



# Faithfully Connected

Holistic Teacher Formation for Shalom-Seeking  
Citizenship in a Fragmented Society

A Case Study

Peter Chr. van Olst



**Theological University of Apeldoorn / Driestar Christian University**

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THEOLOGISCHE UNIVERSITEIT APELDOORN

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HOLISTIC TEACHER FORMATION FOR SHALOM-SEEKING CITIZENSHIP  
IN A FRAGMENTED SOCIETY – A CASE STUDY

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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Peter Christiaan van Olst,  
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### **Supervisors**

Prof Dr A. de Muynck (Theological University of Apeldoorn)

Prof Dr R. Kuiper (Theological University Utrecht)

### **Members of the Assessment Committee**

Dr C.C. den Hertog

Dr A. Mayo

Prof Dr J. van der Stoep

Dr C. Watkins

Prof Dr M. Wisse

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To Annelies and Anneloes.

*'... and of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment.'*  
– 1 Chronicles 12:32 KJV

*'In our isolation lies our strength.'*  
– Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, 1876

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# Preface

How can Christian trainee teachers be adequately prepared to fulfil their duties towards children and youth in a society that can no longer be characterised as Christian? This question came to me when I started my job at Driestar Christian University for Teacher Education in 2017. I witnessed both academic instructors and school representatives wrestling with new challenges concerning citizenship education, as urged or even imposed by national and international authorities. The lively discussions involved, shifted between the desire to respond positively to understandable social concerns, on the one hand, and the idea of defending the freedom of individual, religiously bound education, on the other hand. Somewhat later, I encountered the same question and discussions in international circles, such as the International Network for Christian Higher Education (INCHE) and the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). What these discussions lacked, however, was a clear awareness of the depth of the cultural change that Western countries such as the Netherlands—and, to some extent, as a result of globalisation, all countries of the world—had experienced in recent decades.

I vividly remember Driestar Christian University's celebration, in 2019, of its 75th anniversary, where a keynote speaker from a liberal think tank (1) expressed deep concern with regard to Christian education and the freedom of religious education that makes it possible. He offered two reasons for his standpoint. First, he wanted children to not be immersed in any form of religion. Second, he accused Christian schools of being too removed from general society to be helpful in the crucial task of integrating all kinds of people from very different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. His keynote speech itself was an illustration of how the Netherlands had changed from a relatively homogeneous country with strong Christian roots into an open and plural society in a globalised world. As a theologian, it was easy for me to disagree with the speaker's first objection to religious education, but as a political scientist, I could understand his second objection. Are education and schooling not always a function *of* and *for* society? And is it not reasonable that national and international authorities sometimes appeal to this functionality when preoccupied with, for example, polarisation or the lack of social cohesion?

It might have been my intercultural background that helped me to view the problem from this perspective and to question what it means today to form Christian teachers to take their place in society and the world as it actually is. For 10 years I lived and worked with my family in Ecuador. Immediately

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1 Patrick van Schie, Teldersstichting VVD.

afterwards, I wrote and edited a Reformed Christian missiology <sup>(2)</sup>, which was the starting point for my entry into Christian education in 2017. The longing to have an impact on society from the Christian perspective had never faded. Based on my theological, missiological and political science interests, I went back to the famous Dutch statesman and historiographer Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, who is considered in the Netherlands to be the father of Christian education as it took shape from the 19th century onwards. I discovered that his life's motto—'In our isolation lies our strength' (1876, p. 52)—did not in any way refer to physical or social isolation on the part of Reformed Christians; rather, it related to the fundamental consistency of principle necessary to prepare for meaningful sociocultural and educational engagement (Kamphuis, 1976, pp. 10, 14, 15). How would Groen van Prinsterer, drawing on this reasoning, react to today's challenges regarding education, almost two centuries after uttering his famous motto? How should we, if we want to be 'gospel confessors' like him, prepare Christian teachers for modern, non-Christian, plural society?

I was fortunate enough to have the chance to investigate this issue. I believe the opportunity was given to me. Therefore, I first and foremost thank the Lord, humbly confessing that this research would not have been possible without His guidance. After Him, I thank Annelies Kraaiveld, to whom I dedicate this dissertation. As my manager at Driestar Christian University, she heard my wish and enabled me to join an inter-institutional research project on a topic she and I believed to be helpful and applicable to citizenship education. The topic was whole child development, which includes whole teacher development as an important component. How this topic relates to Christian citizenship formation will become clear in the introduction and chapters to follow. I also dedicate this study to Anneloes Bout. She is the individual who stands for the many—the many students I have worked with during the past few years. The research resulted in action research for these students' curriculum. It was all done to enable them to become Christian teachers who are fully engaged in today's world and society. In Annelies Kraaiveld, I thank Driestar Christian University; in Anneloes Bout, its students, especially those who took part in this research—though not without mentioning how Anneloes showed a special interest in shalom-seeking citizenship, which made her a richer teacher.

I would also like to address words of thanks to the loyal and constructively critical members of my project and research team who, as a conversational community, dedicated themselves to action research concerning the aforementioned curriculum. Without them, I would not have collected the

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2 Kooijman, J. H. C., & van Olst, P. C. (2017). *Onverhinderd. De voortgang van het Evangelie in de wereld [Unhindered. The progress of the Gospel in the world]*. ZGG.

data that render this research valid. I am also grateful for the companionship of the representatives of the NIVOZ Foundation and the three other teacher training institutes with which we collaborated during the overarching research project on whole child development (WCD). Without them, it would not have been possible to reflect so deeply on WCD and its significance in today's educational context. With them, I thank the Porticus Foundation, which made the overarching project possible and made room in it for this PhD study. What I learned from all of the above-mentioned participants is to never forget to include students in educational research, which brings me to express my gratitude to all of the students who participated in the study, especially the six who dedicated their theses to the investigation of WCD and took part in the preliminary research. I also think gratefully of my fellow PhD students from the tightly knit international group of 'Professor Bram' we formed for some years.

I thank my supervisors, Bram de Muynck and Roel Kuiper, for their close reading of my texts and the vivid discussions that reading prompted, in which Bram scrutinised matters from the pedagogical perspective, while Roel did so from the political-philosophical perspective. I also thank and praise my colleague Martijn Boer and my son Thomas van Olst for the artistic expressions they made for all of the chapters of this dissertation. Last but not least, I want to express my profound gratitude to my wife, Sofieke. The illness she suffered for a large part of the years of my PhD study led to the neither sought nor desired homeboundness, which nevertheless provided for the kind of stability that made it possible for this project to be finished within the indicated four years. It is my hope and prayer that we may together enjoy the new phase we enter with my completing this project.





# Introduction

## Teaching and the Art of Living Together

'We may define citizenship as the art of living together, an obvious and a permanent need in all ages.'

*S.P.T. Prideaux during a talk to teachers in Salisbury, 1940*

'According to God's will, Christendom is a scattered people, scattered like seed "into all the Kingdoms of the earth". That is its curse and its promise.'

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 1939, p. 7*

Over 80 years ago, around the outbreak of the Second World War, an Anglican reverend named S.P.T. Prideaux addressed a group of teachers and teacher trainers at the College of Sarum St. Michael—formerly the Salisbury Training College—in England<sup>(3)</sup>. His topic was the same as the topic of this dissertation—namely, citizenship and how trainee teachers should be prepared to practice and teach it from a Christian perspective. Moreover, his approach was as broad as this dissertation’s approach aims to be, as evidenced by his definition of citizenship as ‘the art of living together’ (Prideaux, 1940, p. 203). His context, however, was very different from that of the world as it is in the 21st century. The citizenship Prideaux referred to was the art of living together in a Christian country on its way to, as he saw it, the ‘full realization’ of the Biblical ideals concerning citizenship. Although that realisation was still ‘very far from complete’, Prideaux did not hesitate to invite his audience to make a ‘large contribution’ to it, finishing with the statement that ‘the need of Christian teaching in schools and colleges is urgent today’ (p. 209).

For Prideaux, the Bible functioned as his ‘handbook of citizenship’ (p. 203). In it, he found his deepest motivation to invest in the art of living together. Indeed, Prideaux (1940) believed that it would be ‘unscientific and doomed to failure’ not to include God in citizenship education (p. 203). Citizenship education, he claimed, should always centre on three deeply interconnected core elements: the individual, the group and God as ‘the originator of the whole process of life’ (Prideaux, 1940, p. 203). While the omission of one of these elements would have disruptive consequences, their connectedness provides for wholeness. At the end of his talk, Prideaux (1940) summarised his contribution by stating that ‘God is to be put first in everything; the rights and freedom of the individual are to be respected (...); there is to be perfect balance between the individual and the community’ (p. 208). To this threefold conclusion he added that ‘the whole process of living, its motive and its method, is summed up in the world Love’ and that real *agapè* consists of ‘the recognition of God and devotion to God on the one hand, plus the devotion to the highest welfare of man’s fellow-men on the other’ (Prideaux, 1940, p. 209).

It is my conviction that Prideaux’ talk, the text of which was published in 1940 in a scientific journal, can serve as a historic mirror for the research I am about to present. Like Prideaux, I am a Christian teacher trainer—and like Prideaux’ teaching-related audience in 1940, there are many teachers and teacher trainers today, all over the globe, who find in their Christian faith their

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3 I thank Jenny Head for providing useful information about Prideaux and his role at the College of Sarum St. Michael and for the shipping of the memorial book she wrote together with Anne Johns (Head & Johns, 2015).

deepest motivation to be involved in (citizenship) education. With regard to ‘the art of living together’, the core elements referenced in Prideaux’ talk—that is, the recognition of the Creator of all and the ensuing respect for the interconnectedness of all living things—are still important to these teachers and teacher trainers. However, as a faith community, they are concerned about how they should relate all this to the changed societal reality. Can the Bible still be considered a ‘handbook of citizenship’ in a context of high cultural, ethnical and directional diversity, especially one in which the Bible has consequently, for the vast majority of people, lost its authority? Has the gap between ideal and practice, as already indicated in 1940, now grown so wide in the 21st century that the old ideal has become unrealistic or even undesirable in the context of today’s pluralism? In summary, does Prideaux’ Biblically comprehensive approach regarding ‘the art of living together’ still apply to citizenship education today?

In light of the high levels of diversity and complexity that countries in Western Europe currently face, Prideaux’ (1940) talk may come across as anachronistic. Due to rapid cultural change during the last eight decades, his ideal of the Christian country has largely disappeared from sight. For Christian teachers, the loss may lead to a certain nostalgia that incites them to refrain from providing adequate contemporary citizenship education, or to just concentrate on the bare cognitive necessities of such education. In the most extreme situation, this would cause them to turn their backs on (active participation in) broader society. In other situations, it implies that their personal, faith-based ideals become somehow detached from their citizenship education practices. This may lead to a reduction in their educational effort to just certain areas of life and to the subsequent loss of what Donner (2012, p. 19) termed a ‘Christian cosmovision’, which is an ordered conception of where the whole of life comes from and what it is meant for. If such a loss were to occur, citizenship would no longer be defined broadly and positively as ‘the art of living together’, at least not in terms of the strict connection Prideaux (1940) made with the Biblical command to love God and your neighbours.

This study investigates a completely different, almost opposite approach to citizenship education for Christian teachers in contemporary society. To accomplish this, it draws on the central themes of unity and interconnectedness in Prideaux’ talk and searches for an approach that is both *theological* and *holistic*. Theological, because it deliberately includes the spiritual (vertical) connection between the teacher and God, without obscuring the importance of this connection or placing it in brackets. Holistic, because it connects the vertical to the horizontal relationships, envisioning a network

of connections—that is, to others, to the community, to society as a whole and, finally, to the world itself as God’s created whole. Such a Biblically holistic approach recognises ‘the art of living together’ as, just like Prideaux (1940) stated, ‘an obvious and permanent need in all ages’ (p. 203). Theologically, this art is connected to God’s command to practice *agapè*, while holistically, it focuses on the importance of a sense of belonging (Valle Painter, 2013) in relation to a complex network of relationships. The present study relates this approach to society and the world as they exist today, not shying away *from* reality but studying how to live together *in* it. Or, as this dissertation’s title indicates, to be ‘faithfully connected’ *with* reality.

This broad, Biblically holistic approach to citizenship education responds to the perceived needs of (especially) Western societies with regard to citizenship education. During the early years of the 21st century, the strengthening of citizenship through education was placed firmly on the political agenda practically everywhere in the West (Banks, 2008). For example, in the Netherlands, where the empirical part of this study was conducted at Driestar Christian University (DCU)—as a case study of faith-based teacher training in modern society<sup>(4)</sup>—the government first (in 2006) asked schools to educate students in ‘social integration’ and then (in 2021) specified that to mean ‘social cohesion’ (Kuiper, 2023)<sup>(5)</sup>. A perceived lack of social cohesion raises an open question regarding (lost) connectedness to which religious education in particular should and can respond (Bertram-Troost & Miedema, 2022; de Bas & van Meir, 2023; van Gaans, 2024)<sup>(6)</sup>. Following Prideaux’ example, I would like to define citizenship broadly as ‘the art of living together’, adding for today’s societal and political context the words ‘respecting fundamental differences in culture, ethnicity and basic life conceptions’. Citizenship education I would like to describe as ‘the art of creating social cohesion by inviting students

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4 In Section 3 of this introduction and, later, in Chapter 5.1, Driestar Christian University will be described as a typical faith-based institute for teacher training in the modern context.

5 ‘Social cohesion’ is a broader term that includes knowledge of the democratic system, respect for otherness, attitude and the school culture.

6 ‘Bezieling’ (inspiration, animation) is an important term in this context. Bertram-Troost and Miedema spoke of ‘spirited’ education, while De Bas and Van Meir distinguished the ‘spirited citizen’ as one among four types of citizenship to which primary schools aspire. Whereas other schools opt for the adaptive citizen, the individualistic citizen, or the critical-democratic citizen, Christian schools often opt for the spirited citizen, in which consideration for the other, ethical behaviour, compassion and care for the environment are central (de Bas & van Meir, 2023, pp. 21-22).

to connect—with each other, the community, society and the world—and to flourish within those connections’ (7).

The central purpose of this study is to identify core components for teacher training with regard to Christian citizenship education. To aim for more would definitely overstretch the study’s scope and possibilities. Nevertheless, a leading criterion will be that these core components must fit together holistically. If the intended outcome of citizenship education is to be holistic, the process concerning it must be likewise. To be able to prepare students for ‘the art of living together respecting fundamental differences in culture, ethnicity and basic life conceptions’ from a Christian perspective, trainee teachers should be prepared holistically. To this criterion it can be added that even the method and design of this study, given the intended outcome, should be holistic, which means that the aim is to integrate the insights and experiences of a variety of theorists and practitioners through a process of theorisation and action research. This point will be developed further towards the end of this introduction, in Section 4.

The following sections of this introduction are intended to clarify the concepts already employed and to identify a research design regarding the citizenship education of trainee teachers. Section 1 delves into the challenges of both *super-diversity* (Vertovec, 2007) and *super-complexity* (Barnett, 2000) as central features of today’s world and society, with the aim being to substantiate and outline a choice for the predicate *fragmented* that problematises their effects on society, communities and personhood. Section 2 argues for a *holistic* response to this fragmentation thesis because, properly defined, fragmentation problematises a lack of cohesion. Based on that insight, Section 3 carefully phrases and explains the central research question. Section 4 then presents the case for an adequate (holistic) research design, while Section 5 provides an overview of the steps required to identify some interrelated core components in order to train (future) teachers in Christian citizenship education. The latter two sections contain an initial exploration of what is needed to bring the interrelated core components together into a practice-theory (Löfstedt & Westerlund, 2021; Rouse, 2007) for teacher training in relation to Christian citizenship education.

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7 The reference to flourishing connects this study to Baarda’s (2022) study into perspectives on the theme.

## 1. SCHOOLS AMID DIVERSITY AND COMPLEXITY

Before discerning the central features of our modern, fragmented society and their implications for citizenship education it is first necessary to understand on a basic level what schools and education are meant to do in the context of society. Good education serves to build bridges between the (mostly and hopefully) safe atmosphere of the family, on the one hand, and the more diverse and open atmosphere of society, on the other hand. In so doing, teachers invite students to cross these bridges to actively participate in both the social and the natural worlds, enabling them to accept the invitation to cross by practising the art of living together in the safe space of the school. The historic pedagogue Comenius, therefore, described schools as workshops of humanity, which is a description that can be connected to more contemporary discussion of the school as a mini-society. Hannah Arendt (1977), for example, was very precise in her elaboration of this concept, depicting the school as ‘the institution that we interpose between the private domain of home and the world in order to make the transition from the family to the world possible at all’ (pp. 188–189).

Biesta (2022, p. 18) juxtaposed this ‘older, more hidden and perhaps almost forgotten history’ of the school with the ‘more common history of the modern school’. The latter, he stated, ‘emerged as a result of the modernization of society and more specifically as part of the differentiation of societal fields and functions’ (p. 18). In this final, relatively new conception, schools and education first and foremost perform functions of and for societies that have lost (parts of) their intrinsic educative power because work and jobs have moved to factories and offices and become so specialised that special institutions are now required to prepare their future workforce. However, if education has to be a broad, more general and humane invitation to the world, as Biesta (2013, pp. 141–144) argued in his earlier work, then the older, more classical history of the school is in urgent need of rediscovery. Making this argument, Biesta (2022) called the school ‘a kind of halfway house’—that is, not so much a function of and for society but ‘a rather curious place halfway in between home and the street’ (p. 19) <sup>(8)</sup>.

This classical vision of schools and education can also be seen in Christian thinking and writing on education. A striking example comes from Aalders (1977), who emphasised that the Christian school should be a cultural forum (in Dutch: *cultuurgestalte*; p. 223), a concept earlier employed by van Klinken (1953). This indicates that schools need to remain focused on their bridge-

8 This approach coincides with Epstein et al.’s (2002) theory of overlapping spheres of influence. According to this theory, the position of schools can be described as a remarkable intermediate position between families, state, society and other community partners.

building task. If they do not—and Aalders (1977) is very critical of Christian schools in this regard—they will fall prey either to sterile sectarianism (turning their backs on society) or to featureless worldliness (not adding anything from their Christian perspective; p. 226). The latter outcome refers to a tendency resembling the functional position of the school in modern society as described by Biesta (2022). Aalders (1977) adopted the same idea from Bavinck's (1921) plea for classical education as a counterweight against the modern, liberal functionality (or approach). In Biblical terms, he compared the school to the city gate of Nain (Luke 7): Neither Nain, meaning lovely, itself nor the world outside of it; rather, the transitional stage from the warm safety of the family to the much wider horizon of culture.

Approximating the school along these lines—that is, as a mini-society, a halfway house, a workshop of humanity, a cultural forum or a city gate—clarifies that, for school education in general and for citizenship education more specifically, it matters both how the small entity of the family is composed and what society looks like. Where there is homogeneity across the board (e.g. students all come from Christian families, gather in Christian schools and prepare for predominantly Christian society; as it was in Prideaux' case), strong socialising tendencies are to be expected. These socialising tendencies can be, to a high degree, implicit and based on what sociologist Peter Berger (1967) defined as plausibility structures. Traditionally, many Christian schools in countries with a specifically Christian history tend to count on this socialising dynamic. The premise of this study is, however, that homogeneity is rapidly fading and that relying solely on socialising tendencies is a strategy that cannot last in the new context<sup>(9)</sup>.

Looking closely at the social and natural worlds into which educators invite students today<sup>(10)</sup>, and comparing them with 80 years ago when Prideaux (1940) spoke to teachers about citizenship, some very clear differences can be noted. Scientists seeking to describe these changes tend to use superlatives. For instance, scholars in the field of natural sciences refer to the present era as the *Great Acceleration of the Anthropocene* (McNeill & Engelke, 2014), while social and political scientists since 1940 speak of epochal change in terms of

9 As Chapter 1.2 will point out, this strategy of relying on socialisation may even be contra-productive.

10 The combination of the social and the natural is important especially from a practice-theoretical perspective: 'It is a mistake to distinguish the social world from its natural environment (...) such that a practice theory would make the social world the domain of autonomously social sciences. Moreover, this mistake is one that practice theory is especially well equipped to overcome' (Rouse, 2007, p. 536).

the *Great Transformation* (Kuiper, 2021; Polanyi, 1944). Together, they refer to global processes such as the exponential growth of the world's population, urbanisation, increasing mobility and migration, advances in communication technology and, finally, globalisation, which can be considered causes or accelerators of radical change in the world's ecosystems and cultures (Kooijman & van Olst, 2017).

In Western countries in particular, a strong process of secularisation has been identified (Taylor, 2007). The French philosopher Chantal Delsol (2021) argued that this tendency has now, in the last few decades, reached a climax indicating nothing less than the definitive end of 16 centuries of Christian dominance over politics and culture (11). Instead of becoming increasingly Christian, as teacher trainers such as Prideaux (1940) envisioned, Western societies have become highly plural, thereby encompassing a wide range of religious, political and ethical viewpoints. More than ever before, these societies are characterised by two main features: diversity and complexity. Vertovec (2007), writing specifically about the United Kingdom (UK), referenced both diversity and complexity and chose *super-diversity* as a central predicate to 'underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced' (p. 1024). For his part, Barnett (2000) opted for *super-complexity*.

What both qualifications mean to express is that—as Vertovec (2007) phrases it—diversity per se is nothing new, although 'the interplay of factors' and 'the emergence of their scale' are (pp. 1025–1026). According to Barnett (2000), complexity per se is nothing new either, whereas 'the handling of multiple frames of understanding, of action and of self-identity by which we might understand the world' (p. 6) is, in fact, novel. The relative homogeneity of Western countries has given way to societies comprised of a mixture of people with very different ethnical and cultural backgrounds and life convictions, a mixture who live closely together within the boundaries of the law but differ fundamentally in their answers to basic questions concerning sense-giving and meaning. The bridges that school teachers need to make, therefore, have become substantially longer. As a consequence, the school, if it wishes to serve as a mini-society or a halfway house where the art of living together and the art of creating social cohesion are practiced, must teach students to emerge from their safe spaces and relate to this rapidly developed heterogeneity of *super-diversity* and *super-complexity*.

This study does not intend to approach the aforementioned diversity and complexity as a threat. The resultant change can be perceived that way,

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11 Delsol (2021) discussed *Chrétienté* (or Christendom), meaning Christen-dominance.



especially among Christian teachers and schools when they see the implicit socialising processes they learned to reckon with interrupted by it<sup>(12)</sup>. I choose, however, to view diversity and complexity as a reality that needs to be taken into account in the education of children and, as a consequence, in the education of their teachers. Thus, I do not choose to speak of today's world as *post-Christian* (Delsol, 2021) or *secular* (Taylor, 2007). Although these predicates are certainly not untrue, they convey, especially for Christian teachers, a certain degree of fatalism, a melancholy clinging to a past that has already faded away. In this way, they may implicitly and unwillingly foster an attitude of resistance. Both terms could, therefore, generate impediments to engagement in the task of building bridges between family and society.

Other predicates used to describe society as it is in the 21st century include *pluralistic* (Dahl, 1978) and *intercultural* (Cantle, 2013). Importantly, where *post-Christian* and *secular*, especially from a Christian perspective, have negative connotations, *plural* or *pluralistic* moves in the opposite direction. While *pluralism* is certainly a key feature of modern society<sup>(13)</sup>, I do not opt for that qualification because its positivity may very well overlook the super-complexity associated with super-diversity. The predicate *intercultural*, which was proposed by Cantle (2013) as an alternative to *multicultural*, seems particularly interesting for this study, as it articulates the societal challenges for education in a detailed way, which is why it will form part of the present study. The problem with this predicate is, however, that it—just like *super-diversity* and *super-complexity*—may present a proper description of the status quo but does not describe or evaluate the underlying tendencies, such as societal fracturation or even atomisation.

By contrast, a predicate that does so is *fragmented*. It comes from the work of philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (2007) and concerns the loss of a former sense of interconnectedness or interwovenness. MacIntyre used the example of a fragmentation bomb that, after the Enlightenment project, left only severed fragments of the classical account of morality, deprived from their sense-giving context ('of that context and of that justification', as he stated in his introduction). A coherent context in which different components are mutually interconnected is a strong context, as it assigns meaning to the

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12 MacMullen (2007) recognised that seeking 'the balance between cultivation and indoctrination may be difficult to define' (p. 24), but opposed what he sees many liberal democracies do—namely, limiting religious education to liberal civic standards. At this point, he even referred to 'the civic case against religious schools' (MacMullen, 2007, p. 20).

13 Mouw and Griffioen (1995) distinguished directional, contextual and associational pluralism, among which this study finds the former (directional pluralism) especially interesting.

components and justifies their role within the organic whole of the context. On a societal level, fragmentation means that the unified, sense-giving context is disrupted. In a context characterised by *super-diversity* and *super-complexity*, the old accounts of social cohesion are shattered and changed, and entirely new accounts are proposed. The loss of broad moral homogeneity may cause disorientation among teachers and students, and it asks for a broad and integrative reorientation with regard to both citizenship and citizenship education.

MacIntyre (2007) chose *fragmented* over *pluralistic*. His moral account of fragmentation deliberately dramatised unlimited plurality and diversity. For that reason, he evaluated the term *pluralistic* as 'too imprecise', 'for it may equally well apply to an ordered dialogue of intersecting viewpoints and to an un-harmonious melange of ill-assorted fragments' (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 10). One more reason to opt for the MacIntyrian lens of fragmentation is that it facilitates the search for a moral account of citizenship conceptions and citizenship education. Such an account has been shown to appeal to an explicitly felt need among educators (Veugelers, 2011) (14). Moreover, it ties together the global and the local, focusing on personal responsibility. This perspective also provides the opportunity to address fragmentation, not just at the societal level but also within the individual person, where processes of alienation from the self—as a type of inner fragmentation—can be observed as the effects of radical individualization and subjectivation. As I will argue in Chapter 1, this context of fragmentation is highly relevant for education in general and for citizenship education in particular.

The conclusion to be drawn from this section can be that, in terms of their classical function of preparing students for society, schools have to face the specific challenges of fragmentation as a key characteristic of modern society. Super-diversity and super-complexity are both symptoms of the rapid sociocultural change that led to this fragmentation. Furthermore, part of the complexity stems from the fact that the movement schools have to make to bridge the gap between the relative homogeneity of family and the super-diversity of society has grown much larger than it was in the past.

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14 As Veugelers (2011) found in his study, teachers opt for moral global citizenship over open global citizenship, which would neglect the moral dimensions, and social-political global citizenship, which would pay too much attention to sensitive political affairs.

## 2. PROPOSAL FOR A HOLISTIC APPROACH

If we intend to abide by Prideaux' choice, made 80 years ago, to define citizenship broadly as 'the art of living together', and if we would like to practice this art in schools that fulfil their classical role as workplaces of humanity, cultural fora, halfway houses or mini-societies, we must envision the need for an approach to citizenship education that is comprehensive, integrative, non-reductionistic, connected to the whole of the curriculum, and connected to the whole of the student and society as well. All these qualifications seem to respond to the problem of fragmentation as the isolation of elements from their original sense-giving context. Together, they form what this study intends to develop: a response in the form of a *holistic* approach. If fragmentation is the problem, it automatically follows that partial answers pertaining to just one, two or some aspects of the problem will be insufficient. They will combat the symptoms, but not the much deeper problem. If society can be characterised as *fragmented*, and if this problem not only has consequences for interpersonal living but also entails intrapersonal consequences within individual citizens, then it is clear that partial countermeasures will not restore social cohesion and/or improve the art of living together if they do not fit together holistically.

The former implies that citizenship formation cannot be just a cognitive enterprise, or just an affective one, or a practical one. It always requires the interaction of the cognitive, the affective and the practical to respond to the problem of fragmentation. It cannot aim solely at the head (representing cognition), the heart (representing emotion) or the hands (representing concrete action); rather, it should simultaneously affect them all. Another aspect is that citizenship formation cannot merely be added as a new and additional subject. Integrative, non-reductive citizenship formation has to be directly tied to everything we do, at least in the field of character or personhood formation. Again, the idea of fragmentation as the breaking of interconnectedness calls for a *holistic* answer, meaning an answer that provides for a meaningful context in which all the constituent elements fit together in a way that renders the whole more than just the sum of its parts.

Although the term *holistic* has been used frequently above, it is not easy to define what it actually means. Thus, Chapters 2 and 3 will study this issue and, finally, offer a more detailed definition. To accomplish this, Chapter 2 makes use of the insights of a worldwide movement that advocates for WCD. This movement will also prove helpful in a more practical sense during the intended search for core components for teacher training concerning Christian citizenship education. For now, it suffices to observe that, in relation to citizenship education, *holistic* means that it cannot be just an add-on to

an already existing curriculum, with its aims and objectives separated from other subjects, other educational practices or the pedagogical relationship itself. Citizenship education must—always, but especially in a situation of high diversity and complexity—be embedded in the whole of the educational process and closely tied to its personhood formation, affecting the head, heart and hands. Citizenship *education* in this sense means nothing less than broad citizenship *formation*.

This theoretical deduction regarding the need for a holistic approach to citizenship education or formation is supported by a two-decade empirical study of citizenship education in the UK (Weinberg & Flinders, 2018). Through the analysis of surveys and focus-group interviews, the researchers observed a lack of understanding of citizenship, both conceptually and pedagogically. Furthermore, they noted an emphasis among teachers on individualistic notions of good citizenship. Specifically, the interplay of factors was missing. At the end of their article, Weinberg and Flinders (2018) warned of ‘the anti-democratic scenario in which our future citizens’ education becomes a lightning rod for party political interests’. They concluded that new approaches should ‘ensure that citizens receive a holistic political education that prepares them to be much more than an obedient, employable workforce in the decades to come’ (Weinberg & Flinders, 2018, p. 590).

This final conclusion corroborates Biesta’s (2022) aforementioned critique of the dominance of the modern economical history of the school, as opposed to the classical and much broader conception. Earlier, Biesta (2010) advocated for a shift from an evidence-based to a value-based orientation, which might be less measurable, but would be, as he saw it, more meaningful. Wrigley (2019) moved one step ahead and criticised Western education for being too reductionistic and too focused on accountability, effectiveness and leadership—a terminology that works ‘ideologically by emphasizing technical rationalism, eclipsing questions of political or moral purpose’ (p. 156). He proposed an alternative, non-reductive understanding of schools and school culture to foster ‘an empowerment culture which enables marginalised young people to develop as learners and members of society’ and ‘would recognize the inequalities of power and the dynamic interrelation of school world and lifeworld’ (Wrigley, 2019, p. 157).

Wrigley (2019) deliberately introduced the word *culture* here because—as he stated—it helps to avoid reductionism. Culture refers to the coherent whole that becomes both the product and the cause of how people feel, think and act, thereby matching the biological ecosystem. Developmental models in the field of education should learn from the science of living things to

reference openness, scale, stratification, complexity, systematic pressures and human purpose. Moreover, learning processes are better understood from an open systems perspective than on the basis of ‘the naively positive developmental models of change’ that are commonly used (Wrigley, 2019, p.157). The underlying reason is that they are fundamentally holistic. At this point, Wrigley (2019) introduced the triad of head, heart and hands to further explicate what he meant by holism <sup>(15)</sup>. Teaching should simultaneously aim at the cognitive, the affective and the practical. ‘If you ignore this, you end up with medium- and long-term damage to personal development’ (Wrigley, 2019, p. 157).

Comparable pleas for holistic education can be noted from Christian thinkers. Among them are leading contemporary thinkers regarding Christian education such as J.K.A. Smith and D.I. Smith, both active at Calvin University, Grand Rapids, Michigan. J.K.A. Smith (2009, 2016) tried to correct the cognitive emphasis he encountered among (Christian) teachers with his proposal for an affective pedagogy, which is based on a holistic anthropology. ‘Many Christian schools, colleges, and universities—particularly in the Protestant tradition’, he stated, ‘have taken on board a picture of the human person that owes more to Modernity and the Enlightenment than it does to the holistic, Biblical vision of human persons’ (J.K.A. Smith, 2009, p. 31). Faroe (2013) argued that Smith, in his affective pedagogy, focused too much on affections when compared with cognition, although he embraced Smith’s underlying holistic anthropology. He called for a pedagogy based on this anthropology that ‘honours the rich interrelatedness of the cognitive and the affective’ (Faroe, 2013, p. 4). The challenge is, according to Faroe (2013), to ‘develop a truly holistic Christian pedagogy that wisely integrates the realities, cognitive and affective, of human personhood’ (p. 11).

Such a holistic Christian pedagogy cannot be reductionistic. Reductionism, as I will argue more thoroughly in Chapter 2, implies a sharp focus on separate elements. Holism is meant as a healing correction to the too-far-flung attention paid to separate elements, a correction resulting from a renewed focus on the interconnectedness of what is been studied. For citizenship education—as the art of creating social cohesion—this means that the approach should aim at the interconnection between the intrapersonal and the interpersonal levels; at the latter including its interdependency with the community and the society. Important notions for the creation of social cohesion by inviting students to connect to each other, the community, society and the world—and to flourish personally within these connections—are the notions of subjectification and

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15 This triad (head, heart and hands) will prove highly valuable during the course of this study.

of intersubjectivity. Subjectification, as I want to use and develop the concept in the remainder of this thesis, intends for the free and deliberate subjection of one's self to the justified needs of others (<sup>16</sup>). Intersubjectivity expresses how connectivity on a deeper level of understanding fosters one's personal flourishing, as will be explained in Chapter 1 more thoroughly.

It is interesting that, in sociological studies, the ideas of culture and interculturality have, over the past few decades, led to several types of holistic approaches that care especially about this intersubjectivity. Magni-Berton (2008) spoke of a 'holisme bourdieusien', referring to the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, famous for his rebuttal of the idea that the society and the individual are two different levels of description. What Bourdieu proposed, is 'en un mot', concluded Magni-Berton (2008), 'de rejeter la distinction entre micro- et macrosociologie' (p. 305). One could say that Bourdieu sought a healing of the connection between the micro-sociology of the individual and the homogeneous family, on the one hand, and the macro-sociology of broader society, on the other hand. This reflects the central task of school and education in terms of the classical function of school referred to above.

Van der Stoep (2005) used Bourdieu's critique of society as his starting point to evaluate the political philosophy of multiculturalism. He did so because it places a strong emphasis on the societal conditions that must be met to enable citizens to develop an open and tolerant attitude. With his holistic approach, Bourdieu occupied an interesting position in relation to, on the one hand, universalists who focus solely on modern democratic individual rights and, on the other hand, multiculturalists who mainly focus on integration while maintaining the individual's own (cultural) identity (van der Stoep, 2005). Real tolerance implies that every citizen should have equal freedom and means to form his or her own conception of the good life, without elevating any specific political or life conviction to the status of a public norm. Citizens have to be educated and equipped to independently embrace or reject the conceptions and convictions they receive in their home situations (van der Stoep, 2005, pp. 233–234).

This accords, I contend, with what Biesta (2013) called the beautiful risk of education—an idea that he combined with the notion that education should not only aim at qualification and socialisation but also at subjectification: learning to be a subject in the bigger world (Biesta, 2022). This is what citizenship formation should focus on. To approach education as an ongoing invitation to students to take their own stand in the classroom, the school community, the social sphere and the natural world entails the features of a holistic answer to

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16 A more detailed description of subjectification will follow at the end of Chapter 1.2.

the problem of fragmentation and can be tied to all efforts in the process of education. From a Christian viewpoint, it can be specifically tied to the Biblical call for reconciliation, as will be explored in Chapter 3.

The conclusion of this section can be that only a broad, holistic approach to citizenship education matches the need for citizenship education as the art of creating social cohesion by inviting students to connect with others in a fragmented society, respecting fundamental differences in culture, ethnicity and basic life conceptions. Holistic, in this context, implies a non-reductionistic but integrative approach, not just aimed at cognitive knowledge but at the hands and heart as much as at the head, not individualistic but accounting for the community and the interplay of factors, both in the community and in the curriculum.

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTION AND CONTEXT

The central question addressed in this study, which emerges from the discussion in the above sections, includes three repeatedly and consistently mentioned elements—namely, Christian citizenship education (the subject), modern *fragmented* society (the context) and the need for a *holistic* approach to education (the instrument). The resulting research question aims to investigate how a holistic approach to education (the instrument) can reinforce Christian citizenship education (the subject) in relation to the sociocultural context of a fragmented society (the context):

*How can a holistic approach to education reinforce Christian citizenship formation in the context of a modern, fragmented society?*

This central research question will be investigated by addressing three sub-questions. The first elaborates on what was laid out in the initial section of this introduction: the specific challenge that a *fragmented* world presents to students in terms of teacher training. The second elaborates on the second section of this introduction, which referred to the need for a *holistic* answer. This sub-question makes use of the worldwide movement for WCD that was briefly mentioned above and can be seen as an actual proposal for (w)holistic education. The third sub-question entails an integration of the theoretical answers to the first two sub-questions concerning the practice of Christian teacher training, as based on a form of action research.

1. What are the challenges of a fragmented society that confront Christian citizenship formation on both the intrapersonal and interpersonal (social and cultural) levels?
2. How can WCD, approached from the perspective of Christian anthropology, be used to enrich the citizenship formation of trainee teachers?
3. How can future teachers in Christian schools be holistically trained to holistically form children in a fragmented society?

The question of Christian teacher formation is related to our modern, fragmented world and society, as well as to the need for a holistic answer that does justice to its complexity. This concern and need can be found everywhere teacher training is provided from a Christian perspective in and for (late) modern society as it bears the traits of fragmentation.

### **Context**

The research for this study took place at—and was conducted for—Driestar Christian University for Teacher Education (DCU); more specifically, at its training institute for primary education. Action research for DCU's curriculum can serve as a case study for faith-based teacher training in a modern, fragmented society. Located in Gouda, the Netherlands, DCU is a Reformed Christian teacher training institute in a Western country characterised by cultural change, high diversity and complexity, and fragmentation. It attracts students from all areas of the country who favour its identity and wish to be trained in relation to Christian education. Around the time of its 75-year anniversary in 2019, DCU faced the issue of how cultural change has impacted its way of training (future) teachers. In a study written at the institution, de Muijnck and Kunz (2022) defined education as 'an integral and holistic phenomenon that as a whole exerts a formative power, even if a teacher is not consciously and intentionally engaged in formation at every moment' (p. 235) (17).

The idea behind this statement served as the initial premise for the present study:

*A Biblically holistic approach to education could be helpful for broad and integrated citizenship formation in a pluralistic and fragmented society and should accord with the principles of Christian education.*

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17 More about the specific religious identity of DCU within the Dutch context of secularisation will follow in Section 1 of Chapter 5, when the study zooms in on the case of the Dutch teacher training institute: DCU Amid Secularisation and Fragmentation. The research pertaining to DCU can be seen as a case study that results in conclusions also of benefit to Christian teacher training in other contexts.



This premise was corroborated by exploratory research involving six senior students. The result of this exploratory research will be presented in Section 3 of Chapter 5. In 2020, this premise, while not then scientifically investigated or confirmed, led DCU to participate in an overarching project studying WCD as a 'framework that promotes all dimensions of human development from early childhood, including physical, social, emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and values-based learning' (NIVOZ Foundation, 2018, p. 5). DCU joined the project after having presented its proposal to combine WCD with the broad citizenship formation of its students, presuming that this combination would be fruitful for the curriculum renewal planned for 2022 onwards. This dissertation represents the theoretical and practical elaboration of that proposal especially for DCU, after participating in the research into WCD together with *Hogeschool Leiden (Spring College)*, *Hogeschool van Amsterdam*, *Windesheim (Teachers College)* and the project leading *NIVOZ Foundation*.

Although WCD is indicative of an international movement for (the study of) (w)holistic education, the specific project and DCU's aim to enrich its curriculum renewal with a holistic Christian approach to citizenship formation places the study in the context of the Netherlands. This context can be taken as an example of a modern, fragmented, secularised Western society. As a small country, the Netherlands has always been known for its tolerance and respect for minorities (Weiner, 2015). Official reports showed that, in 2023, more than a quarter of the population (26.4 percent) had a migration background, with the majority of them coming from non-Western countries (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek [CBS], 2023). The country's biggest cities, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, function as harbingers of even greater cultural and ethnical diversity. Between 2010 and 2020, the percentage of people with a migration background in those cities grew to over 50 percent. With 170 nationalities present in the cities, in a joint report, two aldermen spoke of *hyper-diversity* (Gemeente Rotterdam & gemeente Amsterdam, 2020, p. 5).

In addition to increasing ethnic and cultural diversity, religious diversity has also grown rapidly in the Netherlands over the last few centuries. While at the start of the 20th century almost everybody was affiliated with either Protestant churches (60 percent) or the Roman Catholic church (35 percent), in 2017, for the first time, less than half of the population considered themselves to be part of a religious group (CBS, 2020). In 2022, again for the first time in Dutch history, a majority identified themselves as atheists or agnostics (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau [SCP], 2022). In politics, the same trend has become visible. Until 1967, Christian parties held an absolute majority in Parliament, which declined to just 11 out of 150 seats in the 2023 election.

Dronkers (2012) used the Dutch context as a case study for research on civic allegiance in a society that, as he termed it, underwent drastic changes through the processes of globalisation and secularisation. In line with his approach, this study uses Christian teacher training in the Netherlands as a test case for teacher training in relation to Christian citizenship education in such a context. In his final analysis, Dronkers opted for *public engagement* as the best conception of civic allegiance because it 'leaves people the freedom to live in accordance to their own traditions and worldviews, while stimulating them to participate in politics at every level possible to negotiate and rethink the preconditions of coexistence' (2012, p. 231). For religious people, Dronkers assumed in this model the possibility of acting as faithful citizens, recognising others as 'equal members of the same community of fate, to contribute to its survival, and to engage with the public debate on its future' (2012, p. 231). This conception, if applied both theoretically and practically to teacher training with regard to Christian citizenship education in the Netherlands, could result in an approach that is also helpful in other contexts characterised by high diversity and complexity.

In terms of the training of (future) teachers, the Dutch context also presents a number of clear challenges. Research into the pedagogical and political dimensions of citizenship education led van Waveren (2020) to conclude that teachers in the Netherlands are prepared to teach citizenship education at a practical level, but they lack the professionalism to do so in a more conceptual manner—that is, on a deeper level attached to their personal ideals concerning citizenship. Research into how mono-religious schools deal with religious diversity caused De Jong-Markus (2022) to conclude that Christian teacher training should invest more in trainee teachers' ability to cope with external religious diversity and to move beyond a superficial form of right-or-wrong thinking. Exalto and Bertram-Troost (2019) stated, regarding the position of orthodox Reformed schools in modern liberal and secular Dutch society, that 'it is now the best of times for orthodox Reformed schools not only to defend the freedom of those who do not wish to (fully) confirm with the values of the secular mainstream, but also to contribute to broader social cohesion by stimulating their pupils' dialogical competences' (p. 10).

The purpose of this study, however, extends beyond a focus on dialogical competence or the competence to cope with religious diversity from a mono-religious perspective, although it includes them both. Rather, it aims at more than an enhancement of skills—for example, the broadly proposed 21st century skills. It holistically seeks core components for the citizenship formation of trainee teachers who are interconnected and guided by a more

basic conception of what Christian citizenship should look like in a context characterised by high diversity and complexity. It searches for answers to questions of how teacher training in relation to Christian citizenship education changes in this new sociocultural reality. An integrative approach is needed in this regard, as a more clear analysis of both super-diversity and super-complexity will reveal.

#### 4. TOWARDS A (HOLISTIC) RESEARCH DESIGN

As this study searches for a holistically integrated response to the challenges that a fragmented society poses for citizenship formation, its design cannot be at odds with such a search. As argued above, the study itself should have a holistic nature to ensure an outcome that really ties together the different aspects studied within it. A holistic approach is integrative and focuses on honouring relationships and connections, with 'strong potential for revealing complexity' (Miles et al., 2020, pp. 8, 316). It seeks to maintain a view of larger wholes in which the sub-elements and sub-areas are closely related and interconnected.

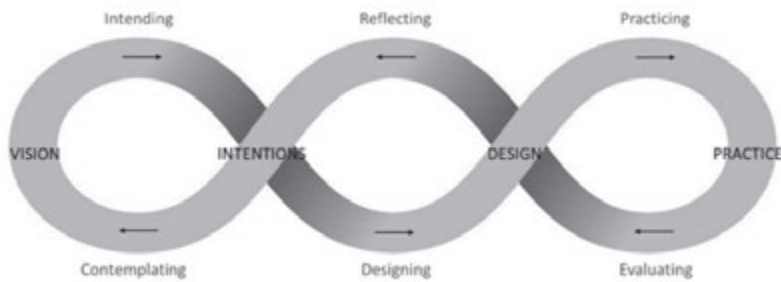
When a holistic approach takes into account a multitude of factors it is impossible to consider every single factor in depth. Notwithstanding, it is the interconnectedness of the factors and elements that is particularly revealing. This is exactly the case here, with an additional reason to opt for a holistic research design—namely, that the study concerns broad educational practice. Educational research should be developed in such a way as to take the reality of educational practices as the starting point and apply a research methodology that respects the reality and complexity of the research theme in practice, which brings forth understandings that are perceived as meaningful (Martens et al., 2020). This means that they potentially contribute to the 'soft emancipation of educational actors by providing them with more and better opportunities for their own judgement, decision making, and action' (Biesta, 2020, p. 22).

This study forms part of a broader movement initiated a few decades ago in the sociology field by the above-mentioned sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. In his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu (1977) argued for including the wisdom of practitioners in scientific research. The term *practice-theory* comes from his proposal, which centres on key themes such as the structure, agency, habitus and epistemology of the social sciences (Maggio, 2017). Criticising structuralists, on the one hand, and existentialists (including phenomenologists and ethnomethodologists), on the other, Bourdieu (1977) stated that social

scientists in particular should understand human action as emerging from *habitus* rather than from structure or agency. Thus, human action cannot be understood as merely determined by structures, nor as just an exercise of individual free will. Instead, *habitus* functions as an important explaining principle: 'A system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks' (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 82–83).

If human action is to be theorised in this complex *habitus* way, then human *interaction* has to be even more so. Bourdieu's (1977) approach not only holistically considered the interconnectedness of elements but also left room for a subsequent step: the practitioner (in this case, teacher trainers) as a researcher in a dynamic process of thinking through and investigating their own practice. This idea was further elaborated by Jarvis (1999), and it was applied to religious education more recently by Löfstedt and Westerlund (2021). The latter argued that, to develop a suitable practice-theory, a constant back-and-forth between theory and practice, between scientific insights and practical wisdom, can and should be initiated. They practiced this through the formation of *research circles*—that is, groups of teachers coming together to formulate a problem or research questions based on actual research and challenges encountered in practice. They evaluated it as a 'fruitful method' (Löfstedt & Westerlund, 2021, p. 79) to overcome the theory-practice dichotomy stemming from Western rationality and analytic thinking.

This study uses a specific model to do so, which was elaborated within the aforementioned overarching project studying WCD (Cijvat et al., 2023). It starts with the formation of *conversational communities*, comparable to Löfstedt and Westerlund's (2021) *research circles*, that include theoretical and practical knowledge and wisdom, as based on van Manen's (1991) theory about research in teacher education: 'What teachers need to do is create conversational communities with others to be able to discuss and address experiences' (p. 82). These communities aim for alignment between the four core elements of educational development—namely, vision, intentions, design and practice. A conversational framework that facilitates discussions within the conversational communities brings the four elements together in a lemniscate providing for a continuous movement of intending, designing, practicing, evaluating, reflecting and contemplating to align the vision, intentions, design and practice (Cijvat et al., 2023).



The alignment this conversational framework strives for requires a constant back-and-forth movement among the model's four central elements. It does so because it understands teacher education as 'a process between two active and reflective agents: the teacher educator and the student teacher' (Cijvat et al., 2023, p. 4). As a consequence, the process starts as a relationship between two (or more) human beings, which is intended to develop the confidence and ability to be in the world (Delors, 1996). In so doing, it creates a 'dialogical and interactive process' in which 'an inquiring attitude of teacher educators as active and reflexive agents is crucial, stimulating a critical reflection on their thought, judgements and decisions and on the resulting alignment between vision, intention, design and practice within teacher education' (Cijvat et al., 2023, p. 20). For this research, it means that insights from the theoretical chapters feed the conversations analysed in the empirical chapters, while, vice versa, the practical discussions lead to renewed theoretical study and choices.

The research that will be presented in this dissertation, starting from Chapter 1, is connected to the work of three different but interrelated and connected conversational communities. As the main researcher and WCD project leader at DCU, I participated alongside two of my DCU colleagues in the overarching conversational community studying WCD under the project leadership of the NIVOZ Foundation, which I will identify in Chapter 2 as a research consortium. The same team of three participated in an internal conversational community at DCU to connect WCD to DCU's curriculum and curriculum renewal process. The team also participated in a third conversational community, alongside representatives from three Christian primary schools who brought ample experience with ethnic, cultural and directional diversity. This conversational community—which, for this study, was by far the most important—applied theological action research (TAR) over the course of four consecutive years (2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024), which will be further described and defended in the methodological chapter of this dissertation (Chapter 4).

TAR is specifically applicable to faith-based institutions such as DCU or other institutes that are concerned about re-matching their identity with their practices and relating the two anew to the changed, secularised social context. It brings together four different theological voices—namely, the voices of normative theology, formal theology, operant theology and espoused theology. The idea behind TAR is that everything that can be said about action motivated by the Christian faith is fully theological and so needs to be taken seriously. Not only can the formal theologian bring religious truth to the table, practitioners must also be heard, even taking into account their unspoken actions. From the interaction among these four voices emerges a theology of disclosure, a new theological insight that provides for the translation of religious truth in today's daily practice. In the case of the conversational community that applied TAR, theologically driven visions and intentions, as well as designs and practices, were brought together to achieve what this research aims to achieve: the identification of interrelated core components for a practice-theory for more holistic teacher training in relation to Christian citizenship education.

A holistic approach with regard to the quest to identify working elements for the citizenship formation of Christian teachers in the context of a fragmented society, therefore, entails a constant movement between theory and practice, the use of a methodology that is both conversational and theological, and a research design that matches a paradigm of change and transformation of practice and theory, which enables the formation of a practice-theory.

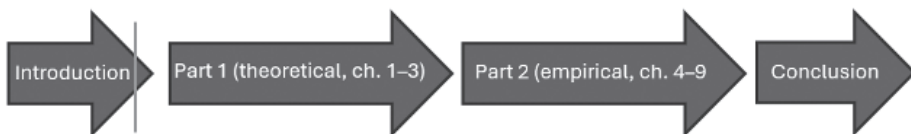
## 5. STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

After this introduction, the theoretical part of this study will be presented in three chapters. This part is distinct but not separate from the practical-empirical part that follows in Chapters 4 to 9. However, when presented in a linear form, this study maintains the constant back-and-forth movement between vision and practice. Chapter 1 delves deeper into the challenges for citizenship formation of the world and society as fragmented wholes. It strengthens the argument for adopting MacIntyre's (2007) predicate *fragmented* as a description conveying the challenges of today's world and society. This leads to a conceptual scheme explaining the layered problem of fragmentation and some initial elements of Christian theology and pedagogy that suggest a direction to face this problem: the radical personhood theology of Zizioulas (2021), the Pauline notion of heavenly citizenship related by Zerbe (2012) to competitive civic allegiances and Beech's (2019, 2021, 2022) relational

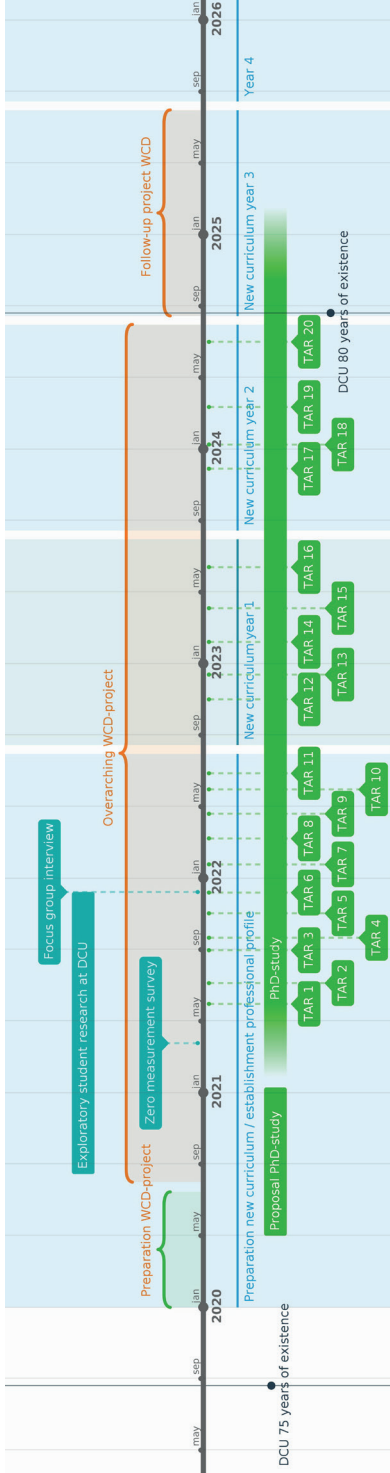
epistemology. All three elements relate to the issue of subjectification that will emerge in Chapter 1 as a crucial force to counteract fragmentation.

