Religion, Education and Citizenship Education: The Challenge of Turning Religion Upside Down

Cok Bakker

Abstract

Reflecting on the link between religion and religious tradition(s) on the one hand and school and education on the other, and reflecting on the reasoning strategy to make sense of this link, people seem to tend strongly to think, argue and reflect in a deductive mode (this point is elaborated in par. 3). This part of the argument is followed by considering the religious claims people make concerning the impact of religion on the day-to-day educational practice, it is, empirically speaking. It is apparently wrong to take this deductive reasoning serious as a road to undisputable and unambiguous links between claims and practices (this point is elaborated in par. 4). Having identified deductive reasoning as wishful thinking or as a supposed but inadequate religious legitimatization of educational practices, which is demonstrated by the empirical educational praxis itself, the final part of the article deals with the question that arises again and anew, viz. how educational practices could be understood in their connection to religious beliefs (see par. 5). Here a paradigm-shift is needed.

Keywords: Religious Education, Religious schools, Diversity, Pillarization, Dutch Educational system

1. Introduction

Once I was observing an RE-lesson of a student-teacher. The lesson was about the Islam tradition and the student was doing well in explaining 'the five pillars of Islam' (the credo, the daily prayers, almsgiving, fasting and

pilgrimage) and the way these 'five acts, considered obligatory by believers, function as a kind of framework for worship and a point of reference for sincere commitment to Islam'.

Sitting in the back of the classroom I got the impression that the student was relatively successful in presenting a clear explanation of Islamic beliefs and practices, and in a way that the learners got involved. The interesting context of this lesson was a school with a formal Christian and with a mixed school population, located in a multi-cultural area in Rotterdam, the second biggest city in the Netherlands. The mixed population of the area was mirrored in the composition of the class room group. Many learners came from ethnic minority groups.

A very interesting moment was created by a boy who made clear to be a Muslim, but who apparently did not recognize very much from the contents of the lesson about 'the five pillars of Islam'; let aside that he could show and 'proof' to fellow classmates that he was a committed Islam-believer by means of the frame of reference that was just presented by the teacher.

Reflecting on the lesson afterwards, we discussed the question how to evaluate this incident. Was this a satisfying lesson on Islam? The contents, were they alright? After all, who is in charge to determine the contents of a RE-lesson? Is it 'the curriculum'? If so, then the question is transferred to another level, but essentially the question remains the same. But also, if the curriculum is in charge, the question is how dominant it should play a role in the topical development of the teaching process. And of course, how would the Muslim boy evaluate the lesson? And as the underpinning of an answer: whose claim about commitment is most valid, the boy's (as a believer) or the teacher's (as the outsider, but expert in religious studies)?

2. The Dutch Background of a 'pillarized' Educational System

Writing in an international (and so inevitably comparative) context, for a better understanding of the proposed shift in thinking, some background information about the Dutch national educational system is needed. In the Netherlands, the debate on the 'identity of a school' is influenced by the long

and dominant history of a close link between religious traditions (mainly the Christian tradition) and the design of the national school system. For almost 100 years now, most schools, formally speaking, are so called Christian schools. This is not an accidental adverb that is used to indicate some of the Dutch schools, but it is a specific indication for a certain grouping of schools ('pillars'; Dutch: 'zuilen') and it has a strong juridical basis. In any discussion on the relationship between religion and education, it is important to see the Dutch situation in the light of an educational policy that is strongly determined by *Article 23 of the Constitution*. This Article proclaims the right of all people to establish a school by themselves and to organise and provide education. Of course, such a right is restricted by basic criteria of quality and quantity, but in principle, everyone is free to set up schools by private initiative. Apart from this, the State provides public education. It is important to know that in a highly secularized and religiously diverse country, public schools account for only 25% of the schools; the rest is composed out of different types of private schools, providing education from a specific religious background or a specific pedagogical or philosophical concept. Examples of these schools are Roman Catholic, Protestant, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, Montessori, Jenaplan, Waldorf schools (in Dutch: 'Vrije Scholen') and others. Remarkable is that about 30% of the total number of Dutch schools is Roman Catholic and roughly another 30% is Protestant. Of the 15% of private schools left, some only have a specific pedagogical or philosophical background, and some in combination also regard themselves as 'Christian'. After all, this means that about 65% of the schools in the Netherlands are formally speaking Christian schools (Ter Avest, Bakker *et al.* 2007: 203-220; Vreeburg 1997).

