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A different learning environment for cultural education

A chapter of the publication *New Foundations for Cultural Education*

Inhoud

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A different learning environment for cultural education

Art and culture are an integral part of any community. Knowledge and skills in this area are required in various ways for full participation in society. Therefore it is necessary for children and adolescents to develop well in this area. This means that all children and young people must have access to an adequate offer and adequate guidance in cultural education, both in the home situation, in the immediate vicinity, in childcare, and at school. In this chapter, we outline what we believe to be the ideal infrastructure for cultural education and its content.

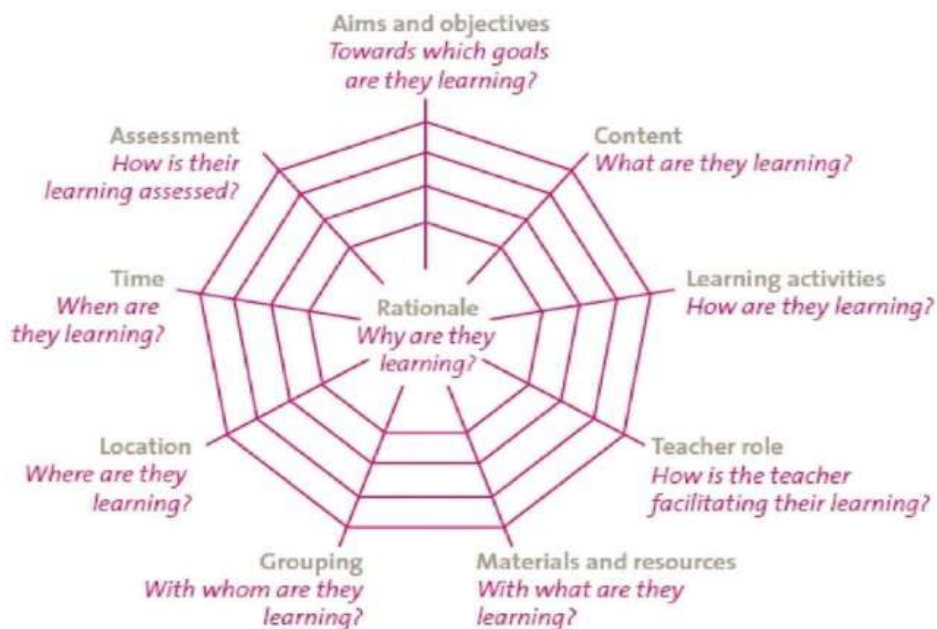
Childcare and school play an important role in the social responsibility for the full growth of children to become participating adults in their own communities, at work and in society in general. Government policy and associated interventions can have a direct influence on the course of activities in these places, such as the revision of the curriculum, the (financial) accessibility of childcare, and out-of-school cultural education. Within the family, there is much less direct influence on the course of events and it consists mainly of information and encouragement. Nevertheless, this role and the possibilities within the family situation must also be carefully considered.

With regard to school and childcare, we limit ourselves here to the pre-school period, primary and secondary education and general education within secondary vocational education. With this limitation, we focus roughly on the age of zero to about eighteen years, from birth to about halfway late adolescence.

The curriculum

When we speak about the curriculum at school, we often only think about the subject content. However, a curriculum has more aspects, which Van den Akker (2003) has brought together in a clear way in a spider web diagram (SLO, 2024). In addition to the ten aspects that emerge in this spider web, we must take into account that the curriculum exists at different levels and has impact on all of these levels. At the macro level, we are dealing with the national education system, at the meso level with the situation at school, and at the micro level with what happens in the classroom in the interaction between teacher and student. In The Netherlands, this means that we have to deal with the core objectives at the macro level, with the school policy plan at the meso level, and with the education plan and/or method at the micro level. To be able to describe a different learning environment, we will sometimes have to include all three levels, although the emphasis here is on the macro level.

Figure 1. Curricular spider web (Van den Akker, 2003)



The ten elements of the curricular spider web provide a good basis for the description of a new and different learning environment. We elaborate on these below.

Rationale

The rationale forms the core of the curriculum and focuses on why children should be educated. At the national level, the emphasis has already been placed in a general sense on the broad development of the child in order to be able to participate fully in society in all its facets. In this regard, three elements are mentioned: qualification, socialization, and personal development (Biesta, 2017b). However, these elements are far from balanced in current education and in recent years we have seen an increasing emphasis on qualification and even talk about basic skills (reading, writing, numeracy, citizenship, digital literacy (Wiersma, 2022b) indicating that other areas of learning are considered less important. In some schools, this reinforces the idea that more effort in the field of cultural education leads to poorer school results, rather than cultural education having a reinforcing effect (BBC News 2018).

