

Education : Learning to Fly on One's Own Strength

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Abstract

In education, the educere aspect makes itself felt – moving from an original situation to something higher, something better. Moreover, the formative character of educare can be recognised in the German concept Bildung, which focuses on human beings in their wholeness, on their attitude within society and their worldview. What shape has been given in the Netherlands to these different aspects of education over the centuries? Without creating the impression that a linear development in thinking about – and acting in – education has taken place throughout history, and without the ambition to be comprehensive, we look at what took place between adults and children in previous centuries in the Netherlands. Will our investigation yield historical constants or differences? We let ourselves be surprised.

Key Words

Formative character, Wholeness, Worldview, Linear development, The Netherlands

자기 역량 강화를 위한 학습 모형에 관한 연구

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논문 요약

교육에서 에듀세레는 그 자체가 기본적인 상황에서 보다 좋은 그리고 보다 높은 상황으로 개선을 함의한다. 더 나아가서 에듀세레의 성품교육은 독일어 빌둥의 개념으로 인정될 수 있다. 여기서 빌둥이란 전체성의 인격, 사회와 세계관에서의 포괄적인 태도를 의미한다. 네덜란드 교육이 이 부분에서 만들어 내는 새로움은 무엇인가? 사고와 행동에서의 선형 발달에 대한 강조 없이 교육은 역사에서 포괄성에 대한 확신 없이 발생하지 않는다. 네덜란드에서 성인과 아동의 포괄성은 우리의 연구에서 역사적 맥락으로 제시된다. 그 결과는 우리에게 놀라움을 제공한다.

《 주제어 》

성품교육, 전체성, 세계관, 선형 발달, 네덜란드

I. The Concept of 'Education'

When it comes to the activity of educating, the Dutch pedagogue Luc Stevens likes to tell the following story about a teacher of 4- and 5-year-olds:

'One morning, as she is busy preparing the classroom puppet theatre and the children gather around it, she suddenly hears Ferry, one of her 4-year-olds, say: "Dirty, filthy bitch". Everyone startles and waits – what is going to happen? The teacher walks up to Ferry, who is sitting there with a red face, and asks: "Ferry, what's the matter?" "My sis doesn't have a good spot". "Well", says the teacher, "then we'll sit your sis down somewhere else"' (De Bruin, 2020, 31-32).

Is this teacher educating the child in question? It depends on what you understand by education. Educere and educare are the two Latin roots from which our modern word education is derived. Educere refers to 'leading/drawing [from one situation to another situation]', educare refers to 'training, moulding'. In education, the educere aspect makes itself felt – moving from an original situation to something higher, something better. Moreover, the formative character of educare can be recognised in the German concept Bildung, which focuses on human beings in their wholeness, on their attitude within society and their worldview. What shape has been given in the Netherlands to these different aspects of education over the centuries? Without creating the impression that a linear development in thinking about – and acting in – education has taken place throughout history, and without the ambition to be comprehensive, we look at what took place between adults and children in previous centuries in the Netherlands. Will our investigation yield historical constants or differences? We let ourselves be surprised.

II. Educating in Love

That the child, in the education of earlier centuries, was not merely seen by adults as a miniature adult, but also as a child in its own right, can be learned from Dutch paintings (children at play), texts resulting from public debate (the

praising of virtues), and last but not least from the limited number of children's diaries that have been preserved (having fun with parents). The voluminous book *Vijf eeuwen opvoeden in Nederland* ('Five Centuries of Education in the Netherlands') provides us with a picture of earlier times through the eyes of historians (Bakker, Noordman & Rietveld-van Wingerden, 2010). Where one historian paints a general picture of the origin of the family and educational practices in the 18th century – as if childhood did not exist before that time – another emphasises the historically ever-present 'natural' attention and love for the uniqueness of the child on its way to adulthood – pointing to the very goal of education. Initially, the idea is prevalent that because of the high infant mortality at that time, love for children was not able to truly develop. This was not the case however, as shown by the objections of the European pedagogue Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) against the hiring of a wet nurse, the poems of the Dutch poet Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679) ('Constantijntje, 't zalig kijntje', 1632) and a letter from Elisabeth Strouven, a Dutch nanny, on the death of a child ('profound grief', around 1620). According to Erasmus, love for children was not only of pivotal importance in family education, but also in school education; 'the first step in learning is the love for the teacher'. He emphasised the element of play in education, and stood opposed to corporal punishment.

