Learning for life. An imaginative approach to worldview education

Abstract
In the project Learning for life we developed a hermeneutical-communicative model for worldview education that answers the European challenges of religious diversity and illiteracy. We implemented the model in a participatory action research project at nine schools for primary education in the Netherlands and monitored the outcomes. A meta-analysis shows that the model can be fruitfully applied in confessional and public schools, as well as in cooperation schools, which are a merger of confessional and public schools. The model is demanding with regard to the skills and attitude of worldview teachers. In a final paragraph we discuss two aspects of the model from the perspective of white normativity.

1. Hermeneutical approach in Europe and the challenge of diversity
The situation of religious diversity in Europe and the ongoing secularization and individualization of religion challenge worldview educators, school boards and educational policy-makers to find new ways to provide worldview education, serving the development of pupils and honoring human rights. Pupils are on the one hand more and more religiously illiterate and on the other hand active learning subjects, constructing their own worldview identity in dialogue with peers, parents and teachers with religious and non-religious worldviews, using sources of meaning taken from media and culture. Worldview educators have to adapt their aims and didactics to these facts when they want to help pupils to develop a worldview identity of their own, not necessarily the same as the identity of the teacher, the school or the church providing the education. Moreover, they want to prepare their pupils to live in a religiously diverse and complex society with a well-rooted identity of their own, but also with a capacity to understand and converse respectfully with people that have other identities to be able to build a peaceful community together.

One of the new ways that surfaces is a hermeneutical-communicative approach to worldview education. This approach recognizes that diversity is not something out there, but like the Reference Book, published by the Council of Europe (2006, p. 15) concludes:

"Whether schools are secular, denominational or faith based, they all share certain features: - there is no real homogenous group of students, even within the same religious tradition, since religious practices and beliefs differ from one family to another and from one individual to another; - in modern society there are different ways of conceiving what constitutes a "good" life, and these conceptions arise from various religious and non-religious views; - children do not leave their values and deeply felt convictions outside when they enter the
Pollefeyt (2008a, 2008b, 2011) formulated an answer to the ongoing secularization, detrationalization and deinstitutionalization in Belgian society, which had major influence in the Netherlands. His approach is a response to the question how the school can teach worldview education in a religiously and culturally diverse society without losing its own denominational identity. Although he developed his approach in a Roman-Catholic context, it can easily be adopted in countries where other religions are culturally dominant or even in totally secular contexts, because of its openness to denominations and religions. Far from seeing the Christian religion as an objective source of meaning, he advocates an intersubjective approach of making sense out of the differences in opinion in oneself, the classroom, the school, the church and society when it comes to interpreting values and beliefs. Pollefeyt sees worldview education as a search for meaning. Students are guided in formulating life questions and are confronted with wisdom from religious and non-religious traditions in order to write and rewrite their own life philosophy and to support their life stories. Truth is deconstructed and worldview is reconstructed with building blocks from tradition and experience and in confrontation with the teacher’s synthesis of his tradition. Within a Roman-Catholic educational context, Pollefeyt refers most of the time to the Christian – Catholic – tradition and to the teacher as firmly rooted in that tradition. However, in the context of other European countries such as the Netherlands, teachers prefer to use a multiplicity of traditions as sources for constructing a life philosophy. Depending on National laws and traditions, the identity of the school, the role of possible churches involved, and the personal convictions of the teacher, one or more religious or philosophical sources are offered as a mirror or as a stumbling block, fostering a process of dialogue and personal reflection. Where Protestant-Christian schools may choose the Bible stories or Christian feasts as the main sources for connecting experiences and convictions of pupils to the wisdom of traditions, the public schools will probably draw from socialistic, humanistic or liberal sources, or choose always to offer more than one religious source. Hermeneutical intersections are the keys to the learning process, according to Pollefeyt. Conflicting frames of reference from the pupils in the classroom and tensions in interpretation of a certain theme or subject bring the multiplicity of possible viewpoints and the underlying traditions to the fore. Through dialogical communication, these viewpoints and sources are exposed and critically deconstructed.

