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## INTERCULTURAL DIMENSION OF THE DUTCH EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Violetta Gul-Rechlewicz\*

### Abstract

Implementation of an effective integration policy is important not only for the member countries' stability and coherency but also for the European Union as a whole. Therefore the intercultural context of educational policy is currently, in times of increased migration, especially significant and should be a global priority. The Netherlands is an example of a country that has undoubtedly failed in the integration field. In spite of educational programmes supposedly evolving in a proper direction the accepted multicultural society model has not in the end brought about the expected benefits. The article points at the conception changes in the Dutch educational policy, its intercultural character and the changes which have been made throughout the last decades.

**Key words:** Netherlands, Educational Policy, European Union, intercultural context, globalisation

### Introduction – the Cultural Context of Education

In Melville Herskovits widely known work *“Man and His Works. The Science of Cultural Anthology”* there are claims related to theory of culture indicating at the same time a number of features characterising culture itself. The ones that should be emphasised are those that constitute to some extent its base allowing simultaneously to bring forth these elements without which culture cannot exist. It leads to legible conclusions: we learn culture, culture comes from biological, environmental, psychological and historical elements of human existence, culture is organised, multipronged, dynamic and changeable (Burszta, 1998, p. 35-37). In culture, there are also certain regularities, which allow for scientific analysis. It seems to be as well an instrument helping an individual to adapt to the surroundings and it allows him to attain resources for the so called *creative expression*. (Kwieciński, 2000, p. 625.)

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Quoted above elements of culture were enriched by **Alfred Louis Kroeber** and **Clyde Kluckhohn** with additional features. The authors defined culture as an entity of patterns pertinent to ways of thinking, feeling and reacting. These patterns, after being adapted, are being passed on throughout symbols simultaneously constituting the core of culture, namely "*historically accumulated and selected ideas and values especially linked to them*". (Kroeber -Kluckhohn, 1975, p. 32.)

In civilisations like ours there are hundreds or probably more, let us call them, *situational frames* pertinent to culture. These frames consist of situational dialects and personalities, material accessories, patterns of behaviours, which appear in certain arrangements or are response to specific conditionings. A situational frame is, in other words, the smallest unit of culture that is able to exist by its own, which is analysed, able to be taught and passed on, and also left to posterity as a total unity. The frames comprise then, inter alia, the following components: linguistic, kinetic, proxemics, temporal, social, material and personal (Hall, 2001, p. 131.).

The concept of "seizing in frames" is necessary not only in relation to the specialised knowledge (i.e. the identification of analytical units) but it also a fundamental element of knowledge for these units. For it is related with adopting new culture if there is such a need. Every culture is not only an integrated entirety but it possesses its own, individual rules of learning. Those rules are strengthened by the patterns of general organisation. A basic element of understanding a culture different from our own is to learn the rules of its functioning, and above all getting to know the way in which the members of the culture learn those patterns and rules.

Every person bears certain pattern of thinking, feeling and behaviour, which is being adopted throughout their lives. The most is absorbed in early childhood when we are still very prone to influences and we learn the fastest. A change of once coded way of thinking, feeling and behaviour requires a double effort: resignation from something that we have already mastered and second learning. It is always more difficult, than learning for the first time (Hofstede, 2000, p. 38-41.).

**Edward Hall** is a proponent of a theory that it does not matter what endeavours we undertake, we are unable to get rid of our own culture because it is written into our nervous system and it determines the way how we perceive the world. A larger part of the culture remains, according to Hall, in concealment and stays beyond the range of conscious control; it constitutes so called

*“fundamental tissue of human existence”*. A human being and their extensions form a system of mutually dependent elements. It is then impossible to separate the human from their home, city, technology or language. Therefore people cannot act, nor interact with one another in any other way but with the mediation of culture. (Hall, 2003, p. 240-241)

## **1 Multicultural Dimension of Educational Policy**

The phenomenon of migration is nothing new. People have migrated for centuries. The reason to leave one's own country and the decision to move to an entirely culturally foreign environment is not easy. It can be caused by, for instance, socio-political destabilisation of the home country or its bad economic conditions. The causes can be various. What is constant though and always current is the problem of newcomers' acclimatisation in the local society, i.e. adapting to the new realities of life and being accepted by the autochthonic environment.