However, the role and importance of art and culture in the life of the child turning into an adult may not go unexploited. Art and culture and its history not only teach children a wide range of emotions and expressions, but also enable them to discover and understand themselves, their environment, society and the world. In today's (culturally) diverse world and society, it is important that children learn to know themselves and their own culture, but also the other and their culture. Art and culture, as Biesta also argues, have unique existential qualities, both in

terms of dealing with the world around us materially and socially, as well as in which way can be dealt with resistance and overcome it (Biesta 2017a, pp. 122-123). In doing so, you also work on the desires that a person has with regard to the world and their existence in that world. This is not only an intellectual exercise, but also requires commitment and effort with heart and hands: a dialogue with the world.

At present, the extent to which children are given the chances and opportunities to make use of art and culture appropriate to their developmental stage, and to benefit from this for their development, depends very much on the home situation. It is only at the age of four that there is more structure because they go to school, but then the child is again dependent on the school situation. As a child grows older, there is an increasing dependence on the possibilities in the (immediate) environment. Unfortunately, we have to admit that for some children it is an accumulation of poor facilities when neither the parents, nor the childcare, nor the school, nor the environment provide sufficient and enriching opportunities.

In our view, facilities to benefit from arts and culture from birth, both from the guidance of parents, childcare, school and the environment, must therefore be available. There must be a continuous approach, appropriate to the developmental stage of the child, from zero to eighteen years of age, coherent and integrated, within a culturally rich environment. Only in this way can all parents be supported in providing a wide and rich palette of artistic and cultural opportunities.

Aim and objectives

The learning objectives describe what children are offered, what they need to know, and what they need to be able to do. In this respect, we would like to agree with what was indicated by the Art and Culture development team in their 2019 advice in the context of Curriculum.nu (Ontwikkelteam Kunst & Cultuur Curriculum.nu, 2019). In a coherent whole, children must be enabled to develop their artistic-creative ability, learn to make art and culture, learn to experience and learn to give meaning to both making and experiencing it.

The artistic ability focuses on the imagination or sounding of experiences, feelings, thoughts and ideas in an artistic expression, using matching techniques and artistic skills. The creative ability refers to an iterative process in which children learn to apply creative making and thinking strategies that are characteristic of art and culture. For example, diverging and converging, playing, fantasizing, empathizing, experimenting. In this process, children have to deal with learning to persevere and show courage, to fail and to deal with it, to feel discomfort but also to celebrate successes.

Content

The learning content is broadly defined by the main topics described in the above-mentioned proposal under Curriculum.nu (Ontwikkelteam Kunst & Cultuur Curriculum.nu, 2019). There is also a more specific elaboration to be found in the eight so-called Great Assignments:

1. Artistic-creative ability (making and thinking strategies);
2. Artistic expression;
3. Artistic techniques and skills;
4. Artistic innovation;
5. Artistic and cultural-historical contexts;
6. Purposes of the arts;
7. Experiencing the arts;
8. Showing and sharing your own work.

At a young age, we believe that a broader approach to the arts and culture is desirable, so as to gradually offer more and more separate disciplines in a targeted manner. The terms 'artistic orientation' and 'musical education' as they are used for the learning areas in the Netherlands and Flanders respectively should be understood here in their full breadth and not as a loose collection of disciplines.

In the period from birth to the concrete operational phase, this broad development is central, which involves sound, color, form and more of the general aspects of art and culture. In the concrete operational phase, between the ages of seven and twelve, the various disciplines can be gradually introduced, together with the corresponding professional skills and activities.

In this first period of development, the foundations are laid and cultural education focuses mainly on getting acquainted with and acquiring basic skills in the various art disciplines and expressions. This is done by starting from a broad formation in cultural education and thus contributing to general education, to *Bildung*, and the acquisition of various skills. This foundation is supported by two general pillars:

- A thorough introduction to the artistic-creative process, the common part of all art disciplines;
- A comprehensive introduction to the various art disciplines in which basic skills in different disciplines are acquired. This introduction enables children to choose to deepen their knowledge of one or more disciplines. In this way, they learn to discover and further develop their interests and talents at an early age.

