

The Netherlands: Challenging Diversity in Education and School life

Inge Versteegt and Marcel Maussen

University of Amsterdam

Education in the Netherlands has been an important site of debate about the accommodation of religious minorities, cultural diversity and tolerance. Two key principles characterize the Dutch education system. First, there is the freedom of education, including the rights of groups of individuals to create and operate primary and secondary schools, within certain limits, and the freedom of parents to choose a school for their children. Second, there is “statutory equality” of governmental or public (openbaar) and non-governmental or denominational (bijzondere) schools and both are funded by the government according to identical and equivalent criteria. Of all primary schools about 68% is non-governmental and of all secondary schools this percentage is 70%.

In 2009 8.1 % of all pupils in primary education were “non-Western-allochtonous”, meaning that they are born abroad or that at least one of their parents is born abroad. In 2009 14.8 % of all pupils in secondary education were non-Western allochtonous. Furthermore, vocational schools and schools in some urban neighborhoods may have much higher percentages.

In the Dutch public debate with respect to education and tolerance for (religious) diversity, there is the idea that the school should fulfill a major role in socialization of “new citizens”. One line of argument is that religious schools, and especially orthodox Christian and Islamic schools, will have a poor record in “teaching tolerance”. Another line of argument makes a plea for more involvement of the government in developing, promoting and implementing the teaching of “good citizenship”. Two case studies clarify the different positions in this debate and investigate their implications for the boundaries of tolerance.

Main features of the Dutch education system:

- *Freedom of Education*
- *High percentage of non-governmental schools*

8-14% students of non-Western origin

School should create new citizens and teach pupils tolerance and “good citizenship”

In this policy brief, the findings of these two case studies are presented. In the first case study, the boundaries of tolerance for orthodox-Christian (Reformed) schools and Islamic schools are explored. A second case study analyzes the implementation of Citizenship Education in The Netherlands. Both studies show that the debate on boundaries for tolerance and intolerance is influenced by the debate on Dutch identity. The actual problems of faith schools, as well as possible didactic solutions for citizenship education are discussed.

Problems and solutions of faith schools (Reformed and Islamic)

Islamic school principals more often mentioned that the schools had been subject to vandalism, neighborhood bullying and hateful anonymous phone-calls. Especially after incidents such as 9/11 and the murder of Van Gogh in 2004 Islamic schools and mosques were targets of vandalism and hateful graffiti in the Netherlands. One of our interviewees also mentioned that the windows of the school had been smashed repeatedly and one night the school bus had been set to fire. A School principal, herself of non-Muslim, non-migrant origin says:

'The type of debate, like: 'I do not understand why you want to work there. (...) The children live in the Netherlands and they should go to Dutch schools'.

One principal of a Reformed school gave the example of meeting a gay couple at a wedding. He said that from a Biblical point of view they were morally wrong and he could not "appreciate" what they were doing, but being tolerant or respectful meant that he would not "approach them to tell them that what they were doing was wrong".

Example of good practice: citizenship education

In an intervention project called Respect2all, a group of twenty students was taken to Auschwitz, Poland, to learn about processes of stigmatization and exclusion. Through a model called the Pyramid of Hate, students were informed that stigmatization ultimately may lead to genocide. Students learned to critically reflect on their negative attitudes and prejudice (particularly towards Muslims). The students were trained to teach their peers this insight as well. After the training, stigmatizing comments on Muslims by their peers were now consciously related to the Holocaust as a first step in the wrong direction. Combined with the leaving of a hardliner-group of neo Nazis, the whole school population's norm changed from intolerant and prejudiced to almost fully agreeing with non-discrimination.

Evidence & Analysis (Key Findings)

Case Study 1: Tolerance for religious orthodox schools

In the first case study, we explored tolerance for orthodox religious schools. Reformed schools and Islamic schools in the Netherlands are under scrutiny and are often subject to political and media debate. Leading question in this case study was: How does tolerance and intolerance for Islamic and Reformed schools manifest itself in the Dutch debate about Freedom of Education in general, and in the opinions of practitioners of such schools in particular?