The majority of societies seem to be improperly prepared to accepting immigrants and do not secure good life conditions for them. It may be related to a geographical dispersion of immigrants (forming e.g. immigration ghettos in boxed-off parts of the city) but also, e.g., wrongly pursued social or educational policy. It results in alienation of newcomers in the recipient society. The authority representatives' insufficient skills and experience, also the local ones, often hamper the integration of foreigners.

Therefore, there is a need to create training programmes which would help both sides, local community and immigrants to reach consensus regarding the multipoint evaluation of a problematic situation and would assist the two (or more) cultures to find ways for reflective assessment of such situations. Very often quite important issue are the ethnocentric and racist attitudes, which came forth across the whole world after the events of 2001. The inclination for ethnocentrism, which is worth mentioning, can be present also in immigrants. The danger in such a case leads to the development of religious fundamentalism, which may result in, e.g., terroristic attacks.

From the above comes the conclusion that immigrants must not be left alone. In order to avoid conflicts, tensions, and even outrages many European countries have decided to introduce a policy aimed at integration of their multicultural societies. It is supposed to prevent the marginalisation and stigmatisation of newcomers, as well as those who settled down in culturally

different country many years ago.

As it was mentioned already, one is unable to change his or her own culture. However, we can gain communication skills in the intercultural space. They will help in functioning in an environment entirely mentally and culturally different from our own.

**Table 1** Working Rules of Multicultural Integration

<b>Activities Regarding Human Relations</b>	<b>Effective Communication</b>	<b>Effective Participation</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promoting a sense of equality amongst all involved individuals,</li> <li>2. Taking care of the harmony of mutual relations,</li> <li>3. Avoiding conflicts if possible,</li> <li>4. Preventing conflicts openly and through a dialogue,</li> <li>5. Accepting people as they are and not as they (in our opinion) should be,</li> <li>6. Supporting direct personal contacts and cooperation and not confrontational and authoritarian relations,</li> <li>7. Sensitivity towards the feelings of others.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attentive listening to everybody,</li> <li>2. Accepting what is said by others and the ability to act in concordance,</li> <li>3. A need to be understood by everybody,</li> <li>4. Truthfulness and honesty,</li> <li>5. Acting within the appropriate social and cultural forms,</li> <li>6. Regular advising others on various occasions.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A significant level of active involvement,</li> <li>2. Carrying out important tasks,</li> <li>3. Support in order to learn from one another in various activities,</li> <li>4. Supporting plans and activities allowing people to be satisfied,</li> <li>5. Staying in direct contact with people.</li> </ol>

Source: the author's work based on: Z. KWIECIŃSKI: *Tropy...*, op. cit., s. 276-278.

The multicultural societies, therefore, need a well prepared policy regarding to multicultural education for their existence and cooperation. Such policy should comprise strategy which will include both autochthons and allochthons (children and adults) in the process of school and life-long education. In the case of such an education a negotiation dialogue will be the

most efficient; a dialogue that requires the attitude of tolerance, openness and meeting the other party halfway. Respecting cultural specificity should lead to overcoming isolation throughout implementation of rules, forms and methods strengthening mutual understanding. For it is important to “*accept the existence of various cultures in the society and to treat them as a factor of mutual enrichment and value confrontation, many times incoherent and contradictory. Multicultural education must, above all, teach mediation and conflict solution*”. (Nikitrowicz, 2009, p. 280-281)

According to **Tadeusz Lewowicki** multicultural education “(...) *fosters getting to know, understanding and accepting various cultures and the people who create them. Moreover, it prepares for cooperation and mutual benefiting from the output of people of different races, nationalities, faiths and cultures (...)*”. (Lewowicki, 2000, p.17) The development of communicative fluency progresses in three phases: realisation, knowledge and skills (Hofstede, 2000, p. 333-337).