This dual system could be seen as the rather common distinction between public schools (*'openbare scholen'*) and private schools (*'bijzondere scholen'*). However, in comparison with the situation in other countries, it is important to realise that the State pays the full costs of running all schools, which is a crucial difference. Nearly one century of this educational policy[1] has led to a rather rigid 'pillarized' educational system

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[1] The freedom of education, including the equalisation of the financial treatment of public and private schools, has been guaranteed by law since 1921.

(*verzuiling*): education is organised on specific philosophical, religious and/or pedagogical foundations; schools with the same affiliation are clustered in separate and rather isolated 'pillars'. In the past, even the recent past, these pillars used to function largely independent from each other.

In former days this picture of a fragmented society was not only true in education, but the whole of Dutch society was organised in 'pillars', creating sub-societies with their own unions, newspapers, political parties, health care systems, and so on. Homogeneity within a specific pillar was a common good. The religious orientation of the various 'domains-of-living' (family, church, school, work, union, newsmedia) was more or less similar, so there was a close relationship between the religious orientation of the family a child was raised in, the church the family belonged to and the school the children attended. This was, sociologically speaking, supported by sets of life-styles and conceptions of the good that were not questioned and were shared by all those belonging to the pillar. It is since the sixties that society has changed fundamentally (no more traditional 'pillars', only some remnants here-and-there), but it is only in the last decades that some fundamental questions have been raised related to this pillarization in education. Despite this questioning *Article 23* is still there (Onderwijsraad 2012; Ter Avest *et al.* 2007).

Let us say, 'de-pillarized', and highly secularized and religiously diverse, Dutch society 'still' features a pillarized system of education all along the confessional dividing lines. This has important implications for the way education in general and Christian education in particular is shaped in daily practices. More than 1.3 million inhabitants out of 16 million have their roots in other countries and cultures. A small number of them are born in other Western countries, but the majority come from or have their roots in countries with other cultures. This very often implies that they belonged or belong to other religious traditions. In most cases, this means a tradition other than Christianity. Most of the ethnic minorities come from Morocco and Turkey and have an Islamic background. The second largest group is the people from Surinam with respectively a Hindu, Islamic or a Christian background. Next to this important tendency of an increase in ethnic, cultural and religious plurality there has been a strong turn to secularization. The statistics show that only 25% attend services on a regular basis (once a month or more; SCP).

Remarkably, still 65% of the schools are Christian schools. One can expect that since the sixties and parallel to developments in society a tension has developed between the formal that is denominational corporate identity of a school (the identity-on-paper) and the actual identity of the school (the identity-in-practice). Secularization, the increase of cultural and religious pluralism in society, combined with an open admittance policy in Christian schools, have not left the schools untouched. So, societal developments urged teachers, school directors, governors, but also the parents to reflect anew on the religious affiliation of a school (TerAvest 2007; Onderwijsraad 2012).

Today, a Christian school in most of the cases will have a plural school population, not at least also religiously speaking. So, no longer, there is a big difference to see between a Christian (private) school and a state (public) school. It is important to realize that the variety in religious and cultural plurality differs from school to school in general and also from Christian school to Christian school. At least the conclusion is undisputable to draw that the times of the religious homogeneity within a particular pillar are over (Braster 1996; Faber 2012; Ter Avest & Bakker 2009). In total 7.5% of the total Dutch school population comes from a non-Dutch background, and already in the beginning of the nineties a majority of the Christian schools have students from ethnic minorities, that is 53% in Protestants schools and 72% in Roman Catholic schools. Most of these students have a Muslim background (Ankersmit 1992).