Chapter 2 starts to apply the insights from Chapter 1 to education, studying WCD in more depth as an international movement for a more broad and holistic approach to students and education. Chapter 3 then brings WCD into contact with historic Christian theology (Augustine), pedagogy (Comenius) and philosophy (Dooyeweerd), which each have contemporary advocates who relate the associated work to holistic teaching: James K. Smith (2009, 2013, 2016, 2017) for Augustine, Jan Hábl (2011, 2017) for Comenius and André Troost (2005) for Dooyeweerd. Based on an analysis of their work and proposals, the application of WCD to Christian education is enriched with Wolterstorff's (2004, 2017) shalom model.

Chapter 4 then marks the start of the practical-empirical part of this study. It presents the methodology for this part, discussing the choice of TAR and applying it in a case study of DCU's curriculum renewal and the challenges associated with Christian citizenship formation in a fragmented society (also see the research time table). Next, Chapter 5 offers an overview of the initial reception of WCD at DCU. It also presents a more detailed description of DCU as a typical example of a faith-based teacher training institute in the modern, fragmented context of the Netherlands. It further details the results of a broad, quantitative investigation among 228 junior and senior students at DCU and 56 teacher trainers about the perceived need or relevance of the WCD approach for DCU's teacher training. Finally, it explains how six senior students at DCU dedicated their final theses to WCD and its relation to citizenship education. After finalising their theses, these six students were interviewed as a focus group, which finalised the exploratory research into the combination of WCD's holistic approach and broad Christian citizenship formation.



Research time table (TAR# = meetings conversational community for theological action research)



Start	Part 1: Theoretical	Part 2: Empirical	End
Introduction	Chapter 1 (Fragmentation)	Chapter 4 (Methodology)	Chapter 10
	Chapter 2 (Holism and wholism)	Chapter 5 (WCD-reception at DCU)	
	Chapter 3 (Shalom-approach)	Chapter 6 (Subjectifying education)	
		Chapter 7 (Relational epistemology)	
		Chapter 8 (Basic attitude)	
		Chapter 9 (Theology of disclosure)	

- Research topic: Citizenship formation trainee teachers
- Research question: How a holistic approach reinforces
- Research design: Holistic, conversational, theological
- Research aim: Practice-theory of core components

- Conclusion
- Discussion



Chapter 6 (Subjectifying education)

Chapter 7 (Relational epistemology)

Chapter 8 (Basic attitude)

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 present the reports and analyses of 20 TAR meetings related to DCU's curriculum renewal, which were held between 2021 and 2024. During these meetings, the conversational community that applied TAR elaborated on the initial reception of WCD

at DCU, seeking to identify the central elements of it in order to bring them into the curriculum renewal process and analyse their effects. The central themes of these chapters are topics that emerged in the discussions and conversations during the meetings, and they can count as core components for holistic Christian citizenship education: subjectifying education (Chapter 6), epistemological formation (Chapter 7) and service-oriented attitude (Chapter 8). In this way, a clear connection is made with the theoretical part of this dissertation, especially through bringing elements of formal theology into the conversational community: Wolterstorff's (2004, 2017) *shalom* model, Beech's (2019, 2021, 2022) relational epistemology and Biesta's (2022) subjectification plea. In turn, this practical-empirical part leads to new insights, for example, the centrality of the combined dynamics of critical openness and critical faithfulness to determining the final answer to this dissertation's central research question. It is this combination that led to the dissertation's title, *Faithfully Connected*, as a wish for trainee Christian teachers in a modern, fragmented world and society.

In Chapter 9, the insights concerning these three topics are brought together in a theology of disclosure: a formulation of theological insights for Christian citizenship formation in a modern, fragmented society, as it emerged within the conversational community that applied TAR. This theology was reviewed and, finally, approved by the conversational community itself. It forms the final step in the empirical part of this study, which leads immediately afterwards to a practice-theory for Christian citizenship formation in a modern, fragmented society.

Chapter 10 presents the identified core components in terms of their holistic coherence and practical elaboration for DCU's curriculum and then discusses both the methodology and the outcome of this study. It is in this final chapter (Chapter 10) that the continuous, interrelated elements of the study—that is, the theoretical and the practical-empirical parts—are brought together and, through their interconnectedness, provide a practice-theory for Christian citizenship formation in education that is as Biblically holistic as Prideaux' (1940) proposal some 80 years ago but also practically applicable to the context of a modern, fragmented world and society, which is characterised by high diversity and high complexity.



# Chapter 1

## Fragmentation and Subjectification

'Sin's darkening lies in this, that we lost the gift of grasping the true context, that proper coherence, the systematic integration of all things.'

*Abraham Kuyper, Wisdom & Wonder: Common Grace in Science & Art, 2011, p. 55*

'The protagonists of the new science never accounted for their concept of the universe, but in attacking medieval scholasticism they were rejecting the concept of the universe as an organism.'

*Theo Donner, Posmodernidad y fe: Una cosmovision Cristiana para un mundo fragmentado, p. 164*

This first theoretical chapter starts with a closer examination of the reality of fragmentation. The first section will be dedicated to Alasdair MacIntyre, from whom I borrowed the term, and to Charles Taylor. Both philosophers became famous for their criticism of modernity and the radical enlightenment. Section 1 first describes their diagnostic (1.1) and then presents an analysis of the consequences of societal and personal fragmentation, linking their thinking to the actual topic of this study (1.2). Next, it evaluates—again with a focus on the topic of this study—the accelerating influence they both ascribed to Protestantism as part of modern Western culture (1.3).

Section 2 considers the consequences of fragmentation for education in general (2.1) and schools in particular (2.2). The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1969) helps in this context to take a first step towards an educational answer to them, being education a topic that receives less explicit attention in the works of MacIntyre and Taylor. Epstein et al.'s (2002) theory of overlapping spheres of influence within education helps to take a second step within this context. Another sub-section compares how MacIntyre (1989) and Taylor (1989) handled the important notion of subjectivity, in addition to comparing their conceptions with how the notion functions and ought to function in education and pedagogy (2.3).

Section 3 briefly presents elements of the Christian faith and theology that are helpful when it comes to addressing the challenges of fragmentation. The two quotations that open this chapter indicate how Christianity has a strong focus on the reconnection (reconciliation, healing) of fragmented relations. On the level of the individual person, the notion of personhood as communion will be studied (Zizioulas, 2021; 3.1); on the level of society, the notion of heavenly *politeuma* (Zerbe, 2012; 3.2); and on the level of the world, the notion of relational epistemology (Beech, 2021, 2019, 2022; 3.3). This chapter then ends with a general conclusion that identifies the main challenges for contemporary Christian education that emerge from these theoretical insights.

## **1.1 MACINTYRE AND TAYLOR: A JOINT CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY**

Although there are differences between the critical approaches of MacIntyre (2007) and Taylor (1989), more striking and certainly more helpful for this study are the manner and degree to which they correspond in their appreciation of modernity as a fruit of rationalism, the radical enlightenment and its counterpart, romanticism. Indeed, while MacIntyre (2007), in the end, remained

more negative and dismal about the topic, whereas Taylor (1989) particularly emphasised the irreversibility of historical developments and the subsequent need to apply classical notions of moral thinking to today's reality, albeit with respect to their assessment of general historical dynamics, there is a widely recognised overlap between the two. Laitinen (2014) distinguished five closely intertwined aspects: their fundamental philosophical anthropology, their views on explanation and understanding in relation to the human sciences, their analysis of modernity and the nature of contemporary late-modern Western cultures and ethics, and the question of rationally comparing and assessing rival traditions of cultures.

This overlap can be partly explained through a comparison of their biographies. As Laitinen (2014) summed up: both were educated at British universities and famous for their teaching in North America, both had an early interest in Marxism and left-wing politics, both came from Christian backgrounds that revived as the years of their scientific contributions went by—and became more strongly connected to their moral philosophies—and both finally committed to Catholicism and its strong emphasis on communitarianism. For this study, it is particularly interesting that they both identified Protestantism (where MacIntyre had his roots, while for Taylor, just with regard to his father) as part of the problem of modern fragmentation. There are, therefore, at least two convincing reasons to take their shared view of modernity as a starting point for describing the challenges of a modern, fragmented society in relation to Reformed Christian teacher training: their diagnostic of modern society as deeply fragmented, on the one hand, and their assessment of Protestantism as—at least—an accelerant of this dynamic of fragmentation, on the other hand.

### 1.1.1 A diagnostic of fragmentation

As indicated in the introduction to this dissertation, the predicate *fragmented*, which has been chosen to describe the state of the modern world and society, comes from the work of MacIntyre (2007). The Scottish philosopher started *After Virtue* 40 years ago with the 'disquieting suggestion' that 'the Enlightenment project' has left the world in a chaos (MacIntyre, 2007). What is left of the original 'conceptual scheme' of classical thinking are only 'parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived' (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 2)—that is, 'fragments left behind from tradition' (p. 59). Substantial ethical precepts that, for ages, were formative for moral thinking and behaving, and that were 'at home in an earlier context of social practices' (Laitinen, 2014, p. 208), were lost in a kind of philosophical scientific revolution; a 'catastrophe'. For contemporary scholars, it is very difficult—if not impossible—to piece

together the different fragments left behind. A comparison is made with a fragmentation bomb, destroying a building down to its very foundation, ruining all relevant information about it: construction plans, detailed pictures, functionality descriptions, et cetera. As children of a new age, 'bearing its social and cultural marks', we cannot comprehend the way of life, or the vision of the good life, that the classical Greek philosophers adopted and internalised and that deeply impacted Christian religious thought and behaviour throughout the Middle Ages.

What has been lost is 'a context in which moral judgments were understood as governed by impersonal standards justified by a shared conception of the human good', as MacIntyre (2007) stated in the introduction to his book. Instead of this impersonal justification of standards, MacIntyre (2007) depicted modern society as morally confused, finding itself in 'a period of social and cultural darkness'. The public space is conceived by dominant liberalism as a neutral space wherein many stories can come together and each and every person can hold his or her own, personal idea of what the good life entails. This very individualistic way of apprehending the good obscures the vision of how morality once functioned, which can be considered MacIntyre's (2007) central hypothesis:

What we possess (...) are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have—very largely, if not entirely—lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, or morality. (p. 2)

'There seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture', added MacIntyre (2007, p. 6). He illustrated this claim with three examples: on the just war, on the legitimacy of abortion and on equal opportunity and access to good healthcare and education versus the freedom of choice. There is no possible way to reach any form of fundamental agreement if there are no joint standards of morality and only rival claims as to what is good, which put each other to shame. What is fundamentally lacking is a 'narrative unity of human life' (which MacIntyre mentions six times: in his introduction and on the pages 226, 227, 228, 242 and 258). To regain this unity, a new orientation towards the metaphysical world is necessary, with a clear sense of *telos*: a joint understanding of what is human life for, why we are on Earth and what is necessarily and intrinsically good to do and aspire to. MacIntyre seemed to have practically no hope of this occurring in a globalising world, for which he predicted 'coming ages of barbarism and darkness' (p. 263). What he

instead, at the end of his book, called for is 'the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained' (p. 263); therefore, he awaited nothing less than 'another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict' (p. 264).

Taylor (1989) did not share MacIntyre's profound pessimism. Indeed, in the introduction to his central work, *Sources of the Self* (1989), he stated that he did not want to 'show a picture of decline, of loss, of forgetfulness', like others. He characterised the modern age as a 'unique combination of greatness and dangers, of grandeur et misère' (Taylor, 1989, introduction). Nonetheless, in his concrete analysis of modernity, remarkable parallels with MacIntyre's (2007) argument can be seen. Taylor (1989) spoke of 'the momentous transformation of our culture and society over the last three or four decades', leading not only to 'a moral world of moderns' that is 'significantly different from that of previous civilizations' but also to the 'suppression of moral ontology' (p. 10). By this, he meant that 'the whole notion of a cosmic order (...) has faded for us' (Taylor, 1989, p. 13), as we 'no longer see human beings as playing a role in a larger cosmic or divine history' (p. 13), while 'frameworks today are problematic' because 'no framework is shared by everyone, can be taken as *the* framework tout court' (p. 17). Ontology and a joint framework are necessary because, without them, people 'fall into a life which is spiritually senseless', 'the fear of a terrifying emptiness', 'a fracturing of our world and body-space' and sheer 'meaninglessness' (Taylor, 1989, p. 18).

Frameworks provide the background to people's moral judgments, intuitions and reactions. At this point, Taylor (1989) confirmed some of the same sense of loss as expressed by MacIntyre (2007):

I want to defend the strong thesis that doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us; otherwise put, that the horizons within which we live our lives and which makes sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discriminations. (p. 27)

At the end of his book, he stated the same, albeit more strongly:

We are now in an age in which a publicly accessible cosmic order of meanings is an impossibility. The only way we can explore the order in which we are set with an aim to defining moral sources is through (...) personal resonance. (Taylor, 1989, p. 512)

Taylor (1989) referred to his argument as an essay of retrieval because he departed from the conviction that the loss of meaningful frameworks needs to be undone. This is a difficult task: 'We have to fight uphill to rediscover

the obvious, to counteract the layers of suppression of modern moral consciousness' (Taylor, 1989, p. 90). Exactly like MacIntyre (2007), Taylor (1989) sought for his intended retrieval of tradition from before Descartes and his rationalism, which he identified as 'disengaged' (p. 12). He also criticised the subsequent 'disenchantment' of the world, in the Weberian sense of the word, which led to the modern perspective of the cosmos not as a pregiven order (filled with *logos*, as an embodiment of meaningful order) but as a neutralised instrument, system or mechanism that can be dominated by reason and technology (Taylor, 1989, p. 148). During the course of his book, Taylor (1989) becomes increasingly outspoken in his argument that, in modernity, the sources of the human self are shifting from the meaningful order or framework (which is stated even stronger than MacIntyre [2007] with his 'narrative unity of human life') to the interiority of the human being:

Thus if we follow the theme of self-control through the vicissitudes of our Western tradition, we find a very profound transmutation, all the way from the hegemony of reason as a vision of cosmic order to the notion of a punctual disengaged subject exercising instrumental control. And this, I would argue, helps to explain why we think of ourselves as 'selves' today (p. 174).

Both philosophers showed themselves critical about individualism. Taylor (1989) repeatedly spoke of 'atomism', which refers to society as a group of extremely separated individuals. In this regard, disengagement has gone so far that, of the human being nowadays, it can be said: 'He is on his own' as a 'sovereign individual' (Taylor, 1989, p. 193). Returning to MacIntyre (2007), it becomes visible that both philosophers view moral fragmentation as a source of alienation of people from those who hold other opinions or convictions than their own, a trend that leads to what the one (Taylor) called atomism and the other (MacIntyre) termed radical individualism. Both perceived certain historical aspects of this dynamic as irreversible, which prompted the more dismal MacIntyre (2007) to deduce:

My own conclusion is very clear. It is that on the one hand we still, in spite of the efforts of three centuries of moral philosophy and one of sociology, lack any coherent rationally defensible statement of a liberal individualist point of view; and that, on the other hand, the Aristotelian tradition can be restated in a way that restores intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes and commitments. (p. 259)

For this study, it seems proper to conclude that fragmentation is a term that does justice to the complexity of pluralistic societies within a rapidly globalising world. The problem these societies encounter due to lacking social cohesion



and disengagement runs much deeper than merely a cognitive or cultural one. Simply adding knowledge (of citizenship topics such as democratic rights, values and responsibilities or the functioning of the constitutional state) or enhancing skills (intercultural sensitivity and behaviour) may appear adequate for addressing a widely identified problem, although such approaches actually reflect the type of superficial control thinking inherent to modernism. The fragmentation thesis exposes a much deeper and more layered problem of modern society: we live closely together, likely even under the rules of one state's law, but we differ fundamentally from each other in terms of our deepest convictions and lifestyles regarding what Taylor (1989) identified as the three axes of moral thinking: what respect for others entails, what makes for a full (good) life and the dignity in our appearance before others. Thus, we differ on the most fundamental levels of understanding, living and behaving. Yet we live together. And we have to learn to manage these differences through peace and collaboration.

### 1.1.2 Consequences of fragmentation

What exactly does the adjective *fragmented* mean with regard to late-modern society? This sub-section intends to provide a clearer definition of fragmentation for this study and to begin elaborating a conceptual scheme that accords with the general cultural analysis of MacIntyre (2007) and Taylor (1989), while also taking some steps ahead both in time and in the application of the analysis. The books by MacIntyre (2007) and Taylor (1989) briefly summarised above were written between 30 and 40 years ago. They analyse, first and foremost, Western culture in light of historic developments that pertain to moral thinking and behaving. The fragmentation or disengagement they describe is a cause and a consequence of human epistemology ('the whole way in which we think, reason, argue, and question ourselves'; Taylor, 1989, p. 7), and it has immediate social and cultural consequences. The rapidly developing cultural and ethnic diversity comes on top of this directional diversity, although it is a more recent trend that largely escapes the interest of both philosophers. For this study, it is useful to describe how the different types of diversity reinforce each other in the globalising world of the 21st century.

The layers upon which fragmentation manifests are, therefore, epistemological, social, cultural and—especially in Taylor's (1989) vision—personal. The problem can be described on (at least) three different levels: the macro-level of the world, the meso-level of the society and the micro-level of the individual person. On the macro-level, fragmentation entails an ongoing separation of meaningful frameworks as a consequence of fundamental differences regarding those frameworks or simply a rejection of their existence.

Humankind lacks, especially in the modern Western world, a shared idea of the cosmic order, which is historically a relatively new element brought to the scene by modernity. On the meso-level, social connections fall apart when the problem of individualism or atomism arises—again, especially in the West—and social cohesion suffers from the lack of a sense of connectedness. On the micro-level of the person, another trend of separation is visible when people become alienated from others and even from themselves, meaning that they are uncertain about their identity and about fundamental issues such as the meaning of their existence and of life in general (1).

To describe fragmentation as a deep and ongoing separation of what originally belonged together means to describe it, from a theological perspective, as a deepening of the consequences of both sin and brokenness. As the famous Kuyper (2011) quotation that opens this chapter shows, sin's darkening implies a type of brokenness that is a cause and a consequence of disengagement and disintegration. In a recent study, van Laar (2021) pointed to the combination of sin and relationality: sin indicates every type of brokenness—with God, others, the self and the world. In this description, the layers of the micro-level (the self), the meso-level (others) and the macro-level (the world) become visible, and even a meta-level (God) appears. Although it would be interesting to focus more on the difference between this metaphysical level and the macro-level of the world—and on how, specifically, Taylor's (1989) cosmic order would fit into it—for now it suffices to distinguish the three levels as different layers upon which the problem of fragmentation manifests.

Distinguishing the levels is helpful in describing the stratification of fragmentation. It is not meant to describe different or separate processes. It is, for example, the lack of a common sense of the cosmic order on the macro-level that causes disorientation and disengagement on the meso-level and even alienation from the self on the micro-level. When MacIntyre (2007) described the modern individual as 'the emotivist self' (p. 35), he referred to 'emotivism' as a central feature of modern culture (p. 61) and society (p. 73), and he established a direct relation between a fading belief in God and a developing belief in 'managerial effectiveness' (p. 76). Except for the individual self, no one can determine what is good or evil for an 'emotivist'. In the 'emotivist culture', the traditional pastor, teacher and doctor lose their centrality to the manager, therapist and rich aesthete. The difference is that the latter three have no need to study content in relation to truth and the epistemological question of how we can know truth. Procedures are more important for them, while

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1 Hartmut Rosa (2010) connected alienation to both modernity and the process of social acceleration.

measurable outcomes (in terms of production, effectiveness and popularity) define their success.

Taylor (1989) brought the lack of coherent frameworks that orient people's way of seeing the world (macro-level) into contact with the intrapersonal micro-level. A strong religious framework causes fear, according to him, although this traditional fear for condemnation 'is quite different from the one where one fears, above all, meaninglessness' (Taylor, 1989, introduction). 'The dominance of the latter perhaps defines our age' (Taylor, 1989, p. 18). Taylor (1989) further described the 'shift in style of pathology' this entails. Where psychoanalysts in earlier days mainly treated hysterical people and patients with phobias and fixations, the bulk of complaints nowadays have to do with 'ego loss'. Taylor (1989) described this alienation from the self as 'emptiness, flatness, futility, lack of purpose (...) loss of self-esteem' (p. 19), tying it to a culture in which the 'loss of horizon' has become a 'popularization and generalization'.

The problem with fragmentation is that it isolates the focus of attention on just one aspect of what is—and should be considered as—a bigger whole. This is what MacIntyre (2007) and Taylor (1989) in their critique of modernity see as reductionism. MacIntyre (2007) discussed 'emotivism's attempted reduction of morality to personal preference' (p. 20), while Taylor (1989) opposed 'the reductive thesis' (p. 27) in favour of his thesis of the frameworks. If a person is more than a physical body, it is a matter of reductionism to expect everything from physical treatment and to remain empty-handed when physical complaints have a mental cause. If a perceived lack of social cohesion is only treated via a summative cognitive approach, or with simply the skills of—say—interculturalism, it is highly probable that society will remain empty-handed. Instead of being reductionistic, the chosen approach should aim to address the layered problem of fragmentation; however, naturalism, scientific positivism and materialism all seem, as elements of modernity, to endorse a reductionistic approach.

The layered, stratified problem of fragmentation suggests that a lack of cohesion—in the form of a lack of connectedness in a super-diverse and, therefore, super-complex world and society—should be countered with an integrative approach that respects and includes fundamental directional and religious diversity. If modern individualism, disintegration, loss of meaning and lack of a fundamental sense of belonging are somehow interconnected, and if they form part of the widely perceived problem of social cohesion, it follows that an approach intended to foster social cohesion and good citizenship should address the issue of moral fragmentation, as wide and complex as it may be. The rapid increase in ethnic and cultural diversity as a consequence of increased

mobility and migration, and the simultaneous process of globalisation, will only cause an intensification and further deepening of this already existing problem. This brings us back to what was stated in the introduction to this dissertation: we live in an age of acceleration. Sin historically leads to fragmentation, yet the modern age is especially characterised by it because relative homogeneity is fading and being replaced with deep directional, religious, ethnic and cultural diversity.

For this study, which is directed towards Christian teacher formation in the Netherlands, this fundamental statement could raise the question of whether the Dutch situation is really as challenging and complex as that identified above in the fragmentation thesis. Recent publications by Kinning (2020) and van de Beek (2022) confirm that this is true <sup>(2)</sup>. Earlier already, the Dutch philosopher Kuiper (2009) confirmed that hyper-individualism—as he related it to globalisation and the information revolution—in late modernity has led to a broad culture of detachment. Indeed, what should be connected does not bond anymore—and where detachment has taken place, it is difficult to reconnect. Kuiper (2009) attached relationality to both the creational order and fundamental human nature, stating that this ‘relation network’ cannot be ignored without affecting human wellbeing (p. 115). The ‘theology of embrace’ Kuiper (2009, p. 127) endorsed, based on the work of Volf (2019) and—in a philosophical sense—of Dooyeweerd (1967), exhibits traits of an approach that recognises the breadth of the fragmentation problem. To arrive at a well-connected society, Kuiper (2009) went a step further than Volf (2019) by arguing not only for reconciliation but also for a caring human being in a moral commonwealth (pp. 125–128).

This sub-section can lead to the formation of a—for the moment still quite raw—conceptual scheme indicating how fragmentation is a layered problem, characterised by the separation of what organically belongs together: within and between persons (meant to flourish in relationships), in the society (meant for social cohesion) and in the world as a whole (meant to be part of cosmic order). This separation is originally a consequence of sin, although it intensifies in different manners as fundamental diversity sets in. The causes of this intensifying diversity are disintegration of the shared frameworks and an individualism as strong as to be referred to as atomisation and alienation from reality, including the meaning of the individual’s own life.

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2 From his theological perspective, van de Beek (2022) criticised Western (and Dutch) culture in general for being too focused on the ego—that is, on the individual self. He also discovered in Dutch (Protestant) church history traces of this egocentrism, which renders him an interesting interlocutor for the following sub-section (1.1.3).

The consequences are alienation from the framework and consequently from each other, disintegration of groups in society and atomisation in the sense of loneliness. Globalisation intensifies this trend, but it is especially strong in Western countries, where directional diversity is most intense, homogeneity most breached and modernity forms the historical-cultural background. In this context, the conceptual scheme becomes a vicious circle: disintegration leads to alienation, alienation leads to atomisation, atomisation leads to detachment, and there the circle starts to repeat itself.

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**Conceptual scheme of fragmentation**

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<i>Level</i>	<i>Structure</i>	<i>Threat</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Macro: world	Ordered framework	Disintegration	Alienation
Meso: society	Peaceful coexistence	Atomisation	Detachment
Micro: person	Relational flourishing	Alienation	Atomisation

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The conclusion for this study can be that the broadly perceived problem of a lack of social cohesion, especially in Western countries, requires an answer that addresses fragmentation. This implies an answer that does not reduce itself to some aspect or level but instead accepts fragmentation as a layered problem that needs to be simultaneously addressed at the micro-level of the person, the meso-level of the society and the macro-level of the world.

### **1.1.3 Protestantism as an accelerant**

A question that requires specific attention is how both MacIntyre (2007) and Taylor (1989) criticised Protestantism for being historically and substantially interwoven with modernity. They depicted Protestantism as, at least, an accelerant for modernist tendencies. For MacIntyre (2007), this was a question of dogmatic Protestant (and Jansenist) views on reason. Where medieval Catholicism left room for reason and rationality to (re)discover the virtues and collaborate with grace, Protestant theologies were critical towards both reason and works. In particular, Calvin depicted the fall of man as so profound and significant that only God's grace could rescue humanity and, in the end, only very partially restore reason and virtue in the renewed believer (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 53). Taylor's (1989) argument was less theological and more sociological, partially following the Weberian critique of Calvinism as being intertwined with capitalism (p. 225). Taylor (1989) described Protestantism as 'rationalized Christianity', for which he especially blamed the Protestant affirmation of the ordinary life.

It is important to consider the substance of Taylor's (1989) argument because, at first glance, he seemed to contradict MacIntyre (2007). For Taylor

(1989), a 'crucial stage' in the shared story of modernity and Protestantism is 'the fusion of the ethic of ordinary life and the philosophy of disengaged freedom and rationality' (p. 234). In both modernity and Protestantism, it is not the sacred space of the cathedral and the church liturgy where the good life is learned and practiced; rather, it is the ordinary, daily life in which (spiritual) good is practically learned. Thus, Protestant opposition to magic was one of the most powerful sources of the modern disenchantment of the world (Taylor, 1989, p. 191), which underlies the disengaged subject as an independent individual being (p. 192). Grace is, in the Protestant conception, a highly individual gift of God to His elect, which can lead to the disengagement of the person from the vicinity, the neighbourhood and even the family (Taylor, 1989, p. 194). Signs of grace can, however, be found in the sanctification of the ordinary life, 'both earnest and detached' (Taylor, 1989, p. 223). At this point, Taylor's (1989) analysis moved close to the Weberian evaluation of Calvinism and, at the same time, started to show more coherence with MacIntyre's (2007) critique of Protestantism.

It is precisely this attachment to Weber that renders their philosophical evaluation of Protestantism unsatisfactory from a Protestant insider's perspective. In the first place, history shows how Protestantism does not automatically leads via Deism to the radical Enlightenment. Nowadays, there are many Christians in the Protestant tradition who in the midst of their secular contexts do exactly what Taylor (1989) observed that the first Reformers did: 'Only drawing the radical consequences from a very old theme in Christendom' (p. 218), believing in a spiritually loaded cosmos and dedicating the whole of their (ordinary) lives to the service of God. This brings to the second argument, which is that their sanctification of ordinary life does definitely not exclude old conceptions of meaningful order based on an ontic logos, as Taylor suggests (p. 232). From the Reformation on, Protestant theologians have been approximating God's creation as filled with the order of God's law, which only via a modernistic epistemology led to a certain disenchantment, while it otherwise led to a fundamental respect for creation as a place to serve God and the neighbour. Kuiper (2014) uses these two arguments—although in reversed order—to underpin his statement that the Weberian and therefore the Taylorian evaluation of Protestantism are not completely fair (p. 111).

A more convincing explication of the interconnectedness of Protestantism and modernity was presented by van de Beek (2022) in his cultural analysis of the ego. Van de Beek (2022) did not, in the first place, look for a dogmatic or social explication, as MacIntyre and Taylor did, but for an epistemological explication. The modern turn to the subject has epistemological implications,

as has been made clear in Section 1.1. Van de Beek (2022) observed how Protestantism preceded modernity in this respect. Luther and his quest for personal faith preceded Descartes' philosophy. Puritans criticised the reliability of human perception earlier than Kant did. Moreover, before the French Revolution overthrew traditional authority, Wesley had already undermined church authority with his strong accent on faith as a highly personal choice. Van de Beek (2022) showed how this spiritual turn to the subject leads in both Reformed and Evangelical Protestantism to spiritual isolation, individualism and alienation, and also to individual judgment and evaluation of others (Chapter 5). The latter leads to an ongoing discussion of spiritual truth and the reproduction of new denominations typical for Protestantism. As Ryrie (2017) stated in his description of Protestantism as the faith that 'made the Modern world': Protestants love the truth so much that they will always fight themselves on it.

A key takeaway from this brief exploration of modernity and Protestantism can be that Protestantism, as a religious belief, is especially interwoven with modern culture. Christian citizenship formation for a modern, fragmented society should be, at least, aware of this interwovenness if it is to be self-critical. If culture is, as Hofstede (n.d.) claimed, the collective programming of the mind, then Protestant Christians should ask themselves whether their conceptions of reality, diversity and complexity are solely influenced by their Christian faith or also by modern culture. If what van de Beek (2022) claimed is true—that in at least one respect Reformed Christians ('reformatoischen' in the Netherlands; p. 72) are not modern, that is, with regard to the great importance they assign to faith—then it is also true that in other respects it is very probable that they will find modern influences. In the area of epistemology in particular, of how they think to find and know the truth, they might find a very modern rationality working towards all the tendencies of fragmentation: disintegration, alienation, atomisation and detachment.

## 1.2 CONSEQUENCES OF FRAGMENTATION FOR EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS

Drawing on the lines of reasoning in Sub-Section 1.1.2, which presented a raw conceptual scheme, it is possible to identify at least three consequences of fragmentation for education and schools. First, students are thought to be affected by fragmentation in their own intrapersonal and interpersonal lives. Thus, it is to be expected that they somehow exhibit the features of isolation and the struggle with meaninglessness. Second, education itself has

become fragmented in the way it has taken shape and form in the context of modernity: it shows the traits of a reductionistic approach that focuses on measurable outcomes and proof of its efficiency and utility for the economy. Third, the role and function of schools has—as observed in the introduction to this dissertation—shifted from the classical conception of a mini-society or cultural forum wherein students learn the art of living together to a place where they obtain, as quickly as possible, the skills necessary to proceed with their lives. However, the consequences of fragmentation make the switch back to the classical form necessary. The following sub-sections evaluate these three consequences of fragmentation. Each sub-section presents a description of the problem and the challenge it poses to the broad citizenship formation of students, especially trainee teachers.

### **1.2.1 Disorientation among students**

According to the conceptual scheme of fragmentation, disintegration of the ordered framework (on the macro-level of the world) causes a type of alienation that—in turn—causes atomisation on the micro-level of the individual person. At this point, it becomes visible how closely the intrapersonal dimension is connected to the interpersonal dimension, as observed in the introduction (Section 2). Bourdieu (1977), who was also discussed in the introduction, referenced the complex interrelatedness of the micro-sociology of the person and the macro-sociology of society, which are so closely connected that to take into account just one would obscure the view of their coherence. Bourdieu (1977) worked this into his renowned concept of *habitus* as a structuring structure: individual persons together shape the structure that, in turn, structures and shape them. The sociological concept of *habitus* that emerges from the realm of interpersonal relations is effective regarding a psychological understanding of the interior of the person—that is, the intrapersonal realm (Reay, 2015).

Taylor (1989) related inner wellbeing to the notion of a cosmic order. He based this direct connection on Aristotle's idea of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) and Augustine's radical inner reflexivity. Both provide for 'a kind of awareness or order, the correct order of ends in my life' (Taylor, 1989, p. 125), which in the more religious approach of Augustine establishes a personal relation with God as the Creator. The awareness of order provides rest and a certain sense of peace to a person's mind and heart, while the opposite causes a sense of detachment and confusion. Approximating this topic from the conceptual scheme presented above, it can be argued that people who feel detached from the world as a whole, or from the cosmic order that provides for its wholeness, may somehow and sometimes be expected to become alienated



or to fall prey to a sense of meaningfulness that is not helpful when interacting with other human beings.

The practical reality of this dynamic is visible in a recent plea for global education (Reimers, 2020). Global education should be given priority by teachers and education leaders for two reasons. First, because it makes what happens in the school more relevant to the world in which students are growing up. Second, because engaging in transformational practices will make teaching more effective and engaging. Both reasons are reflected in the importance of developing a 'sense of purpose' (p. 3) in teachers and, especially, their students. To underpin this statement, Reimers (2020) referred to an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) survey from 2019 in which 15 year olds were asked to respond to three questions concerning their sense of meaning in life: 'My life has a clear meaning or purpose', 'I have discovered a satisfactory meaning in life' and 'I have a clear sense of what gives meaning to my life'. The outcome of the survey showed that, in the 73 investigated OECD countries, a third of 15 year olds enrolled in school did not think their life had a clear meaning or purpose, nor did they have a clear sense of what gives meaning to their lives.

It is interesting to note how, in some countries, four out of five students recognised a purpose to their lives (including Panama, Albania, Indonesia, Macedonia, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Mexico, Colombia and Costa Rica), whereas in other countries only three in five students perceived purpose to their lives (including Japan, Taipei, the United Kingdom, Macao, the Czech Republic, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Australia). Reimers (2020) concluded that 'helping students develop a sense of themselves in the world would help them develop purpose' (p. 26), but failed to observe that at the top of the list were mainly non-Western countries, while at the bottom were mainly Western, individualised countries. In fact, among the 20 countries that scored relatively high on purpose and meaning, only 2 were in Europe or North America, while among the 20 countries with the lowest scores, 16 were European.

The OECD statistics seem to support the fragmentation thesis. If fragmentation is considered the intensifying and deepening of the brokenness that is a consequence of modernity and super-diversity, as in Section 1.2.1, these scores are to be expected. The OECD average regarding a sense of meaninglessness is already high, although the trend is even more intense in Western countries. Based on his own Dutch context, the experienced teacher and philosopher Dohmen (2023) endorsed MacIntyre's (2007) societal

critique (p. 68) and adopted the predicate *fragmented* several times, although he opted to characterise Western society as *post-traditional*:

The modern individual is threatened by fragmentation and is of necessity in search of some degree of coherence of one's personality. Fragmentation arises because post-traditional society offers a vast array of experiences, choices and a diversity of (often changing) roles. It follows that we must learn to deal with all kinds of ambivalence. If we don't succeed, we are threatened by chaos, confusion and psychological tension. (p. 103) <sup>(3)</sup>

Like Taylor (1989), Dohmen (2023) perceived pathological effects manifesting due to this personal fragmentation in society. The specific complaints he identified were anorexia, autism, burnout, compulsions, exhaustion and 'what masquerades as schizophrenia' (Dohmen, 2023, p. 103). Moreover, he recognised that fragmentation leads, especially in Western countries, to a call to invest in good citizenship education. Dohmen (2023) constructed a wide argument around his central thesis that answers need to be sought with a focus on broad formation. He described 'a holistic, integral event' in which 'the goal of one's formation (that for which you live) is closely related to the method (how do you achieve that goal) and the context: what personal and social latitude do you have to shape your life?' (Dohmen, 2023, p. 1131). In this broad formation, philosophy needs to take the lead, but not in the MacIntyrean sense of a revival or virtue ethics. This notion aligns more with Taylor's (1989) metaphor of life as a journey in which strong evaluations help the 'homo viator'—as Dohmen (2023, pp. 1167, 1170) termed it—to make meaningful choices. As Dohmen (2023) expressly added, this 'homo viator' is both liberal and social, which underlines the need to do justice to both individuality and communal responsibility.

A comparable voice came from the United States, from the famous educator Parker Palmer (2017), who referred to the 'pain of disconnection' (p. 92). This disconnection, from colleagues, from students and from their own hearts, was ascribed by Palmer (2017) to a series of 'broken paradoxes' (p. 68): the separation of head from heart, of facts from feelings, of theory from practice and of teaching from learning. Teaching, concluded Palmer (2017), should aim at creating a space where a 'community of truth' is practiced to renew 'the capacity for connectedness' (p. 92). In another book, under the revealing title *A Hidden Wholeness. The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (2004), he depicted the Western world and education as filled with the forces of fragmentation and advocates a journey toward living 'divided no more' (introduction). 'Dividedness

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3 As Dohmen (2023) wrote this in Dutch, the translations are mine.

is a personal pathology', Palmer (2004) stated, 'but it soon becomes a problem for other people. It is a problem for students whose teachers "phone it in" while taking cover behind their podiums and their power...' (p. 6).

The difficulty with all this is that it is relatively easy to point out the problem but hard to indicate what will help to address this fragmentation on the personal level in and through education. Palmer's (2004, 2017) work outlined a beautiful ideal, but it did not provide a scientific method that transcends the boundaries of subjects and disciplines. Dohmen's (2023) plea for personhood formation with a strong philosophical foundation indicated a certain direction but left the reader without a clear educational roadmap towards an educational ideal. The same can be said, in a way, about Taylor (1989), with whom Dohmen (2023) shared the metaphor of the journey, which also appeared in the works of Palmer (2004, 2017). Most explicit on the steps to take is, in this sense, MacIntyre (2007), who called for 'small communities' to rediscover the classical ethic of virtues. However, his suggestion is characterised by too much scepticism and gloom to be deemed a solution. In the following two chapters, the movement and concept of WCD will prove helpful in filling this gap, especially in its evaluation and adaptation from the perspective of Christian pedagogy.

### **Emmanuel Levinas**

It is—rather than MacIntyre or Taylor—the French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas who inspired a new educational focus or approach. Although he cannot be identified with MacIntyre and Taylor, his work reflects basic elements of their critique of modernity and individualism. He performed his philosophical retrieval, however, in his own, Jewish way, a way marked by his experience of the Holocaust. This renders Levinas' (1969) paradigm less ontological and more ethical than those of MacIntyre (2007) and Taylor (1989). For Levinas (1969), the major philosophical question was not the why of existence but the where of the quest for what is good, which is a question not of wonder but of alarm, not of consciousness but of conscience (de Boer, 1976). Levinas (1969) offered an ethical approach, without a comprehensive ethical framework but with the explicit recognition of fundamental metaphysical unity. Thus, Levinas brought ethics very close to the person, albeit in a way that rendered it specifically applicable to situations characterised by high diversity and complexity. With this approach, he applied two dynamics that together form the title of his central work, *Totalité et Infini* (1969).

Here, *Totalité* refers to a closed system, a system that is separated from other systems and has no room for otherness. It can be a system of thought,

an ideology or a discourse (such as the discourse of modernity). In fact, the Western philosophical tradition has become, according to Levinas (1969), a closed system. A person can have the inclination to enclose him- or herself in a totality, meaning that he or she lives in an individual, closed system. However, there is, in every human being, a deep need and subsequent longing for the metaphysical. This is what Levinas referred to with *Infini*. Our very existence is laid out on the infinite, and we meet that when otherness presents itself while it breaks through our totalities or closed systems. Levinas (1969) called this an epiphany and then spoke of the Other (with a capital 'O'). This happens in a very concrete sense. We see otherness in the face of the other that presents itself—with its otherness—to us. This interrupts our existence and appeals to us. It asks for space and for a responsible reaction. We enclose ourselves in our houses, isolated from others, but the Other knocks on our doors and appeals intensely to our deepest form of responsibility. The answer, argued Levinas (1969), should be ethical, morally good, aimed at ending war and finding peace—or peaceful existence with the Other in the world. More succinctly, this appeal is depicted in the countenance of the Other. Levinas' philosophy is, therefore, a philosophy of the face.

Teaching plays an important role in Levinas' philosophy. It is meant as broadly as the definition of citizenship education provided in the introduction to this dissertation: 'The art of creating social cohesion'. Teaching entails a conversation in which the master confronts the student with otherness and presents him or her with infinity. It is an ongoing process in which teaching seeks to support the being and presence of the student, especially in relation to others. Levinas (1969) went as far as to state that only absolute otherness can teach us. In this context, he presented a plea for (inter)subjectivity, even describing his work as a defence of subjectivity. It is exactly this notion that has helped educational philosophers to mine Levinas' (1969) philosophy of the face for education. When Biesta (2015) presented his theory of three partly overlapping educational domains, he was inspired by Levinas. Education may or may not blend fully into qualification (enhancing knowledge and skills) or socialisation (correct insertion in society), but it has to focus deliberately and intensely on subjectification. Subjectification, according to Biesta's (2022) vocabulary, is concerned with both freedom and responsibility, with being a self who responds freely to what appeals:

Responsibility—and here I follow Emmanuel Levinas—is not something we choose, but is actually something we encounter. And it is in such encounters, when responsibility comes to me, so to speak, that my subjectness, my

existence as subject, actually begins to matter or comes into play. (Biesta, 2022, p. 54)

The accent on subjectification in education implies approaching the student with respect, inviting him or her to engage freely with others and with society. This notion, which was derived from Levinas (1969) and coined for education by Biesta (2022), proved its usefulness to Guoping Zhao (2011) in her analysis of modernist views on childhood. Zhao (2011) distinguished five such views: childhood as a moment of innocence, childhood as lacking reason, childhood as the primitive, childhood as a moment of redemption and childhood as a period of active growth. She complained that all of these views deprive children of their autonomy (in the sense of their own, free responsibility) and agency. Only the latter view (childhood as a period of active growth) somehow seeks to do justice to the agency of children, but even in this case 'the child's agency and voice are systematically undermined by the hidden agenda of social control' (Zhao, 2011, p. 254). Zhao (2011) concluded that 'the modern subject is not a cohesive whole, but only fragmented pieces where portions of one's being have to be constantly struggled against' (p. 254). The 'deep logic of the modern project' is that, to enable a person's freedom and agency, 'the modern subject must first be subdued, remolded, and kept under control', which Zhao (2011) termed 'the paradox of modern thinking': 'It can only afford freedom to a transformed and idealized population' (p. 255).

The modern, fragmented approach to education, thus, consistently prioritises socialisation over subjectification. It tends to value manufacturability over agency and personal responsibility, ideological direction over character formation. It moulds students into a fixed world and future rather than inviting them to take responsibility for the shaping of their own world and future. In this way, modernist education strengthens the problem of fragmentation on the personal level, instead of searching for more healing approaches. Levinas' (1969) unique account of subjectivity provided inspiration for such a healing approach, concluded Zhao (2012). She praised Biesta (2022) for showing how Levinas' (1969) subjectivity concept can 'lead us out of the educational predicament of socialization as subjectification' (Zhao, 2012, p. 660). At the same time, she warned that Biesta's (2022) interpretation of subjectivity as 'pure openness and subjection to the other misses its full structure' (Zhao, 2012, p. 672). Where Biesta (2022) proposed a 'pedagogy of interruption', Zhao (2012) pleaded for a 'pedagogy of becoming':

Viewed from this perspective, Levinas's account of individuation is intersubjective and dialectical. Such an account considers individual growth

and sees children's coming into being as a historical possibility that fosters creativity, difference, and transcendence (...) The pedagogy of interruption will be part of the pedagogy of becoming. We can structure schools to provide opportunities for events where all voices—from that of the other to the deep voice inside the self—can be heard. (p. 673)

In this way, Levinas' (1969) subjectivity opens up the possibility for education to move away from both 'the humanist trap of a fixed essence, where education inevitably becomes socialization' and 'the post humanist impasse, where education loses its ground and orientation' (p. 675). This 'genuine educational mission of subjectification', as Zhao (2012, p. 675) perceived it, can be taken into account as one of the core components for the broad citizenship formation this study intends to identify for the education of trainee teachers in a modern, fragmented society. The way in which this answer to fragmentation at the micro-level of the person should function practically will be discussed below (2.4), where this 'new and very different subjectivity' (Zhao, 2012, p. 675) will be discussed in the light of MacIntyre's (2007) and Taylor's (1989) critiques of the modernist approach to the subject. For now, it is sufficient to target subjectivity, as an integral concept from Levinas' (1969) philosophy of the face of the Other, as helpful for personal dealing with otherness and diversity in light of the meaninglessness, alienation and atomisation discussed above.

### **1.2.2 Fragmented schools**

The problem of fragmentation has not gone unnoticed in society. It may not be considered or addressed on the meso-level in its entirety and with regard to its complex stratification; nevertheless, the consequences of disintegration, alienation, atomisation and detachment are felt and perceived, which directly or indirectly leads to political debate. In this debate, it is especially the concern of politicians regarding the influence of growing ethnocultural diversity that seem to surface. Over the last few decades, this widespread political debate, which on a deeper level touches upon the problem of societal fragmentation, has led national governments to reach out to schools. In Europe and North America, national governments have asked their help to foster active citizenship and social cohesion. In the European Union (EU), the term 'active citizenship' was required to be implemented in the educational legislation of all EU member states (Biesta, 2009). However, the question this sub-section raises is whether schools were sufficiently prepared to respond to such (legal) appeals. The brief answer to this is as follows: they were not. The reason for this is that schools themselves were too much a part of the fragmented societal reality to face this fundamental problem through their teaching.

First, it is important to understand that education within schools, as we know them in the West, emerged in the very context of modernity. Schools obtained their functionality as part of the economic system of the capitalist labour market. This functionality differs widely, as argued in the introduction to this dissertation, from the classical function of schools as halfway houses, cultural fora or mini-societies. Martha Nussbaum (2010) characterised it as 'education for profit' (p. 13). 'Education for economic growth needs basic skills, literacy, and numeracy', she stated, adding 'It also needs some people have more advanced skills in computer science and technology' (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 19). Critical thinking is less important in this model. Indeed, the focus is much more on qualification and socialisation than on subjectification, as Biesta (2022) would put it, drawing on Levinas' (1969) philosophy. The increase in directional, religious, cultural and ethnic diversity, however, has led to a new kind of complexity felt at the level of society. In the Netherlands, for example, preoccupations with social cohesion were put on the political agenda. One of the leading politicians in the 1990s, Liberal Party leader Frits Bolkestein (1998), called for attention to the lack of 'bezielend verband'—of an inspiring connection between individuals and groups that fosters national 'togetherness' (p. 57).

In England, Ted Cattle led an independent review team that was asked by the British government to advise after a number of disturbances took place in 2001, mostly in the north of England. The resulting report called for a national debate to establish shared principles of citizenship, resulting in local community cohesion plans 'to combat the fear and ignorance of different communities which stems from the lack of contact with each other', including 'the promotion of cross cultural contact' (Cattle, 2001, p. 11). In a report issued by the Council of Europe, Cattle (2013) later stated that schools should teach interculturalism (which is a step ahead of multiculturalism)—namely, 'the acquisition of an intercultural competence, a certain frame of mind, which in a diverse society becomes as important a competency as basic numeracy and literacy' (p. 87). As the report stated, 'No child should leave school without it' (p. 87). Interestingly, Cattle (2013) underlined that he was not advocating for a secular society, instead proposing 'multi-faith society in which space should be provided for genuine belief systems as part of democratic debate' and in which faith-based communities 'must expect their views to be contested to' (p. 86).

Cattle's (2013) influential advise can be compared with what Martha Nussbaum (2010) termed 'education for democracy'. She juxtaposed that with the previously mentioned 'education for profit' (Nussbaum, 2010, pp. 13–14). This model is very much in need of critical thinking, including more than a

rudimentary knowledge of the humanities. It is, stated Nussbaum (2010), concerned with 'making students responsible democratic citizens who might think and choose well about a wide range of issues of national and worldwide significance' (pp. 27–28). Her proposal ventured far beyond the simple addition of certain knowledge of democratic values and procedures to the established curricula of schools, or of the enhancement of skills such as, for example, the proposed 21st century skills. Her focus was on nothing less than the souls of children and youth. 'The real clash of civilizations is (...) a clash within the individual soul, as greed and narcissism contend against respect and love', she concluded, adding that 'all modern societies are rapidly losing the battle, as they feed the forces that lead to violence and dehumanization and fail to feed the forces that lead to cultures of equality and respect' (Nussbaum, 2010, pp. 142–143). As Nussbaum (2010) related this soul-based approach to a silent crisis of 'massive proportions and grave global significance' (p. 1), it is clear that her analysis fits with the layered problem of fragmentation described above.

The statement that schools were (and still are) unprepared to live up to their new tasks and appeals requires more clarification. Not only is it problematic that the new tasks (fostering social cohesion, educating citizenship, interculturalism, attention to the soul) are far too broad and complex to simply be added to the existing curricula, the situatedness of schools within broader society also has a complicating influence. The theory of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein et al., 2002) helps to clarify this situatedness. Schools form part of a societal system for the upbringing of youth. They function in a network, wherein they work closely together with families, state/society and other educational partners. Due to occupying a remarkable intermediate position between these educational partners, schools are immediately affected by social changes in families, state/society and other partners. In the context of the relatively homogeneous nation-state, for a long time schools were able to focus on qualification as the enhancement of necessary knowledge and skills. In the task of socialisation, they were supported by, for example, relatively strong churches and society itself. The homogeneity across the board also had its own, relatively strong, socialising influence, whereas subjectification was a much less strongly experienced need.

This context of collaboration and separation of estate between the educational partners, however, came under pressure when society began to change rapidly due to what was described in the introduction to this dissertation as the *Great Acceleration* and *Great Transformation*. Changes in the natural and social worlds, which due to advances in technology appeared ever faster, impacted everything that schools surrounded, triggering an ever



more urgent need to adapt. The stable home situation that the traditional family provided for started to disappear, to a certain extent, with traditional family itself (CBS, 2017; OECD, 2011). The supporting role of churches and religious social groups in the educational process declined with lowering church affiliation and the process of secularisation (Pew Research Center, 2018, 2019). Society itself became more diverse and pluralistic. As a consequence, central governments, preoccupied with rapidly diminishing social cohesion, started imposing additional rules. In the modern context, where school results were increasingly measured and monitored, school teams found themselves confronted with ever increasing demands: to maintain existing scores, to help children with problems and backlogs, to handle cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, to include citizenship education, to foster social cohesion, et cetera.

