Learning for life. Developing and implementing a dialogical hermeneutical-communicative approach at nine primary schools in the Netherlands.

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I. Abstract
We present in this paper the results of two government funded research projects in religious and worldview education (RWE) in the Netherlands: the development of a concept and model of dialogical hermeneutical-communicative education (HC model), and the implementation of this concept and model at nine primary schools.

Our dialogical hermeneutical-communicative approach is inspired by the model of the Flemish pedagogue and theologian Didier Pollefeyt (2008, 2011) who suggests that in pluralized European societies religious education should mediate between traditions and the life world of the student. This mediation ought to facilitate the process of attributing meaning to life. Tradition is a concept referring to all kinds of meaning systems, philosophies of life and religions. Starting from plural and conflicting interpretations of reality in the classroom the teacher addresses these hermeneutical nodes and creates encounter and dialogue. He guides students to underlying themes that are connected to traditions. Confronted with these sources students are invited to make choices with regard to their own life story, and also to communicate these choices to themselves and to each other in words, signs and symbols.

In our contextualization of Pollefeyt we stress two aspects: 1. life questions of students should be the starting point of a didactical trajectory in religious education (voicing
students; cf. Stern, 2007); 2. students should be invited to answer to the wisdom of traditions and co-students in a creative way, using their imagination. Therefore we suggest as a supplement to the three didactical roles described by Pollefeyt (guide/cultural guide, moderator/coach, and witness/role-model) the role of the imaginator (Van den Berg, 2014; Mulder, 2015).

During a two years action research project (2014-2016) we implemented this dialogical hermeneutical-communicative model at nine primary schools. This project, Learning for life, is unique because of the cooperation between secular (public) schools, Christian schools and cooperation schools. It is also unique because public schools are deliberately willing to integrate their teaching of religion and citizenship or philosophy in a way of dialogical education in which religious traditions play a major part as sources of wisdom. With this attitude they go beyond a position – held for years – as a so-called neutral school and they construe a practice in which plurality and encounter is explored. The results are promising: it appears that the revised model, originally developed in the Belgian context with a dominant position of Roman-Catholic education (Derroitte, Meyer, Pollefeyt & Roebben, 2014), can be appropriated in the pluralized and secularized Dutch educational context (Geurts, Ter Avest & Bakker, 2014) in a fruitful way. Therefore, we developed new terms for the key-roles teachers play in guiding the learning process of the pupils in plural classroom.

2. The urgency of a dialogical hermeneutical-communicative approach for RWE education

The need for a new approach to religious and worldview education (RWE) gains urgency. In many cases the existing practice does not take the views and abilities of students into account. We demonstrate this by presenting two examples of primary schools. De Polsstok [The Leaping Pole] in Amsterdam (South-East) is a school that wants to take all the worldviews and cultural sources and backgrounds of the students into account. The school wants to offer good education to all children, education that is tailored to the talents and abilities of the children. Every class consists of children from different religious traditions (Christian, Muslim, Hindu) and also from different cultures (Latin-American, African, Dutch). Teachers underline the equality between these traditions and cultures, which should result in respect for every child and for every teacher.

De Wonderboom [The Miracle Tree] in Amersfoort (North) is a Christian primary school stemming from the Protestant tradition. All children are, in the view of the school, good and complete as they are, for all are created in the image of God. The children are raised in different religious and non-religious worldviews and also the school team is a mix of Christian and non-Christian teachers. The school acknowledges tensions between these orientations, but chooses to stick to Christian sources and feasts in religious education. Respect is one of the most important values that are cherished by the school.

[http://www.polsstok.nl/](http://www.polsstok.nl/)
Despite the great differences in population and context teachers of both schools report that it is difficult to make the students subject of their own religious and worldview development. They experience a lack of vision regarding perspective and aims of RWE and also they need more knowledge about possible forms and methods. This experience, due to major transitions in the Dutch society like secularization, individualization and multi-culturalization, is shared by schools all over the country. School documents from schools in middle and southern parts of the Netherlands show ambitions that seem quite difficult to put into practice. Children should be educated to ‘world citizens’, curious and receptive to all kinds of cultural and religious traditions. Practices show to be rather poor.