“The purpose of such a form of hermeneutical worldview education is to allow students to discover their own and others’ religious/ideological presuppositions and to heighten such awareness. In this way students can become receptive to the wonderment and multifaceted interpretable character of reality. As a result, they obtain building blocks hewn from a multiplicity of religious or ideological traditions and the particular perspectives of meaning connected thereto. They learn to deal with the freedom of choice generated by this plural supply of meaning. Some religious/ideological perspectives and traditions need to be deconstructed, yet there must also be room for the (re)construction of one’s life story with the newly added building materials from traditions and experiences. Ultimately, students must be able to communicate their choices to themselves and to others in words, deeds, signs and symbols.” (Pollefeyt, 2011, pp. 11-12)

The Netherlands is one of the most secularized and diverse countries in Europe. The challenge
of addressing diversity, secularization, pluralization and individualization is felt in both public and private schools. Our project Learning for Life (L4L) tried to meet this challenge in appropriating our model of hermeneutical-communicative learning via a participatory action research project in public and confessional schools, as well in cooperation schools in primary education in the Netherlands.  

2. The Hermeneutical-Communicative model (HC-model)

Let us first explain the two parts of the compound hermeneutical-communicative. Hermeneutical means that the teacher aims at the interpretation of sources of meaning in worldview education in connection to the lives of the pupils. The teacher is always focused on what presents itself as meaningful in the stories of pupils, in the perceived experiences of the pupils, and in the traditions or sources they know and live by. We use sources and traditions in plural because the pluralistic society implies that the worldview educator cannot depart from only one meaningful source in order to correlate with the questions and life stories of pupils. We concur with Pollefeyt that people are hermeneutical creatures, looking for meaning and open to wisdom conveyed by traditions. The hermeneutical condition implies that life is open to multiple interpretations, and so are the sources of meaning people use for guidance in their lives. There is no such a thing as ‘the’ Christian tradition or ‘the’ Islamic tradition. Traditions are pluralistic by their nature. An exchange is therefore always necessary. Here we come to the second word in the hermeneutical-communicative compound.

Communicative means that the teacher aims at dialogical exchange of views and experiences in the encounter with pupils about what is meaningful to them. This exchange starts with an open attitude from the teacher, with a real interest in the stories of the pupils. The teacher recognizes his own reactions and reflects on them to the pupils in a respectful way. The teacher is willing to share his views and experiences in order to reach mutual understanding. By eliciting the opinions and stories and moderating discussions and conversations between pupils, a dialogue can take place. Differences of opinion between pupils come to light, and they are used as a starting point for a deep learning process. Conflicting interpretations of reality and of sources of meaning are laid bare and traced back to suppositions about reality, world, God and so on. In these conversations, pupils and teacher may change their views or attitude with regard to the subject at hand. Worldview education never is a one-way street. Worldview education is, in our view, not only and not foremost the transmission of meaningful information, but particularly the construction of meaning in interaction.

HC-teaching is a dynamic interplay between 4 aspects: the aims of HC-learning; the learning faculties of the pupils; the dimensions of worldview; and the didactical roles involved. We present these aspects briefly.

2 Parts 2-4 of this article are a very short introduction into our book Learning for Life. An imaginative approach to worldview education in a plural context (submitted for publishing 2018). This book provides an overview of the challenges for worldview education, the answer to these challenges we proposed in our project L4L, the hermeneutical an pedagogical backgrounds, the results, the 9 case-studies, the cross-case analysis, requirements for teachers an schools and a general evaluation. For the Dutch phenomenon of cooperation schools see Renkema, Mulder & Barnard (2016) and Renkema (2018, in press).
**Aims of hermeneutical-communicative worldview education**

We formulate three aims of our model which are closely connected, fostering worldview competency:

1. **Personal clarification of existence:** Pupils 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 dialogue with others to construct and reconstruct their own personal religious presence in the world.

