Maximal Interreligious Citizenship Education

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ABSTRACT
There is the need to link religious education and citizenship education now. One option is to strengthen the view that every child's and youngster's personal religious identity in every school should flourish. Religious identity could then be interpreted as an integral part of the concept 'personal identity development'. A full concept 'citizenship education' may imply that religious education and development is part and parcel of citizenship education and should form a structural and necessary element of all citizenship education in schools.
This is combinable with McLaughlin's plea for a maximal interpretation of citizenship education characterized by an emphasis on active learning and inclusion, interactivity, that is values-based and process led, and allowing students to develop and articulate their own views and to engage in debate.
That view is fully compatible with inter-religious education too when the aim no longer will be an education into a religion, but rather combining educating about religions with educating from religions, enabling pupils to develop their own point of view on matters of religion/worldview in the context of plurality via encounter and dialogue.

INTRODUCTION

Terrence McLaughlin once wrote that it is important to remember that 'citizenship' and 'education for citizenship' are not abstract notions, but require concrete specification in relation to a particular society (cf. McLaughlin 1992, 241).

The same prevails when we add 'religious education' to these two terms. How specific and different particular societies are from a religious education perspective, can be show in the case of the Netherlands. Citizenship education and development for citizenship is an important issue in the political and public debate in the first decennium of the 21st century in the Netherlands. In 2005 the Dutch Minister of Education proposed a change of the Law on Primary and Secondary Education in terms of the obligation for state and denominational schools to stimulate active citizenship and social cohesion for all students between 4 and 16 years old. On 1 February 2006 this change became manifest in the law 'Stimulating Active Citizenship and Social Integration'. A flanking brochure with this law bearing the title *A Basis for Citizenship* (Bron 2006) was published by the Dutch National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO). It is quite remarkable that in this brochure for the very first time the particular profile and identity of the schools is taken into account. The question is also raised how citizenship education and religious education could be adequately related to each other. The following core concepts are mentioned in the

brochure: the recognition of different views, tolerance and openness for encounters with persons with different views and opinions.

We may conclude that also from a Dutch governmental perspective there are fruitful possibilities discernable now to further link citizenship education and religious education, and that is at least remarkable from a historical point of view (cf. De Ruyter & Miedema 2000). It is my contention, however, that next the possibilities there is also the need to link religious education and citizenship education now. One option is to strengthen the view that every child's and youngster's personal religious identity in every school should flourish. Religious identity could then be interpreted as an integral part of the concept 'personal identity development'. A full concept 'citizenship education' may imply that religious education and development is part and parcel of citizenship education and should form a structural and necessary element of all citizenship education in schools.

This is combinable with McLaughlin's plea for a maximal interpretation of citizenship education characterized by an emphasis on active learning and inclusion, interactivity, that is values-based and process led, and allowing students to develop and articulate their own views and to engage in debate.

That view is fully compatible with inter-religious education too when the aim no longer will be an education into a religion, but rather combining educating about religions with educating from religions, enabling pupils to develop their own point of view on matters of religion/worldview in the context of plurality via encounter and dialogue.

MINIMAL OR MAXIMAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION?

In 1992 Terrence McLaughlin published an article in which he introduced an ideal-typical distinction of what he called a 'maximal interpretation of education for citizenship' in contrast to a 'minimal interpretation of education for citizenship' (McLaughlin, 1992). He himself interpreted these distinctions in terms of contrasting interpretations on the continuum of the very concept of 'democratic citizenship'. It was his aim "to offer a substantial notion of 'education for citizenship' in the context of the diversity of a pluralistic democratic society"; a notion "…'thick' or substantial enough to satisfy the communal demands of citizenship, yet compatible with liberal demands concerning the development of critical rationality by citizens and satisfaction of the demands of justice relating to diversity" (McLaughlin 1992, 235). Such a society, according to McLaughlin, should seek to find a balance between social and cultural diversity with cohesion. It could have been said in 2010.