Reformed schools account for 3.4% of primary and 2.0% of secondary schools. Islamic schools are even less common, of all Dutch primary schools 0.5% are Islamic and 0.3% of secondary schools is. Although there is little political support in the Netherlands to do away with a dual system in which governmental and non-governmental schools are equally funded, the schools that have been discussed in this case study are under scrutiny. According to politicians of the Socialist Party (SP) **more Orthodox religious schools and their discriminatory selection of pupils and staff are beyond what a liberal democratic state can “tolerate”**. According to the Freedom Party (PVV) Islamic school are also intolerable. Other political parties of the Left (PvdA, GroenLinks) and liberal parties (VVD and D66) are **willing to tolerate these religious schools, but around issues such as non-discrimination of gay teachers or selection of pupils, they articulate a discourse of “liberal intolerance”**. Christian political parties (such as CDA, CU and SGP) more fully support associational freedoms of schools.

From the interviews it has become clear that Reformed and Islamic schools in the Netherlands feel the public debate about them is too much influenced by stereotypes and misconceptions. They believe at present there are still enough constitutional guarantees that protect their educational freedom, but principals often made reference to a lack of political support and of indirect forms of resistance or rejection by the surrounding society.

Principals of these two types of schools articulate slightly different discourses on tolerance and recognition. Principals of Islamic schools primarily expressed a need for recognition as “normal schools” and for

How does tolerance and intolerance for Islamic and Reformed schools manifest itself?

What percentage of Dutch schools is Islamic or Reformed?

How do political parties view these schools and their freedoms?

Are religious schools in line with the Dutch Constitution?

What do school principals say?

them to be positively accepted as genuinely Dutch. For directors of Reformed schools tolerance was an important frame of reference, because to them it meant the right to exist as a minority in a secularizing society. Principals of Reformed school stressed there should be room for opinions and life convictions that strongly deviate from the “liberal norm” and that orthodox religious communities are entitled to have schools based on their own views.

Main Findings concerning the ways Islamic and Reformed schools make use of their associational freedoms: **First**, the identity of the school and the school’s policy is negotiated between school management (principal and teachers), school board and parents. Contextual factors influencing these negotiations are: the need for the school to have sufficient pupils, the image of the school, the interpretation of educational goals, the media debate, and the control exercised by the Inspectorate of Education.

Second, in Reformed schools religious identity informs the schools’ policy with regard to admission of pupils, selection of staff, curriculum and dress codes. The Islamic schools have predominantly non-Muslim teachers and management, and there are no special text books for Islamic schools on general subjects (history, biology etc.). It is thus misleading to speak of Islamic schools as orthodox religious schools. The main reasons why they are so fiercely criticized are because, first, they are seen as “un-Dutch”, second, they suffer from organizational problems and incompetent management, and, third, their educational performance is poor and they have nearly 100% allochtonous pupils.

Reformed schools are more strict and “illiberal” than Islamic schools but Islamic schools are perceived as more culturally alien and ‘un-Dutch’ than the Reformed schools.

COMPARING THE DILEMMAS FACED BY THE TWO TYPES OF SCHOOLS

1. ‘Reformed’ schools appear slightly more ‘orthodox’ than Islamic schools:
 - Headscarf versus skirt: more obligations for Reformed girls’ dress
 - Reformed schools more ‘religion-specific’ books for biology and literature
 - Reformed schools less open admission policy for teachers and pupils
2. School principals experience most intolerance from society because of ‘segregation’/ ‘isolation’
3. Both school types face prejudice and (local) political obstruction, but only Muslim schools are subject to violence
4. Local (in)tolerance: evangelicals and homosexuals may live in society but not enter the school

Case Study 2: Citizenship Education and Tolerance

The second case study analyzes the implementation of Citizenship Education. In 2006, Citizenship Education (2006) became compulsory in the Netherlands, due to an ongoing debate on integration and identity, and due to European developments. Because of the Dutch Freedom of Education, the precise interpretation of what citizenship education should encompass, is left to the schools. It is **required** that schools develop a plan for Citizenship education and that they see to it that the plan is executed. The Government provides only general guidelines, stating that it should increase social coherence and “the willingness and the ability to be a part of the community and to contribute to it actively”.