In addition, we believe that children at this age should be enabled to work specifically with one or more art disciplines, because of aptitude, interest, or from a broader education.

In the formal operational phase, the focus is gradually on specific disciplines that appeal to the adolescent, while attention to other disciplines and perspectives is maintained in a more general cultural education. In early adolescence, the line of development from the first period continues. Central to the development of the artistic-creative process is the further deepening and elaboration in a limited number of disciplines. During this period, young adolescents can

explore and experience what their possibilities are in different disciplines and how they want to shape them. This allows them to make an informed choice about the role that art and culture will play in their lives. For those who have already started with a certain discipline at an earlier stage, this is often a period of reorientation, often in combination with the transition to secondary education. It is important to give attention and space to this reconsideration from the perspective of the art discipline as well.

In our view, the period of middle and late adolescence revolves around deepening and specializing in the art disciplines and cultural heritage. It is important to offer separate disciplines, with the possibility of concluding them with an exam at school. This applies both to current disciplines (drawing, visual arts, music, dance and theatre) and to new disciplines, such as media and film. Cultural heritage also has a fully-fledged place in this.

Because art and culture are everywhere and are intertwined with all kinds of facets of society, cultural education also lends itself well to connecting with other (knowledge) domains and development areas. In addition to learning in and about art and culture, there is also learning through art and culture, in which elements of cultural education can be used to strengthen, inspire and support other areas. The coherence with other learning areas can be sought in the coordination of two or more components, such as language and music (Broekhof & Hoogeveen, 2020), or cultural education and the promotion of reading (Broekhof et al., 2023). The connection with citizenship (Crone, 2021) or the more technical elements, think of STEM – STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) or Maker education (Neele et al., 2019) is also easy to make, as is with digital skills and history or social studies (Neele et al., 2020).

Learning activities

Learning activities outline the way in which learning takes place. In cultural education, the emphasis is more on the process of achieving a result rather than on the end result itself. In addition, it is about being actively engaging with art and culture and giving meaning to it, as well as experiencing the activities of others, both peers, amateurs and professionals.

This means that the learning activities consist partly of acquiring skills and techniques, designing and performing, and partly of visiting historical or current cultural expressions, interacting with cultural professionals and learning and reflecting on art and culture from the past and present. In addition, it is important that art and culture are also put in context, in the functions they may have and in the relationships with other subjects, society and the world. Integrating subjects and subject or learning areas into projects or themes enables children to understand the connection between different subjects and society. A proper integration of disciplines also requires a sufficient basis in the individual areas and a good alignment of learning objectives and content.

Because not every school or learning environment is able to offer all art disciplines in the current situation, scaling and collaboration will be necessary. Enlargement of scale does not equate to large-scale complexes; it can also be found in physically bringing together smaller units with communal facilities or virtually bundling these units with good transport to the communal facilities.

With respect to offering all disciplines as exam subjects in a region, schools can work together in the offer of their exam subjects, so that a total range of cultural subjects is accessible in each region. For less chosen exam subjects, pupils from different schools can be brought together in order to achieve a sufficient group size. In this way, young people have the opportunity to take exams at a high level in the subjects they want to follow, also from a practical point of view. A cultural subject as an examination subject contributes to the preparation for future professions or studies, whether in an art subject or not.

Teacher role

Good cultural education requires teachers who are adequately trained. This requires an appropriate set of knowledge and skills, both in the field of culture and the general positioning of culture, as well as in the field of pedagogy and didactics. On the one hand, this argues for the use of art teachers trained in pedagogy and didactics in their discipline, aimed at a certain stage of development of children. On the other hand, general teachers and pedagogical staff must have sufficient affinity and training in the cultural field. This means that they can make the connection with culture in subjects, projects and thematic work, and that they can achieve good cooperation with subject teachers. The question is whether they should be trained to teach the art subjects themselves, or whether they should gain experience and knowledge in their education to recognize the value of art and culture and the connection of art and culture to children's broad development and other learning goals.

When teacher, pedagogical staff member and art subject teacher work together in good interplay, they are able to work with (elements of) art and culture in relation to different subjects and themes. Research in this area shows that the teacher and art teacher have to find a balance between the challenge for the students, their own knowledge and skills, and the school culture (Van Meerkerk, z.d.). The teacher or pedagogical staff member takes care of the big picture and integration, the subject teacher takes care of the art- and culture-specific line and content. Good coordination in the classroom, the school and in cooperation with the immediate surroundings of the school is indispensable, for example in the form of an in-school cultural coordinator in collaboration with an extracurricular counterpart.