Literature research unfolds that until the nineties in the last century little information and materials were available on child centred RWE. And even today we know just bits and pieces about the religious and worldview development of children. With the schools we addressed initial questions like: How can a powerful learning environment be constructed in which the religious and worldview development from every child is fostered? What abilities and skills need to be stimulated to contribute to RWE?

We discovered that we need more knowledge about symbolising, dialogising and philosophising with children to be able to improve practices which create encounters with religious and worldview sources that will be fruitful to learning processes in which the questions of children are starting points.

The two schools participated in a research program for a doctoral thesis (Van den Berg, 2014) that addressed two questions, aimed at a transformation of RWE. These exemplary questions reflect the situation of many schools in the Netherlands and our research from 2008 until today point to an increasing urgency in the need to answer these questions. The questions are: How does a learning environment look like that fosters the religious and worldview development of all students interacting with a religious and worldview question, phenomenon or source? How can we introduce all students to a manifold of cultural and religious stories in an inviting way?

In both questions the word all is of central importance. Both schools want to respect the enormous diversity with which a teacher is confronted. They want to create dialogical learning environments that are playgrounds for imagination and for appropriation of religious and worldview sources.

We discovered that teachers have a lot of experience in reading or telling religious and other stories, for instance at the start of the school day, but that they have few skills and materials that contribute to practices in which students discover and explore these narratives themselves. There is a need for pedagogical and didactical frame works that foster an autonomous search of the students with regard to attributing meaning to existential questions. In our model we try to address these challenges, based on our research at nine primary schools. The life questions of students are a starting point for the construction of a learning environments in this research. Sources of wisdom from various traditions and modes of cultural expression (film, theatre, art, literature, music) are made disposable for the students in such a way that they can explore, discuss and appropriate
them in a creative way. In that process they use a variety of abilities. Teachers need to reflect on different roles to guide students in these learning process.

3. The societal and educational context for this new approach: The Dutch situation.

Our project Learning for Life Meaning is a project that has the characteristics of the culture and society in which it was designed and executed, it is a Dutch affair. We shall explore the Dutch educational system and religious context briefly. But being a Dutch project it could not have become what it was without the influence of the wider context of Europe. Although every country has its own political and religious history in Europe, our project bears the traces of the culture and the religious climate of the surrounding countries. In almost all European Countries a debate has started about content and aim of RWE. Not only because of 9/11 and its subsequent debates about the position of Islam, but also because of secularization, and the individualization of religion. The European questions are how Europe can create safe and stable societies in which there is room for different religious and non-religious belief systems, and what roles education in general and religious education in particular must play to prepare children for a peaceful multi-cultural and multi-religious society. These questions are also Dutch questions. Handling religious diversity seems to be a long-lasting challenge for schools and governments.

The Dutch educational system has government and non-government schools. The latter are most of the time private schools based on religion, world view or a distinct pedagogical perspective. Until two decades non-government schools were divided into various types of Protestant, Roman-catholic and Pedagogy oriented schools (Dalton, Montessori, Anthroposophical Schools). Religious schools used the subject of religious education to introduce students into the views, rituals and habits of their particular denomination. Parents sent their children to the school of their religious orientation. Religious pluralisation, secularization and multiculturalization challenged this separation into affiliations. Next to this a third variety appeared in the Dutch system, the cooperation school, which is a merger of government and non-government schools, and this complicates the picture.

Government schools offer religious or worldview education when parents request this. Their children can take classes in Christian, Islamic or Humanistic tradition. These classes are optional. Also, since 1985 government schools and non-government schools all are obliged to offer ‘objective information’ to the children about Ideological and Spiritual Movements.