The tendency towards secularization in society is reflected in both state and denominational schools. What is true for society in general is also true for children and their involvement in church life. So there are the Christian schools where – on an average – only 25% of the children/ youngsters attend church services on a regular basis (Vreeburg 1997; SCP). This corresponds with the overall picture of society. Given this average, a huge variety is the daily reality, even to the extremes. Examples of this can be found in the big cosmopolitan cities in the midst or the western part of the Netherlands, where students from ethnic minorities form 80 or 90% of the school population, which is true for both public and private schools. In a research done by the Utrecht research group in the school year 1998-1999 the researchers came across a Protestant elementary school where only 11% of the parents identified themselves as Christians, 48% were Muslim, and 17%

were Hindu. A further 24% indicated that they had no specific religious background. Remembering the rigid segregation between the pillars in the recent past, it is also relevant to mention that among this 11% of Christians a number belonged to a Chinese church and that the majority belonged to the Roman Catholic Church due to their descent from the Cape Verde families (Ter Avest *et al.* 1999). A subtle marginal note would be than to realize that 'Roman-Catholic' is not the same as 'Protestant' and that Chinese churches have developed in their own ways, far away from Protestantism in the West ....

At the same time, it is good to realize that in the pillar of Christian schools there are 'still' the rather conservative schools with a strict and precise admittance policy, where one could expect a high grade of homogeneity. So, as said, there is a huge diversity within the pillars, originally designed with the opposite intention (Bakker & Rigg 2004).

In this changing landscape Christian schools react in many different ways. They could either passively undergo these changes or could pro-actively try to develop a policy by which they could adequately deal with the changed and still changing circumstances. However, how they react finally, the preceding and crucial question is if and how involved stakeholders reflect on the link between a religious tradition and the organizing of education.

3. Linking Religion and Education: The Default is a Deductive Way of Reasoning

Because of and against the background of the pillarized system of education teachers, school directors and school board members feel themselves obliged to legitimize why their school is called a Christian school and how their school could be distinguished from schools who function as pillars. Of course, this is not the daily concern of the teacher or school director (Bakker & Rigg 2004), but as soon as the issue about the 'identity of the school' is raised then an explanation seems to be expected. It is interesting to observe the kind of reasoning mechanism that is triggered to explain a school's position. Very often it is a rather naïve, deductive way of reasoning (Bakker 2002: 97-124; Bakker & Rigg 2004).

In the mechanism of a deductive reasoning a specific concept precedes the development of educational processes in the school. In other

words: one reasons from the general concept to the concrete practice(s). The ideal is that the daily practice is cultivated and modelled by the concept. The central and leading principles and concepts of the school (and/or its overarching foundation) are perceived more or less independently from the daily practices in the school. Is the school formally speaking a 'Christian school', which is formally articulated by its position in the Dutch educational context, then daily practice is supposed to be shaped by, translated from, derived from the Christian identity concept. Implicitly, without doubt, there will be a mutual influence between the dynamics of daily practice and the position and impact of the steering principles and concepts, and this will have its own effects, but when it comes to *explicit* reasoning and debate the default seems to be that this is not primarily taken in account. The concept concerned could have all kind of contents and shapes: it could be a specific Dutch-reformed theology, a concept of open catholic education, or the concept of 'active plurality' as it is proclaimed in the 'pillar' of the Dutch public schools. It could be a Hindu educational concept based on the Karmavidian tradition or a specific pedagogical concept (like e.g. Maria Montessori's). All these concepts are – in deductive reasoning mechanisms – perceived, experienced and very often cherished as absolute values. They are perceived by the stakeholders involved as good guarantees for good or even the best education. Once such a specific concept is chosen, the next job is to elaborate the concept and to translate this into good daily practices (Bakker & Rigg 2004).

Most easy this reflection process could be observed when it comes to explicit religious topics, like the policy making about school prayers, the objectives and contents of Religious Education or the ways religious feasts are expected to be celebrated. One could possibly presume that the more conservative and orthodox schools have a stronger inclination to reflect deductively like this, but in our observation this is not true. The more conservative argument that it is obliged for every child, whatever his background might be, to celebrate Christmas, because (!) the school is a Christian school, is as much a deductive way of reasoning as another Christian school where the team decides from (!) a more liberal theological point of view to cherish their concept of being good hosts and to organise *Id-ul-Fitr* (the breaking of the fasts), because of the many Muslim children that take part in the school population. Rather independent from their theological

position both schools reason from a certain general concept and interpretation of being a Christian school to the more concrete level of policy and decision making (Bakker & Ter Avest 2010; Faber 2012).