The content of educational practices in the 16th - 18th century was very much legitimised on the basis of sources from the Christian tradition. The style of education was patriarchal and the goal was a chaste and godly life. Education centred on piety and good manners – especially for boys, according to Erasmus. Good manners in those days were 'city manners' shaped by general Christian values, in which the virtue of humility towards 'people of higher rank' played an important part. Virtues such as industriousness, sincerity and frugality completed the image of the good citizen. This was in keeping with the general social climate in the Netherlands at the time, in which urbanisation and the emerging bourgeoisie set the tone. 'With frugality and industriousness, one builds houses like castles'. Not only the inhabitants of the cities were 'bourgeois-minded', but also the attitude of 'peasants and country folk' of that time could be characterised as 'bourgeois-minded': freedom-loving, courageous, frugal, independent and in-

dividualistic.

III. Educating for Living Together

The fight of the Dutch against flooding led to land reclamation, and collectives were formed to protect the land from the unpredictable forces of water. The fruits of the land were intended for the townspeople, which provided the latter with the means to dedicate themselves fully to trade. The accumulation of wealth provided opportunities beyond mere survival. Learning to read and write, initially seen as a particularly important skill for merchants, also became important in religious education. The ability to read the Bible independently was seen as important for the development of an authentic religious attitude. In the domestic sphere it was mainly the father who took the leading role in religious education. During meals he read from the Bible and led the family in prayer. It was not uncommon to speak of the family as 'the church in miniature'. The Dutch population at the time was composed of Christians of different denominations and Jews. The Christian part of the Dutch population counted a minority of Calvinists – only a third of the population was reformed – who were tolerant of Catholics, Mennonites, Remonstrants, Lutherans and Jews. In other words: there was freedom of religion, not yet enshrined in law, but effectively practiced in daily life.

It was the great degree of freedom that brought Jan Amos Comenius (1592-1670) – who was, for his time, a radical pedagogue – to the 'low countries by the sea' as the Netherlands were called. He emphasised the connection between man and the environment, focusing on the lives of human beings in – or rather with – nature. Comenius' starting point was what mankind and nature, and children among themselves, have in common. Whereas Erasmus focused especially on boys, Comenius articulated what we would nowadays call inclusive education: 'All education for all children'. 'Even for girls and children with learning difficulties'. In other words: for Comenius, every child mattered. Education, he held, is 'the equipping of all people, so that through exercise of all their faculties they

may gain knowledge of creation as intended by God, and are able to live accordingly' (Kroon & Levering, 2016, 32; Komensky, 2009; Rietveld-van Wingerden, ter Avest, & Westerman, 2010).

IV. Educating – From Child Labour to Compulsory Education

The carefree play of children, which can be seen in Dutch paintings from the 17th and 18th century, came to an end in the 19th century for children from the lower echelons of society. By the end of the 18th century, a shift from cottage industry to industrialisation was already underway, in which children shouldered a work burden that should not be underestimated. 'A boy does this while playing. When a boy has done this [work] for 12 hours, he is still full of energy and bounds and leaps like a hare'. This kind of 'playing' – which we might call child neglect these days – came to an end partly through the establishment of factory schools, where children were educated a few hours each day in addition to their factory work. For young children, compulsory schooling was stipulated in the Netherlands by law at the end of the 19th century. The Child Labour Law of Van Houten (1874) for children aged 12 and older was a first step in this direction, followed by the Compulsory Education Law for all children (1901). The Child Labour Law turned out to have a significant impact, not only on young children's cognitive development and reading skills, but also on their moral and religious development. The school had to breathe an atmosphere of 'civic and Christian virtues' and was tasked with moulding children into 'useful, loyal and trustworthy citizens'.

'Proto-industrial textile production' lasted for a long time in the Netherlands, for example in the eastern part of the country, the region called Twente. In times when there was little to do on the land, small farmers supplemented their income with home weaving for paying customers. Not everyone was able to meet the living needs in this way. There was widespread poverty with related problems of alcohol abuse and, in the long run, a lack of incentive to work. Food distribution and the founding of workhouses were attempts to tackle 'the social

issue'. The lack of 'friendly but firm leadership' in poverty-stricken families had to be compensated by education. There were high expectations of the benefits of education for both parents and children. Impoverished families from the cities were transported to agricultural colonies in undeveloped peatlands, as part of the 'civilization offensive', to make parents and children into 'useful, loyal and trustworthy citizens'. One of those colonies was Frederiksoord, movingly described by the Dutch author Suzanna Jansen in her novel *Het pauperparadijs* ('The Pauper Paradise') (Jansen, 2008).

V. Education in Children's Books

Until now we talked about parents and teachers who took charge of the education of children. Mothers, in particular, were assigned a central role in the forming of the child's conscience. They were seen as role models in education, a task encapsulated in the proverb 'the branch bends, while it is still delicate'. The pedagogue Friedrich W.A. Fröbel (1782-1852) pleaded, among other things, for the 'natural' development of each individual child, so that the child might participate in its own education to become a virtuous citizen. This changes the child from a receiving object (the child is educated) to a co-operating subject (education is a joint project of the educator and the educated).