In 2002 only 34% of the parents enlisted their children in the school of their own religious affiliation. Today this number is even lower. The reasons from affiliated and non-affiliated parents to send children to a religious school differ to a certain extent, but are no longer or foremost religiously motivated: sometimes the proximity of the school is a reason, sometimes the quality of the school or the influence parents can have at the school policy. But religious reasons do count: especially when religious schools present themselves as open to all worldviews and respectful to religions, they have a strong attraction even to non-believers.
At the beginning of the 21st century Dutch Educational Policy is focused on the role of knowledge development in a late modern society. Social constructionism has gained enormous popularity and knowledge is therefore viewed as a result of a process of construction. Knowledge arises in a dynamic process of interaction between acting students, confrontation with content and within an ever-changing context. In various school subjects teachers seek personalized and creative learning environments and processes. This social-constructionist perspective is in RWE being combined with a hermeneutical and phenomenological approach to religions and worldviews. Experiences of students, their existential questions, their views and attitudes are points of engagement for the exploration of RWE content. Many schools search a new perspective, new source books, new methods and new didactical roles to adapt not only to social constructionism but also to adopt to new functions of RWE. These functions are sought for not in proclamation or initiation but in guiding students into a safe space of autonomous and dialogical identity development. A new approach can be a powerful answer to new and ongoing interest in religion and life philosophy in the Netherlands. At a transformed and individually appropriated way religion and spirituality are still of meaning to a lot of Dutch people, young and old. There is manifold devotion to the Higher, as Van den Brink puts it, but the form has changed from God to vitality, health, citizenship, and nature (Van den Brink 2011).

People construct patchwork identities made out of various sources and traditions. RWE has to deal with this undogmatic plurality.

Religious schools can no longer only eat the fruits from one tree, when they want to connect to all students and help them prepare for a pluralized and multi-cultural society. Government schools have the same challenge, and reflect on the role of RWE in these so-called ‘neutral’ schools. How can they give form to active plurality respecting the roots of all students and preparing to good citizenship for a safe and colourful society.

4. A description of the aims and key aspects of the model

The model we developed in our project Learning for Life draws heavily on the work of Didier Pollefeyt (Pollefeyt, 2008, 2011). It is our answer to the religious and educational challenges of the situation in the Netherlands. In this section we shall present the four key aspects of the hermeneutical-communicative model: the goals, the didactical roles, the faculties of students and the dimensions of religion.

In shorthand we can describe the hermeneutical-communicative approach in a few movements:

• From instruction to interpretation.

The teacher is not the all-knowing and all-wise instructor about life’s goals and ethical prescriptions. Religious education is a full-fledged collective hermeneutical enterprise. Teacher and students go down a discovery lane.

• From texts to threefold hermeneutics.
Teachers are juggling with the hermeneutics of religious sources, hermeneutics of context and personal existence. In the classroom religious education tries to offer a safe place where existential questions can be formulated and discussed and where the socio-cultural and political dimensions of the context of the students are analysed.

- **From mono-religious to interreligious education.**

The task of the school is to prepare the pupils for the religiously plural society and to provide a powerful learning environment in which students can develop their personal religious identity. The best preparation for such a society is to encounter the multiple religions present today.

- **From teaching into to teaching about and from religion.**

To the goal of formation of a religious/worldview identity can only be contributed in education when students are able to receive information and to experience religious rituals or artefacts and may respond to it. Religions, life philosophies and wisdom in popular culture are all seen as important sources. Education must be more than transfer of concepts: is must also be a critical examination of phenomena and a personal appropriation of these phenomena.

- **From convincing to witnessing.**

In a plural classroom, with children who are in many cases not sent to this school for religious reasons but for reasons of convenience or quality standards, teachers cannot – if they could ever – have the aim of proselyting. They have to change focus to witnessing and role-modelling. The same is true for an atheist or agnostic teacher at a public school.

- **From teacher centeredness or tradition centeredness to student centeredness.** In a hermeneutical approach questions of students and their interpretive responses to material from sources of wisdom – be it traditional or drawn from popular culture – take centre stage. The activities of the teacher and the encounter with religious materials are both in function of the development of a religious identity of the student.

