

2.

The Netherlands has a special education system. As in many countries, children of different ages can attend public schools and schools based on a specific worldview or religion, denominational education. The Netherlands is unique in this because both types are financed equally by the government. And this is a government that does not favor a worldview position in public affairs.

At the moment, almost every school in the Netherlands is either a school for denominational education or a public school.

This dual education system covers all levels of education: from primary schools to universities. The public school is neutral in matters of worldview and religion: it cannot base its education on a single ideological tradition. The public school approaches the worldview visions of students, teachers and society in an active pluriform manner. This is apparent, for example, in the open admission policy for students and the open appointment policy for staff, regardless of their cultural, ethnic or worldview background.

A school for denominational education bases its education on a worldview tradition. About 2/3 of all schools are denominational education schools, mostly Catholic or Protestant Christian. There is, among others, also a number of Islamic, Hindu and Jewish schools. In both most public schools and most denominational schools, the student population is plural from a worldview point of view. This means that for example that Islamic students visit a Christian school and are welcome to express their beliefs.

A relatively new phenomenon is the school that is the result of a merger of a public and a denominational school. Such a school is called a cooperation school. Public and denominational education is combined.

3.

Almost all schools in the Netherlands face a number of challenges.

I outline three challenges, concerning the role of worldview and religion.

In the first place, Dutch society, and not only this one, is characterized by a polarizing climate. Opinions and ways of life seem to be increasingly divergent and increasingly opposed to each other. There seems to be less and less listening and more and more being posited. One's own vision is sacred, dialogue and tolerance seem like hobbies for unworldly figures. There is suspicion of that which is different. And that suspicion manifests itself in violent or non-violent protests and unfounded theories.

4.

The second challenge concerns diversity in society and at school. More and more people express themselves in worldview and religion, in gender, sexuality, culture and ethnicity in a way that differs from that of another. Diversity is also growing within certain groups. This development poses many schools, and certainly denominational schools, the question of how and why their education should and can take this diversity into account, for the students, and certainly also in the recruitment policy of colleagues. Since 1985, all Dutch primary schools, for example, have been required to pay attention to different worldviews and religions in the multicultural society and, since 2006, also to sexual diversity. Schools see the growing diversity among students, colleagues and parents not only as a problem, but above all as an opportunity to develop strong and good education. In practice we see wonderful examples.

5.

In 2006, with a view to these two social challenges, the government gave all schools the assignment of citizenship education. Since 2021, a tightening of the law on citizenship education has come into effect. This law focuses on a socially involved and active student, on education that values the democratic constitutional state, combats polarization and stimulates understanding of diversity. The law is strongly linked to the first two challenges outlined.

6.

I mention a third challenge: worldview illiteracy. Fewer and fewer people in the Netherlands are members of a religious organization and feel connected to a religious institute. Many Dutch people put together their own individual worldview into a personal, meaningful palette. With this secularization and individualization, knowledge of worldview sources, religious or otherwise, is also declining. And with this decline in knowledge, worldview illiteracy, the significance attributed to these sources and traditions also declines.

7.

The task of citizenship education is given even more color by several organizations and academic sources. They underline the importance of '**worldview** citizenship education'. This is a perspective for schools that want to give substance to the citizenship assignment, based on the basic democratic values of freedom, equality and solidarity, *and* that want to work on the personal development of their students. An important role is reserved for worldview questions and worldview content in education. This 'worldview citizenship education' is in line with the Citizenship Act and it gives it even more color by strongly focusing on worldview education of all students.

Worldview citizenship education has three important characteristics that focus on reducing polarization, stimulating mutual understanding in the context of diversity, and promoting worldview literacy and sense-making; the three developments I have outlined.

8.

First:

With worldview citizenship education, teachers challenge students to relate personally and critically as well as constructively to social processes and developments. The school, the student and the group are at the center of the world and society. Education is rich in content that discusses and/or contributes to this world and society.

In this way, education fosters the development of understanding for other people's choices, even if they are not yours and do not have to be. A school is a society in miniature, where tolerance and alienation, understanding and disapproval are practiced. Even if the school population seems homogeneous at first sight, all students are of course different. Sometimes it rubs and collides quite a bit in a school. This also means that the strange and unheard points of view are valuable. It encourages students to practice dealing with differences, living together democratically and in meeting and dialogue.

9.

This education stimulates the personal identity development of students. This important aspect means that the educational offer invites students to reflect on and form their personal self-understanding.

10.

Worldview citizenship education makes students 'source-wise' through hermeneutical-communicative attention to worldview sources. This stimulates the worldview literacy of young people.

We recognize these sources and their associated existential questions in religious traditions and certainly also in secular sources of meaning, such as children's literature, films, music, games and visual arts. A choice for worldview citizenship education is therefore also an emphatic and conscious choice for the valuable contribution of worldview (including religious) traditions, art and literature: they are expressions of life questions of people from all times and directions. This means that all students can learn from different worldview traditions and other existential sources. For example: students from a Christian or a secular background learn what Islamic sources of wisdom can mean for Muslims. But worldview citizenship education that deals with identity formation of *all* students also invites these secular and Christian students to reflect on these Islamic sources for their own existential questions and way of living.

Worldview citizenship education requires an investigative attitude towards these sources and existential questions and answers. The hermeneutical question is always central: how does this source invite students to develop their worldview?

Dutch society is in a state of flux. As a result, education faces many challenges. The professionals in front of the class make the difference. They are working on it every day.