2. **Dialogical responding to plurality:** Pupils develop a receptive and critical attitude in order to manage differences in how people see their lives, in interpretation of religious sources, and in the choices people make related to their worldview. Pupils 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. **Worldview literacy:** Pupils gain valuable insights and wisdom from the confrontation with worldview traditions as expressed and conveyed in stories, rituals, symbols, views, laws, architecture, music, art, from history as well as from today. They acquire basic knowledge about religious traditions and know how to relate to the information in a critical way, and to formulate their own reaction to solutions to life issues offered in that information.

**Worldview faculties of pupils**

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3 These three aims comply with Biesta’s general purposes of good education (subjectification, socialization and qualification) (Biesta, 2010, pp. 20-21).
Teaching can simply be described as stimulating faculties of pupils to let them grow. What faculties can be stimulated? We take eight as the most essential (see De Schepper, 2015; Van den Berg, Kompels & Ter Avest, 2013)

- Observing (looking, listening, feeling, smelling, touching).
- Wondering (being open, being curious).
- Imagining (empathizing, creating pictures, expressing, connecting to form and color).
- Telling (arranging experience in language, attributing meaning, narrating)
- Valuing (handling dilemmas, 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 single lessons and programs 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 to act one-sidedly. There is a multiplicity of intelligence to be addressed in worldview formation. Worldview education 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 well in the experience of dark and light in Chartres Cathedral or a walk through the Rocky Mountains. Self-awareness takes place in imagining and expressing what lives within pupils and in the conversation about this expressions with fellow pupils.

**Dimensions of worldviews**

By posing questions a pupil learns to understand himself and the world in which she lives with the aid of all kinds of sources from worldviews. There is a plurality in forms of appearance as it comes to religious and non-religious worldviews. In addition to doctrines and philosophies, multi-colored and multi-faceted practices comes to the fore. To structure this complex learning material, we use the grouping of dimensions of religion presented by Smart (1998). We have experienced that this grouping also suits non-religious worldviews very well. The seven dimensions (or aspects) are:

- The doctrinal and philosophical dimension (formulated ideas and concepts about man, gods, the world, creation, liberation).
- The narrative and mythic dimension (narratives, parables and legends about gods, saints, prophets, priests and sages, saviors, heroes, good and bad spirits, key moments in history).
- The ethical and legal dimension (universal principles about living a good life, laws, regulations, prescriptions, norms, values).
• The experiential and emotional dimension (emotions like awe and wonder, guilt, shame, visions, conversion, delight, ecstasy, music).

• The practical and ritual dimension (forms of expression in behavior, rituals and ceremonies, role regulation, contemplation, discipline, practice, 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).

Four didactical roles of the teacher

We define a didactical role as a coherent set of actions which contributes to a specific educational purpose. Pollefeyt (2010) is very brief about this subject. We elaborated on his description and discern four roles: the role model, the guide, the coach and the imaginator.

As a role model the teacher demonstrates her involvement with a religious tradition or worldview. Teaching religion within a hermeneutical framework is not a neutral activity in which objective information is passed on. On the contrary, it is preferred that a teacher shares her views in an engaged manner, in critical dialogue with other perspectives. In this way, a teacher can function as a role model demonstrating how inhabiting a worldview identity is done. Witnessing to the religious or non-religious worldview in which she is rooted or to the worldview she has adopted later on in life, she mirrors a constructive way of life, leaving room for other choices and options.

The coach initiates and coaches the dialogical conversations about the relationships between pupils’ experiences and opinions and the colorful world of sources of wisdom. In this collective search for meaning, she respectfully leaves room for all kinds of identifications. The pupils are encouraged to construct their own religious identity and communicate that to fellow pupils in an open manner. The coach moderator offers an adequate presentation of several worldviews and religions in an open ‘practice room’ for ideological searching, philosophizing, theologizing. She teaches the skills to handle differences respectfully.