**Short description of the key aspects**

Our hermeneutical-communicative model has four aspects: 1. Starting from the life questions of the student we formulate three learning objectives; 2. We keep the learning faculties of the students in mind (section 6); 3. We offer a multiplicity of religious sources following Ninian Smart; 4. We present four didactical roles (section 7). Teaching RWE is a dynamic interplay between these four aspects (see model below).
### World view faculties

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<td>Role Model</td>
<td>Ethical and Legal dimension</td>
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<td>Imaginato r</td>
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#### Didactical field of dynamic interplay of the four roles

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### Aims of hermeneutical-communicative religious education

Education is responsible for the coming into presence of unique human beings as Biesta puts is. Existential questions of students about world, future, the other, God, the Self, nature are

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starting points for learning processes. From this heart of education we formulate three aims of our model which are closely connected:

1. **Personal clarification of existential questions**: Students learn to articulate their questions and to formulate their view on living in this world, to develop an own way of life, to explore existential questions and life issues. They reflect on them and explore sources of meaning in dialog with others to construct and reconstruct their own personal religious presence in the world.

2. **Dialogical handling of plurality**: Students develop a receptive and critical attitude in order to manage differences in life view, in interpretation of religious sources and in the choices people make related to their world view. Students have the ability to converse about these differences in a respectful way in order to be prepared to contribute constructively and peacefully to debates in a plural and diverse society.

3. **Religious literacy**: Students gain valuable insights and wisdom from the confrontation with world view traditions as expressed and handed over in stories, rituals, symbols, views, laws, architecture, music, art as well from history as from today. They acquire basic knowledge about religious traditions and know to relate to the information in a critical way and to formulate an own answer to solutions to life issues offered in it.

The religious educator chooses for every learning moment or lesson which generic purpose is pursued (lowest bar in the diagram).

Thereafter a hermeneutic-communicative learning process can be arranged via several possible trajectories:

- The teacher can start with an experience, question or story of a pupil and think of what world view faculty he would like to stimulate (first column). Then he can think about the content and turn to the dimensions of world view and choose one of them which serves the subject best (last column). And then he decides which didactic role he would like to take to stimulate adequate learning (middle columns).
- Another trajectory may go like this: starting point is again an experience, question or story of a student; then there may be a philosophical or religious dimension that fits very well to this starting point column); next the teacher chooses which faculty could be stimulated to grow and suits best to the chosen source (first column). Then the teacher decides which role to take (middle columns). Of course there can be reasons to start with a religious dimension, for example because a religious festival or feast comes up in the next few days or weeks, maybe Easter. The teacher wants to explore the Biblical narratives of Easter to work on the generic purpose of religious literacy. He will then think about the life experiences of the students who are, or may be associated with, for example, experiences of new life in the nature, in the family or in the rabbit cage at home. He then chooses a religious faculty, for example telling and finally the didactical role, for example the guide. To picture the process:
5. **RWE faculties of students and dimensions of religions and worldviews**

Teaching can simply be described as nothing more than stimulating faculties of students to let them grow. In RWE we should like to see that students will have religious competency when leaving the educational system. This means that they have a more or less coherent frame of reference of convictions, views and images about man and world; that they can use this meaning system to interpret life experiences; that they can arrange and plan their life within and from this frame work; that they can communicate about their meaning system with others.

Which faculties are especially on the agenda in RWE? De Schepper presents six skills:

- To observe
- To handle traditions
- To imagine
- To reason
- To communicate
- To act

These are basic faculties for all schools, public and private to work on in religious education. School identity can trigger an expansion of this sixpack. A religious school might add
‘sensitizing for transcendence’ or ‘development of a hope oriented attitude’ to embody their identity.

No list of skills is perfectly covering the wealth of faculties that can be stimulated in education. We developed our own variant, which has some hermeneutical-communicative accents.