The changing role and position of knowledge and skills in our society requires a different role of teachers. They change from 'knowledge carrier' to 'knowledge gateway': they guide their students in finding and interpreting the right knowledge and information. This does not mean that the knowledge and skills of the teacher in a subject area are less necessary, but rather focuses on how they transfer this knowledge and skills. Thematic and project-based education gives students room for self-direction and personality development. Teachers fulfil the role of supervisor and coach. It is important that they guide their students well and provide a stimulating learning environment with room for experimentation. The artistic-creative research and process, and the cultural-historical context can play a more emphatic role in this.

Materials and resources

Art and culture have many forms of expression and presentation. The material used, whether it is the body itself, an instrument, device or tangible material, is crucial for the proper

development and application of art and culture. This means that the facilities must also be designed for these forms, such as studios, stages, and rehearsal rooms. A good and broad introduction to and application of cultural education does not ask for a choice or to use a slimmed-down form, but needs a broad and well-equipped supply.

In addition, professional expressions and experiences should be seen as a source for children's development in the field of art and culture. Therefore, there must be space and opportunity to meet arts professionals, either in the professional's own environment or in the learning environment of the child or adolescent, at school or daycare. To make this possible, many of the current schools and childcare facilities are too small. As with learning activities, scaling up therefore makes sense.

Grouping

Although all children and adolescents go through the different stages of development, this does not happen according to a strict schedule linked to a specific age or order. If we want to adopt to the developmental stage a child is in, it is not possible to form groups purely on the basis of their age. Also, not every child will have the same affinity or aptitude with certain forms of art and culture, and will therefore develop faster or less quickly in this area.

In order to stimulate children, it is important to match with their level of development in the field of art and culture in a general sense or with a specific discipline. Because art and culture are focused on communication and (groups from) society, it is important to form groups of equal levels of development. This allows children to learn from and with each other, something that is important from an early age. Individual instruction is then in the service of maintaining the connection of the individual in a group or of promoting the development of the group. This may mean that a child who is lagging behind receives extra attention to stay connected or to make a switch to another developmental group. But that can just as well apply to a child who has a leading role in a group: by giving him or her the space to shape rapid development and possibly move to another group.

Due to the nature of the different disciplines and the way in which skills are taught, group sizes vary to suit the chosen activities and disciplines. From the perspective of feasibility and affordability, it will be necessary to look for an optimum in which the various interests are properly weighed against each other. As with learning activities, upscaling makes sense here, also in order to be able to put together sufficiently large groups of the same level of development.

In addition, it is important that children take note of each other's expressions and process, and that they are enabled to present to each other. This can be done both within their own development groups, but also within other development groups. For groups that are less advanced, this can be stimulating, for groups that are already further in their development it can help them to reflect on their own process and development. Working together in a group towards a presentation or performance stimulates self-confidence and solidarity.

Location

Learning about and from art and culture takes place both in one's own learning environment and in the environment of the cultural professional, such as a museum, theatre or music venue. It is important to have suitable spaces and facilities within one's own learning environment, and children must be able to move around to important places for art and culture in the area. This can be cultural heritage such as a castle or mill, but also a library, gallery or dance studio. In order to be able to use this in the development of children, a rich cultural environment with both amateurs and professionals is needed, but facilities are also needed to be able to get there or to offer the rich cultural environment within the learning environment.

When it comes to responsibility for the culturally rich learning environment, provinces and municipalities play an important role. Children and adolescents must have opportunities to follow the widest possible range of disciplines and expressions and also have perspective on how they can continue to actively participate as adults. And, in doing so, provide a richer cultural environment in their future home situation.

Time

At present, there is no legally prescribed schedule of teaching hours in The Netherlands, but there is a minimum number of school hours set during the school career and there are designated times and periods that may or may not count as teaching time. Lessons provided during the summer holidays, for example, do not count as teaching time, even if the same content is taught as in the month of September. The obligation for a five-day school week and a balanced distribution of hours throughout the day is also laid down in the Dutch law. Furthermore, primary schools are obliged to provide after-school services when parents request it. However, in the pre-school and out-of-school periods, no other times have been set within which opportunities for childcare or youth guidance must be offered. Only pre-school education is subject to an offer of 16 hours a week up to a total of 960 hours.

