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Erik Renkema  
Assistant Professor of Worldview Education and Diversity  
Windesheim University of Applied Sciences  
Mailing address 10090, 8000 GB, Zwolle  
Visiting address: Campus 2-6, Zwolle  
The Netherlands  
+31.(0)610313579  
erik.renkema@windesheim.nl

**Title - The Teacher: Specialist in a Pedagogy of Difference.**

***Abstract.***

Western societies and schools are characterized by an increasing plurality. We consider the hermeneutical-communicative perspective on worldview education as meaningful when dealing with this diversity: students are encouraged to explore their personal clarification of existence, to encounter differences and to develop their worldview literacy. Former research has pointed out that hermeneutical-communicative learning demands several roles of the teacher. In this paper we focus on the role of Specialist concerning the interpretation of this role in the context of diversity and what teachers need for implementing the role. The Specialist is the role in which the teacher has knowledge about ideas, practices and sources of worldview traditions, he is able to evaluate these in a critical way, and he possesses skills to translate this knowledge into a meaningful dialogue in class. We will add former views on this role by theoretical insights related to the use of worldview sources on an equal bases and to schools that educate students in a particular faith tradition or worldviews.

***1. Societal developments***

Western societies are more and more religiously plural “in the spheres of religions, values and culture” (Jackson 2006, 21). Even within the same religious tradition, there is a diversity of views (Milot 2006; Bakker 2001). Every school is characterized by a plurality of worldviews and religious convictions: there is no such thing as a religiously homogenous group of students (Milot 2006). Plurality is interpreted as a challenge for schools and teachers (Ipgrave 2004).

We recognize pluralization in Western societies not only in the existence of multiple religious traditions, but also in the presence of non-religious or non-affiliated people in society and classrooms (Vermeer 2004; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017).

In a plural society and a school that is characterized by its religious diversity, education in general and worldview education in particular should stimulate “a reflective and sensitive encounter” (Schreiner 2006, 32). Differences in ideas and beliefs are to be explored in order to create mutual understanding on the one hand and to provide enrichment for the development of personal identity on the other (Ipgrave 2004). This encounter serves the ultimate goal of educating young people in order to prepare them to live in a plural society (Miedema and Ter Avest 2011). People with diverse values and convictions are challenged to live together and contribute to their shared goal of a peaceful society based on equality. This diversity contains religious as well as non-affiliated and secular views on life and on the world we live in.

Encounter in plural settings can foster identity formation among students. Confronted by and in dialogue with views and experiences that are unfamiliar or different than their own views, students can reflect on their personal position and can add something new to their identity and view of life (Elias 2010; Vermeer 2004; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017). Encounters in the context of diversity have a positive effect on the development of the student’s personal identity. We underline the importance of the exploration of students’ personal life experiences and views in worldview education in encounter, which contributes to students’ identity formation (Schreiner 2006; Ghiloni 2011). The encounters between students from different backgrounds are particularly enhanced when this exploration is encouraged (Miedema 2000; Wright 2004): “Pedagogically, the more aware teachers are of beliefs and values embedded in the experience of students, the more they can take account of pupils’ concerns and can provide teaching and learning situations which are designed to foster communication between students from different backgrounds” (Jackson 2004, 108).

Encountering differences in education and worldview education in particular also stimulates students’ attitude of tolerance and openness (Elias 2010). Encounter promotes peaceful ways of living together and building bridges between people that have diverse worldview perspectives (Miedema and Ter Avest 2011; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017; Gabriel 2017).

So, in a western society like the Netherlands worldview education is challenged to focus on encounter about personal experiences in order to foster the identity formation of students living in a plural society. It is of great importance to take the context of students’ existence into account and to address his or her existence in classroom dialogue.

## ***2. A hermeneutical-communicative perspective***

The context of students’ life experience in dialogical and plural settings is underlined in a new perspective on worldview education: the hermeneutical-communicative approach. We interpret this as an innovation in worldview education that fosters the identity formation of students and the encounter between a variety of religious and other worldviews within and outside the classroom, especially in the context of the aforementioned societal development of the pluralization of the Dutch society. The teacher contributes to this formation and encounter by putting forward content of a variety of traditions and challenging the students to contemplate and to discuss the human life experiences in the sources. Traditions of belief and worldview are introduced to stimulate students to reflect on their life in an intersubjective and hermeneutical process (Miedema 2014).

