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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the development of the social studies curriculum of the Noordelijke Hogeschool Leeuwarden (NHL), a polytechnic college in the north of The Netherlands. The following issues are addressed: (1) current developments in the labor market and in education that have to be addressed by a new curriculum; (2) the concept of 'learning how to learn' as a key feature of the NHL curriculum; (3) social studies as a thematic form of education in the NHL definition; (4) the method of curriculum development that is used to implement the framework; and (5) problems and points of discussion in the current implementation process. Graphs and charts help explain the different learning techniques described in the paper. The paper contends that the distinction between Dutch universities and colleges for professional education, such as the NHL, can be made productive within a national educational system. (EH)

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NOORDELIJKE HOGESCHOOL
LEEWARDEN

Social Studies in the Netherlands

a challenging experience

Paper for the 75th Annual Conference
of the National Council for the Social Studies
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Introduction

This paper gives an impression of the development of the social studies curriculum of the Noordelijke Hogeschool Leeuwarden, a polytechnic college in the north of the Netherlands. Separate from this paper a brochure is available in which the Noordelijke Hogeschool Leeuwarden (NHL) and the social studies department introduce themselves. This brochure is called 'HBO Social Studies; learning how to learn in Social Studies'.

In Dutch education a couple of trends can be identified, that make social studies - as an integrated field of study - of growing importance. A few examples.

First of all in secondary education, in junior high schools and high schools the national prescribed curriculum gives more and more room to a thematic and integrated way of working in the field of social studies. One of the new subjects, that will be introduced in high schools two years from now is called 'Man and Society'.

As a consequence the Secretary of Education has taken the initiative to restructure Dutch teacher training accordingly. In a policy document called 'Vital teacher training' he more or less dictates a development towards (partly) integrated fields of study for all teacher training institutes in the Netherlands. He also is in favor of a coordinated curriculum for all teacher training institutes in the country.

Until recently colleges of higher education were autonomous in structuring their curriculum within the framework of the law. Because of the initiative of the Secretary of Education this probably will change for teacher training in the years to come. The social studies department of the NHL already made the choice for a development towards social studies as an integrated form of education a couple of years ago. That's why the department can present a rather sophisticated framework for higher education, which is outlined in this paper. The department hopes to play a leading role in the coming national developments.

At the moment the core of the Dutch social studies network as advocates for integrated studies is formed by the SLO, the Dutch foundation for curriculum development and the NHL. These two institutes have nominated the Netherlands for the international conference on social studies, which is organized by NCSS every three years. After Sidney in 1997 we would like to host the social studies educators of the world in the year 2000.

In this paper the development of the social studies curriculum of the NHL will be outlined by addressing the following issues:

- Current developments on the labor market and in education that have to be addressed by a new curriculum.
- The concept of 'learning how to learn' as the key feature of the NHL curriculum.
- Social Studies as a thematic form of education in the NHL definition.
- The method of curriculum development that is used to implement the framework.
- Problems and points of discussion in the current implementation process.

Current developments

The introduction of this paper already refers to a couple of developments in education. In this paragraph a couple of major developments in Dutch society and education will be added, that have to be met by the curriculum of the NHL social studies department.

Student behavior is rapidly changing. It seems as if -on the average- students do not study as effectively as they should be able to. A lot of students have motivational problems, concentration problems, and there are problems with class discipline. Students very often do not know what profession they aspire to. Even in higher education these changes become visible. Teacher behavior should change accordingly. In Dutch secondary education a major change will take place in the coming years, where the teacher's role will be redefined from the man or woman in front of the classroom telling students how things work and what they should do, to the coach that helps students to study and explore for themselves. The concept of 'learning how to learn', that will be explained below, is part of the policy documents for secondary schools of the Secretary of Education and addresses this problem.

In the Dutch system of higher education more distinction is wanted between the universities and the colleges for professional education (the polytechnics). The latter should concentrate on the preparation of future professionals for the labor market by curricula that are derived more or less directly from those professions (by so called professional profiles). The former should not offer all kinds of professional programs, but should concentrate on the academics of the traditional subject areas and scientific research (more or less 'back to basics').

Our society is changing very rapidly. The subject contents that are taught in our schools will not be up to date 5 years from now. These rapid changes also affect the labor market and the future professions of our students. A key feature in the professional profile, demanded by schools as well as businesses, is flexibility and the ability to tackle problems as an independent and professional team member. The future professional is a self-reliant learner who has the ability to develop into the requirements and challenges that a professional career has to offer. As a team member working in a multidisciplinary context will be required, in the awareness that the complexities of reality can be understood more profoundly by a multidisciplinary approach.

