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Global Education in the Dutch Context

Zusammenfassung:

Die Niederlande haben im Hinblick auf Globales Lernen in Schulen einen guten Ruf. Die Veränderungen des sozialpolitische Klimas und die Deregulierung der Bildungspolitik geben jedoch Anlass zur Sorge. Bezug nehmend auf eine empirische Fallstudie in zwei Städten in den Niederlanden im Jahr 2003 und 2004 wird dargestellt, wie Globales Lernen in Schulen momentan umgesetzt wird. Zudem werden derzeitige Initiativen vorgestellt, durch die Lehrkräfte darin unterstützt werden, globalen Fragestellungen Vorrang zu geben und Bewusstsein für internationale Themen zu wecken.

Abstract:

The Netherlands have a reasonably good reputation for global education in schools. However, the hardening socio-political climate and the deregulation of education policies give reason for concern. In this paper the authors try to open the black box on what is actually happening in schools in terms of global education, on the basis of case study research in two Dutch cities in 2003 and 2004 and explain current initiatives taken to support teachers in giving any priority to global issues and raising awareness about international issues.

Introduction

The Netherlands have a strong tradition in global education and a broad civil basis for engagement with international issues and for international solidarity. Already in the 1970s there was a solid support structure of development education NGOs. However, several recent reports give reason for concern and alertness (Osler/Vincent 2002; O'Loughlin/Wegimont 2005; Van der Vaart 2004). The threats for global education have to do with changes in the socio-political climate. Immigration, uncertainties due to deregulation and other neo-liberal policies, increasing commercialization and myopia in the media, and many other trends result in contracting worldviews among large sections of the population, more focus on local problems and a negative attitude towards 'outsiders' and newcomers. Moreover, for some years now, there has been a strong trend of devolution and deregulation in education policy. National curriculum guidelines for primary and lower secondary education are increasingly generalized and abstract and schools are given more autonomy (but less funding). Educational debates are mainly about constructivist pedagogy; subject matter is hardly

discussed. Many people tend to downplay these threats for global education and believe – without any empirical underpinning – that a lot of good work is going on in schools in terms of global education thanks to private initiatives of teachers, and is linked to projects and materials of developmental, environmental or educational NGOs, of churches, cultural festivals, or new IC&T initiatives. This assumption is informed by Dutch tradition rather than by actual trends. In fact we know very little about actual practices of global (citizenship) education in schools (O'Loughlin/Wegimont 2005, p. 9). Therefore, in this paper we want to focus on the actual practices of global education in a context of a changing socio-political climate and of curriculum deregulation and increasing school autonomy, and on the possibilities of supporting teachers in this changing context. We will use the results of two local surveys about local global education practices, carried out in the cities of Tilburg in 2004 and Rotterdam in 2003. Before exploring the case studies, we will briefly introduce the nature and context of global education in the Netherlands.

Global education in the Netherlands

Global education is not an integrated subject in Dutch primary and secondary schools. Most established school subjects offer subject matter elements and perspectives that contribute to global awareness. Among these subjects, geography has the most pronounced global outlook, although the curriculum has become far less prescriptive. The dominant approach to global education is cognitive (learning about the world) rather than holistic (learning for the world).

The major innovations in the curriculum of the last fifteen years were in the domain of skills, considered to be very important for learners in a society that is rapidly changing. A broad knowledge base is generally seen as also important, but little effort has been invested in the question of what this knowledge base should be about (van der Vaart 2003). The Ministry of Education is very hesitant in stimulating structural debate about substance in education, especially in primary and lower secondary education. Moreover, deregulation of curriculum prescriptions is a major trend. Schools are quite free to make their own choices in specifying the curriculum and very often they follow the choices made by textbook authors. In this context, there is little to be expected from the public sector in terms of agenda setting for and stimulation of global education. As far as the government is involved at all, it is the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (including development cooperation) rather than the Ministry of Education. Initiatives to get or keep global education on the agenda of schools, school departments and individual teachers, are a task for civil society, mainly development-related NGOs.

What really happens in schools in terms of global education cannot be fully derived from curriculum guidelines and textbooks, however. On the one hand, some teachers may use textbooks in uninspired ways, so that no real 'global learning' takes place. On the other hand, other teachers presumably will offer additional and activating learning experiences for global learning. Maybe they make use of international Internet contacts between schools, maybe they have lots of informal classroom discussions about international news, maybe they integrate visits to world museums in their courses. And enthusiastic teachers will always find their way to the exciting materials that some development NGOs have produced for schools. We just have no empirical evidence of what is going on.