- Observing (looking, listening, feeling, smelling, touching)
- Wondering (to be open, to be curious)
- Imagining (empathizing, creating pictures, expressing, connecting to form and color)
- Telling (arranging experience in language, attributing meaning, narrating)
- Valuing (handling dilemma’s, ethics, recognizing good and bad, judging, choosing)
- Reflecting (philosophizing, debating, reasoning)
- Performing a dialogue (changing perspective, listening, reacting authentically, ask questions)
- Acting (initiating or partaking in rituals, community programs, social action)

Teachers constructing learning programs and single lessons will consciously stimulate a combination of faculties in their didactics by choosing different assignments and working methods. We find it important to consider all faculties and not act one-sidedly. There is a multiplicity in intelligence to be addressed in world view formation. RWE is a holistic activity which touches upon head, heart and hands. Discovering and attribution of meaning takes place by all these faculties. Meaning can be found in an impressive thought or line of reasoning, in participating in the Eucharist, but just as good in the experience of dark and light in Chartres Cathedral or a walk through the Rocky Mountains. Self-awareness takes place in imagining and in expression of what lives within students and in the conversation about these expressions with fellow students. That conversation addresses the content of the subject of religious education namely the dimensions of religions and world views.

**Dimensions of religions and world views**

The third aspect of our hermeneutic-communicative model, next to the aims of RWE and the faculties of the students is the content of the subject of religious education. The student learns to understand himself and the world in which he lives with the aid of all kinds of sources from world views. There is a plurality in forms of appearance as it comes to religion. We often observe a focus on dogma’s, doctrines and views in religious education. This is a too limited approach if we keep in mind that practices are very significant in religions, i.e. in Judaism or Islam. In our view students get to know the vivid reality of world views in encounters in city or village, at religious feasts or processions, in broadcasting of news networks, in documentaries, in vlogs, in reading narratives. It is advisable to start the confrontation with religious content in the lessons by concentrating on the lived religion, as experienced en communicated by believers themselves. Lived religion is visible and recognizable for students. Next to doctrines and philosophies the multi-coloured and multi-facetted practice comes to the fore. To arrange this complex learning material we use the grouping of
dimensions of religion from the religious scientist Ninian Smart. We presume that this grouping also suits non-religious world views very well. The seven dimensions (or aspects) are:

- The doctrinal and philosophical dimension (formulated ideas and concepts about man, gods world, creation, liberation)
- The narrative and mythic dimension (narratives, parables and legends about gods, saints, prophets, priests and sages, saviours, heroes, good and bad spirits, key moments in history)
- The ethical and legal dimension (universal principles about a good life, laws, regulations, prescriptions, norms, values)
- The experiential and emotional dimension (emotions as awe and wonder; guilt, shame, visions, conversion, delight, ecstasy, music)
- The practical and ritual dimension (forms of expression in behaviour, rituals and ceremonies, role regulation, contemplation, discipline, practicing, dance)
- The social and institutional dimension (forms of organization, communities, groups, movements, institutions, leadership)
- The material dimension (architecture, art, movies, ritual objects, clothing, jewelry, holy places)

When students get acquainted with these seven aspects of religion they will be stimulated in all kinds of faculties and they will grow in their religious development.

To teach religion as a differentiated and complex process the teacher has to take on four didactical roles.

6. The requirements of the model for the improvement of teaching for primary school teachers

The fourth aspect of the hermeneutical-communicative model is the didactical role. Teachers should master four didactical roles to work fruitfully within our model. We define a didactical role as a coherent set of actions which contribute to a specific educational purpose. Pollefeyt is very brief about this subject. He distinguishes three roles for religious education teachers: the witness, the specialist and the moderator. We use a slightly different terminology better applicable to the plural and multi-religious situation in Netherlands and also better suited both for public and private schools. We take guide for specialist, coach for moderator and role model for witness.

In the role of the witness/role-model the teacher demonstrates his involvement with a certain religious tradition or world view. Teaching religion within a hermeneutical frame work is not

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a neutral activity in which objective information is passed on. On the contrary it is preferred that a teacher shares his views in an engaged manner, in critical dialogue with other perspectives. In this way a teacher can function as a role model how inhabiting a religious identity is done.