The concept of 'learning how to learn'

'Learning how to learn' is not new but, as can be derived from the previous paragraphs, it gets a new emphasis in the Dutch educational situation the last few years. With the incorporation of this concept in the curricula an answer is given to the phenomena of the changing student and the flexibility and problem solving skills, that are required by the rapidly changing labor market.

First of all a little bit more on the concept. The learning strategy of an individual consists of learning activities. Learning activities can be defined as thinking activities used when learning. In the chart below an overview of learning activities is given, which is based on the research of Dr. Jan Vermunt in higher education in the Netherlands (1994). The cognitive activities are used by students to comprehend and digest contents, which should lead to learning results in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills. Affective activities are directed towards internalizing the feelings that students develop during their learning process. Metacognitive regulation activities are necessary to steer or control the cognitive and affective activities.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES		
COGNITIVE	AFFECTIVE	REGULATIVE
relate	attribute	orientate
structure	motivate	plan
analyze	concentrate	process control
concretize	self-assessment	test
apply	value	diagnose
memorize	make an effort	steer
critical comprehension	raise emotions	evaluate
select	expect	reflect

The research among students of higher education by Jan Vermunt has shown, that the quality of the learning results depends on the quality of the used learning activities. This also implies that the quality of the educational process improves if students are challenged to use learning activities of a higher quality level.

Vermunt distinguishes four learning styles. A learning style is the relative stable pattern of learning activities that is applied by an individual, which is based on past experience and the conceptual learning model or learning orientation. Is learning a way of absorbing knowledge offered by educators or is learning directed towards the building of ones own body of knowledge? Is learning directed towards the application in everyday life or is learning important for the better understanding of society? Is learning necessary to get your diploma or because one does not know anything better to do?! This implicit conceptual or mental model is based on personal objectives, intentions and motives, on expectations, attitudes and concerns related to the education that one is taking on a specific point in time.

In the form of archetypes four learning styles can be distinguished:

- the nondirected style: not controlling ones own learning processes, depending on others in group processes, depending on external steering and not really knowing why one is studying;
- the reproductive style: uses memorizing and analytical learning activities, depends largely on external steering and the external determination of the results. Learning is absorbing what is offered and necessary to get a diploma and to measure ones capabilities;
- the comprehending style: uses critical and qualifying activities in order to understand and satisfy personal curiosity. Learning is controlling ones own development and growth;
- the style that aims at application of knowledge and skills: learning makes things practical in the perspective of the future profession. One prefers learning by doing in a situation where one has an own responsibility.

The last two learning styles are considered learning styles of a higher quality level because they contribute more effectively to the development of a student towards a self-reliant learner who prepares him- or herself adequately for the labor market.

At the social studies department of the NHL the concept of learning how to learn has to be understood in the perspective of the research of Vermunt. The concept is incorporated in the curriculum in a structural, but also systematic way. The method of curriculum development (see below) ensures that students work on their learning control throughout the entire curriculum (structural dimension) in such a way that all the relevant skills necessary to become a self-reliant learner are practiced along the way (systematic dimension). In the four year process the student has to develop metacognition in such a way that he or she will be able to study purposefully and with a large sense of personal responsibility.