The support network for global education is quite well developed. NCDO (National Commission for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development), located in Amsterdam, is a national organization for the funding of schools and global education NGO's. In the Netherlands there is a well-developed network of support in global education. There are sixteen Centers for International Cooperation (COS) in the country, small local support and expertise centers that will help schools, when asked to do so, with the design of innovative global education projects. These Centers have NCDO funding. Twin city relationships may also be used for school projects. At the national level there are about 300 NGOs for global issues and international solidarity and many of these are active in school-related support and campaigns (O'Loughlin/Wegimont 2005, p. 61). This thick institutional network is increasingly important for global education because of the curriculum deregulation discussed above. As may be expected, loads of materials for global education (CD ROMs, lesson plans, project materials, web sources, et cetera) are made available: by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by NGOs, educational publishers, school subject journals and magazines, or by educational support institutions that specialize in international, global, environmental or development education. It is a black box, however, to what extent and in what way these materials are actually used by learners and teachers.

Local Case Studies: Tilburg and Rotterdam

Tilburg is a city of almost 200.000 inhabitants in the south of the Netherlands. It has 19 secondary schools, 55 primary schools, two adult education institutes (ROCs) and three higher education institutes. Various NGOs involved in global education are located in Tilburg and the municipality has twinning relationships with cities in Tanzania, Nicaragua, South Africa and Poland. Since 1988, there has been a highly successful annual global intercultural festival with all kinds of activities aiming at global awareness raising (www.festivalmundial.nl). Data for our survey in Tilburg were collected through 16 interviews (details at the end of the paper), with persons involved in (global) education.

Rotterdam is the second city of the Netherlands with almost 600.000 inhabitants. The global education infrastructure is somewhat bigger than in Tilburg and includes various relevant museums such as the World Museum. Compared to Tilburg, the population of this harbour city is more diverse; migrants and refugees from all over the world live in Rotterdam. Although present in Tilburg as well, the discussion about integration and problems of the multicultural society is much more prominent in Rotterdam. Both cities have a center for international cooperation (COS). The Rotterdam survey that we use here was done by COS Rotterdam for the municipal Department of Urban Development (Van Hooft 2003).

The main results of the two surveys will now be summarized under four headings.

The attention paid to global education in primary and secondary schools is rather modest

Global education is not a 'hot topic' in schools in Rotterdam and Tilburg. There are no schools where the global dimension is one of the leading concepts in educational (school) policy. School policies on international perspectives tend to focus on European projects where clear funding channels are available. During the Rotterdam interviews, various Heads of schools seemed to be open to external advice on global education (van Hooft 2003). As one of them said:

"We are now reorganizing our social studies curriculum. Global education should be in it. Support, from the COS for example, would be very helpful."

It is doubtful, however, whether this good intention remained in the Head's mind for long after the interview. There is strong competition between themes and topics for inclusion in school programs (multiculturalism, environment, ICT, heritage). It became apparent in the surveys that quite some schools had cut the time and energy formerly spent on global education in order to focus on 'new' themes and agendas.

Osler and Vincent (2002) believe that new pedagogies may offer an opportunity for global education. This cannot be confirmed on the basis of our surveys. The teacher training departments in the two cities have embraced constructivist pedagogies and focus on student portfolios, in-service training, learning styles and the like at the expense of subject learning and subject-matter related reflection. The good practice we found in schools demonstrated far more balance: up-to-date pedagogical approaches and the 'drive' of well-informed teachers to use good geography for global learning. What we commonly found in schools, however, was a clear preoccupation with pedagogical and managerial changes; subject matter is hardly being discussed, let alone the more important question of the goals of school subjects (such as orientation to and empathy with the international world). The director of the COS in Tilburg: "Educational reforms in the past ten years have not given us many new windows of opportunity. Schools have been confronted with so many policy changes and new tasks, that they hardly have the time to reflect on things such as global education. Schools tell us: 'Not now, we are already too busy with other changes.' This happens particularly in secondary schools."