An early but nevertheless clear and practical example of this dynamic is found in a booklet published by the American scholar John I. Goodlad, titled *What Schools Are For* (1979). In it, Goodlad highlighted the growing difference between what schools were asked, expected or called upon to do (goals); what schools were actually doing or used for (functions); and what schools should do (aims). According to Goodlad (1979), a very common error was the tendency to increasingly focus on superficial qualification methods. By doing so amidst all the identified changes, schools sought to keep up with standardised levels for the 3R (reading, writing and arithmetic) subjects. They were also required to comply with detailed government instructions for the socialisation of students. 'Thus education is corrupted, becoming indoctrination or training', complained Goodlad (1979, p. 104). Schools should invest, above all, in personhood formation in direct relation to their educational task, Goodlad (1979) recommended, 'to do the educating not done or not done easily elsewhere in culture' (p. 106). In terms of the future, Goodlad (1979) foresaw 'reductionism with respect to educational goals and practices, preoccupation with minimum competencies, excessive testing, and measured outcomes as the sole criteria of school and student performance' (p. 118).

When viewed from the fragmentation perspective elaborated in this chapter, it is no wonder that Goodlad's (1979) words came true. The next chapter, Chapter 2, will describe how WCD emerged from 2005 as a growing movement in education seeking a new and radically more integrative approach—an approach that Goodlad (1979) already advocated as holistic (p. 75). However, when the consequences of fragmentation were felt on the societal level, and when schools were looked at to help resolve at least part of the problem, policymakers did not dig deep enough. Schools were, in and of themselves, part of the problem they were supposed to resolve. They

were fragmented in terms of their functionality (mainly economic) and their situatedness (their rapidly changing partnerships with families, the state and other partners). To really address the problem of fragmentation, a more profound approach was (and still is) needed—an approach that reconsiders the classical function of the school and what can and should reasonably be expected of schools in a context of high diversity and high complexity.

### **1.2.3 Fragmented (global) education**

Another layer is added to the problem of fragmentation when the global level is taken into account. The *Great Acceleration* and *Great Transformation* are scientific descriptions, as mentioned in the introduction, which concern the world as a whole and confront the whole of the world with a series of relatively new challenges. Recent technological fruits of the industrial revolution have enabled the exponential growth of the world's population, highly increased production and global commerce, and propelled migration to levels unseen before. This process, otherwise described as globalisation, has caused not only social but also natural changes. Nowadays, policymakers worldwide struggle with the problem of climate change. To adequately handle these changes, policymakers have again looked to schools, espousing global citizenship education and imposing a sustainable development agenda.

Torres (2017) described these concerns as a 'new class of global challenges which require some form of collective response to find effective solutions' (p. 14) and provided a brief overview of them referring to official United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2013) documentation:

These include increasingly integrated and knowledge-driven economies; greater migration between countries and from rural to urban areas; growing inequalities; more awareness of the importance of sustainable development and including concerns about climate change and environmental degradation; a large and growing youth demographic; the acceleration of globalization; and rapid developments in technology. Each of these elements carries far reaching implications, and taken together, these represent a period of transition of historical significance. Education systems need to respond to these emerging global challenges which require a collective response with strategic vision that is global in character, rather than limited to the individual country level. (p. 14)

Based on these global trends, Torres (2017) claimed there to be a need for global democratic multicultural citizenship: 'Global citizenship refers

to a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. It emphasizes political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global' (p. 3). Global citizenship education should seek to 'equip learners of all ages with those values, knowledge and skills that are based on and instil respect for human rights, social justice, diversity, gender equality and environmental sustainability and that empowers learners to be responsible global citizens' (Torres, 2017, p. 3). Torres (2017) added that 'any definition and theory of global citizenship as a model of intervention to promote global peace and sustainable development should address what has become the trade mark of globalization: cultural diversity' (p. 15).

Torres' (2017) descriptions proved that, within the core of their content, the challenges on the global level do not differ from the challenges that present themselves on the societal level of the nation-state. The problem, however, is not only that their scale becomes much more extensive but also that contradictory civic allegiances emerge. Fostering social cohesion on the level of the nation-state often complicates the need for a joint, cohesive and coherent approach on the global level. To foster an inspiring connection at the Dutch national level, as referenced in the example of the liberal politician Bolkestein above, involves creating a kind of Dutch-ness that is deliberately non-global. Creating a strong sense of belonging in the form of national citizenship implies the creation of an in- and an out-group. To enter elections with the policy proposal 'America first' automatically suggests 'others last' or, at least, 'others next'. What the challenges on the global level show is that the stratification of the fragmentation problem renders it so complex that the solutions chosen on one level worsen the problem on another.

To describe this dynamic, it is helpful to borrow a term introduced by former Governor General of Canada Adrienne Clarkson. Based on her practical experience with multiple people groups in her home country, including Indigenous groups, she spoke about citizenship as an ever-developing concept, which results in what she termed 'the paradox of citizenship' (Clarkson, 2014). This paradox means that different people groups need to deliberately relate to other people groups, despite the visible or intangible differences that might separate them. Turning one's back on another would be a dehumanising force that affects all groups. It is a kind of prisoner's dilemma on the level of people groups. Clarkson (2014) explained the paradox of citizenship as follows:

It is that we are most fully human, most truly ourselves, most authentically individual, when we commit to the community. It is in the mirror of our community—the street, the neighbourhood, the town, the country—that

we find our best selves. We've been on a long journey through some of the history of the idea of the citizen, and what a story it is. It evokes an idea of what it is to live together, and the sometimes meandering path that idea has taken as it finds its way to us, today. (p. 90)

The macro-level of the world adds another level to this quotation, extending the paradox of citizenship. Worldwide developments in the natural and social worlds drive the need for new civic allegiances that come on top of the old ones. Thus, more layers are added to the concept of citizenship. While thinking about citizenship started in the time of Plato and Aristotle with regard to the Greek polis, it later developed into the citizenship of the premodern empire and—after the Middle Ages—gradually into the citizenship of the modern nation-state. During each of these phases, citizenship received a new signification, albeit without completely losing the older one(s). Nowadays, we see the concept of global citizenship coming into existence, as a fruit of globalisation, with its cosmopolitan citizen, who also belongs to local, national and, probably, international communities. More than ever, this brings about the need to peacefully and collaboratively combine these different and sometimes competing allegiances, which is another task not so thoughtfully attributed to schools and education.

It is interesting how Kumar (2010) praised the citizenship narrative of the premodern empire over the citizenship narrative of the modern nation-state, which was, generally speaking, a smaller and more homogeneous entity. Its sense of community and belonging was built on a nationalistic narrative. Kumar (2010) contradicted the idea that the narrative of the modern nation-state suits the actual questions regarding citizenship in a modern, super-diverse and fragmented society better than the empire narrative. He considered it to be the other way round: 'Empires, as large-scale and long-lasting multi-ethnic and multicultural experiments, may have much to teach us in the current historical phase of globalization and increasingly heterogeneous societies' (Kumar, 2010, p. 119). It is exactly this lesson that Dronkers (2012) applied in his case study of Dutch citizens and their religious diversity, stating that they currently find themselves 'embedded in a complex network of competing and often conflicting allegiances and identifications' (p. 1). As Cattle stated (2013):

Globalization will ensure that the world—and almost every country—will become more multicultural. That is to say: each country will find that its population is increasingly made up of more people from many different cultures, nationalities, faiths and ethnic backgrounds and become 'super-diverse'. (p. 69)

These descriptions give rise to the question of how to do it. How to make people, who are disoriented and disengaged due to fragmentation, connect, prompting them to practice citizenship not only at a local but also a national, international and global level? The contribution of the fragmentation thesis to addressing this question is that the answer must not do justice to only one level of fragmentation and so strengthen fragmentation on another level. This is what renders the whole discourse of active citizenship and social cohesion on the national, societal level worthy of profound critique. Such critique is most sharply uttered by Banks (2008), who distinguished between liberal assimilationist views and universal views of citizenship. Both views tend to be highly individualistic and leave practically no room for fundamental differences among identity groups, for the rights of smaller social groups or for group influences over the individual person. To educate and practice the liberal assimilationist view of universal citizenship, therefore, has destructive outcomes for communities that could motivate and inform what Banks (2008) termed 'transformative citizenship' (4):

In the liberal assimilationist view, the rights of the individual are paramount, and group identities and rights are inconsistent with and inimical to the rights of the individual (...) This conception maintains that identity groups promote group rights over the rights of the individual and that the individual must be freed of primordial and ethnic attachments to have free choice and options in a modernized democratic society (...) A universal conception of citizenship within a stratified society results in the treatment of some groups as second-class citizens because group rights are not recognized and the principle of equal treatment is strictly applied. (p. 131)

Global and national citizenship go hand in hand in Banks' (2008) proposal for transformative citizenship education that 'helps students to develop reflective cultural, national, regional, and global identifications and to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote social justice in communities, nations, and the world' (p. 137). This vision shows a clear susceptibility to the layered problem of fragmentation causing deep divides between people's conceptions of the world, life, meaning and, ultimately, individuals. It does not impose a

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4 Banks (2008) distinguished four levels of citizenship: the legal citizen, the minimal citizen, the active citizen and the transformative citizen. The first has rights and obligations but does not participate in the political system. The second votes, while the third moves beyond voting to actualise existing laws and conventions. The transformative citizen, however, takes action to actualise values and moral principles beyond those of conventional authority.

certain politically loaded conception of citizenship; rather, it deliberately allows space for identity groups, including religious groups, to draw on their own traditions and frameworks to give shape to the world alongside other groups. This does not imply a radical return to one clear epistemological system such as, for example, MacIntyre (2007) would wish, but at the same time, it does justice to his call for small communities to practice the virtues and keep their remembrances in the world.

Banks' (2008) transformative citizenship includes what Dronkers (2012) termed 'faithful citizenship', which belongs to a model that he referred to as 'public engagement', a model that honours the 'pivotal role of civic commitment' but also guarantees 'the freedom to have different motivations for their continued allegiance to the civic community' (p. 2) <sup>(5)</sup>. A specifically Christian example of this faithful citizenship could be what Wilson (2010) proposed as *new monasticism*, as based on MacIntyre's (2007) call for a new St. Benedict. In a fragmented world, small 'communities of disciples' should seek to recover 'authentic discipleship' through 'the recovery of wholeness in our understanding of the gospel' (Wilson, 2010, pp. 14–15). In this process, they need to avoid the 'reductionistic temptation' to separate elements of their Christian faith from each other: just a cognitive application of the faith, just an emotional one or just a very practical one. Wilson (2010) learned from MacIntyre (2007) that it is important for Christians to understand the central telos of the goal of their 'integral mission' in the world:

In recovering this telos, the new monasticism will seek to heal the fragmentation of our lives in this culture. Therefore, the new monasticism will not be marked by a division between the secular and the sacred. Rather, it will see the whole of life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ (p. 60).

Small communities or identity groups can help individuals to find meaning and purpose, as well as to contribute to society—and, ultimately, to the whole world—as 'deep citizens' (Clarke, 1998, p. 6). This means that they are 'conscious of acting in and onto a world shared with others' and also 'conscious that the identity of self and the identity of others is co-related and co-creative, while also opening up the possibilities of both engagement in and enchantment with the world' (Clarke, 1998, p. 6). The same conception of citizenship was adopted by Biesta (2009), who warned that other conceptions undermine this kind of deep citizenship. Biesta (2009) was critical of the way in which active

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5 Dronkers (2012) distinguished this model from models of 'moral commitment', 'pious loyalty' and 'national attachment', which leave little space for the freedom of the person or the group.

citizenship is pursued and measured in the EU. It is too focused on socialising its citizens so that they may support the needs of the existing socio-political order. He warned that this approach of individualisation and the domestication of citizenship 'runs the risk of undermining rather than promoting citizenship and civic action' (Biesta, 2009, p. 154).

Although this may seem an indiscriminate accusation, it is supported by the fragmentation thesis. Fragmentation simultaneously occurs on the macro-level of the world, the meso-level of society and the micro-level of the individual person, and it cannot speak of citizenship solely in terms of the individual person (leading to individualisation) or of the existing socio-political order (domestication). The socio-political order may have its rationality, however that is not the only possible rationality of the world<sup>6</sup>. Biesta (2009) pleaded for a citizenship conception that is 'more driven by political and collective than strictly individualistic concerns' and 'more aware of the fact that different interpretations and articulations of the democratic values of liberty and equality point at real alternatives' (p. 152). His conclusion presented a choice and showed a direction for education:

There is, therefore, a real choice for European higher education. It can either become one more socializing agent for the (re)production of the competent active citizen, or it can seek to support modes of political action and civic learning that embody a commitment to a more critical and more political form of European citizenship. (Biesta, 2009, p. 154)

The need for global citizenship is one more argument for thinking of citizenship education as a subjectifying force that invites the student to be a self in the world, to respond to others and to collaborate with people from very different

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6 The way Biesta (2009) phrased this references MacIntyre's (1988) critical question: *Whose justice? Which rationality?*

Citizenship conceptions	Individualistic orientation	Collectivistic orientation
Low diversity acceptance	Unitary	Pillarised
High diversity acceptance	Atomic	Community-based

cultural backgrounds to address the joint challenges of the world (<sup>7</sup>). This critical subjectification assigns no basic preference to one dominant direction, instead inviting all people to help in seeking the right direction (<sup>8</sup>). It is important to emphasise that such an 'invitational model of

citizenship', as I will term it, does not exclude the influences of groups over individuals because it does not seek to sharpen the ongoing atomisation.

To conclude this sub-section, it can be stated that thinking about how one sees citizenship must precede one's citizenship education—as illustrated in the table on this page. If citizenship is nothing less than the art of living together, then citizenship education means inviting students to connect with each other, the community, the society and the world as a whole. Moreover, if global citizenship is to be combined with other civic allegiances (community, society), then the individualistic orientation should be avoided, and when diversity is to be accepted as a matter of fact, then community-based citizenship should enable citizens to combine their individuality with their community, their community with their nation and their national citizenship with their cosmopolitan citizenship. In this way, it should be possible to combine different allegiances within one integral person. This emphasises the need for a well-integrated, holistic approach to both citizenship and citizenship formation.

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7 An example is the perspective-oriented approach developed at the Dutch universities in Leiden and Groningen (Janssen et al., 2019). This approach aims to combine the dominant focus on the curriculum with a focus on the broad personhood formation of students. In curricula and textbooks, questions are mainly treated as clear and simple, singular issues, whereas in today's world, they are mainly unclear, plural issues with lots of complex relationships involved. Educational examples, however, have to reflect the complex reality, as compared by one of the authors of this approach with a swamp (Janssen, 2017). The perspective-oriented approach aims to achieve three goals in education: opening the world for the person, opening the person for the world and opening people for each other. This resembles, albeit a bit more from the perspective of the subject matter, what Biesta (2022) stated about subjectification and personhood formation as world-centred education, or teaching 'not understood as the transmission of knowledge and skills, but as an act of (re-directing) the attention of students to the world, so that they may encounter what the world is asking from them' (p. i).

8 Biesta (2022) referred to the German term 'Aufforderung', an invitation in the strong sense of summoning or encouraging (p. 46).



### 1.2.4 Engaging with subjectivity: A conclusion

On each of the three levels on which the layered problem of fragmentation was described, the term subjectification appeared among the suggested approaches to addressing this fragmentation. On the micro-level of the person, it emerged from the application of Levinas' (1969) philosophy of the importance of otherness; on the meso-level of society, it was related to Nussbaum's (2010) 'education for democracy'; and on the macro-level of the world, it was connected to Biesta's (2022) plea for a more critical form of citizenship education than the current, mainly socialising, approach. However, as the fragmentation thesis presented above is derived from MacIntyre's (2007) and Taylor's (1989) critiques of modernity, a question arises concerning how subjectification as a means to face modernity coheres with their critical treatment of both subjectivity and subjectivism. This sub-section will clarify how a plea for subjectification—'subjectifying education', as Biesta (2022, pp. 49–50) termed it—matches the fragmentation thesis built on the work of both MacIntyre (2007) and Taylor (1989).

Modernity is described as a 'turn to the subject', which indicates 'the emphasis in certain strands of philosophy of the last few centuries on the interior, first-person, or subjective perspective, as opposed to an exterior or third-person perspective' (Spencer, 2016). It is this turn to the subject that preoccupied MacIntyre (2007), as it destroys the 'narrative unity of life' and leads to a fragmentation that begins with moral accounts but immediately impacts social cohesion. When MacIntyre (2007) characterised modern culture as an *emotivist* one, this predicate was interchangeable with *subjectivist*. *Emotivist* accounts are, for MacIntyre (2007, p. 21), *subjectivist* accounts, while *emotivist* analyses of judgment are *subjectivist* analyses of judgment. For Taylor (1989), the modern turn to the subject leads, in the end, to disengaged subjectivity and highly expressivist ideologies of personal fulfilment that 'tend toward emptiness' because 'nothing would count as a fulfilment in a world in which literally nothing was important but self-fulfilment' (p. 507). Taylor (1989) used subjectivity many times in negative connotations such as 'the danger of a regression to subjectivism' (p. 510), 'the subjectivist bias' (p. 513) and 'the slide towards subjectivism in modern culture' (p. 526).

This raises the question of how MacIntyre and Taylor would, from their critical perspective, evaluate the intended approach of subjectification, as suggested by Biesta (2022) and others. To answer this question, it is important to draw a clear distinction between subjectivism and (inter)subjectification. While subjectivism stands for a turn to the subject that can be seen as disengaging, atomising and polarising—and thus causes fragmentation—

subjectification aims to do exactly the opposite: to (re)connect, to heal and to engage. Wiede (2020) showed through a lengthy argument that subjectification is not necessarily intertwined with the 'linear narrative of increasing self-expression and self-regulation' (p. 22) in histories that can be traced it back to the autonomous, self-reflexive subject of Descartes:

New studies in sociology suggest that the most recent processes of subjectification go beyond the emancipated self-realization and economical self-optimisation, but include also ideals of social conformity, submissiveness, obedience, or even the 'comeback of authoritarianism'. (p. 22)

In two articles on subject, subjectivity and subjectivation, Rebughini (2014, 2015) concluded that there is a need to 'rise above a self-referential conceptualization of the modern autonomous subject' of these issues (2015, pp. 3–4). In a time of 'difference and pluralism', there can be no room for the 'monolithic, essentialist, self-referential and Eurocentric vision of the subject' (Rebughini, 2014, p. 9). Rebughini (2014) perceived research in this regard to be going 'in the direction of some sort of "light ontology" of the idea of the subject' (p. 8), in which the subject is conceptualised as 'able to take into account cultural and gender differences' (p. 9) and subjectification is interpreted 'in a relational way' (Rebughini, 2015, p. 4). In the 'struggle against alienation', she perceived a need to strive for 'a reconciliation between the subject and the world', for which she found a strong motivation in Hannah Arendt's (1977) 'love for the world' (Rebughini, 2015, pp. 3–4). Although Rebughini did not use the term subjectification, her desire for a light ontology of the subject seems to intend the same: to reconnect the alienated and atomised individual to society and, ultimately (ontologically), to the world as a whole.

Taking subjectification as a movement that starts on the micro-level of the person, and invites that person to freely respond and connect to others, it can be applied to all levels of social life. It serves as a guiding principle in education to counterbalance the ongoing process of fragmentation. It requires a critical acceptance of both differences and plurality: people will always have widely different life conceptions, opinions, feelings and attitudes. It also leaves space for socialisation, maybe even more space than Biesta (2022) in his critical engagement with socialisation suggested. Good socialisation coheres with subjectification when it helps people (or, in the case of education, students) to form an integral part of their own social groups, to be social within them and to enjoy their meaningful support. Socialisation allows for good social bonds with the group and is helpful on the level of society and even the world when

these group influences motivate people to live peacefully in the broader world. Socialisation only becomes a problem when it undermines subjectification as a person's free response to the needs of others, the whole of society and the world. In a community-based society, there is room for cultural group influences, provided they do not prevent the peaceful coexistence of different groups and their peaceful collaboration for the common good.

In my view, the concept of subjectification includes both personal freedom and the (educational) ideal of the person using that freedom to reach out and connect to others. This idealistic element of subjectification fits and completes the conceptual scheme presented earlier (at the end of 1.2) with an extra column concerning how to respond to the fragmentation problem:

Conceptual scheme of fragmentation...				... and subjectification
<i>Level</i>	<i>Structure</i>	<i>Threat</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Response</i>
Macro: world	Ordered framework	Disintegration	Alienation	Communicating frameworks
Meso: society	Peaceful coexistence	Atomisation	Detachment	Healing civic allegiance(s)
Micro: person	Relational flourishing	Alienation	Atomisation	(Re)connecting persons

### 1.3 ANSWERS FROM CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND PEDAGOGY

In the introduction to this dissertation, I stated the desire to look for an approach to citizenship formation that is both theological and holistic. As a consequence, in the first two sections of this chapter, culminating in the conceptual scheme presented above, I analysed the challenges of personal and societal fragmentation with regard to such an approach. Given the need for subjectification on each of the three indicated levels (macro, meso and micro) as a correction, an integrating and, therefore, holistic approach emerged in a natural way from the statement of the problem. However, up to this point, the approach that fits the layered problem of fragmentation was only holistic in the sense that it calls for the recovery of horizontal relationships. In the introduction, I argued the necessity of the theological angle, referring to the vertical relationship with God as the Creator, with faith as the deepest motivation and with the deliberate inclusion of the spiritual dimension. This third section searches for theological notions or elements that correspond to the subjectifying responses involving (re)connecting persons (on the micro-level), healing civic allegiances (on the meso-level) and communicating frameworks (on the macro-level).

I do not intend to be complete in this section. There may be aspects that I will not mention, and there are other authors to quote on the same topics. Undoubtedly, more can be said on each of the topics I consider. The point is nothing more than to explore the theological side of the conceptual scheme. As the whole chapter includes criticism of modern Western culture, I opt for authors who represent an intercultural perspective. On the ground level of the person, this has led me to the Eastern-Orthodox metropolitan John Zizioulas (2021, 2023) and his radical personhood theology (3.1). Looking for an approach related to the paradox of citizenship, I engage with Gordon M. Zerbe (2012), professor emeritus at the Canadian Mennonite University, and his analysis of the overarching impact of heavenly citizenship within Pauline theology (3.2). Then, to deal with the lack of a joint framework or conception of the cosmic order, as Taylor (1989) employed the term, I focus on the contributions made by the missiologist and pedagogue Geoff Beech (2019, 2021, 2022) to the debate concerning Western dominance in the global debate on epistemology with his proposal for a relational epistemology (3.3). In so doing, I lightly touch upon each of the levels of fragmentation, adding the vertical dimension to the horizontal ones already included in the analysis and its conceptual framework.

### **1.3.1 Re-connecting the person: Zizioulas**

Modern Western thinking on and approaches to the person bear the hallmarks of individualism, sometimes even hyper-individualism or atomisation, and its immediate consequence of alienation. Protestantism, in its Lutheran, Calvinistic and Evangelic forms, is historically intertwined with this. In fact, the notion that not even medieval Catholicism was free of it represented a lifetime's argument for Greek-Orthodox Bishop John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon from 1986 until his death in 2023. Through appointments at New College in Edinburgh (1970), the University of Glasgow (1973) and King's College London, he occupied an intermediate position between Eastern and Western theology, criticising the latter for its focus on the individual and the individuality of the person. In contrast, Zizioulas (2021, 2023) offered his radical personhood theology, which suggests a historical application of what it means to be a person that, in and of itself, needs to be clearly distinguished from the notion of individuality.

Zizioulas (2021) criticised Western theological anthropology for its substantialist approach. Due to its connection with Greek (especially Aristotelian) philosophy, its definition of human nature and even of the person started to change. The idea of *nature* found in Western theology attached to 'objectified substance' (Zizioulas, 2021, p. 9), with its own qualities and

potencies, its own uniqueness and independency<sup>9</sup>). This led to the concept of *man* as an autonomous self, as founded on two basic components: rational individuality and psychological experience and consciousness. Through its definition of person and personhood, Western theology built its approach on the Greek word for person—*hypostasis*—which originally meant substance. As Zizioulas (2021) argued, this involved taking a just part (substance) instead of the whole (person)—an error that he traced back to the 4th century. Before that time, discussion of a person and personhood meant not only *hypostasis* but also *ek-stasis*, which implies ‘openness of being’ and ‘movement towards communion’ (Zizioulas, 2021, p. 14).

A Biblical account of the person, stated Zizioulas (2021), does not understand man’s personhood in terms of personality—of the complex natural, psychological or moral qualities possessed or contained in the human *individuum*. Being a person is ‘basically different from being an individual or personality in that the person cannot be conceived in itself as a static entity, but only as it relates to’ (Zizioulas, 2021, p. 14). In other words, there cannot be true personhood without a relationship, without the person answering to others, without standing in a relationship with other beings. The human *hypostasis* is not an independent substance; rather, it bears its *ek-stasis*, which means that the person is in fundamental need of others and, in the end, of relatedness with the whole of creation. For Zizioulas (2021), there is no individual personality, only ‘corporate personality’ (p. 53). Personal autonomy in the sense of individualistic independence is not possible, and the very idea can be damaging for the person. Personhood in a Biblical sense is directly related to ontology: ‘It is not in its “self-existence” but in communion that this being is itself and thus is at all’ (Zizioulas, 2021, p. 15).

Ontological identity, as Zizioulas (2021) claimed, is not to be found in every substance or bodily individual, ‘only in a being which is free from the boundaries of the self’ (p. 15). The reason for this is that these boundaries render the self subject to ‘individualization, comprehension, combination, definition, description and use’ (Zizioulas, 2021, p. 15). The *imago Dei*, which was both preserved and destroyed in Adam’s fall, continually distinguishes humans from animals. It fills their teleology: they are in the world to be the priests of creation (Skira, 20003; Zizioulas, 2023), trying to reconcile others and, finally, the whole of creation with God. This is so closely related to human personhood itself that Zizioulas (2021) stated personhood to be in this world but not of this world. Of the utmost importance is the restoration of the relation, communion

9 Similar criticism of the Western concept of substance has been voiced from Reformation philosophy, see Kuiper (2009) following Dooyeweerd (1967).

or *ek-stasis* with God and 'what is outside creation'; otherwise, nature will not be united and instead sink deeper into 'fragmentation of nature and hence (...) an individualization of beings: each being acquires its identity not through the hypostatic differentiation which emerges from communion, but through its affirmation in contrast and opposition to the other beings' (Zizioulas, 2021, p. 29).

In this case, everywhere in the world, 'difference becomes division and person becomes individual, that is, an entity affirmed by way of contrast to rather than of communion with other entities' (p. 29). This is why Zizioulas (2021) reached the same qualification of modern Western culture as MacIntyre (2007), albeit tracing the problem back to the fall as its central reason: 'Fragmentation and individualization is the price that nature pays for man's introversion. It is also the very basis of death' (p. 29). Once again, Zizioulas (2021) made the connection with personhood: 'Man, by his fall, chooses to sacrifice his personhood by individualizing his existence in the manner of the division and fragmentation of thinghood' (p. 32). Man is restored through faith in Christ, stated Zizioulas (2021), but without losing his connection to the rest of creation. 'Juxtaposing a priori the world to God goes against the very heart of Christology, since Christ realizes the unity of God and the world, through man, in communion' (Zizioulas, 2021, p. 50) <sup>(10)</sup>.

As indicated above, this sub-section does not intend to provide a full description of Zizioulas' (2021, 2023) theological anthropology. The related conclusion for this study, however, can be that fragmentation is immediately connected to both the interpersonal (disrupted *ex-stasis* or communion) and the intrapersonal (a disoriented *hypostasis* or confused personhood). This implies that fragmentation on the level of the person needs to be addressed, from a Biblical perspective, with an approach that does justice to the fundamental intersubjectivity of the human person and that is, at the same time, extremely cautious with individualising tendencies. Zizioulas' (2021) description of the

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10 In 2022, the International Network for Christian Higher Education finally held its repeatedly postponed (due to COVID-19) conference on 'Building Communities in Fractured Societies'. Fractured, as a predicate, is almost synonymous with fragmented, although the consequences of fracturing are less destructive than those of fragmentation. At this conference, Govert Buijs, who represented the Vrije Universiteit (Amsterdam), argued for a 'weak, transforming Christian presence' in society, motivated by 'agapeic love' as a 'concrete commitment to the flourishing of others'. Moreover, Claudia DeVries-Beverluis called for Christian schools to think of healing as a core mission of Christian education. To consider the present world as fragmented paves the way to think through this healing, agapeic presence.

person and personhood present a clear warning not to underestimate the forces of alienation and atomisation in modern Western society. This warning concerns the intertwining both of Western theology with individualism and of Protestant religion with modernity. Biblical theology should identify the self as important, while recognising it to be in constant need of others (intersubjectivity). The human person can only flourish in communion. This communion pertains to the triune God, the neighbour, others and the whole of nature in the created world. A Christian vision of connecting or reconnecting the person recognises the deep bond of destiny between what we call the individual, the society and the world.

### 1.3.2 Healing communities: Zerbe

To (re)connect people with others entails encouraging them to show meaningful civic allegiances. Yet, as we have seen in Sub-Section 1.2.4, these allegiances can rapidly become contradictory towards each other. To be a member of a religious community means automatically distinguishing oneself from other communities or communities based on other religious convictions. Similarly, national citizenship in the form of a strong sense of belonging to a certain nation-state can easily become competitive with regard to global citizenship in the form of a sense of belonging to the global world, which has its global problems to solve. This ‘paradox of citizenship’ (Clarkson, 2014) can only be addressed in a society with a collectivistic orientation and a high degree of acceptance of diversity. In such a community-based society, there is room for different social groups and (cultural, ethnic and religious) group influences over the person, although a crucial loyalty to the common good on the part of the groups should be expected.

The Mennonite theologian Gordon M. Zerbe (2012) addressed this challenge from a Biblical perspective by investigating the citizenship notion of the Apostle Paul. According to Philippians 3:20, Christians have their citizenship (*politeuma*) ‘in heaven’. With this affirmation, the Apostle Paul seemed to place his readers in the suspense of a double civic allegiance: on the one hand, they belong by faith to Christ as their *Kurios*, while on the other hand, they remain part of their own communities in the world. A closer look at the letter to the Philippians, however, reveals the centrality of heavenly citizenship. Paul referred to the heavenly *politeuma* to motivate his readers to take their daily duties towards their worldly societies seriously, as in the case of Philippi. One could say that he connected the macro-level of the world with the meso-level of the society. It is even possible to identify a meta-level here: a level that surpasses the present world and includes the world to come—that is, the coming Kingdom. As Zerbe (2012) summarised:

Paul's eschatological ecclesiology means that a messianic citizen is by consequence a global citizen, not just in the resistance to any current national sovereignty, but also in the hope that messianic sovereignty may be actualized globally, animating loyalty among all humanity and reconciling all creation. (p. 120)

Zerbe (2012) perceived the messianic citizen in the same way as Church Father Augustine perceived the church: as a network of citizens that form an inspiring polis or city in the world, which is not in any way dangerous or threatening to peaceful coexistence in the world. As Augustine sketched in his famous *De Civitate Dei*, on the one hand, there is the city of man, which is formed by the love of the self (*amor sui*) that is widespread in the world. On the other hand, due to God's grace, there is the city of God, present within the city of man but shaped by the love of God (*amor Dei*), which produces a serving, spiritual city within the larger city of man. This city of God has a cosmopolitan scope: it is meant to fill the whole Earth. The city of God can and will be a suffering entity in the contemporary world, although faith and hope imply that God will not permit the city of man to exterminate His own city, which will prevail by the Second Coming of Christ. Investigating Augustine's explanation of the city of God, Pieper (2021) concluded that it clearly favours cosmopolitan ideals over political egoism.

Zerbe (2012) argued the same with regard to Paul's eschatological ecclesiology. The Christian *politeuma* that is central to it provides a strong motivation for a global allegiance in the life of the Christian. This allegiance extends much further than ecclesial discipleship. Where *discipleship* may be 'easily susceptible to an individualist interpretation or practice', Zerbe (2012) posited that *citizenship* 'not only conjures up the crucial element of personal loyalty and practice, but also that of a social and global-ecological vision, formation and identity' (pp. 2–3). To demonstrate how this notion functions as a 'vital framework for understanding Paul's apostolic letters', Zerbe (2012) chose to translate *faith* as *loyalty*. The reason for this is that *pistis* and *pisteuein*, in their original sense, not only denote conviction in the sense of considering something to be true but also loyalty and fidelity—a view recently corroborated by Sierksma-Agteres (2023). 'In Paul's theology conviction, trust and loyalty are integral—that is, both central and interrelated. They cohere not only linguistically in the one word *pistis* (...), but they also cohere when we consider Paul's overall theological expression' (Zerbe, 2012, p. 26).

Thus, the idea of Christians having their *politeuma* in heaven means that they are, first and foremost, loyal to God; however, as creation and mankind are in the Biblical-Christian conception fully His, and as His commandments



urge Christians to love Him and what is His, Christians live their lives as loyal citizens (Zerbe, 2012). Zerbe's explanation of faith as loyalty, the close relation between discipleship and citizenship, as well as the *politeuma* of a worldwide messianic kingdom that motivates Christians to live as faithful citizens, are all informed by his own biography. Holding both Canadian and the US citizenship, Zerbe knew the true meaning of a double civic allegiance. Meditating as a Christian on this double earthly citizenship, he concluded:

My ultimate allegiance goes to the great mother Jerusalem above, not to the great mother Queen of an earthly empire. My "truest allegiance" was declared in oath at the moment of my baptism into Christ, the Christian citizenship ceremony. And it is for this reason that balancing my two earthly citizenships is an insignificant matter, because of my primary commitment to Christ's world-reconciling regime. (And note that, by contrast, no modern state sovereignty is interested in having its subjects or citizens making oaths to a global citizenship—whether construed theologically, politically or ecologically—that trumps narrow state or national interests. But the imperative for such a globally oriented citizenship—what the Stoics called cosmopolitanism—is becoming increasingly critical.) (Zerbe, 2012, p. 2)

Zerbe's personal example shows how a Christian approach to citizenship in a globalised world, with numerous interconnected societies and the respective allegiances, could work. Different civic or social group allegiances should be sound for individual citizens, providing them with security and a sense of belonging, but also for the larger whole. National citizenship should not compete with international or even global citizenship. Within the realm of society, different social groups should intend to live together peacefully and resolve joint problems. Within the wider world, nations should help each other to solve worldwide problems. Where Hannah Arendt (1977) proposed the concept of *amor mundi*, Christianity holds an even more cosmopolitan motivation. The Christian *politeuma* can inform and foster both the public and civic allegiances of Christians in the world. The *amor Dei* that composes God's spiritual Kingdom in the world can lead to *amor mundi* in the good, Biblical and spiritual sense of the term.

### 1.3.3 Communicating frameworks: Beech

If a Biblical approach to the person serves to (re)connect the person to others, and if the Biblical concept of *politeuma* helps communities to serve the needs of multiple civic allegiances, there still remains the problem of deep fragmentation over the frameworks, the basic life conceptions and the (lack of) a supporting 'cosmic order', as Taylor (1989) phrased it. If *hearts* are

inclined to live together and *hands* to work to make this possible, the problem of widely different truth conceptions can still cause a fundamental short circuit in *heads*. For the modernist, truth should be known through positivistic science, a process that, ultimately, leaves no room for directional diversity and only allows for temporal uncertainty. For the post-modernist, there simply remains no space for meta-narratives, as Lyotard (1984) observed. This leads to the question of how truth should be handled in a modern, fragmented society, if not every single individual has to have his or her own.

This question is an epistemological one. Both MacIntyre (2007) and Taylor (1989) referred to it: MacIntyre (2007) in his plea for the classical Aristotelian account of the virtues and Taylor (1989) in his retrieval of moral sources for actual debates. In a modern, fragmented society, people differ fundamentally in their reactions to basic questions such as the following: What is the meaning of life? When does life start? Where does morality come from? What is death, manhood, femininity, marriage, et cetera? For Christians, this raises the question of how to handle revealed truth in a context of secularisation, which prompted Greene (1998) to note that 'there are few things that the church needs as badly as a new epistemology' (p. 116). Responding to Greene's (1998) plea, the Australian missiologist and educationalist Geoff Beech (2021) put forward a Christian theory of knowledge that he described as a relational epistemology. It is an epistemology that does justice to both revealed truth and partial knowing among believers.

As in the cases of Zizioulas and Zerbe, Beech's intercultural biography also matters. As a missionary in Bolivia, he discovered how deeply he was influenced by Western thinking about knowledge and truth, whereas the people he lived and worked with adhered to other cultural values and visions. Describing Bolivia as 'a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and (...) a pluri-lingual country' (p. 10), Beech (2019) noted that 'the religious context of the people of Bolivia, including their beliefs, worldview suppositions, and understanding of truth and knowledge, relate to a particular epistemology' (p. 20), an epistemology that he characterised as more holistic and relational. This discovery motivated Beech (2019) to criticise the dominance of Western epistemology in science and education.

Beech (2021) also fully subscribed to Greene's (1998) view that Christian thinking in the West has become too closely related to the principles of modernism due to its sheer faith in the Western scientific method. 'The downside of this relationship is that the doctrine of knowledge present among many Western Christians is much more influenced by rationalism and empiricism than by a Biblical view of truth' (Beech & Beech, 2019, p. 134). Secularist systems of education promote 'an unhealthy scepticism and deny the existence of the so-called, supernatural or at the very least of the interaction of the supernatural

with the physical' (Beech & Beech, 2019, p. 38). Christians should return to Calvin's notion of the *sensus divinitatis*, which underlines how the presence of God, although it cannot be empirically proven, can be felt or detected. This would include a return to the Augustinian notion that God can be sensed in nature as it surrounds mankind. With insistence, Beech & Beech (2019) referred to Bible passages such as Romans 1:21, 1 Corinthians 1 and Colossians 1, with the latter claiming Christ to be the Lord of all things, 'and that includes all truth' (p. 28).

When dealing with ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, according to Beech (2021), there is no need to give up faithfulness, nor to impose one's truth on others. Biblical knowing is not 'an attempt to construct science on fully objective, empirical knowledge, believing that the human mind can discover fully the facts and universal laws of nature by means of totally objective observations' (Beech, 2021, p. 119). Instead, it is knowing in a sense that the English language does not convey as adequately as Spanish or French, where *saber/savoir* is distinguished from *conocer/connaître*: 'knowing more intimately or personally', based on a relationship that includes loving (Beech, 2021, p. 123, 2019, p. 22). This kind of knowing, based on faith in Christ's Lordship over all things, 'includes what we know, how we know it, and what we do with it', and it also includes 'from whom we know it and when we know it' (Beech, 2021, p. 120). More than that, it 'involves a large set of relationship connections. One may know a fact but to *understand* it is to place it within its relational network' (Beech, 2021, p. 120). Being related to this truth does not mean that Christians do hold knowledge or truth in themselves, as a form of possessing it. They still live in a world that suffers from communication problems:

The Creation is so complex we are still struggling to understand it; the Scriptures can be very confusing in places and contain apparent contradictions; Jesus's teaching, rather than being straight forward and logical, as we understand logical, used metaphors and illustrative stories that in many cases left listeners puzzled; the Holy Spirit's voice can be very difficult to detect amidst the cacophony of competing voices. (Beech & Beech, 2019, p. 36)

The knowing of Christians obtains its form through interaction with others. Beech (2021, p. 122) referred at this point to Dewey's existential matrix (Dewey, 1938), which involved individuals relating to the elements of the environment and to each other. Beech however added that, from a Biblical perspective, this matrix includes 'the relationship God has with all the elements in the diagram' (Beech, 2021, p. 122). It actually starts from God and His Spirit of Truth (John 14:17). It is the Spirit of Christ that guides believers into *aletheia*, a Greek word

that is also present in Greek mythology. Before reincarnation, the spirits of the dead drink from the River Lethe to forget. What God's Holy Spirit does is to make people un-forget: *aletheia* means 'to un-hide, dis-cover, re-mind, re-member (as opposed to dis-member), re-call, re-veal (from unveil), dis-close, and real-ize (make real), truth' (Beech & Beech, 2019, p. 40). In the process of un-hiding, a term Beech & Beech (2019) borrowed particularly from Heidegger, believers do not possess the whole amount but learn on an everyday basis from their Lord and Creator through the relations they have with others, nature and Scripture.

This is what Beech & Beech (2019) termed a relational epistemology. In this proposal, they showed themselves to be followers of Dooyeweerd's (1935/1969) reformational philosophy, to which he added the specific intercultural approach that proceeds from his own, missionary biography. Beech's relational epistemology is 'an understanding of knowledge that is integrated, holistic and dependent on the network of relationships that exist' (Beech, 2021, p. 122; Beech & Beech, 2019, p. 133). Christian knowing, in its essence, proceeds from a personal knowledge of Christ who is the truth (John 14:6). It 'resembles a return to an Augustinian, neo-platonist, triadic structure where there is a recognition that there exists a reality that is distinct from the individual-object physical reality (c.f., Plato's forms)' (Beech & Beech, 2019, p. 20). It also resembles Martin Buber's comment that 'it is in the between that spans subjectivity and objectivity that truth is found' (as cited in Beech & Beech, 2019, p. 20), Lewis' idea of *Tao* (1943) and Dooyeweerd's (1969) idea of an absolute origin:

The epistemic encounter we might have with an object is seen to involve the full connectedness of that object: with the knower, with other knowers, with the rest of the created order and with an acknowledged Creator. Cross-culturally, the ontological source, or perceived Creator, in this sense refers to an individual's or to a culture's perceptions of origins of being. (Beech & Beech, 2019, p. 21)

Beech's (2021) relational epistemology is, like its reformational philosophy background, a faith-based epistemology that springs from a fundamental difference between God and man: 'God does not have theories about anything: He already knows' (p. 134). It fundamentally accepts that 'there exists an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, "supernatural" Being who is the source of all truth'; that God created, in His image, perceiving, sentient and reasoning human beings to whom He reveals truth continuously through 'a. His acts (in the experienced Creation and redemption), b. His person (in the accounts of Jesus and the work of His Holy Spirit), c. His inspired Word (the Bible)'; and that 'all knowledge is relational and the knowledge of greatest value is personal knowledge

(God-person, person-God, person-person)' (Beech, 2019, p. 135). Beech & Beech (2019) mentioned four building blocks for constructing knowledge on this basis. First, it is important to recognise knowledge's extents and limits—in the way the Book of Job teaches. Second, it is necessary to understand epistemological foundations from Scripture—that is, to work on good *exegesis* and avoid *eisegesis*. Third, one needs to acknowledge the Great Divide and recognise the reality of cognitive dissonance and the impact of human emotions over thinking processes. Finally, it is necessary to avoid justified false belief (Beech & Beech, 2019, pp. 135–139).

The relational epistemology that Beech (2021) proposed can help in achieving a more humble handling of truth, which, on its turn, fosters intersubjectivity. We only know very partially, and our partial knowledge is still highly influenced by our culture. To consider truth as a divine Person means to set aside the felt need to defend it to or impose it on others. It opens up a way to listen to other cultural, ethnic and even religious perspectives, to learn more. In this manner, a relational epistemology can inform and help Christians to hold onto their own framework of reality and to find a deep motivation in it to live faithfully together with people who do not share their basic conceptions of life, the creational and moral orders, and all sorts of other potentially deeply divisive topics. A relational epistemology provides for a humble reliance on the living Truth that can and will stand up for itself. It cannot undo fragmentation, but it is helpful in bringing people with different frameworks into communication with each other and—thereby—diminishing the strong trend of disintegration of the frameworks.

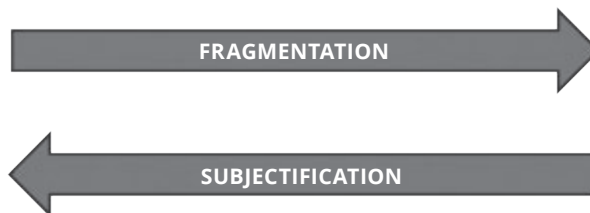
After adding Beech's (2021) relational epistemology, Zerbe's (2012) plea for *politeuma* and Zizioulas' (2021, 2023) radical personhood theology to the conceptual scheme, a clearer idea of a possible Christian response becomes visible:

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**Conceptual scheme of fragmentation and subjectification**

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<i>Level</i>	<i>Structure</i>	<i>Threat-Outcome</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Direction to take</i>
Macro: world	Ordered framework	Disintegration-alienation	Communicating frameworks	Relational epistemology
Meso: society	Peaceful coexistence	Atomisation-detachment	Healing civic allegiances	Heavenly politeuma
Micro: person	Relational flourishing	Alienation-atomisation	(Re)connecting persons	Personhood as communion



## 1.4 CONCLUSION

As a result of this chapter, the conceptual scheme is complete for now. It represents the main findings concerning the challenges of fragmentation for citizenship formation. It describes the modern world and society, based on the significant overlaps in the fundamental modernity critiques offered by MacIntyre (2007) and Taylor (1989), as deeply fragmented, while the art of living together is challenged by a stratified problem that cannot be addressed on just the micro-level of the person, the meso-level of the society or the macro-level of the world. Addressing fragmentation as a deep and layered problem means that an integrative citizenship approach is necessary, which affects all three levels and responds to the social forces of disintegration, alienation, atomisation and detachment that can be perceived on each level. The original situation of coherence is shattered: on the macro-level, there is no agreement on reality as an ordered framework, which leads to a lack of purpose; on the meso-level, there is no stable situation of peaceful coexistence, which leads to a lack of social cohesion; and on the micro-level, hyper-individualism poses a constant threat to personal flourishing in relationships, which leads to a lack of a sense of belonging.

The rapidly increasing ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in nearly all Western countries cannot be seen as the first cause of the problem of fragmentation, which is—as described above—sin. Nevertheless, it most certainly serves as an accelerant of it. This conclusion means that not much can be expected from existing policies intended to foster social cohesion through simply the teaching of active citizenship, global citizenship, 21st century skills, sustainable development goals, et cetera. A complicating factor is that schools, and even education itself, form part of the fragmentation problem, because they have, over time, adopted a functionality that bears the traits of their context of fragmentation. To really address the widespread phenomenon of fragmentation, schools should rediscover their classical function and education should aim more at facilitating the art of living and working together than at efficiency and profitability. In the meantime, Protestant Christian education should be very aware of its interconnectedness with modernism, which clouds thinking about possible responses to the indicated challenges.

An important finding of this chapter is that, on each level of fragmentation, subjectification can provide direction for possible, integrative educational responses. Subjectification should be distinguished from qualification and socialisation in the sense that it helps to be a self in a fragmented world. It invites students to seek communion (intersubjectivity) with others and to respond freely and responsibly to the needs of others. It corrects modernity's

excessive focus on the subject by encouraging the person to be subject to others and to the common good. It goes hand in hand with socialisation, although socialising forces can also pose a risk for it. Amid high diversity and complexity, it is necessary that the student becomes a self that knows what it stands for and why it reaches out to others or involves itself with the common good. To rely heavily on socialisation as uncritical assimilation into the wider social group poses a threat to the necessary subjectification.

On the level of the person, the need for subjectification entails (re) connecting persons to both themselves and others, which theologically implies a focus on personhood as communion. On the level of the society, it involves creating room for social and identity groups, even when they exert influence over the individual person, but always requiring them to be subject to peaceful coexistence and the common good of, for example, global citizenship. A strong Biblical motivation to do so is the Apostle Paul's concept of heavenly *politeuma* which can be applied well in a community-based society. On the level of the world, subjectification means that people who differ widely in their life convictions—and possibly even disagree on the very existence of a cosmic order—keep connecting to each other in the meaningful sense of intersubjectivity. A Biblical way to do so can be found in a relational epistemology, which holds that it is helpful to rely on revealed truth without feeling the need to possess or impose it to others. These Biblically holistic elements help to give cohesion to citizenship education as the art of creating social cohesion by inviting students to connect with each other (within the school), their communities, society as a whole and the world as the whole of God's creation.





# Chapter 2

## Whole Child Development as a (W)Holistic Response

'And so we may venture to assert that anyone who can produce the perfect blend of the physical and intellectual sides of education and apply them to the training of character, is producing music and harmony of far more importance than any mere musician tuning strings.'

*Plato, The Republic, book 3, part 3, p. 117*

'My final word on holism in education, therefore, is to suggest that educators might consider their deep work as taking care of the health of their student's souls, even as they focus on learning and knowledge.'

*Thomas Moore, in: International Handbook of Holistic Education, 2019, p. 56*

This chapter investigates a concrete proposal for a holistic approach applied to education. This approach emerged since 2005, first in the United States, but soon as a worldwide movement that can be captured under the title of WCD. This movement can be considered the reaction that was to be expected—and was actually predicted by the American scholar John I. Goodlad (1979), as argued in Chapter 1.2.2—from educational practitioners all around the globe but especially in the West. Their joint experience was that it made no sense that, in a time of rapid cultural change, schools were assigned a series of new tasks without a fundamental re-evaluation of their functionality in the new sociocultural reality of high diversity and high complexity. This chapter’s central aim is to describe the WCD movement historically—which not has been done before (!)—and to understand its historical situatedness and holistic nature. This must be accomplished to be able to draw lessons concerning the central research question:

*How can a holistic approach to education reinforce Christian citizenship formation in the context of a modern, fragmented society?*

I will first elaborate briefly on the problem of reductionism in education, which was mentioned in the previous chapter in relation to fragmentation (Section 1). In the three sections that follow, I will take some necessary steps towards understanding WCD as a response to the challenges of both reductionism and fragmentation. The first step is a historical description of *holism* as it emerged in the 20th century (Section 2); the second is a description of whole child education (WCE) as a wholistic approach (Section 3); and the third step shows how holism and WCE over time merged into WCD (Section 4). These lines of reasoning come together in Section 5, which presents a conceptual framework for WCD, as prepared by the overarching research consortium into WCD that operated in the Netherlands from 2020–2024 (Section 5). The chapter will end with a brief conclusion that paves the way for what I want to do next (in Chapter 3)—namely, to evaluate WCD from the perspective of Christian anthropology.

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1 This chapter was initially written in association with the overarching WCD research consortium consisting of Hogeschool Leiden, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, Hogeschool Windesheim and DCU. It was published in Dutch on the website of the project leader, NIVOZ Foundation (van Olst, 2021).

## 2.1 REDUCTIONISM IN EDUCATION

The Western school and education system has become a leading force in the globalised world of the 21st century. Western education is respected for the good results it produces, noting that these are primarily technical, cognitively defined results. Indeed, its central focus is on measurable outcomes, and its core belief is that these outcomes can be controlled via proper insight into the process and management of its components (Bulterman & de Muynck, 2014). Given all this, the Western school system and education breathe the atmosphere of Western culture more generally. Images of school classes are often reminiscent of the factory environment that was the fruit of the Industrial Revolution, with students being tightly lined up as if the intention was to assign them an economically defined added value on the assembly line. 'It's not values anymore, but value that counts', criticised Geurts (2012), who perceived commercialisation and technologisation as dynamics that 'pushed the schools towards the factory'. In fact, what is considered valuable displays the traits of Western rationalism (Zhao-hua, 2006).

Rationalism is a philosophical movement that places reason at its centre as the source of certain knowledge, ignoring revelation, tradition and experience as other sources of knowledge. In Western culture in particular, this approach has gradually gained ground. The driving forces behind this development were medieval scholasticism, the Cartesian revolution immediately following the Middle Ages and the interweaving of rationalism and empiricism during the 18th century Enlightenment. Scholasticism, wherein answers to metaphysical questions were sought through scientific analysis of sources, would become decisive for the Western school system and the associated subject classification, while the Cartesian revolution introduced an inevitable connection between rationalism, individualism ('Cogito ergo sum') and dualism (separation between thought and extension). The Enlightenment connected this to empirical science through an adage that became definitional for European and North American thinking: 'Trust only your own eyes and reason'.