**Realisation** refers to the sphere of understanding that not everybody is driven by the same motives as we are. Therefore, not everyone has the same “*mind software*”(Hall, 1987, p.81) as we do. In the sphere of realisation one points at: equality of rights for all cultures, independence, own identity, group, local, cultural, national and beyond-national bonds, ecology regarding the natural environment and society.

**Knowledge** is a necessary element allowing for learning foreign culture regarding its symbolism, rituals, or language. The skills are an effect of awareness, knowledge and practice. They allow to get a satisfaction from staying in culturally foreign environment, comprehending it and, if such a need occurs, to be able to identify with it in a certain way.

**The sphere of skills** refers to: perception, distinguishing and understanding cultural differences and one's own dignity and the value of communication with others, conceiving the otherness as enriching, interesting and absorbing need to leave the centre of one's own culture, internal enrichment throughout conscious entering borderlands and cultural junction areas, realising inequalities, discrimination and marginalisation, seeking understanding on account of undertaken interactions, negotiations and dialogue, strengthening reciprocal relationships between diverse communities. (Nikitrowicz, 2009, p.284)

Every state aims at so called diffusion of “societal culture” (Kymlicka, 2001b, p. 17) or, in other words, territorially concentrated culture based on a

common language, which is used in many social institutions, both in the private sphere, as well as in the public (schools, media, the law, economy, the government, etc). The promotion of integration, i.e. enforcing a societal culture is a part of a nation forming process, and comprises the imposition of a common language, sense of belonging and equal access to social institutions that use the language of the majority. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that states guard their cultural sovereignty. It does not translate, however, into hostility to accept culturally diverse community. The latter often raises a strong objection towards being tied to, for instance, social institutions that use the language of the majority. It is worthy to remember that every kind of diversity (also the cultural one) is linked to inevitable result of laws and freedoms given to the citizens. (Kymlicka, 2001a, p. 25)

Ethnic minorities have, practically speaking, several options, which they can employ:

- To emigrate to another country, especially if it is settled by members of their culture (e.g. Turks from the Netherlands to Germany, or Indians from France to Great Britain);
- To agree to the integration with the culture of the majority but to negotiate better conditions of that integration (e.g. Turks in the Netherlands, Algerians or Moroccans in France);
- To strive for gaining the authority required to maintain their own societal culture (for instance creating their own economic, political and educational institutions that use their own language);
- To accept the marginalisation and claim to be allowed to live on the margin of the society. (Kymlicka, 2001a, p. 22-23)

What follows from the above said is that without certain cooperation from the state in a form of multicultural policy, self-governance, language rights or legal exceptions there cannot be a multicultural dialogue – “(...) *it is the governing elites that in the name of the dominant group determine the frames of education for the weaker or minority groups (politically, economically, culturally, etc.). The policy of the majority of states – independently from the official declarations – prefers the assimilation processes. It is one of the most serious obstacles of currently conceived multicultural education (...)*” (Lewowiczki, 2000, p. 33)

## 2 The Meanders of the Dutch Educational Policy

Intercultural education in the Netherlands is an example of evolving changes in the sphere of educational policy. It is strongly connected with the character of the state that for centuries, since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, has been functioning in a greatly culturally diverse environment (The Netherlands is settled by approximately 120 national groups).

**Table 2** The Number of Immigrants (Allochthons) residing in the Netherlands vs. Local Community (Autochthons) in 2007 and 2011 with a Prognosis for 2020

	2007	2011	2020
<b>Number of People in the Netherlands</b>	16 357 900	16 699 813	17 069 200
<b>Number of Autochthons</b>	13 184,40	13 229 906	13 296 998
<b>Number of Allochthons, 1<sup>st</sup> Generation</b>	1 026,3* + 588,0**	1 068 689* + 662 871**	1 180 213* + 794 468**
<b>Number of Allochthons, 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation</b>	722,3* + 844,8**	830 442* + 862 539**	1 044 663* + 912 453**

\* “Non-Western” allochthons from Turkey, Morocco, Surinam, The Dutch Antilles and Aruba, China, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and Somalia.