Global Learning at Koning Willem II College of Tilburg

There is a wide variety between schools in global education practices

Every school in our surveys in some way gives attention to global issues: in regular subjects such as geography and political studies and often also in extra activities or project work. The variety in frequency, types, approaches and quality of the activities is overwhelming, however. Practices vary from very traditional fund raising activities not at all embedded in coursework to very innovative projects. One Tilburg school has a long tradition (35 years) of an annual fundraising fancy-fair for development projects, which is its main 'global education' activity. The teacher who chairs the Third World project group told us: "Every year we collect money for some 'good purpose', but the image of our fancy-fair is dull. Although our school managers want to conserve our name of 'Third World School', they are not really interested". In another school a teacher commented: "In our school we started fifteen years ago to make the fund raising activities more embedded in the educational programs. But at the moment it is hard to get students involved for global matters". Getting the students involved is not a problem at a third secondary school we visited; this school participates in the "Education for Global Citizenship" project. This project was initiated by an international learning and development partnership of NGOs and schools (www.globalcitizenship.at). "The best ambassadors for the project are the enthusiastic students involved", as a teacher involved in this project told us. Compared to secondary schools, primary schools seem to have (or take?) more freedom and flexibility for organizing global education activities. Most of the primary schools that we visited have an annual 'global project week'. Cooperation between schools at the primary level is easier than between secondary schools, because there is no real competition (for pupils,

as at the secondary level). According to one primary school teacher: "This year we organize a project week on Tanzania. Doing it in one week avoids fragmentation. We look for external activities like a museum visit or a workshop in order to avoid a heavy workload for the teachers. Sometimes we collect money for our twincity Same, but not every year because the resistance of parents increases." This primary school uses materials from 'Mundial-Novib in de klas' (Mundial-Novib in the classroom: www.mundialnovibindeklas.nl). This project started in Tilburg years ago as an activity to involve schools in the annual global festival. It proved to be very successful and evolved from a very local small-scale activity to a regional and now even national event. The educational materials are no longer per se connected to the festival as schools from other cities and regions may use them as well. In 2005 about 20.000 children in 60 schools worked with this project (van Peski/van Zundert 2004). The core of the materials consists of daily life stories, mainly from children in the South. Every year the topic (related to the MDGs) changes and is linked to a selected country. The educational concept is the idea of using 'multiple intelligence': children are invited to work with all their senses. Cultural programs in school (music, dancing) are optional.

Highly motivated individual teachers make the difference

Global education practices in schools depend very much on the presence of motivated and involved teachers. A representative of an anti discrimination NGO in Rotterdam (LBR landelijk bureau van rassendiscriminatie; see Van Hooft 2003) states: "It is our experience that attention for global education differs per school and depends very much on the input of individual teachers who do this at an irregular project base". If such a

teacher leaves school, interest in the topic and approach will drop. It is perhaps for this reason that most of the global education practices we found are isolated activities without any integration. The global dimension as we found it is quite fragmented. This was found evident by a teacher involved in 'internationalization' at a Tilburg school: "There is not much support among teachers for a real anchoring of the international component in the curriculum. Because of this, there is a collection of separate projects in different school subjects. In order to get a better continuous focus we need more support, more hours and more money." In primary schools it is easier to integrate different subjects, thanks to the fact that every class has only one or two teachers during a whole year. Sometimes the difficulty is to get other teachers involved, in other cases it is difficult to get school managers interested in or their support for a global project. School managers will favor 'extra activities' that are seen as beneficial for the marketing and promotion of the school. But this is not always the case, of course. A teacher in economics: "Our school management was enthusiastic for the global citizenship project. However, it was far more difficult to get support from other teachers. Most teachers feel the pressure and are tired of the constant changes in the education system that we have seen over the past fifteen years. But when the project was running and foreign students were visiting our school, many colleagues became more and more involved."

According to international studies about global education, the quality of support materials developed by NGOs is a strong aspect of Dutch global education (Osler/Vincent 2002; O'Loughlin/Wegimont 2005). Our surveys made clear, however, that most teachers are not aware of the range of available projects and products. Strikingly, a majority of the teachers complain that they do not know what to use or how to evaluate

the quality of global education materials offered by NGOs. We also found that primary schools adopt such external materials more often than secondary schools.

Successful cooperation between schools and NGOs

Good and successful practices are often linked with the work of NGOs. Many NGOs have invested in contacts with schools and individual teachers who are prepared to develop projects together. NGOs that do not invest in such direct working contacts with schools are clearly less effective in the dissemination of their products. Some of the NGOs we came across were local organizations, but more often schools worked with NGOs that operate nationally and therefore are not really embedded in the local context. A representative of Amnesty International in Rotterdam observed that "institutions like ours have to realize even more that it is important to work locally at a small scale, to integrate projects in school subjects and cooperate with teachers and students instead of overloading all schools with materials".