In addition to the mother as guardian of virtues, in the 19th century, Dutch children's songs ('firm boys, tough lads') and children's literature were given their own place in education focused on the forming of virtuous citizens. Here, fun and learning came together. Books like *De Brave Hendrik* ('Good Henry', 1809), and the follow-up *De Brave Maria* ('Good Mary', 1810) taught Dutch children the duties of 'obedience, orderliness, honesty, merciful charity and kindness'. The book *De kleine Sofia* ('Little Sophi', 1819) sent the message that the environment, the family and educational context a child lives in, is the decisive factor in upbringing. The nature-nurture debate seemed to be decided in favour of nurture. In terms of correct environment, educators (fathers and mothers, teachers) were asked to teach 'love, understanding, tact, hopeful trust

and patience', accompanied by a 'friendly but firm leadership'

VI. The Professionalisation of Education

In the 20th century, 'the century of the child', the focus shifted more and more from the goal of education to the process of education itself. Rules and disciplinary measures were given an important place in the fight against undesirable sexual behaviour and education tasked to make children into virtuous Dutch citizens. Men's and women's roles were kept strictly separate: the man was the provider and the woman was responsible for three key household elements: cleanliness, rest, and regularity. Further attention was given to mothers in light of research results about infant mortality. In a first step, mothers were given advice on breastfeeding, soon supplemented with advice on nutrition, childcare and education. The three household elements were supplemented with three childcare elements – nutrition, childcare and vaccination – and later with three parenting style elements: life, leadership and love. 'Leadership' referred to the importance of discipline and boundary-setting in education.

Parents needed to act as role models in the education process, a task encapsulated in the proverb 'words open the child's eyes, but examples inspire'. The first university-educated in the Netherlands were opposed to the outsourcing of childcare, even to kindergartens. Loving leadership, 'tender strictness' ('gentle when possible, strict when necessary') was seen as crucial in the education process. In addition, the child was given a certain freedom in its inner struggle, i.e., the conflict between good and evil; the child was given space to make mistakes. This could be in situations where the child came face to face with an unsafe world; moments that frightened the child. The opinion was that the child had to learn independently how to deal with this kind of fear. The Dutch pedagogue Martinus J. Langeveld (1955) thought along that line when he advocated a parenting style that allows the child to 'go its own way within the confines of given examples and rules', aptly articulated in the spirit of that time as 'earning one's living independently and paying the entrance fee at heaven's

gate out of one's own pocket' (Langeveld, 1955). According to Langeveld, parenting was 'creative anticipation.' 'In our way of doing things', (and refraining from doing things, addition by the author) he states, 'we present the child with an image of the good life; an image that becomes a life journey destination and which makes an appeal to the individual'.

Education received more and more attention from scientists. The professionalisation of education in the Netherlands took off in the second half of the 20th century and continues into the 21st century. From the goal of education the focus shifted increasingly to the education process, specifically to the difficulties which could occur in that process, with an emphasis on the prevention of such issues. This explains the success of American paediatrician Benjamin Spock(1890-1966)'s *Baby and Child Care* (1946) and Dutch Protestant theologian Jan Waterink's monthly journal *Moeder* ('Mother'). The point of view was that child predisposition and educational errors caused such difficulties, which could be avoided and resolved with love and understanding – under the guidance of professionals such as child therapists and orthopedagogues (Langeveld, 1955).

VII. Education: A Joint Project

Playing children who are having fun with their parents we find in the Netherlands, as we described above, already in the 17th century. Playful learning was an educational approach proposed by Erasmus. However, as a result of societal changes, the playing child of the 17th century had to make way for the labouring child. In the 'civilization offensive' of the 19th century, the focus gradually shifts to the learning child – 'all education for all children' was already the motto of the reformer Comenius.

The content of education was initially grafted on to the Christian tradition. A freedom-loving and independent attitude was stimulated in the child, as shown, among other things, by the importance attached to reading skills – not just useful for the merchant, but also essential for the believer in order to read the Bible independently and learn from it as an individual. Until the 1950s there

existed a specific Christian pedagogy, as outlined for example in Dutch pedagogue Langeveld's *Kind en Religie* ['Child and Religion'] – although the exclusive role of Christianity was relativised by Langeveld. The evolution of the educational content seems to have been closely linked to the developments in the Dutch society.

That the moulding of children into virtuous individuals was seen as more than just a task for educators, parents and teachers, is shown by the playful style that was adopted in the upcoming children's literature, which was tasked with 'teaching and entertaining'. Education became a joint project of educators and their environment. This gave rise to parenting as an interplay between parents, neighbours and leaders of (sports) clubs in the civil society. Does the increase in international contacts play a role in this, with the effect that the African concept like 'ubuntu' ('I am because we are') in combination with the statement 'it needs a village to raise a child' can acquire a place in pedagogical thinking?