This perspective is hermeneutical in the sense that the teacher stimulates the exploration of the relation between worldview sources and personal experiences and views of the students: *“The teacher is always focused on what presents itself as meaningful in the stories of students, in the perceived experiences of the students, and in the traditions or sources they*

*know and live by.*” (Mulder and Van den Berg 2019, p. 3). This is an hermeneutical process in which the teacher and the students search for possible ‘hermeneutical junctions’ in the interaction between sources and student’s views and experiences. Theoretical sources about the hermeneutical communicative perspective underline the variety of the worldview sources (Pollefeyt 2011a; 2011b; Mulder and Van den Berg 2019), especially in the context of pluralization in society.

Our perspective is communicative because of the concentration on dialogue and encounter between students and the teacher. This asks for an open and reflective attitude of both the students and the teacher: “*the teacher aims at dialogical exchange of views and experiences in the encounter with students about what is meaningful to them.*” (Mulder and Van den Berg 2019, p. 3).

In the current investigations of the research group of Theology and Worldview of Windesheim University, hermeneutical communicative learning is central. We regard this model as a powerful perspective on worldview education, precisely in the context of diversity (Van den Berg en Mulder 2017; Mulder and Van den Berg 2019). We investigate how this model of worldview education can take place, and what this requires from the teacher. It is therefore follow-up research to further develop the model of hermeneutical communicative learning.

In this model, this perspective, we assume three key points.

a. In the first place the teacher sees diversity as an opportunity and not as a threat to his or her own philosophy of life and identity. Diversity is a resource. It is an enormous chance for education in general and worldview education in particular to stimulate “a reflective and sensitive encounter” (Schreiner 2006). Teachers work with diversity by introducing space for different visions. It is about the school as a small society. Where living together is practiced. It is both a great possibility and a challenge for schools in western societies to deal with diversity in society and in the classroom (Ipgrave 2004). Religious and intercultural education play an especially important role in this plural setting (Schreiner 2006).

b. Secondly, in the practice of living together, and in the hermeneutic-communicative perspective, worldview education is about experiences and visions. It is about the experiences and visions of students, peers and adults within and outside the classroom. These visions are connected to personal experiences. The questions and experiences of students are the center of worldview education and the development of their identity. We believe that dialogue benefits from the focus on life experiences in worldview education. In our perspective it is important that worldview education is “*brought down to earth, to what is ‘common’ between human beings*” (Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015, 335). When life experiences are shared in education, the dialogue is stimulated (Jackson 2004). This also means that the views of the students and the teacher can change their perceptions on the good life and religious points of views (Van den Berg en Mulder 2017; Mulder and Van den Berg 2019).

c. The third key point of hermeneutical communicative learning is that religion and worldview matter in education (Schreiner 2006; Van den Berg en Mulder 2017; Mulder and Van den Berg 2019). Not to emphasize a preferred position, and certainly not to initiate students into an exclusive tradition. But as an essential part of children's education: “*All kinds of sources from worldviews are examined to find provisional, temporary answers to minor and major questions of life.*” (Mulder and Van den Berg 2019, p. 5-6). Education of children is impossible without the development of a critical, independent and personal position in the life of the student. Also, precisely in relation to religion and worldview.

We describe three aims of the hermeneutical communicative perspective:

1. **Personal clarification of existence.**  
Worldview education is aimed at learning to understand and articulate the personal life questions and experiences by students. These questions and experiences are introduced into a dialogical process with others and with sources.
2. **Dialogical responding to plurality.**  
In dialogical practices, students explore their own questions and experiences, those of others and the meanings of traditions and sources of meaning. This means that the diversity of different insights is seen as a force for identity development. Students learn to deal with dialogue in a diverse context. These dialogical practices are organized in education on the basis of equality. We recognize this characteristic in several sources (Leganger-Krogstad 2003; Keaten and Soukup 2009; Miedema and Ter Avest 2011).
3. **Worldview literacy.**  
Students learn to give meaning to a diversity of traditions and sources of meaning: stories, rites, ideas, laws, architecture, symbols and images: *“They acquire basic knowledge about religious traditions and know how to relate to this information in a critical way and to formulate their own reaction to solutions to life issues offered in that information.”* (Mulder and Van den Berg 2019, p. 5).

### **3. Teacher roles in worldview education**

In current research of the research group of Theology and Worldview of Windesheim University we focus on the roles of teachers in hermeneutical communicative learning. We investigate what competences and skills are required when implementing this perspective. These roles of the teacher build on earlier views. In the first place we are inspired by Pollefeyt (Pollefeyt 2011a; 2011b). He spoke about three teacher roles in his GSM model. The teacher is Getuige (Witness), Specialist and Moderator (Van den Berg en Mulder 2017; Van den Berg en Mulder 2019).