The guide. While pupils search for meaning hermeneutically relating to sources and in a communicative way, the specialist assures that the discussed information about the different religions and worldviews is correct in view of up-to-date scientific knowledge. A lot of imaging and framing is going on in newspapers and television shows, and the teacher corrects false images and provides full and proper information. As an expert, she can not only help pupils to debate with proper arguments, but she can also critically evaluate truth claims of the religious traditions and other worldviews at hand. She shows them the way in the colorful world of worldviews.

The imaginator. In our view, experiencing imagination and exercising imagination are preconditions for religious learning. First of all, this is obviously due to the nature of the subject itself. Religions are systems of an imaginative approach to reality using narratives,

4 He named three didactical roles: the witness, the moderator and the specialist (Pollefeyt, 2010).
mythic language, symbols and rituals. Pupils have to learn to understand this material in which all sort of peculiarities, impossibilities, metaphorical expressions and symbols are present. Imagination can be seen as the power to turn absence into presence; to turn the actuality into the possible; to convert what-is into something-other-than-what is (Kearney, 1998, p.4 ff). Imagination is abundantly available in religious sources. And secondly: in the learning process, imagination plays in a different register than cognition. It serves a different type of rationality. Roebben (2015, p. 44) asserts that imagination deepens the cognitive process of seeking sense in life by penetrating spiritually into the soul of the pupil. To understand religion, pupils need to develop metaphoric sensitivity, inventive imagination and creative interpretation (Van den Berg, 2014, pp. 77-118).

The imaginator stimulates religious imagination and critical thinking by inviting pupils to respond creatively, reflexively and interactively to symbolic/metaphorical language in stories, rituals, objects of art, architecture and practices from religious traditions.
A diagram of the hermeneutic-communicative model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worldview faculties</th>
<th>Didactical roles of the teacher</th>
<th>Dimensions of worldview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guide</td>
<td>Doctrinal and Philosophical dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>Narrative and Mythic dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing</td>
<td>Role Model</td>
<td>Ethical and Legal dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wondering</td>
<td>Imaginator</td>
<td>Experiential and Emotional dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagining</td>
<td>Telling</td>
<td>Practical and Ritual dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing</td>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td>Social and Institutional dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling</td>
<td>Performing a dialog</td>
<td>Material dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims of worldview education</th>
<th>Personal clarification of existence</th>
<th>Dialogical handling of plurality</th>
<th>Worldview literacy</th>
<th>Aims of worldview education</th>
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**Figure 2 | The HC-model in detail**

The basis of our model is formed by the aims. For every learning moment, lesson or series of lessons, the worldview educator chooses which generic purpose is pursued, which question is addressed, which faculties can be stimulated, which didactical role is appropriate and which dimension of worldview can be used as source. Unlimited possibilities in combining the four aspects of the model make it flexible in usage.
3. Nine schools improve their practices
In a two year government funded research process nine schools (two public schools, three Protestant-Christian schools, one Roman-Catholic school and three cooperation schools), located in different parts of the Netherlands (North/Middle/South) and different areas (urban/rural) innovated their practices of worldview education. Using Professional Learning Communities (PLC) consisting of teachers and researchers, as a research method (Lomos, Hofman and Bosker, 2011), we implemented the HC-model in the specific contexts of the nine schools. Each school reflected on the pedagogical, philosophical, theological and didactical principles of the model and created new practices in accordance with the school identity and answering their specific actual and urgent questions. We gathered data of different kinds: case studies written by the teachers, self-reports about their learning process of the teachers, and structured observations of the PLC-meetings from researchers. We wrote nine portraits of new practices of the schools and we also performed a cross-case analysis per region and a nationwide meta-analysis.
The results of L4L were inspiring. We can only present one of the nine cases about a Protestant-Christian school, and add a few highlights of the meta-analysis.

Primary school De Es in Hellendoorn
The Protestant-Christian primary school De Es is situated in Hellendoorn. Its principal, R., participated in the project, as did teachers H. and M. and teacher-in-training N.. Their worldview lessons consist primarily of reading a biblical narrative to the pupils and asking them to reproduce what occurred in the narrative afterwards.
The participants have been searching for a new method for worldview education in which they can centralize religious holidays from various traditions, biblical narratives and the pupils’ worldview questions.