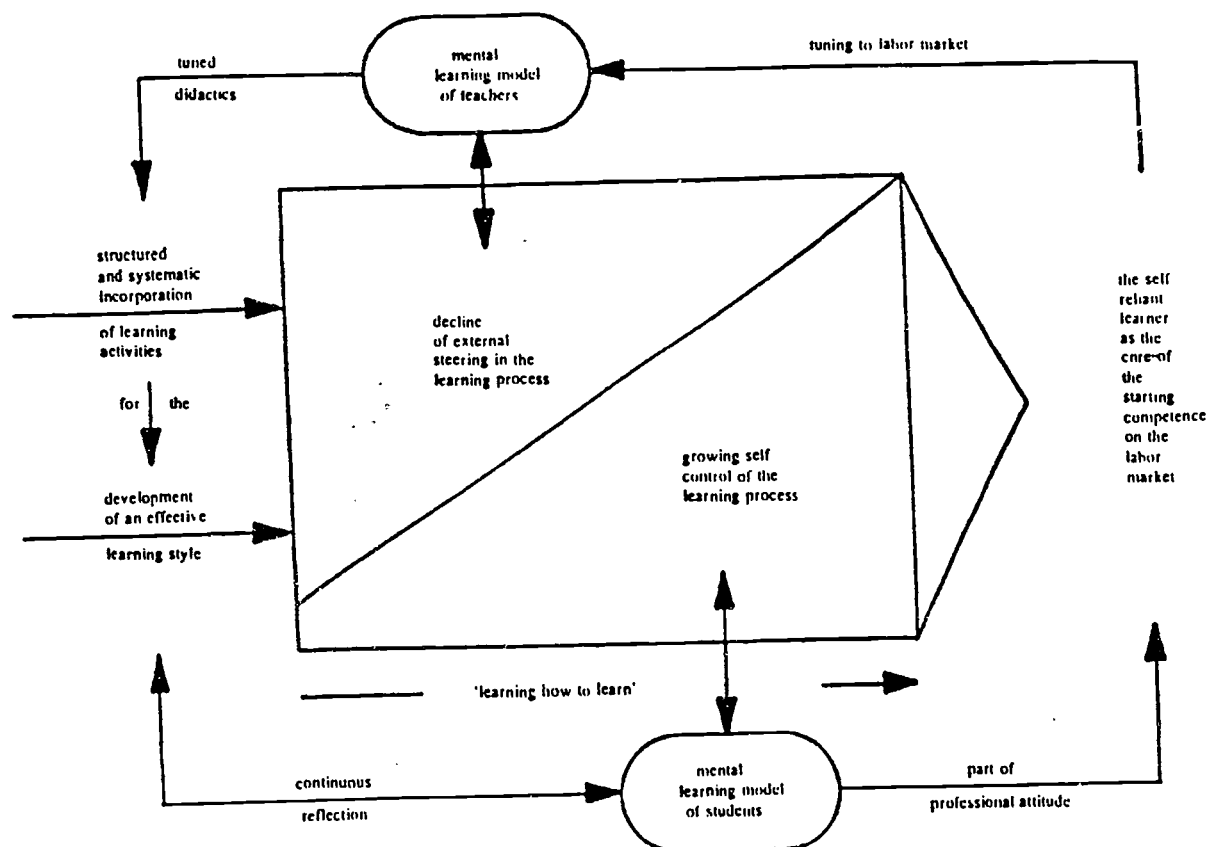
During this process it should become increasingly clear to the student:

- what the learning objectives in a certain task are en why these are important;
- which learning activities to apply in order to accomplish what was set out by the objectives;
- how the learning results can be measured in relation to the objectives;
- how to use feedback procedures to control the learning process in direction of the objectives;
- that the attainment of the objectives is a matter of control and not of chance or luck.

The curriculum starts in the first years with a large portion of external steering of the learning process by the NHL staff. This steering has to be replaced by the internal control of the student in the second part of the program. In the end the student has become a self-reliant learner, who is ready for the labor market, which requires flexibility, creativity in problem solving and life long learning.

This emphasis on 'learning how to learn' implies a major change for the teacher trainers in the NHL social studies department as well. This role change has to be accomplished during the implementation process that the department is working on at the moment.

Summarized in a scheme 'learning how to learn' for the NHL social studies department means the following.



Social Studies as thematic form of education

The NHL is a college with a polytechnic mission and as such not limited by traditional university structures in which it proves to be very difficult to cooperate towards a certain professional profile, especially in teacher training. The NHL can offer an integrated curriculum which is entirely geared to the professional perspective after graduation. The social studies department of the NHL wants to work in themes in which the core problems of the future profession are addressed. Next to that the preservice programs can only be successful if an extensive internship, in which the advanced student gains supervised practical experience in school and classroom or in business, is included.

As a member of NCSS the social studies department has taken the 'Curriculum Standards for Social Studies; expectations of excellence' (1994) as one of the starting points for the design of the curriculum. Implemented in the Dutch situation and taking the educational mission of the College of Education into account, the NHL has developed a definition of Social Studies which is based on the NCSS-definition of 1992:

'Social Studies is the integrated study of social phenomena, based on the complete spectrum of the social sciences and the humanities. The Social Studies curriculum provides a structure for a multidisciplinary approach by the use of themes directly derived

from the complex (professional) reality. The primary purpose of Social Studies is to prepare students for jobs in the educational and communicative sector embedded in a socio-cultural context. Students should be able to make informed and reasoned decisions as citizens and working professionals in a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.'