His elaboration on a minimal and maximal approach runs as follows. In the minimal approach to citizenship and education for citizenship the subject is presented in a purely knowledge-based way and with a particular civics-related content to be transmitted in a formal and didactic manner. The identity conferred on an individual in this conception of citizenship is merely seen in formal, legal and juridical terms. In schools, the development of the student's broad critical reflection and understanding is not stimulated nor fostered. A maximal conceptualization of citizenship and education for citizenship, however, is characterized by an emphasis on active learning and inclusion, is interactive, values-based and process led, allowing students to develop and articulate their own opinions and to engage in debate. The individual's identity in this conception of citizenship is dynamic instead of static, and a matter for continuing debate and redefinition. Maximal conceptions of citizenship education

"require a considerable degree of explicit understanding of democratic principles, values and procedures on the part of the citizen, together with the dispositions and capacities required for participation in democratic citizenship generously conceived" (McLaughlin 1992, 237).

McLaughlin observed that the 'minimal' interpretation is open to various objections. The most notable is "that it may involve merely an unreflective socialisation into the political and social *status quo*, and is therefore inadequate on educational, as well as on other, grounds" (McLaughlin 1992, 238). That is why he was in favour of more maximal conceptions of education for citizenship, because these require "a much fuller educational programme, in which the development of a broad critical understanding and a much more extensive range of dispositions and virtues in the light of a general liberal and political education are seen as crucial" (McLaughlin 1992, 238). But he was not blind for objections against the maximalist interpretation either, because such interpretations "are in danger of presupposing a substantive set of 'public virtues' which may exceed the principled consensus that exists or can be achieved" (McLaughlin 1992, 241).

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Although religious education is not the same as citizenship education, there are fruitful possibilities now and there is in my opinion a need to further link these two fields. McLaughlin's preference for a maximalist interpretation of education for citizenship may be helpful here, because he points to the necessity of a full educational programme in which the development of a broad critical understanding and a much more extensive range of dispositions and virtues in the light of a general liberal and political education are seen as crucial. His view on education for citizenship offers the possibility to include religious education as part of such an educational programme and makes it even fuller in combining democratic education for citizenship and religious education in schools to what adequately could be characterized as 'religious citizenship education'. This is fully combinable with what has by some be claimed to be the aim of education in schools, that is that every child and youngster in every school should be able to develop her or his personal identity or personhood. Religious edification is interpreted then as an integral part of an embracing concept of personal identity development, and an embracing concept of citizenship education should imply that religious education and development is an inclusive part of citizenship education. It should form a structural and necessary element of all citizenship education in all schools, including common schools, based on a transformative pedagogy stressing the actorship and authorship of the students.

It is widely recognized that citizenship education is the responsibility of each country's government in liberal-democratic societies. And if a government should take the responsibility for an inclusive concept of education for citizenship seriously, it means that without any preference *per se* at the side of the government itself for a particular world view or religion, each government could take the *political-pedagogical responsibility* to stimulate the policy of and practice in schools to foster religious or worldview education as part of an integral citizenship education (cf. Doedens & Weisse, 1997; Knauth 2007). In that way the state can support democratic citizenship and religious education definitively combined in schools as religious citizenship education.

Following the train of thought of John Dewey (cf. Dewey, 1916), it is, pedagogically speaking and from a societal perspective, desirable that children already in the embryonic society of the school, experience or are confronted by and should become acquainted with other children's religious backgrounds, ideas, experiences and practices. Seeing the impact of the religious domain on political, cultural and economic areas they can also benefit from such experiences and insights when they encounter religious 'others' in society at large. So, from a societal as well as pedagogical point of view, all schools should be obliged to foster a religious dimension to citizenship, and thereby bring about mutual respect and understanding and may stimulate the development of the personal religious identity formation of children and youngsters in school life (cf. Miedema, 2006).

INTERRELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND LEARNING

For common or state schools in the Netherlands it should be rather easy as it seems to follow this line. However, habitually state schools interpret themselves as religiously neutral. For a long time, and even till the present day, a lot of these schools take the passive non-preferential road towards religion or worldview. This includes in practice that no student can be refused admittance regardless the religion of worldview the student brings with her or him; that the religion or worldview of the student is to be respected; that pedagogically speaking religion is not dealt with pro-actively and intentionally (cf. De Ruyter & Miedema 2000, 136-137). Even the so-called active non-preferential approach did not change much of this practice of postponement. Fortunately, the fact that citizenship education and development for citizenship is an important issue in the political and public debate nowadays in the Netherlands, combined with the possibilities for what I have coined as religious citizenship education, also creates new challenges and potential for common schools in my country to deal with religious education.