The moderator /coach initiates and coaches the dialogical conversations about the relationships between experiences and opinions of students and the colourful world of sources of wisdom. In this collective search for meaning he leaves respectfully room for all kinds of identifications. The students are encouraged to construct their own religious identity and communicate that to fellow students in an open manner.

The third role of the religious educator is the specialist / cultural guide. While students search for meaning hermeneutically relating to sources and in a communicative way, the specialist assures that the discussed information about the different religions and world views is correct in view of up to date scientific knowledge. As an expert he can not only help student to debate with proper arguments but he can also critically evaluate truth claims of the religious traditions and world views at hand. He shows them the way in the colourful world of world view and religion in the seven dimensions.

In order to reach the three goals of our model teachers has to be able to take these roles. We add to Pollefeyt’s set a fourth one: that of the stimulator of imagination which is crucial for fostering appropriation of religious content in the construction of identity.

A fourth role: stimulator of imagination (the imaginator)

In our view experiencing imagination and exercising imagination, are conditions for religious /worldview learning. First of all this is given with the nature of the subject itself. Religions are systems of an imaginative approach to reality using narratives, mythic language, symbols and rituals. Imagination can be seen as the power to turn absence into presence; to turn the actuality into the possible; to convert what is in something-other–than–what is.5 Imagination is abundantly available in religious sources. And secondly: in the learning process imagination plays a different register than the cognitive. It serves a different type of rationality. Roebben asserts that imagination deepens the cognitive process of seeking sense in life by penetrating spiritually into the heart and soul of the student.6 To understand religion students need to develop:7

Metaphoric sensitivity: student’s ability to recognize the figurative language of the narrative in words, sentences, key words and motifs, to recognize the figurative language of the narrative in existential or spiritual events and themes and to recognize the figurative language of the narrative in the portrayal of experiences, values and insights.

Inventive imagination: student’s ability: To make mental depictions of character’s actions and speech and of situations and themes; to emotionally conceive the otherness of characters,

5 Kearney, Poetics of imagining, 4 ff.
6 Roebben, Inclusieve goeddenstopdagogie, 44.
7 Van den Berg, Speelruimte voor dialoog en verbeelding, 77-118.
situations and themes, and to create new connections between the actions and speech of characters, situations and themes in the narrative world, and their own perceived reality.

*Creative interpretation*: student’s ability: To express in their own words and images the meaning of the acts and speech performed by characters in the narrative, as well as the situations and themes found in the narrative; to fill the gaps between the words and images in the narrative with their own words and images, and to find meaning and purpose in the ‘in-between’ between the situation, themes and character’s acts and speech found in a narrative and the student’s own perceived reality.

The imaginator stimulates religious imagination and critical thinking by inviting students to respond creatively, reflexively and interactively to symbolic/metaphorical language in stories, rituals, objects of arts, architecture and practices from religious traditions.

RWE is a dynamic interplay of threefold hermeneutics and fourfold didactics. Depending on the subject and on the purpose of a lessen one or the other role will be on the front.

7. *Three Examples of the carry-over of the HC model in practices of RWE in different primary schools*

9 schools developed new practices in our action-research Learning for Life. They worked two years in Practice Development Groups (PDG).

We demonstrate some of the outcomes of the application of our model of hermeneutical-communication from the examples of three schools.

a. *De Zevensprong [Song of Seven] in Dronten*

   The Protestant Christian School for primary education De Zevensprong is located in Dronten. Two Teachers, Cindy and Rosanne, are strongly involved in our project. They put a lot of energy and effort in motivating their team for a new approach to RWE. They want to work thematically with Bible narratives in connection to life questions of children.

