

**Educational Evaluation and Assessment: Beliefs and Values in Educational Discourse**

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**Abstract**

This study explores how non-standard schools in the Netherlands can be evaluated and assessed. Firstly, the historical context of the development of compulsory education and freedom of education is provided. This leads to a differentiation between standard and non-standard schools. Secondly, the value of non-standard schools in the Dutch educational system is explained through educational experimentation and innovation.

This is followed by an exploration of the concept of education itself. The goals of education will be put in a societal context, which leads to a division into three domains of functionality and disfunctionality: qualification, socialization and subjectification.

It is explained how the preferable balance between these domains is based on educational beliefs and values about what is considered *good* education. Educational beliefs and values are shown as the foundation for educational assumptions and the organization of schools. Concurrently, the role of beliefs and values in the evaluation and assessment system are explored.

In the end a framework for educational beliefs and values will be proposed. This framework will be suggested as a starting point for redesigning the educational evaluation and assessment system and for redefining educational discourse.

### Introduction

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2013 a parent was sentenced in court for not following the law with regards to compulsory education in the Netherlands. This law was intended to protect children and to guarantee them their constitutional right to education (Bakker, Noordman, & Rietveld-Van Wingerden, 2011). The child involved in the lawsuit had, according to the judge, not received education for 19 months. During this time, the child had gone to a school but the school was not considered a proper school. One of the arguments in support of the sentence was that the freedom for children and parents to choose their preferred type of education is, and should be, limited by educational legislation (Rechtbank Midden Nederland, 2013a).

This court sentence was one in a series of lawsuits between 2010 and 2014 concerning similar school-types (Raad van State, 2011, 2012; Rechtbank Haarlem, 2010; Rechtbank Midden-Nederland, 2013a, 2013b; Rechtbank Noord-Holland, 2014). During these lawsuits it was noted multiple times that all parties (e.g. parents, school-staff, prosecutors, school inspection) clearly had the best intentions for the involved children. Yet, they disagreed on what is best for children with regards to education and school-type.

The dispute started in 2009 when the Inspection of Education (IoE), the institute responsible for educational evaluation and assessment in the Netherlands, concluded that some schools were, according to their standards, actually not schools at all (Raad van State, 2011, 2012; Rechtbank Haarlem, 2010). The involved schools, “De Koers” and “De Kampanje”, were both Sudbury Valley schools. This is, in short, a school-type in which children are considered ultimately responsible for their own learning. Within the multitude of lawsuits that followed, judges ruled some of the conclusions made by the Inspection of Education premature or unjustified. In the end, however, multiple parents were sentenced as described above and both involved schools were closed.

The question rises if education at these 'schools' was truly of such poor standards to justify their identity as school being denied. Sudbury Valley schools have existed for over 45 years in the United States and some research has found this school-type to be at least as efficient as other types of education (Gray & Chanoff, 1986; Greenberg, Sadofsky, & Lempka, 2005; Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009). Children seem to have the same general prospects with regards to follow-up education and career. This suggests that the school-type itself is not of a low standard. Yet, why would “De Koers” and “De Kampagne” then be evaluated so negatively? According to proponents of the Sudbury concept the Dutch evaluation and assessment system cannot properly evaluate or assess this school-type because the instruments used for evaluation and assessment by the IoE are not applicable.

This leads to the the question how non-standard school-types can be assessed. An underlying assumption to this question is that non-standard schools should not be regulated or altered by their

evaluation and assessment. After all, if that would be the case, they would no longer be the original school-type intended for evaluation.

In other words, this question and assumption entail the difference between educational changes made after evaluation, with the direct goal to improve a school (ideally with all parties conceding that this change is an improvement), or changes made to fit a school to the used evaluation and assessment instrument. The second instance implies that the instrument used for evaluation and assessment is invalid. If it is not applicable to a specific school, the instrument should be altered rather than the school it is supposed to assess. This article proposes a basis for developing an educational evaluation and assessment system in which non-standard school-types can be assessed without altering or regulating their educational environments.

### **Method**

In order to answer the question how non-standard schools can be assessed, this article will first provides a historical context of compulsory education in the Netherlands. Here, the development of laws regarding compulsory education and freedom of education will be described. This context of the Dutch educational system is the starting point for this article for it explains the reasoning behind the current educational evaluation and assessment system.

Following, the origin of non-standard schools will be described. A first clarification of the problems regarding educational evaluation and assessment of non-standards schools will be provided through the example of the Sudbury Valley concept. To explain the value of non-standard schools the process of educational experimentation and innovation will be explained. This leads to the question of what education actually is.

Therefore, the concept of education is described and the difference between schooling and education will be explained. The boundaries for this article's focus will be provided shortly, followed by a general definition of education in a societal context. To continue this exploration, the goals of education will be examined. These goals of education will be shown to be divided over different functionalities and domains. By analyzing the concept of education and its goals, the main question regarding educational evaluation and assessment of non-standard schools is clarified by providing an explanation as to *what* should be evaluated and assessed.

This leads to the question of what the preferable balance between the different goals of education is. This question will be the starting point for the final part of the analysis in which the concept of *good* education will be explored. This analysis provides an explanation as to why the preferable balance between different goals of education is disputed. Here, the tension between individual rights and collective needs in a democracy will be explained. This provides further

explanation to the importance of an educational evaluation and assessment system which includes non-standard schools.

In the end, the fundamental problem of educational evaluation and assessment of non-standard schools will be clarified. Hereto, the current system will be explained in more detail and some concrete examples of the problems it produces will be provided. In this last part of the analysis the actual basis of the problematic nature of educational evaluation and assessment is clarified by acknowledging the role of beliefs and values in education.

The insights resulting from these analyses of the practice and concept of education in the Netherlands, as well as the analysis of the problems with regards to evaluating and assessing education, resulting in the acknowledgment of beliefs and values related to education, will lead to the proposal of a new framework for conceptualizing education. This framework could be a starting point to redesign educational evaluation and assessment in the Netherlands. This might prevent further lawsuits with regards to the educational evaluation of non-standard school-types. It could also help reboot the scientific, policy and politic discourse about what *good* education is or should be.