More difficult to recognize is this same pattern concerning the non-explicit religious practices. School culture, pedagogical concepts of childhood and cognitive development, a shared understanding and practice of 'good' (!) education, are without doubt somehow related to the leading concept and identity of the school. But how? And how do teachers reflect on this relationship?

Let me start wit an anecdote: to my surprise, but also what made me intellectually very much involved in these school ethos issues, was the following discovery. In 1998 I was asked to design a 2 year course for the teaching team of a primary school in the West of The Netherlands, downtown Rotterdam). The Christian identity of the school was frequently debated because of the high percentage of children with a Muslim background. After some time the discussion has got bogged down and people got frustrated. It seemed to be a good management decision to create time and space to renew the discussion and to ask 'someone from outside the school' to facilitate such a project, asking this person to monitor the talks and present some new ideas how you could possibly cope with dilemmas without clashing all the time. The leading question was: 'what does it mean to call your school a Christian school, given the Rotterdam context, and taking this context (in all its diversity) seriously for the full 100%?' We were already on track for some months when I discovered that many members of the team were participating simultaneously in an external course on 'Norms and Values; And how to take responsibility for this in the daily educational praxis'. Remarkably, reflection on the Christian identity of the school and the issue of 'Norms & Values' were not linked; not to say, was not seen as the same topic. It is an illustration how easily a gap could come up between the talks on the religious affiliation of the school and other practices in school. Or may be better put: there is a risk of an isolated talk on school identity.

Between 1999 and 2006 some of our research team were involved in a course module with the title 'The identity of the school'. This module was constituent part of a nationally organized 2-year course on school leadership. In the Netherlands, newly appointed school leaders were expected to attend this course (1 day a week) in order to be better prepared for their complicated

jobs. Besides all kind of managerial themes the students had the assignment to reflect on the question how they were leading the development of their school as an organisation. What did they do to have their teams involved in formulating a mission?, how do they act as critical discussion partners, both leading and compassionate?, and how would they put on the agenda the issue of school ethos and religious affiliation? For this assignment they wrote elaborate papers. We made a connection between the course (and how we were involved in this and our research programs). So, the written papers functioned in a twofold way: they were the students' input in the course with the ambition to discuss, to evaluate and finally to assess as well as the empirical data of our research project. Parallel to the courses we made an extensive analysis of the way school leaders reflect on the link between religion and their educational practices and we published on this afterwards (Bakker, Miedema & Van der Kooij 2007).

Also in this research project (as we had seen already in other research projects; Bakker & Rigg 2004) the conclusion was confirmed strongly that if a school leader is explicitly asked to reflect on the religious affiliation of his/her school, they start to reason deductively. We discussed this already before. In addition we made up the following conclusions:

First, the observations, reflections and perceptions of the principals are reported in 'the verbal mode'. Precisely because we notice that so much complexity and emotions and also biographical complexity is part-and-parcel of the identity-debate, we can be sure that many is lost in the verbalizing of the experiences. So, concerning the school leader as a person as well as the empirical praxis in school, there is much more dynamics and divergent complexity than what could ever be represented in a verbal reflection. Verbalizing is just a poor aspect of what is 'really' going on.

Secondly, theorizing and making analyses of these complicated matters with the help of theoretical distinctions (by using theory as analytical instruments), is a difficult exercise for the average principal. Going to and fro theory and praxis, the praxis often dominates theory. Not primarily because of difficulty of the intellectual effort or a lack of fascination, but just because of the high pressure of daily activities. Too less time for reflection. Very often it is experienced as a too demanding issue in policy-making to create time and space to make reflection possible, both at the individual level and the collective level (Bakker & Rigg 2004)

Nevertheless, thirdly, if a principal decides to create this time and space for reflection in the school's diary anyway, ambivalence is easily created. This ambivalence is related to the unclearliness where identity considerations should focus on. Is it only about explicit religious issues? Very often identity talks are interpreted in that direction, which quite easily suggests that school identity is restricted to the explicit religious domain and is going to be discussed isolated from other domains. The pitfall might be, again, that the average teacher is not aware of a broader interpretation of the school's identity by neglecting the daily decision-making, class room management, the assessment of learners' performances, etc. as if these issues were not at stake.