Although at first glance it seems that there are few obstacles to connecting to the developmental stage and needs of children and adolescents, in practice it turns out to be difficult to fill teaching time in a different way in order to offer the student an appropriately varied learning day. In recent years, the obstacles to achieving a good offer have been well mapped out, and solutions have also been put forward for the organizational structure (Van Rozendaal et al, 2015) and flexibilization of teaching time (Vereniging IKOOK, 2017). The current system of equal teaching time but unequal learning time outside school reinforces inequality of opportunity for children and adolescents (Ploegman, 2023). By the way, the obstacle caused by the school system applies not only to primary education, but also to secondary vocational education and higher education (Lutters, 2021).

In order to provide equal opportunities for all children, we believe that developmental opportunities that are currently offered in school and outside school should be brought together into one, so that 'extracurricular activities' such as a culture lesson, also during the day, can be offered alternately with 'in-school activities'. We envision a learning day in which activities that are currently organized as in-school and out-of-school activities are offered alternately

during one day, so that an integrated approach to learning and development becomes possible which also can be varied with student attendance. In this way, it is possible to better meet the needs of the home situation in terms of the child's presence and attendance. Within this, you can work with an alternation of compulsory blocks and choice activities. This includes a structure in which at least fifty weeks a year, during the weekdays from seven o'clock in the morning to seven o'clock in the evening, children and young people can go to a facility to develop, learn and discover, relax and meet each other. Attendance should become more flexible, adapted to what the child needs and what the family situation requires: for example, starting later in the day, or finishing earlier. For example, shorter free periods that occur more in the winter than in the summer, because parents have more work in the summer than in the winter.

That this is possible is shown by the experiences of schools that have been given permission to experiment with school hours. It is also evident from the experiences of integrated child centers that have come to an actual merger of primary school and childcare and that offered a varied program, with different roles and divisions for teachers, subject teachers and pedagogical staff.

Assessment

The last aspect of the curriculum deals with the method of assessing the development of the child or adolescent. In the current Dutch situation we are dealing with a mandatory package of transfer tests at the end of primary education and a central final exam at the end of secondary education, standardized tests for language and arithmetic, and student monitoring systems with interim test moments. These tests are often summative, i.e. focused on a one-off moment in which the child has to show what it can and knows, and much less formative, i.e. charting what development the child has gone through and where it now stands in its development. The results of these tests are used to assess the quality of the school, or the state of education (PISA ranking), and they are highly determinant for the child's chances of advancement during and after primary education. As a consequence, pressure is exerted on the summative result from all sides. This in turn translates into an attitude within the school in which learning is mainly for the test ('teaching to the test') instead of focusing on the broad development of the child and adolescent. A clear example in The Netherlands is the great attention paid in the final year of secondary education to practicing old exams. The term 'exam year' that is used for that year also indicates that the exam is central and not the development of the student.

Assessment should be more in the service of the child's development and appropriate to its developmental stage. This means that more formative testing should be done, and that the child's development in the past period is recorded. This forms the basis for the approach of the next period, and therefore also influences the way in which the guidance is organized in the next period. In this way, differentiation in levels and development can be more easily controlled. A logical consequence of this is that standard tests and standard assessments for the entire group at the same time are not possible. This does not mean, however, that there is no standard against which to compare development and achievements. It is a different system, not a different standard. The role of the teacher in assessing the level a student is at becomes much more important, similar to the Finnish system.

An integrated learning environment

When we bring together the above aspects of the curriculum, we see that this requires a different design of the way in which we provide support to parents and guide children and adolescents in their development. By connecting to children's developmental stage, developmental level, preferences, and interests, we offer them optimal opportunities to develop. And by providing these opportunities for all children and adolescents, we ensure equal opportunities for all. This applies both to the possibilities in the field of art and culture as well as to developmental opportunities in other areas. Art and culture cannot be seen separately from society, which also means that the introduction to art and culture, and the development within it, cannot be seen separately from the broad context of society and learning situations, and therefore cannot be seen separately from other learning areas. This leads to broad learning experiences and therefore better learning (Van Heusden et al., 2016, p. 126).

