apply social, communicative and organisational skills necessary to realize a positive social climate. These skills are complementary to the informative skills as mentioned under "Democracy" (see table B2).

### Knowledge: socially literate people

To support their development of attitudes and skills learners acquire insight in the ways people can communicate and what drives them in their social behaviour. Also awareness of the human right to participate actively in community life (see table B3).

### III. Identity

#### Attitudes: responsible people

To socially live together in a multicultural and pluralistic society, learners show that they are prepared to inform themselves about other people's cultures, their views, habits and customs without denying their own identity. In addition they are willing to internalise commonly accepted values and norms concerning freedom, equality and the need for mutual respect (see table C1).

#### Skills: empathic people

It is essential that learners are encouraged to develop empathic skills in addition to informative and social-communicative skills. These are related to the ability to respectfully put oneself into the shoes of others, to try to understand their views and feelings without losing one's self respect (see table C2).

#### Knowledge: culturally literate people

Learners should acquire basic knowledge about the main characteristics of Dutch multicultural and pluralistic society. They should also gain awareness about the human right to experience their own identity and as members of groups in such a society. They also know that this right applies to everybody without exception (see table C3).

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Lessons on democracy at an Islamic school

◀ A summary of the main goals of citizenship and human rights education for the first phase of secondary education

	Democracy	Participation	Identity
<b>Attitudes</b>	<p><b>A1 Problem-solving people</b> <i>are prepared to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• solve conflicts satisfactorily without using violence</li> <li>• stand up for a social climate in which everybody feels free and safe to express themselves</li> <li>• cope with conflicting interests</li> <li>• manage with possible tensions when reaching and carrying out majority decisions</li> </ul>	<p><b>B1 Active people</b> <i>are prepared to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be involved in and feel responsible for the social and physical quality of their daily environment</li> <li>• stand up for an atmosphere of non-discrimination in social relations</li> <li>• dedicate themselves to services useful for society and people in need</li> </ul>	<p><b>C1 Responsible people</b> <i>are prepared to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have two-way conversations with others</li> <li>• feel and show respect for their own development as well as the development of others</li> <li>• reflect on their own views in relation to commonly accepted values and norms</li> <li>• cooperate with others irrespective of their group identity</li> </ul>
<b>Skills</b>	<p><b>A2 Informed people</b> <i>are able to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• express, explain and communicate their views, opinions and ideas</li> <li>• actively inform themselves by consulting and weighing a range of sources</li> <li>• accept and deal with the possibility that their views will not be shared by others</li> <li>• explain the importance of Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights to their own lives</li> <li>• form an idea of life in countries where human rights are not or just partially observed</li> </ul>	<p><b>B2 Social-communicative people</b> <i>are able to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• apply basic social-communicative skills</li> <li>• reflect on their ways of communicating</li> <li>• apply their rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly to initiate and organize activities to improve the social climate in class, school and other parts of their everyday environment</li> <li>• discuss the importance of socio-economic rights to participate in society</li> </ul>	<p><b>C2 Empathic people</b> <i>are able to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop basic empathic skills, especially to open up to and put themselves into the position of others</li> <li>• cooperate with other people regardless of their social, ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds</li> <li>• imagine themselves in situations where people are denied the right to (the development of) their own (cultural) identity</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge</b>	<p><b>A3 Democratically literate people</b> <i>have insight into:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• key features and characteristics of Democracy and the Rule of Law in the Netherlands and the European Union</li> <li>• the relation between state and citizens/people concerning rights, duties and responsibilities</li> <li>• the importance of the Dutch Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child</li> </ul>	<p><b>B3 Socially literate people</b> <i>have insight into:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• forms of communication</li> <li>• different and shared roles, tasks, positions and responsibilities of people in schools</li> <li>• activities of organizations that are aimed at human solidarity</li> <li>• from a global perspective: several examples of what a lack of human rights means in people's lives</li> </ul>	<p><b>C3 Culturally literate people</b> <i>have insight into:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a few basic characteristics of the Netherlands as a multicultural and pluralistic society, including the right to identity</li> <li>• the importance of socialization to identity development</li> <li>• from a global perspective: a few examples of the consequences of non-observance of cultural rights for people's daily lives</li> </ul>

**Teaching ideas and practices**

In the examples below we outline just some main points. They illustrate that:

- schools should act as environments where learners can apply knowledge and skills and develop attitudes concerning citizenship and human rights education;
- curriculum overload can be prevented by integrating parts of social studies and language skills.