Finally, once the more this study makes clear that in Dutch education the homogeneity of the pillars in the educational system is of bygone times. The high number of principals that claim to work at a school with a specified and contextualized own program is the most explicit prove for this. At the same time we observe that the form and the formality of the pillarized system still exist, influencing the debates on the school's identity, be it in a varying way and intensity (Ter Avest, Bakker & Miedema 2008; Bakker & Rigg 2004; Bakker 2006). The challenge is to mobilize the 'thinking-power', the reflexivity of teachers and principals, to re-define the connection between (religious) commitments on the one hand and educational practices at the other. The reward for this will be *a more authentic narrative* on how one believes in the Christian, or the Muslim, or the Humanistic identity of the school.

Thus far I have focused very much on the 'meso-level' of school policy. On other levels we could distinguish similar reasoning schemes, e.g. on the micro-level of classroom teaching. The inclination to reason deductively is correspondingly demonstrated by the example at the beginning of this article. In this particular case deductive reasoning is at hand on two different dimensions. The first is how we are dealing with a curriculum itself, understanding the curriculum as if this determines the expected and provoked learning outcomes, which is an illusion to some extent (Hargreaves XX). A lot more could be said about this, but this is not our theme at the moment, because it is not about the explicit link between religion and education. The second dimension of deductive reasoning on the micro-level is how religion (in this case: the Islam-tradition) is represented in school. The concept is

clear: 'Islam = 5 pillars', and this concept is leading for the teaching process. In other words: these contents are expected to be communicated to the class. But what if in the it comes out that the concept itself seems to be questionable, or at least ambivalent? Do we work with a 'codex' of the characteristics of religions, aiming to teach this to children? Of course, one could criticize this by discussing the aspect of 'power'. Who is in charge to tell what the codex should be? In my eyes this would be a discussion to be warmly welcomed, but it is not exactly the point of this contribution. The heart of the matter is if we approach religion as if one representation of a religion is the indisputable concept that could be applied to teaching practices.

Parallel to the writing of this article I was busy with another article quoting a teacher who reasons as follows: 'my school is a Christian school which means that we cherish Christian values'. Apparently, this looks like a sound elucidation, and the problem probably is that it sounds so convincing that hardly no one would ask what he actually means by this. Because if he would have been asked – which was actually done in the research project he was participating in – it came out that he hardly could manage to give illustrations of these concrete, so called Christian values; let alone, the confusion that came up discovering that the values that were expressed ('respect for all that lives') could as easy also be typified as humanistic, Muslim or Hindu values.

4. Religious Claims and the 'Empirical Mis-matches'

In the text above, the radical deductive approach in applying a religious concept to the educational praxis of a school is initially already criticized, be it sometimes between the lines. It is a quite simple but effective observation: two schools with an identical 'concept of their religious affiliation' could quite easily differ in culture and the way concrete education is developed. Entering the two schools, talking to the teachers and students, all kind of differences could be observed and experienced from the very first minutes on. How is this possible? Quite an easy question to answer. Is it not true that one would be more surprised if no differences would occur at all? Apparently, there is more at stake than just the concept of good education and the formal commitment to a certain religious tradition. If and how this

concept is of any influence depends on the awareness and interpretations of every single actor involved, and besides these influences, also many other influences are there and play their roles, like the individual commitments of teachers, their passions, ambitions and frustrations, the configuration of the (religious) backgrounds of the children (believe it or not, but in the Netherlands schools are labelled as 'white schools' and 'black schools'), the housing of the school, the atmosphere of tidiness or disorder, the well-mannered children we have (or not), the individual and without doubt differing interpretations of the daily news, of the family lives in the local district and of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and not to talk about the external expectations of the professional, communal or governmental field.

Having said this, I would like to bring up our own policy when developing our research and consultancy projects: we presume that the formal identity of religiously affiliated schools does not precede the thinking and acting of the teacher, but that the topical identity and ethos arise from and receives its shape from the decision-making and acting of the teachers of that very school. It is 'identity-*in-actu*'. In the acting actual identity is generated continuously, to be distilled from practice. This identity formation includes continuous verbal and non-verbal communicative processes. The formation of identity does not work only deductively, but emphatically features an inductive mechanism: 'Morality arises from the lasting interaction between the members of a specific and concrete community' (Taylor 1994; Wenger 1991; 1998; Klaassen 1996 (referring to Durkheim); Baumann 1999; Ter Avest & Bakker 2009).