### **The Development of the Dutch Educational System**

In 1901 the first compulsory educational law was instated in the Netherlands (Bakker et. al., 2011; Tweede Kamer, 1899, 1900; Van Elten, 2011). This law declared that children between the ages of 6 and 12 were obligated to attend primary school, the intention was to reduce child labor and truancy, and to increase the amount of educated labourers for more complicated factory processes. This initial law was the origin of the current laws regarding compulsory education for all children. At first the compulsory educational law allowed (temporary) exemption from education for children in order to work, for example in agriculture. Later it was extended over a larger age-group and exemptions were abolished (Leerplichtwet 1969, 2015). The only exceptions to compulsory education between the ages of 5 and at least 16 years, are now children in special circumstances, such as children with severe health issues. If children have no degree at the age of 16, compulsory education continues until the age of 18 or until they gain a secondary school degree.

During the development of compulsory education, the Netherlands was religiously divided into a strong pillarized society: there was segregation between different (religious) communities. Some people considered education where children of all segments simultaneously received education to be inferior or less desirable to segregated education. Parents felt their children should receive education based on the same life philosophy and religion they encountered in all other aspects of their lives, which led to a division of public and particular schools and a constitutional right to freedom of education (Art. 23 GW, 2008; Bakker et. al., 2011; Leerplichtwet 1969, 2015).

Currently, this division into public and particular schools still holds and is an integral part of the Dutch educational system. The differences between these types of schools will be shortly explained.

### **Public and Particular Schools**

Public schools are freely accessible for all children. They are based on a liberal democratic philosophy in which religion is considered a private affair. The education is therefore not religiously based. The general curriculum at these schools is set by the government and these schools are always fully government funded so receiving education is free for students and their parents (Rijksoverheid, n.d.).

Contrarily to public schools, particular schools are allowed to set requirements to their students and could therefore exclude certain pupils (i.e. a child from a Protestant family could not join a Catholic school). Particular schools were originally based on specific religious views and the education followed these convictions. In this historical context of segregated education, particular schools over time changed to become more open in character (Bakker et. al., 2011). With the disappearance of pillarization in Dutch society, most particular schools became less segregated as well. The education at religious particular schools remains based on the specific religion however.

Particular schools are mostly government funded, but contrarily to public schools they can ask parents for a financial contribution to their children's education (Art. 2 GW, 2008; Rijksoverheid, n.d.). Though uncommon, some particular schools are not government funded and fully rely on donations or parental contributions, this are private schools (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2008a, 2008b). Though private schools are always particular schools, most particular schools are not private schools.

The opportunity for people to establish a particular school in which children are educated according to a certain life philosophy (i.e. religion) also creates an opportunity for particular schools based on a non-religious life philosophy (Levering, Koops, Winter, & Van Tartwijk, 2015; Rijksoverheid, n.d.). These are life philosophies about how children should be raised and educated. Thus, these schools are not so much different in their direction of education from public schools but rather in how the education is structured and organized. In this article these schools will be called non-standard schools.

With this distinction the classification of schools has two levels. Firstly, there is the differentiation between public and particular schools (Bakker et. al., 2011; Levering et. al., 2015; Rijksoverheid, n.d.). At this time public schools are based on a neo-liberal philosophy in which such things as religion are considered a private affair. Particular schools can be based on all other life philosophies. The differences between public and particular schools concern the direction of education, it entails variations in *what* should be learned. Secondly, there are differences on an

organizational and structural level, in other words: differences in *how* education is shaped. This leads to the distinction between standard and non-standard schools. In the following paragraph their differences will be explained in detail.

### **Standard and Non-Standard Schools**

As described, standard schools can have some differences in the direction of education: they can be based on a specific religion or on the neo-liberal perspective in which religion is a private matter (i.e. they can be public or particular). These standard schools follow the same general rules with regards to teaching and learning, in other words *how* learning takes place is similar in both public and particular standard schools (Bakker et al., 2011; Levering et al., 2015). This school-type is based on a system of year-groups and standardized curriculum [Leerstofjaarklassensysteem]. In this system, schools are divided in age groups named classes. Each class consists of children of roughly the same age and has a teacher who gives lessons according to a fixed curriculum. The curriculum is set by the government, school and teacher. If at the end of (or during) the year, the pupils have mastered the curriculum well enough they *pass* to the next class. This mastering of the curriculum is mostly monitored by formal assessment such as exams. Deviations from the standard curriculum can be made in relatively small amounts, for example through easier material or extra lessons, the general though, all pupils receive roughly the same curriculum (Bakker et al., 2011; Levering et al., 2015).

Contrarily, non-standard schools are not based on the structure and organization of education based on system of year-groups and standardized curriculum. How the education in these schools is structured or organized can vary (Bakker et al., 2011; Levering et al., 2015; Volman, 2006). Some of these schools might hold to the year-group and class-structure, while others do not. These schools could be based on an explicit educational theory, such as the educational theory of Montessori schools. Concurrently, in other non-standard schools such as Jena-plan schools, the education can be shaped by the involved teachers, parents and students.

Non-standard schools can be public or particular in their educational direction, in other words, they can be based on the neo-liberal perspective or on a different life philosophy. Though exceptions are possible, most non-standard schools are particular schools. Just as standard particular schools, non-standard schools can be government funded or private, though private schools are rare in the Dutch educational system (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2008a; 2008b, Rijksoverheid, n.d.).

All thing considered, non-standard schools can vary in what makes them non-standard. Their similarity is that they are set up differently then standard schools; non-standard schools are not based on the top-down structure of fixed curriculum combined with the year-group and class structure.

In the standard school-type students have little influence over the basic fundamentals of *what*, *when* and *how* they are learning (Levering et al., 2015). There are, of course, a variety of possibilities to shape the specifics, but in general the educational path is decided for, and brought to the students. One main assumption of this model is that children of the same age are at roughly the same point in development (Bakker et al., 2011). A more in depth assumption of this school-type is that children not only need to learn certain things during their school-time, but that they need to be *made* to learn these things. Furthermore, it coincides with the statement that there is a need for children to meet and learn to overcome resistance in their (school)life (Biesta, 2012b). One could suggest these are not assumptions but logical consequences of children *needing* to learn.