By conducting the Witness role, the teacher expresses personal values, ideals and motivations in the search of students to a personal vision of life. He does so without wanting to convince, he shows what he finds important and how his personal views and experiences play a role in his life.

As a Moderator, the teacher guides students to conduct conversations about life themes and learn to dialogue in open and respectful way and to perform educational activities from and with differences. She challenges students to express personal thoughts and views and to reflect on them in dialogue with others.

The teacher as Specialist *“makes students familiar with the colorful world of cultural-philosophical and religious stories, rituals, values, questions, ideas and practices. The teacher knows how to find his way in the colorful world and corrects wrong insights or images based on current scientific information”* (Van den Berg en Mulder 2017). She is a specialist in the field of worldview traditions and sources. She has knowledge about ideas, practices and sources of worldview tradition, she is able to evaluate these in a critical way, and she possesses skills to translate these knowledge into a meaningful dialogue in class.

#### 4. *The role of Specialist in worldview education*

We interpret the role of Specialist in worldview education as a key role in the context of diversity. The teacher knows his way in a variety of sources and traditions and is able to translate key thoughts to the personal experiences and world views of students. He knows and he values religious and cultural diversity in society as meaningful for the personal development of students. The Specialist is able to use multiple sources and traditions in an open, critical and hermeneutical way, *“because the pluralistic society implies that the worldview educator cannot depend on only one meaningful source to correlate with the questions and life stories of students.”* (Mulder and Van den Berg 2019, p. 3).

However, little research has been done about this role concerning the following questions:

a. we know from a theoretical point of view that the Specialist can play an important role in a pedagogy of difference. There has been some empirical research at Dutch primary schools about the hermeneutical communicative perspective on worldview education (Parlevliet, Van den Berg en Zondervan 2013). But there are hardly any empirical findings concerning the specific role of Specialist. Especially because of the important role the Specialist, according to theoretical insights, plays in fostering the students’ attitude towards difference and diversity, we need to know how teachers value this role. We need to find out what teachers in primary and in secondary education think of their competences and attitudes concerning this role. This way we find out what teachers need for schooling possibilities and what content and skills they value for implementing this role in education and in teacher training.

b. in the Netherlands we detect a decrease of religious and cultural literacy. There is a decline of affiliation with religious institutes and knowledge of religious and cultural stories and content. Also teachers and students at teacher training institutes deal with this decline. There seems to be a gap between this limited literacy and the role of Specialist, a specialized teacher that knows her way in worldview sources. So, empirical research and further theoretical study need to find out what possibilities teachers and scholars see as necessary for dealing with this gap. Further research and discussion focuses on the question what we can expect from teachers in worldview education when we observe teachers and students from teacher training institutes to be less and less literate in worldview traditions and sources?

c. The dual educational system is a unique feature of Dutch society. Article 23 of the Constitution provides that a school is either public or nongovernmental. A school for nongovernmental education is based on a specific and recognized religion or philosophy of life (Glenn and Zoontjens 2012; Noorlander and Zoontjens 2011; Zoontjens 2003). A public school exists thanks to a government initiative and cannot define or motivate its education from any religious point of view (Bakker 2012; Zoontjens 2003; Ter Avest et al. 2007). In addition to this principle, public education is characterized by its so-called ‘active multiformity’ (Veugelers and De Kat 2005). In almost all schools for nongovernment and public education, the diversity in society is also recognizable in both the student and teacher population. The Dutch constitution confers the right for every nongovernment school to receive governmental subsidy, to the same extent as public education (Zoontjens 2003). However, when we consider the teacher to be a Specialist in a pedagogy of difference in educating worldview education from a variety of religious and non-religious sources we wonder: how does a teacher motivate a diversity of worldview traditions and sources based on equality, especially in a specific context of a school that educated students in a particular faith tradition or worldview? How can the teacher at such a school implement this diversity in order to foster dialogue between these sources and students’ personal experiences and visions? The central hermeneutic-communicative concept of equality and dialogue between a variety of worldviews needs to deepen by investigating how and why teachers deal with this

concept in the context of their faith-based school identity.

Based on these three questions we conduct further research concerning the interpretation of the teacher role of Specialist in the context of diversity and what teachers and teacher training institutes need for implementing this role.

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