The meaning of Pentecost to children
“Almost no one knows what Pentecost means, even though the story is read to the class every year.” Quote by K., a sixth-year old pupil.

Teacher-in-training N. has conducted a survey regarding the pupils’ satisfaction, which showed that most pupils did not find the worldview education lessons interesting and that they felt they learned only little. To N., it was clear: “Children cannot find meaning in the reading of biblical narratives to the class and the subsequent demand of reproducing what had happened in the narrative.” She decided to introduce change: to let the lessons revolve around the pupils’ own experiences. For L4L R., H. and N. herself developed a teaching format that addresses holidays from various religious traditions, biblical narratives and worldview questions raised by the pupils.
During the last PLC meeting, N. shows how a set of lessons revolving around Pentecost was made meaningful for sixth-year pupils. Two of these pupils are present as well. They say: “The worldview education lessons were boring. You couldn’t do anything on your own and you forgot what the story was about.” As a result, the goal for the new set of lesson plans is as follows: “Pentecost has to become meaningful for all children.” N. emphasizes the diversity in the groups: “The days off on Pentecost Holidays are spent in various ways: one child attends church, while another goes to the mall.”

5 For more details from the PLC method, see Mulder & Van den Berg (2018), Ch. 4.1.
The Pentecost tradition is a narrative of hope, passion, fire and enthusiasm. These themes are close to the pupils’ own realities. Through the use of such phrases, the teachers hope to entice the pupils to think about the themes of the holiday. N., R. and H. subsequently decide to introduce several new didactic formats in which they appeal to the worldview faculties of the pupils. Furthermore, they consciously employ varying teaching roles. The aim is to spark the pupils’ curiosities for the tradition of Pentecost and to get them to think about it, to imagine it, for themselves.

**Pentecost lessons**

N. starts the first lesson by having the group study an image of the biblical narrative of Pentecost. She asks the pupils what they see and which thoughts and feelings the image provokes. One child sees a man who prays, while another sees a man who consoles another person. The pupils’ thoughts revolve around love, warmth, hope and ‘healing hands’. During the second lesson, a teacher-in-training tells the narrative. The children listen breathlessly. Afterwards, the teacher-in-training shows the pupils a video clip in which the Pentecost narrative is told humorously in a minute and a half. This sparks a discussion. Some children believe the story is too straightforward or too funny. N. says: “Some pupils suddenly wanted to show that they think the Pentecost narrative is important.”

During the third lesson, the teacher-in-training has the class discuss the Holy Spirit. She conducts a worldview dialogue with the pupils. She asks them about their fires, their passions, about what drives them and about their hopes for themselves, their families, their friends and the world as a whole. Then, she asks them to describe what their own Holy Spirit looks like and what it means to them. In small groups, the pupils draw pictures of their own Holy Spirits in a variety of creative ways. What follows are presentations of these drawings. Gusts of wind, fires, queens, hands and rainbows all come into play. Meaningful words such as ‘protection’, ‘colorful’, ‘inspiration’, ‘untouchable’ and ‘healing hands’ are mentioned.

**Goal achieved**

After these lessons, all sixth-year pupils have attributed a personal meaning to Pentecost, as well as a meaning they themselves found in the tradition. N., R. and H. have achieved their goal and the children responded positively. K., the boy whose quote is shown above, says: “The Pentecost lessons are fun now, because we have to think for ourselves, we can express our opinions, and we do not have to agree with one another. I know what Pentecost is now.”

**Results of L4L**

The result of L4L at De Es was the evolution from a teaching method in which a biblical narrative was read to the pupils, after which they were asked to reproduce what had taken place, to a school-wide project regarding worldview education in which hermeneutical communication was the central focus. The school chooses to do so by using the holidays of various religions, biblical narratives and the pupils’ own worldview questions. Below, we show two further results of the project conducted at De Es.