However, there are multiple counterarguments that could be made against these educational assumptions (Levering et al., 2015; Volman, 2006). Non-standard schools are based on some of those counterarguments or on alternative educational assumptions. Thus, some non-standard schools might be relatively similar to standard schools while others could be very different. This depends on how many alternative educational assumptions non-standard schools are based. The Sudbury Valley school-type can be described as an opposite to the standard school-type for it differs from standard schools in organization, structure and underlying educational assumptions (Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009).

**The Sudbury Valley school.** The Sudbury Valley concept is based on the fundamental educational assumption that children *want* to learn everything they need to know and subsequently, that they will come to voluntarily seek out these learning goals at their own time. This means there are no fixed classes or lessons and there is *no set curriculum* at those schools. This does also include, for example, reading and writing. The students are not made to learn this, they have to seek out the learning themselves or learn it without consciously seeking out the knowledge (Gray, 2011; Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009).

Graduation and follow-up education is also different within the Sudbury Valley system. When students wish to continue with further education after the Sudbury school (e.g. college or university) students at a Sudbury school must actively choose to take the examinations and meet the requirements set by the school they want to participate in. They can choose to take state exams to get a regular high school diploma, or they can take admission tests at the specific follow-up educational institute of their choosing. A Sudbury Valley diploma itself does not give qualification for follow-up education, but students can choose to get the qualifications fitting their needs during their time at a Sudbury school (Gray, 2011; Greenberg et al., 2005; Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009).

Additionally, Sudbury Valley schools are governed differently. The schools are set up democratically, with the students themselves being a part of the governance. They decide alongside

staff members in choices regarding funding, rules and punishments, management (including hiring teachers) and overall governance of the school. This is done by different committees and all students, regardless of age, are allowed to take part in these processes. All staff members and students hold equal votes in the governance of the school (Gray, 2011; Greenberg et al., 2005; Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009).

### **Dynamic Education: Experimentation and Innovation**

The Dutch educational system could be considered complex because of its distinction into public and particular schools and subsequently standard and non-standard schools. Yet, it has advantages. One of those is the prospect of experimentation and innovation. Over time society changes: developments such as globalization and technology have changed the structure of our community (Bourn, 2008; Volman, 2006; Moravec, 2008, 2013). As a consequence, the needs of a society and its members change too.

Moravec (2008, 2013) suggests the current society to be in transition from industrial to (k)nomadic in knowledge acquisition and usability. This entails developments through which workers are no longer expected to be employed by one company for their entire adult life. It also involves developments of technology and a quick growth of knowledge. Knowledge could become more fluid and with innovations such as the Internet the value of knowledge changes. Workers do not need to know everything by heart, but they do need to be able to learn (by themselves) what they need to know and continue doing so through their entire career. This suggests a change for the way in which people should handle knowledge and learning.

Yet, even if the extreme changes in society Moravec (2013) suggest are not tenable, the changes of globalization and technology can not be denied. Society changes and education needs to change with it. A first step to these changes is to develop educational theories about how to improve or change education to fit the (new) societal needs.

Thus, educational change can be worked out in theory before its implementation. However, it can never be fully foretold how an educational theory will work when it is put into practice: the exact effect cannot be predicted (Kelly, 2003; Levering et al., 2015; Volman, 2006). A theory of any educational change can be founded and seemingly perfect. But, when put in practice, much more aspects besides educational theory play a role. Teacher-, parent- and child-characteristics for example could influence the outcome. Therefore, a seemingly perfect theory might *not* work in practice. Furthermore, even if the involved individuals are content with a school system, it could be disadvantageous for the society as a whole (Cheong Cheng & Tam, 1997; Elmore, 2005; Fenech, 2011).



Thus, to innovate education, the educational theories regarding educational changes need to be implemented before their worth can be determined: these first implementations are by definition experimental (Levering et al., 2015; Volman, 2006). Any educational experimentation could turn out to be an innovation, yet it could also turn out to be a failure for society as a whole or the individuals directly involved. Therefore, educational experimentation is a necessary risk. One that can be monitored by educational evaluation and assessment. A question that rises is what entails as a success and what as a failure? To explore this, the concept of education and its goals will be described.

### **What is education?**

Previously, the Dutch educational system was explained. Its origin and current structure contain among others the existence of standard and non-standard schools, which are all evaluated and assessed by the IoE. To further explore this, the concept of education needs to be examined.

A clear definition of education is disputed. Education involves learning and knowledge, but what is it really? Multiple definitions of education entail the process in which students learn to function (better) within the society they live in (Biesta, 2015b; Elmore, 2005; Gray, 2011; Moravec, 2013; Sears & Hughes, 2006).

Gray (2011) broadly defines education as “the set of processes by which each new generation of human beings . . . acquires the skills, knowledge, rituals, beliefs, lore and values- in short, the culture- of the previous generation”. In this context, education is more than the learning that takes place at school environments. Also, it suggests educational processes are not by definition deliberate (Moravec, 2013). Schooling is defined by Gray (2011) as all deliberately set up learning in special settings.

Within these definitions, schools can be learning environments for both education and schooling. The Sudbury Valley school is more focused on education and less on schooling (Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009). In the historical context of compulsory education, standard schools were more focused on schooling, yet over time this seems to have shifted at least partly towards education as a more holistic process (Bakker et al., 2011; Levering et al., 2015). The extent to which this might have happened is unclear and can differ between schools and school-types.

In this article the term ‘education’ will be used. Unless specifically mentioned otherwise, ‘education’ refers to all learning that can take place at school grounds (deliberate or not). This contains both formal and informal learning and schooling, and it does include social (including cultural) and emotional development and learning.

In short, even though the differentiations between education and schooling could be made in which education is broader, here education refers only to the learning process of students in schools.

Education in other environments, such as sport clubs, is excluded. The concept of home-schooling is not excluded as such, though it will not be considered explicitly.

All things considered, when trying to answer the question '*what is education?*' a definition will probably involve at least some description of the goal of education (Biesta, 2015b; Elmore, 2005; Gray, 2011; Levering et al., 2015; Moravec, 2013; Sears & Hughes, 2006). In general terms education encompasses the assimilation into the culture or society in which the learning takes place, yet it is still unclear what this entails. To this end, the goals of education will be described.