   Cindy has 14 years of experience at this school. Until now she would read a Bible story every day and ask the children reproductive knowledge: ‘What happened to Moses?’ One or two students would respond. After that time was up and math class could start. In herself the question grew how to explain the Bible to children. Whenever a child asked about the historical reliability of the creation narrative she would always respond positively. During the sessions in the PDG Cindy discovers what really matters to her and what she wants to share with the children: “I cannot say God created the world in seven days. I can say how special it is for me that there is a sun, that we have a moon. That there is light after darkness. And that that must be something from God for me.” Also her personal motives are something she wants to share with the children. She tells passionately about the dinners she and her family share with an Afghan refugee family; how curious her children are about the turban a father of Sikh family wears. And her discovery that people of another religion share the same values with her as a Christian: love, forgiveness, sharing, peacefulness.
b. **De Horn [The Corner] in Wijk bij Duurstede**

De Horn is a government school in Wijk bij Duurstede. The school wants to contribute to the formation of independent, competent and social people in all her pedagogical actions. The selfhood and individuality of every child is to be respected. Diversity is not a problem but a wealth. The school says to offer a broad development by stimulating cognitive, affective and creative growth and maturation. The school works on skills and transfer of knowledge in a balanced way.

Within this context the teachers of De Horn realized that their result oriented approach of education left little room for mutual encounter in the classroom, with which they meant that students see, hear and value each other.

There appeared to be almost no attention to the slower, existential questions in life. This was in contradiction with the school’s vision and mission. Thanks to the project Learning for Life the school team found opportunities to adapt their practice to one more in line with the school goals.

An example of a lesson might illustrate the new direction.

In a lesson about actual news the discovery of a new planet was subject of a discussion. In the next lesson the teacher takes the students back to that discussion and introduces the central question for that lesson: What do you think what we are going to discover in space and how do you think it shall be there in 30 years? The students receive reflection time and they are stimulated to write down their thoughts on a piece of paper. In duo’s they share their views. The students have to practice to keep their attention with their peer who is sharing and they practice to stick to the subject.

After the moment of sharing the teacher initiates a group discussion. She alternates between open and closed questions, the latter in case of a response to an answer, for instance: ‘Would that be a life comparable to the life we have here, on earth?’ The attitude of the teacher is rather reticent in order to give room to the dialog between the students.

This more philosophical approach can indeed address slow questions.

c. **Samenwerkingsschool De Magdalon [The Magdalon]**, Veere

Veere is the location of a cooperation school, De Magdalon. A working group has been formed to rebuild a program of RWE. Three teachers and the principal participate in this innovation team. The example of a lesson can give a glimpse of the results of the work in Learning for Life.

Teacher Virginia starts a lesson with the subject of ‘independence’. After a short introduction she gives room for a moment of brainstorming about the word ‘independence’. She asks what the children can do themselves. A real flood of responses follows: preparing sandwiches, walking to school, tying shoelaces are just a few examples. After that the children may interview each other about the same question. They could talk about it a lot, and they liked this question. Virginia connects the theme of independency to the Biblical narrative of

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8 Magdalon is referring to the name of the wife of Floris IV, Count of Holland, who named a castle after this lady. The school is built in the vicinity of original location of this castle.
Ascension. The majority of the children were familiar with this story, but when reading the story the teacher underlines all the things the disciples had to do on their own, because Jesus has gone away. So a well-known story receive new meaning and a new perspective for them. When the reading was finished the teacher asks: Do you think the friends of Jesus can continue on their own? Most of the children think this is the case and with that conclusion Virginia closes her lesson.

8. The promises of the model for future designs of RWE worldwide in the 21 century

The effects of the presented HC model are promising: it appears that the revised model, originally developed in the Belgian context with a dominant position of Roman-Catholic education (Derroitte, Meyer, Pollefeyt & Roebben, 2014), can be appropriated in the pluralized and secularized Dutch educational context (Geurts, Ter Avest & Bakker, 2014) in a fruitful way. The model can be adopted by Christian, non-Christian and cooperation schools in their own local (rural or urban) and religious context. The model inspires to renew religious education and ritual activities challenging students to confront themselves with sources of wisdom of several religions and life philosophies and with the questions, experiences and opinions of co-students in a dialogical way. The model can be integrated in several perspectives of RWE: biblical storytelling, philosophizing with children, or phenomenology of religion. In our research we found results like a curriculum plan for 8 years primary school that combines goals for religious education with social emotional development and citizenship and lessons with activating didactics, which were developed during our research project.

9. References
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