The first is a table showing a framework for worldview education when it comes to children’s competences. The pupils’ worldview questions in this learning process are connected to the religious holidays...
throughout.6

**Framework De Es**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups 1-2; age 4-5</th>
<th>Groups 3-4; age 6-7</th>
<th>Groups 5-6; age 8-9</th>
<th>Groups 7-8; 10-11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on familiarization (Perception, experiencing, familiarizing)</td>
<td>Emphasis on familiarization (Perception, experiencing, familiarizing, meeting)</td>
<td>Emphasis on learning how it works, recognizing cohesion and insight (applying insights)</td>
<td>Emphasis on correlations, interpretation, dilemmas (attitudes, applying insights)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hears biblical narratives and learns to respond to them</td>
<td>Hears biblical narratives and learns to respond to them</td>
<td>Knows how to ask worldview questions, how to talk about them and how to explore them</td>
<td>Knows worldview questions, is able to identify dilemmas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounters worldview questions and learns to ask them</td>
<td>Knows how to ask worldview questions, how to talk about them and how to explore them</td>
<td>Knows worldview questions, is able to identify dilemmas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounters holidays and experiences them</td>
<td>Encounters holidays and experiences them</td>
<td>Is able to identify the connection between worldview questions, holidays and religions</td>
<td>Is able to identify several dilemmas surrounding holidays and religions and can provide arguments and perspectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Matrix of development and content

**Teaching plan March 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebration</th>
<th>Worldview question</th>
<th>Social development</th>
<th>Worldview</th>
<th>Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day of Prayer</td>
<td>What is space?</td>
<td>Where do you live? What aspects of nature do you enjoy? Are you happy where you live? Where would you like to go?</td>
<td>Do you feel responsible for the Earth? What do you to make the space around you comfortable? Did God create the Earth consciously or</td>
<td>1-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 For the other 8 case studies see Mulder & Van den Berg, 2018, Ch. 4.2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebration</th>
<th>Worldview question</th>
<th>Social development</th>
<th>Worldview question</th>
<th>Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easter</td>
<td>What are the meanings of happiness and life, but also of suffering and death?</td>
<td>When are you happy and when are you sad? Who do you go to when you are happy and when you are sad? Who are your real friends, who you can go to with both happiness and sadness? Are you part of the group or are you an outsider? Do you feel like you belong/can be yourself?</td>
<td>What are the meanings of happiness and life? What are the meanings of suffering and death? Why do people die? Can God console you at certain times? Do you prefer talking about happiness and life over talking about suffering and death? What do you think you could change about this? What would you want to change?</td>
<td>5-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2 Teaching plan March 2017 De Es**

**Meta-analysis**

In a protocolled cross-case analysis we searched for the educational challenges formulated by the teachers willing to learn within the HC-model, the interventions chosen within the HC-model, the motives for these interventions and the results.

The openness of the HC-model raises similar questions at all school types: a tension is felt between the conscious insertion of religious content in education and the assumed identity of the school. The tension can be formulated as follows: the identity of the school requires a degree of neutrality (public school/cooperation school) or showing one’s colors (Protestant-Christian/Roman-Catholic) that does not seem to fit in with the use of content from multiple religious traditions. Public schools and cooperation schools wonder to what extent their neutrality is preserved, while Protestant-Christian schools may wonder to what extent the Christian character of the school remains assured. Each school could manage this tension in his own way and context.