**Functionality and disfunctionality.** In its broadest sense, education has a societal function (Biesta, 2012a, 2012b, 2015a, 2015b; Moravec, 2008, 2013; Sears & Hughes, 2006). After their education children should become functioning members of society, so it can be suggested that education has a cultural and an economic value in a society. Children need to learn how to be democratic civilians of the community they grow up in (Biesta, 2015a; Levering et al., 2015). To keep the society viable its members have to contribute on multiple levels, such as politically, economically and culturally (Gray, 2011; Moravec, 2008, 2013; Sears & Hughes, 2006).

This leads to two domains of educational functionality: qualification and socialization (Biesta, 2012a, 2015b). Qualification revolves around knowledge and skills inhering the more economical function of education. Socialization is focused on emotional and social development in which children learn how to function within the culture they grow up in (Gray, 2011).

However, besides this efficiency of education it can be argued that education is, or should be, more (Biesta, 2015b). Schools can be a place for children to learn how to be grown-up and to experiment with their own identity within the (school) community. This function of schools goes further than the direct learning of how to become productive members of society, it is more abstract. It contains the development of children as their own persons, without a direct function for society. Biesta (2012a, 2015a, 2015b) calls this goal of education subjectification.

It can be argued that the subjectificational function of education serves a purpose for society (Biesta, 2015b). Yet, this is not directly and subjectification could theoretically turn out counterproductive for the current society. In other words, subjectification does not *have* to serve society. Even if in some or most cases it would, any function for society would only be a side effect and not a priority of this goal of education.

So, schools have some values that has no direct or guaranteed functionality for society. Therefore, it could be called the disfunctionality of education (Biesta, 2012a, 2015a, 2015b). *-Dis-* is a prefix based on Latin, meaning 'a lack of', not to be confused with *-dys-*, a prefix meaning 'bad' or 'abnormal'. The disfunctionality of education is about the intrinsic value of the *school process for children*, which could have no function for society. The disfunctionality of education could be

considered important in the context of educational evaluation and assessment. It suggests an intrinsic value of schools that transcends their direct function, as is the nature of intrinsic value: it is sufficient in its own right without it needing to attribute to anything else.

So, in short, the goal of education can be divided into multiple domains (Biesta, 2012a, 2015a, 2015b). Qualification is more economical in nature, while socialization is more cultural and subjectification is considered to be of intrinsic value in the emancipation of children. These three domains can overlap and they suggest a division between functional and disfunctional goals of education (Biesta, 2015b). Disfunctional refers to the intrinsic value of education and does primarily involve the domain of subjectification. The functionality of education mainly involves the qualification and socialization of students and the direct function of education for society.

All things considered, in this article 'education' refers to all learning of children in school, this includes the three domains of qualification, socialization and subjectification. Concurrently the *disfunctionality* and the *functionality* of schools are to be considered when the function of education is examined. The preferable balance between, or the relative importance of, the domains and functionality or disfunctionality of education is not yet determined though. In essence, what remains is the question of what *good* education is or should be.

### **Good education**

What is good education? The difficulty with this question resides in the word *good*. In its most fundamental basis *what* is considered *good* is an interpretation or opinion (Bos, 2007). Therefore, *good* education is based on beliefs about what is valuable, preferable or proper in educating.

Thus, what is considered good education is based on one's life philosophy. If we would believe children primarily need to learn reading and writing, education should logically primarily involve (this specific) qualification. On the other side, if we believe children should primarily learn how to think critically and be their own person, the domain of subjectification is of more importance. Logically, a balance between the three domains would seem preferable, yet, the exact balance itself is inevitably based on beliefs and values concerning education and the respective importance of the three domains.

In the current neo-liberal democratic society of the Netherlands, freedom of opinion is a core value (Biesta, 2015a; Mouffe, 2000a, 2000b). All people are free to have their own opinions and to (within limits) act on these opinions. Yet, as stated before: education has a function greater than that of the directly involved, it has a societal function as well as an individual one. Thus education is not just a personal matter, even if its perception of quality is based on personal beliefs. This creates a tension between educational quality in the perspective of the individual and of the collective needs

in society (Heller & Fehér, 1989; Levering et al., 2015; Welsh, 2010). To further explore this, the core values in a democratic society and their relation to this educational tension will be explained.

**Democratic paradox.** The Netherlands is a democracy. This is a form of governance, a political project that forms the fundamental values and beliefs of a society. Democracy is not rational, it is a political construct (Mouffe, 2000a, 2000b). It is based on certain values and beliefs, and at the same time it is the origin of those same values and beliefs. The three core values involved are liberty, equality and solidarity.

In this threefold set of foundational values there is a paradox between liberty and equality (Biesta, 2015a; Mouffe, 2000a, 2000b). Liberty creates room for distinction and differentiation because people can use their freedom to make different choices and create different opportunities for themselves. Thus, freedom can create diversity. Equality, on the other hand, means all are considered equal and *all should have equal opportunities and possibilities*. It simulates evenness and by extent conformity to a collective of equals.

Therefore, liberty and equality can be viewed as counterparts (Mouffe, 2000a). These two contradicting values create the democratic paradox in which all are equal yet free to be unequal. Solidarity could be seen as a mediating value, for it promotes accountability with respect for both the collective and the individual differences. Yet, there still remains a tension between individual wants and collective needs (Heller & Fehér, 1989). In order to retain freedom and equality, the individual wants and wishes cannot always be swept away by the collective needs, yet the collective needs cannot be ignored merely because individuals want something.

When this tension between liberty and equality is put in the perspective of education it explains the tension between individual and collective or societal perspective. Individually there should be liberty to educate children according to one's own life philosophy, while collectively there is a need for children to become well functioning citizens of the society in which all are fundamentally equal.

**Pluralism.** To maintain equality, there is a need for conformity to the collective. Yet, through liberty there is also a need for diversity within this collective (Billing, 2004; Elmore, 2005). Those contradicting needs are both essential for the maintaining of a democratic society. In other words, within a democracy there is a need for pluralism: the existence of distinct social or cultural systems within a society (Biesta, 2015a, 2015b; Moravec, 2013; Mouffe, 2000a, 2000b)

In analyzing the educational system this tension between equality and liberty of the democratic paradox can also be discovered. Every child is of equal worth and importance (equality) yet not everyone is the same (individuality) and therefore, people are free to hold to different values and opinions about education and to exercise this (freedom of education), within certain boundaries set by the conviction that all are equal and thus *should* have equal opportunities. The tension lies in the

conviction for equality and equal opportunities on the one side and that of liberty and freedom of education on the other.