**Communication: debate, discussion and conversation**

A secondary school in the municipality of Bloemendaal, in the province of North Holland, interprets communication as a lesson, project and also as a whole school activity. Learners are encouraged to explore and discuss a range of social issues and simultaneously to apply and acquire Dutch language skills and social studies content and skills, both from textbooks and real life. They are challenged not only to participate in competitive debating but also to have discussions in order to reach consensus and to engage in empathic conversation to understand each other (see table A1, B2, C1, C2).

It is central that learners are encouraged to reflect on the above-mentioned components of communication. The question is when and why debates, discussions and conversations are appropriate forms of communication. In some situations it can be necessary to win an argument. In other situations the main goal can be to reach consensus or to understand other people's thoughts and feelings.

Finally, communication is about applying democratic and human rights which can be related to learners' participation and pupil voice. In Bloemendaal learners participate in making decisions about school affairs that are relevant to them, in particular by drawing up school rules and realising, as a supplement to the

obligatory curriculum, their own curriculum: content and learning activities they want to commit themselves to (see below).

**Participation and voice**

Unlike the UK, pupil voice as way to elaborate the child's right to participation and active citizenship (Huddleston, 2007) does not get a whole lot of attention in the Netherlands. In a way participation is seen as a regular practice: pupils in Dutch schools have quite a lot to say in class, teacher-pupil relations are not very formal and class representation and pupil participation in school councils are formalised. This can be seen as a drawback to introducing the necessary new approaches to pupil participation and voice that are based on a clear vision on what good education should entail. However, new emerging developments are promising.

SLO is a strong advocate for pupil participation and voice. It is promoted by the curriculum framework that regards participation as one of the three main domains for citizenship education (see table B1-3), by opening up good practices of pupil participation and voice and by supporting schools to find ways of integrating pupil participation. Schools like Vandercappelen in the town of Zwolle, are piloting different methods for pupil participation, based on the principle that pupil participation should be easily accessible to the largest possible group of pupils: in class and during regular lessons. One way of doing this is to invite pupils to negotiate the curriculum (Boomer, 1992). A worksheet helps learners to develop learning questions that are compared with curriculum guidelines. Teacher and pupils then decide which questions to cover, how to go about tackling them. The whole process is monitored as part of a PhD study by Jeroen Bron, one of the authors.

**Community service and citizenship education**

In the Netherlands learners in secondary education have to do community service (Bruning et al. 2011). For example, fifteen-year-old Yasmine chose to assist with the relief of homeless people. She worked for Humanitas: an organization which aims at helping deprived and destitute people. Her task was to organise a weekly lunch.

When she prepared for the community service Yasmine discussed with her teacher how to cope with problems she could encounter and how to achieve certain citizenship education goals. They arranged to pay special attention to skills concerning cooperation, communication and empathy (see table C2, B2) because they met her personal educational needs.

During the community service period she practised and reflected on how to cooperate with colleagues and to communicate with and understand homeless people besides the practical work. She had to discuss her experiences with her colleagues at Humanitas and her teacher.

As a result, her community service was also a site for experiencing citizenship. She learned about the ins and outs of cooperating with colleagues and to socialize respectfully with homeless people. She also increased her awareness of her own personality and identity. She overcame, for instance, her shyness when communicating with others and gained more insight into the importance of helping people in need (see table B1). ■

[For references, see the full version of this article on the ACT website: [www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk](http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk).]