In policy documents and educational research, three dominant positions are taken with regards to the aims of citizenship education and its corresponding outlook on tolerance:

1. *The community-oriented, adapting citizen. In this perspective, norms and values are created within a group, community or society. The internalization of these norms is the core objective of citizenship education. Discipline and social awareness are core values.*
2. *The individualist, autonomous citizen. The objective for citizenship education in this perspective is to create autonomous citizens who have an independent attitude and an individual identity, through cognitive development. Discipline and autonomy are core values.*
3. *The critical-democratic, socially oriented citizen. Citizenship education must teach children critical reflection on society's structures, and stimulate the development of attitudes which will increase emancipation and equal rights. Autonomy and social awareness are core values.*

Throughout the research, it became apparent that while political debate centred on the first interpretation of CE, educational policy makers tend to choose the second or third approach. The approach that schools refer to in their final implementation may consequently be inspired by all three of these approaches. On the practical side, CE gets little priority. There is no money or time available, it has no book or method, and most of it is left to the schools. Schools develop incoherent,

Which ideals influence citizenship education?

Citizenship Education gets little priority. There is no money or time available, no book or method and most of it is left to the schools. Eventually teachers teach mainly anti-discrimination issues.

patch-work curricula that suffice for Inspectorate checks and then leave it to the individual teacher. The Inspectorate's checks are sporadic and only focus on paper work, not on practices or results. The individual teacher may thus approach Citizenship from his or her own ideological perspective, awareness and creativity. This leads to many failures and some successful approaches to citizenship education.

NGOs who create programs, such as Respect2All, often work from a Critical-Democratic perspective and are opposing the Identity-Adaptive ideals which are expressed in governmental policy for CE. Thus, while the government may envision CE to increase integration of ill-adapted Muslim youth into "Dutch norms and values", school programs may instead try to reduce the negative stereotype regarding Islam and reduce prejudice among the "white" youth. Researchers and experts involved with implementation are actively bending the policy in this direction. The freedom of education thus creates opportunities to teach tolerance, because it allows for deviation from the dominant political ideology.

Dutch identity, tolerance, (religious) diversity and how they are addressed in school life

There are conflicting ideas among educators and parents about Dutch identity, tolerance for (religious) diversity and the idea of individual or community autonomy. Yet, we also notice how the alarming tone of the political debate can be out of tune with the pragmatics of the classroom.

Regarding Orthodox Religious Schools: The first case study shows how stereotypes and stigmatization of Reformed and Islamic schools lead to a lack of tolerance in neighbourhoods for these schools. These schools experience problems and hostility, even threats from local communities which are related to the negative stereotypes associated with the schools in the media and political debate. Segregation and fundamentalism are the two main objections to the existence of these schools, both Reformed and Islamic. A thorny issue here is the fact that neither school accepts teachers of a homosexual orientation.

Regarding Citizenship Education in the classroom: We found three different views on what it means to be a good citizen: Identity-adaptive, Individual-Autonomy and Critical-Democratic. Whereas governmental policy is mostly guided by the first perspective, educators interviewed favour the third and teach pupils to be critical citizens with democratic values. However, teachers and practitioners working in education may adhere to all these values and perspectives to some extent, and shift perspectives according to the specific dilemma they are dealing with in the class room. An important drawback in properly implementing citizenship education is the lack of time and money to implement extra-curricular activities and exchange programs (see for instance the example of Respect2all and the visit to Auschwitz mentioned above).

Key Messages for Policy Makers

1. Address discrimination and stigmatization

On the one hand, it is legitimate that Reformed schools and Islamic schools, like all educational institutions, encounter public scrutiny and that practices of discrimination are condemned. On the other hand, religious groups and schools may face discrimination, stigmatization or even violence from the larger society. Both problems need to be addressed and carefully balanced when building a tolerant society is our main concern.

2. Protect institutional rights

A sensible balancing of the liberal principals of non-discrimination and of collective freedoms and associational freedoms is necessary in order to uphold a truly pluralistic society in which there remains room for more Orthodox religious groups.

3. Focus more on autochthonous students

Many times in Dutch political debate, Muslim young men are considered a problem. However, the lower educated, male, 'Dutch' students have the most negative attitudes towards diversity and the lowest percentage agreement with non-discrimination laws. The shift from intolerant views towards intolerant behaviour in these students must be carefully monitored and addressed timely.