When all this comes together, certain conclusions can be drawn. If we assume it preferable to maintain a democratic society, there is a well defined need for pluralism. The tension between liberty and equality, or in other words, the tension between conformity and diversity, is inevitable and can also be found back in different educational beliefs and values (Biesta, 2015a, 2015b; Billing, 2004; Elmore, 2005; Moravec, 2008, 2013). The conclusion is that educational diversity, the existence of standard and non-standard school-types, is not merely something to condone, but something to aspire to. It fits with the democratic values, and it helps maintain democracy.

### **Resume**

Summarizing, to answer the main question of how non-standard schools can be assessed, firstly the current Dutch educational system was put in its historical context. This has led to the distinction between standard and non-standard schools and has resulted in the of question what actually education is. In exploring this concept, the goals of education have been described and now it has been stated that what can be considered good education is inevitable based on beliefs and values.

Within the context of the democratic society the tension between liberty and equality was shortly explored. Liberty, or freedom, includes the possibility for non-standard schools to exist; it shows that a divers educational system can be a consequence of and contribution to a democratic society. Yet, to maintain equality, education should provide children with roughly equal opportunities (Biesta, 2015a, 2015b; Mouffe, 2000a, 2000b). In the Dutch educational system, educational evaluation and assessment serves this purpose for its goal is to guarantee a minimal standard of education.

Together with the conclusion about beliefs and values as the foundation of *good* education this creates some problems in educational evaluation and assessment. These problems will be explored further by providing more details about how the current evaluation and assessment system works and which problems can be found with regards to evaluating and assessing non-standard schools.

### **Evaluation and Assessment of Educational Quality**

Some concepts involving education and educational quality have been explored. The goal of education, the answer to *why we educate*, has been suggested in terms of functionality and disfunctionality (Biesta, 2012a, 2015a, 2015b). Though noteworthy, the disfunctional goal of education has an intrinsic value and is thus not the primary concern of educational evaluation and assessment by the IoE. Therefore the focus hereafter will lie on the functional goal of education. This primarily concerns the domains of qualification and socialization, though subjectification could be suggested to have a societal function as well.

Evaluation and assessment of school quality has a multitude of goals (Billing, 2004; Cheong Cheng & Tam, 1997). It is considered to be primarily focused on the functionality of schools. In other words, it involves the question whether or not schools fulfill their societal and educational goals. Yet, it can also serve as a means for public assurance, or to help policymakers with fund distribution. Thus, it could be suggested that the function of educational evaluation and assessment is about more than school quality for children; it also has a public function.

So, when discussing educational quality and evaluation there are multiple levels and interests involved: the child, parent, teacher and school, yet also policymakers, politicians and the general public (Billing, 2004; Fenech, 2011). These different interests can conflict with each other; on a micro level parents wish high quality education for their child based on their beliefs and values about what is good education. On a macro level the societal interest education has economical, political and cultural effects in which the need of the collective surpasses the need or 'wants' of individual parents (Heller & Fehér, 1989).

To bring this together all schools have to provide a minimum standard of education. This minimum standard is supposed to guarantee the development of children into productive members of society on a macro level, while freedom of education within those minimal standards gives parents a chance to provide education for their children according to their beliefs and values on a microlevel (Billing, 2004; Levering et al., 2015).

In the Netherlands this is set in an educational system in which most schools are primarily government funded, which guarantees that for example children with parents who have a lower economical status can still receive this minimum standard of education (Levering et al., 2015). In this system both public and particular, and standard and non-standard schools are held to roughly the same requirements. Their differences are found in organization or structure and not in 'quality' of education.

With this the problem of educational evaluation, assessment and *quality* is truly uncovered. Educational quality is based on beliefs and values concerning what can be considered *good* education (Biesta, 2015a; Levering et al., 2015). However, there is no clarity about which beliefs and values good education should encompass. Thus a contradiction arises. In a neo-liberal democratic society people are free to have their own (educational) beliefs and values and to act on them (Mouffe, 2000a, 2000b). The IoE evaluates and assesses educational quality, yet it cannot fully prescribe what educational quality should entail.

In an attempt to circumvent the problems that arise with this, the evaluation and assessment system is intended to be objective; free of beliefs and values so all involved parties are free to hold their own beliefs and values. But, educational evaluation and assessment examines educational

quality and therefore it is inevitably based on beliefs and values (Biesta, 2012a, 2015a; Fenech, 2011). To explore this the current evaluation and assessment system will be explained.

### **Current Evaluation and Assessment System**

To the end of objectifying the educational evaluation and assessment system a nationwide list of fixed learning goals was set up by the national expertise center for curriculum development: Sichtung Leerplan Ontwikkeling (SLO). This nationwide list of learning goals describes what pupils should learn during their school-time with regards to the domains of qualification and socialization. Furthermore, this list of learning goals gives a rough timetable for when they should have gained any specific knowledge or skills (SLO, n.d.). The time-table is not strict or mandatory, it gives some guidelines but teachers or school-staff can choose to apply this flexibly. Eventually though, at the end of their school-time pupils should have reached the prescribed learning goals. The intention behind the nationwide list of learning goals is to have a baseline for what should be learned that is applicable to all schools in the Dutch educational system, regardless of the school-type (standard or non-standard). Thus, these nationwide learning goals set the fundamental basis of *what* children should learn in the Dutch educational system.

The Inspection of Education evaluates and assesses school quality. Inspectors visit schools to see their educational environment and paperwork is monitored, e.g. finances, reports, student's results (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2008a, 2008b, 2012, 2013, 2015). To evaluate and assess this information, multiple checklists are used. These checklists include points regarding, for example, financial well-being, school-governance, teacher qualifications, and student's graduation results.

In sum, in general terms educational learning goals are set up in a nation wide list. The Inspection of Education (2008a; 2008b; 2012) evaluates if schools have reached these goals by using other checklists of points considered to be a part of a school environment in which the nationwide educational goals are reached. In this, the possible invalidity or non-objectivity of the evaluation system is revealed: the points on the checklists are considered to be present in a proper school environment, but are they really points on which the suitability of a school environment can be determined? The checkpoints and the nationwide learning goals are seemingly objective, yet, it will be argued that they are still based on educational beliefs and values.