Moreover, what the Western school and education system has become big on—in short—is analysis (Mazzocchi, 2006). Analysis is the decomposition of objects into their constituent elements to understand and put them into words. For example, medieval scholastics had the ambition of arriving at scientific proof of the existence of God through argumentative dissection (e.g. Anselm of Canterbury's ontological proof of God). René Descartes worked on the critical dissection of certain knowledge, for which he closely applied his methodical doubt. Modern logical and empirical science has long been based on deductive

reasoning and, preferably, quantitative data to support theories that cannot be further reduced to alternative causal relationships.

Analysis requires a cool mind. Objectivity is the norm in the search for certain knowledge via substantiating theories. Subjectivity, feeling, intuition and spontaneous, less considered actions or deeds sometimes are considered to pose a direct threat to analysis. Through as many objectified standards as possible, reality can be controlled and directed. In this realistic approach, the urge to control and the ideal of social engineering are lurking, and an early protest against it was formulated by the French sociologist Bourdieu (1977). In medical science, diseases are eliminated to as great an extent as possible; in cultural science, the focus is on problem-free coexistence; and in education, progress can be measured on the basis of standardised results. Governments and supervisory bodies monitor what is happening and make adjustments where necessary. Martens et al. (2020) described this tendency, especially since the early 1970s, as the belief in the manufacturability of reality and the resulting need for control.

This kind of exercising of control over systems and situations, which is based on clear and cool-minded analysis, follows a reductionistic pattern. Hossenfelder (2020) presented reductionism as the hypothesis that the properties of the constituents of a system determine how that system works. As a consequence, the system can be controlled through a clear understanding of its constituent parts. Hossenfelder (2020) did not hesitate to claim that the reductionistic hypothesis has always proven to be true. She perceived the entire history of science as its success story.

In the field of education, reductionism shows itself in the high level of attention paid to measurable outcomes and the mechanistic view of schools and the curriculum. Standaert (2014) criticised the fondness for standardised testing, the early selection of students and the tendency to rank schools by results. Schools are focused on the added value they provide to students, and they define this value predominantly in cognitive terms. Much broader personhood formation sometimes lacks attention due to being less measurable. Hard analytic data are perceived as more tacit and important than soft approaches that are associated with respect and mystery, or even a combination of the two. Relatively little room is left for emergence: the idea that what spontaneously comes into being through classroom interaction should be seized with pedagogical tact.

The problem with reductionism is that paying stringent attention to the constituents can easily lead to the failure to perceive the whole of the (eco)system of the organism. Stafford and Combs (1967) and Wrigley (2019)

all criticised Western education for being too reductionistic and, therefore, lacking an eye for the whole and the more organic approach that this whole requires. Reductionism may present itself in different ways, stated Wrigley (2019), but ‘generally signifies a loss of complexity which hinders an adequate understanding of reality’ (p. 146). He argued for ‘the need to attend to openness, stratification and emergence’, which for formal education means not just focusing on scores but also reckoning with:

multiple nested and interlocking systems (the individual learner, groups, classrooms, the accountability machine) and various forms of interaction and interface (teacher–pupil, teacher–management, school–parents). Learners are pulled between school world and lifeworld—particularly challenging if there is a distance between school and community cultures. Even a solo act of learning involves interaction between subject and object, mediated by various instruments and cultural tools, in a dance involving backwards and forwards motion between abstract concepts and sensory experience. And this is not even to begin considering social, economic and cultural power differences of the politics of the curriculum. (Wrigley, 2019, p. 160)

What this quotation clarifies is that the bigger whole of the complex context matters. Reduction may be necessary for a good analysis, but what must not to be overlooked is the subsequent need for synthesis. ‘Western science favours analytical and reductionist methods as opposed to the more intuitive and holistic view often found in traditional knowledge’, summarised Mazzocchi (2006, p. 464). Beech (2022) even denounced Western science for committing ‘epistemicide’, meaning the imposition of a strongly rationalised scientific method over the worldwide scientific debate, declaring other forms of wisdom and reasoning unjustly out of order. The conclusion for this study can be that reductionism may function as a useful instrument in all scientific endeavours, although it always needs proper correction to not lose sight of the bigger wholes of organisms and of subjects in their wider contexts. Good analysis requires good synthesis (2).

## 2.2 HOLISM AS A BROAD REACTION TO REDUCTIONISM

A particular focus on (both natural and social) ecosystems can be found in *holism*. Holism is a concept introduced in 1926 by South African statesman, military leader and philosopher Jan Christian Smuts (1870–1950), in his work

2 The main part of this section, from the first to the penultimate paragraph, was previously published as part of a peer-reviewed article (van Olst, 2023a).

*Holism and Evolution.* Etymologically, he derives it from the Greek word *holos* (ὅλος), which means whole, entire or complete. Purposefully, he coins the term to counterbalance the post-Enlightenment focus within the natural sciences on the analytical nature of matter. Smuts (1926) disliked the mechanistic approach, concept and interpretation of nature (pp. 16, 56, 87, 89, 101, 103, 142, 145, etc.), and he criticised the ‘hard and narrow concept of causation’ that arose as a dogma from 19th century science (p. 17). As a diagnosis of this one-sidedness, Smuts (1926) stated that, in his view, there had been an erroneous divorce between philosophy and science:

The result of this divorce is lamentable in the extreme. For science, divorced from the viewpoints and principles which philosophy embraces, structure becomes merely mechanism. For philosophy, divorced from the actual concrete structural facts which science studies, the general principles remain in the air, and never generate this specific concrete sensible world which is there to explain and understand. (p. 91)

Smuts (1926) was very impressed with the new perspectives offered by Darwin's theory of evolution and Einstein's theory of relativity, although he lamented that despite these ‘great advances which have been made in knowledge (...), matter, life and mind still remain utterly disparate phenomena’ (p. 1). He introduced his holism concept as a fundamental creative principle, wherein the understanding of the existence and functionality of ‘wholes’ is crucial to understanding the universe. Explicitly, he argued for a synthetic approach to correct the analytical one (Smuts, 1926, pp. 86, 105–107, 118–119, 125, 129, etc.).

Smuts (1926) concentrated on wholes not only in biology but everywhere in the universe, even in international politics, where he became one of the initiators of the League of Nations, the first international organisation with truly global pretentions (Kochanek, 2013). He went as far as to tie his definition of holism to the concept of personality, stating that he had gradually come to realise that personality is ‘only a special case of a much more universal phenomenon, namely, the existence of wholes and the tendency towards wholes and wholeness in nature’ (Smuts, 1926, p. vi). After having described the mind as an organ of wholes (<sup>3</sup>), Smuts (1926) treated personality as ‘the latest and supreme whole which has arisen in the holistic series of Evolution’

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3 Smuts explained: ‘For Mind is much more elusive and penetrative than life and still more so than matter. Its “field” covers and penetrates the “fields” of matter and life in a way which makes the tracing of hard-and-fast boundaries very difficult, if not practically impossible. It seems to impinge in all directions on areas already apparently securely held by the other departments of natural and biological science’. (pp. 223-224)

(p. 261). The mind is its 'most important and conspicuous element', but the material body 'is also very important and gives the intimate flavour of humanity to Personality (...) The ideal Personality only arises where Mind irradiates Body and Body nourishes Mind, and the two are one in mutual transfiguration' (Smuts, 1926, p. 261).

Jörgenfelt and Partington (2019) showed how widespread the influence of Smuts' (1926) holism became in around 90 years, leading to quantum holism, holistic ecology, holistic engineering, holistic biology, linguistic holism, management holism and holistic medicine. However, they criticised the lack of a clear definition and the vagueness of the concepts used in these areas, identifying at least 36 different scholarly definitions of holism itself. At the same time, they were convinced that Smuts' (1926) claims concerning wholes, matter, fields and space–time in contemporary science constituted a possibility for explaining the reality of nature. Still, they remained critical of Smuts' (1926) insights into personality as an ultimate evolution of matter, life and mind. According to Jörgenfelt and Partington (2019), the three wholes that Smuts (1926) distinguished in his anthropology—body, cognitive abilities of mind and individual personality—can, in fact, be positively debated (p. 12).

Craig (1992) applied the definition from the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* that describes holism as 'the theory that whole entities, as fundamental and determining components of reality, have an existence other than as the mere sum of their parts'. She argued that the adjective 'holistic' has been applied, since Smuts' (1926) introduction of the term, to 'approaches and attitudes, in the humanities and the social sciences as well as the sciences, that privilege the study of a system over analysis of its parts' (Craig, 1992, pp. 4–5). Tucker (1996) distinguished between two versions of holistic thinking: one that focuses on the individual organism and relates to holistic health, and another, more sociologically informed, that encompasses both economic and political systems as well as biological and environmental systems. He combined the two versions into a critical holism that integrates a shift from biomedical reductionism to individual and sociological holism, including political holism as well as interpersonal and spiritual dimensions.

What Tucker (1996) accomplished with regard to the sociology of health, Nederveen Pieterse (1997) sought to apply to the social sciences. He argued that necessary antidotes to modernism tend to suffer from dichotomous thinking themselves, skipping levels and framing contemporary dilemmas in anachronistic terms. 'Wholeness in development should not be expected from a shortcut towards an undivided whole in a divided world, but should be sought in a new balance: a combination of wholeness and difference'

(Nederveen Pieterse, 1997, p. 1). He also brought in the Tao, pleading for a 'Tao of development'. The Tao is a metaphysical concept from Eastern philosophy (Confucianism) that binds human reasoning to what is eternal and cannot be put into words. The Christian apologist C.S. Lewis (1944) made use of it in his well-known work *The Abolition of Man* to correct the strictly linear approach of rationalistic thinking and scientific positivism. Nederveen Pieterse (1997) connected it to the merging of fact and value, science and art, Buddhism and governance, Qabalah and Judaism, Christian mysticism and Christendom, Sufism and Islam. It all boils down to correcting pure analytical reason by paying more attention to the dynamics of bigger wholes. For critical holism in the social sciences, this means that 'identifying with the whole means that development can no longer be simply geared to material aims and achievements but includes nonmaterial dimensions, as in cultural development' (Nederveen Pieterse, 1997, p. 27).

In a plea for holistic individualism—meaning a synthesis between modern liberalism with its attention for individual freedom and community values—Gracia Calandín (2010, p. 205) counted the French philosopher Alexis de Toqueville, due to his criticism of individualism and the atomic society of Hobbes and Locke, among the thinkers who promoted the value of greater wholes. He also referenced the German philosopher and theologian Johan Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) due to his romantic individualism and his critique of secular reason, as suggested by Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (2007). It was from Taylor's work that Gracia Calandín borrowed the term holistic individualism. In the field of education, holism was often associated with the work of the broad range of Reform pedagogues (Montessori, Dewey, Steiner, etc.) and their concentration on action-oriented principles, humanistic view of learners and children, and integrative teaching approach (Finkbeiner, 2013).

### **2.3 WCE AS AN EDUCATIONAL REACTION TO REDUCTIONISM**

This section studies WCE as a recent proposal for a more holistic approach to the student in basic education, including a vision for whole teacher education as a holistic approach to trainee teachers who must learn to work according to a WCE vision. The first problem to solve is that WCE lacks a clear definition and can only be studied as a phenomenon based on the growing consensus



worldwide regarding what to call it <sup>(4)</sup>. Therefore, WCE will be studied via a comparison of a range of selected documents and studies published in the first 15 years following the concept's appearance around 2005. In the first part of this section, the history of WCE as a phenomenon will be described as a result of a growing movement towards a whole child approach (3.1). The second subsection will be dedicated to describing WCE based on an analysis of the central terms derived from a number of studies on WCE and subjected to a process of coding into a matrix. In this way, I will start to define the growing agreement on what WCE is, what it entails, what it advocates and what it rejects (3.2).

The matrix (available in Appendix 1 of this dissertation) forms the core of this section and helps to demonstrate what WCE is or, at least, what it wants to be, whereas the more in-depth discussion in Section 4 identifies and clarifies its relation to holism and wholism more profoundly. The document analysis leading to the matrix is based on one of the most inductive methods for qualitative research into primary sources, which was introduced by Noblit and Hare (1988) in the field of cultural anthropology under the name of meta-ethnography. It helps to define a (cultural) phenomenon from a number of

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4 In the Dutch research consortium (2020–2024) led by the NIVOZ Foundation, we spoke of WCD. This section, which was written at the start of the project and considers the developments until 2020, starts by speaking of WCE, although it gradually shifts to WCD. In Section 5, which was presented at the end of the project, I will define what we understand as WCD or broad formative education.

studies into that phenomenon by comparing the overlaps and differences in their respective descriptions (5).

### 2.3.1 History leading up to WCD

In 1983, the Reagan administration in the United States accepted the educational report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, which was issued by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The tone of this influential report was alarming because it underlined ‘the widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system’ (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 7). It noted that the educational foundations of society were ‘being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity’ and that schools across the country had ‘lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort to attain them’ (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 9). The preoccupation was not solely economic but also included ‘the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people which knit together the very fabric of our society’; therefore, the report focussed on ‘the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era’, proposing a broad range of reforms to enhance ‘excellence in education’ (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 10). It explicitly addressed the concern that

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- 5 Meta-ethnography was mainly used in health research, but more recently it has found its way into educational research. Indeed, in a follow-up publication 30 years after the introduction of the method, Noblit stated: ‘Meta-ethnography posits that interpretations need to be synthesized. Meta-ethnography, in the end, constitutes additional layers of interpretation. Further, meta-ethnographical syntheses are not simply an aggregation of the interpretations already made in the studies being synthesized. Instead, meta-ethnography sees synthesis as involving translation – the translation of the whole interpretations (we like to think of these as storylines) of each study (not the individual themes, concepts or elements) into one another’ (Urrieta & Noblit, 2018, p. 36). The constituent parts of meta-ethnography are: (1) identifying intellectual interest that qualitative research might inform; (2) deciding what is relevant to the initial interest, driven by some substantive interest derived from a comparison of any given set of studies; (3) reading the studies repeatedly and noting of concepts and themes with close attention to detail; (4) determining how the studies are related by creating a list of key metaphors, phrases, ideas and concepts; (5) translating the studies into one another, rather more idiomatic than literal, through which data are synthesised; (6) synthesising the translations to compare concepts with each other and see if some translations or concepts can encompass those from other studies; and (7) expressing the synthesis (this will be done in the matrix). Noblit and Hare (1988) termed this a holistic method of interpretation.

schools may emphasize such rudiments as reading and computation at the expense of other essential skills such as comprehension, analysis, solving problems and drawing conclusions. Still others are concerned that an over-emphasis on technical and occupational skills will leave little time for studying the arts and humanities that so enrich daily life, help maintain civility, and develop a sense of community. Knowledge of the humanities, they maintain, must be harnessed to science and technology if the latter are to remain creative and humane, just as the humanities need to be informed by science and technology if they are to remain relevant to the human condition. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 12)

The high standards for schools imposed based on *A Nation At Risk* led, over time, to significant pressure concerning accountability for meeting the prescribed cognitive and academic standards. This pressure was strengthened in 2001 following the approval of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, with President G.W. Bush stating his great concern that ‘too many of our neediest children are being left behind’ (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). The NCLB Act contained four cornerstones: increased accountability for states, school districts and schools; greater choice for parents and students, particularly those attending low-performing schools; more flexibility for states and local educational agencies regarding the use of federal education dollars; and a stronger emphasis on reading, especially for the youngest children. Despite the focus on improving education and leaving no one behind, both attempts (of the Reagan administration and, later, the Bush administration) led to a reductionist focus on outcomes that did not work well for all children or for education as a whole. Based on the discussion in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, they could be described as attempts to combat the challenges of reductionism and deep fragmentation that were reductionistic and fragmented in and of themselves and, therefore, could not lead to anything other than the exacerbation of the fragmentation problem.

In particular, in the years before the scheduled evaluation of the NCLB Act in 2005, there was a clear focus on the education of the whole child among a wide range of scholars, based on a fundamental critique of the NCLB practices and outcomes. This critique was raised almost simultaneously in a special edition of *Educational Leadership* from September 2005, which was dedicated to ‘The Whole Child’, and a conference held at Yale University on ‘Play = Learning’, where Zigler and Bishop-Josef juxtaposed the cognitive child and the whole child. The conference led to a book featuring a contribution by Zigler and Bishop-Josef based on the pedagogies of Piaget and Vygotsky (Singer et al., 2006). In the same year, the Association for Supervision and

Curriculum Development (ASCD), which had over 100,000 members from the field of education worldwide, published a preparative study by Hodgkinson (2006) titled *The Whole Child in a Fractured World* and called into being a special 'Commission on the Whole Child to redefine the learning compact'. This Commission coined the term whole child in a more holistic, complete and, above all, strategic way than before. It did so in a report that laid the groundwork for the wide modern usage of the term whole child: *The Learning Compact Redefined* (ASCD, 2007).

Approaches like this had already been proposed in relation to healthcare (Tarbell & Allaire, 2002) and counselling (Florey, 1989). In addition, in the field of education, from time to time, there had been a call for attention to be paid to the child as a whole. Since 2005/2006, however, due to efforts made by the ASCD and driven by the growing awareness of the downsides of the NCLB Act in the United States, far more structural attention has been paid to the whole child. Looking back 15 years later, the ASCD (2020) concluded:

Since the launch of the Whole Child Initiative, ASCD has created an array of resources to support educators in understanding, advocating for, and implementing a whole child approach to education. Over the years, these have included the Whole Child Blog, Whole Child Podcast, Whole Child Newsletter, Healthy School Report Cards, Whole Child Snapshots, and publications such as *Educating the Whole Child. An Action Tool* (2008) and *Making the Case for Educating the Whole Child* (2012). ASCD has also hosted five Whole Child Symposium events on topics such as teacher leadership, poverty and education, and the engagement gap. In 2011, ASCD released the Whole Child Indicators. Each tenet has 10 indicators that delineate how schools should embed that tenet in their school climate and culture, curriculum and instruction, community and family, professional development and capacity building, and assessment. The indicators were followed by the launch of the ASCD School Improvement Tool in 2012, a free, online needs assessment for schools and districts that measures the Whole Child tenets and indicators. Additionally, and as a result of our commitment to the whole child, ASCD in collaboration with the U.S. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model (WSCC) in 2014. (pp. 10–11).

In 2017, the American Institutes of Research found proof that WCD pedagogies and models were already clearly traceable in 10 different countries in Western Europe and North America: Ireland, Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, the UK, Canada (Ontario) and the United States

(<sup>6</sup>). 'All of the countries included in this study valued WCD and incorporated WCD to at least some extent in their educational systems' (Spier et al., 2017, p. 31). In 2019, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) presented a conceptual framework of 11 themes describing WCD and measured its effects in Bhutan, Cambodia, Canada, Colombia, Colorado, Congo, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Finland, Gambia, Guatemala, Japan, Honduras, Mauritania, Nepal, Panama, Portugal, Russia, Senegal, South Korea and Vietnam (ACER, 2019). Similarly, in Portugal and Spain, the Universidade Católica Portuguesa and the Fundación Europea Sociedad y Educación presented research on the implementation of WCD through a leadership programme (Liderazgo para una Educación Integral/ WCD Leadership (LEI/WCDL), 2019). In the meantime, in the United States, the whole child terminology had gained a place in the final report with which the National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development (2018) sought to leave behind 'two decades of education debates that produced deep passions and deeper divisions' and make a 'fresh start' (p. 5). The title of this report, which was published by the Aspen Institute, referred directly to the aforementioned *A Nation at Risk* report, although it changed the tone dramatically: *From A Nation of Risk to A Nation of Hope*.

In the Netherlands, in 2018, recognition of WCD led to the publication by the NIVOZ Foundation, a think tank for educational development, titled *Good Education is Whole Child Education*. The description of WCD it presented was as follows:

A whole child development (WCD) framework values and promotes all dimensions of human development from early childhood to young adulthood, including physical, social, emotional, cognitive, spiritual and values-based learning. WCD embodies relational, bio-ecological principles of child development, highlighting the importance of relationships and contextual support, and the interconnectedness of social, emotional, cognitive and health factors. (NIVOZ Foundation, 2018, p. 5)

Based on this study, a research consortium was established in 2020, with a leading role played by the NIVOZ Foundation and researchers from four different teacher training institutes in the Netherlands: Hogeschool van Amsterdam, Hogeschool Leiden, DCU and Windesheim. The initial theoretical findings of this consortium are included in the final row of the meta-ethnographical matrix (Appendix 1). The final conclusions of the research

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6 This report starts to use WCD rather than WCE.

consortium, which were summarised in a published paper (de Voogd et al., 2024), will be presented in Section 5 (7).

### 2.3.2 Meta-ethnography of WCD-related studies

When it comes to WCD, all of the aforementioned studies seem very clear what they are talking about, although they all use different terms and definitions. To obtain a clear vision of what binds them together and what separates them, 13 studies are selected, read and re-read, and brought together in a matrix (Appendix 1) to determine how the phrases, ideas and concepts are related. Six of the selected articles are directly linked to the ASCD, three to the association itself (ASCD, 2004, 2007, 2012) and three to the September 2005 special edition of *Educational Leadership* (Eisner; Noddings; Scherer, 2005). Zigler and Bishop-Josef's (2005) contribution to the Yale Conference is also present, as is the AIR (2017) report, the Aspen Institute (2018) report, the NIVOZ Foundation (2018) study from the Netherlands, the ACER (2019) study from Australia, the LEI/WCDL (2019) study from Portugal and Spain and the first theoretical findings of the Dutch research consortium led by the NIVOZ Foundation (2020; internal document).

In the first row of the matrix, five studies are marked with a 'P'. This refers to the Porticus Foundation, a worldwide working foundation for charity supported by the Dutch Brenninkmeijer family, which has taken an interest in WCD and co-financed several studies into the concept. It is interesting to see how the influence of the Porticus Foundation has influenced WCD in a more religious way over time. In the matrix, this becomes visible in the strengthening, with time, of the accent on values- and spiritual-based learning; however, these elements were already present beforehand.

To translate the studies into each other, and thereby to synthesise them, in the first row of the matrix several central indicators are also stipulated. What does each study say about its central goal(s)? What aspects of the child are (repeatedly) mentioned in the study? What other aspects, less directly connected to the person, are mentioned? What elements of support for the process of educating the child are mentioned? What trends or elements in the realm of education are criticised in the study? What kinds of semantics are employed? The penultimate question seems, in the context of the matrix, to especially produce results. Indicating what overlaps are to be found in what the studies are up against appears to be indicative of what they stand for. Thus, the second question also produces results. Here, the answers are ordered not

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7 A summary of this section was published as part of a peer-reviewed article (van Olst, 2023a).

in terms of where they appear in each study but comparative to each other in the horizontal rows of the matrix. Hence, they provide insight in what the studies understand by the whole child of the whole person.

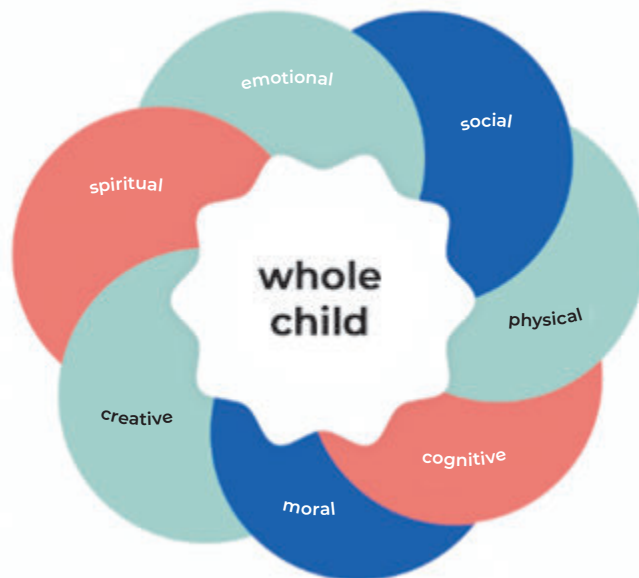
To begin with the penultimate question (What trends or elements in the realm of education are criticised in the study?), it is clear from almost all of the studies that they criticise the ‘overwhelming focus on academic achievement’, as the first study states. Several studies directly attribute this ‘too narrow definition of students’ success’ to the educational policy enshrined within the NCLB Act. The focus has become too narrowly directed towards cognitive results that indicate academic, measurable growth, as obtained via standardised test and exam results, meaning that other elements of wellbeing in the child are overlooked. What is actually meant by this is found as an answer to the second question. Children and young students are to be approached more broadly. Almost all of the studies pay attention to their physical wellbeing. Their academic wellbeing or cognitive growth is envisioned as important in every study, although every study also wants to pay attention in relation to education on emotional and social wellbeing. The explicit connection made by the Aspen Institute (2018) with social and emotional learning (SEL) is not adopted by the other studies, but the importance of wellbeing in these areas very clearly is; however, it sometimes focuses on the term engagement. Morality and ethical wellbeing are mentioned in the early studies from 2005—that is, in the contributions to the special edition of *Educational Leadership*—but they gain more force when the Porticus Foundation’s support is added, and they are even divided into two areas of attention: a moral dimension and a spiritual dimension. Relatively new is the artistic or creative dimension, although it was mentioned in a way in 2005 with ‘imaginatively responsive’ and it is questionable whether the creative dimension has to be considered separately from the emotional, spiritual, cognitive and social dimensions.

Regarding the first indicator (goals), all of the studies call for a more comprehensive approach to the student in education. Some studies describe this approach as explicitly holistic; others avoid the term<sup>(8)</sup>. A more individual concept is coined by the ASCD with ‘Whole Child’, which then comes under the influence of the Porticus Foundation’s ‘Whole Child Development’. The studies from 2012 onwards look for a more clear conceptual framework of what is to be understood by the concept of WCD to consider how it should be put into practice. The same image arises from the last indicator (the semantics employed in the studies), which shows that ‘Whole Child’ has, since the beginning of the

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8 Due to the close connection that exists between holism as an adjective and spirituality in the broadest sense of the word, which Section 4 will elaborate on.

ASCD's interest, been employed in a variety of different compositions. Finally, it results in 'Whole Child Development', with a conceptual framework for an alternative approach to the student within the educational process.



To provide a clear synthesis of the 13 included studies in a way meta-ethnography does for ethnographical studies: WCD stands for an approach to the student that is critical of a narrow focus on academic achievement and solely cognitive growth, which is viewed as reductionism concerning the student, and that recommends taking into account from the beginning and throughout the educational process the student's physical, emotional, social, creative, moral and spiritual wellbeing as well. In this way, it stands for a more holistic approach to the student in his or her individual and contextual complexity, which can be seen as an intentional correction of the kind of reductionism in education that seems to focus itself on just the cognitive child. Thereby it is a correction of the influence of fragmentation, at the least in the realm of education, which was part of problem of fragmentation as described in the previous chapter.

## 2.4 MERGING OF HOLISM AND WHOLISM IN EDUCATION

The focus on the whole child, which started as a response to the NCLB policies in the United States, did not appear in a vacuum. In the field of education, even before the introduction of holism by Smuts (1926), a clear movement



towards a more integrative and synthetic approach to the student was present. Scheuerl (1997) described the international movement of Reform pedagogy as a collective name for a series of distinct, partly competing pedagogic renewal efforts that developed in the 19th century and had its heyday following the start of the 20th century. He perceived the movement as a very broad one, reaching from the Scandinavian countries in the north to Italy in the south, and from Russia in the east to the United States in the west. However, Scheuerl (1997) placed the movement's centre of gravity in Germany, especially the Weimar Republic, the breeding ground of Pietism and several smaller internalisation movements that, as 'Stillen im Lande', sought their way out of the endless dogmatic disputes of orthodoxy by concentrating on a 'gottseliges Leben' (p. 188).

As a central feature of the Reform pedagogy, Scheuerl (1997) mentioned the longing to return to a more human-friendly approach in schools, situating the student and his or her autonomous development as the centre of attention, instead of standardised programmes that can only lead to 'Seelenmorde'. After considering the Renaissance and Humanism, as well as 'Reformdidaktiker' such as Ratichius, Comenius, Rousseau and Pestalozzi, as historic precursors of Reform pedagogy, Scheuerl (1997) began with Maria Montessori (1870–1952) and her focus on freedom and the own nature of the child. From Russia, he mentioned the poet Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910); from Ukraine, Anton Semjonovic Makarenko (1888–1939). From the United States, John Dewey (1859–1952) and his pragmatism were mentioned, as were William Heard Kilpatrick (1871–1965) and Helen Parkhurst (1887–1959)—the latter being known for the Dalton schools. From France, Adolphe Ferrière (1879–1960), while from Austria, Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), with the latter being considered the father of the free Waldorf schools. In the heart of the Weimar Republic, Scheuerl (1997) considered the origin of Peter Petersen's (1884–1952) Jena Plan schools to be found.

The emphasis in Reform pedagogy is on the creative nature of the child, on the unity of the head, heart and hands, on freedom and on a certain wholeness connected to holism (Byram & Hu, 2013). The intention of the Reform pedagogy was to bring fundamental change to a school system highly influenced by the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, which focused on learning content and treated students like products in need of aggregated economic value. The connection between the ASCD's (2007) whole child approach and holism in the early stages of the 21st century seems no less than logical. The matrix (Appendix 1) shows that Nel Noddings had, in 2005, already referred to it as 'holistic treatment'. At a more fundamental level, Sam Crowell and David Reid-

Marr (2013), colleagues at California State University in San Bernardino, made this connection, presenting their ideas and experiences under the title *Emergent Teaching: A Path of Creativity, Significance, and Transformation*. Crowell (2013) presented himself as an applied philosopher focused on 'translating the "new sciences" into educational understandings, interpreting neuroscience research for classroom practice, and applying holistic perspectives and transformative approaches to teaching and learning' and as one of the founding members of the Spirituality and Education Network (p. ix). Reid-Marr (2013) was trained and ordained as a Zen monk and presented his education as inspired by art, allowing 'the emotional and creative life of the students to unfold' (p. ix).

Crowell and Reid-Marr (2013) claimed that 'our current educational models will not work in contexts where complexity, creative chaos, and openness are required' (p. 4) and that the educational system is in real trouble because 'learning has become about accumulating information for its own sake' (p. xiii). They presented the idea of emergence as neither a methodology nor a pedagogical theory; they simply borrowed it from open systems theory and applied it to an educational approach that is profoundly contextual, event-centric and non-linear. Therefore, Crowell and Reid-Marr (2013) cited Osberg and Biesta (2010) concerning the space of emergence, something that presents itself and has to be utilised with pedagogical tact:

The space of emergence occurs when learners have an opportunity to question, explore and share their understandings and deepest concerns with others. Emergence means that the whole is constantly changed and transformed by the parts even as the parts, too, are changed. (p. 8)

To find these spaces of emergence, which are unpredictable, as well as to respond to them with pedagogical tact, requires a different way of seeing. Crowell and Reid-Marr (2013) claim that 'our tendency, especially in the West, is to focus and act on that aspect of a problem that seems most apparent, that is glaring us in the eye' (p. 8). But when the central concern is to solve the problem as quickly as possible, the interrelatedness of aspects is easily overlooked. 'When learning becomes defined by high test scores, teachers tend to put all the emphasis on fixed results to the exclusion of everything else' (Crowell & Reid-Marr, 2013, p. 8). An organismic view of things and, in the end, the whole universe is needed to correct the severe impact the Enlightenment and reductionism have had on education, especially in the West:

An organismic view of the universe is not new. It has ancient roots in both Eastern and Western cultures and in indigenous societies as well. What is new is the science behind these ideas and the contrasting paradigm this

presents to the dominant mechanistic and reductionistic worldview of our time. Emergent teaching is not a repackaged romanticism, nor is it a newly constructed vocabulary for progressive education. But it is reminiscent of these traditions. Philosophically, emergence is much more aligned with what has been labelled constructive postmodernism and espouses a radical contextualism and interconnectedness. It specifically uses and develops the language and questions of wholeness rather than reductionism. (Crowell & Reid-Marr, 2013, p. 5)

This brought Crowell and Reid-Marr (2013) to a holistic perspective on the curriculum 'as a conversation' (p. 110) wherein the focus is not on premeditated content but on 'the whole person' (p. 112). Here, they started to adopt the ASCD terminology concerning WCE, claiming that 'Emergent teaching is naturally situated within the framework of the whole person and holistic education in general' (Crowell & Reid-Marr, 2013, p. 113).

While still an outlier in terms of its larger perspective, emergent teaching is relevant to the overall vision of the whole-child initiative and provides an additional lens on how to create educational experiences that are potentially transformative and significant for learners. (Crowell & Reid-Marr, 2013, p. 113)

Crowell and Reid-Marr (2013) also distinguished six interacting and interrelated elements of what they called 'holistic health' (p. 114): mental/intellectual focus, emotional focus, social focus, physiological focus, environmental focus and spiritual focus. Intellectual development requires the ability to think, see patterns, consolidate understandings and make applications. Cognition is always inseparably linked to emotion. In particular, a lack of safety and emotional distress affect learning abilities. Human beings are social creatures who learn through interaction, which starts early with simple play and is structured in communities. At its heart, all learning is physiological. Neural processes are not limited to the brain but present in the whole body. Body and mind are inextricably related. Good teaching appeals to all of the senses and counts alongside the necessity of the body to move. A good environmental focus means much more than the good decoration of the classroom. Indeed, it concerns the whole place where teaching and learning happens and interactions are formed. It is here that the senses are really activated. The spiritual focus is about significance and meaning. The disenchantment of the modernistic worldview has, in many ways, led to a world stripped of meaning and significance. The abandonment of the inner world and life of students needs to be corrected.

When compared with the above-mentioned outcome of the meta-ethnographic comparison of 13 studies concerning WCE, Crowell and Reid-Marr (2013) underlined the importance of an educational focus on intellectual, physical, emotional, social and (moral-)spiritual wellbeing. They also included the holistic environment, and they perceived art and play as important instruments for fostering emergent teaching.

### **Holistic and wholistic**

In 2019, Sam Crowell was a member of the editorial committee that launched the *International Handbook of Holistic Education*, which featured contributions of 58 different authors from around the world (Miller et al., 2019). In the first, foundational part, John P. Miller (2019) referred the above-mentioned study by the American Institutes of Research concerning WCD pedagogies and models in 10 different countries in Europe and North America (p. 15), identifying overlaps and differences between what he called holistic and wholistic education. Holistic education mainly entails the application of the broad concept of 20th century holism to education, while wholistic education refers specifically to the early 21st century reactions to the NCLB policies in the United States and the reductionistic focus on academic achievement and testing, as fostered mainly by the ASCD.

Miller identified John Dewey and Nel Noddings as scientists who can be connected to wholistic education but not particularly to holistic education (Miller, 2019, p. 14). With regard to Dewey, Miller (2019) argued that 'his focus on problem solving and the scientific method place him within the pragmatic tradition' (p. 14). Moreover, while Miller (2019) validated Noddings' work on caring (1992) and happiness (2003), he did not situate her within the realm of real holistic approaches 'because she mostly avoids including the spiritual' (p. 14). Still, he described the work of Dewey and Noddings as 'very important in that some educators cannot include spirituality in public education' and stated that 'their work provides a bridge for teachers who are more comfortable with a wholistic perspective' (Miller, 2019, p. 14).

Miller (2007) argued earlier that the spiritual dimension signified a crucial difference between the holistic and wholistic perspectives. The former includes the spiritual dimension, while wholistic education 'focuses more on a biological and psychological holism' (Miller, 2007, p. 14). In the introductory part of his contribution, Miller cited two early definitions from the first issue of the *Holistic Education Review*. The first came from Ron Miller (1988, p. 2, as cited in Miller, 2019):

Holistic education, above all else, is an expression of profound respect for the deeper, largely unrealized powers of our human nature. Holistic educators see each child as a precious gift, as an embryo of untapped spiritual potential. This attitude is similar to the Quaker belief that there is “that of God in every one”—or at least an unfathomed depth of personality, contained in the soul of every person. (p. 2)

The second came from John P. Miller himself:

The focus of holistic education is on relationships—the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationships between various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and community, and the relationship between self and Self. In the holistic curriculum the student examines these relationships so that he/she gains both an awareness of them and the skills necessary to transform the relationships where it is appropriate. (1988, p. 3, as cited in Miller, 2019)

In later editions, the connection to the Earth was included, and the soul replaced the self:

Holistic education then, is about education the whole person—body, mind, and spirit—within the context of an interconnected world. Although the term is relatively new, as a practice holistic education has been going on for centuries. (Miller, 2019, p. 5)

From the previously presented meta-ethnographical matrix (Appendix 1), it is clear that, over two decades, a synthesis was produced between the holistic and the wholistic perspectives. With the influence of the Porticus Foundation and, possibly, the influence of different countries with a strong Roman Catholic presence, the spiritual domain was added to the whole child approach. The *International Handbook of Holistic Education* also contains a contribution by Spier, Leenknecht and Osher (2019) from a whole child perspective. However, when defining their holistic educational approach, they did not mention the spiritual domain and, in reference to the ASCD documentation, just referred to ‘the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and talent development of children and youth from diverse backgrounds’, adding that ‘a holistic framework embodies relational and bioecological principles of child development’ (Spier et al., 2019, p. 287). By bioecological principles, they mean ‘the interaction between a child’s genetic predispositions or potentialities and his or her environment’ (Spier et al., 2019, p. 292).

While Spier, Leenknecht and Osher (2019) make no further reference to any kind of spiritual aspect, the *International Handbook of Holistic Education* (Miller et al., 2019) itself is full of such references, with contributions coming from Chinese spiritual practices (p. 209), Buddhist schools in Thailand (p. 278), Hebraism (p. 328) and East Africa (Madrasa schools), and even an Islamic perspective on holistic education is offered (p. 191). In terms of spiritual questions that are helpful in not losing sight of the whole, Tony Eade (2019) mentioned questions such as ‘Who am I? Where do I fit in? Why am I here?’ (p. 64). In the foundational part of the book, the history of holistic education is described, with special attention paid to the American Transcendentalists, who strongly believed in the infinitude of man (Miller et al., 2019, p. 9). There are also several references to indigenous worldviews (Miller et al., 2019, pp. 33–40, 57), as well as references to the practice of yoga (pp. 71–73) and mindfulness (pp. 111–113).

Taking all these spiritual references into account, it is striking that the Christian presence among the 58 contributing authors is limited and, therefore, a clear Christian perspective is missing. In particular, after the explicit presence of the Quakers in the very first definition of holistic education and given the strong presence of Christians in most of the mentioned countries, one would expect more. However, having reached this conclusion, there is still Thomas Moore, author of *Care of the Soul* and over 20 other books, who was a Christian monk, a teacher and a psychotherapist before becoming a full-time writer and lecturer. From the holistic perspective, Moore (2019) confronted the ‘modern distaste for mysticism and emotion’ (p. 53) and, especially, the ‘neglect of the soul’ in general and in education in particular:

Neglect of soul leads to weak families, a desperate search for meaning, the feeling of being lost, not knowing your purpose of calling, the sense of not being at home, and being at the mercy of powerful emotions connected to the past or swirling autonomously in the present. (p. 54)

Moore’s (2019) contribution about the soul, celebrated by the book’s editors as one of seven central dimensions of holism and of the book itself (the soulful dimension; p. 4), cannot be described as explicitly Christian due to referring to the Greek philosophers who sought virtue in education: courage, prudence, justice and piety. About spirituality, he stated that ‘every aspect of education has a spiritual dimension and relates to (holism) infinite mystery, the sublime, strong values, and an expansive sense of community’ (Moore, 2019, p. 54). Teachers, therefore, have to always be doctors of the soul: ‘My final word on holism in education, therefore, is to suggest that educators might consider

their deep work as taking care of the health of their student's souls, even as they focus on learning and knowledge' (Moore, 2019, p. 56).

## 2.5 TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In 2024, after four years of joint study into and conversation about WCD, the Dutch research consortium under the leadership of the NIVOZ Foundation, in which DCU participated (with two pedagogues and myself), presented its main findings. It did so in a short paper published in Dutch (de Voogd et al., 2024), which I co-authored. I will briefly summarise the paper here, following the lines of the conceptual framework that it presented and that is featured in this section. An important note to start with is that the research consortium did not ultimately choose to uphold the term WCD, instead opting for a type of umbrella term that is less closely connected to the cultural counter-movement and more informative regarding the content of the type of education it wants to endorse. A significant problem is that this name—'breedvormend onderwijs'—is difficult to translate into English. The most accurate translation I can suggest is 'broadly formative education'.

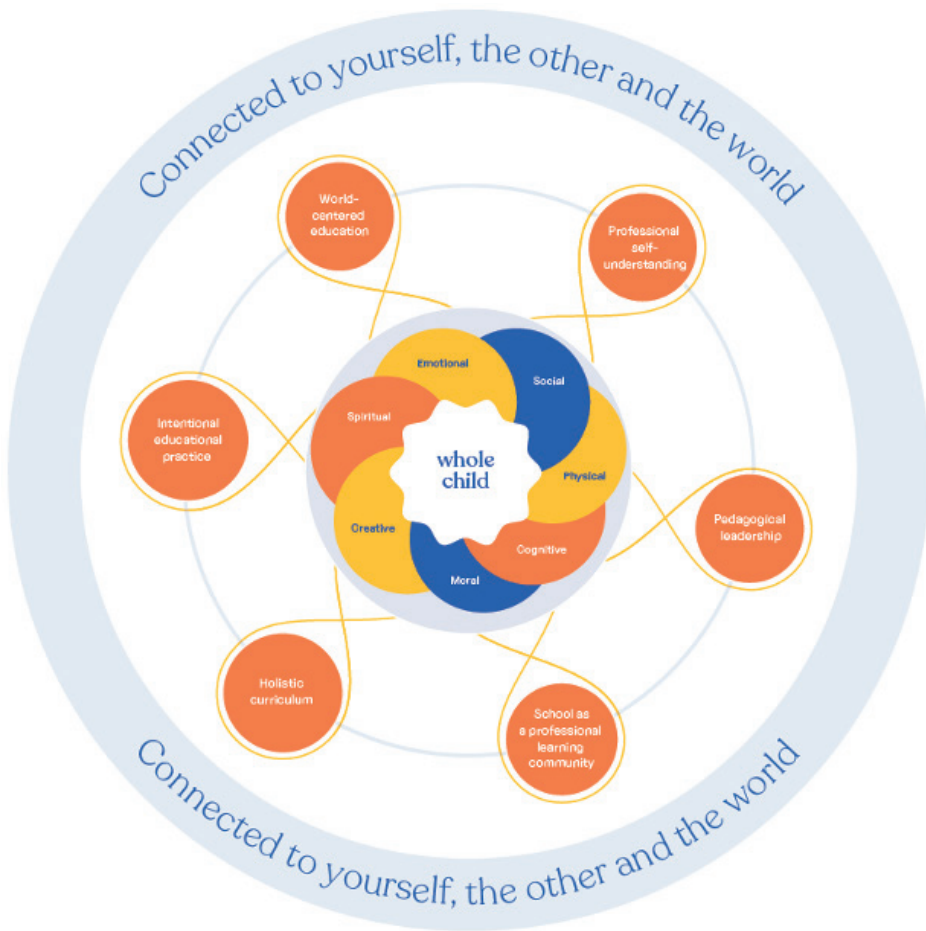
The paper first discussed intentions. The aim of broadly formative education is that children, when they grow up, are connected—to themselves, to others and to the world. The ideal is that they 'can and want to be meaningful in society from their own talents and interests' (de Voogd et al., 2024). To this end, 'it is important that children can develop to their full potential, in which all dimensions of their humanity (physical, social, emotional, cognitive, creative, spiritual and ethical) are seen, valued and stimulated' (de Voogd et al., 2024). As basic principles of broadly formative education, the paper distinguished a holistic view of humanity and the world ('you cannot separate children (and adults) from their environment and isolate the different dimensions of being human'; de Voogd et al., 2024), a pedagogical basic attitude ('the teacher is constantly looking for what this child, in its context and this moment, needs and assumes the possibilities of each child') and world-centredness ('the teacher introduces children to the world, inviting them to relate to it in their own way'). With respect to the latter—world-centredness—the paper mentioned the strengthening of agency in students as one of its central goals.

Broadly formative education cannot be achieved without 'intentional educational practice' (de Voogd et al., 2024). Therefore, 'professional self-understanding' on the part of the teacher is needed (de Voogd et al., 2024). For teacher training, this requires a 'holistic curriculum', with deliberate attention paid to student agency, pedagogical tact and world-centredness.

On the level of both teacher training institutes and schools, ‘pedagogical leadership’ and the formation of a ‘professional learning community’ are necessary elements (de Voogd et al., 2024). Together, these elements—as the conceptual framework shows—form the building blocks for broadly formative education. These building blocks are grouped around the previously established (in 2.3.2) image of the whole child, with all its interconnected domains. Each dot is connected to this centre with a lemniscate, which refers to the in the introduction mentioned lemniscate allowing for constant movement between visions, intentions, designs and practices.

The central objective of connection with the self, the other and the world encircles these building blocks, showing how WCD or broadly formative education aims to respond to the challenges of reductionism in education. This response also applies to the layered problem of fragmentation, as discussed in the previous chapter, because its focus on connection, relationship and agency bears the hallmarks of subjectification. It especially applies to contexts characterised by high diversity and high complexity. In a sub-group, members of the research consortium focused on adversity in education, which they defined as every obstacle to a full sense of belonging (related publications are currently in progress). In one of the last research consortium’s meetings, attention was paid to *culturally responsive teaching* (Alhanachi, 2023) as a means of including students from very diverse cultural contexts in both teaching and classroom processes.





## 2.6 CONCLUSION

WCD (or WTD) represents an approach to students that is critical towards a narrow focus on academic achievement and cognitive growth, which is viewed as a matter of reductionism. Thus, WCD recommends taking into account from the beginning and throughout the educational process the student's physical, emotional, social, creative, moral and spiritual wellbeing as well. Based on a prolonged study within the Dutch (NIVOZ Foundation-led) research consortium, which involved four teacher training institutes including DCU, it can be added that WCD starts from a basic pedagogical attitude, is world-centred and aims to strengthen students' agency through intentional pedagogical action.

The central goals are connectedness with the self, the other and the world. All this makes WCD applicable to the fragmentation thesis, as presented in the previous chapter, and the resulting need for stratified subjectification.

WCD has a clear affinity and overlap with holistic education, especially as it, over time, has come to identify with and attend more explicitly to the spiritual dimension of the student. A distinction can still be drawn between a more explicit holistic approach with clear attention to the mind, body and soul complexity (e.g. Waldorf education, religious-based education) and a more stringent wholistic approach, such as that of Reform pedagogue Dewey and educational philosopher Noddings, in accordance with Rousseau, which seems to avoid the spiritual part of the whole. In fact, WCD tries to combine both approaches, involving the spiritual and indicating explicit preoccupation with spiritual wellbeing. Thus, it can be understood as a clear reaction to the analytical focus in Western education, which strives for synthesis and attention concerning the complex interrelatedness of things, leading to a focus on the child as a complex connected person who cannot be reduced to his or her cognitive function.

Approached from the fragmentation thesis as built carefully in the previous chapter, however, it must be observed that WCD nevertheless falls short in its bold attempt to incorporate holism and wholism and give a clear place to the influences of the spiritual domain. WCD does address reductionism as part of fragmentation on the micro-level of the person (the child), and also to some extent on the meso-level of society, but not the lack of an overarching framework on the macro-level of the world. Although it mentions the world, it pays hardly any attention to the nature and quality of the connectedness of—especially—the human interior to the whole of the world. Philosophically, it misses the attention for its destiny (*telos*) that both MacIntyre and Taylor wished for (Chapter 1.1.1). Theologically, notions like personhood as communion (intersubjectivity) and an overarching moral (heavenly) *politeuma*, as mentioned in Chapter 1.3, have therefore no place in WCD. This might explain why there has apparently been a reluctance or at least hesitation among Christian scholars and teachers to make their own contributions to WCD or to integrate WCD in their own vision and intentions, as noted above. The following chapter aims to fill this gap and evaluate WCD from the perspective of Christian anthropology, including its theology and pedagogy.





# Chapter 3

## Christian Anthropology and the (W)Holistic Approach

'For what is sublime in the message [of Jesus Christ] is precisely that the Lord was talking not just about another life, not just about men's souls, but was addressing the body, the whole man, in his embodied form, with his involvement in history and society; that he promised the kingdom of God to the man who lives bodily with other men in this history.'

*Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), What It Means To Be a Christian, 2006, p. 28*

'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.'

*Answer 1, Westminster Shorter Catechism, 1647*

As a (w)holistic approach to education WCD is not a Biblically holistic approach. There is considerable overlap between the two, but there are also differences. Evaluating WCD from the perspective of Christian anthropology, this chapter argues for the clear *telos* that WCD lacks, as an overarching (spiritual) goal connecting its ideals and intentions. Furthermore, it argues for a clear focus on the heart, as the root entity of the undivided human being connecting it not only to the world (creation) but also to its Creator. This chapter adds these two notions and defines a Biblically holistic approach to education as an approach that ‘values and seeks all dimensions of human development from early childhood on, including physical, social, emotional, cognitive, spiritual and values-based learning, aiming at the person’s heart as the undivided principle of its existence that precedes head and hands, placing it with pedagogical optimism based on Christian hope before God, to seek its restoration and the longing and ability to serve in all the organic relationships God placed him into; with the self, the neighbour, and nature as a whole’ (van Olst, 2023a).

To arrive at this definition, the first part of this chapter will be dedicated to the evaluation of insights concerning WCD from the perspective of Christian anthropology (Section 1). To accomplish this, three scholars from the broad Christian tradition, who each lived on the brink of a new sociocultural era, are selected. Church Father Aurelius Augustine (354–430) lived at the start of Christendom, historic pedagogue Ján Amos Comenius (1592–1670) just after the Middle Ages at the dawn of modernity and philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977) at the end of Christian Europe and the start of pluralistic society. It is especially interesting for this study that each of them has a contemporary advocate who has pleaded for a more holistic approach to man(kind) and education. First, Comenius will be considered alongside his contemporary advocate Jan Hábl (1.1), then Dooyeweerd and his contemporary advocate André Troost (1.2) and, finally, Augustine with James K.A. Smith as his contemporary advocate (1.3). In a short synthesis, the accents and insights of all three famous scholars and their advocates will be brought together, leading to the previously mentioned definition of holistic Christian education (Section 2). After that, the idea of educating for shalom, as proposed by the American philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff (2004), will be presented as the motivating teleology that WCD, when evaluated from a Christian perspective, is missing (Section 3).

### 3.1 WCD INSIGHTS AND CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

*Holism* is a term that, in the last few decades, has gradually become socially acceptable among well-respected Christian educationalists. David I. Smith (2017) has repeatedly argued for holistic Christian education, as did James K. Smith (2017). Nicholas Wolterstorff (2004) used the adjective 'holistic' for his shalom model. Swaner et al. (2021) promoted 'holistic teaching' in a report by the Association for Christian Schools International, explaining that it 'involves helping students develop spiritually and emotionally (teaching the heart and soul, as well as the mind' (p. 12). However, after these clear references, it all stops. There is no clear-cut definition—or, at least, no detailed description—to be found of what should be understood by holistic teaching or education. Apparently, the desire for a more holistic approach exists, albeit only as an implicit and unspecified need. In this section, I intend to address this gap between a felt need and its articulation, for which knowledge of WCD is particularly helpful.

The search for a clear answer starts with a selection process. In the wide field of Christian theology, pedagogy and philosophy, three contemporary thinkers stand out for their opposition to reductionistic tendencies in Western culture and education. Each connected his plea with a historic thinker and scholar from the Christian tradition of the West. The first is the Czech pedagogue and educationalist Jan Hábl (2011, 2017), who referenced his great inspiration Ján Amos Comenius (1592–1670) in relation to holistic education as opposed to the dehumanising trends in Western education. The second is André Troost (2005), who presented a contemporary version of the Reformational philosophy that can be characterised as fundamentally non-reductionistic. He based his ideas on the work of the father of Reformational philosophy, Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977). The third is the Canadian-American philosopher James K.A. Smith (2009, 2013, 2016, 2017), who based his view on the life and work of Church Father Augustine (354–430).