Let me elaborate on this by making this position more concrete in line with some of the examples and cases that come across in the earlier paragraphs of this contribution:

> – We expect the committed Muslim boy (at least claiming to be a Muslim himself) at the beginning of this article, not to be disqualified as a Muslim by the non-Muslim teacher, even if he is teaching that the concept of the 5 pillars of Islam is the most important frame of reference. Even though the teacher's initial concept is clear, it is in the practice of that very moment that it is decided what will be the concrete and final impact of the official

curriculum and to what learning effects this will lead. At that very moment, the teacher is about to make crucial decisions, on the spot, and in 'split seconds' (Doyle & Ponder 1978). To take this to the extreme and to put it bluntly: the realised practice of the teacher's decision-making is generating the school's identity for this boy: is his belief-claim disqualified or not?

– We met the case of the two schools, both serious in interpreting their formal Christian identity with the eye on a decision how to deal with religious feasts. In the complex daily reality and against the biographical, historical and contextual background of the school as a organization and of all the team members individually, the one school decides to celebrate Christmas only (because ...) and the other school decides to celebrate both Christmas and Id-ul-Fitr (because ...). Realizing all the additional factors that are coming in, the moment a team prepares the decision, it is self-evident that there is not just one, logically sound deduction from the formal Christian identity.

– And to give a third illustration, referring to the case of the school principals: in a sound way one could describe the school's identity, but at the same time one could have the feeling that the wording and the documents do not really cover what really makes the school into just this school. Or, as a principal, one could trigger an internal discourse on religious ideals and principles, that is finally experienced to be set up rather isolated from the more essential and topical discussions in the school and the team (cf. the school leaders and the anecdote of the Norms and Value project). Or one could paint a sound and clear picture of the school's religious profile ('This is a Christian school..., so Christian values') and be that convincing and persuasive (or friendly selling this story) that no one takes the initiative or even dare to question and interrogate.

5. A Paradigm Shift: Moving Away from a Deductive Way of Reasoning

In some respect and for several reasons it might look rewarding not allowing the complexity of the empirical reality to come in. More easily it leads to clear patterns, grip and control on processes, etc. But our analysis before, reveals the simplification of reality that is imbued with this. Opposed to this, the challenge is not to start with an essentialized image of religion and religious identity (cf. Baumann's notion of the *reification* of religion, culture etc.; Baumann 1999) and to overcome the suggestion as if we reason with a single, undoubted interpretation of a tradition, religion or culture.

The variable 'religion' in an educational context is never on its own, but always related to a bigger or smaller number of other variables inside and outside the school (Taylor 1994). In this sense, realizing this, religious claims need to be de-constructed all the time and need to be seen in its interrelation with other variables (see above). As a first step of reflection.

But let us realize that school never is neutral in its program and acting: commitments (even if they are fragmented and diffuse), passions and ideals are playing important roles in the day-to-day decision making of the teachers (and other actors) in the school. It is in these dynamics that the school will get a specific 'colour' and profile. Through the daily processes, although they are complex, and very often implicit, the school unavoidably will have its own characteristics. In addition to the first step of de-constructing claims, there is also the challenge to make this integrated process of identity formation explicit and to reflect on this individually and collectively.

My impression is that the so often obligatory talks on religious identity of schools – that is so easily detached from the experienced practices – would benefit greatly from the paradigm-shift we are discussing now. On the one hand, it might be seen as a big step forward that we do not keep on asking again and again to put the religious identity item on the agenda, knowing the different types of aversion it might evoke (Bakker 2004; Versteegt 2010). In other words: we do not burden teams with this heavy stuff anymore. On the other hand, in line with the proposed paradigm-shift, we start with reflection on the daily practices, wondering who we are, what we do, how we evaluate the quality of what we do, and how we could

improve. Professionality implies the intention to reflect like this (Schön 1987; Wenger 1998). This latter approach, in my view, would lead us finally also to a talk on worldview, views on life and the meaning of life and beliefs and (eventually!) also on religious beliefs. It is important to stress that we organize the discussion in this order (so, not starting with the 'given fact' that the school has a religious affiliation in some way, but to trigger profound reflection on daily practices).