\*\* “Western” autochthons from Indonesia (so called the Dutch India), Germany, Belgium, former Yugoslavia, and Great Britain.

Source: the author’s work based on <http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?VW+T>

The Netherlands is being inhabited by more than 3.2 million people with immigration lineage whose at least one parent was born outside the Netherlands. Out of them approximately 1.7 million comes from outside of the European cultural circle. 42% of newcomers were born in the Netherlands, i.e. they belonged to the second generation of immigrants. It is anticipated that in 2025 the percentage of people with immigration lineage will reach 22% and in the four large cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Den Haag and Utrecht this number will increase up to 50%.

The above state of affairs forces the Dutch government to engage into a very serious debate on the educational policy regarding the immigrant community. Depending on changeable governing coalition there are clearly seen changes being undertaken considering the educational reform. It is closely linked to the parallel evolving policy on immigration and integration (Penninx, 2006, p. 31-35).

Within the framework of the educational policy in the 1960's a programme "*Learning in Your Own Language and Culture*" (*Onderwijs Eigen Taal en Cultuur – OETC*) was implemented. It was of supportive character, aimed at maintaining one's own identity after coming back to the country of origin, or, in the case of the second generation, to the country of origin of one's parents. The initiative to implement this form of education came from the immigrants and was co-financed by the embassies of the immigrants' home states. After the initial success of this project it was introduced into the schools in the 1970's. In 1984 its status has been legally consolidated in the Act of Primary Education (*Nederlandse Taalunie on Onderwijs*, online). The OECT classes consisted in 80% of language learning, 10% of merged geography and history class, and in 10% of religion class (Protsiewicz, 2008, p. 154).

According to **H.B. Entzinger**, this programme initiated the creation of multicultural society that is tolerant to being different – "*(...) the debate on that topic was dominated by the respect for the culture of immigrants and the efforts of the government aiming at maintaining and development of the cultural identity of the ethnic groups. In such a way, already in early stages of immigration the government began subsidising foreigners' cultural organisations, one of the first examples of which was introduced in 1974 'Learning in Your Own Language and Culture' (OETC)*" (Protsiewicz, 2008, p. 154).

The programme initiative, which had both proponents and opponents, was accepted and in 1988 on the account of the amendment to the Act of Primary Education it changed the name from OETC to OALT (*Onderwijs allochtone levende talen*), i.e. learning the languages used by the immigrants.

The OALT programme has gained many supporters (independent research institutes, non-governmental organisations, etc.) who presented numerous expertise of its positive impact. One of those was produced by the Institute for Multicultural Development (*Het Instituutvoor Multiculturele Ontwikkeling*), which argued for the rightness of the OALT functioning and saw in it the most important aspect, i.e. the development of the process of mutual understanding,

the development of the process of learning the language, methods of reading and comprehension and skills of working with a dictionary.

Extremely important from the perspective of the programme's purposefulness was also the aspect of using the so called first (dominating) language in order to transfer the knowledge, strengthening at the same time the development of the Dutch language. Moreover, the quality of education played also quite essential role, i.e. cultural and pedagogical context during learning the first and the second language served to attain the best educational results (Turkenburg, 2002, p. 120).

The programme was pursued in the course of 1980's. It was a part of integration policy that aimed at maintaining one's own culture and identity. It was supposed to help in forming a tolerant multicultural society. It was assumed that integration of the immigrants with the Dutch society can be accomplished in twofold manner: by supporting the learning of the Dutch language, and at the same time through studying the immigrants' languages.

Therefore, there were two educational domains within the programme: cultural education and supporting the learning of Dutch. The most numerous groups were, at that time, Turks, Moroccans and Chinese. There were, however, smaller groups of Indians, Ethiopians and Somalis as well.