Firstly, the system of setting learning goals nationwide does coincide with the educational assumption that learning goals should be set *for* children (Bakker et al., 2011). Furthermore, for example checkpoints regarding student's results are used to determine educational quality. This means the quality of a school is partly assessed by the amount of students that go through examination and pass from one class to the next, or the average examination result at a school.

In standard schools this is normal procedure (Bakker et al., 2011). At the end of both primary and secondary education students undergo a nationwide examination to determine their knowledge and skills. Among others their results determine whether or not the students are ready to graduate or if they have to repeat their last year of education.

The Inspection of Education (2008a; 2008b; 2012) uses these results to evaluate and assess schools, for example the percentage of students that graduate is used as a checkpoint, just as the average result per school. These checkpoints may create problems in comparing standard schools, for example because of differences in student characteristics that reflects in the students' results. These differences in results are not fully based on the quality of education that takes place at the school (Biesta, 2012a; Levering et al., 2015). For non-standard schools these checkpoints can be even more problematic. The example of the Sudbury Valley school will be used to explain this further.

Sudbury Valley schools are based on the belief that children will seek out all the learning they need, and that it is preferable to have no top-down influence over learning (Gray, 2011; Greenberg et al., 2005; Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009). This does not mean there are no rules, standards or expectations set at these schools. The students are free to learn, play and go exploring. There are behavioral rules however (e.g. they have to be present at the school grounds for a certain amount of time each day, or, they may not leave behind litter). There are also requirements to graduate. Students have to write an essay and give a presentation in which they defend why they are ready to 'go out into the world' and be a responsible member of society. This means students have to be able to, among others, read and write and be able to set up arguments and defend them. The learning goal of 'writing' is not set at a fixed point in their education, but they do need to gain the skill somewhere during their school-time if they wish to graduate. If students wish to enroll into college they must actively choose to either graduate on the required educational level by taking part in the standard state examination or to take admission tests at the college they wish to enroll in. In order to do any of this, they need to read and write and set appropriate learning goals by themselves.

If the learning goal *reading and writing* is evaluated in a Sudbury environment it can not be formally evaluated (Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009). After all, in this school-type no obligatory testing takes place. Whether or not students have learned this skill can only be 'proven' if and when they decide to use or show it, there is no fixed moment in which the overall capabilities of the student population as a whole can be evaluated.

Concurrently, Sudbury Valley schools do not use classes (Gray, 2011; Greenberg et al., 2005; Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009). thus it is not applicable to use a checkpoint to evaluate educational quality that encompasses the amount of students that 'pass' to the next class (and respectively the



amount of students that fail to reach the next class). So even though a checkpoint regarding the percentage of students passing to the next class is seemingly objective, it is still based on the educational assumption of a system in which classes are used. Such a system is based on the belief that learning goals need to be set and students need to show they have reached those goals to *pass* to the next class (Bakker et al., 2011; Levering et al., 2015).

The evaluation and assessment system that is used by the Inspection of Education (2008a, 2008b, 2012) is intended to be valid and as objective as possible. Yet, when the Sudbury Valley school is taken as an example, the checkpoints can be questioned. The points themselves may be phrased objectively, their content is still based on specific educational beliefs and values. Furthermore, even if the content of the checkpoints is considered valid, there remain problems with how they can be evaluated. Within the example of the mandatory nationwide list of learning goals both standard and non-standard schools are bound to the same general outcome of education. Whether or not these learning goals actually are a valid representation of the goal of education is questioned by certain educational philosophies, as shown by the Sudbury Valley concept (Biesta, 2012a, Greenberg et al., 2005; Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009). Yet even if these learning goals are conceded to by arguments such as 'this is the law', *how* they are reached is open to interpretation in the context of freedom of education (Art. 23 GW, 2008).

## Resume

At this point it seems appropriate to repeat that all parties in general do have the best intentions for students: they all want *good* education for children in the Dutch society. They do, however, differ in their educational beliefs and values, and therefore in their opinion on what *good* education is.

It has been suggested that any evaluation and assessment system is inevitably based on beliefs and values about educational quality and therefore that it can not be truly objective (Biesta, 2012a, 2015a; Billing, 2004; Cheong Cheng & Tam, 1997; Fenech, 2011). Even objectively phrased, checkpoints and learning goals are still based on specific educational beliefs and values and their subsequent educational assumptions about the nature of *good* education.

The proposed solution to this problem is to open up the discourse about educational beliefs and values and their place in the Dutch educational system. This entails a more normative approach in which the core of the problem is acknowledged: (educational) beliefs and values are the foundation for educational choices. To evaluate and assess education, these underlying beliefs and values will inevitably be a part of the conceptualization and operationalization of educational quality. Here, a framework will be proposed to incorporate beliefs and values in the educational discourse.

### Educational Beliefs and Values Framework

The School Value Compass is an instrument for parents, students and professionals to determine what type of education fits their preferences. It is intended to include both standard and non-standard educational beliefs and values without forming normative conclusions about their respective worth (Herzberg, Broekema, & Van Dieten, 2012). The instrument itself includes a questionnaire about personal preferences and a framework for conceptualizing education that incorporates different educational beliefs and values parallel to each other. Here, the focus lies on this foundational framework.

The educational beliefs and values framework consists of two axes both containing a spectrum of two educational beliefs, see Figure 1. The vertical axis is named the goal-ax and the horizontal is the relationship-ax. The system is divided in four quadrants representing four types of educational institutes (Herzberg et al., 2012).

