De odyssee van klassieke culturele vorming (KCV)

Meurs, Renée Helene van

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summary

The Odyssee of Classical Cultural Education (KCV), the Implementation of KCV in Dutch Education

Classical Cultural Education (KCV) is a subject that was introduced in Dutch pre-university schools (gymnasium, atheneum, havo) in 1998/1999 as part of a government-initiated innovation operation, in which four career streams and new subjects were introduced and a new didactics was propagated. The introduction of KCV was only a minor part of the operation.

KCV offers education in the classical background of European culture: an introduction in Greek and Roman stories (myths) and Greek drama, ancient philosophy, Greek and Roman architecture, Greek and Roman arts (sculpture), and the reception of arts, literature and architecture in later periods. For example, it studies the paintings inspired by classical subjects in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, or (neo-)classical elements in Renaissance, classicist and post-modern architecture. KCV aims to show the influence of the classics on literature, arts and architecture in the world around us. The subject KCV is a compulsory part of the gymnasium curriculum, but optional for atheneum and havo pupils. In the initial guidelines, visits to theatres and museums, and reading classical texts (drama, myths) in translation were integral parts of the curriculum. The objective was that pupils should develop research skills by actively researching subjects of the KCV curriculum. This required a change in the didactics normally used in the teaching of Greek and Latin.

This study starts with an historical overview of the influence of Greek and Roman culture on education in Europe in general and in the Netherlands.

For centuries education was focused on comprehension and fluency in Latin (and to a lesser degree Greek). Classical civilisation was transmitted through the original languages. Latin was the vehicular language at universities. New ideas about teaching classical culture arose in the beginning of the twentieth century. In Denmark Oldtidskundskab was introduced: Greek and Latin literature in translation and Greek and Roman history and arts. Later on classical civilisation and classical studies were introduced in England, as was a comparable subject in Flanders. The ‘lyceum reform’ of 1984 intended to introduce classical culture in the Dutch educational system, but the plan was not executed.
The second part of the study focuses on the actual implementation of KCV. Three research questions are asked: Firstly, in what way was KCV implemented by school managers? Secondly, in what way was the new subject implemented by teachers? Thirdly, what are the learning effects of this new subject on pupils?

A combined methodology was used involving both quantitative methods and qualitative methods, such as interviews, questionnaires, observations, ‘learner reports’ (learning rated by self-assessment), ‘art reports’ and the analysis of school documents. During the preliminary research study, five experts in the field, managers of five school boards and nine teachers were interviewed. Also, a ‘learner report’ (students report about their own learning) was developed to investigate the learning effects of the lessons in KCV. This was tested in six groups of pupils.

A review of the literature on professional organizations (Mintzberg 1983, 1995, 1998), implementation theories (Van Meter & Van Horn 1975, 1977; Hogwood & Gunn 1986; Rogers & Shoemaker 1971) and theories about education (Simons, van der Linden & Duffy 2000, Anderson, Reder, Simon & Greeno 1996-2000) form the theoretical background to the propagated ‘new learning’ provided the framework for a questionnaire for managers and teachers. Eighty school managers participated in this study and offered information about their management of the implementation. Ninety-seven teachers filled in a questionnaire and gave an impression of the way they organized their lessons in KCV and recorded their feelings about the implementation process.

The third part of the research focused on the implementation on classroom level and the effects of the KCV lessons. During one year, four groups were followed by means of interviews, classroom observations, document analysis, ‘learner reports’ and ‘arts reports’.

Although most of the school managers regarded KCV as important for the mission of the organization, it was found that only a small part of the schools gave atheneum and havo pupils the option to choose KCV. Only 7000 out of more than 20,000 pupils of the upper level of pre-university education (16 to 18 year-olds) that graduate each year had the opportunity (or choice) to learn about the classical background of European culture. Innovations in schools were introduced after preparatory consultations and deliberations in committees in which teachers participated. Those who had taken part in these ‘consultancy groups’ felt involved and had the impression that they could influence the process of implementation. The other teachers, not involved in consultations and deliberations, displayed less or no sense of ownership.
The teaching conditions provided by school managers for KCV were not very promising in all schools. In some schools there was a shortage of teaching hours, the time schedule was unfavourable, and no regular classroom was available. Moreover, in some schools there was a shortage of books on the subject, computers, audiovisual media, and/or financial means for excursions. During the implementation process some training days were offered by the professional organization (VCN), universities and others without financial support of the government. At the same time an internet network (Grex) was set up which teachers could use to communicate and exchange material for lessons, questions etc. Half of the teachers participated in the internet network, but only a small group used the possibilities for contact and exchange.