Education based on this concept can be powerful, as NCSS states, because it is meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging and active. In the latter catchwords the concept of 'learning how to learn' plays an important role. The NHL department is convinced that the more students take responsibility for their own learning process and reflect on it, the more they will comprehend the contents of the subjects or themes.

Based on an SLO study (Toebes, 1995) the NHL has defined a mixed form of thematic education, in which the following prerequisites are taken seriously:

- an integrative approach only makes sense when it is problem oriented and deals with a current or future situation or problem;
- contributions of 'traditional' subjects and their characteristic perspectives should be possible and not be dominated by any discipline.

Themes at the NHL are based on the concept of partial integration and consist of theme modules and supporting basic modules. The theme module deals with the application of subject matter on a core problem of the future profession. The basic modules enable the students to deal with the problems presented in the theme module by studying relevant background subject matter or training relevant skills.

The themes have to be derived from the professional profiles that are based on extensive consultation of the work field. In this respect the curriculum can be characterized as field based, especially when the extensive internships are taken into account.

Next to that, however, the themes have to fit within the thematic strands as the NCSS has defined them in her framework and the general structure of the HBO Social Studies curriculum. This structure, which is also included in the brochure, shows the general framework for the curriculum, that is being implemented at the moment (see page 7). Within this structure the teacher training programs (e.g. history or general economics) and the general and applied programs (e.g. public relations) are positioned. The curriculum is not based on the structure of traditional subjects, but on a broad social studies perspective that stimulates a multidisciplinary way of working. The student starts with one of the thematic fields (Culture and Society, Economics and Services or Communication and Society) and specializes in the junior and senior year. Within these program lines the themes have to be developed in such a way that they meet the requirements of the professional profile for a specific program.

Method of curriculum development

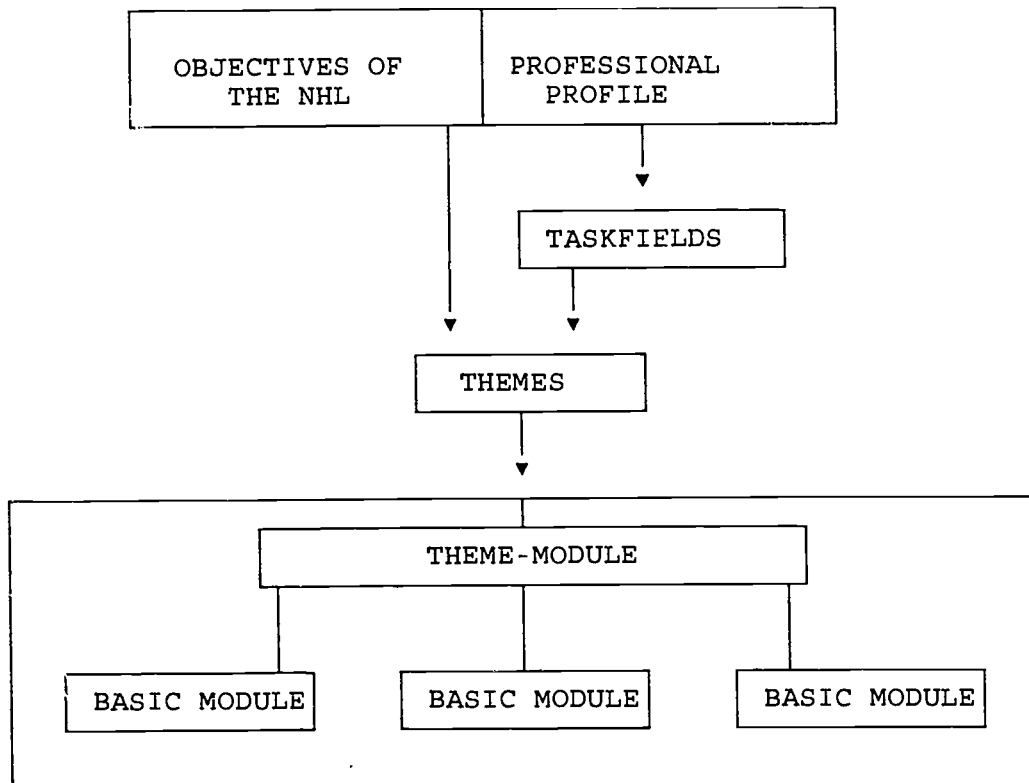
In order to ensure the structured implementation of the new curriculum as outlined above, the NHL social studies department has developed an instrument. The instrument is structured in such a way that it ensures:

part-time	POST-GRADUATE PROGRAMS FOR TEACHING DEGREES ON THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL			
senior year	Specialization on vocational education or in-service business employee training	Social Studies teacher for junior high school with a light major in a specific subject area	Social Studies as an integrated field of study in the liberal arts tradition	Social Studies applied to communicative professions (e.g. public relations)
junior year				
sophomore year	Culture and Society	the school as organization	Economics and Services working in companies	Communication and Society
freshman year	Culture and Society the manifestation of norms, values and ideas in patterns of human behavior within a society		Economics and Services how people take care of themselves, each other and their (material) subsistence	Communication and Society how people exchange information in a knowledge based society

- the development of a teacher training program in social studies that is tuned to the requirements of the teaching profession and to the future changes in that profession.
- the development of general and applied programs, related to the educational mission, that are tuned to the professions in business and other institutions.
- a clear overview of the positioning of learning objectives in the curriculum and the way they are to be realized.
- the implementation of the departmental curriculum framework (as far as learning how to learn and the implementation of the social studies concept is concerned).

To develop educational programs as part of the teacher education a working format has been developed in the form of six steps and two matrices. The matrices are used in the last of the six steps to translate the previous choices in a concrete and balanced educational planning.

Before the steps are described the scheme on page 8 gives an overview. Starting out with the consultation of the work field it will end up with the definition and development of themes.



The following steps are necessary to completely outline the curriculum in the NHL format. This process has to be completed for each of the programs that can be distinguished within the social studies department.

1. The determination of the core subject of studies. This is the abstract and underlying concept of the relevant teacher training or other program. It defines the part of the professional field towards which the curriculum is directed.
2. The development of professional standards or profiles. The core subject definition distinguishes between the profiles that have to be addressed by the curriculum and the profiles that can be ignored.
3. The relevant professional profiles have to be worked out into job descriptions with a specification of task fields and duties that have to be fulfilled within the job. The task fields are clusters of activities that a teacher should master in order to perform successfully.
4. The specified tasks have to be translated into final objectives or exit qualifications (in terms of knowledge, attitude and skills). In these qualifications the NHL distinguishes between those that are relevant for a starting competence and those, that are necessary for the further development of a professional after a year or a couple of years.

5. The choice for themes. The exit qualifications are decisive for the themes that have to be included in the curriculum. Consequently it is determined in what sequence the themes are to be included.
6. The development of the themes. The themes are based on the rough material that was provided by the inventory of tasks and duties (step 3) and the connected levels of control (step 4). Per theme a theme module is developed and if necessary basic modules with traditional subjects or training programs for several skills are added.

The matrices that have been developed support step six and help to ensure that a coherent curriculum is developed with a well balanced planning of learning activities (the systematic incorporation of learning how to learn).

Where is the NHL at this moment? The way the staff is experiencing it, we just got started. At the moment the second year of implementation is well underway. Nevertheless, there still is a long way ahead because the new curriculum describes a turn around in the Dutch tradition of higher education. And such a turn around takes time; at least four more years. What is very important for the NHL is that the current developments in Dutch education at large support the development towards social studies and learning how to learn. This really confirms the NHL choice and is expected to reinforce the innovation process that is underway.

Points of discussion

A number of thesis can be derived from the above outline.

1. The concept of 'learning how to learn' has the potential of giving an adequate answer to the phenomena of 'the changing student'.
2. Learning how to learn leads to the self-reliant learner that will be a key feature in the future professional profiles.
3. Only through a strict and demanding system of student coaching (through mentors) the final objectives can be met.
4. The concept of 'learning how to learn' requires a different role of teachers, a turn around that is very difficult to make. Not only learning styles are pretty stable: the same applies to teaching styles.
5. The distinction between Dutch universities and colleges for professional education can be made productive within a national educational system.
6. Changing the curriculum towards 'learning how to learn' is one thing, breaking down the partitions between the traditional subjects is another. Doing both is too much for an innovation process.

7. Thematic education in higher education brings down the final qualifications of the graduate as far as the 'contents level' is concerned.
8. The method of curriculum development is strongly based on the control paradigm. This can only succeed if the professionals, the teachers can play an important role in the application of the instrument during process.

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