For an optimal curriculum that focuses on the broad development of every child, also in the field of art and culture, we will have to review the current structure of education and childcare. This requires an integrated learning and development place with activities for all children and adolescents from zero to eighteen years old. This place is a combination of current primary and secondary education, part of vocational education, out-of-school care and out-of-school education. In short: a bundling of the current fragmented efforts around growing children. In this view, a day consists of a combination of learning, playing, experimenting, experiencing and discovering. This creates a combination of current learning areas, school subjects and projects, extracurricular cultural education, sports and play, social play and the social encounters that children and adolescents have in their free time. Playing and learning, relaxation and concentration alternate, more in line with the needs and natural rhythm of children and young people. The term 'school' is no longer applicable here, so it is better to speak of a 'learning environment'.

The learning environment we have in mind offers activities and guidance from seven in the morning to seven in the evening, at least fifty weeks a year. Children and parents have the freedom to choose in starting time, duration and period, with a mandatory minimum annual attendance. For children and adolescents, teachers, pedagogical staff and other professionals this means a more varied day. Different professionals alternate during a day or period to take care of the education and development of the students. They do this in coordination with each other based on their own professional knowledge, skills and availability. With development files and plans they can guide, support and monitor growing children in their development as much as possible. Of course, clear frameworks for obligations and responsibilities for children and professionals must be provided.

With this approach, the current in-school and out-of-school cultural education for the age of zero to eighteen years is brought together in one facility as part of an integral learning and development place. This makes it possible for all children to follow group and/or individual lessons in the field of art and culture at an early age. The teaching options will no longer be limited to the edges of the day but are instead integrated into the entire day program. Until the age of eighteen, it is then possible to continue to offer this in this broad context, which does not alter the fact that it is still possible for children and young people in this age group to

participate in associations for art and culture or in other areas, or to participate in projects or meetings. It is precisely the flexibilization of the day and the attendance in a day that makes it easier to make choices and more opportunities for participation arise, not only in the evening or at the end of the day, but also during the day.

The opportunity to get acquainted, to develop and deepen with culture is the same for every child within an integrated learning environment. Due to the integral curriculum and the integral daily schedule make visits to or from cultural activities natural and easy to fit in. In this way, cultural institutions can better contribute to cultural development and, where possible, the cultural expertise and background of parents can be used as well.

Offering equal opportunities to all children and young people, including in the field of art and culture, does not mean that every child should follow exactly the same program. Connecting to the developmental stage, developmental opportunities and interests means making choices in terms of offer and guidance. These choices can be made by the parents and the child at the level of activities, but also on the basis of a specific profile or offer of the learning environment. This does not alter the fact that there is a broad basis that should be offered in all learning environments.

To provide all facilities and possibilities, the current scale of education and childcare is often too small. This applies not only to the requirements for buildings and the affordability of facilities, but also to the possibilities of creating dynamic groups that match the development and possibilities of a child and young person during their period of growing up. Connecting to the developmental stage of a child and young person does mean paying more attention to individual development, but it certainly does not equal individual education. In fact, (learning to) function in groups of different sizes and compositions is an important part of development.

A changed design of the learning environment also requires a different view of housing and facilities and their scale. Current schools and facilities will have to work together more and be brought together more. This can be physical, by bringing institutions together in a certain area, with, for example, small, intimate locations for different groups of children. But it can also be virtual, when locations work together and provide mutual transport.

If one location is chosen, the children can be brought by bus, with fixed pick-up and drop-off points in the neighborhood, but they can also be dropped off and picked up by their parents or go themselves at a later age. Hot meals are provided at school, as is breakfast for children who opt for it.

An integrated learning environment offers amateurs or professionals the opportunity to provide activities, performances or presentations as an integral part of the developmental process that children and adolescents go through. In addition, the integral daily schedule ensures that there is room for groups to undertake cultural activities. In this way, the integrated approach in the education of the future is also reflected in the physical layout of the school and its surroundings. After seven o'clock in the evening, the facilities could be used for and by adults to actively engage in art and culture, or with other activities such as sports, technology or nature.

Visions of the future

To give you an impression of what our vision can look like, here are two descriptions of a day of a child or adolescent:

Vision of the future 1: a child's day

At seven o'clock in the morning, mother wakes Bram up to get him ready for his day at the integral child center (ICC). The nine-year-old boy quickly gets dressed so he can have breakfast. Mother walks with Bram to the place where the special bus stops to take all the children from the neighborhood to the ICC. Also on the bus is Zoë, who is the same age but goes to a different ICC. Their ICCs, together with other ICCs, are located on a large campus in a green area just down the road.