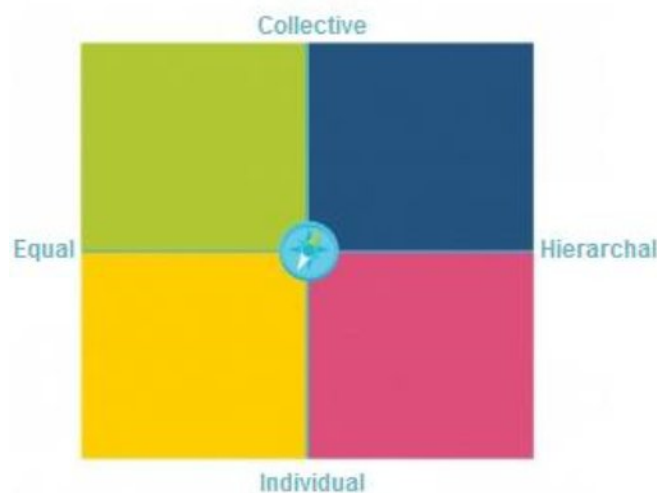


Figure 1. Educational Beliefs and Values Framework. Adapted (tr.) from *School Waarden Kompas* by T. Herzberg et al., 2012, retrieved from <http://www.schoolwaardenkompas.nl/>

**Goal spectrum.** The goal-ax relates to learning goals and specifically to whom determines them (Herzberg et al., 2012). On one side of the spectrum all learning goals are determined top-down by 'the collective' (e.g. government). On the other side goals are purely set by the individual learner.

At this moment the Dutch educational system is located on the 'collective' side of the spectrum for the nationwide learning goals as described by the SLO are mandatory for all schools (Art. 23 GW, 2008; SLO, n.d.). Since the exact implementation of these goals is open for interpretation the educational system and set up itself could be described moderately collective.

Standard schools conjoin with the educational system thus they are also located in the collective region of the spectrum (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2008a, 2008b, 2012, 2013, 2015). In general, the nationwide learning goals are interpreted by school boards or teachers and brought to the students. Schools within the collective region can give students opportunities to determine some of their own learning goals, those schools would be more centered to the middle of the framework. Simultaneously, other schools could be set at the outskirts where learning goals are completely decided top-down (Herzberg et al., 2012).

Even though the Dutch Educational system could be described as located in the collective region, freedom of education allows for schools in the individual side of the spectrum to exist (Art. 23 GW, 2008). Within the evaluation and assessment system even schools based on the belief that learning goals should be set individually are held to the collective learning goals (Art 23 GW, 2008). This further explains some of the tension between schools and IoE as explained through the example of the Sudbury Valley school.

The Sudbury concept is located on the far side of the individual part of the goal-spectrum. This school type is based on no top-down decision making over learning goals at all, with the philosophy that students will, consciously or unconsciously, determine the learning they need for themselves and set the appropriate learning goals for this (Gray, 2011; Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009).

**Relationship spectrum.** The horizontal axis of the framework is based on relations between teachers or school and students. In essence this pertains to the allocation of responsibility between teacher and student about the education (Herzberg et al., 2012). One side of this spectrum is based on the belief that there should be a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student. The teacher is considered an expert and therefore better suitable to decide what students should be learning and how this should be organized and structured. This builds on the belief that children cannot take the proper responsibility for their own learning process and need to be directed by their (adult) teacher (Bakker et al., 2011). The teacher is considered a (dominant) guide, mentor and leader for the children, with students' motivation needing to be extrinsically created or maintained by the teacher (Herzberg et al., 2012).

On the opposite side of the relationship spectrum the students are considered fully capable of taking the responsibility for their own learning process (regardless of their age). It is believed that children can be trusted to make proper choices about their own learning. The role of teachers is more coaching and facilitating, while the motivation of students to learn is considered intrinsic with no need for extrinsic motivation (Gray, 2011; Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009; Herzberg et al., 2012).

**The four quadrants.** Within this framework there are four corners (Herzberg et al., 2012). The first is collective-hierarchical, the *dominant quadrant*, here learning goals are purely set up top-down

by government, schools and teachers. Teachers are considered dominant in their relation with pupils, they are the experts responsible to instruct children in their teaching.

In the collective-equal, or *collaborative quadrant*, the learning goals are still set top-down, with students being recipients of education. The teacher, however, plays a more guiding role, with the pupils themselves being responsible for their learning. Educators and learners collaborate to form education (Herzberg et al., 2012).

The individual-hierarchical or *individual quadrant* views learning goals as personal, so each pupil will set up their own goals. Yet the teacher is still considered an authority figure, whom should monitor and steer children and take the responsibility for their learning process (Herzberg et al., 2012).

In the individual-equal or *free quadrant* children are seen as fully responsible for setting their own learning goals and process. Students are trusted with these choices and are considered the authority of their own learning process. The teacher can coach or advise, but as an equal and not by setting down goals or boundaries for the learning process (Herzberg et al., 2012).

### **Resume**

These four edges are the far extremes of the framework, and could be seen as the ultimate characteristics of the quadrants they represent (Herzberg et al., 2012). Standard schools are located in the dominant quadrant of this framework while non-standard schools can be in any of the other quadrants.

In educational history, the concept of a stern, authoritative teacher who brings knowledge to children is a realistic (at one time standard) example of the extreme of the dominant quadrant (Bakker et al., 2011). The *standard* educational viewpoint used in this article is more moderate, yet still based on (some of) the same underlying basic principles and fundamental assumptions of education (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2008a, 2008b, 2012, 2013, 2015). The Sudbury valley school system, though portrayed as the opposite of the standard school-type, is in actuality the opposite of these most extreme educational beliefs and values (Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009).

### **Redefining Educational Evaluation and Assessment**

This article has been centered around the main question of how non-standard schools can be assessed. Dutch educational system was explained by providing the historical context of the development of public and particular schools (Bakker et al., 2011). Standard schools were defined as all schools based on the system of age-group classes and standardized curriculum, while non-standard schools were defined as all schools that do not follow this system with regards to how education is structured or organized.

The dynamic nature of education was explored. It was stated that a changing society has changing needs and that education can help fulfill some of these societal needs (Bourn, 2008; Moravec, 2008, 2013). The value of non-standard schools was explained by showing their role in educational experimentation and innovation (Kelly, 2003; Levering et al., 2015; Volman, 2006). Concurrently, the first function of external educational evaluation and assessment for educational experimentation was shown (Cheong Cheng & Tam, 1997). It was explained how educational evaluation and assessment can examine if an experimental educational concept does serve society additionally to its functioning to the contentment of the directly involved children, parents and school-staff (Billing, 2004; Fenech, 2011; Levering et al., 2015; Sears & Hughes, 2006). This led to the question what would entail as a success or failure in educational experimentation. To explore this the concept of education and its goals were examined.

