

Colophon

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Sharing the Language School. New modern foreign languages in the context of teaching. Recommendation of the Education Council issued to the State Secretaries of Education, Sciences and Cultural Affairs, dated December 2001.

The recommendation (in Dutch) can be ordered by using order number 20010522/588.

Summary of recommendation

Sharing the Language School New modern foreign languages in the context of teaching

The Education Council has produced a report on teaching in foreign (living) languages or TFL. In its report the Council makes recommendations as to the way in which teaching in foreign languages should be handled and structured in the future. The subject has some common features with the recommendations contained in the reports *Wat 't zwaarst weegt* ('What carries most weight') and *De rugzak gewogen* ('Weighing the learning load') on the subject of government policy addressing the general backlog in teaching. The Council published its recommendations on 21 November 2001.

Reasons for the report

Over the course of time the subject of teaching in foreign languages has regularly been the subject of political and social discussion in the Netherlands. Central points of attention here

included the rationale for it, and the objectives and structuring of teaching in a person's own language (for instance Turkish). In 1998 the Teaching in Foreign Languages Act was introduced, by which teaching in a foreign language was positioned in the context of national cultural policy. Here, the intrinsic value of teaching in a person's mother tongue was recognised. The main objective of teaching in a foreign language is teaching a person's mother tongue and thereby promoting contact with a person's own culture. It was considered to contribute to the emancipation and participation of ethnic minorities in Dutch society and the raising of the intercultural character of the Netherlands in general. In practice the implementation of teaching in a foreign language has caused problems. As a result the subject of teaching in a foreign language in a multicultural society has come in for much attention.

The instruction to produce the report on teaching in a foreign language by the State Secretary of Education dates from 20 December 2000. The Council for Social Development made a significant contribution to the recommendations in the report by the Education Council on teaching in foreign languages.

'Multi-path' policy

The Teaching in Foreign Languages Act proposes a double objective: in addition to teaching in a foreign language as 'education in one's mother tongue as a part of general cultural development', opportunity was also to be created for teaching of foreign languages as 'general language support'. In this last case a support function will be given to a person's mother tongue as assistance in learning Dutch as a second language, as a basis for addressing the backlog in education suffered by ethnic minorities. By accepting a double objective, the implementation of teaching in foreign languages has been under pressure from the start. The Education Council states that this multi-path policy has led in practice to education in a person's own language in the sense of cultural education being largely subsumed by language support.

Considering the progress of teaching in foreign languages, the Council considers the following objectives to be of importance in the context of education in an own language:

- A didactic aim – mastering one's mother tongue is essential for successfully learning Dutch and possibly also for learning other subjects.
- A social aim – a facility for learning one's mother tongue gives the language group concerned a position in society and brings it into the social process.
- An individual or group associated aim – education in one's mother tongue can be a desire of an individual in society or of a specific language group, a desire that can be honoured in the political process.

Current status of teaching in a foreign language

The Council states that the practice of teaching in a foreign language has shown up a number of positive results, such as the enthusiasm of the staff involved, the growing number of initiatives in teaching in a foreign language and the rising professionalism of teachers teaching in a foreign language. Nonetheless, in practice various difficulties can be identified at the level of objectives and processing in teaching in a foreign language. The most important conclusions of the Education Council are:

- Continuously varying policy recommendations have led to loss of clarity on the position of the mother tongue. The multi-path policy in the Act has brought no improvement to this.
- The practice of teaching in a foreign language shows up numerous difficulties.
- The discussion on education in a person's own mother tongue involves a mix of ideological, political, psychological, linguistic and educational elements.
- International comparisons suggest that, unlike the case in the Netherlands, in many countries the teaching in a foreign language is clearly placed in the context of one objective – addressing the educational backlog or multiculturalism.
- Scientifically, there is no consensus on the problem of teaching in a foreign language and the best way of undertaking this.
- In view of the differentiation between them there are few if any positive conclusions

to be drawn in empirical terms from the achievement of the three objectives (didactic, social and honouring individual or group interests).

Teaching in a foreign language in a new perspective

The Council proposes no longer placing education in a person's own language in the framework of educational backlog policy. The didactic objective, that is language support, must no longer form part of the policy. This objective should be placed in the context of a policy directed at Dutch as a second language.