All three famous scholars combined a clear idea about the complexity of the inner person with an extremely broad view on the complex interrelatedness (coherence) of totality. Rather than consider them in chronological order, I choose to start with the pedagogue Comenius and his contemporary advocate Hábl, as doing so enables me to focus first on education (1.1). After Comenius, the philosophy of Dooyeweerd will be helpful in connecting education to both the totality of the cosmos and the totality of the human being, as summarised by Troost (1.2). Finally, the shift back to Augustine as the theologian of interiority can be made with greater clarity and through his contemporary advocate James K.A. Smith it will be possible to link back to education (1.3).

### 3.1.1 Ján Amos Comenius and Jan Hábl

Born in Moravia as Ján Amos Komenský, Comenius arrived after many wanderings through different countries in Europe in the Netherlands, where he died in 1670. As a foreman of the *Unitas Fratrum*, the Bohemian Brethren, he was highly appreciated by representatives of the *Nadere Reformatie* (1600–1750; Groenendijk & Sturm, 1992). As a pedagogue, in retrospect, he was appreciated more broadly as a precursor to Reform Pedagogy (Stevens, 2020). His pedagogy not only culminated in a plea for world peace (Comenius Museum, 2021) but was also based on the recognition of the fundamental coherence in created life. This is why Stevens (2020) characterised him as a humanist, stating that modern educators should learn from him to avoid positioning education as a meritocracy and to follow a pedagogy of responsibility that is focused on society (1).

For Comenius, every single human being was perceived, in the end, as a *homo universalis*. In order to fundamentally respect this, education should be *pan-sophia*. The editors of the Dutch translation of his work *Unum Necessarium* (Comenius, 1668/1983) observed how these two central concepts blended together in Comenius' life and work: 'That man is more than the mind and thinking controlled by senses, was for Comenius a lived fact' (pp. ix–x) (2). In this book, written just two years before his death, Comenius (1668/1983) stated that 'all confusions in the world have but one cause, that man cannot distinguish the necessary from the unnecessary' (p. 21). Thus, to avoid remaining 'confused and entangled in it' (Comenius, 1668/1983, p. 21), man needs to listen to the all-wise God. In his allegorical book *The Labyrinth of the World* (1623), Comenius depicted the world created by God as a beautiful theatre, currently broken down into an obscure labyrinth in which chaos, exclusion, segregation and fragmentation are fundamental features (D.I. Smith, 2017, p. 15). As Comenius (1623) pointed out in that book, fundamental renewal begins within the human heart when it starts to listen in silence to the voice of God. From the heart, it flows outside to transform the world through education.

Comenius' (1623) allegory preceded John Bunyan's (1678) famous allegory titled *The Pilgrim's Progress*. D.I. Smith (2017) noted that Comenius expected much more of his pilgrim than Bunyan did: 'Unlike John Bunyan's pilgrim, this one remains in the world, freshly strengthened to face its failings and filled with hope. The transformation of the self is the beginning of the transformation of all things' (p. 22). As Comenius sees it in his *Great Didactic* (1657/2019), schools

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1 Stevens, the founder of the NIVOZ Foundation, spoke at the opening of a special exhibition on Comenius and reform pedagogy held in 2020–2021 in the museum in Naarden.

2 The translation is mine.



are workshops of humanity, where students should be taught ‘the whole art of teaching all things to all men’. For Smith (2017), this means a type of education that does not solely focus on basic skills or narrow vocational goals but is instead ‘*broad* in its scope (learning about “all things”) and *holistic* in its developmental goals (focused on the cognitive, the moral, and the spiritual)’ (p. 26). It is education of the ‘whole person’ instead of ‘narrow training or mere academic activity’ (D.I. Smith, 2017, p. 26). It embraces fundamental questions such as ‘how to live well with God, with one’s neighbour, and with the material creation’ (D.I. Smith, 2017, p. 28). Smith (2017) learned from Comenius that ‘true education must attend to the cognitive but also to the moral, the spiritual, the relational, and the practical’, while the end of it is ‘happiness, the life of the blessed, the realization of the garden of delight’ (p. 28).

The way in which Comenius (1668/1983) combined the notions of inner piety and worldwide transformation gave his work a resonance that extends beyond the Christian circle, although it was not always well received or understood within it. Despite the narrow ties Comenius had with the movement of *Nadere Reformatie* in the Dutch Republic, the appreciation of his work suffered under the influence of the Kuyperian antithesis, especially where it entailed an opposition of people, not only of ideas. The final conclusion Groenendijk and Sturm (1992) reached, around Comenius’ 400th birthday, is that these strongly personal-ideological considerations pro and contra Comenius hinder a clear vision of his life and work in a 17th century context (p. 86). They noted that the Dutch pedagogue Bavinck did not criticise Comenius directly, however he did blame him for being the precursor to the reform pedagogy, which Bavinck showed himself hesitant about (Groenendijk & Sturm, 1992, p. 85). Another pedagogue, Waterink, can be related to real comenio-clasm. He portrayed Comenius as trailblazer of the modern idea of tolerance and other, in his eyes, unscriptural pedagogical principles (Groenendijk & Sturm, 1992, p. 77).

Groenendijk and Sturm (1992) themselves opted for a more responsible and, therefore, more fruitful historical approach to Comenius. They perceived Comenius as a Calvinist with clear romantic influences on his anthropology and a remarkably positive and optimistic pedagogy (Groenendijk & Sturm, 1992, p. 85). D.I. Smith (2017) warned, however, that any direct identifications with Romanticism or Reform Pedagogy must be rejected as anachronistic:

Modern studies of Comenius often have read his work through a post-Enlightenment (and, in Eastern Europe, communist) lens that assimilated his pedagogical suggestions to modern ideas, stressing his anticipation of current views while leaving his own theological and philosophical framework aside.

In time, more of his works have been rediscovered (a process lasting well into the twentieth century), and the discipline of Comeniology has continued to grow. Through these efforts has emerged a richer, more complex picture of Comenius's thinking that recognizes the integral connections among the many facets of his thinking. (p. 11)

D.I. Smith (2017) judged that Comenius' insights could be meaningful in an era of pluralism, wherein Christian education is no longer the naturally expected thing. This meaning lies, above all, in the connection Smith (2017) made between the general and the specific, between pansophy and Christianity, between cognition, morality and spirituality:

He combined a focus on universal education with a fundamental orientation to Christian faith and to Christ as the one in whom all things would be renewed. In a society more secular and pluralistic than envisaged by Comenius, the question arises regarding whether we must simply drop one or the other of these emphases, seeking either universal schooling without religion or religious schooling that is for the few and excludes the many (...) Comenius would have regarded the separation of religion from the curriculum as a fundamental mistake. (...) To pretend that we can know things about the world and gain skills for speaking and acting in it without becoming morally responsible for how we affect the world through our words and actions is inadequate. Knowledge and virtue are connected. (pp. 72-73)

### **Jan Hábl on Comenius**

Jan Hábl is one of the most prominent interpreters of Comenius' work today. Like Comenius, he is Czech and, therefore, has a double connection to his inspirer. Hábl's (2011; 2017) work has focused on Comenius' meaning for the world (including Western culture) and his meaning for the reality of Czechia, where scholars look to Comenius from the perspective of liberation from communism. The former meaning has to do with the latinised name Comenius under which the Moravian pedagogue tried to formulate answers to the 'educational, cultural religious, and political needs of the entirety of the western world which had dramatically self-destructed in the cataclysm of the Thirty Years War'. The latter meaning has to do with his original name Komenský, which he used when offering answers to 'a very particular historical tradition, the relatively unknown Czech Protestant Church, the *Unitas Fratrum*, in interaction with various currents of western thought' (Hábl, 2011, p. 7).

In broader Western culture, according to Hábl (2011), the question of what man really is should be recognised as central. The French philosopher Chantal

Delsol (2021) referred to the 20th century as the age of the dismantling of the idea of humanity. In this context, technology and science have reached altitudes of development that have brought about previously unimaginable possibilities and prosperity, although humanity has lagged behind, 'even so far as to be in crisis' (Hábl, 2017, p. xiv). Hábl referred to the worldwide gap between rich and poor, hunger, refugees, illiteracy and backlogs in the Global South for which the supposedly cultivated West, due to its own problems, has continually failed to formulate a working solution. To these specific problems of Western culture, Hábl added some important side effects of the highly developed technocracy: alienating individualisation, ignorance and the 'depersonalizing of human relationships'. He also referenced a 'decrease in moral literacy, a dramatic decline in social capital (nobody trusts anyone), the global threat of self-destruction, conflicts of civilizations, various forms of extremism and the like' (Hábl, 2017, p. xiv).

While the need for humanity elsewhere arose through social disintegration and secularisation, in Czechia it is now mainly felt through the void left by the dehumanising totalitarian communistic regime after its fall in 1989. The Czech search for humanity caused Hábl to a plea for child-centredness. Comenius' views provided a good model for doing so. Hábl, however, warned that Comenius' Christian worldview, as the central axis of his approach, cannot be overlooked. It is there that the lines of reasoning of the Western Comenius and the Czech Komenský come together. Knowledge, morality and spirituality form a strong unity in Comenius' work (Hábl, 2011, p. 65). In particular, this unity is missing from modern Western society. 'Since the Enlightenment and the onset of Modernity, the anthropological paradigm, the definition of humanness, has been determined by a self-imposed restriction on metaphysics, which has deprived humanity of a transcendent dimension' (Hábl, 2011, p. 14). Just like D.I. Smith (2017), Hábl (2011) perceived the added value of Comenius mainly in the connection he made between everything (all) and Christian wisdom.

Hábl's (2011, 2017) approach is not optimistic regarding the presence of humanity in Western education. Rhetoric and intentions are good, he concluded, but in practice the dominant focus is a performance-oriented one. From Pavel Floss, Hábl (2017) adopted the qualification 'essentially functionalistic': Western education brings forth efficient workers and experts for different fields of labour, but it fails in the formation of 'the whole person' (p. vxi).

It knows how to equip pupils with the given amount of useful information and the pragmatic skills and competencies needed for successful self-assertion (usually in the marketplace), but it fails in the formation and cultivation of

that human dimension of personality that would guarantee a humane—in current terminology—pro-social use of all of the school acquired equipping, and it fails in spite of a significant (and more or less alternative) didactic arsenal. (Hábl, 2017, p. xvi)

What Comenius offered in this respect, according to Hábl (2017), was a unique combination of ‘anthropological realism’ and ‘pedagogical optimism’ (p. xvii). Both differ substantially from the unfounded optimism that critics have distinguished in Comenius himself. They are connected to both an ontological and a moral dimension in Comenius’ approach to man. Ontologically, Comenius (1623/2021) perceived man as a good creation, noble, valuable and gifted with ‘innate dignity’ (as cited in Hábl, 2017, p. xvii). Morally, however, man is broken, fallen in sin and corrupt. ‘Or said other way, our humanity is fine, our humaneness, however, is depraved, as is evident by all the inhumane things a person is capable of doing’. Emphatically, Hábl (2017) avoided attributing to Comenius any anthropological optimism. In a pedagogical sense, however, optimism is justified and present in Comenius’ thinking. Hábl (2017) defined pedagogical optimism shortly as ‘the conviction that man is essentially educable, i.e., pedagogical effort can shape the nature of man’ (p. xvii). Thus, pedagogical optimism is the opposite of pedagogical pessimism, which ‘does not believe it is possible for education to achieve substantial change’ (Hábl, 2017, p. xvii).

The combination of the accent on ontological dignity and the accent on moral brokenness distinguishes Comenius’ view of man from rival views, such as those of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Comenius’ approach to the child can be considered unique because it does not solely depart from the good in man, as anthropological romanticism does, neither from manufacturability without ontological dignity, nor from ontological dignity without any chance of enhancement or renewal. The fact that Comenius, from a Calvinistic perspective, appeared to pay little attention to sin and brokenness was, according to Hábl (2017), the result of the development of his thinking during his lifetime. In the phase of his life in which the focus on the beauty of creation caused especially strong emotions in him, this accent was, in fact, less strongly present.

It is true that at this time Comenius was focused more on the ontological beauty of humankind—there is moral decay here, but so far he wasn’t emphasizing it too much. For now he still hadn’t contrived a corrective plan, he was only leading his listeners/readers to contemplation and wonder. (Hábl, 2017, p. 14)

This focus changed, however, when Comenius, displaced and on the run from Roman Catholic, Habsburgian troops, meditated on finding rest and renovation. Hábl (2017) expressed this in the chapter title 'The Depths of Safety'. The content of this chapter was largely borrowed from Comenius' *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* (1623/2021). Real spiritual renovation starts with hearing God's voice inviting the restless sinner to 'return to the place from whence thou came, to the home of your heart, and shut the door fast behind thee' (Comenius, 1623/2021, p. 245). Here, Comenius centralised the Latin word *resignare*: to resign. Practically, this means resignation to the grace of God and starting to follow Christ.

This return to God He himself made possible when He made Himself visible to human beings through Christ the Savior. The way back was revealed. The one who wants to find his centre of safety must rely fully on Christ. The key concept in this turning is *resignare*. (Hábl, 2017, p. 21)

Hábl (2017) described this resignation as 'hopeful resignation' that starts within the person (p. 23). Normally, resignation does not sound like something hopeful and positive, but according to Comenius' spiritual view on man and the world, this resignation does not mean less than a return to the lost paradise, a giving up of resistance to the transcendent and a decision to let yourself be guided into reconciliation and the renewal of life. It is like the return of the lost son to the Father (Luke 15). Therefore, it simultaneously means the start of a totally new beginning. Hábl (2017) cited from Chapter 10 of Comenius' forementioned book a list of nine elements that cause this renewal and help to enable it:

The resigned have 1) peace with God; 2) spiritual security in spite of physical dangers; 3) perpetual good-heartedness; 4) a safe distance from worldly confusions; and they 5) do not fear any harm; 6) bear suffering with praising of God; 7) are amazed by God's benevolence; 8) do not fall harmfully; 10) die joyfully. (Hábl, 2017, pp. 22-23)

Remarkable congruence can be observed with the life and work of Augustine in the narrative Comenius employed at this point. This becomes clear from the central lemma of Augustine's life, as presented in the first part of his *Confessions*: 'Our hearts are restless until they find rest in You, oh God'. Hábl (2017) juxtaposed the resignation that accompanies this truth with the archaic Czech term *samosvojnost*, which means 'having one's ultimate goal and end in oneself' (p. 22). The beautiful theatre of the good creation has fallen apart in an obscure labyrinth in which man is an obscure labyrinth himself, but the light comes in when the unbridled quest for happiness through maximum self-development based on a fundamentally egoistic attitude is given up and man

himself resigns to his Maker. In so doing, man really becomes man. Moreover, through this renewed man in the broken creation something is made visible again by the good Creator. This entails a renovation of multiple relations.

Comenius's resignation to God functioned as the foundation of emendation (...) In other words, the anthropology of innate reliance (*resignare*) laid the foundation for an anthropology of action (*emendare*), which is both understandable and internally consistent, because positive hope usually leads to positive actions. Hopelessness doesn't lead to anything. (Hábl, 2017, p. 24)

In Comenius' work, belief in change and world improvement through education can be seen to be connected to his personal theological roots in the community of the Bohemian Brethren. This religious group not only traces its roots back to the Reformation but also has, via the Czech Hussites, a direct connection to one of the Reformation's precursors, Ján Hus. The Bohemian Brethren fully agree with Lutheran soteriology and the Reformational doctrine of justification by faith alone. 'They did not, however, embrace his views without any reservations', noted Hábl (2017, p. 6) immediately. 'According to the Brethren theologians, there is not as sharp a discord between law and grace as Luther claimed' (Hábl, 2017, p. 6). The Bohemian Brethren do not recognise themselves in the problems Luther had with the apostolic letter of James and its accent on practical works that prove the true faith of born-again Christians. In Article 6 of the Brethren Confession, they endorsed the doctrine of justification by faith, while in Article 7 of the same document they 'retained their old emphasis that justification and sanctification belong together' (Hábl, 2017, p. 6).

Hábl (2011) summarised the theological tradition of the Bohemian Brethren as follows:

Such was the theological heritage of the Brethren which Komenský came into: emphasis on saving faith and knowledge of dependence on God, pacifism, desire for religious unity, fundamental openness to the truth, desire for spiritual purity, active moral consistency, and hopeful eschatological expectations. Besides traditional Christian doctrines, these motifs seem to be the most important formative factors in Komenský's anthropology and in his overall work. (p. 23)

The conclusion on Comenius can be that, departing from eschatological hope, he established a line of renewed connection from the intimacy of the human heart, by and via the school, to—ultimately—the whole world and creation. His pansophy, as most clearly presented in his *Whole Art of Teaching all Things*

to *all Men* (Comenius, 1657/2019), was born out of, and directly connected to, ‘teaching and learning through resignation’ (Hábl, 2017, p. 15). This resignation stand in a direct relation to the telos of human presence on Earth: a joint understanding of what is human life for and what is necessarily and intrinsically good to do and aspire to: to serve the Creator by dedicating His broken creation again to Him.

### 3.1.2 Herman Dooyeweerd and André Troost

The Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977), together with Dirk Vollenhoven, founded what is termed Reformational philosophy. Dooyeweerd (1969) himself called it *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* from the start, which is also the title of his central work. In English, he chose the ‘philosophy of the cosmonomic idea’. It provides an analysis of reality based on Kuyper’s (1880/2021) idea of sphere sovereignty. It focuses profoundly on the coherence of things—in unity and diversity. Dooyeweerd’s life and work can be placed in the neo-Calvinistic or Kuyperian tradition, although Dooyeweerd himself did not uncritically relate to it. In particular, Kuyper’s antithesis meant too much of a contradiction between people (the personal) when, in fact, there is an antithesis about fundamental ideas (the idiosyncratic), which even within one person can be fought (Hengstmengel, 2015, p. 177). This precision proved to be essential for the development of Reformed epistemology in the United States.

Dooyeweerd’s cosmonomic idea is interesting for the sake of this study because it entails a broad discussion about man and anthropology from inside the church and the Reformed tradition that comes together with a fundamental critique of the interwovenness and dependence of Christian thinking about man and creation in relation to Greek philosophy. At the latter, Dooyeweerd (1935/1969) aimed his well-known ‘transcendental critique’<sup>3</sup>. Transcendental thinking departs from the idea of creation as a cosmonomic unity with its religious root in a personal Creator. Anyone who denies transcendental reality and limits their thinking to just the immanent (focusing on the here and now, the tangible, the verifiable) misses the ‘Archimedean point’. To not overlook this point is a ‘religious act’ that defines everything that happens next (Dooyeweerd, 1969, p. 20). There starts, for Dooyeweerd (1969), the antithesis:

This basic motive does not lead to antinomies in philosophical thought, but rather to an absolute antithesis with all philosophy which is dominated by apostate ground-motives. It also leads to a thankful recognition of all the gifts and talents that God has left to fallen humanity. (p. 507)

3 For this study I used the English translation published in 1969.

Dooyeweerd (1969) perceived the world as a principally coherent creation of the eternal, supra-temporal God, whereby Man is related to Him and His supra-temporal reality through the heart. This discovery, not inspired by Kuyper's systematic works but by his meditations on the Pentecost (Kuyper, 1888/2014), for Dooyeweerd marked a turning point in his life: 'As I reflected on it, I realized that this insight overturned my whole view of man, and my view of the whole reality in which we live, since all reality has in humanity a central point of concentration' (in: van Meggelen, 1973). The way in which the Bible discusses the heart does not situate feelings and emotions as the focal point, but rather refers to the very core of being human—that is, the undivided principle of man in his transcendental relation with God. Referring to the opening words of Calvin's *Institution* (1536/2008), Dooyeweerd (1969) underlined that real self-knowledge and knowledge of God must go hand in hand. In his *New Critique*, he articulated this as follows:

The heart in its pregnant Biblical sense as religious root and centre of the whole of human existence may never be identified with the function of 'feeling' or that of 'faith', neither is it a complex of functions like the metaphysical concept of soul which is found in Greek and humanistic metaphysics; it is alien to any dualism between the body (as a complex of natural functions) and the soul (as a complex of psychical and normative functions (...)) It is the fulness of our selfhood in which all out temporal functions find their religious concentration and consummation of meaning. (Dooyeweerd, 1969, p. 516)

The heart is like the flower bulb as a root entity in which all aspects of believing, thinking, feeling and organic life come together. Dooyeweerd (1969) fiercely resisted all kinds of reductionistic thinking of man because such thinking cuts off this connection to the heart. Not only the separation between philosophy and faith found in Kant but also the scholastic theology within the Christian tradition lead to the separation and even absolutisation of logical reason. The core of Dooyeweerd's cosmonomic idea is that man, especially due to the transcendental relatedness of his heart, can be neither reduced, nor absolutised, nor approached as a goal in itself. In his essence, man has no independent existence, separated from God or from creation. Responsibility and respect are the core values of human existence. Just like Comenius, for Dooyeweerd the heart as a religious centre relates to the whole world. Parting from the connection to God in broken creation, the battle must be fought with the demonic powers that are active within it.

On these core ideas (antithesis, sphere sovereignty, heart as the transcendental centre), Dooyeweerd (1969) based his theory of modal aspects. He stated that all forms of existence are composed of 15 modalities that each



answer to their own internal laws. These modal aspects are always present in the same structure and in mutual coherence. In man, as the highest form of creation in the temporal reality, all 15 are present: the quantitative, the spatial, the kinematic, the physical, the biotic/organic, the sensitive/psychic, the analytical, the formative, the lingual, the social, the economic, the aesthetic, the juridical, the ethical/attitudinal and the pistic/faith (Hengstmengel, 2015; van Woudenberg, 2015). The latter aspect can only function in a reality broken by sin through the faith connection to Christ, who as the incarnate son of God is the transcendental God-with-us. These modal aspects are a way of showing both the complexity of life and its coherence.

Dooyeweerd's approach can be considered fundamentally philosophical. Although his theological elaborations are sometimes subject to criticism (Hengstmengel, 2015, p. 187), he certainly had an impact on theology and Biblical anthropology as practiced by theologians. Dooyeweerd did not enter into discussion about theological issues concerning, for example, the ratio of body, soul and spirit—trichotomy or dichotomy—or the existence of the image of God in man after the fall—the Roman Catholic *superadditum*, the Calvinistic distinction between a stricter and a wider sense, or the Lutheran rejection of every form of godly image in unreconciled sinners (Stewart, 2003). Notwithstanding, his philosophical ideas led the theologian G.C. Berkouwer (1962) to dedicate an entire chapter of his anthropology to 'the whole man' (pp. 194-233), as already noted at the beginning of this section.

Berkouwer started this chapter by observing that there is plenty of reason to focus on the whole man because without such a focus one can never truly encounter the mystery of his existence. In relation to man's physicality in particular, Berkouwer regularly perceived reductionism. With Dooyeweerd, he characterised the Biblical view of man as one that does not seek attention for man himself but reserves all attention for his relation to God. The Biblical view of man is profoundly religious, with explicit attention paid towards all kinds of cosmic and interpersonal relations. Man as man of God (1 Tim. 6:11) perishes by His anger but prospers by His goodness and mercy. Without the connection to God, man is just impossible, a phantom, a creation of abstract thinking who is unable to realise his coherence with what surrounds him. This man, 'in the impossibility of his being isolated and independent' is, according to Berkouwer 'the whole man' (1962, p. 198).

Berkouwer proved convincingly that the typical, non-scientific speech of Scripture does not justify an analysis of man in a trichotomy (body, soul and spirit), nor in a dualistic substance dichotomy (body/flesh and soul/spirit). Biblical terms such as flesh, body, spirit, soul, heart, mind and kidney are,

many times, interchangeable or partly overlapping and otherwise separated. Berkouwer supported the non-substantial, non-dualistic speech of the Roman Catholic Council of Vienna (1311) and of Reformed confessions such as the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession about body and soul, as they underlined the 'ontical unity' of both elements. The reason Berkouwer sought a subtle balance with regard to body and soul (duality, not dualism) was the insight he acquired from Dooyeweerd's cosmonomic vision:

There is a widespread feeling that this theory of man does not propose a duality-in-unity but rather a tension-filled dualism, which is not at all abrogated by saying that soul and body are related to each other, in some explicable (or inexplicable) way. The argument thus concerns dualism rather than duality. When the Dutch Calvinist philosopher Dooyeweerd (and his philosophy of law spheres) made his sharp attack on the teaching of the two substances in man, he nevertheless spoke of a distinction between 'heart' and 'body' ('functiemantel') and declared more than once that he was not opposed to the idea of dual moments; he held that a substantial dichotomy implied much more than a duality, and that it dualistically destroyed the unity of human nature. (Berkouwer, 1962, pp. 212–213)

Berkouwer's focus on the unity of body and soul raised a question about what effect this has on the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. He considered this question in his next chapter, again referring to Dooyeweerd, this time especially to his distinction between the temporal and the supratemporal. Berkouwer did not deviate from the Reformed confessions, as he ended with a standpoint that is today defended by John W. Cooper (2009) as 'dualistic holism': 'The existential unity but temporary separation of body and soul' (p.32). The work of van den Brink and van der Kooi (2012) deviated more significantly from traditional Reformed confessions. They referred to Berkouwer (1962) but also to recent developments in biology, psychology and neurosciences, concluding (4):

We humans are much more an organic unity of soul/spirit and body than we supposed for over a long time. Our 'higher' abilities and actions always prove to have a physical substrate in our body, especially in our brain. There is much reason to say that we are our body instead of saying that we (just) have a body. Ideas of the soul as the non-visible, untouchable core of human existence that carries our psychological functions (awareness, thinking, feeling, etc.) have scientifically been proven untenable. Because these functions are controlled by physical and neurological processes in

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4 Translation from Dutch is mine.

our brain (...) The idea of an immortal human soul that resides in the body, goes back much more to Greek-philosophical roots than having a Biblical background. (van den Brink & van der Kooi, 2012, p. 248)

Justly, Peels (2015) posed some critical questions regarding the position adopted by van den Brink and van der Kooi (2012) here. To validate man as mainly the physical body does not match with what the Belgic Confession claimed in Article 37 about the resurrection of the body and its reunion with the soul, nor with what Sunday 22 of the Heidelberger Catechism confessed about it. Peels (2015), therefore, proposed a more moderate 'holistic dualism', which he—remarkably—connected to Cooper's (2009) 'dualistic holism'.

Ouweneel (2018) perceived Dooyeweerd's cosmonomic philosophy as a radical Christian answer to the question about the unicity of humanity. It opposes other answers, such as the scholastic-dualistic and the strictly evolutionistic answers (p. 153). Man is not to be seen, as in the scholastic-dualistic answer, as mainly a dichotomy or a trichotomy (in some charismatic circles, it is even common to say that man *has* a spirit, *is* a soul and *lives in* a body). Nor is man to be seen as an ennobled type of animal, as the strictly evolutionistic answer proposes, which is prone to dualism and reductionism. Man is much more than a further developed variant of a group of pre-Adamic hominids (pre-people). Ouweneel (2018) considered Calvin, Berkouwer and, especially, Dooyeweerd extensively, reaching the following conclusion <sup>(5)</sup>: 'For myself I find it simply not understandable how such an exalted vision on man could be reconciled with the evolution picture' (p. 185). Ouweneel (2018) not only called for attention regarding the 'humanity structures' that he based on Dooyeweerd's theory of modal aspects but also concerning three central dimensions of humanity: the cognitive, the creative and the conative dimension (knowledge, imagination and will).

Dooyeweerd (1969), Berkouwer (1962) and Ouweneel (2018) agreed on the central position of the heart; an aspect that is less clear in van den Brink and van der Kooi's (2012) systematic theology. In addition, Golverdingen (1995) did the same in his pedagogical anthropology (p. 75). Scripture depicts man as both an individual and a communal being, created in relation to God (religious dimension), to the neighbour (social dimension), to the environment (stewardship dimension) and to himself (inner dimension) (Golverdingen, 1995, p. 52). Although Dooyeweerd hesitated to approximate his cosmonomic idea too much from a legal perspective, it has a strong connection with the law (nomos) of God. The Ten Commandments concern the relation to God and to the neighbour. They have, as O'Rourke Boyle (2018) proved, everything to

5 Translation from Dutch is mine.

do with the heart. She characterised the usage of the term heart (*lēb/lēbab*) in the Old Testament as an ‘agent of the divine law’ (O’Rourke Boyle, 2018, p. xii). Then, she showed that Aristotle combined the term mainly with the physical organ, while Augustine spoke about a burning desire, Thomas related it to natural reason and Calvin to brokenness and healing. In line with Calvin, characterised by O’Rourke Boyle (2018) as a ‘passionate cardiocentrist’ (p. 119), Dooyeweerd in his cosmonomic philosophy comes close again to the original Biblical meaning of ‘heart’.

### **Troost on Dooyeweerd**

A comprehensive overview of Dooyeweerd’s work can be found in Troost’s *Antropocentrische totaliteitswetenschap. Inleiding in de ‘reformatoische wijsbegeerte’ van H. Dooyeweerd* (2005), where the title offers a summary of the book: anthropocentric totality science. The human being is seen as the centre of God’s creation, with special responsibilities assigned to mankind before God, within creation. Totality science refers to reality as a totality, not only of temporal (physical and visible) reality but also of the supratemporal (spiritual) one. Based on Dooyeweerd’s Reformational philosophy, Troost (2005) sought to introduce his reader to the totality of scientifically investigated and accessible created reality. A less bombastic alternative title would have been ‘Christocentric philosophy’ (Troost, 2005, p. 7), but in line with Dooyeweerd (1969), he was hesitant to enter too much into theology. Reformational philosophy aims to establish a scientific basis for theology and to do so from a religious perspective that, notwithstanding, does not belong to philosophy itself. Troost (2005) referred to the ‘contemporary, evermore common critique on the rationalistic Enlightenment ideal of a religion-neutral and society-impartial science’<sup>6</sup>, for which Dooyeweerd was a precursor (p. 8).

The message built on Dooyeweerd’s work is prophetic—namely, a ‘calling back of our culture, and especially our scientific culture, from the idolatry with theoretical reasoning’ (Troost, 2005, p. 9). This cultural critique comes from totality. Troost defined philosophy as ‘theoretical thinking, from and to the origin, aimed at the totality of the cosmos’ (p. 12). The border area of what ‘is and is not accessible for theoretical investigating’ emphatically belongs to it (Troost, 2005, p. 26). The origin of the totality has been withdrawn from human observation and logical analysis, although it is still present in reality. It becomes visible in man, who is connected to it through the heart. For Troost, anthropocentrism and Christocentrism can be considered the same: Christ

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6 Translation from Dutch is mine.

became man and in doing so He became the root unity of totality (p. 27). In Him, everything is created and everything is being renewed (Col. 1:15-18).

After these *Prolegomena*, Troost (2005) considered time and time transcendence. In this part, he depicted the human heart as a transcendental root unity that binds the temporal to the supratemporal and the creation to the Creator. Referring to Proverbs 4:23, he called it a 'metaphorical or idiosyncratic articulation of what exceeds our understanding' (Troost, 2005, p. 48) (7). In the heart resides human identity and the 'whole person' who keeps existing after physical death (Troost, 2005, p. 49). Then, at the start of several chapters about cosmology, Troost observed that, in the scientific analysis and systematisation of the cosmos, the 'one, integrative reality of man and world' (p. 55) cannot be left out. Reformational philosophy has, from the start, paid attention to 'this all-inclusive interwovenness of (not just the sum of) all diversity in reality' (Troost, 2005, p. 55). This interwovenness comes directly from the transcendental origin: 'The divine order of existence, the law of creation, is the principle of the transcendental structure of the created reality, that first enables her concrete existence' (Troost, 2005, p. 59). Therefore, there is a cosmic order, which is called the creational order by Christians and is known as the Tao or world logos by others.

Within this order, man occupies a central position, as described by Troost in several anthropological chapters. Mankind is, in contrast to the animal kingdom, a 'spiritual totality and unity' (Troost, 2005, p. 154), a 'spiritual community in Adam and/or Christ' (p. 157).

The whole creation is, both to its law-side as to its subject-side, via its own religious centre in mankind, inwardly directed at and related to God. Not in a pantheistic or mystical sense (that would be unbiblical philosophical metaphysics or ontology), but 'in Christ', and thereby just real and knowable by faith. (Troost, 2005, p. 167)

It is for this reason that Reformational philosophy fundamentally protests against every form of closed worldview. The fact that the human Self resides in the heart as an undivided, transcendental unity centre does not mean that it is an isolated centre. Man is man in three relations that go together: the I-self relation, the relation of humanity towards other people and the relation to God. As opposed to the cosmos as an independent and closed whole:

Reformational philosophy recognizes a process of unlocking that is pre-given in the nature of creatures, but to a great extent collapsed and closed by

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7 Translation from Dutch is mine, as in all other quotations from Troost (2005).

sin. Through God's grace in His providential and saving work the unlocking process is in principle and fragmentary re-opened towards meaning and fulness of meaning. This means that development as such can go on, but does not always take place in the religious directionality towards God. (Troost, 2005, pp. 167-168)

While the representatives of Reformational philosophy speak fully integratively and synthetically about reality, it is noteworthy that they carefully avoid the predicate holism or holistic. Dooyeweerd's (1969) own work made it clear that what he perceived of holism mainly has to do with biology and is located at the other side of the antithesis, as he did with humanism.

The philosophical conflict concerning the foundations of biology intervenes in the centre of scientific problems, and up to now, it is exclusively conducted within the cadre of a Humanist view of science. Can the Christian biologist choose sides in the sense of a mechanistic, a vitalistic or an holistic view of the living organism? Or will he consider it safer to hide behind the positivist mask of neutrality? For it is a naïve positivism that has caused the idea of philosophical neutrality to dominate the special sciences. Our conclusion is, however, that the positivistic conception of special science cannot be reconciled to a Christian cosmomic Idea. (Dooyeweerd, 1969, p. 565)

Troost (2005) showed how Reformational philosophy, in fact, subscribes to the critique of Western rationalism and reductionism and then pleaded throughout his work for clear, synthetic, theoretical thinking. Nevertheless, he warned that merely the correction of reductionism and rationalism will not provide a good alternative, 'neither does the irrationalistic and personalistic chaos thinking that systematically (!) tries to be anti-systematic and anti-metaphysic' (Troost, 2005, p. 216). What Troost (2005) opted for surpasses the holistic and humanistic alternatives he was aware of and is specifically Christian. Still, Troost (2005) recognised the need to relate himself and Reformational philosophy to the predicate holism:

The moment of truth in holism is indeed that in all life there is a whole that is more than the connection or sum of the parts. It is therefore understandable that holism came up from biology, as a reaction against physical-mechanistic views that part exclusively from the parts of a whole (for example the physical qualified sub-structure), but cannot do justice to the typical own nature of many (organically qualified) wholes. The difference with the Reformational vision, however, is that also the biological or organic view, that within temporal reality surely has its right, cannot penetrate the real, if one like: the absolute, unity of all that belongs to created reality.

It leaves out its whole transcendental, supratemporal, religious centre, the deep root-dimension. (p. 50)

The conclusion regarding Dooyeweerd for now can be that, just like Comenius, he established a clear connection between the human heart—in his case considered as the root entity of undivided human existence—and human responsibility (as a telos) towards the Creator and His whole creation. In Dooyeweerd's cosmic philosophy the necessity of Christ for this (re) connection is put more sharply and absolutely than in Comenius' pansophy. Although Dooyeweerd for contextual reasons showed himself sceptical about holism, his insights encourage to pursue the connectedness of all that is created, in its vast diversity.

### 3.1.3 Aurelius Augustine and James K.A. Smith

There is no evidence of any kind of hesitation towards the predicate holism in the scientific work of James K.A. Smith (2009, 2013, 2016, 2017). Indeed, the term has appeared throughout his books and lectures. He connected a strong plea for holistic Christian education to the life and work of his great inspirer, Aurelius Augustine. From the perspective of Dooyeweerd and Reformational philosophy discussed above, this does not naturally follow. Augustine is by no means elevated above Dooyeweerd's critique of confusing the Biblical Christian view of reality with Greek philosophical thinking. His approach to the human body bears the weight of clear platonic dualism, especially his view of marriage, sexuality and lust (van der Zwaag, 2008), although he was less negative about it than many contemporaries (Dupont, 2015). Due to his ongoing conversation with Neoplatonism, the Church Father continually reacted to its sharp distinction between form and matter. With regard to the soul and body, but also considering things such as knowledge or love, he spoke of substances.

The mere observation of certain dualistic or Greek philosophical tendencies in Augustine's doctrine of man, however, does him no justice. In his analysis of what man is, the Church Father counted and still counts as the one who discovered the human interior (Cary, 2000). Augustine began his approach to man with a sharp distinction between the outer and the inner man. 'As the inner man is endued with understanding, so is the outer with bodily sense', he claimed (*On the Trinity*, ±400/1887, Book 9.1). The inner man inhabits the outer as a physical home. When Calvin later, in his *Institution* (1536/2008), prolonged this distinction, he even spoke of the body as the prison of the soul. Augustine, however, stressed the interwovenness of both. He did so by, for example, localising the soul in the whole body, instead of merely identifying a certain connection:

In each body it is both whole in the whole, and whole in each several part of it; and, therefore, when anything takes place in any small particle whatever of the body, such as the soul can feel, although it does not take place in the whole body, yet the whole soul feels it, since the whole soul is not unconscious of it. (On the Trinity, Book 6.6)

When studying *On the Trinity*, especially Books 9 to 12, it is remarkable how carefully Augustine analysed man without losing sight of his totality. He always ended in synthesis.

Augustine's clear distinction between the *homo exterior* and the *homo interior* was effectively summarised by Maertens (1965) (8):

To the area of the *homo exterior* belong: a. The body. b. The activity of the body: what belongs to its organic structure (*compages corporis*) and to the activity of the senses (*omnes sensus, quibus instructus est ad exteriora sentienda*). c. The images of sensory objects that rest in memory and can be derived of it by recording (*re-cordando*) (...) To the area of the *homo interior* belong: a. The intentional storing of higher images (*de industria memoriae commendata retinere*) and to rescue them from oblivion by reflection (*recordando et cogitando*). b. Using this treasure of images to create imagination constructs by randomly combining (*assuendo componere*). c. To indicate the relation of all these things to the Truth (*in hoc rerum genere quae veri-similia sunt dic-cernere a veris*). All these activities happen in the *homo interior*; however, the used material can belong to the sensible world (*quamvis in sensilibus*). It is precisely for the latter that a part of the *mens humana* is delegated. d. The judgements on all these corporalia according to intangible and eternal laws. This is the work of the higher mind (*sublimioris rationis*). While already repeatedly is concluded that the soul also is changeable, these laws have to be transcendent. (pp. 194–195)

This presentation of Augustine's view on the complexity of man appears dualistic, especially when he defined the inner man as the real man. However, Maertens (1965) valued this interiority doctrine (p. 223) precisely because it has grown throughout the work of the Church Father into a really 'integral life attitude' (p. 223). Key to this doctrine and attitude are a 'deep sense of powerlessness and dependence' that humbles man (Maertens, 1995, p. 224) and the clear attention paid to the human will and the necessary renewal of it (p. 226). A person can rationally discover that there is no rest outside of God, whereas to find rest in God is connected to an underlying conversion. This

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8 Translations from Maertens (1965), written originally in Dutch, are mine.



truly personal element that emerges from the connection between Augustine's own conversion and the whole of his theological and anthropological thinking is what caused his view of man to differ fundamentally from 'the rigidity of Plotinic contemplation' (Maertens, 1995, p. 226) and, therefore, from all his philosophical predecessors from Eastern, Hellenistic and also patristic thinking. Renewal of the will is renewal of lust and of the directionality of longing towards God and His truth.

Maertens (1965) identified humanistic tendencies in Augustine's view of man, without referring to him, from a modernist perspective, as a humanist.

Altogether, isn't this first humanism: to activate a power beyond the sensory apparatus at man's disposal, and even beyond his mind, that is capable of realizing his ultimate possibilities? But therefore one has to dare, like Augustine, the experience with God, and thus leave superficiality. (Maertens, 1965, p. 227)

Man, according to Augustine, only really becomes man and flourishes in the tension between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the self. This tension can gradually reduce, but it will never be completely disappear, even not after death. In Plotinus' philosophy, stated Maertens (1965), the human ego is finally eliminated, but in Augustine's view, it maintains its existence, becoming its ultimate fulfilment, *coram Deo*. This 'I' is located in *On the Trinity* (Augustine, ±400/1887) mainly in the soul, as in it Augustine discussed platonic thinking, while in his *Confessions* (±398/1961), the Church Father used, above all, the Biblical term heart. Hengstmengel (2015) observed that the soul in Augustine's vocabulary had a more 'technical-philosophical connotation' (p. 36), whereas heart had a more religious one.

This observation shows that Comenius came chronologically after Augustine and demonstrated his influences. It also shows that, notwithstanding all of the platonic influences, Dooyeweerd's cosmonomic philosophy remained close to Augustine's central conceptions. Man really becomes man when he finds rest in God, and this occurs in the undivided and indivisible core of his existence: his heart. He reaches his fulfilment when he is reconnected to the Eternal. His life, then, achieves another direction and his existence becomes subservient in the world. Dupont (2012) described the Augustinian view on the start of this new life as the return to and ascend from the heart, a phrasing that again evokes Comenius' pilgrimage. Dupont and Walraet (2015) noted that the Latin word for heart (*cor*) appears no less than 8000 times in Augustine's work. In their anthropological analysis, they even indicated that the heart, for

Augustine, meant no less than 'the holistic identity centre of each person, as human interiority in general' (Dupont & Walraet, 2015, p. 45).

When man's will and longing are renewed by God's Spirit, according to Augustine a certain form of detachment from the earthly aspects can be observed. This detachment, however, fundamentally differs from world avoiding and isolation. The highest object of love can only be God Himself. The ever-changing world can be loved to a certain degree, but only as God's creation (Hengstmengel, 2015). Inverting this order, loving the world (*fruti*) above God and only using God (*uti*) for one's benefit means that sin is committed. Sin destroys connection and takes away happiness. In the right order, a Christian can love and serve the world. According to Maertens (1965), Augustine showed Biblical optimism in this aspect.

### Smith on Augustine

Like Dupont (2015), James K.A. Smith (2009, 2013, 2016, 2017) sought to make use of Augustine's insights to give direction to Christian education today. Thus, on Augustine's doctrine of human interiority he based his conviction that it is not just man's rationality (mind, reason) that defines his distinction from higher animals. In the heart, as the central core of humanness, thinking, feeling and longing come together. Still, its directionality is predominantly shaped by the latter (by longing, desire). This is most immediately apparent in the title of the book in which Smith (2016) accounted for his connection to Augustine: *You Are What You Love*. In this book, Smith distanced himself from the Cartesian idea that people are who they think they are. Their concrete actions reveal much more about their identity due to exposing their deeper desires. The combination of longing and wanting leads to certain life practices that, in turn, stimulate and direct one's desires again. This is what Smith (2016) referred to in the book's subtitle, *The Spiritual Power of Habit*.

Augustine's two kingdom doctrine motivated Smith (2009, 2013, 2017) to relate Christian education to the city of God. Based on this relation, he first published *Desiring the Kingdom* (2009) and then later *Imagining the Kingdom* (2013) and *Awaiting the King* (2017). The theory he elaborated in this trilogy concerned *cultural liturgies* and the person-as-lover model. Human beings are not mainly independent thinkers who rationally choose who they are and what they want; rather, they are governed by sinful lusts or by longing for God and His Kingdom. There are all kinds of forces in the world that do everything possible to drive people's desires towards the earthly and the material. God, however, works in people a new desire. Smith repeatedly quoted the central line from Augustine's *Confessions* (±398/1961): 'For You have made us for

Yourself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in You' (*quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*). Therefore, God utilises the preaching of His Word, which not only contains cognitive information but is also closely tied to all kinds of practices or liturgies aimed at the heart and desires of man.

For Smith (2017), this approach was holistic, and Dupont and Walraet (2015) supported this idea with more scientific proof. By holistic, Smith meant, in the first place, non-reductionistic: he distanced himself from the rationalistic, reductionistic approach that dominates Western anthropology and also Christian education. In reference to Augustine, Pascal and Heidegger, Smith promoted an alternative to cognitivist anthropology. In the church and in Christian education, there should be more attention paid to the whole person, attention in which *worship* (the active service of God, including the physical and creative side of man) should not only be the central goal but also formative practice. The following quotation shows how he imagined the role of the Christian university that provides this attention:

The Christian university does not simply deposit ideas into mind-receptacles, thereby providing just enough education to enable credentialing for a job. No, the Christian university offers an education that is formative—a holistic education that not only provides knowledge but also shapes our fundamental orientation to the world. It is what I'll call, in a slight tweak of Flaubert, a "sentimental education". The alumni of Christian universities are sent in God's good (but broken) world equipped with new intellectual reservoirs and skills for thinking; but ideally they are also sent out from the Christian university with new habits and desires and virtues. They will have been habituated to love God and his kingdom—to love God and desire what he wants for creation—and thus engage the world. Indeed, if we are going to teach students rigorously and critically, we must also form them in what Augustine calls "the right order of love". (Smith, 2013, pp. 4–5)

Holistic Christian education arises in Smith's (2013) opinion from an approach to man that he calls 'liturgical anthropology' (p. 29). Central to this anthropology is the term 'embodied intentionality', by which Smith (2013) meant that desires become visible in the activities of the bodily existence, in visible practices that, in turn, are formative for the desires driving them. He based this claim on the work of phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty and sociologist Bourdieu, who both considered and assigned meaning to 'embodied intentionality'. Merleau-Ponty did so with the term *praktognosia*, while Bourdieu used the term *habitus*. *Praktognosia* concerns knowledge and insight that is not acquired

in a cognitive manner but is instead the consequence of bodily perception based on practical experience. The body knows with 'preconscious knowledge' that enables judgement, analysis and conscious knowledge. Man's being in the world produces this knowledge, without the possibility of drawing a clear line between mind and body: 'So we can no longer separate the body as physiological mechanism from the "habit-body" that has built up over time' (Smith, 2013, p. 44). This led Smith (2013) to new educational questions such as 'How do we teach the body?' and 'How is the body trained to perceive the world?' (p. 73).

While *praktognosia* relates to the phenomena that surround man, *habitus* is concerned with the dynamics between man's interiority and men, the group, the community he is part of. This interaction generates a 'system of structured, structuring dispositions', a 'communal, collective disposition that gets inscribed in me' (Smith, 2013, p. 81). This immediately brings to mind Augustine's law of the heart. Not only does bodily interaction with nature and phenomena form an unconscious disposition that influences acquaintance but also cultural interaction with people. A person is part of a group that defines what is fashionable and what is not. Bourdieu (1977) interpreted this aspect of human reality with the term *habitus*, which in the work of Aristotle stood for a certain disposition, a latent capacity from which earlier or later on something can develop. Smith (2013) tied it to his 'embodied intentionality' and discussed Bourdieu's *habitus* in a chapter he titled 'The Social Body'.

The image of man that Smith (2013) focused on is of much greater complexity than the affirmation that man is an *animal rationale* (Aristotle) or a thinking being. There is a complex, inseparable bond between the human body and the human spirit. In addition, the whole of the human being is inseparably connected to the context in which he or she lives and to the group he or she is, willingly or unwillingly, part of. All of these influences on the human being shape certain desires. In particular, this point influenced Smith (2013) to derive many thoughts from Augustine. When human desires are only horizontally aimed, they degenerate into (sinful) lusts. By the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world, however, human desires can also be aimed at God. The Holy Spirit utilises, therefore, Biblical teaching that, in a holistic manner, is communicated via knowledge and through practices. In relation to the church and Christian education, Smith's (2013) conclusion, based on Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, was as follows:

Having fallen prey to the intellectualism of Modernity, both Christian worship and Christian pedagogy have underestimated the importance of this body/story nexus—this inextricable link between imagination, narrative, and

embodiment—thereby forgetting the ancient Christian sacramental wisdom carried in the historic practices of Christian worship and the embodied legacies of spiritual and monastic disciplines. Failing to appreciate this, we have neglected formational resources that are indigenous to the Christian tradition, as it were; as a result, we have too often pursued flawed models of discipleship and Christian formation that have focused on convincing the intellect rather than recruiting the imagination. (p. 39)

According to Smith (2013), a holistic approach to education would activate and, finally, orientate concrete action. The whole world is God's world, which is what Smith learned of Kuyper after he became a Christian. This corrected the Christianity that Smith (2017) knew from the 'largely dualistic stream of North American evangelicalism, complete with a robust dispensational view of the end of times and a very narrow understanding of redemption' in which 'heaven-centric piety' had 'little, if anything, to say about how or why a Christian might care about urban planning or chemical engineering or securing clean water sources in developing nations' (p. 85). Afterwards, Smith also explored the opposite—namely, a purely horizontal, world-focused interpretation of Christianity. The dialectical approach he finally chose entailed awaiting Christ's Second Coming from heaven while serving expectantly on Earth. From Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* (412/2008), Smith perceived the church in pluralistic society as a 'habit-forming polis in which we gather to be shaped and (re)formed by the Spirit in ways that make us good neighbours, even to our enemies' (Smith, 2017, p. 150).

In Augustine's teaching the heart represents the person's deepest longing. There is no real fulfilment of it if it not comes to its religious telos. The human heart finds rest in coming to God and serving Him in the complex and diverse city of man. For education this means that teachers should aim at the child's heart by habits that shape its longing in this religious sense of the word.

### 3.2 SYNTHESIS OF THE THREE CONTRIBUTIONS

The fundamental ideas of Augustine, Comenius and Dooyeweerd, as described in Section 1, can now be brought together. Despite of their differences in time, approach and focus, these three historic Christian scholars showed a remarkable and significant overlap that can be helpful when evaluating WCD, as presented in Chapter 2, as a worldwide movement to correct reductionist inclinations in modern, fragmented education. Christian anthropology along the lines of Augustine's interiority theology, Comenius' optimistic pedagogy and Dooyeweerd's cosmonomic and anthropocentric philosophy can likewise

be characterised as non-reductionistic and—as became especially true in the analysis of their contemporary advocates above—holistic. A further, summarising, synthesis of their insights creates space to endorse WCD from a Christian perspective, albeit not without a critical remark.

To provide for such a synthesis, the following points can be put forward with regard to Augustine, Comenius and Dooyeweerd:

- All three showed deep awareness of the inner complexity of man. Augustine did so in his interiority theory, Dooyeweerd through both his theory of modal aspects and functions in the human person. Comenius was less explicit about inner complexity, although he clearly paid attention to it when beginning his wide vision of the transformation of the world in the inner silence of the human heart, from which flowed his plea for broad, integrative education. In all cases, it led followers of their ideas to plead for attention to be paid to the whole person and for a clear rejection of reductionistic approaches to man.
- All three combined detailed insight into the complex personal inner life with a broad cosmologic vision. Both Comenius' pansophy and Dooyeweerd's cosmonomic philosophy placed man at the centre of a universal whole created by God and governed by eternal law. Augustine was less explicit regarding this aspect, but he underlined the presence of the city of God in the world and the possibility of serving God in it through respecting the law written in the heart. Their contemporary advocates described this attention as holistic, as did James K.A. Smith (2009, 2013, 2016, 2017) and Dupont and Walraet (2015) for Augustine, as well as Hábl (2011, 2017) and David I. Smith (2017) for Comenius. Troost (2005) was, as Dooyeweerd's contemporary advocate, more hesitant about the term, although he explicitly recognised the central moment of truth in holism.
- Comenius was described as profoundly humanistic by his contemporary advocates (Hábl, 2011; Stevens, 2020). Maertens (1965) was ready to call Augustine's anthropology humanistic, albeit in a non-modern sense of the term. Troost (2005) was again more hesitant with the term, but he nevertheless placed the human being at the centre of Dooyeweerd's anthropocentric theory of totality.
- All three famous Christian scholars coincided in their attention to the transcendental aspect of reality. For Augustine and Comenius, this seemed to be a natural part of their reality. Dooyeweerd, reacting to modernity, formulated a fundamentally transcendental critique of theoretical thought. Their contemporary advocates (Smith, Hábl and Troost) agreed that

modern thought and education suffer from a fundamental neglect of the transcendental—and consequently of the human telos or destiny in the whole of creation.