4. Teach for complexity and with concrete examples

In teaching tolerance, students must be made aware of its complexity, dilemmas and collision of interests. Ensuring that students are able to learn this, may require specific didactics, such as classroom debate and deliberation. Students should be made aware of the consequences of their lines of thinking, and be confronted with oppositional views. Not general ideals, but specific issues should be used as examples to create understanding of these dilemmas. Tolerance should be taught in relation to concrete historical paradigms where intolerance led to genocide (e.g. the Holocaust). This teaching strategy may require additional teacher training.

5. Provide funding and information

Even though the declared ambitions of citizenship are high the actual amount of money and opportunities does not match them. In order to enable teachers and schools to implement the Citizenship Education of their choice, they should receive funding to implement programs, and be provided with information about the possibilities, programs and methods on offer.

6. Minimal tolerance as educational aim

The freedom of education protects the autonomy of schools to give shape to their citizenship education programs. National guidelines and educational goals should therefore remain minimal but precise. Minimal forms of decent behavior in schools (fighting bullying, active discrimination, racism) should be paramount, in order to avoid an ineffective implementation of broader, contradictory educational goals.

Methodology

This report draws on desk research and fieldwork. We have collected statistical data, policy documents, statements by government officials, media and examined the relevant scholarly literature. In order to address a large scope of Dutch education, the first Case Study mainly describes primary education, and the second Case Study mainly addresses secondary education.

The selected respondents for Case Study 1 had to be school principal of a Reformed or Islamic school (or school association). They were selected through internet search as well as through contacts with the organization for Islamic schools, ISBO. For Case Study 2, we selected several experts in Citizenship Education and some teachers. As a selection criterion for experts we looked for people who had published official documents on the policy and implementation. We aimed at comparing two types of schools: those that wish to influence behavioral and attitude change, and those which address cognitive development in political and democratic knowledge. The interview guide and a list of interviewees can be found in the appendix of the full report.

In June 2011 we organized a public event and discussion group to present our preliminary findings and exchange ideas with experts, practitioners, politicians and scholars. The transcripts of this meeting were used as additional data. After the interviews were conducted, they were fully transcribed. In the analysis and presentation of the findings we aimed to reconstruct argumentations in relation to different discourses on citizenship, pluralism and tolerance.

The findings in this policy brief are more elaborately discussed in:

Inge Versteegt and Marcel Maussen (2010): *The Netherlands: Challenging Diversity and Education in School Life*, of which a downloadable PDF is available at <http://accept-pluralism.eu/Home.aspx>

Additional readings:

Driessen, Geert and Merry, M. (2006). Islamic schools in the Netherlands. Expansion or Marginalization? *Interchange*, Vol. 37 no.3, pp.201-223

Veugelers, W. and Vedder, P. (2003). Values in Teaching, in: *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, Vol.9, No 4, November 2003, 378-389

Vogt, Paul W. (1997). *Tolerance & Education: Learning To Live with Diversity and Difference*. Sage.

Project Identity

Acronym:	ACCEPT PLURALISM
Title:	Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe
Short Description:	<p>ACCEPT PLURALISM questions how much cultural diversity can be accommodated within liberal and secular democracies in Europe. The notions of tolerance, acceptance, respect and recognition are central to the project. ACCEPT PLURALISM looks at both native and immigrant minority groups.</p> <p>Through comparative, theoretical and empirical analysis the project studies individuals, groups or practices for whom tolerance is sought but which we should not tolerate; of which we disapprove but which should be tolerated; and for which we ask to go beyond toleration and achieve respect and recognition.</p> <p>In particular, we investigate when, what and who is being not tolerated / tolerated / respected in 15 European countries; why this is happening in each case; the reasons that different social actors put forward for not tolerating / tolerating / respecting specific minority groups/individuals and specific practices.</p> <p>The project analyses practices, policies and institutions, and produces key messages for policy makers with a view to making European societies more respectful towards diversity.</p>
Website:	www.accept-pluralism.eu
Duration:	March 2010-May 2013 (39 months)
Funding Scheme:	Small and medium-scale collaborative project
EU contribution:	2,600,230 Euro, Grant agreement no. 243837
Consortium:	19 partners (15 countries)
Coordinator:	European University Institute (Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies)
Person Responsible:	Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou
EC officer:	Ms Louisa Anastopoulou, Project Officer