At the beginning of the 21st century, this 'village' consists of an ever-expanding group of experts. The high expectations parents have of their children, the increasing educational uncertainty and the concern to educate children well, drives parents into the arms of psychologists and pedagogues. But what does 'good education' actually mean? What does it require from educators?

VIII. Conclusion: Reconsidering the Concept of Education

Up to this point, we have used the word 'education' to refer to everything that leads a child to the threshold of adulthood. A catch-all term with 'love' as a constant. This calls for a closer study of the concept – according to the Dutch pedagogues Jan Steutel and Doreth de Ruyter (2019), specifically in terms its content, style and tone. Above, we wrote about educational practices legitimised on the basis of Christian sources; this is already a clarification of the content of education. The statement 'the branch bends, while it is still delicate' points to a difference in education style. Education can be predominantly authoritative, prohibitive, cautioning, playful, stimulating or discouraging; this refers to the role

of disciplinary measures in the education style. In any case, the verb 'educating' refers to a process in which an adult is educating, and a child is being educated, whereby the goal of 'good education' is that the child eventually takes on the role of an adult; an adult who behaves properly according to the rules prescribed in the society in which the child grows up.

'Properly' and 'in the society in which the child grows up' are two elements of this description that are subject to change, as we have shown above. The Dutch society has changed considerably in the centuries that preceded us. Transitions took place from a bourgeois society with an emphasis on the freedom and individuality of its citizens, to a plural society with an emphasis on the respectfully participating citizen; from a society that is marked by poverty and fights to reduce it, to a wealthy society that combats loneliness; from a society with strictly separated gender roles for fathers and mothers, to a more egalitarian society. What 'good education' is, cannot be separated from the developments in society. In the voluminous standard work of Charles Taylor (2004), *Sources of the Self*, we read about the changing normative role of society; about a transition from a society with a framework, a space, in which citizens are assigned their place by birth ('he who is born for a dime never becomes a quarter') to a well-nigh unlimited society where successful positioning takes place on the basis of personal qualities. The long-standing nature-nurture debate seems to have been decided in favour of an interplay between predisposition and education, between internal and external environment. An example of such an interplay can be found in the school slogan: 'Discover your talent'. In short, it is within society that the educator undertakes manoeuvres to guide the child to a successful 'coming into the world,' an expression of the German philosopher Hannah Arendt (1961). He or she manoeuvres, guides the child, until it is ready to 'fly on its own strength'.

Bringing the child to the point that it can successfully 'fly on its own strength' – nothing is too much trouble for parents to accomplish this. In the Netherlands clinging to the child and protecting it against the big bad outside world seems to be the current manifestation of parents' love for their children. Under the influence of a changing society, both the content and the style of education have

undergone changes. As far as the content is concerned, contemporary thinking is no longer dominated by the educational goal of the 'frugal citizen', but by concern about the future social success of the child – which then gives direction to the parent's education. As far as the style is concerned, in the loving tone used in this day and age, in the early 21st century in the Netherlands, we mainly perceive overprotection. The term 'curling parents' was coined in 2004 by the Danish pedagogue Bent Hougaard to characterise parents who, like curling players, scrub away any problems so that children cannot stumble over them. In doing so, children are denied the opportunity to fall down and get up again.

Denying the child all of its 'disruptive moments' should be seen as a manifestation of loveless rather than loving guidance. Children's preparation for adulthood has shifted (degenerated?) into the attempt to prevent them from (2014) becoming human beings. Specifically, becoming human beings, living as human beings in a globalising society, in which there exists a connection between the Twentse 'kroamschuddn' and the African concept of 'ubuntu' – 'I am because we are'. 'Kroamschuddn' (lit. 'crib rocking') is a tradition native to the Dutch region of Twente, where residents of the neighbourhood visit families where a baby has been born. During this event, the baby goes from hand to hand, and is thus 'carried into the world', as it were, by the whole neighborhood. The connection with 'ubuntu' lies in 'the community' that takes co-responsibility for the new child. Education does not happen all by itself, education requires a joint effort.

Parents' fear of not doing well in the education of their children seems to signal a lack of confidence that – even without their interference – children will turn out all right. 'While the farmer sleeps' (1974), is the title that the Dutch Christian pastor Jan Nieuwenhuis gives to one of his books: a way of expressing trust in children's own strength. Does education unfold automatically after all? Good advice might be not to cling to the child, but to hold on to it in a different way. Might 'loving neglect' perhaps emerge as a surprising new concept in further thinking about education as an accompaniment to 'flying on one's own strength'?

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