Besides the more powerful and stimulating approach of this strategy to overcome frustration and alienation, the strategyt also seems to match with the spirit of times, both broader in society and more specifically in education, that offers appropriate starting points for the proposed strategy. I will mention some of them in the following.

First, in Dutch society, in the academic world as well as in education there has been a growing awareness that neutrality as such does not exist. Even the academic world has agreed that academics do have their own stances and work with and from their specific premises and paradigms (cf. Kuhn's theory on scientific revolutions). And so it is in education: whether a school is a Christian school or a public school, a school is never neutral and has its own profile. To some extent this profile is explicit or could be made explicit, but characteristics mainly remain implicit. Besides this, people have their images of a school anyway. The eventually formalised religious affiliation of a school, e.g. the claim to be a 'Christian school', is an explicit statement, but many more explicit and implicit variables actually give profile to the school and helps people to create, to construct their images (plural!) of this very school.

I will not elaborate on this here and now, but interestingly in the Netherlands also public schools (originally perceived as 'neutral') have started to reflect on how they deal and should deal with life-questions, life themes and also philosophical and religious themes (Bakker 2010). Or to put it in the terminology of this article: also a public school has a specific identity (Braster 1996).

Secondly, there is a growing awareness that the professionalism of the teacher is not just an *instrumental* professionalism, but that individual characteristics of the teacher are crucial in the ultimate processes in which professional behaviour is shaped. In spite of the many standardized protocols, the agreed lists of teacher competences and pupil performance

measuring instruments, which are not to be disqualified, there is also the individual biography of the teacher and the subjective interpretation of all the 'instruments'. It is hard to measure the quality of an 'understanding attitude' as a teacher, but safely we could assume that this attitude will have an effect in teaching processes. This *subjective* and *normative* dimension of professional behaviour, and the growing awareness of this, opens the door for another type of reflection on the identity of the profession and finally also on the collective identity of the team of professionals of a certain school. The real professional also reflects on the normative dimension and the meta-level of his/her professional acting. An exchange of these reflections in a team quite easily could be characterized as a collective reflection on the identity of the school, without the risk of alienation when starting in the deductive mode (Bakker 2013; Schön 1987; Klaassen 1996; Weggeman 2007).

A third consideration regards the primary task of the school. In Dutch schools it is a popular saying: 'A school is not a church' (very often said when identity considerations get stuck). And indeed, in the deductive mode, the pitfall always will be to end up in theological debates and an unsolvable polarization. A school primarily is seen as a pedagogical institution. This implies that there is an appropriate pedagogical concept and a vision how to realise educational goals. It is about the answers on the value loaden questions: to know about *good* education, and to know how to be a *good* school themselves; but also evaluating yourself continuously, and striving to develop into a *better* school. The notions of 'good' and 'better' presuppose premises and references. Inevitably these processes are at stake in all schools. This is inevitably related to a philosophy of life at least, and probably it is also about religious beliefs, but, let us say, in an integrated way. Whatever answer is given, it is value-loaden.

We could wonder if this is also true for schools where the professionals just do their work and are not that much those reflective practitioners as we as a academics would like them to be. It is interesting to develop an answer to this question by realizing, that even if no one explicitly reflects on 'good education', teachers still make decisions all the time and that in this decision-making certain patterns could be observed, related to an implicit idea of good and bad. In the series of acts and decisions, the teacher implicitly contributes in a certain way and direction (!) to the specific profile of the school.

Recent research among the Dutch population (done by *Motivaction*) has shown that 26% of the Dutch would characterize themselves as 'unaffiliated spirituals'. An interesting finding, if we realize that modern professionals are probably not that much interested anymore in the formal affiliation of a school (as a manifestation of institutionalized religion), but that this does not mean that religiosity and/or spirituality are out of sight (Berghuijs 2012).