On the playground, Bram sees his friends Max and Mohammed, who came with another bus. "What are we going to do today?" he asks the other two. "Um, play soccer?" They think that's a good idea. But the teacher has other plans today. When the children arrive at the ICC at eight o'clock, they have plenty of time to play and play soccer until about nine o'clock, but then the lesson begins, with writing, language and interactive arithmetic. At eleven o'clock it is time to play together again and a few children go to the music or sports lesson they would like to take. Bram takes his trumpet with him for his music lesson. At lunchtime there is a meal for everyone.

After lunch, the students work in groups on the project 'Where do I come from?' The children collect images on the internet of the places where their parents and grandparents come from and look up how they lived back then. Everyone has brought an object from grandpa or grandma that has been important to them in their lives. They pay a lot of attention to the design of the work, which they present with a self-made play or poem. In this way, they also learn a lot about the places and countries where the parents and grandparents of classmates lived and what happened during that time.

'What a strange tent dress your grandfather is wearing', Bram laughs when he sees a photo of Mohammed's grandfather. "Ha, look at yours, with those weird long hair and flowers in his hair. That's even crazier", says Mohammed, who can't believe that Bram's grandfather really looked like that.

After the students have worked on the project, it's time for the next activity on the large campus: sports in the hall or on the sports field, or taking art lessons in the cultural center. Students of different ages engage in the sport or art subject of their choice. Older students or students with great talent help the younger students. At the end of the afternoon, the bus takes the children back home. Zoë went home earlier, because her parents had taken that afternoon off with her.

'How was your day today?' mother asks when Bram jumps out of the bus at six o'clock. 'Oh, just like usual', says Bram, 'I played well and saw Mohammed's grandfather in a tent dress.' Mother smiles and grabs his hand as they walk home for dinner. After dinner, Bram goes to the rehearsal of the youth orchestra of the brass band and doesn't go to bed too late. After all, tomorrow is another day.

Vision 2: the day of an adolescent

Today is the first day in the new year that Izaira goes back to school. Small breath clouds indicate how cold it is and Izaira shivers in her new coat. Since the promotion round in December, she has been in a different building than her best friends Sara and Meike. They have gone to the practical stream, and Izaira is going to the theoretical stream. All three turned 15 shortly before the turn of the year. They celebrated it together; a kind of birthday and farewell party in one.

Izaira doesn't know what she wants to do when she grows up. Continuing her studies, yes, but going to a college or university? And which direction? She still has plenty of time to get her bearings. In recent years, it has become clear to her which fields suit her best. A bit artistic, but also the exact direction. That makes it all a bit more difficult to choose. No, then Hassan, her older brother. He had a much easier time choosing: very linguistic, science subjects were not for him. He is now studying Dutch at Utrecht University.

It's always exciting, a first day in a new period. The groups for the different projects have changed based on the individual progression and choices. And the split into the practical stream and the theoretical stream makes it all even more different.

Izaira starts the day with dance, one of the art subjects in which she wants to take an exam. After dance, she is doing a project on the urban planning of Paris, a combination of French, mathematics, physics, history and geography. Fortunately, she is allowed to skip the French language components because she did not choose French as an exam subject. That language doesn't suit her at all. English is much more fun, especially because she can work on the grammar at her own pace and because she is going to London in three months for an exchange project.

Now let's get dancing and wake up properly. Izaira opens the door to the dressing room and quickly changes her clothes. After greeting her friends with best wishes for the new year, she opens the door to the dance room where the music is already greeting her...

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Colophon

New Foundations for Cultural Education

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Editorial

Soplutekst

With special thanks to

Daniëlle Baas – BMK

Edien Lammers, Fianne Konings, Astrid Rass – VCPS

Fenna van Hout – VNG

Gijs van Rozendaal, Joke Tillemans – Pact voor Kindcentra

Jan van den Eijnden, Karin van Dijk, Marian van Miert, Piet Roorda – LKCA

Jeroen Lutters - ArtEZ

Karin Hoogeveen – Sardis

Lode Vermeersch – HIVA – KU Leuven

Pauline Verhallen – Cultuurschakel

Peter Pot – Stichting Kunst & Cultuur

Richard Smolenaers - Mocca

Publisher

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