An adequate vehicle for fostering such a kind of religious personhood might be one of the varieties of interreligious approaches in teaching and learning, as it was practised for ten years in the one and only interreligious primary school in the Netherlands, the Juliana van Stolberg Primary School (cf. Ter Avest 2003; 2009), and is still concretized in Hamburg, Germany (see Doedens & Weisse 1997). The use of such an approach especially holds when the aim of religious education no longer is an education *into* a religion. Combined with a maximal interpretation of education for citizenship, it can neither exclusively be a mere teaching *about* religion or religions. Rather, when educating about religions, it will be conceptualised as a function of an education *from* religions, that is enabling students to develop their own point of view on matters of religion in the context of plurality and to develop their own personal religious identity (Jackson 1997; Wardekker & Miedema 2001).

Roughly speaking we can distinguish between two conceptions of interreligious education and learning: i) interreligious education and learning as an explicit teaching method next to other teaching methods (the minimal approach); ii) interreligious education and learning not as a method, but as a guiding principle and as an intention that more or less penetrates all pedagogical and didactical situations and relations in schools (the maximal approach) (Miedema & Bakker 2000). In the latter case we characterize every event, meeting, dialogue, encounter, or situation in which boundaries between religions are crossed as being interreligious in character.

One of the stimulating forces behind interreligious education and learning in the maximal interpretation already in the early 90s in the Netherlands was Professor Trees Andree, now emeritus from Utrecht University. In 1994, at that time holding the chair in interreligious education at the Utrecht University, she pleaded in a sweeping statement and with a prophetic view for an education for all children based on interreligious principles:

> "Necessary is education in dialogue, respecting each individual's uniqueness, looking for communal aspects in the different life views, being conscious of equality of all humans and a common responsibility to construe new fundamentals for a true humanity in a multi-religious society" (Andree 1994, 29; current author's translation)

In Andree's view education should care for the development of each student's unique religious identity as well as at the same time creating opportunities for the encounter with people from other religions. Not only students who are socialized in a religious tradition, but also students from secularized families should be welcomed in schools that want to foster inter-religious education and learning, and should feel at ease. It is in such schools that students are taught, learn and practice to build bridges between people, bridges between religions, bridges from today till tomorrow.

Andree showed a special interest in the developments of the Christian-Islamic Juliana van Stolberg Primary school, the inter-religious school where teachers experimented with Andree's favourite type of inter-religious education. Andree's approach is highly in line with the pedagogy articulated by Walter Feinberg in his 1998 book on common schools and uncommon identities when he states that: "(S)harp boundaries between cultures are not desirable at all levels of interaction, and dialogue within and across cultural boundaries is the more desirable state of affairs" (Feinberg 1998, 243).

IN CONCLUSION

I have taking the aim of embracing citizenship serious in matters of religious education, and that's why I have held a plea for what could be adequately coined as religious citizenship education. In elaborating on it I have greatly profited from McLaughlin's helpful distinction between a minimal and a maximal interpretation of education for citizenship. Inspired by his thoughts I have followed his preference for the maximal interpretation due to its emphasis on active learning and inclusion, on interaction and its values-based and process led nature which allows students to develop and articulate their own opinions and to engage in critical and reflective debates.

This line of thought was combined with the claim that an adequate vehicle for fostering such a kind of religious personhood might be one of the varieties of interreligious approaches in teaching and learning. Especially when the aim of religious education is no longer an education *into* a religion. Combined with a maximal interpretation of education for citizenship, it can neither exclusively be a mere teaching *about* religion or religions. Rather, when educating about religions, it will be conceptualised as a function of an education '*from* religions', that is enabling students to develop their own point of view on matters of religion in the context of plurality and to develop their own personal religious identity.

The focus in this essay was greatly on common or state schools. However, it is my contention that - although, the very practice of interreligious education and learning in the school setting might be a different one - there should be *no fundamental differences* between open denominational schools and common or state schools, if they both interpret religious education as an integral part of an embracing concept of personal identity development, and combine this with a transformative pedagogy stressing the actorship and authorship of the students.

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