- The three famous Christian scholars showed remarkable agreement on the centrality of the human heart, not the physical organ per se, nor as a symbol of the emotional aspect of life (feelings), but as the core of undivided human existence. For Dooyeweerd, it is through the heart that the temporal and the supratemporal reality come together, while according to Augustine and Comenius, true renewal, happiness and flourishing are only possible when sinners return to their hearts, which represents a return to God and His eternal law.

The five points that comprise this summarising synthesis are helpful for both endorsing WCD and criticising it from a Christian anthropological perspective. In particular, the latter two points show that not only is the lack of attention to spirituality in the original wholism a problem but also how the place it received in the WCD combination of holism and wholism, as described in Section 2.4, falls short. From a Christian perspective, the *Anthropos* cannot be understood without paying clear attention to its transcendental origin (from God), its transcendental ontology (through God) and its transcendental teleology (towards God). Augustine, Comenius and Dooyeweerd, as Christian scholars, cannot be understood without taking all of this into account and emphasising their focus on the heart as the (transcendental) root entity of the human being, *coram Deo*, before God. While endorsing the WCD approach, from a Christian perspective, a critical remark must be made that it lacks this ontology and teleology. This remark accords with what was written in Chapter 1, along the lines of MacIntyre's (2007) and Taylor's (1989) cultural critiques, on *telos* and *ontology*.

To be able to make the WCD approach fruitful for the citizenship formation of trainee teachers from a Christian perspective its description must be enriched with these notions. This led me to formulate a definition of holistic Christian education that this chapter began with (<sup>9</sup>). It aligns with the more secular and general description of WCD elaborated by the NIVOZ Foundation, as quoted in Chapter 2.3.1 and in the introduction (NIVOZ Foundation, 2018), but adds both ontology and teleology:

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9 This definition was developed and published in a peer-reviewed article in the *International Journal of Christianity & Education*, in which a summary of this chapter is also included (van Olst, 2023a).

Christian-holistic education values and seeks all dimensions of human development from early childhood on, including physical, social, emotional, cognitive, spiritual and values-based learning, aiming at the person's heart as the undivided principle of its existence that precedes head and hands, placing it with pedagogical optimism based on Christian hope before God, to seek its restoration and the longing and ability to serve in all the organic relationships God placed him into; with the self, the neighbour, and nature as a whole. (van Olst, 2023a, p. 11)

### 3.3 TOWARDS SHALOM-SEEKING CITIZENSHIP

The definition of holistic Christian education (Section 2) based on a critical evaluation of WCD in light of historic Christian anthropology (Section 1) refers to the restoration of originally good but later (in the fall) broken relationships. In this restoration, that can be seen as a reconnection of fragmented relationships, both the intrapersonal (the heart before God) and the interpersonal (including community, society and the world) play a role. This all refers to a profound need for Godly grace in education, although it also provides direction to educational practices instrumental to that grace. It brings this study to the pedagogical question of how Christian citizenship formation should be exercised to foster this restoration of relationships and combat both reductionism and fragmentation. To answer this question, I turn to Nicholas Wolterstorff (2004, 2017), a former Yale philosopher in the tradition of Dooyeweerd's cosmonomic philosophy. More particularly, I turn to his *shalom* idea for (higher) education, which I think can provide the teleology that WCD is lacking and is based on Biblical ontology.

The shalom idea is the fruit of Wolterstorff's lifelong publishing, although it has received renewed and more coherent attention following a bundling of his essays on the topic by Clarence Joldersma and Gloria Stronks (2004). In the book's introduction, Joldersma (2004) stated that Wolterstorff's call for Biblical shalom is meant to preclude 'withdrawal from the world and society into the safety of a homogeneous Christian community, instead asking Christian institutions of higher education to become voices for social justice and human flourishing' (p. xxi). Christians need to recognise that all human beings are 'unavoidably hermeneutic creatures' who disagree on many topics, but who all interpret experiences and find meaning in doing so, on which basis they all 'desire, feel, and act' (Joldersma, 2004, p. 103). To this end, Wolterstorff's (2004) shalom idea presents a teleology, which I will summarise as 'shalom-seeking citizenship'.



It is fundamentally Reformed to not withdraw but to 'turn to the world', argued Wolterstorff (2004) in one of the essays (p. 104). He began by outlining an environment of secularisation and rapidly growing directional pluralism, stating that the Christian college needs to redefine itself in terms of its pedagogy, curriculum, community structure, relation between content and gospel, place and role of worship, and connection between 'what we offer' and practical life. He then took both globalisation and 'mixed-pluralistic society in which the body of those committed to Jesus Christ is just one of the components in the pluralism' into account, underlining the need for internationalisation, new ways of packaging and 'fresh strategies for bridging theory and practice' (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 34). For students, he perceived the necessity not only of understanding society as it has become but also of being enabled to take their positions in it (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 89). Therefore, the idea of shalom is fundamental: it combines epistemology and action.

Wolterstorff's (2004) shalom idea is not only recognised in the United States but also internationally. In the Netherlands, it led to a publication edited by Van Putten et al. (2017), who invited Wolterstorff to give a lecture at the presentation of their book. During this lecture, Wolterstorff (2017) acknowledged that 'the idea of shalom' had been a 'fundamental component in the framework of much of my thinking and writing since the early 1980s'. Although the Hebrew word *shalom* from the Old Testament (and its Greek equivalent, *Eirene*) is most commonly translated as peace, a much better translation would be flourishing. Peace is a necessary component, although it can be understood as simply the absence of harmony. Shalom includes the positive side, wellbeing, embracing in the end two fundamental components: communal and individual shalom. These two are mutually correlated in terms of how the Biblical prophets and, later, the New Testament authors elaborated the idea (Wolterstorff, 2017):

Individual shalom consists of being related to oneself and one's surroundings in ways that are overall good for one and morally right, and finding satisfaction in being so related: to God, to the natural world, to oneself, to one's fellow human beings, to institutions and cultural artifacts (...) Fundamental to the shalom understanding of social or communal flourishing is its affirmation of what I shall call the 'each-and-every principle': when determining the degree to which some community is flourishing, the flourishing of each individual in that community is to be taken into account; not only the rich but also the poor, not only the bright but also the not-so-bright, not only the healthy but also the sick and disabled.

As an introduction, Wolterstorff (2004) returns, in his essays edited by Stronks and Joldersma (2004), to the Biblical vision of ‘what constitutes flourishing and of our appointed destiny’ (pp. 22–23). It is not a vision of ‘disembodied individual contemplation of God’; rather, it is one of individual and communal shalom—a vision of *flourishing together*. This flourishing is based on *justice*: ‘Justice is the ground floor of shalom’ (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 23). However, at the same time, it goes beyond justice, incorporating correct relationships in general, ‘whether or not those are required by justice’ (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 23). It leads to a fundamentally inclusive *shalom community* wherein God’s laws for our multifaceted existence are obeyed. This community is a delightful and fundamentally inclusive community, which means that it welcomes strangers and pays special attention to the widow, the orphan and the poor because they are humans and have rights:

To dwell in shalom is to find delight in living rightly for God, to find delight in living rightly in one’s physical surroundings, to find delight in living rightly with one’s fellow human beings, to find delight even in living rightly with oneself (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 23).

According to Stronks and Joldersma (2004), this conception of shalom ‘combines a Reformed confessional Christianity with an increasingly radical social conscience and progressivist pedagogy’ (p. vii). They described how Wolterstorff’s vision of education developed over time from a more intellectualist, liberal arts approach to one framed by concerns for social justice in the context of educating more than just the mind. Wolterstorff rejected the maturation, socialisation and humanisation models of education, instead calling for the teaching of justice and shalom. He did so because he found that none of the mentioned models ‘responds adequately to the *wounds* of humanity—in particular, the *moral* wounds; none gives adequate answer to our cries and tears’ (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 22). The ‘overall goal of Christian collegiate education’ should be to help students to practice justice, while the ‘goal for which Christian educators are to teach is that our students be agents and celebrators of shalom, petitioners and mourners’ (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 24). The moral wounds of a world full of injustices must be present in the curriculum of the Christian college. Students must not only be taught *about* justice but *for* justice. ‘The graduate whom we seek to produce must be one who *practices* justice’ (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 24).

To prepare students for the world means enabling them to be ‘agents of shalom’ (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 34). This means that they become responsible agents before God. ‘We are given an office, a mandate, with respect to the world, with respect to each other, and with respect to God. This is definitive of

our uniqueness amidst our fellow earthlings' (p. 53). Wolterstorff combined this more with the Biblical call to love than with moral law as it functions in Enlightenment ethics:

In Kant, the center of the picture is always me and the moral law—this moral law being the deliverance of my own transcendent self. In the prophets the center of attention is not the moral law but persons—the widow, the alien, and the orphan, the little ones, the voiceless ones, the oppressed ones, the poor ones, the hundredth one, the one left outside. Of course there is law. But the law is grounded in God's love for the little ones (p. 144).

Wolterstorff admitted that his shalom vision may be too big to be performed in the process of education: 'Maybe teaching cannot do it' (p. 154). However, he insisted on the necessity of holding unto that precise Biblical view, leaving room for the mysterious, the spiritual. 'Maybe only through one's own tears can one see God's tears. Maybe we as teachers must humbly acknowledge our limitations before the mysterious and troubling fact that suffering illuminates' (p. 154). He, therefore, went on dreaming:

What I visualize is a college that teaches for justice without neglecting the arts; a college that engages in praxis-oriented scholarship without denying the worth of pure scholarship; a college that gives its students some sense of the social practices of science and the works of art; a college that concerns itself with the multiple nonverbal ways in which it shapes the actions of students without neglecting the importance of classroom learning; a college that presents to us the faces and voices of suffering humanity without neglecting the importance of books; a college that teaches for mercy and justice without neglecting the importance of liturgy and devotions and contemplation; a college that responsibly inducts some students into the formative professions of American life without neglecting the arts and sciences and humanities. (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 169)

This dream or vision has inspired Christian educators to find ways to connect to modern, globalised and fragmented society. Stronks and Stronks (2014) made a connection to Christian citizenship. They referred to Cardus educational research highlighting that relatively few schools are able to systematically integrate learning within the school with engaging the world outside of the school. As 'every one of us is a citizen, and every one of us impacts the community around us', they were persuaded that 'Christian citizenship that emphasizes the rights of others to live and flourish in accordance with their own worldview is a necessary part of Christian witness in broken but redeemed

world' (Stronks & Stronks, 2014, p. 44). Therefore, they felt the need for a 'theology of citizenship' (pp. 44–45). A strong basis for such a theology can be found in Wolterstorff's shalom idea. 'If we broaden our understanding of politics to the concept of citizenship, then we have a framework in which to encourage engagement with the world' (p. 50).

A theology of citizenship would start by focusing on who God is: 'As revealed by the Trinity, God is relational and created people to be relational as well' (Stronks & Stronks, 2014, p. 45), which motivated the call for solidarity found in Wolterstorff's (2004) shalom idea. 'Both the Old and New Testaments tell us that God is glorified when communities and nations reflect God's will for justice, *shalom*, and care for the poor. God has shown a deep care for social issues and a deep anger towards injustice' (p. 45). They added that teachers and students should be careful not to approach this as works righteousness. Instead, they should attempt to approach the shalom idea from a perspective influenced by the central Biblical notion of grace. In their theological underpinning, Stronks and Stronks (2014) repeatedly situated both Biblical truth and the shalom idea in relation to an approach that they termed holistic, as they referred to:

a good creation, the holistic effects of evil and sin, the holistic scope of Christ's redemption, authentic faith is not an addendum to our lives but is holistic and pervasive, God's sovereignty over all of life, God's Lordship is over all the earth. (p. 9)

Another example of how Wolterstorff's shalom idea has inspired Christian citizenship formation can be found in an article by Joldersma (2016). He showed how standing up for the needs of vulnerable minority groups works within the Christian college itself, provided it bothers to be a shalom community. The case he made concerned LGBT students in Christian schools. As Joldersma (2016) argued, this group of students can easily feel oppressed, intimidated or excluded within the setting of a faith-based school. The question he raised concerned whether they are fully admitted to a 'secure place in Christian schools, without verbal harassment, physical assault, and intimidation because of their sexual orientation or gender identity' or whether they are 'relegated to a second-class citizenship' (Joldersma, 2016, p. 42). Doing justice to these students means explicitly including their positions and interests in the school's non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies, in addition to providing professional development for teachers and other staff members regarding effective intervention strategies to create safer environments.

Joldersma (2016) did not choose one side or the other with regard to the Biblical exegesis of texts about how LGBT sexuality should be valued from a

Christian perspective. 'Without minimizing the discussions about the seven scriptural passages, the Biblical bases for current definitions of marriage, or the reasons for protecting religious freedoms', Joldersma (2016) stated, 'this article suggests another approach' (p. 33). This approach 'does not require resolution of these conversations in the church or even agreement with all the assumptions above' (Joldersma, 2016, p. 33). In the application of the shalom idea, Joldersma (2016) stated that LGBT students have a *claim right* (the term comes from Wolterstorff himself) not to be marginalised as a vulnerable minority group. LGBT students should feel welcomed and protected to share their feelings, although others may disagree with their practical choices, because 'God not only loves justice, but (...) God's love is directed toward human image bearers' whom He wants to 'be treated justly precisely because of that' (Joldersma, 2016, p. 44).

A third example of how the shalom idea has inspired Christian thinking and acting in today's world can be found in the aforementioned Dutch publication (van Putten et al., 2017). In this collection, an essay by Kuiper compared the shalom idea to the critical educational philosophy of Biesta (2010, 2013). Wolterstorff's Christian perspective overlapped significantly with Biesta's perspective. The two shared the idea that schools educate for life and that education is about a way of being in the world. When Biesta (2013) distinguished his three target domains—qualification, socialisation and subjectification—he underlined the importance of subjectifying education, which means that students learn to be increasingly independent persons who relate to society in their own way and based on their own beliefs. Kuiper (2017) noted a parallel between Biesta's (2013) subjectifying education and Wolterstorff's (2004) education for shalom in forming students into responsible agents for shalom. In both cases, he recognised a 'responsibility theory of education' (Kuiper, 2017, p. 102). Kuiper (2017) concluded his essay by stating that Wolterstorff deserved a permanent place in the canon of Christian educational innovators.

A fourth example can be found in the complete 'pedagogy of shalom' edited by Lee and Kaak (2017). Their work included a plea by Ann Palmer Bradley (2017) on mentoring. When she concluded that mentoring as a 'model of relational empowerment' brings back 'the personal touch (...) to an impersonal, individualistic, and spectator society' (Palmer Bradley, 2017, p. 179), her idea corresponded with Kuiper's (2017) identification of a responsibility theory of education. Less clear in Palmer Bradley's essay is the handling of what Biesta (2015) termed 'the beautiful risk of education'—namely, how to respond when students do not assume their responsibilities as intended by a pedagogy of shalom. In the compilation edited by Lee and Kaak (2017), a number of areas

were identified and investigated with regard to the question of how to foster a shalom community: inclusive learning; diversity conversations; racism; cultural awareness; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender experiences, and so on.

In a final summary, Lee and Kaak (2017) concluded that building a shalom community entails nothing less than the essence of Christian teaching. For them, a pedagogy of shalom provides direction to all their efforts as teachers, which lends an almost missional teleology to their practice:

The beautiful world that God created was marred due to human sin and God sent His own Son to redeem the relationship. Therefore, Christian education is missional in its efforts to restore the world to the original status that God created (...) This intervention should be established and implemented through two ways: individual and communal dimensions. However, this intervention should not be finished instantaneously; rather, it is implemented gradually until Jesus's second coming (Lee & Kaak, 2017, p. 210).

### **3.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter's reflection on the anthropology of three influential scholars from the broad Christian tradition—namely, Augustine, Comenius and Dooyeweerd—leads to the conclusion that the worldwide movement for WCD, as described in Chapter 2, certainly has a point. Fragmented education within a fragmented society needs to recognise this point as a fundamental correction of its reductionistic tendencies. Christian schools and educators, which are involuntarily part of the modern, fragmented culture, can learn from their own tradition in order to start supporting this fundamental correction. Their way has been cleared by the above-mentioned contemporary advocates of Augustine, Comenius and Dooyeweerd—that is, James K.A. Smith, Jan Hábl and André Troost—and others, who have expressed a clear plea for a more holistic approach.

A synthesis of the anthropology of Augustine, Comenius and Dooyeweerd fills the gap in the WCD approach which I observed in the final conclusion of Chapter 2, when I approached WCD from the fragmentation thesis as built in Chapter 1. Their joint Christian perspective makes it impossible to overlook the transcendent aspect of human ontology and its corresponding teleology. The coherent unity within the person as well as of the person with others and with the whole of creation starts with God as the Creator, besides Whom no real human restoration of broken relationships or flourishing can be expected. Such notions are included in a definition of holistic Christian education, together

with the centrality of the human heart—holistic Christian education values and seeks all of the dimensions of human development from early childhood onwards, including physical, social, emotional, cognitive, spiritual and values-based learning, aiming at the person’s heart as the undivided principle of its existence, preceding the head and hands, relying on it with pedagogical optimism based on Christian hope before God to seek its restoration and the longing and ability to serve in all the organic relationships God placed him into: with the self, the neighbour and nature as a whole.

Christian anthropology values this transcendental, theological perspective as fundamental for education in general and citizenship formation in particular, especially when approached from the challenges of fragmentation. The direction or teleology that citizenship formation should take to not become reductionistic or dualistic, is therefore best described as shalom-seeking citizenship. It is based on Wolterstorff’s (2004) shalom idea, which perceives shalom as flourishing based on justice and restored relationships. It has a moral focus and aims to help students practice justice in the world—as agents of shalom. It accords with Biesta’s (2013, 2022) plea for subjectifying education, although it finds its deep motivation for theological citizenship in Biblical subjectness to God and the neighbour. It aims at the heart as the root entity where the human being is still undivided, but it affects from there both thinking and acting, head and hands, with an approach characterised by social justice.





# Chapter 4

## The Methodology of Theological Action Research

'Holism is the idea that the properties of a system cannot be determined or explained by the sum of its components alone. Holistic methodologies are concerned with whole systems rather than with the analysis or dissection of systems into parts.'

*Chris Kimble during a presentation on holistic methodologies, University of York, 2008*

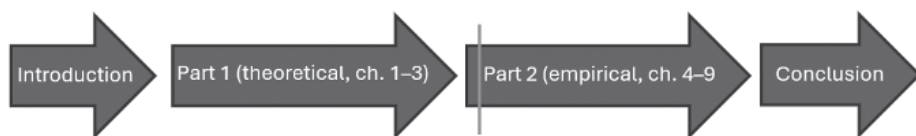
'Through recognizing these four different lenses on theology, people in TAR projects manage to get out of their head-only mode.'

*Helen Cameron during a TAR training, University of Roehampton, 2022*

**W**hy should TAR be considered the indicated method for investigating how a holistic approach to students could reinforce Christian citizenship formation for a modern, fragmented society? The initial choice of this method was briefly explained in the introduction to this dissertation. As a type of action research, TAR fits the central aim of producing concrete results for the teacher training curriculum. At the same time, TAR is theological by nature, just as this study aimed at fostering citizenship for a fragmented society from a (Reformed) Christian perspective, which—as the conclusion of Chapter 3 stated—is in fundamental need of a transcendental and theological approach. Moreover, TAR is empirically focused, but not in a hard, positivistic way, as it is flexible, open to change and reinterpretation, and holistic in and of itself, with the aim being not just analytic thinking but also a synthetic approach. In this methodological chapter, based on the topic of this study and the previously presented research question, the choice of TAR will be justified in depth (Section 1). Afterwards, its ramifications for the project will be outlined, starting with the design of a conversational community to perform the data collection and interpretation (Section 2). This second section will also focus on the role of the main researcher. Then, an overview of the different types of data collection methods, both quantitative and qualitative, and the corresponding means of interpretation will be provided (Section 3). Finally, some ethical considerations will be highlighted (Section 4) and some remarks made on the data analysis (Section 5).

## 4.1 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE USE OF TAR

As explained in the introduction (Section 4), this study intends to engage in a constant back-and-forth movement between vision, intentions, design and practice—that is, between theory and practice. The theoretical part presented in the previous chapters profited from the practical-empirical part of this study, which opens with this methodological chapter, just like the empirical part profited from the theoretical study. This part is entirely empirical and reports the procedure and finding of TAR. The action research and the corresponding reflection can be seen as a holistic approach in and of itself, as it strives for a continuous alignment of head (vision), heart (intentions) and hands (design and practice). It is aimed at bridging the gap between a faith-based vision and



theological intentions, on the one hand, and a strong design and educational practices, on the other hand.

The central research question to be tested in the case of DCU was as follows: *How can a holistic approach to education reinforce Christian citizenship formation in the context of a modern, fragmented society?* Three sub-questions were formulated:

1. What are the challenges of a fragmented society that confront Christian citizenship formation on both the interpersonal and intrapersonal (social and cultural) levels?
2. How can WCD, approached from the perspective of Christian anthropology, be used to enrich the citizenship formation of trainee teachers?
3. How can future teachers in Christian schools be holistically trained to holistically form children in a fragmented society?

The first sub-question was explored in the first chapter. The second sub-question was studied in the second and third chapters, leading to an answer that needed the test of real educational practice to be worked out in more depth. This methodological chapter intends to indicate a practical-empirical way to move the study from sub-question 2 to sub-question 3. It does so while remembering the central objective of this study—namely, to identify core components that are interconnected and guided by a more basic conception of what Christian citizenship should look like in a context of high diversity and complexity, which together could count as a practice-theory.

This means that theoretical notions have to be brought into a practical process of curriculum renewal to show their practical value as well as to inform and possibly reform these theoretical notions. Meanwhile, through the renovation of citizenship formation as an integral aspect of teacher training, there will be an impact on the citizenship formation of students attending primary education. The lessons learned in this study can help other schools to think through their own personhood and citizenship formation. It was for this kind of purposes that TAR was designed, being 'initiated to help church organizations and faith-based agencies find renewal in their own lives and in their relationship with society. Its aim was to help these organizations deepen their theology and improve their effectiveness' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 66).

TAR has gained a well-respected position in the field of empirical practical theology since it was introduced in England between 1990 and 2010. De Roest (2020) treated TAR as a form of research in the community and a relational approach that values the experiences, values and knowledge of practitioners (p. 190). He placed TAR in his overview directly after action research, participatory

action research and participatory research. It can be concluded that TAR, with some of its own specific features distinguishing it from the other methods, belongs to a bigger family of action research-based methodologies. 'As with action research, the concerns of the faith community are the starting point', argued De Roest (2020, p. 215).

### **History of TAR**

TAR came into existence through a project conducted at Heythrop College, University of London, in collaboration with the Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology, Ripon College Cuddesdon. The project ran from 2006 until 2010 under the name ARCS: Action Research Church and Society. Afterwards, Cameron et al. (2010) provided a detailed description and justification of its approach. Cameron and Duce (2013) later presented a more practical guide to its use for scientific research. TAR is actually supported by the Theology and Action Research Network (TARN), which is based at the University of Roehampton, under the directorship of Clare Watkins.

TAR is especially helpful for the topic under investigation in this study because DCU, as a university for applied sciences in the Netherlands that bases itself on the Reformed creeds, can be considered a faith-based organisation. TARN's (2021) website stated that

the methodology of theological action research was established to help faith-based organisations and church groups adopt an approach to research which could help bring about definite and practical changes within that agency or community. In particular TAR aims to assist these organisations in defining and seeking new ways of taking up their mission amidst a rapidly changing and increasingly secular, post-modern and post-Christian society.

Describing TAR, Cameron et al. (2010) stated that it 'was motivated by a desire to find more faithful ways of relating theology and practice, ways that did justice to the whole discipline of theology and the complexity of practice' (p. 8). In a cultural context that has become somewhat prejudiced and resistant towards religion and perhaps even turned anti-theological through the process of secularisation (Cameron et al., 2010, pp. 14–15), faith-based organisations such as schools and colleges, healthcare facilities, social action projects and voluntary organisations 'find their identity subtly remoulded by the pervasive organizational culture'. While adapting to 'today's professional standards and bureaucratic practices', they are prone to 'drift into today's secular world view' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 16).

In this divergence between gospel and culture, there is a strong risk of polarisation: 'The religious feel vulnerable before secularism; secularists are

threatened by the continuing hold of faith' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 18). Cameron et al. (2010) did not want to risk falling into such polarisation. Rather than becoming trapped in a battle, they suggested the approach of practical theology, indicating its central task as being to 'propose anew the deep connectedness of the Christian theological tradition and human experience' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 18). With this approach, deliberately not just cognitive but also including both faith and the practice of practitioners, TAR can be characterised as holistic:

As long as theology remains only words, or discipleship is only action, the dynamic of Theological Action Research is not under way (...) Practical theology is a discipline committed to making whole and dynamic the truthfulness of Christian thought and action, through the bringing together of aspects of faith which, in truth, can never be separated from one another. (Cameron et al., 2010, pp. 20, 26)

### **Five characteristic features**

TAR, therefore, offers a method that is, in itself, holistic and focuses on faith-based organisations (including schools) in modern, secular, pluralistic and fragmented society with the goal of renewing in this changed context the articulation of traditional faith in a contemporary way. Thus, it is built around five characteristic features. It is theological all the way through, understands theology via four voices, discloses theology through conversations, aims at the formative transformation of practice and allows practice to contribute to the transformation of theology. First, I will summarise these five features and then, afterwards, I will discuss them to clarify their usefulness for this study.

#### **1. Theological all the way through**

TAR belongs to the discipline of practical theology. The following features of practical theology were deliberately incorporated into TAR (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 67):

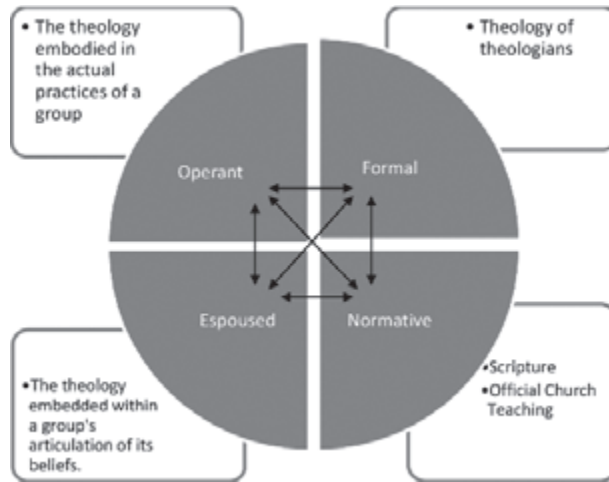
- Collaborative working between practitioners and academics.
- Taking practice seriously as already faithful to the gospel but seeking greater faithfulness in a changing context.
- Asking theological questions about the work of church organisations and faith-based agencies.
- Gathering data systematically rather than anecdotally.
- Performing theological reflection that allows practical theology to act as a gateway to the wider theological task of facilitating change in belief and action.

To include practice fully in the study of theology, ‘researchers employing TAR consider all the material—written and unwritten, textual and practical—as (potentially) “theology”, as “faith seeking understanding”’ (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 54). This approach is based not only on the epistemology that includes the knowledge of practitioners that goes with action research but also on a spiritual understanding of God’s revelation in the world and through human cultures. TAR takes the practices of ‘faithful Christian people’ seriously because they are ‘themselves already the bearers of theology; they express the contemporary living tradition of the Christian faith’ (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 54). Consequently, ‘contemporary practice’ is considered ‘a part of the ongoing dynamic of God’s revealing life’ (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 55). The aspect of contemporaneity can become so important that practices may, at times, be even more reliable than what practitioners say about them (Cameron et al., 2010):

As practices of faith the practical actions of Christian groups being researched and reflected on are generally always and already consciously aligned to an articulated theology. This is the ‘espoused’ theology of a group. It may well be that the espoused theology of practitioners is less well developed than their actual practice; or that the relation between it and the actions carried out is not always clear or coherent. Discovering such tensions is part of the task for TAR work. (p. 56)

For this reason, it can be supposed that TAR will be especially helpful when investigating the consequences of the fragmentation of society for (traditional) Christian education and, more specifically, its broad personhood and citizenship formation. As explained in the introduction to this dissertation and in Chapter 1, MacIntyre (2007) introduced the term when discussing morality based on the larger classical and Jewish Christian tradition. His argument that, after the Enlightenment and due to the influences of rapid cultural change, only fragments of the old sense-giving systems of morality and values remain evoked the idea that elements of theological systems and convictions in an ongoing process of secularisation may possibly remain stronger in actions and habits than in coherent thinking and understanding. While the same might well have happened to practitioners in Christian education during times of rapid cultural change, including at DCU as a Reformed Christian, faith-based teacher training institute in a rapidly changing social and cultural environment, TAR seems to be the appropriate methodological choice for this reason.

## 2. Understanding of 'theology in four voices'



For TAR, it is not just the voices of normative and formal theology are meaningful sources but also the voice of what the practice of faithful practitioners reveals and their own voice: what they themselves can say about it. By normative theology, TAR means to say: Scripture, the creeds, official church teaching and liturgies—and everything that, for the practitioners in the organisation, counts as authoritative and thus normative in terms of their lives and practices. For formal theology, it understands the theology of theologians and their academic dialogues with other disciplines. The silent, non-verbal voice of theology, as embedded in the actual practices of a group, is termed operant theology by Cameron et al. (2010, p. 57). The theology embedded in a group's articulation of its beliefs, as well as in how they explain verbally their actions, is referred to as espoused theology.

The task of theological research is 'to bring the four voices into conscious conversation so that all voices can be enriched' (Cameron & Duce, 2013, p. 356). In so doing, it can be expected that the four voices will really complement and reinforce each other, although it is possible that they will sometimes prove to be contradictory. In such a case, it is still valuable to hear them all. According to TAR, a good listener cannot do without any of them: 'We can never hear one voice without there being echoes of the other three' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 57). Seeking the richness of all the voices brought together is again based on the specific spiritually driven epistemology that TAR is based on. The four voices theology should be deployed from 'the conviction that there is, in all this diverse articulation, a certain coherence—a coherence of faith, of the truth being revealed in the Spirit' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 56).

### 3. Disclosing theology through a conversational method

The four theological voices need to be brought together at one table, where good conversation can take place. This practical-theological conversation wherein all theological voices are heard can be described as the cornerstone of TAR. 'It is, if our theological reading is right, only in the conversation between voices, carefully attended to, that an authentic practical-theological insight can be disclosed' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 60). This conversation requires not only 'a proper place to the variety of theological voices' but also 'a genuine openness to hearing those voices, even when they might seem strange or contradictory' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 60).

Cameron et al. (2010) elaborated a few more practical yet fundamental conditions for TAR. Very practical is their indication that, as TAR is focused on faith-based organisations and agencies, it is necessary to work with an in- and an out-group to investigate the practice of the organisation at hand. This practical requirement is included in their own definition of TAR (Cameron et al., 2010):

TAR is a partnership between an insider team and an outsider team. The insider team owns the practice that is the subject of the research and has a commitment to exploring and reflecting upon that practice. Their aim is to change the practice or develop their theological understanding of that practice or both. (p. 66)

How big these teams need to be, as well as whether the project is outsider- or insider-led, depends on the specific organisation, situation and context being investigated. To ensure fruitful participation in the conversation, all participants need to exhibit the following key qualities (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 75):

- Interest in the practice of the insider organisation and a willingness to ask questions about it.
- Acceptance that their voice will be just one among a number.
- Willingness to change their views and play a part in changing the views of others.
- Trustworthiness concerning confidential documents.
- Willingness to make mistakes and forgive the mistakes made by others.
- Willingness to articulate their own position.

To be a theologian is not a requirement to be a team member. It is, however, beneficial for the conversation to include one or more formal theologians—that



is, 'people working in universities writing books about aspects of the Christian tradition'—because they can be seen as 'experts on the Christian tradition able to offer insights to the work of theology that goes on in the Church and among practitioners' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 77). But within the team and during the conversations, 'their participation is not as experts but as participant in the conversation' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 77). TAR teams refer to them as non-expert experts—persons with expertise but not behaving as such. The reason for this downplaying of expertise is that 'no one voice should drown out the others even though the search is for a renewed espoused theology that makes the best use of normative and formal sources' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 78). Apart from the above-mentioned key qualities of team members, it is helpful for TAR 'if the teams contain someone who is good at suggesting connections between what people say' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 75).

#### **4. TAR as formative transformation of practice**

Central to the convictions behind the TAR methodology is that, 'by naming and recognizing theological connections across the four voices, the theological embodiment at the operant level in particular will be renewed as its own authentic message comes to light and is more clearly understood by those living it out' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 61). Conversations within a TAR project in which the four voices are brought together can and must lead to renewed theology. Brouard (2018) spoke of a 'theology of disclosure' (p. 27), resulting directly from 'TAR's moments of revelation' (p. 153) through faithful conversations. New theological insights, first and foremost, pertain to the practice of the faithful practitioners (operant theology), but also to their espoused theology.

#### **5. Method allowing practice to contribute to the transformation of theology**

When TAR really results in renewed practice and renewed espoused theology, the possibility should not be excluded that it could renew formal theology and the interpretation of normative theology. On the contrary, this is actually deemed a clear intention of TAR. This intention departs from the conviction that theology (speaking about God) entails more than merely interpreting what the Bible says in a systematic way with the help of logical reasoning. A theology of disclosure, which is based on a less private, more common and multifaceted understanding of the Word, enriches Biblical understanding and theological insights for the present time and cultural context. The employment of TAR implies a 'commitment to enable embodied theology to contribute and shape formal, and even normative, theologies' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 62). Notwithstanding, it is clear that the TAR methodology recognises the special

authority of the normative voice of the practice being explored. 'The point is that the "normative", to a greater or lesser degree, enjoys a privileged position in terms of a certain structural authority' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 63).

## Discussion

Based on its central features, TAR seems especially appropriate for this specific study as part of an overarching research project in which a dynamic and inclusive form of action research was used. TAR is a type of action research that is holistic of nature; however, at the same time, it is profoundly theological—as Christian education is and, in this case, as DCU wants to be. It is also holistic in the sense that it includes the theological voices of practice and practitioners, brings them together with the voices of normative and formal theology, and allows new practices and new theological insights to emerge through conversations. All of these characteristics do justice to the experienced need for a holistic methodology, as argued in the introduction to this dissertation (Section 4: Towards a Holistic Research Design). The central research question requires it. It focuses on the practice of broad citizenship formation in Christian schools, as related to a culture that has rapidly fragmented. In its original design, TAR focuses a bit more on culture as secular, although it nevertheless serves the same aim—namely, to seek new ways to serve society based on theologically driven motivation.

Still, a question can be raised with respect to the epistemology underpinning TAR. Brouard (2015), who led a TAR project for a Catholic developmental agency, tied it directly to 'a theology of revelation where insight and truth is reached, not through agreement, but through listening to others, through disclosure' (p. 28). Consequently, TAR 'privileges an inductive epistemology where theology is revealed with others through processes of reflection and sharing' (Brouard, 2015, p. 28). Brouard supported this epistemology by inserting a quotation from Haley (as cited in Watkins, 2011): 'Truth is discerned through engagement with those who are other than "we" are: with the Spirit, with those Christians with whom we disagree, and with those outside the church'. Brouard (2015) connected this to Watkins' proposal to view 'education as a holistic enterprise' and a Catholic theology of the person as a 'whole person' (p. 34). Both trace this 'theology of revelation' back to Augustine: 'What is important is not telling people things, or "truths", but rather equipping them and forming their thinking in such ways as the truth may be encountered by them' (Watkins, 2013, p. 3).

From Chapter 1 (1.1.2/1.1.3/1.3.3), it is clear that epistemology plays an important role in research aimed at combining a holistic approach with the broad citizenship and personhood formation of trainee teachers. Thus, it is of specific interest to this study how the epistemology expressed by Watkins

(2013), as closely related as it is to TAR, coheres with the Reformed Christian epistemology. In this epistemology, the Bible is considered God's absolute, true and full revelation (Huijgen, 2019, pp. 156–167) (1). Nevertheless, it is important to underline that Reformed theology recognises two sources of revelation, as stated in Article 2 of the Belgic Confession. God reveals Himself through nature and through Scripture. In his study of the interrelationship of these two sources in article 2, Kunz (2013) argues that it cannot be maintained that God can be known from creation only through the lens of the Bible, but that, on the contrary, creationist knowledge of God is accessible to all human beings. In addition, according to Calvinism, the Holy Spirit is present in culture and in creativity, as stated by Geluk (2000). Furthermore, man's understanding of Biblical truth and divine revelation in nature is never perfect, as it is always partial and subject to a process in which Word and Spirit, reader and context, actuality and tradition play their roles (van Doleweerd, 2012). In this process, Christians necessarily learn from each other (Ephesians 3:19). Thus, van Doleweerd (2012) concluded that:

The Holy Spirit works with and by means of the Word in the reader. Therefore, in hermeneutics we must speak with three words: Word and Spirit and reader (...) The autopistia legitimizes fluidity in hermeneutical methodology to arrive at an explanation, interpretation, and application of the text. (p. 225)

What van Doleweerd (2012) did with respect to divine revelation through Scripture can, via comparison, also be applied to the other source of revelation distinguished in the Reformed Christian tradition: nature, creation and the knowledge that comes from it. Reformed epistemologists have underlined that a general idea about God and/or His wisdom is even reflected in and through the teachings of secular or even atheistic persons. The fundamental realisation that Christians can learn from them, even about God and morals et cetera, lies at the heart of Reformed teaching about the very partial knowledge of God in man due to the fall and brokenness, which is not restored immediately or wholly by grace.

Approximating the TAR methodology from a Reformed perspective, it can be observed that there are both Protestant (Salvationist and Anglican) and Catholic influences on its epistemology (Watkins, 2020). Among its inventors, the work of Clare Watkins has arguably showed the most Catholic influences. Referring to what she called 'an authentic "whole-church" ecclesiological instinct' (p. 8),

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1 Although he was critical of it, Huijgen (2019) mentioned the far-reaching Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978). This statement was also signed by Reformed theologians such as J.I. Packer and R.C. Sproul.

in which she radically included ‘those who might be seen as on the edges of the church’ (p. 1), Watkins (2020) presented ‘an Ecclesiology of Epiphanies’ (p. 8). Talking about epiphanies (which impart completely new revelations) goes further than referring to a theology of disclosure (speaking about God and newly discovered things). The normative voices of theology in the vision of Watkins (2020) have become ‘historically dependent on operant, espoused and formal’ (p. 45). Further on, she noted: ‘The conviction is that divine revelation, embodied in the “tradition” (written and unwritten), makes progress (*proficio* – to advance, go forward) in all the complexity of ecclesial life, and its various activities, offices and experiences’ (Watkins, 2020, p. 51).

From a Reformed Christian perspective, this is a really far-reaching statement. Is divine revelation, then, still incomplete and open to add-on revelation, for example, through epiphanies? Or would it be better to say that God’s revelation for life on Earth and salvation is complete, although human understanding, even after restoring grace, lacks insight? Wright (2013) nuanced the latter, traditionally Reformed, position with his hermeneutical paradigm of ‘the fifth act’. What God revealed about creation, the fall, Israel and Jesus is firmly established in the Old and New Testaments. Still, how it goes on—and how Biblical truth needs to be interpreted in new ages and circumstances—needs to be discovered ‘through Spirit and prayer’ (Wright, 2013, p. 126). This, warned Wright (2013), should be done in a manner ‘ferociously loyal’ to the Bible (p. 123) by the Church. Geoff Beech’s (2019, 2021) relational epistemology, as considered in Chapter 1.3.3, accords with this finding, calling for an attitude of humility towards revealed truth as it needs to be understood together with all the saints in a process of ongoing unveiling in light of time and cultural change.

A quote by Nicholas Healy, again cited by Watkins (2013, p. 5), can function as a necessary mirror for Reformed theology, especially after what was discussed in Chapter 1.1.3 on Protestantism and its interconnectedness with modern, fragmented thinking:

In general, ecclesiology in our period has become highly systematic and theoretical, focused more upon discerning the right things to think about the church rather than orientated to the living, rather messy, confused and confusing body that the church’s actuality is.

This discussion of the TAR methodology and its inductive and spiritual epistemology is too brief to suggest a final answer to this dilemma. It is clear, however, that the Protestant interpretation presented above differs from Watkins’ (2013) ecclesiology of epiphanies but nevertheless leaves room for a

theology of disclosure, relating God's revelation to new cultural contexts and circumstances. This is another reason to conclude that TAR is especially useful to this study.

## 4.2 TAR APPLICATION FOR DCU

TAR has been employed in England for research in dioceses, homeless charities, Catholic youth retreats and developmental help organisations. It has also been applied in projects involving catechesis, evangelisation and Alpha courses. This study focuses on DCU as a Reformed Christian teacher training institute in the Netherlands and on the process of curriculum renewal it went through during the research period. To prepare a well-integrated and ongoing learning approach for (world) citizenship education for this new curriculum, TAR was chosen as the methodology. Therefore, a TAR community was created, which involved representatives of DCU and two (later three) partner primary schools. Together, they formed a conversational community (see Section 4 of the Introduction) with an insider and an outsider team to bring all the theological voices to one table—that is, to ultimately feed DCU's teacher training in general and citizenship formation in particular. The conversational community met a total of 20 times during the period 2021–2024.

A question was raised regarding which of the teams comprising the conversational community could most accurately be referred to as the insider team. The insider team in TAR normally owns the practice; however, in this case, two different kinds of practices could be distinguished. On the one hand, there was the practice of the teacher training, a practice owned by DCU. A crucial problem with regard to this practice was that it took place in a socially very homogeneous and traditional context lacking experience of society's highly increased levels of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. On the other hand, there was the practice of the representatives of the two—and later three—primary schools that were selected because they already had a long history of a Christian school identity with very open admission policies, resulting in a highly diverse population of children and families being connected to their schools. This practice was deliberately sought as a theological experience and practice to enrich DCU's curriculum and its citizenship formation for a fragmented society.

As, in the end, the practice of teacher training was chosen in the start-up meetings by all of the participants as the practice subject to action research, the decision was made to refer to the DCU team as the insider team. As a result, it was clear that the project would be insider led. The main researcher worked at DCU and was assigned the task of integrating an ongoing learning approach to

(world) citizenship formation into the new curriculum. In this task, I was assisted by two more DCU teacher trainers, both from the pedagogical department, and an associate member of DCU's Research Centre. Together, we formed the insider team with—at a distance—the help of another conversational community of DCU teacher trainers and other DCU teams busy with curriculum renewal, such as the Team Internationalisation of the Pedagogical Academy (TIP). In addition, again at a distance, help and critical reflection were provided by the overarching research consortium led by the NIVOZ Foundation, which included representatives of four teacher training institutes, including DCU, as represented by the previously mentioned pedagogues and myself as the main researcher.

The members of the outsider team owned the practice of Christian education in a highly diverse context. They were able to inform DCU's teacher training through practical wisdom regarding how to deal with this diversity, which was scarcely known at DCU. In this way, the voice of operant theology was heard at the conversational community's table from two sides: from multicultural Christian primary education and from traditional, more homogeneous teacher formation. Moreover, the voice of espoused theology came from the practitioners of highly diverse primary education and from the practitioners of homogeneous teacher training with an experienced need for better acquaintance with diversity and complexity, as will be shown in Chapter 5. All of the participants were free to bring to the table what they would like to add, to discuss, to read or to analyse. In the conversational community's meetings, they were repeatedly invited to present their own ideas and influence the direction of the research project.

As this construction guaranteed the relatively strong presence of the voices of operant and espoused theology in the conversational community, the other voices (of formal theology and, somewhat later, of normative theology) were deliberately strengthened. The voice of formal theology was brought in by the main researcher and the two participating pedagogues. This voice was constantly fed by their participation in the other conversational communities mentioned above and by the main researcher's work on the theoretical part of this study, including the pedagogical, anthropological and philosophical insights and theories. The voice of normative theology was strengthened by the decision to begin every meeting, starting from the fourth, with a devotion from Scripture. This devotion was led by a different member of the community each time. The conversational community's members, all of whom shared the Christian faith, were free to choose a Bible passage. The only indication they

were given was to choose something along the lines of the general topic of study.

### **Partner schools**

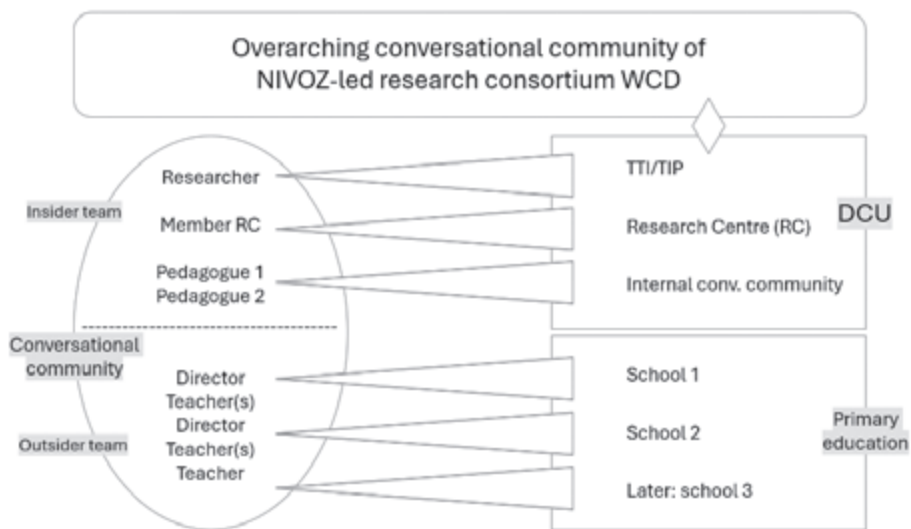
At the start of the project, two schools were selected that matched the criteria and were ready to collaborate for several years. One of them is a Christian school located in one of the biggest cities in the Netherlands, with a student population of 250 from over 30 different ethnic backgrounds. The other is a Reformed Christian school, also located in an urban area, with a student population of 350 from over 20 different ethnic backgrounds. Both schools will admit children with non-Christian religious convictions, provided their parents are willing to sign a declaration of respect for the school's Christian identity. At both schools, the Bible counts as God's infallible revelation and, therefore, as normative theology. At the second school, as at DCU, the Reformed Christian identity means that the school subscribes to the Calvinistic confession as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity: the Catechism of Heidelberg, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort.

The director of school 1 joined the outsider team for the TAR project, as did two teachers. The director of school 2 also joined, again with two teachers. The TAR project, thus, was able to start with a total of ten members: six in the outsider team (two school directors and four school teachers) and four in the insider team (three teacher trainers, including two pedagogues and one theologian, and one teacher-researcher). During two start-up meetings held in the spring of 2021, one via Teams because of COVID-19 restrictions and the other at school 1, the team members got to know each other and learned about TAR and its characteristics. In the second warm-up meeting, the team decided to limit the scope of the research to the citizenship formation of DCU students, instead of including in a more direct form the citizenship formation of students at both primary schools, focusing on the formation of trainee teachers and, only through this, impacting the formation of students.

In most TAR projects, the main researcher forms part of the outsider team, which makes such projects outsider led. In the second warm-up meeting, the team decided that this TAR project should be insider led. Due to this joint decision, my personal leadership role in the insider team became the leadership role for the whole group. When the insider and outsider groups met separately, it was generally one of the school directors who led the outsider team. During the warm-up meetings, nine follow-up meetings were scheduled for the 2021–2022 school year. At the end of this period, a proposal was accepted to continue during the year 2022–2023, albeit with a lower

frequency. For DCU, this academic year meant the first year of application of the renewed curriculum, so the ground-laying part of thinking through the necessary citizenship formation had to be completed by then. The meetings held in 2022–2023 had the character of monitoring, finetuning and improving what was already set in motion. The same decision was taken for some follow-up meetings in 2023–2024.

During the first year and a half of the TAR project (spring and fall 2021; spring 2022), there were 11 meetings, each lasting two hours with some informal time afterwards. During this period, one of the team members, a teacher of school 2, withdrew from the project because it did not match his expectations. After some time, he was replaced by another teacher from school 2, meaning that the outsider team had six members again. At the start of the academic year 2022–2023, there were some other changes. Over time, three members of the outsider team got jobs at other schools and were replaced by others. A representative of another Reformed Christian school was, at his request, allowed to join the outsider group, although the diversity present within his school was less intense than in schools 1 and 2.



## Discussion

The relationship between outsiders and insiders during research on religion is much debated. An argument against the prominent position of insiders in research for a religious organisation is that they may be too immersed in the culture and beliefs of the organisation to be objective about their practice.



TAR, however, works from a paradigm of transformation rather than from a paradigm that departs from a descriptive-positivistic focus on objectivity. In the former paradigm, the insider can have an advantage. With regard to outsiders, doubts are sometimes expressed about whether they will be able to fully understand what is going on in the religious organisation. Cameron et al. (2010) responded to the objections as follows:

TAR tries to make creative use of this tension by building it into the design of the research. The insiders need to build sufficient trust with the outsiders to regard them as partners in the gathering and interpretation of data. The outsiders need to be sufficiently different from the insiders to stimulate reflection that goes beyond current assumptions. The relationships need to be sufficiently robust for each to challenge the other without feeling diminished. (p. 76)

To each of the three criteria that Cameron et al. (2010) established in this quotation, the DCU project responded positively. The insider team reached out to the outsiders for help when DCU was lacking the type of (cultural) experience they had with ethnic, social and religious diversity. In this regard, the members of the outsider team differed sufficiently from the members of the insider team. Meanwhile, the differences were not so significant that they rendered the relationships less robust. All of the team members were Christian, trusted each other and were striving towards Christian citizenship formation for a modern, fragmented society. The experiences within the TAR project confirmed the following assumption by Cameron et al. (2010): 'Genuine curiosity about practice, a desire to understand it theologically and some energy from team members is sufficient to take a TAR project forward' (p. 87).

Special attention was required, however, concerning the project leadership. For insider-led TAR, Cameron et al. (2010) noted the risk that too little attention may be paid to what the outsiders bring to the table. The insider team, therefore, should not avoid any effort in time, logistics and commitment to really include the outsider team (Cameron et al., 2010):

We feel that good quality reflection rarely occurs without someone from outside the situation to ask the obvious questions and challenge assumptions. They can also help sharpen up the research question and suggest creative sources of data and methods of gathering it. It also provides the opportunity to work with people from another part of the Christian tradition or to involve theologians in a context that is faith-based but does most of its work in a secular language. (p. 94)

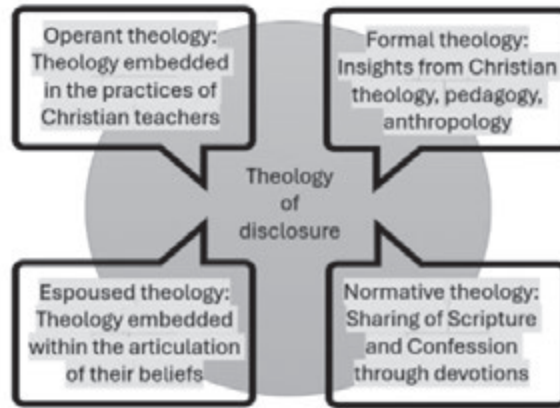
At the start of the project, it was obvious to the DCU insider team that the experiences and insights of the outsider team would be of utmost interest to the project. Their experiences in their contexts of high diversity and complexity were necessary for the curriculum renewal and the future citizenship formation of DCU students for a modern, fragmented society. In the evaluation of this study, it will be reflected on whether this was sufficiently achieved or not. In this reflection, the voice of the outsider team will be heard. Moreover, in the TAR project for DCU, we did not speak of a project team, but of a conversational community (Cijvat et al., 2023), as explained in relation to the research design. This gave specific meaning to the participation of all project members as equals.