The implementation of KCV caused fewer problems than one would have expected on the basis of the literature. Only one in nine managers recorded any problems. Examples of such problems were teachers who did not want to teach the subject or conform to the guidelines of the government.

In six percent of the schools KCV is not taught by teachers of Greek and Latin (entitled to teach KCV), but by teachers in history, arts or philosophy.

Teachers have a great degree of freedom in organizing the content and didactics of their lessons. The guidelines of the government make only some restrictions. Government control by the inspectorate is mostly indirect. School managers hardly have any influence. They do not regard it as their task and their competence – they often lack expertise on the subject – to evaluate their professionals in this respect.

Two factors had a positive effect on the implementation. In most schools there was consensus about the way the subject should be taught (in one out of three schools there was only one teacher for KCV). Also, two teaching methods were introduced, written by two lecturers (and others) of two Dutch universities. Almost all teachers used one of these two methods (or both).

Most teachers felt the introduction of KCV to be a tremendous change. Forty percent of the teachers were initially ‘unhappy’ about the implementation of KCV. However, sixty percent of the teachers were positive. Some teachers who initially were cynical, later changed their attitude and started to enjoy teaching the subject.

Lectures, individual study and group work were widely used in KCV lessons. Fewer than half of the teachers used visual media on a regular basis. Less than a quarter of the teachers used computers during the lessons on a regular basis.
Nine in ten teachers visited museums. Two thirds of the teachers travelled with pupils to Rome, to visit classical sites, museums and churches. One out of six travelled with their pupils to Greece. The number of schools that organized this kind of excursions increased after the implementation of KCV. Half of the teachers visited the theatre to show their pupils Greek drama. The research data suggest that most teachers have taken up the challenge and have succeeded in implementing KCV.

What affected the implementation of KCV was that the Dutch government took some measures during the implementation that undermined the initial plan. As of 2000 only one practical (research) task was compulsory. Additionally, in 2003 activities such as visiting museums, theatres and reading authentic texts in translation were no longer obligatory. And last but not least, as from the first of August 2007 school managers may choose between continuing KCV as a subject in its own right or integrating KCV in Greek and Latin lessons. One of the shortcomings in the implementation appeared to be that there was no public debate to develop a ‘theory’ or legitimation of the necessity and importance of the new subject in the school. Although KCV allowed teachers to spend more actual teaching time with their pupils over and above Latin and/or Greek lessons, the implementation was difficult for teachers: the subject covered new contents and new didactics and no large-scale training was offered.

The case-study showed that nearly all pupils considered the subject interesting and an important part of their education. Of the four groups studied, the subjective learning effect was the largest for the pupils of atheneum and havo. One reason for this effect could be that for these pupils the information conveyed in the KCV curriculum was totally new.

There were considerable differences in the KCV programme of the four groups under study, in terms of both method and curriculum. Two programs focused on knowledge and skills, two other programs were more or less devoted to ‘new learning’. The learning effects of the lessons depended on the way the subject was taught. The learning effects of the lessons on the students – rated by self-assessment – were greater the more topics were covered and the more information was processed by them. No subjective learning effects could be traced to ‘new learning’ activities. As for grades, there were no differences in the average grades between the groups.

If the government implements a new subject it is advisable:

a. to start a public discussion about the goals and merits of the innovation to legitimate the subject to the public;
b. not to change the conditions and rules during the process of implementation of a new subject;

c. to support financial and provide sufficient conditions in the schools to train the professionals during the process of implementation.

School boards need to provide adequate conditions such as classrooms, teaching time, budget for excursions, media, computers and above all (coaching and) mental support.

School boards in general do not have the expertise and means to evaluate their professionals. It is necessary to supervise the quality of education (accountability).

From the perspective of European integration, the whole school population atheneum/havo/mbo should have the opportunity to learn about the background of European culture (KCV). It should not remain the virtually exclusive right of gymnasium students.