Within the framework of supporting the learning of Dutch four work models were put in practice:

- The immigrants' language was used in the class as a direct assistance in the process of conducting the class;
- The immigrants' language was used in the pre-teaching process during the class (i.e., the children were familiarised with issues that were to be addressed in the class in their own language);
- The pre-teaching process was conducted beside the regular classes;
- The immigrants' language was used in the remedial teaching process (repeating with the pupils in their own language the material, which they learnt during the classes conducted in Dutch) (Turkenburg, 2002, p. 120).

"Learning in Your Own Language and Culture" (OETC) functions till today, in spite of the fact that strategically it is not conform to the current integration policy regarding the immigrants. The programme has been successively modified, and was upheld mostly because of potential immigrants' protests.

The first educational programmes were directed towards foreigners and aimed at teaching them the basics of functioning in a culturally new society. For

years these programmes have been undergoing alterations; their content-related scope was changing as well. One thing stayed unaltered, namely the engagement of the Dutch state to help culturally different citizens in regard to equalising the chances. Accordingly to the constitutional presuppositions: *“All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted”*. (The Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2002)

Two other programmes belonging to the Dutch educational policy are also worthy of attention, namely, NT2 (learning the Dutch language as a foreign language) and IO (intercultural education), both of which were directed at the immigrants' children.

**C.A. Tazelaar** emphasises that the lack of a proper educational policy (e.g. not knowing the language) leads, in turn, to the limiting of the possibility for further education and ipso facto intellectual limitations. Not speaking Dutch means for the immigrants not understanding the texts and, ipso facto, not remembering the information (Tazelaar, 2002, p.63).

Education of the immigrants in the Netherlands refers to three basic issues:

- To educate the children and youth from the immigrant families,
- To enable them the education at the university level,
- To educate the adult immigrants, where the most important things are: teaching them the language, having the immigrants gain educational qualifications required at the job market and accepted by the state bodies, and professional retraining requiring the participation in school courses.

Education is one of the most important instruments in the process of immigrants' integration into the new society. The level of integration depends on the degree of education, which ultimately brings about open possibilities at the job market as well as a change of social status. Educational programmes for immigrants' desired effect is precisely in equalising the chances in the educational process. School and efficient teaching system help the immigrants to become rightful citizens who effectively function in social life of the Netherlands.

During last several years the level of education among the immigrants has significantly increased. A number of people with only a primary education have decreased. Higher percentage of people with a secondary education has been

noted. According to CBS (*Centraal Bureau Statistic*) the number of educated Turks has increased by 19%, Moroccans by 26%, Surinamese and Antilleans by 45%<sup>1</sup>. Still, there is a clear discrepancy in this matter between the native Dutch and immigrants. It is enough to refer to the basic data: there are still 50% of Turks and Moroccans without a primary school diploma, while this figure reaches merely 9% among the native Dutch<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 3** The level of the Dutch language proficiency among the largest ethnic groups living in the Netherlands (in %)

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Turks</b>	<b>Moroccans</b>	<b>Surinamese</b>	<b>Antillean</b>
<b>Problems with Dutch in Conversation</b>				
Always	32,7	15,6	4,5	4,2
Sometimes	39,8	38,0	10,2	24,1
Never	27,5	46,5	85,3	71,6
<b>Problems with Dutch when Reading</b>				
Always	46,8	47,1	17,3	7,1
Sometimes	45,4	41,1	34,0	42,9
Never	7,8	11,8	48,7	50,0
<b>Using Dutch when Talking with Partner</b>				
Never	42,3	47,0	2,9	17,8
Sometimes	33,8	35,4	14,7	22,0
Always	23,9	17,6	82,4	60,2
<b>Using Dutch when Talking with Children</b>				
Never	30,2	24,8	1,2	6,7
Sometimes	50,2	46,6	7,4	28,3
Always	19,6	28,6	91,4	65,0

Source: P. MATUSZ PROTASIEWICZ: *Integracja ...*, op.cit., p. 210.