### **4.3 DATA COLLECTION**

In TAR conversations in the insider team, in the outsider team and between the two teams (the conversational community), attention was paid to exploration, planning, data collection and data analysis. Not only were the conversations themselves a source of empirical data, they simultaneously formed a platform for deciding how to bring data to the table for joint interpretation. In this section, a brief overview will be provided of the different types of data collection methods used in the TAR project for DCU's teacher training. First, attention will be paid to the meetings of the conversational community as a source of (quantitative) data. Second, a list of initiatives by the conversational community to collect both qualitative and quantitative data will be presented.

#### **1. Conversations as a data source**

The conversational community meetings of DCU's insider team and the primary education outsider team resulted in detailed minutes that were sent to all of the participants. Any comments on the text of those minutes could be expressed immediately by mail, if a participant wished so. At each meeting after the initial meeting, one of the first points on the agenda was the joint approbation of the minutes. At the end of the first (long) cycle of meetings, all 10 participants signed the growing document containing the minutes of the meetings. Specific parts of the meetings in which ideas and concepts central to the research were discussed were taped and then transcribed. These transcriptions were inserted into the minutes using noticeably smaller text.



In this way, the minutes were specifically a source of the voice of espoused theology taking into account through observation the voice of operant theology. The voice of formal theology, as applied in a broad sense including insights from (Christian) anthropology and pedagogy, was brought to the conversational table by written documents, mainly by the project leadership, to be discussed from the perspective of practice. From the fourth meeting onwards, every meeting began with a reading of Scripture, a short meditation and prayer. This was led by the different participants in turn, choosing each time a passage from Scripture that they connected to the central theme of broad citizenship formation for a modern, fragmented society. These contributions were reported in the minutes as well, ensuring that the voice of normative theology would also be part of the deliberations and of the corresponding data.

## 2. Other data sources

Operant theology was to be found via the conversations in the practice at both primary schools (school 1, school 2 and later school 3) and the teacher training institute (DCU). While the conversational community chose to limit its research to the formation of DCU students as trainee teachers, the practice at DCU as operant theology became increasingly important. At the start of the project, a questionnaire was designed in collaboration with DCU's research centre and the overarching NIVOZ Foundation-led WCD project team for third-year and older DCU students and DCU's teacher trainers. The results of a baseline survey, which will be presented in the next chapter, were brought to the table to be discussed. Particularly at the start, this strengthened the voices of operant and espoused theology, especially from the side of DCU students.

At the request of the outsider team, several students were present in the meeting when the survey results were discussed.

This was not the only occasion that students participated in the meetings. In the fall of 2021, five students participated in a joint discussion about adversity and socioeconomic backlogs, mainly in urban areas of the Netherlands, after having immersed themselves in the topic following a short programme designed for it. Afterwards, the conversational community decided to join forces with another DCU project—namely, a special pilot for teenager education. The reason for this was that a chapter on personhood formation needed to be written for the pilot study. In between the two meetings, which were scheduled for Spring 2022, a series of 54 short interviews with children (8–14 years old) were conducted and 11 students provided personal responses to questions about moments of personhood formation that felt significant. The results were discussed in small groups during the second of the two meetings, which involved the participation of two students, one of whom played a leading role in this joint investigation.

In December 2021, for the first time, the directors of schools 1 and 2 held masterclasses at DCU, which were attended by 40 senior students. Lamentably, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to host all of them at the two schools, although 20 of them observed and participated at school 1 later that week. All the other students studied aspects of education in highly diverse urban contexts and visited urban neighbourhoods. They all responded to a series of reflection questions designed by the conversational community. These responses were discussed in the meeting held in January 2022. In December 2022, 10 DCU students were invited by the conversational community to discuss topics related to epistemological issues.

Another data source was formed by the graduation theses written by senior DCU students. Six of them were part of the exploratory research that will be presented in Chapter 5. They had access to both school 1 and school 2 to observe, interview and survey in the months before the conversational community officially began. There were others as well. Their findings were, from time to time, shared with the conversational community and formed part of the voices of mainly operant and espoused theology but also of formal theology.

In the meantime, the insider team applied the insights and findings of the conversational community in concrete proposals for DCU's curriculum renewal. It did so with the help of the TIP. These proposals, directed towards future citizenship formation at DCU and between DCU and the partner primary schools, were repeatedly discussed and further improved by the conversational

community, thereby allowing an ongoing, well-integrated line of learning for (world) citizenship formation to emerge.

#### 4.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All of the members of the joint conversational community of school 1, school 2, school 3 and DCU signed a written declaration of informed consent (Appendix 2). This declaration indicated that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw whenever they wanted and without a statement of reason. Furthermore, it stated that the results would be presented anonymously, that personal data would be left out or replaced with impersonal codes, that recordings would only be accessible to people participating in the research team and that their pronouncements would be quoted anonymously in publications, reports, books and other forms of research output.

Students and others who incidentally met with the conversational community also signed the declaration. They knew that they were meeting with a research group and that their pronouncements would only be quoted anonymously in publications. Underage children were only approached via short personal interviews by participants in the conversational community and in the DCU pilot for teenager education, and this way of interviewing guaranteed their anonymity. In all cases, it was explicitly asked if they agreed to have their anonymous answers used for analysis and further investigating, to which four out of 54 children responded negatively. These four were omitted from the process of interpretation and further investigation.

In terms of the quantitative survey among junior and senior DCU students and their teachers, all of the participants were at least 18 years old, responded anonymously and voluntarily, and knew that they were providing responses for academic research. The students who participated in the exploratory research (or guided student investigation) also did so voluntarily and were at least 18 years old. They signed a formal declaration of informed consent in which they indicated that what they said in the (focus group) interviews could be quoted and used anonymously. By signing the declaration, they stated that they had already graduated or were grade-independent of the interviewer/researcher. They also agreed that the findings of their research, openly accessible via DCU, can be used for further investigation. In all cases, the participating students agreed to provide their material, indicating if they wanted their names to be used in relation to their personal (written) findings.

The gathered data were stored in a protected environment in Microsoft Teams, owned by the Theological University of Apeldoorn, only accessible to

the main researcher and his supervisors. Access to the partly coded minutes and transcripts was also provided, for a short period of time, to one of the members of the conversational community and DCU's research centre. This was done to enable the participant to perform part of the coding process and provide feedback on the process itself. After this work was done, access to the data was removed for this participant.

## 4.5 ANALYSIS OF DATA

The quantitative data were presented to the conversational community and then interpreted and discussed by it. Sometimes, this was performed between the two teams; at other times, the insider and outsider teams had separate discussions. In the latter case, their interpretations and conclusions were compared in subsequent plenary sessions. In this way, a rich theological conversation was stimulated within the conversational community. The text of the minutes and partial transcripts of these conversations were coded after the approbation of the conversational community (with the help of Atlas.ti), initially through open coding with provisional codes (Miles et al., 2020). Afterwards, two more layers of codes were added: one indicating where the four different voices can be recognised in the text and one with three central conceptual codes (Miles et al., 2020). The conceptual codes followed a pattern that was found and established by the conversational community during its 14th meeting (7 February 2023), when an overview of the topics and headlines that had been discussed was studied. This triad was accepted by the conversational community and declared helpful for organising further meetings and discussions: subjectifying education, epistemological formation and attitude formation.

The interpretation of data became a three-phase process. The data gathered from the above-mentioned additional data sources and concrete ideas for DCU's teacher training were brought to the conversational community's meeting and became part of the back-and-forth movement between vision, intentions, design and practice, as well as the conversation of the four theological voices. The second step involved the coding and subsequent analysis of the conversational community's minutes and transcripts. The process of coding by the main researcher was controlled and evaluated by one of the members of the insider group who has a master's degree in education. He did 15 percent of the coding by himself and then provided feedback to the main researcher about his evaluation of the ongoing coding process (an overview of the codes and code groups is provided in Appendix 4). The third step involved

the presentation of the results in the three main categories or topics and the formulation of feedback requested from the conversational community on the theology of disclosure (Chapter 9).

The three main topics were, therefore, helpful in shaping the outline of the results presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 of this dissertation. Chapter 6 will focus on what subjective education means and how it was embraced by the conversational community concerning the citizenship formation of DCU students. Chapter 7 will present the findings on epistemological formation, while Chapter 8 will present those on the formation of a basic attitude of service in students. This approach may seem analytic and can be criticised due to the holistic conviction behind TAR. The idea, however, is not to get lost in analytic thinking, but through analysis to return to a synthesis that enables the improvement of Christian citizenship formation within the teacher training curriculum. In this synthesis, a theology of disclosure will be presented, leading to a set of indicators for a holistic curriculum that provides for the Christian citizenship formation for trainee teachers (Chapter 9).

The insider team, supported by TIP, provided the conversational community with plans and proposals for an ongoing line of learning regarding shalom-seeking citizenship formation in DCU's new curriculum. These plans and proposals were (partly) based on the findings and conclusions of the conversational community, and they were scrutinised and improved by it through consensus, as shown in the minutes of the meetings. However, before presenting the results of the analysis of the TAR meetings held by the conversational community, the results of the baseline survey that were afterwards shown to the conversational community will be presented, together with a more detailed description of DCU in the Dutch educational context than that presented in the introduction to this dissertation (Section 3). This will be accomplished in Chapter 5.





# Chapter 5

## Preliminary WCD Reception at Driestar Christian University

'When I think of what makes DCU DCU, I think of the atmosphere, the openness, the classes where we share loves and sorrows, and have discussions about faith positions and their value.'

*Open student reaction to the baseline survey*

'To teach is to touch a heart.'

*Central slogan at DCU*

In the introduction to this thesis, DCU was presented as a typical faith-based institute for teacher training in the context of the Netherlands, a typical example of a modern, fragmented society. Located in the historic city of Gouda, DCU offers bachelor's and master's degrees in education. During the years covered by this study almost 1000 students were engaged in teacher training for primary education. Due to DCU's confessional allegiance to the Three Forms of Unity (Catechism of Heidelberg, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dordrecht) and its sociological relation to the so called Experientially Reformed churches in the Netherlands (Coster, 1998; Janse, 1985), the university attracts students from across the country. The majority of them wish to be prepared for teaching in Reformed Christian primary schools, while others want to be trained for the broader range of Protestant Christian schools or for schools with a less clearly pronounced confessional identity. As an institution for higher education, DCU has, by law, to have an open admissions policy. When combined with its clear public identity statement, however, this only leads to a very small minority of students not being specifically interested in DCU's Christian identity but opting for DCU due to geographical or other reasons.

This chapter elaborates on the premise that DCU can serve as an example for other faith-based initiatives for teacher training in a modern, fragmented world and society and, further, that its position in the Netherlands provides an adequate context for this case study. The chapter is composed of three main sections, of which the first concerns DCU in general (Section 1). It applies the topic of fragmentation and subjectification, as considered in Chapter 1, to the Dutch context and, specifically, to DCU's position in it. Next, attention will be paid to the early reception of WCD, as presented and evaluated in Chapters 2 and 3, at DCU (2020–2021). This will be achieved through presenting the results of a baseline survey among junior and senior DCU students and their teacher trainers (Section 2) and through a summary of the work by six seniors who dedicated their graduate theses to WCD and a closing focus group interview with them (Section 3). The central lines of reasoning that emerge from these three sections will be brought together in this chapter's conclusion and used as input for the conversational community's deliberations that are analysed in the following few chapters.

## **5.1 DCU AMID SECULARISATION AND FRAGMENTATION**

DCU students mainly come from communities located in what is identified by sociologists as the Dutch Bible belt. In a time characterised by secularisation, church abandonment and the loss of political power by Christian parties,

Reformed Christians in the Netherlands often feel threatened in terms of their religious identity (Kennedy & Zwemer, 2010). Lots of families, therefore, have moved from the big cities to rural areas, grouping together in the more homogenous and safe atmosphere of the Bible belt (Janse, 2005). As the ideological descendants of Groen van Prinsterer, students from these families grow up in a reality in which the isolation principle is, in their minds and experiences, closely connected to social and geographical isolation from the penetrating effects of cultural change (super-diversity and super-complexity), which are especially manifest in the big cities. Although they are well aware of the increasing calls from central government urging schools and teachers to foster active citizenship and social cohesion in their students, these calls are in the Reformed Christian faith community sometimes considered as a threat (').

The reason for this feeling could very well be a high reliance on the relative homogeneity within the Reformed Christian faith community as a means for the formation of children and youth. This reliance is first and foremost a reliance on socialising forces, which has been a common instrument in the typical Dutch system of pillarisation, from which Reformed schools and DCU as a Reformed Christian university are exponents. The exposure of students to high levels of diversity and processes of subjectification—as argued for in Chapter 1—is from that perspective intrinsically threatening, although it may be considered necessary at the same time. A plea for subjectifying education and a more adequate preparation of children and youth for the super-diverse,

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1 In response to the gradual shift towards a post-Christian, pluralistic society, in 2006, the central government of the Netherlands required, by law, all schools to foster active citizenship and social cohesion in their students. Ten years later, international investigation showed that Dutch students were still not doing well in citizenship competences when compared with their peers in other European countries. Therefore, in 2021, a new bill was authorised by both chambers of the Dutch Parliament under the title 'Wet verduidelijkend burgerschapsopdracht in het funderend onderwijs' [Act Clarifying Citizenship Task in Primary Education]. This bill sharpened the requirements for citizenship education. In both instances of lawgiving (2006 and 2021), the reactions from Reformed schools and communities were, at least, hesitant. Where some saw the legal requirements as a chance or a challenge, others viewed them as another threat to the Reformed Christian identity (Wegeman, 2006). Representing a large group of Reformed schools, Vereniging Gereformeerd Schoolonderwijs (VGS) asked during the internet consultation prior to the sharpened bill whether or not it generated tension concerning the pedagogical freedom of schools and teachers (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2018). At the same time, secular politicians and thinkers blamed Reformed Christian schools for their relatively closed admissions policies and posited that the very existence of homogenous schools increased social segregation (2017).

fragmented society is, therefore, in the historical context of DCU and Reformed primary and secondary schools, a complex requirement.

The validity of this analysis is underpinned by an address given in November 2019 by Wim Būdgen, chairman of DCU's supervisory board to DCU's resonance group on identity matters (Būdgen, 2019). Būdgen discussed the topic of 'opvoedingsverlegenheid', which can be translated as *parenting shyness*, which Christian parents and educators (in families, churches and schools) feel when they face the rapidly changed cultural reality of the postmodern, open, dynamic society in which they live, not anymore as one of the constituent social pillars but as a small and vulnerable minority. As a 'mayor complication', Būdgen perceived 'the topic of implicit or explicit learning' (p. 4). On this topic, a longer quotation is required as an explication of how the reality of a new world and a changed societal position was discussed at DCU (2):

For centuries, the transfer of values and norms, but also of confessional doctrine, took place by way of implicit learning (...) Things were passed on by parents and catechists, contents were memorised, and the context of life made the narrations and memorisation gradually becoming relevant for the younger generation. Great things grow slowly. As the everyday context moves further from the things we want to transmit, we slowly but surely shift from more implicit towards more explicit learning. From an early age, we want our children to understand what values and norms are about, like a kind of compensation for a context that becomes less and less helpful (...) But the internalisation of beliefs only takes place to a very limited extent through endless explanation. Internalisation takes place indirectly through relevance derived from the context. Very practically: identification figures, the concrete lives of people around us, gaining experiences by imitation of others are invaluable for internalisation (...). (Būdgen, 2019, p. 4)

Būdgen (2019) examined the importance of identification figures and how they learn to interact with broader society, subsequently stipulating a specific problem:

Many of us grew up in a protected way unto this day. We often live in communities with a clear orthodox stamp. And not a few also work in the same protected environment. The question arises: Do we actually know from our own experience what it means to maintain your individuality in the midst of dissenters and yet be loyal to dissenters, for example, in our work or in

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2 Translations of Būdgen's address, originally in Dutch, are mine.

our neighbourhood? Do we know in concrete terms what it means to live as Christians in a postmodern and thoroughly secular society? (p. 6)

What Būdgen emphasised before DCU's identity resonance group can be seen as a specific problem for personhood and citizenship formation from a Reformed Christian perspective. On the one hand, there is a wish to contribute to social cohesion on the level of society, to prepare students and teachers to connect with it, accepting in the process that the own position has now become that of a small minority in need of subjectifying elements for its formational processes. On the other hand, there is a considerable concern regarding what such a contribution—inviting students to connect to society's cultural, ethnical and religious diversity—might do to their socialisation processes and the traditional reliance on them that has characterised Reformed education in the Netherlands from the start. In terms of Chapter 1's fragmentation thesis, the question that presented itself at DCU was: should an accent on personhood as communion (on intersubjectivity) include or exclude people with fundamentally different cultural and religious views than one's? In terms of WCD (Chapter 2) and especially its evaluation from the perspective of Christian anthropology (Chapter 3): is a fruitful combination of inward and outward connectivity possible without losing one's theological approach?

The introduction to this dissertation already referred (in Section 1) to the sociologist Peter Berger and his (1999) theory on plausibility structures as socialising structures. Berger concluded that the inevitable penetration of these structures, to which social pillars can be reckoned, would in pluralistic societies not necessarily lead to the secularisation of all groups. Gorski and Guhin (2017) distinguished between endogenous pluralism (internal, within the social group) and exogenous pluralism (caused by globalisation), stating that 'while endogenous pluralism may indeed weaken or fragilize "plausibility structures", exogenous pluralism often leads to a deepening, sharpening, and hardening of beliefs' (p. 1124). They added that religious subgroups such as the American evangelicals amidst a pluralistic society have often 'created their own closed sub-universes of meanings and thereby stored up traditional "plausibility structures", albeit in a more fragmented form and on a smaller scale' (Gorski & Guhin, 2017, p. 1124).

Others, again in the context of the Netherlands, have argued that the formation of a strong identity is actually helpful in accepting and adjusting to high levels of diversity. De Wolff (2006) and MacMullen (2004) both found proof that a strong personal identity formation stimulates students to approach others with openness and respect. Investigating the practice of several Reformed Christian primary schools in the Netherlands, de Muijnck (2008)

observed that teachers validate diversity within their own Christian group as enriching (p. 379) and new, strange experiences outside their comfort zone as transforming in a positive, strengthening of their own identity sense (p. 264). Comparative research into religious identity and religious tolerance among senior DCU students resulted in the identification of a positive correlation between the two (Broer & de Muynck, 2017). These theoretical and empirical insights are helpful for DCU to embrace subjectification as an important instrument (de Muynck & Kunz, 2022), although the question of how to relate that to the citizenship formation of trainee teachers remains open for empirical study.

## 5.2 BASELINE SURVEY

At the start of the overarching WCD project that DCU joined in 2020, the DCU project team decided to conduct a baseline survey on the curriculum as it was and the possibility of including the WCD approach in the upcoming curriculum renewal (³). As the project was not yet far along, conceptions among students and teachers at the time this survey was designed were still a bit rough and generic, which has to be taken into account when reviewing the results. Questionnaires concerning WCD in the DCU curriculum were prepared in collaboration with DCU's Research Centre. DCU's initial acquaintance with WCD and its early participation in the overarching research consortium helped to check the composition of the questionnaires. The survey was subsequently completed by 56 teacher trainers (an 81 percent response rate) and 228 students, who were at the end of their third year or beyond in the programme (a 50 percent response rate). Students who only clicked on the survey or failed to complete the first 10 questions were excluded. Other students were included, although in each case the number of respondents was indicated because, during the course of completing the survey, some students dropped out. Looking at the points where students dropped out, it can be assumed that they did not always feel able to answer the more complex questions. Among the teachers, every respondent completed the entire survey.

The 213 students who completed the whole survey indicated at the end the city or town in the Netherlands where they grew up. Apart from one student who answered 'home', all of the responses appeared to be serious. It can be noted that almost all of the students came from small to medium-

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3 The results of this survey, and of the focus group interview presented in Section 3, were also presented in a peer-reviewed article published in the *International Journal for Christianity and Education* (van Olst, 2024).

sized towns that form part of the traditional Dutch Bible belt. Only a few grew up in an urban, metropolitan context (with more than 100,000 inhabitants): Apeldoorn (x 2), Amersfoort, Dordrecht (x 2), Scheveningen/The Hague and Zwolle. The smaller towns or cities that were mentioned and do not belong to the traditional Bible belt were as follows: Assen, Best, Bleiswijk, Katwijk (x 2), Lisse (x 2), Noordsescht, Oosterwolde, Wehl and Wouterswoude. Summing up the characteristics of these students, it can be concluded that only 5 percent of the responding students did not grow up within the forementioned Bible belt. Of the 213 students who completed the survey in its entirety, 158 were following the full-time route with their studies (74 percent) and 55 were following the part-time route (26 percent). The majority of students who completed the questionnaire indicated that they came from the most orthodox or conservative church denominations in the Netherlands—that is, the different Gereformeerde Gemeenten (including GGiN and OGG): 66 percent. The other students had other denominational affiliations, with the exception of 1 percent who indicated not belonging to any church.

### **Teacher trainers at DCU**

With regard to 11 statements pertaining to the formational processes for trainee teachers and new opportunities for it in the upcoming curriculum renewal, the 56 teacher trainers expressed whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, agreed or strongly agreed. The table below shows the number of respondents (N), mean score (M; maximum = 5) and standard deviation (SD; spread) for each statement. The table is presented in descending order based on the mean <sup>(4)</sup>.

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4 I thank my former colleague Nico Broer for help with the presentation of all tables in this Section.

	N	M	SD
1. Good formative education requires a broad approach that connects head, heart and hands.	56	4.70	.46
7. Good formation requires students to step out of their comfort zone and have different kinds of (cultural) experiences.	56	4.41	.56
10. Good citizenship education for our students is only possible if we teach them to really be able and willing to listen to dissenters.	56	4.23	.60
11. Good citizenship formation of our students requires that they learn to cooperate with dissenters.	56	3.93	.66
2. For good formative education, cross-curricular (group) collaboration is a must.	56	3.77	.89
4. More attention on the broad formation of our students offers opportunities for new forms of subject (group)-transcending cooperation.	56	3.70	.74
<b>Overall average</b>		3.51	
6. When renewing our curriculum, students should be listened to more.	56	3.14	.77
5. The education as a whole should be better tailored to the demands of the student(s).	56	3.04	.83
8. Students are sufficiently exposed to the world outside their own (subcultural) comfort zone through our classes.	56	2.84	.85
3. There is sufficient cross-curricular (group) collaboration within our programme.	56	2.70	.93
9. Students gain sufficient experience outside their own (subcultural) comfort zone during internships.	56	2.18	.58

The statements about 'head, heart and hands', 'stepping out of one's own comfort zone' and 'being willing and able to listen to dissenters' scored, on average, very high (> 4.00). They can all be directly related to the WCD approach and a need for subjectification. However, by contrast, the statements concerning their actual realisation scored very low. This also applies to the statement that deals with cooperation between departments and subjects (groups).

What stands out from the teachers' responses is the strong support for the idea that good formative education requires a broad approach that connects head, heart and hands. Also striking is the strong support for the proposition that good education requires students to step outside of their comfort zone and gain different kinds of (cultural) experiences. The teachers wished to pay more attention to this in their own lessons, but also certainly by having students participate in internships outside of their (subcultural) comfort zone. There is clear support for the idea that good citizenship



education is only possible if students learn to really be able and willing to listen to dissenters. There is also support for the idea that they must learn to cooperate with dissenters, although the average score here fell just short of 4. The teachers tend towards the proposition that there is insufficient subject (group)-transcending cooperation within DCU.

### Students at DCU

Responding to 14 statements on their preparation for interaction with and connection to society's diversity and complexity, the students expressed whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, agreed or strongly agreed. The table below shows the numbers of respondents (N), the mean score (M) and the standard deviation (SD). The table splits the students into two categories: full-time students and part-time students. Where the results are presented in colour, a substantial difference can be noted, with the number in red being substantially higher than the number in blue.

	Full-time students			Part-time students		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
When I graduate soon, I expect to have actual entry-level competence to work as a group teacher in a Reformed Christian school.	158	4.47	.66	55	4.40	.85
When I graduate soon, I expect to have actual entry-level competence to work as a group teacher in a Protestant Christian school with a restrictive admissions policy.	158	4.22	.62	55	4.09	1.06
When I graduate soon, I expect to be entry-level competent to work as a group teacher in a Christian school with an open admissions policy.	158	3.91	.78	55	3.78	1.12
When I graduate soon, I expect to be able to work as a group teacher in a Christian school with high ethnic and/or religious diversity.	158	3.36	.99	55	3.15	1.19
When I graduate soon, I expect to be able to work as a group teacher in a public school with a secular identity.	158	2.80	1.09	55	2.93	1.21
At DCU, you receive sufficient training to take your place as a Christian teacher in a pluralistic society.	158	3.94	.74	55	3.76	.90
At DCU, you receive sufficient training to do your work as a Christian teacher in an urban, metropolitan environment.	158	<b>3.59</b>	.84	55	<b>3.27</b>	.93

	Full-time students			Part-time students		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
I recognise that I live within a Reformed Christian social bubble—namely, that my own circle and experiences are separate from wider society.	158	3.24	1.11	55	3.31	1.35
I have gained too little life experience outside of the Reformed Christian bubble.	158	<b>2.61</b>	1.05	55	<b>2.20</b>	1.18
In our DCU education, too little attention is paid to what is going on outside the Reformed Christian bubble.	158	<b>2.96</b>	.98	55	<b>3.31</b>	1.12
There is sufficient attention paid in our DCU education to teaching children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families.	158	2.43	.87	55	2.64	1.01
There is sufficient attention paid in our DCU education to teaching children with significant (language) backlogs due to integration problems.	158	2.78	.96	55	2.53	.98
Our DCU education pays sufficient attention to good citizenship education.	158	<b>3.59</b>	.91	55	<b>3.22</b>	.92
Our DCU education provides education in which the various aspects of WCD are generally well connected.	158	<b>3.61</b>	.76	55	<b>3.22</b>	.85
I have personally come into contact with new Dutch people who were still in the process of integrating into Dutch society.	158	2.66	.93	55	2.76	1.23
I have personally dealt with people experiencing socioeconomic adversity.	158	<b>2.44</b>	.97	55	<b>2.84</b>	1.26
I have come into contact with children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families in my internship experience.	158	<b>2.61</b>	1.00	55	<b>3.04</b>	1.15
I have personally come into contact with children with significant (language) backlogs due to integration problems.	158	2.22	1.16	55	2.51	1.35

What stands out from the students' responses to the statements is that, at the end of the DCU programme, the students feel they have entry-level competence for Reformed Christian and Protestant Christian education, but not for secular schools. Moreover, for a Christian school with an open admissions policy, most students still feel entry-level proficiency, whereas for a Christian school with a high ethnic and/or religious identity, they feel less so. The students appreciate the broad citizenship education they receive as part of the DCU curriculum, although they indicate that the programme does not connect this with learning to deal with and teach children from poor families or children with (language) deficits due to integration problems. The students do not feel that they have

personally gained too little life experience outside the Reformed Christian bubble <sup>5</sup>, although they do indicate that, generally, they have little contact with people and children who are struggling with socioeconomic adversity and with people with migration backgrounds who are still in the process of integrating into Dutch society.

Based on a comparison between the group of the full-time students and the group of the part-time students, it can be concluded that the part-time students are, on average, more critical of their current education than the full-time students. By contrast, they have gained more experience by themselves, especially with socioeconomic adversity and with pluralism in society. The full-time students more often indicate that they have not yet gained enough life experience outside of the Reformed Christian bubble.

### **Students and teachers on the WCD dimensions in the curriculum**

Both the teachers and students were asked about the domains associated with WCD (see Chapter 2.3.2). They assigned certain numbers of points to these domains or aspects. Each teacher and student rated the aspect that he or she encountered the most in the curriculum with seven points, assigned six points to the aspect that he or she encountered most after that, and then went on to arrive at only one point for the aspect he or she recognised the least in the training. Thus, for each aspect, the maximum score is seven and the minimum score is one.

The following table presents the results for the teachers and students. The table is arranged in descending order based on the overall averages ('M' under 'Total'). The averages in the highlighted cells differ significantly from each other, with the red means being significantly higher than the blue means.

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5 While the theoretical part of this dissertation refers to relatively homogeneous social groups, the empirical part employs the term social bubble, because it was commonly used in the TAR community and among DCU students and teachers. The baseline survey for the students used this term repeatedly, as will be the case throughout the next empirical chapters.

	Respondent group								
	Teacher			Student			Total		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
B. Cognitive aspect	56	<b>5.66</b>	1.50	214	<b>5.10</b>	1.73	270	5.21	1.70
F. Social aspect	56	4.98	1.59	214	4.98	1.77	270	4.98	1.73
E. Moral aspect	56	4.02	1.53	214	4.44	1.65	270	4.35	1.63
G. Spiritual aspect	56	<b>5.37</b>	1.64	214	<b>4.00</b>	2.20	270	4.29	2.16
C. Emotional aspect	56	<b>3.21</b>	1.29	214	<b>4.15</b>	1.68	270	3.96	1.65
A. Artistic aspect	56	2.45	1.57	214	2.84	1.66	270	2.76	1.65
D. Physical aspect	56	2.30	1.74	214	2.39	1.64	270	2.37	1.66

From the table, it can be concluded that both the teachers and the students encounter the cognitive aspect the most and the physical aspect the least. Moreover, the teachers encounter the cognitive aspect and the spiritual aspect more than the students, while the students encounter the emotional aspect more than the teachers. Regarding WCD the table shows that more could be done at DCU to foster whole teacher formation to enable trainee teachers to approach children, amidst society's high levels of diversity and complexity, as whole children.

#### 5.2.4 Open student reactions

At the end of the survey, 64 students took the trouble to also leave an open, spontaneous comment. Some students showed great, sometimes critical, commitment to DCU. A strikingly high number of responses provided advice regarding how closed and/or open the curriculum was, at the time, to the non-Christian environment and field. A total of 42 students expressed the opinion that DCU should be more open in one way or another. Often, these reactions were directly related to religious identity, although seven of them also mentioned a lack of connection to the problems of socioeconomic adversity and/or integration. Opposed to the call for more openness were seven responses from students who felt that, on the contrary, openness had gone too far and that more closedness, more focus on the individual in form and content, was desirable<sup>(6)</sup>. For all three of the aforementioned categories, one example can be provided<sup>(7)</sup>:

6 It is important to also take into account these negative reactions, as they show that there is not only a wish for more openness but also resistance towards it, at least among a small proportion of DCU students.

7 Translations are mine.

- DCU has the luxury of being able to train teachers for Reformed Christian education. Only, I am afraid there is too much focus on that and not on the world outside, so that students are not fully competent for encounters with children from outside the so-called bubble. There should be more focus on that, as far as I am concerned, in the form of practical assignments (internships) in public education.
- Students in non-Christian schools, in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, challenge you much more as a teacher; I have so little experience with that myself, but that's how I can imagine it. I don't feel competent to deal with those children correctly. For that, I am too spoiled in my safe little world, too shaky in my shoes. This has to do with experience, of course, but also with the minimal preparation for the teaching profession.
- Where has the Christian teacher at DCU gone? Propagating Reformed values and norms occupies a smaller place than pluralistic society. This completely overshoots the purpose of DCU, especially when you consider what its founders had in mind.

### 5.3 EXPLORATORY STUDENT RESEARCH

Before DCU joined the WCD research project, the project team questioned whether this type of holistic approach would or would not (completely, partly or completely not) fit with its Reformed Christian identity, principles and educational aims. The initial feeling before the start of the WCD project in 2020 was that it could be both a well-fitting model and, at the same time, a challenge to keep in touch with the development of society towards greater levels of pluralism. This feeling was corroborated by the work of six fourth-year (senior) teacher training students who dedicated their graduation research to WCD. The research track they opted for was designed as exploratory research into WCD and its compatibility with and usefulness for Christian teachers and Christian citizenship formation in (relatively new) contexts of high diversity and complexity. Like the baseline survey, the results served as input for the deliberations within the conversational community that applied TAR.

Nine students voluntarily chose to join the track, six of whom concluded their personal projects well and in time to be interviewed in an evaluative focus group interview about WCD, which was designed as a qualitative follow-up for the survey presented in Section 2. During the focus group interview, the six students were asked to define WCD (for the outline of the interview, see Appendix 3). They all worked towards a better understanding of the idea and concept through the study of literature and documents, on the one hand, and

through personal research or educational design, on the other hand. In the midst of their conversation on the topic, they took a short break for personal writing on WCD to be shared later in the ongoing focus group interview. Their responses were as follows <sup>(8)</sup>: WCD is...

St1: An educational concept that looks to the whole child in all of its aspects, not just cognitive but also social-emotional, physical, spiritual, moral, et cetera. Also, the development of the child is considered in its context (community, citizenship, etc).

St2: An educational concept that puts the whole child in the centre and thus is aimed at several developmental aspects, in which life comes before learning and explorative learning is very important. The central question is: What is good education?

St3: Looking at the whole child. Not looking to the (cognitive) restrictions, but first to the possibilities; seeking for the talents of each child and deploying them.

St4: The development of each child is central, regardless of background/ cognition; as teacher have/show esteem in which every pluriform background is recognised.

St5: To pay attention and invest in the wellbeing and development of all aspects of the human being in children; in addition to that, the development of a (Christian) worldview, lifestyle and attitude are the core.

St6: For me, the development of the child, in which social and emotional and all non-cognitive capacities are valuable for the overall development and, therefore, necessary for the cognitive development.

The interview transcript proves, by means of thematic colour coding, that all of the students perceive the holistic approach of WCD as an eyeopener regarding the conviction that education is about much more than just working on the cognitive aspect. Four of the students (St1, St2, St3 and St6) express this explicitly in the interview by stating: 'There is more'. Several times, they indicate aspects such as happiness, wellbeing and good relations as the ultimate goal of education (St1, St3, St5 and St6). They associate WCD with having an eye on, being interested in or paying attention to the child itself (St1, St3, St4 and St6). St3 explicitly connects WCD to having an eye on the child's talents, whether cognitive or not. St2 addresses the same issue. St6 connects WCD to hope, especially for children in a less advantaged socioeconomic context.

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8 Translation is mine.

All of the students agree that an educational approach such as WCD should be integrated into DCU's curriculum. The reason for this unanimous agreement is twofold. First, each of the students is convinced that WCD fits with Christian education. Second, they underline the belief that WCD would be especially helpful and perhaps even necessary in an environment of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. Regarding the first reason—the similarity between WCD and Christian education—the students observe the following:

St6: I think that it fits with all types of education but especially well with Christian education, because Christian education does already have an eye on spiritual things. Just things like the heart or how one lives, things that go well or go wrong, that have to do with, for example, one's moral life; and that fits to WCD, to one's identity.

St3: In Christian education, when you do it well, you talk with students about the fact that grades, indeed, are not everything, but that there's more: that there is God, the whole Christian world. So, you already work towards a future that brings more. With WCD, you can express that stronger.

St1: Yes, the goal is different, much broader, in Christian education. It is not about bringing them finally to a high position in society or something like that, but that you really come to your goal as a human being.

St4: Your starting point at a Christian school has many interfaces with WCD (...)

St2: In the world, in non-Christian education, you would call it citizenship formation, but the New Testament gives us, in this sense, much of our citizenship formation.

St5, however, offers the more critical remark that WCD also needs to be purposefully combined with and corrected by Christian pedagogy. As an example, this student mentions that WCD seems to focus on achieving the maximum personal growth of the child, whereas Christian pedagogy underlines the central goal of serving God. Other students (St6 and St2) underline this observation, with St2 explicitly calling this a less individualistic focus. In response to the interviewer asking whether they see WCD in some way as 'floaty and not really goal oriented', they respond as follows:

St5: Not floaty, but if you only want the child to come to maximum development, then I think that it does not really fit with Christian education. In fact, Christian education somehow has another, a higher goal. Maximum development cannot be the only thing to want.

St6: Yes, maximum happiness is the only thing you want, but eternal happiness.

St5: Yeah... eternal happiness. I think more in terms of a child coming to its destination (...)

St2: The focus can really be on the child and all aspects of its being, and that you want to develop that to the max. But I don't think that is what Christian faith is about. Not in the sense that the child, from early childhood, gets a focus on itself, like: in all aspects I have to be as good as I can and prove myself. In that case, you really teach them to be individualistic: I am important. That is just not what Christian belief tells us.

With regard to the second reason the six students believe that a WCD approach fits with Christian pedagogy in general—namely, that WCD is helpful or and even necessary in a context of high ethnic and religious pluralism—several students (St1, St2, St5 and St6) underline the importance of a good cognitive focus in education, of core subjects such as grammar and mathematics. However, they then move from there to the specific questions that a context of high diversity and complexity present for teachers in primary education. A close reading of the transcript reveals how they address the question of the teacher's responsibility where greater diversity in the sociocultural preconditions of children, when they arrive in the classroom, can be observed. From there, they start rethinking the position of schools and teachers within the broader educational partnership with family, state/society and church, speaking of a gap that asks for the teacher's engagement:

St2: But it is still true that all together we focus a lot on the cognitive.

St5: Yes, and I think that education has to focus itself. There are so many others aspects that should be addressed at home. School is, in fact, an institution where you have to learn to read and calculate; overall, so to say. But all together we may be going a little overboard.

St6: Well, there is a gap. Because what we should do at home is not happening. So, who then solves it? When you want to do so at school, yes, then you have to replace that cognitive focus a little. But when you want to close the gap, then you may be looking first: well, educators, what are we going to do with that? (...)

St1: It may vary really from school to school. That gap may be bigger at your school, where you see that all sorts of things in the upbringing at home are missing, whereas when you come to a Reformed school, you notice that children, most of the times, rely on a safe environment at home, with good social skills... Of course, you cannot generalise that, but there are, I think,



more and more schools where it is really necessary that the school also jumps into the non-cognitive.

As a group, the students believe that, while WCD is especially helpful in more diverse urban contexts, the more traditional Christian schools with relatively homogeneous student populations should also focus more on the fostering of social cohesion as an important educational task in a fragmented society. St1 notes that 'less and less schools look like such a safe Reformed Christian village school', while St 5 adds that 'to hold society together schools will become more and more important'. The joint conclusion of the students is that WCD is helpful for all types of schools, although it is especially necessary in schools where societal fragmentation is felt more intensely. A WCD approach will also be, they believe, helpful for the cognitive aspects of education. St6 stresses this point: 'If you make use of WCD, the cognitive part will also get the chance to develop. So it is not logical to think: we don't have time for WCD, let's focus on the cognitive'.

However, all of the students also recognise and mention constraints: the system focuses on cognitive testing, the agenda is full, a WCD approach will only be helpful if it is well integrated and not an add-on to the existing curriculum. St1 responds to this from the perspective of a private school with an international curriculum that she visited, indicating that a more independent approach is needed and can, in fact, make a difference. St5, some moments later, responds to this claim:

St5: They actually found the relationship with God and each other to be the basis for everything they did, and then came the learning. And that learning went really super-good. Even children who didn't do well at all at other schools, they were very comfortable and learned. So, they did not have to think primarily about the inspection requirements and, in the meantime, they achieved good results. I found that interesting to see.

St6: It does require a very different way of thinking and, of course, it's not something you can measure very easily, whereas the quality of education is completely based on things you can actually, scientifically measure. Something like this really requires a different way of thinking and you can't make it that easy and objective in that way, I think.

Together, the students agree that their own formation at DCU should have been more of a whole teacher education formation to know and experience how this is done. They, therefore, not only embrace WCD as a way to practise education in a modern, fragmented society but also WTD as an adequate method for teacher training and formation. What the students wish for is holistic teacher

formation to help trainee teachers to both learn and practice a WCD approach for children who grow up in a society with rapidly increasing levels of diversity and complexity. St2 adds one more layer to WCD and WTD: 'And not only that. I think (...) also for the person who teaches the student'.

### 5.3.1 Brief summary of the exploratory student theses

During her own research, St1 <sup>(9)</sup> took 14 teachers and 270 children through a questionnaire about citizenship formation. Half of them belonged to three relatively traditional, homogeneous schools, while the other half belonged to three schools with high levels of ethnic and sociocultural plurality. The results she gathered led to the conclusion that plurality in the classroom is helpful in preparing for citizenship in a pluralistic society and that

the ethnically homogeneous schools pay less attention to dealing with people from a different culture and this is also reflected in the reactions of the students. Yet it is very important that the students later, when they go to study or work outside their protected bubble, can also function well in society with people from a different culture. Because in our multicultural society, everyone has to deal with this to a greater or lesser extent.

St2 surveyed 13 staff members from 3 pluralistic schools and interviewed a school director who showed themselves to be positive about the same conclusion. St3 surveyed 25 children and teachers and then selected 3 children and 2 teachers for in-depth interviews to reach the conclusion that ethnic and cultural diversity in primary schools in urban zones requires a broad, intercultural approach.

Based on interviews with teachers from schools with high rates of plurality, St4 designed a tool to value elements of personhood formation besides the reports children receive for cognitive results. In this 'qualities profile', she enumerated 69 different characteristics from which teachers could pick three that they recognised as especially strong in the student. The profile also asks teachers to choose two characteristics in terms of which, according to them, students could grow more. All 69 characteristics were linked to five central areas or sources indicated by the ASCD (see Chapter 2.3.1): physical qualities, social qualities, emotional qualities, spiritual qualities and value-driven qualities. St5 conducted a series of observations and interviews at a private international school to compare WCD with a student-centred approach

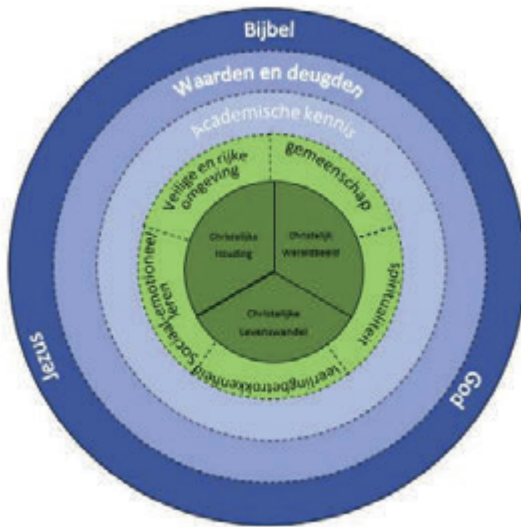
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9 The student codes are random here, which means that they cannot be connected to the codes applied in the focus group interview.

from a Christian perspective. When discussing the results of her research, she stated that

all in all, the holistic vision of whole child development seems to align well with Christian visions of education, the child and reality. In particular, the attention to personal development, the vision of reality as a coherent order and the vision of the child as a unit, a created whole.

St6 performed a comprehensive literature review to be discussed in both an expert interview and two focus groups formed by teachers from two Christian schools with very diverse student populations. Throughout her profound and extensive study, she compared what she could find on WCD with Christian education, with the aim of developing a model to combine the two. In the model that she presented at the end of her work (visible on this page), she placed the



Christian worldview, Christian lifestyle and Christian attitude in the centre. Around this core, she grouped elements of the context she believed to be important: the community, spirituality, student engagement, social-emotional learning and a safe and rich environment. She surrounded that circle with other circles that included academic knowledge, values and virtues, and, finally, God, Jesus and the Bible. At the end, St6 concluded that

the WCD vision that, in education, there has to be attention paid to the whole child ties in with the Biblical vision of the human being as a unity of mind, feeling and hands. This education of the whole child must, like all Christian education, proceed from the following educational aims: The development of a Christian vision of the world as a created, a fallen and a hopeful reality; the development of a Christian lifestyle aimed at serving the Other, the other and otherness; the development of a Christian attitude.

Together with the six senior students, the DCU project team was able to confirm the starting premise with respect to WCD and Christian citizenship formation

for a modern, fragmented society that was presented in the introduction to this dissertation (Section 3). Their insights were helpful in the evaluation of WCD in Chapter 3 and confirmed this evaluation, including its critical remarks. WCD helps Christian pedagogy to prepare for contexts with much higher levels of diversity and complexity, thereby providing a way to respond positively to the needs of fragmentation. However, from the perspective of Christian education, it also requires correction, as the very core of Christian education is the Christian view of God, man, community and relationships.

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter started by proving the initial claim made in the introduction that the nature and context of DCU's teacher training are appropriate for a meaningful case study for this research. The layered problem of fragmentation, as described in Chapter 1, applies fully to the strong secularising and individualising tendencies in Dutch society over the past few decades. The relative cultural and directional homogeneity the country once exhibited has given way to much higher levels of diversity and complexity. Regarding this diversity and complexity, DCU, coming from a context of strong reliance on implicit socialising forces, struggles with a felt need to invest more in subjectification to combine its own faith-based formational processes with its responsibilities in the field of citizenship formation. The baseline survey conducted at the start of DCU's participation in the overarching research consortium on WCD reveals how students, together with their teachers, live in a socialising social bubble that separates them from the challenges of high (urban) sociocultural diversity and complexity. It also shows that both groups (students and teachers) are partly aware of this and feel the need for a more open, holistic acquaintance in the curriculum with this social reality, although elements of resistance are also visible in the student group.

Exploratory research performed by six senior students and the analysis of their subsequent focus group interview supports the conclusion that WCD provides for a more holistic approach that is helpful in responding to the challenges of high diversity and complexity; however, it is also necessary for less diverse contexts. It helps to integrate the growing range of teacher duties, which, for the Christian teacher, can lead to the better connection of these duties with one's own identity and beliefs. Parting from this identity, the exploratory research shows the importance of a specifically Christian conception of and approach to WCD, to make it cohere with the (trainee) teacher's identity and beliefs and the deep motivation they provide for being active in education. In this case, WCD itself becomes a motivating force in such

way that the participating students not only support the idea of including WCD in DCU's teacher training for primary education but also desire a whole teacher development approach in the curriculum, which should be handled by whole teachers trainers.

The above-mentioned results of the baseline survey and the experiences of the six senior students were included in the deliberations of the conversational community at the start of the TAR process, especially the first substantive deliberation after the two start-up meetings. They enriched the voices of operant and espoused theology by taking into account the reactions of DCU's teachers and students, including the critical ones from the latter group.



# Chapter 6

## Subjectifying Education and the Art of Living Together

'Put simply, subjectification is not about responsibility but about freedom, including the freedom not to be responsible, the freedom to walk away from one's responsibility, so to speak.'

*Gert Biesta, World-Centred Education, 2022, p. 54*

'Peace, social justice, letting children flourish, well, name all those beautiful words that have to do with shalom... they inspire me as a Christian teacher.'

*Member of the outsider TAR group*

In its 14th meeting held on 7 February 2023, the conversational community spent some time looking back at its previous meetings, with the aim being to summarise what it had done so far and identify the main topics discussed up to that point. The reason for doing this was to verify if there were any topics that needed more attention regarding the broad and holistic citizenship formation of Christian trainee teachers in a modern, fragmented society and DCU's curriculum. The three main topics the conversational community identified in that meeting were as follows: subjectifying education, epistemological formation and attitude formation (see Chapter 4.5). These topics were not only helpful for the conceptual coding process—and thus the analysis of the minutes and transcripts—but also provided the structure of the three chapters used to present this analysis. Each of Chapters 6, 7 and 8 will focus on one of the topics, explain how it emerged in the deliberations and analyse what role it played within the TAR.

This chapter will focus on subjectifying education. The central question that the conversational community perceived in relation to this was formulated as follows: 'What ability should broadly, (w)holistically formed students develop with regard to the personhood and citizenship formation of children?' The first part of this chapter (Section 1) describes how this question emerged from the outset of the conversational community's activities and the discussion of the exploratory research that was presented in the previous chapter. This section also identifies what subjectifying education should mean in the formation process of Christian trainee teachers. Section 2 provides a more broad analysis of how the four voices of theology came together during discussions on subjectifying education. Section 3 presents the elaborations made by the conversational community for the DCU curriculum, briefly explaining how they were embedded in the ongoing process of curriculum renewal. The final conclusion identifies the takeaways concerning the intended practice-theory for Christian citizenship formation (1).

## 6.1 THE PRACTICE OF CITIZENSHIP FORMATION

From the constant back-and-forth movement between theory and practice, particularly from the theoretical chapters (Chapters 1–3) and the exploratory research (Chapter 5), arose some early conceptions that influenced the start of the conversational community. Citizenship formation is not something a

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1 All of the quotations from the minutes and transcripts of the conversational community used from this point onwards have been translated into English by me.



teacher can just do. Indeed, it is not a makeable thing; it happens during the ongoing contact of students with the world that their schools and classrooms form just a small and relatively protected part of. Therefore, it cannot be approached as merely an add-on to an existing curriculum, something that teachers do because they like to pay more attention to it or the government says it has to be featured. Citizenship formation is narrowly tied to and thoroughly interconnected with all a teacher has to do when he or she influences the preparation of schoolchildren for higher levels of diversity and complexity in society and the wider world. This process cannot function when trainee teachers are inclined to turn their backs towards society and the world as it is, or to enclose themselves in their safe social bubbles. To practice the art of living together in an exemplary way for students, they have to be open to the challenges of a modern, fragmented society.

These conceptions were embraced by the members of the conversational community, forming the foundation for its longing to improve the formation of DCU students for a modern, fragmented society. Trainee teachers need to be open to the challenges associated with high diversity and complexity and to learn to handle those challenges as a person, independently of their more socially safe and homogeneous contexts. They must learn to be a self that freely and responsibly responds to these challenges without being forced or manipulated because, as future teachers, they need to serve as examples of embracing the challenges of the world. As Biesta (2022) explained, first and foremost, they need freedom. Socialisation is in direct need of subjectification, of being enabled to respond as a subject to the challenges presented. This is what Biesta (2022, p. 50) termed 'subjectifying education'. It is 'not about forcing children and young people to stay there'; rather, it is better described as 'encouraging an "appetite" for trying to live one's life in the world' (Biesta, 2022, p. 50).

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**Overview of TAR analysis - main topics and levels**

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Chapter 6	Subjectifying education	Hands
Chapter 7	Epistemological formation	Head
Chapter 8	Attitude formation	Heart

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The conversational community, thus, found this need to encourage an appetite for practicing the art of living together to be one of three main issues concerning the central topic of holistic Christian teacher training for citizenship and citizenship education. It followed Biesta (2022) in calling this 'subjectifying education'. When, in the 14th meeting, the three issues were identified, one of the members of the outsider group recognised in them the triad heart,

head and hands. The conversational community followed her proposal to tie 'subjectifying education' first and foremost to the hands, as a symbol of the most practical aspect of the study: to help students to (know how to) act and behave. Thereby, it tied subjectifying education to the practice of social justice for which it is necessary to be a self that chooses to respond to the challenges related to otherness that present themselves to the person. The latter was linked to, but also distinguished from, the formation of a basic attitude underlying to this practice (which is also subjectifying, but aimed at the heart) and to the epistemological formation that is required with it (subjectifying; aimed at the head). The conversational community, thus, chose to start a fundamentally subjectifying approach from practice (the hands), to later dig deeper and find out what that requires on the levels of head and heart. Respecting daily practice, it searched for answers to questions such as the following: How are citizenship and personhood formation related? How does citizenship formation work in practice? What is a holistic way to learn the art of living together? What works and what does not work in this area? All of these questions are related to the core question the conversational community formulated to it: What pedagogical practices appeal to students to prepare themselves for responding freely but faithfully to the challenges posed by high diversity and complexity?