Education was defined as the process of assimilation into the culture in which the learner should function as a participating member of society (Biesta, 2015b; Elmore, 2005; Gray, 2011; Moravec, 2013; Sears & Hughes, 2006). In the context of this article this was specified as all learning that takes place at school. The goal of education was put in terms of functionality and disfunctionality, followed by a division in the domains of qualification, socialization and subjectification (Biesta, 2012a, 2015a, 2015b). The focus of educational evaluation and assessment concerns functionality and is primarily involved with qualification and socialization.

Continuing, the goal and function of educational evaluation and assessment was more clearly defined (Billing, 2004; Cheong Cheng & Tam, 1997). Its function can be divers; among others educational evaluation can serve as a tool in policy making, as public assurance or as a means to determine fund distribution. Yet, its actual goal is evaluating and assessing if the societal goals of education are met in general, while simultaneously serving as a means to guarantee a minimal level of educational quality for all children.

Additionally, the role of educational beliefs and values was explained. It was shown that beliefs and values shape the fundamental assumptions about what should be the preferable balance between the domains of educational goals. Furthermore, it was explained that the perception of educational quality is also based on beliefs and values (Biesta, 2012a, 2015a, 2015b; Fenech, 2011; Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009; Moravec, 2013).

During this exploration into the nature of quality and good education, the importance of the existence of non-standard schools and educational evaluation and assessment was reconfirmed. Pluralism in education, or educational diversity, can be described as the existence of both standard and non-standard schools. Through the democratic paradox the tension between liberty and equality it was explained and the importance of pluralism was shortly described (Biesta, 2015a; Mouffe,

2000a, 2000b). It was concluded that educational diversity is not merely something to condone, but something to aspire to in maintaining a democratic society.

Thereupon certain conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, what can be perceived as educational quality is based on beliefs and values. Secondly, it can be considered preferable to have multiple beliefs and values presented in the educational system. Thus, besides inducing some conformity to societal interest an educational evaluation and assessment system should allow or even nurture educational diversity (Billing, 2004; Elmore, 2005; Heller & Fehér, 1989; Welsh, 2010). The societal need for diversity explains the importance of an educational evaluation and assessment system in which there is room for (educational) beliefs and values.

This resulted in the proposal of a framework for conceptualizing education that includes educational beliefs and values. The framework is not an evaluation and assessment system itself, but it is an alternative approach for the foundation of such a system. It does not dispute the societal goals of education, nor does it deny the individual interests of the directly involved (Herzberg et al., 2012). The educational beliefs and values framework provides a conceptualization in which different school-types can be considered parallel to each other. With this it offers a new perspective for educational discourse.

If the educational beliefs and values framework is applied this could lead to questioning about the validity of some aspects of the current evaluation and assessment system (Biesta, 2012a; Levering et al., 2015). For example, are all mandatory learning goals still pliable in a society where most knowledge can be found on the internet? Do these learning goals serve the goals of education and a minimum standard of education? Or, are the current checkpoints and the way in which they are used valid and reliable for educational evaluation and assessment? Furthermore, the framework for educational beliefs and values could be used as an argument to suggest different evaluation and assessment frameworks for evaluating different schools of, for example, the four quadrants of the School Value Compass (Herzberg et al., 2012).

This could be a downside of the educational beliefs and values framework for it could lead to a more complex evaluation and assessment system. Thus, it could possibly lead to a more complex educational system, especially if changes would include other areas such as policy.

It should be noted however that the current system is already complex: there are non-standard schools and the evaluation and assessment system already includes multiple assessment frameworks (Art. 23 GW, 2008; Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2008a, 2008b, 2012; Leerplichtwet 1969, 2015). It could be suggested that the main difference lies in the *acknowledgment* of the complexity of the educational system but not in its existence. This acknowledgment would possibly result in changes within the educational system, which could lead to an increase in costs during these reforms.

Besides these consequences, a conceptualization of educational based on the framework for educational beliefs and values could also have scientific implications. These implications include past research as well as future ones. Just as the educational evaluation and assessment system, some past research will likely have been based on certain educational assumptions following (unconscious) beliefs and values and educational conceptualization (Biesta, 2012a, 2015a, 2015b; Fenech, 2011; Levering et al., 2015).

For example, when research would examine the development of responsibility in children, it could be suggested that the conceptualization and operationalization of responsibility differs based on beliefs and values concerning the relationship axis (Herzberg et al., 2012). After all, if responsibility is for example operationalized by describing it as the attitude of children towards the independent completion of a week task, this would have some implication when it is used in a school environment of the free quadrant such as the Sudbury Valley school. In these schools children are not used to having a week task, or to getting 'independent tasks' at all, thus an independent week-task would not be a suitable operationalization of responsibility (Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009). Additionally, the end-result of the development of a sense of responsibility could be variable for different school-types, yet it could be that children generally develop the same sense of responsibility while doing so by a different path. Meanwhile, it is also possible that there is no difference at all. This example shows some considerations or implications for developmental theories.

Future research could continue with the educational beliefs and values framework to discover the differences between school-types and their longitudinal effectiveness on both micro and macro level (Biesta, 2012a, 2015a, 2015b; Levering et al., 2015; Moravec, 2013; Sears & Hughes, 2006; Volman, 2006). Furthermore, within the boundaries of normative research it could be questioned which educational beliefs and values are preferable.

This article is build around the suggestion that educational quality, with its foundation in educational beliefs and values, cannot truly be objectively determined. This shows a post-modern constructionist approach in which a core assumption is that 'knowledge' is shaped through interpretation and that there is no neutral viewpoint for ethical and normative knowledge (Bos, 2007). Different scientific philosophies might lead to different conclusions about whether or not the quality of education can be objectively perceived, produced or measured. Within the assumption that it cannot, however, the acknowledgment of beliefs and values in education seems appropriate.

The answer to how non-standard schools can be evaluated and assessed is given in terms of acknowledgment for educational beliefs and values and their subsequent educational assumptions. This suggests the development of an educational evaluation and assessment system that includes

educational beliefs and values. For educational practice this suggests a redefining of the conceptualization of the educational system and for scientific research it has implications for interpreting past and future research regarding education. In the end, the educational beliefs and values framework stimulates a redefining of the educational discourse that could include a constructive normative discussion about what the goal of education is or should be.



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