

Project 3 PhD *Heritage and entrance narratives: constructing shared historical knowledge*

Vacancy

Supervisors

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Heritage education can contribute to national identity and social cohesion. At the same time it is important that education reflects the multicultural society in a globalizing world, offering students of heterogeneous backgrounds and with different frames of reference the opportunity to give meaning to heritage. A study of The Netherlands Institute for Heritage revealed that 45% of the heritage institutions consider it necessary to pay attention to the increasing heterogeneity of classes and its implications for heritage education (Stroeker 2007). An inquiry of EUROCLIO in 2004 (Van Wijk 2004) showed that history educators in Europe welcome teaching materials which relate heritage to a multicultural and international context. In this project the focus will be on the student level. Empirical research on the learning processes and outcomes of heritage education is still very scarce.

Research question:

- *How does participation in heritage education activities transform the entrance narratives of students and contribute to shared historical knowledge that includes plural perspectives?*

Answering this question requires a better understanding of the knowledge and experiences students have related to heritage. Doering and Pekarik (1996) state that the entrance narratives of visitors guide them through a museum. These narratives comprise interest in the subject and knowledge and opinions about it. Also Silverman (1995) emphasizes the contribution of the identity and experiences of individuals to a museum encounter. From several studies we know that students' understanding of the past is mediated by family, social background and ethnic collective memories (Seixas 1993; Epstein 1998; Tutiaux-Guillon 2001), denominational identity (Gottlieb, Wineburg and Zakai 2005) and movies (Wineburg, Mossborg and Porat 2001). In the Interactive Experience Model of Falk and Dierking (1992) the motivation, interests, expectations, knowledge and past experiences of museum visitors are considered the most important context that influences museum learning experiences. We expect that culturally heterogeneous classrooms will show a variety of entrance narratives on heritage related to the topics *Christianization*, *Black slave trade* and *World War II*. This expectation is supported by previous studies. It can be expected that in culturally heterogeneous classrooms there will be differences in prior knowledge, meanings and experiences related to these topics, sometimes evoking negative emotions. Ribbens (2006) elaborates upon the topics *Black slave trade* and *World War II* as examples of historical phenomena that are part of the memory cultures of groups with and without a Dutch background. Grever and Ribbens (2007) found that in the Netherlands, black students from Surinam and the Caribbean appeared to be very interested in learning about colonial history and the slave trade. Dutch secondary school teachers point out differences in knowledge and experience concerning World War II between Muslim and non-Muslim students (Blanken et al 2003). Heritage institutes complain that children do not know the meaning of Christian churches anymore (Van de Putten 2008).

An important question is how entrance narratives are transformed through heritage education activities. Falk and Dierking (1992) reveal that visitors of museums take several things away, such as enjoyment, enduring memories and learning. Wertsch (1998) makes an important distinction between the mastery of cultural tools and appropriation. Polman (2006) gives examples of how mastery and appropriation may go together in a twofold way. Persons may be able to recite the history that is taught, but privately resist this history and not use it in other contexts (mastery without appropriation). Interest and motivation can be strong, at the same time understanding is yet lacking or unsophisticated (appropriation without mastery). Previous studies have shown that knowing a particular historical narrative does not necessarily result in the appropriation or self-identification with that narrative (Epstein 2000;

Murrell 2001). To what extent do students of ethnic minorities master and appropriate the same historical knowledge and meanings? Are the entrance narratives transforming towards frameworks more "polythetic" and acknowledging alternative narratives (Shemilt 2000)?

We conduct a multiple case-study with multicultural classrooms in the Netherlands.

Sources are student interviews, observations, transcribed videotapes of student interactions, and student products. For each topic we will select a heritage education program that includes both activities in the classroom and a museum, aiming at acknowledging plural perspectives. The programs will provoke student verbalization, student interaction and whole-class discussions, whereas especially verbalization can shed light on the processes involved in learning with and about heritage (Leinhardt and Knutson 2006). Six classes of different schools will participate. The topic *Christianization* will be studied in two primary school classes; the topics *Black slave trade* and *World War II* each in two secondary school classes (age 14-15). First, we investigate the entrance narratives of the students using task-based pre-interviews (Barton 2001). Second, we examine interaction of students in classrooms and museums. These conversations will be coded for structural patterns, explanatory engagement, content emphasis (Fienberg and Leinhardt 2002), multiple perspectives and historical thinking (Van Drie & Van Boxtel 2008). Third, we will analyze student products and conduct interviews after the heritage program in order to determine the appearance and character of shared historical knowledge.