With regard to the interventions we could conclude that a colorful palette of interventions is carried out using many methods through which pupils could respond to worldview content. Much attention has been paid to the practicing of dialogue in the classroom (posing questions, learning to listen, expressing yourself), in which the questions, views and experiences of the children were central. Also lessons have been designed and tested in which the creative
processing of content and the creative responses to content are major changes. These are lessons in which, in particular, the didactical role of the imaginator is used. At the school level, new rituals are designed after an intensive dialogue between the school and parents. For these innovations teacher provide the following motives: First, the key word in most of the answers is involvement: teachers want to increase the involvement of pupils, teachers and parents all together with regard to worldview education. The second motive is the aim of putting the existential questions of children related to their worldview development up front. The third motive is socialization: teachers find it important for children to acquire the faculty to dialogue in view to the diversity in society. Fourth: Worldview education should also become more meaningful to pupils. Fifth: the interconnectedness of teachers, parents and children on the theme of worldview should be increased by means of group rituals. Evaluating the interventions three main conclusions are: 1. The teachers are enthusiastic about the ways in which children respond to the new interventions: they discover the many possible thoughts of children, their skills to express themselves creatively, the links between phenomena they now describe, and the originality they show. 2. Teachers are enthusiastic about the increased involvement of pupils with the theme, which is caused by the hermeneutical-communicative approach. 3. Teachers appreciate the greater commitment of colleagues and parents to the joint brainstorming and organizing of religious celebrations. 

Looking back we can say that the model serves all school types in creating meaningful practices for worldview education staging the existential questions of children and confronting them with sources from various traditions in a critical and dialogical way. The model appears to be flexible because it can be appropriated in various confessional and non-confessional contexts. Schools handle the structural aspects of the HC-model in their own way, in line with their school identity and pedagogical goals. We also noticed that working with the HC-model requires specific skills and knowledge from the teachers and also a structural embedding in the school. And we experienced that schools needed an extra year in the transition from a transfer-oriented approach to a pupil-oriented approach, wherein they could elaborate more on the different didactical roles an on the general aims.7

5. The HC-model and white normativity

The HC-model is constructed by white scholars and grounded on theological and pedagogical literature stemming from white and mostly European and American authors. Therefore we are obliged to reflect on the question how the model contributes to a praxis beyond white normativity. Despite the fact that HC-learning centers dialog in the classroom as an interpersonal learning strategy, it is not self-evident that hegemony of some kind is prevented. Despite the fact that the personal narratives of students are the anchor point of learning processes within the HC-model we are not sure that teachers are able to address them in a non-oppressive way. Although the HC-model honors different religious and non-religious worldview sources, we are not sure how these richness in sources is handled. We must realize that occurrence of white normativity in classrooms or elsewhere is not easily avoided. Literature shows that in those contexts where one might expect a heightened sensitivity for equality and domination, good practices, nevertheless, are not guaranteed.

7 For all the outcomes see Mulder & Van den Berg, 2018, Ch. 4.3 and 4.4. and for the school and teacher requirements see Ch. 5
There are examples of practices of same sex marriages (Kimport, 2012), intercultural churches (Jenkins, 2014), an LGBT organization (Ward, 2008), a 50/50 white/latino populated school (Hurd, 2008) or a film about a lesbian couple (Kennedy, 2014), that indicate that good intentions are not enough. Even in these contexts, where diversity is unavoidably and prominently present, white normativity creeped in or surfaced as a structural condition. Also, reports from European countries on religious education, f.i. form Norway, show how hard it is to handle plurality in an impartial way, due to national or regional traditions, politics and personal convictions and training of teachers (Skeie, 2017). Therefore, a constant, enduring awareness of the own positioning in gender, race, economy, educational level, politics and neighborhood, paired to a reflective attitude concerning perspective, goals and methods of worldview education are required to decrease the risk of subtle white hegemonic interventions, remarks and judgements, which are so often automatically given in the course of teaching.

The reflection on the HC-model with regard to white normativity can be stretched to all the aspects of the model (aims, didactical roles, worldview faculties, dimensions of worldview). We limit ourselves to two aspects: the general aims of the model and the didactical role of guide.