But we also found some opposite experiences where local activities based upon local cooperation were successful and even became regional and national success stories, such as the "Mundial in the classroom" project. New initiatives, such as the twinning projects of municipalities, replace former ways of international school cooperation, for example with churches. The COS in Tilburg focuses among other things on stimulating projects where schools are twinned with schools in one of the twin cities. They hope to create more structural activities and long-term relationships between schools in North and South. However, until now, it seems to be difficult to get the schools communicating with each other on a regular basis.



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People from the local centers for international cooperation (COS) and from other NGOs told us that for them it is extremely difficult to establish good long-term relationships with secondary schools. Most of the museums that are relevant for global education, such as the World Museum in Rotterdam (and other similar museums in the country), apparently do not have this problem: most of them are fully booked throughout the year. Their success is probably a result of innovative approaches, such as combining local issues (multiculturalism, immigration) with global issues, or the use of interactive and activating museum display techniques.

The teacher training departments in the two cities hardly play a role in promoting global education locally (nor regionally). A teacher working at the teacher training department in Tilburg: "In the training for primary teachers global education is absent, but at the department for teacher training in secondary education there is slightly more attention for development education, especially in geography and social studies."

Vulnerable situation

Our survey in the cities of Tilburg and Rotterdam makes clear that 'the global' has many faces in school practice. Some of the more traditional fund-raising activities and projects have their roots in church-related activities. But churches are now a far less important player in (inspiring) global education in schools. Activities related to twin cities, to IC&T applications, or to cultural global festivals, just to mention a few examples, have filled part of the gap. Curricula have become less precise and prescriptive, schools have gained more autonomy also in curricular matters, and therefore 'global education' has increasingly become a matter of the engagement of individual teachers, only rarely groups of teachers. At school level, global education has to compete for time, space and attention with issues such as environmental education, European education, values education, heritage education, new employability initiatives etc. The reliance on enthusiastic individuals who rarely mobilize groups of colleagues around them, combined with the non-mandatory nature of global education and the weak preparation of young teachers for global education in their training phase, make the situation of global education in Dutch schools quite vulnerable.

New initiatives

In the short term, there is no expectation that the national government will become more involved in global education and make it a mandatory subject. This implies that it is very hard to work on more structural improvements of global education at schools. However, there is one trend in educational policy that can be used for promoting global education. As in other European countries, the role of citizenship in education became explicitly part of the Dutch educational debate. The Ministry of Education decided to give schools guidelines on the promotion of active citizenship. Already since 2003, the concept of global citizenship has been actively promoted by the National Commission for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development (NCDO 2003). NCDO facilitates various initiatives that focus on global citizenship in education. Subsidies are available for projects aiming at embedding global citizenship education in schools and teacher training departments. NCDO also invested in concept clarification and pub-

lished a 'vision' document (Beneker, van der Vaart, Van Stalborch 2007). A new canon project building on this document will take place in 2008. It is inspired by the success of the canon for Dutch history and culture (van Oostrom 2007). This canon project shows that a new consensus has been raised. Schools have severe problems with their new autonomy in curriculum selection, with the threat of making no choices at all. Nowadays there is an overload in options and possibilities. Canon ideas help schools to think about the essentials and these are welcomed for this. Although contested, the idea of a Dutch canon was received very well by schools and teachers. In the NCDO project for 2008 a canon on global citizenship and education will be constructed. With this canon's acceptance in primary and secondary school, teachers may be stimulated to develop new inspiring learning materials, which have the potentials of influencing the overall quality of global education in the Netherlands in a positive way.

Notes

1 The case studies part of this article are published in: Beneker, T. & R. van der Vaart (2006), *Global education in a local context – the case of the Netherlands*. In: Purnell, K., J. Lidstone & S. Hodgson, *Changes in Geographical Education: past, present and future*. IGU Conference proceedings. Brisbane: IGU-CGE, pp. 68–74.

2 Interviews in Tilburg were conducted with teachers of primary schools (2), secondary schools (6), teacher training department (1), education support institute (1), the education alderman (1) director COS (1), staff member Mundial Novib in de Klas (1), founder Yelkabé (projects in Burkina Faso) (1), staff members from organizations involved in twinning projects (2: Same en Matagalpa). The Rotterdam survey is based on a similar amount of interviews.

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