Finally than, we come to the issue of Citizenship education. 'Only now, in this stage?', one could wonder, realizing that it is an explicit notion in the title of this contribution. An easy reaction could be (but still totally true in my eyes) that all that has been said thus far, was already about citizenship, in the sense that we have explored how we could understand religion as a feature of a modern society. Apparently, how we perceive religion as a relevant factor in the public domain is one of the highlighted elements of Citizenship education (cf. Jackson 2003; 2004).[2] What we did, on the one hand, is to tone religion down, and try not to see religion as avariable that dominates other variables. Religion is better to be understood as an 'interrelated and interdependent variable', together with other variables like cultural background, ethnicity, gender, language, socio-economic status, etc. On the other hand, when religion is seen as being integrated in daily practices, as a dimension, it is always there, be it more or less influential, and more or less explicitly. Reflecting on these practices could make professionals more aware of the normative dimension and could bring this to the surface.

All along this nuancing and integrating, we learned that religious claims probably could be deconstructed by academics, but that reified representations of the truth at the same time still could stay powerful. They might seem to be unreal or untrue in their deconstruction, but for many they still can stay real. Real or not, justifiable or not, at least religious claims are real in their consequences.

So, even if this 'easy answer' might satisfy, there is more to say. In the Netherlands, but also broader in Europe, Citizenship Education (CE) is an excellent example of the integrated way religion could be discussed in

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[2] Also see The European Wergeland center on Citizenship Education (www.theewc.org).

education, not starting in the deductive mode. CE is seen as a very important issue in educational politics and many initiatives are taken to develop CE. After the 9/11 attacks (on the global stage) and the murder of the famous Dutch movie maker Theo van Gogh by a Muslim extremist in 2004 and the murder of the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 (on the national stage), an urgency is felt to take care for safety in our society. With this aim a heavy agenda is put on education. And, of course, elaborating this for CE it is already soon not only about safety, but also about the issue how to deal with differences. The climate in the Netherlands, but also broader in Europe, is one of urgency and has led to an important trend to develop CE further.

So, in the Netherlands it is agreed to have CE and quite a lot of energy is invested to organize the subject. Poor attention however is paid to the presupposed leading ideas of 'the good citizen' and 'the ideal society'. What kind of picture do we see? On what arguments and vision do we develop our ideas how we could ever live together harmoniously and how we could deal with conflict and differences. We need to have an answer on these questions before we could explore the ways we could educate our children to become that 'good citizen' and to contribute to society in a way that they (co-)create the good society (cf. Jackson 2004).

Coming to the end of this contribution, I would mention Citizenship education as a perfect illustration of the type of talks we need to have in our schools. In order to develop a subject we think we should have in every school, fundamental talks are requested, with the highest urgency. Independent from a religious affiliation, every school has to reflect on 'the good citizen' and 'the ideal society', and inevitably, sooner or later, ideals, beliefs and probably religious convictions are at the table. Quite a secular starting point (in bigger words: a talk and exploration of the good life), but also a space where professional teachers, children/students and eventually also their parents are invited to be explicit about their premises, ideals and beliefs.

6. Finally

In Christian schools, in public schools, in Muslim schools, do we dare to turn religion upside down, in the sense that we do not start our talks on the identity of the school with the self-evident claim that the religious affiliation

is 'translated' somehow into educational practices, but just to start with a focused and fundamental reflection on the educational practice itself?

If we do, we could avoid the problem of different interpretations of religious believing as such, we do not have to solve the pillarization problem anymore (every school has a unique profile / identity), and we could prevent ourselves from the often experienced frustration when it comes to identity considerations.

The agenda is to start the open talks in the schools, individually and collectively reflecting on daily educational practice. It takes courage to do so, because principally it is left open if and how religion will come in and, if it comes in, we cannot be sure in advance that it will be in the easy to recognize and ready-made patterns and schemes. But when it comes in, we can be sure that it is sized down to the level religion is actually and authentically interpreted and making sense.[3]

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[3] My experience is, leading these type of talks in schools and looking at our research findings, that very often and rather easy life issues, world view, ideals, also religious beliefs are discussed very soon (cf. Bakker & Ter Avest 2010).

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Cok Bakker
Religious Education
Faculty of Humanities
Utrecht University
The Netherlands