The HC-model in itself is not a neutral model: it advocates a dialogical form of worldview education that accepts the peaceful co-existence of different worldviews and that aims at student’s personal growth in worldview literacy, dialogical responding to plurality and the clarification of existence. There is room for different pathways to discover truth about the world, society and personal life. Worldviews are seen as possible narratives and practices about existence that are valuable as sources to live from, apparently equally valuable, although all treated critically. These aims can be put under criticism from a white normativity perspective: why should we not formulate aims that are less individualistic, or subject oriented? Is the goal of personal growth not a white prerogative in the eyes of many people having only few opportunities? The starting points for educational trajectories within the HC-model are the existential questions of students. We see this as an optimal way of handling plurality (cf. Skeie, 2002). This might be experienced as a white liberal and individualistic point of departure. Shouldn’t we reconsider the formulation of the aims of worldview education in a more community oriented terms, for instance that it must contribute to community life, welfare or interconnectedness? Of course, these and comparable aims can be reached within our model, when the themes addressed by students and the didactical assignments that accompany them lead in these directions. And also the aim of dialogical handling of plurality has its effect on democratic citizenship. But the question remains whether the wording of the aims within the HC-model is not all too white, liberal, upper class.

The second aspect we want to discuss with regard to white normativity is the didactical role of the guide. The guide is a specialist in knowledge of worldviews: this specialist assures that the discussed information about the different religions and worldviews is correct in view of up-to-date scientific knowledge. A lot of imaging and framing is going on in newspapers and television shows, and the teacher corrects false images and provides full and proper information. The teacher shows students the way in the colorful world of worldviews in all their dimensions. So far so good, but what is ‘proper information’ and who decides whether images are ‘false images’? The worldview teacher needs to reflect on the concept of worldview and of religion which is used in providing information about worldviews. What is essential to whom in the presentation of information? What is meant by up-to-date scientific information, and what concept of knowledge is appropriate? Is worldview a subject that you
can speak about from a distance, searching for objective facts? Is it possible to search for
essences of religion leaving the stories of believers and the historical and social situatedness
of language aside? Flood (1999) argues that all explanation of religion is historically situated,
and that scholarly language itself is part of a specific Western Enlightenment narrative, which
touches in our view upon white normativity. The only ways to go beyond it, are thorough self-
reflection about the language and terminology used, the charts en models presented, the
structures en key elements explained to students, and also the construction of a narrative
dialogical view on religious and non-religious worldview. In this view multiple voices about
the meaning and experiencing of the dimensions of worldview have to be heard and critically
evaluated in dialogue. When f.e. the theme of ‘community’ is addressed, what model of living
together is used as normative? Is it a white, well-to-do Western model of the family, is it a
model of a multi-generation household or is the point of reference an ubuntu model, stemming
from Africa? Truth about the meaning of worldview is highly contextual and a matter of
community, intersubjectivity an debate. In a narrative-hermeneutical approach several models
should be discussed.
The worldview teacher as a guide is aware of the positioning of scholars and teachers
regarding the subject and will therefore be cautious in providing ultimate meanings. Many
textbooks are based on a phenomenological perspective on religion. Flood (1999) argues
convincingly that a phenomenological approach to religion cannot be the dominant approach
anymore. Because of the situatedness of knowledge and language a detached observer cannot
by intuition provide universal explanations of religious phenomena. Therefore, worldview
teachers should take a critical stance towards phenomenology. For our HC-model this means
that our application of the seven dimensions of worldview, provided by Ninian Smart should
be critically evaluated. Smart provides formal categories which can easily be read as
‘essentials’ of worldview. To prevent this emic narratives must correct the guide in what is
essential in the human experience of the transcendent realm and what is not. This is in line
with the interpretive approach of Jackson (2002) who pleads for the use of ‘insiders’ in
religious education.
Our reflection on two aspects of our model from the perspective of white normativity leads to
the conclusion that the HC-model has many qualities to create a safe learning environment in
which equality and subjectivity are secured in a dialogical process. Nevertheless the model
needs critical evaluation and further elaboration as it comes to the wording of the aims, the
implementation of the role of the guide and the appropriation of the Smart categories. An
adaptation in the light of white normativity may improve the HC-model as an instrument for
learning for life.

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