The above list indicates an explicit dissonance in knowing the Dutch language between particular ethnic groups. The largest ignorance of the language exists among the Turks and Moroccans. It stems from the features of particularly hermetic and closed cultural group for which the mother tongue is the dominant language. The Surinamese and Antilleans, historically connected with the Netherlands (former colonies) have got a much more liberal approach

<sup>1</sup> More information on Central Bureau voor de Statistiek, available on: [www.cbs.nl](http://www.cbs.nl)

<sup>2</sup> TK, 2003-2004, 28 689, nr 8-9. *Report of the Second Chamber of the Dutch Parliament*, p. 262.

towards the “foreign” culture. They frequently speak Dutch as a second “mother” tongue.

Constantly changing programmes regarding the educational policy were not concluded with the anticipated results. 2001 is significant in this regard, for a report of the Scientific Council for Government Policy argued for firm reform regarding the training activities carried out. The immigrants’ children’s unceasing linguistic problems and their inability to find the way around within the school system were underlined.

The last decade has brought consecutive alterations in the intercultural integration policy. A particular emphasis was placed on the preschool education, a reason for which was the idea that only early contact with the language will help programme the mind of a young person efficiently. Textbooks and courses for the immigrants’ children appeared on the market („*Knop het in je oren*”, „*Laatwat van je horen*”, „*Taalplan Kleuters*” et al.).

Dutch educational system is characterised by pupils’ segregation in various types of schools. Such a way of its functioning is closely related to the socio-political order and the division of the society into the so called pillars. This social order did not raise any objections until “black school” began to emerge in districts inhabited in majority by the immigrants – Turks, Moroccans, and Surinamese. It became clear that such segregation leads to isolation of those groups and often it is connected with social exclusion of the allochthons.

Intercultural education is a result of coexistence of various cultural groups in the society. It is an attempt of finding a consensus between the groups that speak different languages and have different tradition and customs.

According the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science the most important assumptions of the intercultural education, the so called ICO (*Intercultureel Onderwijs*), are:

- Creating the interaction and cooperation opportunities for the pupils from various ethnic groups;
- Pedagogical atmosphere that fosters intercultural cooperation;
- Understanding for ethnic diversity in the educational process;
- The staff’s professional approach towards the pupils from various ethnic groups;
- Keeping the contact between the school and the parents coming from different cultures;
- Creating the educational programme after taking into account ethnically diverse staff, school’s regulations against discrimination, creating reformed

programmes of teaching Dutch and a programme dealing with culture that would include all ethnic groups constituting the school's community. (Protasiewicz, 2004, p. 229)

### **3 Remarks and Conclusions**

There are few fundamental issues that determine the evaluation of the Dutch integration policy. These issues shed light on the shape of the educational policy in the progressive stages of the implementation of the new concepts. Among the most important ones there are:

- The lack of translation of very general integration concept with keeping one's own culture stemming from the tradition of the Dutch pillar society into concrete actions;
- A wrong assumption regarding the immigrants' time spent in the Netherlands, and in a later period regarding their independent access into the society and the employment of citizen rights;
- Treating the immigrants as a subject of policy and including them in the welfare social system of the state resulted in their passivity, e.g. on the job or educational market;
- The marginalisation of the importance of socio-cultural integration and building a dialogue between the Dutch and the immigrants.

Unsatisfactory changes in the field of the educational policy towards the immigrants cause a heated socio-political debate in the Netherlands. The periodically alternating educational programmes, although often well assessed, do not bring about anticipated positive changes. This fact leads to the escalation of conflicts in the social sphere. An increasing pressure from the side of the governing circles on the newcomers to assimilate as well as their quickest possible access into the society though inculcating the local way of life is becoming apparent.

New restrictions in the immigration reform imposes on a potentially new citizen, inter alia, the obligation of passing the language exam even before the presumptive arrival to the Netherlands, as well as having a basic knowledge about the Dutch culture. These facts indicate a firm retreat from the "soft" integration policy employed not so long ago.

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