Education in a person's own language must become more generic in character and the facilities in this area should be made available to pupils for whom that specific language is not their own mother tongue. The generic character of the policy should also be expressed in the naming of the policy. The title 'Education in New Modern Foreign Languages' deserves preference in this case over Education in non-Dutch Living Languages'.

The Council is of the opinion that both the societal and the individual, language group-oriented objectives have their worth in teaching in foreign languages. It feels that with careful policy applied over time, a result is conceivable in which both objectives will be given full justice. It therefore recommends not giving preference to the one or other objective but to start the creation of a policy with the concept of a development model. A starting point in this development model should be the variant that responds to the objective: 'Teaching in foreign languages in the interests of individuals and groups'. As guide and aim the Council sees a result targeting the social objective: 'Teaching in foreign languages to promote social integration and interculturality'.

New foreign languages in practice

The teaching in foreign languages can best be realised through the 'Language School'. In the report, a setup is proposed. The Language School must actually be positioned in a development perspective in which the participation of pupils in one common teaching facility is the ultimate goal. The Language School is:

- a local organisation;
- responsible for ensuring extra-curricular provisions for teaching in foreign languages;
- widely accessible to pupils who would like to be considered for this and;
- whose need in the first instance is based on a demand analysis per language group.

The Recommendations of the Education Council

In its report the Council proposes a change in approach to teaching in a foreign language and indicates what this would mean in practice in the early stages. Below is a summary of the Council's recommendations in the context of implementing foreign language teaching. With regard to teaching in a person's own language the Council offers the following for consideration:

- 1 A person's own language should no longer be a point of consideration in the policy addressing the educational backlog. Language support (the didactic objective of this language teaching) should therefore be separated from the policy of teaching in a foreign language and should be brought under a policy targeting the promotion of Dutch as a second language.
- 2 The name of the current policy, teaching in a foreign language, should be replaced by 'teaching in New Modern Foreign Languages'. This would more clearly express the fact that the teaching of these languages should be as far as possible seen from a general position with regard to modern languages and not from the position of specific population groups.
- 3 To consider the use of a development model in the creation of a modern language policy by which a restricted variant linked to current practice (targeting demand from individuals and language groups) progresses gradually to create a broader result in which the process of integration and interculturality will slowly be given body.
- 4 Likewise in this sense to adopt a more generic approach that will also allow non-

mother tongue language learners (for instance Dutch nationals) to follow education in a language other than their own mother tongue (for instance Turkish). The emphasis here changes from one's 'own' to one's 'chosen' language.

With regard to the structuring of education in new modern languages the Council recommends:

- 5 Irrespective of the stage of development of teaching in new modern languages, to create a local organisation - the Language School. This development should lead to participation of pupils in the one common teaching facility.
- 6 The provision of teaching in new modern foreign languages to be open to pupils who (via their parents) choose for this. Ultimately neither the age range nor the language group of the pupils should play any role when the teaching facilities are made available. The Council can imagine that an interim adjustment phase be built in for this.
- 7 In the context of policy decentralisation, the municipality (or possibly municipality groupings) to be responsible in the policy for the creation of a Language School and for the analysis of demand for the need for this teaching in the various modern languages.
- 8 The board of the Language School should be responsible for the organisation and implementation of the teaching product. The quality of the teaching will also fall under its responsibility. In creating the teaching capability it will be necessary that the Language School prepare a plan that, for financial reasons, will have to be approved by the municipality.
- 9 Funding, at least initially, should adopt mixed financing from the national purse, municipal funds and contributions from parents and language associations.
- 10 To make sure that the conditions for teaching in modern languages are fulfilled. This applies first of all to the availability and support of competent teachers in foreign languages, in which national government has a role to play. In the second place it is a question of the ability to supervise the teaching in foreign languages. In this context the Council proposes provisionally linking supervisory tasks to the various responsible actors: national government, municipality and language school. A third important condition is the availability of suitable teaching materials, a subject for which the national government will have to take the initiative.
- 11 After some years the policy should be evaluated, making use of the experience of the language schools. The lessons learned at the Language School will contribute to further policy development, an effort that must ultimately be directed at long term upgrading of social integration.