These questions emerged from the conversational community's processing of the exploratory research. This processing led to the identification of two core elements that the conversational community wanted to do justice to—namely, critical openness and critical faithfulness (6.1.1). To stimulate students to develop not just one but both of these core elements, the conversational community started to invite DCU students into the context of urban diversity, evaluating how to deal with it as a Christian teacher and registering their evaluation to see what it did for them (6.1.2). Afterwards, it established a more specific inquiry into personhood formation in students from 8 to 14 years of age to check what this means for their teachers (6.1.3). Each of the following sub-sections shows what the conversational community, when applying TAR, concluded from these findings with regard to the citizenship formation of trainee teachers.

### **6.1.1 Critical faithfulness and critical openness**

During the third meeting of the conversational community, the results of the baseline survey, as presented in Chapter 5, were discussed. At the request of several members, this was done in the presence of two DCU students, one more enthusiastic about including higher levels of diversity in the DCU curriculum and one more hesitant towards it. The first student described her upbringing

Nr.	Date
1	2021-05-31
2	2021-07-05
3	2021-08-31
4	2021-09-21
5	2021-11-02
6	2021-12-07
7	2022-01-25
8	2022-03-08
9	2022-04-19
10	2022-05-31
11	2022-06-27
12	2022-11-01
13	2022-12-13
14	2023-02-07
15	2023-04-04
16	2023-06-13
17	2023-11-28
18	2024-01-09
19	2024-03-12
20	2024-04-09

within the Reformed Christian community as heavily built on a socialisation process within a specific social bubble, stating that she experienced being 'put too much into a tube'. What she missed was 'respect for others, for people from other ethnicities, being able to handle diversity and not finding otherness immediately strange'. Reflecting on the DCU curriculum, she felt she had learned 'either to be completely Reformed or to conceal one's identity and adapt', with the letter referring to non-Reformed social contexts. She expressed the wish for a better combination of rootedness in one's own tradition and openness towards others. The other student responded to this with hesitation. According to him, DCU was already addressing diversity at the level of rural village schools, and he feared that too much acquaintance with urban diversity would possibly do theological and cultural harm to DCU's traditional identity.

When talking through the baseline survey results and the initial reactions of both students, all of the participants recognised the existence of the aforementioned social bubble and the gap between the Reformed Christian social circle and Dutch society as a whole. According to members of the outsider group, who represented school 1 and school 2, the examples of their schools prove that it is, in fact, possible to be a faithful Christian teacher, fully loyal to the Bible and the creeds, and still be open to people from other ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Participants from both the outsider and insider groups observed that there are good reasons to look for both aspects in the training of Christian teachers: the parental vows made at the time of infant baptism to educate the child faithfully and the missional idea put forward in the Bible to be salt and light within society; the actual pressure of the secular majority in Parliament on Article 23 of the Constitution granting freedom of education and the need to show, as Christian schools, the ability to make a difference that is good for society as a whole; the quest by Christian parents for a safe environment for their children and the strength of Christian education as broad formation that would be a good present for every child in society.

All of the participants agreed about the importance of learning to really respect otherness and the necessity of dismantling stereotypical thinking in

Reformed Christian circles. Despite agreeing with all of this, the second—and more hesitant—DCU student insisted that he would like to be very careful with terms such as ‘cracking open the Reformed bubble’. The first task of DCU, as he saw it, was to prepare trainee teachers for Reformed Christian schools. Members of the outsider group agreed with him on the differences between urban and rural diversity, conceding that the former, as part of their daily reality, was much more complicated. They added, however, that it would be good for all DCU students to get to know the reality of urban diversity because teachers in all circumstances have to prepare children for the whole of society, which includes this urban reality of high diversity and complexity. At the end of the meeting, this discussion led to a joint threefold conclusion that was partly based on formulations from the outsider group but approved by all of the participants:

- We note that modifications to the DCU curriculum need not be aimed at cracking open the Reformed bubble; rather, what is needed is for students to have foreign and, therefore, formative experiences outside of their own context. The reason for this is to introduce students to, and teach, respectful interaction with others. It is also good to make students sensitive to specific problems of society that, according to the baseline survey, they certainly do not encounter on a daily basis, such as adversity and multi-ethnicity.
- It is also important to carefully include critical students in this.
- The goal is not to open up Reformed education, to choose a different orientation or to change the constituency or target group of DCU; rather, it is to connect the Reformed Christian education with the reality of pluriform society as it applies in the Netherlands. The responsibility both towards government and society (citizenship task) and towards students makes this necessary.

This conclusion elaborated on what had been discussed in the conversational community’s second warm-up meeting. The Reformed social bubble was mentioned in this meeting no less than 12 times, by participants from both the insider and outsider groups. The joint conviction this meeting led to was that real acquaintance on the part of DCU students with urban diversity is necessary and cannot remain purely cognitive. Good cognitive preparation in the form of obtaining knowledge about ethnic, cultural and religious diversity is absolutely necessary—and, as one member of the outsider group observed, precedes other types of acquaintance—although real encounters outside the student’s social comfort zone are much more formative and helpful when it

comes to learning how to be one's self outside of the familiar social context. A member of the insider group raised the issue of what would motivate students to take steps outside of their comfort zones, as this may well feel threatening to them. A member of the outsider team responded that short but obligatory internships would open up new worlds for them that would provide intrinsic motivation:

That's why it's just right that they have to have been here once, because then there's just no choice for a while. Because you have to experience this. Of course, you can be prepared cognitively for this type of education, but in the end, you have to experience what it is like to walk around among these children, and like you said: wow, you just get a hug from a child in the middle of the hallway, that only happens in our kindergarten. You don't know things like that if you haven't been here.

Another member of the outsider group observed that good motivation within the student is necessary to help him or her to take the step: 'They really have to want to'. To this, however, she and others immediately added the following <sup>(2)</sup>:

P1: But sometimes you really have to put them on the spot. Who knows, they might be very happy afterwards.

P2: Of course, that's the case with a lot of things you learn.

P3: Indeed, looking outside your own bubble, that just helps. But not to force. Not like: everyone should be able to work here, because that's just not the case.

The conclusion drawn from these deliberations was that initial acquaintance with higher levels of diversity should be included in the curriculum but not emphasised to such an extent as to deter students, instead opening new windows (on dealing with diversity and complexity) for them. Based on intrinsic motivation, more intense follow-up steps should be optional for students. In the conversational community, a clear difference was noted between a first, well-prepared, but not highly exigent taster internship for, for example, sophomores, and a more intense but optional internship for juniors or seniors. The caution here was motivated by the experienced tension between the two dynamics that would play an important role throughout the conversational community's activities: faithfulness, on the one hand, and openness, on the

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2 All quotations from the conversational community's minutes and transcripts are anonymised. Here, P1 means Participant 1. In each separate quotation, the numbers are assigned anew. This means that P1 in one quotation cannot be identified automatically with P1 in other quotations, and so on.

other hand. In the second meeting, the conversational community decided that faithfulness and openness should be considered two critical elements that, throughout the action research and in the citizenship formation of students, should always go together. Students often think of them as mutually exclusive, the conversational community concluded in several meetings, but they also can go together:

P1: So, that openness and that faithfulness, of course you could say that they are always at odds: the more open I am, the less faithful. But you could also say: maybe they belong together. It might be my faithfulness that means I am really there for that child, even though that child thinks very differently from me, and that I really pay attention to how he or she experiences things.

P2: Yes.

P3: It could also be that if you become more closed-minded, then you actually become less faithful.

P4: Exactly.

P3: Because what you said really touches me. About not wanting to be right but showing Jesus' love... when you are with people from different denominations, but all Christian, together, sometimes it is more about the differing denominations than what binds you. Because you're not in the full society anymore, you go into small things. So I think precisely when you know how small we are in this society that we also have to give that to our students: you are in your bubble, but that bubble is getting smaller, look beyond, you just need it. That can also, in a way, impart more faith.

It is particularly interesting to see how the terms openness and faithfulness emerged during the early discussions of the conversational community. Both terms appear in the literature as critical: critical faithfulness (Swinton & Mowat, 2006) and critical openness (Thiessen, 1993). In the next chapter, which addresses epistemological formation, this will be further explained and explored (7.1). For now, it is useful to notice that, at the time, the conversational community was only familiar with the formal term 'critical faithfulness' and just mentioned 'critical openness' as its logical counterpart. The discussion during the second meeting ended with the concluding remark that high diversity can be considered not only a threat but also a chance. This led one of the participating school directors to respond: 'But isn't that exactly the story of what we want to do, the question we want to answer?' During the course of the conversational community's existence, with regard to this question, the aim was to honour both critical faithfulness and critical openness to invite students

to be whole persons—true to themselves and their upbringing—in the world, able to flourish in connection to its diversity and complexity.

### 6.1.2 Eye-opening experiences

During the autumn of 2021, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, it was impossible for senior DCU students to travel abroad as planned for the usual internationalisation tracks. The conversational community took advantage of the alternative tracks that had to be rapidly prepared. The participants were happy to see that no less than 40 students were interested in studying the reality of Christian teaching at multi-ethnic urban schools in the Netherlands. However, the initial idea of inviting 20 students to spend the night in the big city (at school 1) and 20 in the other urban region (at school 2) had to be cancelled due to changing COVID-19 restrictions. In the end, the two school directors, in December 2021, gave a joint presentation at DCU. The day after, 10 students visited school 1 for the whole day, while other students investigated in small groups the reality and complexity of urban multi-ethnicity via screening websites, watching a documentary called *Klassen* about the opportunity gap (Sylbing et al., 2020), playing a game designed to prompt empathy with the opportunity gap called *IQ110* (Hogeschool van Amsterdam, 2020) and visiting multi-ethnic neighbourhoods in two of the biggest cities in the Netherlands.

In its fifth meeting, the conversational community formulated four questions for the students to reflect on after their different forms of acquaintance with multi-ethnic teaching:

- What did you learn from the encounters you had?
- What did those encounters do to you personally?
- What would you need in your teacher training to afterwards work in such an environment?
- What did you learn about the articulation of a Christian vision and the adoption of a Christian life and attitude in this environment?

After completing their respective tasks, all of the students came together at DCU to fill out their evaluation forms, share experiences in small, mixed groups and reflect on what they had learned. Before the conversational community's seventh meeting, each member studied the evaluation forms filled out by the students. During the meeting, the insider and outsider groups reviewed the students' reflections separately so that they could share their conclusions afterwards. The outsider group responded positively to both the encounters with the students and the students' evaluations. 'What a quality those girls possess', one of the coordinators of the program at school 1 exclaimed. At the

same time, the joint conclusion of the outsider group was that the students lacked confidence because they were not familiar with the context of high diversity and complexity. This lack of confidence was not only related to not being used to the level of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in the classroom but also to the idea that class management in such situation was supposed to be much more complex. According to the outsider group, one of the main lessons was that students should be given the confidence to step into new contexts.

What struck the outsider group specifically was the students' frequent use in their evaluations of the word 'eye-opener'. P1, on behalf of the outsider group, noted the following:

Students said: My eyes were really opened to other situations, prejudices that fell away, appearances that are less important, the great hospitality of parents and the school and the question from students: how do you make it explicit: religious education to non-Christian students, how do you do that? And the surprise of: hey, so Christian education can go hand in hand with meeting and talking with non-Christians; that's when it comes right out, that's when there's respect, when you differ.

The same observation was made by the insider group. Based on the students' experiences, the insider group advocated for a standard acquaintance in the DCU curriculum through outside-the-comfort-zone internships in the second year of teacher training—with the possibility afterwards to elaborate on it in a more optional form during longer and more intensive internships in years three and four. P2, on behalf of the insider group, stated:

What struck us from what the students gave back was that they actually all experienced it as very enriching and that they were also enthusiastic, that it also really emerged that they would have to be really strong in order to work in such a school. We talked about how you should prepare for that at the pedagogical academy and what you need then. What exactly is that? Is that more something in terms of identity, that you can stand for that, or is it also in terms of skills as a teacher, with regard to classroom management and professional duties, for example. We talked about how important it is that you, at least, know who you are and how you can, for example, express what you stand for.

The evaluation of the experiences and, specifically, of the students' own evaluations strengthened the conversational community's resolve concerning the necessity of obliging students to, at least once during their



teacher training, step out of their comfort zone and into the context of this kind of multi-ethnic school, to engage in a holistic experience that opens windows to new worlds, as a deliberate eye-opening experience. The joint idea to do so in the second year of teacher training was argued, on the one hand, by the notion of not doing it too soon, so that trainee teachers do not have unnecessary negative experience that undermine the trust and confidence they require. On the other hand, this was complemented by the notion of not doing it too late, so that students with this positive holistic experience could still opt for more acquaintance with higher levels of diversity and complexity. The idea that teacher training should offer this third- or fourth-year follow-up to a shorter second-year taster internship in the form of both internships and optional courses, modules or minors was a conclusion that gradually became more clear during the early meetings of the conversational community.

### **6.1.3 Citizenship formation as personhood formation**

The conversational community's eighth and ninth meetings, which were held in spring 2022, were especially helpful in terms of developing a clearer idea about what trainee teachers need to be able to guide students aged eight to 14 years to grow as people. The conversational community worked closely in these two meetings with an ongoing DCU pilot investigation into personhood formation in students. For the conversational community, it was particularly interesting to see how the broad citizenship formation of students was interconnected with their personhood formation and how this affected the formation that they later, as teachers, will provide to students in primary schools, specifically concerning their transition to secondary education. The linchpin proved to be Biesta's (2013, 2022) view on subjectification in relation to qualification and socialisation—and his plea for subjectifying education.

A central role was reserved for a senior student who was conducting her graduation research on personhood formation. To introduce the topic to all of the participants, both from the conversational community and from the pilot project on personhood formation, she related her personal story as a DCU student. As she, in her childhood, did not learn to reflect on herself, she ran aground as a junior during teacher training and had to leave. Only after having learned who she was in practical life was she able to begin her studies again, and she did so with the conviction that the educational materials were too focused on cognition and not sufficiently focused on the children's personal development. As a senior student finalising her part-time teacher training, she longed for 'developing children emotionally, socially and cognitively in a simultaneous way, putting love to God and love to the neighbour at the centre, just like resilience in society'. From pedagogical literature, she learned

that personhood formation has to do with understanding one's responsibility to oneself and others, 'while the teacher plays a role as an example to help students to develop an intrinsic motivation and discover their own qualities'.

After this student's presentation, which reflected some of the core elements of Biesta's (2013, 2022) subjectifying education, the participants separated into four groups to discuss broad and integrated formation, as well as the pedagogical competences teachers need to foster this in children. At the end of the eighth meeting, all four groups presented their ideas on the topic. Their presentations were recorded and afterwards analysed by the leading senior student, who summarised the insights from all of the presentations in the following conclusion on personhood formation, which was approved by all of the participants:

Personhood formation is not a separate subject but rather a matter that pertains to the whole class. It is not only focused on strong or weak students but on everybody, in line with their age development. As a teacher, you know, if all goes well, what to expect from your students. Important starting points are Bible stories and connections to the children's experiences. As a teacher, you are the identification figure who is allowed to be vulnerable. You act, the students imitate; there is two-way traffic. This can be done in lessons and around lessons. Important lessons or forms that can play a role in promoting identity development are the expressive subjects, various collaborative forms and philosophising/theologising. Personhood formation takes place at different levels. Here, qualification, socialisation and subjectification (or subject-becoming) are important. Having children reflect on the good and less good moments can also contribute to gaining insight into the question: 'Who am I and what do I think/want?' However, the place in the group and the development are also very important: Do the children have a place in the group and can they reflect on the relationship with others, the group and the teacher? Here, communication at the interaction and existence levels is also of great value.

At the end of the meeting, all of the participants agreed to taking this research further by interviewing at least one child per person to be able to clarify during the next meeting what works from a child's perspective. The group endorsed the proposal by one participant to do this through 10 starting sentences to be completed by the child, which were based on the joint conclusion formulated by the senior student (3). In the ninth meeting, which involved the same joint

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3 For more information and details about the joint investigation process, I refer readers to the internal DCU document that resulted from these meetings (van Olst, 2022b).

group, the results of 50 interviews were evaluated: 15 with children in primary education and 35 with children in the early years of secondary education. In addition, 11 students from DCU's teacher training programme completed the sentences. The children's results were studied in three different groups, while the students' results were studied in a fourth group. The groups reported their findings:

- First group, studying child interviews: Much depends on finding the right words so that feelings can be expressed. The teacher is a great example in terms of bringing up feelings with the right words at the right times. The Bible story seems to be a good time for this in today's practice, but it soon seems to go back to the order of the day. However, the teacher is essential throughout the day via a personal gesture and a nod. In addition, professional help matters. In short, a safe learning environment is the basis of everything.
- Second group, studying child interviews: The important point is being seen. Despite the fact that the teacher has his hands full with the order and lesson material, it turns out that personal contact, in particular, is very much appreciated by the children. An optimal focus on person formation is almost impossible for young teachers, but a master-apprentice construction (working with an experienced teacher) could help. Children seem to place special value on group discussion. It is striking that many children like it in primary school, while they often do not experience secondary school that way. This is a point from the children's responses that causes great concern.
- Third group, studying child interviews: First of all, it appears that a positive and safe group atmosphere is important for children. The group is important to students and, as a teacher, it is important that you are involved with your students. You need to see them and help them grow. It is important for a teacher to be aware of their own role model, expressing feelings and showing vulnerability. It can be helpful to put cards on your desk for each day, to remind yourself, as a teacher, to promote a group spirit and engagement amidst all the other teaching efforts required of you. In addition, it is important to observe, for example, during breaks and observe the process within the group. Teachers need concrete tools to foster personhood in students.
- Fourth group, studying student interviews: The group is important to children, and a positive and safe atmosphere are essential. Really seeing the group and investing in a good and safe atmosphere, right

from the golden weeks, are of great value. Students must be prepared for this. For themselves, student time proves essential to their own person formation. A clear danger is that the shortage of teachers leads to students being lured into jobs within education as soon as possible. This ensures that part of the student's time is lost and personal development comes under pressure. The goal should be: 'Training together, from the relationship'. Students want to be seen and to hear that teachers are equipped. They need to hear feedback from relationship. In group dynamics, it appears to be important for students to get to know each other well and, therefore, learn to get along better. They also highly value freedom of choice, where they are more likely to ask for guidance.

What the conversational community learned from this inquiry into personhood formation in children, as well as what is required from teachers, is that, in the first place, personhood formation is something that just happens, specifically in relationships: teacher-student, student-student, student-group, teacher-group. It happens throughout the day, without teachers being able to identify exactly when and where. Therefore, personhood formation is not very measurable. These findings coincided with findings by researchers from *Inholland* (Elshout & Enthoven, 2022) that were presented to the conversational community. The conclusions underline the importance of the pedagogical relationship for subjectifying education. Becoming a subject has everything to do with citizenship as the art of living together. This art is practiced on a daily basis in the group and needs to be guided by the teacher in an exemplary way.

In the final report stemming from the two joint meetings, the conversational community endorsed the difference that Visser-Vogel and de Muynck (2019) identified between identity formation and personhood formation. In identity formation, the core question is: 'Who am I?' In personhood formation, the central question is: 'How am I?' This distinction ties personhood formation to a broad and integrative conception of citizenship formation (intersubjectivity). Moreover, central to the formational process are questions that can only be answered in relationships: What is expected from me? How should I be? What does this situation ask of me? How am I related to God? How am I related to my neighbour? How do I relate to creation and the world in which I live? All of these questions relate to a person with a personality that is influenced by relationship, as found in Zizioulas' (2021) conception in Chapter 1.3.1. The student becomes a person when he or she freely answers what the relationship presents him or her with. The person becomes a citizen when he or she freely responds, as a subject, to the challenges of a diverse and complex society.

This profound relationality, together with personal subjectness, shaped the threefold ideal Visser-Vogel and de Muynck (2019) perceived in personhood formation. This threefold ideal was subsequently embraced by the conversational community, albeit without specifically taking into account a context of diversity or Biesta's (2022) central idea that real responsibility requires freedom:

- The person experiences in thought and action that he or she is part of a greater whole.
- The person forms an integral unity: A person with a stable identity.
- The person develops into someone who takes responsibility actively and with discernment.

## 6.2 FOUR THEOLOGICAL VOICES ON SHALOM-SEEKING CITIZENSHIP

How can a strong moral ideal, as attached to one's idea of the person and of responding with responsibility, align with the freedom that enables a person to be a person with agency and liberty? This is the central question that needs to be answered with regard to subjectifying education, especially when education takes place based on a strongly religious conception in a diverse and, therefore, complex environment. This discussion repeatedly presented itself at the table of the conversational community, where the voices of operant, espoused, formal and normative theology were brought in, both in the moral ideal and in concepts of good citizenship. One emerging question was how to foster subjectifying education while respecting a variety of individual conceptions, preferences and attitudes, as informed in very different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. The central question identified by the conversational community was as follows: What and how do trainee teachers need to learn to be prepared to handle both the moral ideal and the necessary respect for diversity?

As explained above (6.1.1), the conversational community chose two separate lines of reasoning as dynamics to hold together throughout the process: faithfulness and openness. Both can be termed critical—that is, of fundamental importance: Faithfulness with regard to the Biblically informed moral ideals and openness with regard to the context of diversity, but also informed by the Biblical notion of being present in the world. The reason why the conversational community also found openness critical was the focus of its members on the missional aspect of Christian teaching in general and on Christian teaching in a context of high diversity more specifically. Apart

from the first warm-up meeting, the missional aspect was mentioned in every meeting of the conversational community, except for the eighth one, which, as mentioned in Section 1.3, was dedicated to the question of pedagogical practices for fostering personhood formation in students. The missional aspect came across relatively frequently in the fifth meeting (10 times), the 11th meeting (8 times) and the 13th meeting (11 times). The matters that were discussed in these meetings included the Biblical concept of shalom (fifth), the basic attitude of service (11th) and the handling of Biblical truth in a context of diversity (13th).

As this missional aspect is important, it will be analysed more deeply in Chapter 8 with regard to the basic attitude that Christian trainee teachers need to learn, according to the conversational community. For the actual issue of subjectifying education, it is important to observe that, while faithfulness and openness are both considered critical, there sometimes seems to be an intrinsic contradiction between the two. The minutes of the second meeting reflect this dynamic: 'The conversation is about how faithfulness and openness are sometimes perceived as opposites but can also represent an opportunity and reinforce each other'. In particular, members of the outsider group underlined throughout the meetings that students who are inclined to rely on the relative safety of their social in-groups need to learn that stepping outside of their comfort zones (with openness towards others) does not automatically lead to a loss of faithfulness. The following are some brief examples of what these members of the outsider group said:

P1, meeting 2: No adding water to the wine right? You don't have to. That's what I thought, but that really turned out to be unjustified.

P2, meeting 3: Being fully committed to one's faith and being meaningful in the neighbourhood can go hand in hand. School 1 and school 2 are examples of how you can maintain your Christian identity, even at a school where 90 percent of the student population does not share your identity.

P1, meeting 2: Welcoming students with open arms to see up close how you can be open and Christian at the same time, without watering down the wine.

P3, meeting 3: This adds value to worldview development and teaches students that individuality, openness and respect can go hand in hand.

P4, meeting 11: I think their attitude is so closed because they are afraid of being vulnerable, of giving away pieces of their own faith, or, how do you say that... that you don't dare to be vulnerable and want to hold onto your faith, stating that this is how it is and not otherwise.

P3, meeting 11: A lot of Christians see their faith as a wooden ship. If you pull out a plank, the whole thing sinks. Whereas (...) it's actually more like a clay bung. You can push a bit on the outside, but the core that you believe in, that will stand. God doesn't just fall over or something, even if you interact with others a little more and someone says what you don't think or something. I think that if you have that awareness, it also helps a lot to be more open towards others.

P2, meeting 11: It is an eye-opener for many students that an open admissions policy does not have to diminish the Christian identity, as diversity can also strengthen that identity.

Stepping outside of the safety of one's social comfort zone can, as the conversational community learned, be considered a holistic eye-opening experience. It is, therefore, subjectifying in the sense that it appeals to the person to respond. It is a stimulating experience, as one of the participating students noted in the 11th meeting, because it shapes the need to think through one's personal faith and to articulate and practice it towards others who do not necessarily share one's own convictions. The conversational community underlined that these kinds of holistic experiences outside of one's comfort zone need to be prepared and guided, for example, through the participation of students in small learning communities to exchange views and ideas with others students and with teacher trainers. The minutes of the seventh meeting state as a general conclusion 'that these learning communities offer a good place to work together on the articulation and internalisation of the Christian faith, for example, by also taking responsibility for weekly and daily openings'.

### **6.2.1 The voice of operant theology**

The voice of operant theology stems from what people of faith actually do (Cameron & Duce, 2013) and includes their 'faith-carrying words' (Cameron et al., 2010, p. 19). With regard to subjectifying education, the practitioners from the outsider group were insistent that it is possible to be a faithful Christian teacher in a context of high ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. They had personally noted a tension between critical faithfulness and critical openness, but after stepping outside of their personal comfort zones, they learned that this tension could be overcome. Afterwards, as they indicated, they felt the freedom to act as faithful Christian teachers, having learned to more clearly distinguish between what is essential to their faith and what may be important but does not belong to the non-negotiable core of it.

The DCU students demonstrated, through their participation in the research, some hesitance to step out from their personal and social comfort

zones because they feared they would not be able to act as faithful Christians after doing so. After being specifically invited to take the step and observe the example of Christian teaching in a context of high diversity at school 1 or school 2, they described it as an eye-opening experience. They were motivated to think through their own convictions and the essentials of their faith: 'P1 indicates that she hears from students that being forced to the core is often experienced as refreshing and a wake-up call'. Their operant theology initially expressed a high level of reliance on the safety of their social in-group for their faithfulness; however, as the conversational community concluded from the experiences of participating students, this operant theology could change through practical experiences outside of their comfort zones.

### **6.2.2 The voice of espoused theology**

Reflecting on these practical experiences, the conversational community thought about the goal of inviting and taking trainee teachers out of their social comfort zones. It decided to respect the comfort zone as something that can be useful and helpful for faithfulness. Its goal, however, was to ensure that all of the students were acquainted with the high level of diversity and complexity that characterises the society they will work in, whatever type of denomination of school they join. This goal, formulated in the third meeting and reformulated several times afterwards, was not to have all future teachers come to work in schools with high diversity and complexity; rather, it was to at least once during their personhood formation give them the experience of what it means to stand alone as a Christian interacting with others, just to see why subjectifying education is necessary in a context too complex to rely solely on socialising forces.

Part of this approach should entail, according to the conversational community, that trainee teachers cannot be forced in a certain direction. On the one hand, it is necessary to overcome hesitation and even resistance, but on the other hand, it is necessary to give students space to do so in their own way. The missional aspect of this type of citizenship formation for Christian trainee teachers involves making them aware of their calling to love God above all and one's neighbour as one self. But when students are forced to respond to this calling, they need to be given the freedom to do so in their own way. In its 14th meeting, the conversational community decided to pay more attention to the topic of longing and how to foster in students the longing to freely respond to their calling in society. After discussing this matter in the 15th meeting, the outsider team stated that, in a society characterised by fragmentation, polarisation and individualism, the Christian perspective should be characterised by 'the sense of community and responsibility for each other'.



For the Christian teacher, this means putting an accent not on the individual and his or her scores and progress but on being part of the bigger picture of living as a heavenly citizen on Earth to honour God and be a blessing for others.

For a Christian pedagogy of longing, this implies a focus on the wider story to be told to induce love, attention and respect. The realisation that such things are not manufacturable led the outsider group to some theological reflections:

Teachers should, therefore, be transparent about their doubts. At the same time, they also live the gospel and speak with enthusiasm and amazement about all that can be taught. The goal of education is more than conversion to God (too much emphasis on this can lead to passivity), and also more than 'doing good things' (too much emphasis on this can lead to activism without a vertical line upwards). The goal is to form children into the 'image bearer of God', thereby arriving at their destination/meaning. For Christian teacher training, it seems important to us that students engage in conversation on these themes, asking inquiring questions about systems, each other's motives, et cetera. They also need a role model figure, an engaged mentor who speaks to and knows the students.

In the same meeting, the insider group underlined the function of the school as a mini-society: 'The school is the place where the upbringing of the child in the family is reinforced. Christian education is meant to help the child to become a Christian and be a Christian'. The role of the teacher is 'to be inspirational and to support the child to flourish'. Teachers can never be cynical; rather, they have to always be 'longing and by that trying to make a difference'. They do not have to change the world all by themselves, but just 'awaken in the child the longing to serve God in society, just like the child was meant to by its Creator'. In the sixth meeting, the conversational community as a whole, along with the five senior students, established a clear parallel between the education of trainee teachers and that of children: The ideal can be fully Christian; however, the way towards it should be subjectifying. This implies encouragement, not imposition. To do so, a teacher needs to really see the child in his or her uniqueness, be open-minded regarding other cultural influences and know what is happening in society. At the same time, a Christian teacher needs to 'be himself', 'uphold the Bible' and 'uphold his or her own norms and values'.

The longing to simultaneously be critically open and critically faithful coheres with the clear attention on the weak forces in education. In a context of high diversity and complexity, the Christian teacher must have learned to rely on spiritual powers, for example, the power of the Spirit. This enables him or her to act like formulated in the sixth meeting by a small subgroup of one

student, a member of the insider group and two members of the outsider group: 'The Christian teacher also sometimes has to park the faith for a while, but you don't have to push it away. There needs to be a golden balance'.

### 6.2.3 The voice of formal theology

According to the conversational community, the WCD movement and its practical approach can be helpful in managing the weak powers in education. The 16th meeting involved an evaluation of WCD in light of what was already investigated and established. Participants from both the insider and outsider groups mentioned that their study of WCD helped them to focus on the child and to not be 'stuck in systems', 'hold onto a basic pedagogical attitude', 'be related and stay in touch with yourself and the other' and recognise the social justice perspective that belongs to WCD. At the same time, some members of the outsider group suggested that, from the Christian perspective, they found WCD to lack clarity and, therefore, initially perceived it to be 'floaty'. Looking back, it helped them to enrich WCD with a specifically Biblical motivation and purpose or telos. Without that, they considered WCD, even after studying it more deeply, to remain too focused on just the child and his or her self-development, as the following conversation between members of the outsider group shows:

P1: I like this text on WCD as it is now. Yes, of course, you explicitly miss Christianity in it, but that makes sense. But no, I don't find it floaty anymore.

P2: A little too child-centred?

P3: Yes, it is very much child-centred. The child has to develop, self-development (...) Of course, we want children to flourish (...) But I also want them to come to their destiny. And what is their destiny in this world? I think that's what you want, to give children direction for their lives in that, that they can also come to that destination.

P4: Yes, beautiful.

P2: If you write it down completely separate from the Christian identity like that, it becomes more purposeless.

P3: Yes. But again, whatever I just said, I think every pedagogue also wants to direct something anyway. Pedagogy also means taking by the hand.

To fill this gap, Wolterstorff's (2004) concept of educating for shalom was, at a relatively early stage, brought into the conversational community's deliberations. This concept was rapidly embraced by the conversational community because it made the connection with some core concepts of WCD, including its social justice perspective, filling it with a Christian theological ideal

and providing it with the telos it was previously missing. Wolterstorff's (2004) shalom idea, as considered theoretically in Chapter 3.3, was discussed from the fifth meeting onwards. A member of the insider group described shalom as 'a powerful term that helps to give words to things you do at school but that are hard to articulate'. A member of the outsider group added that shalom can be seen as 'God's counterpart to the fall: Peace with Him, with your neighbour, loving God above all else and the neighbour as yourself... if that is your driving force when in contact with other people, this helps to put words to it'. Yet, another member of the outsider group initially perceived it as too abstract a term, later adding that 'In our conversation, I saw that it is really very practical; you have to see shalom in a practical way'.

The participants from the outsider group confirmed that the strength of the shalom idea is that it combines individual spirituality—in the sense of seeking and having peace with God through God's justice in Christ—with the very practical aspect of social justice. A lifestyle of shalom entails practicing the gospel, not with strong words in the first place but through making a difference by means of practical deeds. In the sixth meeting, the shalom idea was considered in small groups of students and members of the conversational community, focusing on the question of how this idea could inform pedagogical action with regard to social injustice as inequality and adversity. Afterwards, the (senior) students were asked what they had learned and whether (and how) they would like to include such insights in DCU's curriculum:

St1 mentions the realisation that every child is created for eternity. St2 emphasises that every child should be seen as a gift from God. St3 sees it as a calling for Christian education to truly see children and aim at

Overview of TAR meetings (X = with coded minutes/transcript)			
1	Warm-up meeting	Via Teams (COVID19)	X
2	Warm-up meeting	Via Teams (COVID19)	X
3	Exploratory research review	With invited students (2)	X
4	Curriculum documents	Insider-outsider separation	X
5	Shalom idea		X
6	Shalom and social justice	With invited students (5)	X
7	Curriculum documents	Insider-outsider separation	X
8	Personhood formation (PF1)	With invited guests (8)	X
9	PF2: child interviews	With invited guests (8)	X
10	Curriculum documents		X
11	Basic attitude		X
12	Curriculum evaluation		X
13	Dealing with absolute truth	With invited students (10)	X
14	Overview and evaluation		X
15	Pedagogy of longing	Insider-outsider separation	X
16	Curriculum documents		X
17	Curriculum evaluation	Insider-outsider separation	X
18	Theological evaluation	Via Teams	X
19	Theology of disclosure	Via Teams	
20	Project closure	Informal reunion	

achieving their happiness. The students insist that the introduction to this theme in the curriculum should take place through real encounters, with St1 cautioning against including everything in this regard in the second grade.

Looking back during the 16th meeting, one member of the outsider group observed that, above

all, Wolterstorff's (2004) shalom idea had struck her. She was not familiar with it before, but she found it a very beautiful concept 'to pass along for Christian education in the pluralistic society' because 'it puts peace and social justice at the centre and urges students to be agents of shalom'. With the latter, she meant that the shalom idea motivates Christian students and teachers to do good and to seek what is necessary to do good, not to walk away when things get complicated, especially in contexts of high diversity and complexity. The shalom idea helped the conversational community to define the central telos or goal of Christian citizenship formation as a quest for 'shalom-seeking citizenship'. Wolterstorff's (2004) shalom idea resembles the Biblical calling of the Christian teacher that appeals to his or her individual and personal responsibility. The criterion for shalom-seeking citizenship is that it seeks peace and the establishment or restoration of connections—with God (as a foundational relation), with others and with the whole of creation. Because of this, shalom-seeking citizenship is subjectifying by nature.

#### **6.2.4 The voice of normative theology**

The fact that the shalom idea motivated the members of the conversational community to strive for a WCD approach from a Biblical perspective and with a Biblical telos becomes even clearer when discerning the voice of normative theology in the meetings. This voice of normative theology was brought in by every member of the conversational community due to each meeting starting and closing with a devotion (Bible study and prayer) in which all of the members participated. The members were free to relate topics from the meetings to what was, for them, normative—above all, the Bible. In the fifth, sixth and 16th meetings, this led to choices immediately connected to the shalom idea: Jeremiah 29: 1–7, Isaiah 32: 1–8, Isaiah 35. All three passages belong to the Old Testament prophets and highlight the need to do good, even in unfortunate circumstances and times of hardship. In Jeremiah, the unfortunate circumstance is the Babylonian exile of the Jewish people. The call to pray for the city and strive for its wellbeing, which the Jews knew from Psalm 122, where it was applied to Jerusalem, is applied by Jeremiah to the hostile Babylonian empire, which must have been shocking for the receivers of his letter.

Isaiah 32 concerns the hardship of injustices and poverty on Earth. It presents a vision of the messianic kingdom in which all of these injustices will be rectified. Isaiah 35 elaborates on this vision. It succeeds in Chapter 34, in which bad leadership leaves the world a desert. Educational systems can foster injustices, as a member of the conversational community explained, which may cause a 'desert feeling'. Christian teachers, however, have to raise their heads and long for the vision. Their practicing of the gospel may seem

meaningless, although it will be part of the vision the Lord holds for the world, in which His kingdom is coming. With respect to the vision of the messianic kingdom, one senior student present during the sixth meeting observed that it all ‘begins with the spiritual righteousness of the Man who is Christ’. Another student added that Isaiah depicts Him as ‘a King of justice’. One member of the outsider group noticed that, according to Isaiah 32: 3, ‘justice has directly to do with seeing, hearing, heeding and not looking away’ from people who suffer injustice. Another member added that ‘Christ’s righteousness sometimes seems to be quite the opposite of social righteousness, yet this section actually emphasises that the two belong together’.

Meditating on Isaiah 35, the conversational community connected the motivation arising from the vision as a subjectifying element. When high diversity is accompanied by high complexity in the sense of polarisation, fragmentation, social backlogs, inequality of chance and specific hardships in certain urban contexts, teachers may feel impotent. They are not able to give children what they need to flourish—and they frequently encounter in the educational system elements that are not helpful. A member of the outsider group described Isaiah 35 as ‘a comforting and at the same time relaxing text’ because it shows that real progress, development and flourishing do ‘not depend on our efforts’. A member of the insider group related the text to Proverbs 3: 5 and 6, stating that ‘we need the wisdom of the Lord to rely on His strength and not too much on our intellect, as otherwise we would be discouraged’. The messianic kingdom vision of the Christian faith thus provides an inspirational source for responding to the challenges of living together in a fragmented society without discouragement or overstrain.

### 6.3 CONCRETE ELABORATIONS FOR DCU’S CURRICULUM

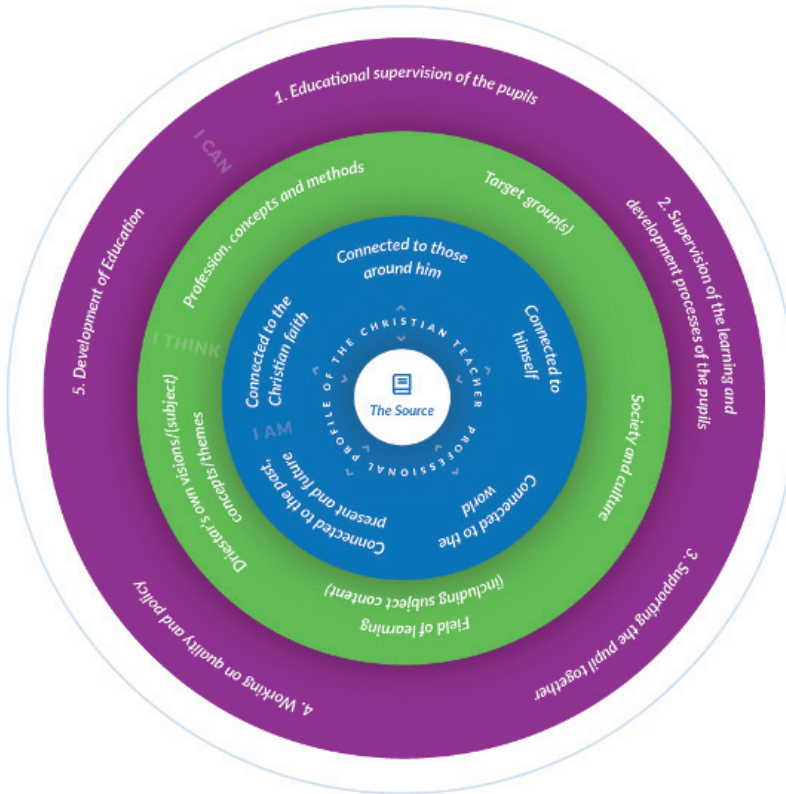
After studying the results of the baseline survey (Chapter 5.2) and evaluating them with senior DCU students (6.1), it became clear to the conversational community that the traditional strength of DCU’s curriculum was more closely related to its qualification (specifically its knowledge base) and its socialisation (because of its strong ties to the Reformed Christian community in the Netherlands) than to its subjectification. The curriculum paid a lot of attention to personhood formation; however, in practice, the relation between the person and wider society was studied in a highly cognitive manner and the holistic experiences seemed to not be very well integrated into the bigger whole of learning to deal with real societal diversity. Thus, the conversational community tried to apply the lines of critical faithfulness and critical openness

to DCU's curriculum renewal, alongside an overall concept intended to achieve a good combination of the two in an approach aimed at the whole teacher—namely, head, heart and hands; the person in all his or her dimensions (cognitive, emotional, physical, social, creative, moral and spiritual).

The strong identification of the conversational community with Wolterstorff's (2004) shalom idea made it possible to use this idea as the leading principle or concept. As trainee teachers, DCU students have to be familiarised with this concept, which should not just be momentaneous in one or two modules, nor just cognitive through studying the concept. The shalom idea has to be integrated into the whole of DCU's personhood formation. This finding was helpful in supporting the idea that, in the new professional profile of the Christian teacher, which DCU adopted as a basis for shaping its new curriculum, the inner (blue) circle—concerning personhood formation—should be filled with relationality. The personhood formation circle relates to who the teacher is, while the surrounding circle, which covers the subject knowledge base that teachers need, relates to what the teacher thinks and knows—and the widest circle is about what teachers do (professional skills and competences). Having the three circles rotating towards each other gives the professional profile a holistic nature, as everything has to do with everything else. Due to giving words to relationality in the blue circle as the teacher 'connected to the Christian faith, those around him, himself, the world and the past, present and future', the profile can basically be termed subjectifying.

The question that the profile raises for the curriculum and the student is the central question of personhood formation as considered earlier in this chapter (Section 1.3): How am I in my connections? When approaching this question with the shalom idea and the reality of a fragmented society, it becomes clear that both the student and the curriculum have a problem—namely, the destruction of all kinds of connections. Due to sin, the relations with God, faith, the neighbour, the self, nature, the world, tradition and the wider community are fractured. Through grace, however, restoration is possible. Regarding this restoration, the shalom idea refers to Biblical justice as its ground floor. First and foremost, the justification of the fragmented sinner is necessary through the work of Jesus Christ. Based on that, a healing of relations is necessary and should be worked on daily. This is what the conversational community meant when it spoke of living and practicing the gospel (Section 6.2.3).

The conversational community strongly supported the adoption of the shalom idea as the leading principle for an ongoing line of learning regarding citizenship formation, covering all four years of the curriculum in a broad and well-integrated manner. In this way, over the years, a series of different elements



could be combined with and related to this leading principle (specific modules, assignments, workweeks, international activities, et cetera). The conversational community established that the level of openness should be increased from the first year to the fourth year little by little, allowing shalom to be understood and practiced at increasing levels of diversity. This choice was confirmed in the discussions on challenging the student to freely respond as a subject, without forcing too much on him or her at once. Becoming acquainted with diversity within wider society was seen as something that should be picked up from the second year, allowing freshmen the opportunity to first adapt to the challenges of teacher training and the in-group (4).

Year	Theme related to shalom	Explication
1	Shalom at home	In the own social group
2	Shalom in the city	In the country/society
3	Shalom worldwide	Internationally
4	Shalom in action	For practice

4 A link was made in the curriculum between this gradually increasing acquaintance with cultural diversity and Bennett’s (2017) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity.

Through various discussions, this led to the establishment of a shalom line to address the increasing levels of diversity and complexity. With the help of the conversational community, each level—one for each year—was cautiously named. For year 1, the title ‘Shalom at home’ was chosen, with the idea of focussing on diversity within the Christian community. For year 2, the title ‘Shalom in the city’ was chosen with reference to Saint Augustine’s *The City of God* (412/2008), covering acquaintance with ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in the Netherlands. For year 3, the title ‘Shalom worldwide’ was chosen to combine the idea with the internationalisation programmes for the students, which meant they would be placed in contexts of international diversity. For year 4, the title ‘Shalom in action’ was chosen to enable students to act out the idea, preferably in a secular context, when DCU’s management was willing to invest in the inclusion of a new social internship in the curriculum. This internship was—on the advice of members of the outsider group—later termed a citizenship internship. This order of topics in the third and fourth years, which was slightly preferred by the conversational community in its fifth meeting, was later reversed by DCU’s management for practical reasons.

In years one and two, the existing working weeks were, from this point onwards, substantively connected to the respective shalom themes. In year 4, the same connection was made between ‘shalom worldwide’ and the international tracks. In year 2, an out-of-the-comfort-zone internship was built into the programme, after a short acquaintance with multi-ethnic education in urban areas. For year 3, a citizenship internship was prepared and the terms discussed, including good preparation with regard to the shalom idea, attention to social justice, practice as a Christian in a secular context and low reporting expectations. These types of holistic experiences were connected to lessons and discussions within small learning communities and to other aspects that will be considered later in Chapters 7 and 8.

## 6.4 CONCLUSION

To be holistically broad, citizenship formation for a modern, fragmented society has to be closely tied to, first, broad personhood formation and, second, the curriculum as a whole. One discovery made by the conversational community was the importance of subjectifying education for both areas. Trainee teachers in a society characterised by high levels of diversity and complexity need to know who they are and what they stand for (to have a clear self), so that they can live up to the challenges they will encounter in terms of the art of living together. Freedom is an important aspect of this, which throws education on



its weaker powers—that is, not relying on cognitive knowledge and measurable skills, nor on strong socialising tendencies, but instead on giving good examples and inculcating the moral ideal of good citizenship.

Especially outside of their comfort zones, when put in contexts that are highly diverse and complex, students start to discover their selves. An important aspect of this discovery is understanding that diversity and complexity are not (just) threats to their identity but (also) challenges to be a self—and the subsequent eye-opening experience that diversity is an invitation not to conceal one's identity but to present it honestly. Students still experience tension between their comfort zone and contexts of high diversity and complexity, although this tension challenges them to know what they personally stand for and to learn how to act and behave towards others with respect, subjectifying themselves to what the relationship with these others' needs. WCD, as a model, is helpful in seeing what is necessary and placing the (pedagogical) relationship at the centre of attention and behaviour.

Given the practical nature of subjectifying education, which was tied by the conversational community in the first place to practice (the hands), the voices of operant and espoused theology were dominant in this chapter. Still, the voices of formal and normative theology appeared to be particularly helpful in finding the deep, motivational words and concepts necessary to adopt a WCD approach. In particular, Wolterstorff's (2004) shalom idea proved to be appealing. In a Biblically theological sense, it integrates the doctrine of personal salvation through justification with the sanctification of life via the healing and restoration of relationships—with God, the self, others and the world. It also combines the motivational vision of the messianic kingdom with practical action at a personal level in the form of social justice, and it helps students to connect, for example, faith and the challenge of adversity. For the training of Christian trainee teachers, it is good to include shalom-seeking citizenship as a leading principle for both holistic experiences outside of their comfort zones and lessons based on how this Biblical principle relates to contemporary reality.

The aforementioned elements (relations and their healing at the centre, with shalom as the leading principle) are helpful in terms of being both critically faithful and critically open towards others. Approached from Christian anthropology, as was done in Chapter 3, both are fundamental for the holistic formation of trainee teachers. In the experiences of students and teachers, however, there seems to be some tension between the dynamics of faithfulness and openness. To address that tension as a challenge (or even an invitation) to learn how to develop an attitude that enables students to be themselves in a subjectifying way, they first need some epistemological formation for the art of living together in a highly diverse context. This will, therefore, be the next chapter's topic.



# Chapter 7

## Relational Epistemology and the Art of Living Together

'Truth touches the core of your existence. If everything turned out to be relative, why would you, as a future teacher, go to Driestar Christian University?'

*Member of the outsider group on TAR*

'Christian nurture should attempt to foster both growth in a rational grounding of Christian convictions and honest and serious grappling with doubt, questions, and objections to Christian convictions.'

*Elmer J. Thiessen, Teaching for Commitment, 1993, p. 263*

To practice the art of living together in a modern, fragmented society, subjectifying education is a necessary condition. It guides students in developing a self that does not turn away from society's diversity and complexity, instead responding to the challenges that come with them. In Christian education, the shalom idea provides an inspiring guiding principle but, as was made clear in the preceding chapter, never comes without tension. This chapter pays specific attention to the tension between the previously mentioned elements of critical openness and critical faithfulness. The conversational community phrased the following question: If both are believed to be crucial, how should the experienced tension between the two be handled? More concretely, how should DCU students be trained to sustainably connect critical openness and critical faithfulness in super-diverse classrooms? The conversational community formulated this latter question as central to the second of three main topics it identified during its 14th meeting. It is the topic of epistemological formation—that is, of how students handle truth knowing and truth claims.

This chapter presents the conversational community's findings and conclusions regarding the question on epistemological formation. These can be qualified as an acceptance and, at the same time, an application of Beech's (2021) plea for a relational epistemology (see Chapter 1.3.3) to DCU's teacher training. The first part of the chapter spends some time clarifying the problem found by the conversational community during its interactions with DCU students—namely, conflicting allegiances when handling a diversity of perspectives on absolute truth (Section 1). As in the previous chapter, what follows is a part that listens carefully to each of the four theological voices as they were heard in the meetings of the conversational community (Section 2). As this part of the research also involves informing the teacher training curriculum, concrete elaborations for the curriculum renewal process are again discussed and modified (Section 3). The conclusions of the separate sections will be brought together in the description of what a relational epistemology for Christian teacher training nowadays should represent.

## **7.1 CONFLICTING ALLEGIANCES: BETWEEN FAITHFULNESS AND OPENNESS**

As the baseline survey results showed (Chapter 5.2), DCU students tend to come from what is known as the Dutch Bible belt. They could be identified as the youngest and freshest children of the famous Dutch system of pillarisation. Where the major pillars of Dutch society (protestant, catholic, socialist and

liberal) were already on the decrease, Reformed Christians still invested time and energy in their own churches, organisations, newspaper and schools. The newspaper (*Reformatorisch Dagblad*) and the Reformed secondary schools were founded in the 1970s. Two decades into the twenty-first century, they are still relatively strong, with the newspaper broadening its scope as a media concern and the schools still employing closed admission policies, although there is a clear sense of pressure (Janse, 2015). DCU's student population is tightly connected to this so-called 'refo-pillar'.

Within this pillarised context, as indicated in Chapter 5.1, there is a strong focus and reliance on socialisation, not on subjectification. The conversational community was already aware of this, although it discovered, little by little, more about its consequences for the way in which DCU students tend to deal with absolute truth. In general, students seem to strongly believe in the existence and knowability of absolute truth, and they see their own context as privileged by the presence of it—in sharp and growing contrast to the secularising world outside of their social pillar. This tendency has consequences for both critical faithfulness and critical openness. Where openness is often considered a risk, faithfulness seems to be viewed as the criterion to hold on to. When the conversational community opted to consider both as crucial for the Christian citizenship formation of trainee teachers for a fragmented society, it had to face the problem that doing so, given the social background of many DCU students, was not the obvious choice; rather, it was a risky one.

In the case of DCU students, it could be said that conflicting allegiances seem to play a role. On the one hand, they want to be faithful and, subsequently, consider openness a risk. On the other hand, they feel the need to prepare children for (citizenship in) today's world and society, which entails a certain degree of openness to both diversity and complexity. The conversational community studied these conflicting allegiances (Section 1.1 will present the results regarding faithfulness, while Section 1.2 those concerning openness) and invited 10 students to a special meeting to discuss the topic and search for a way to practice the two at the same time, both as persons and as teachers (Section 1.3).

### **7.1.1 Loyalty to God, parents and social background**

Although faithfulness and openness appeared almost spontaneously during the conversational community's meetings, both concepts can be found in the literature. Critical faithfulness is a concept elaborated by Swinton and Mowat (2006) and applied to the TAR methodology by Cameron and Duce (2013). Critical openness is employed in an older publication by Thiessen (1993), who resists the Enlightenment charge towards religious education that it indoctrinates

children. Moreover, critical openness means 'to have a disposition to form and revise one's views in the light of evidence and argument' (Thiessen, 1993, p. 163) and critically open people are 'tolerant of others who hold viewpoints different from their own, listen to people who express differing viewpoints, and consider objections to their own viewpoints' (p. 164). The latter aspect renders it different from 'blind faith in tradition or authority' (p. 164), which reflects the tension that can be perceived between faithfulness and openness. To declare both critical, as the conversational community did (see Chapter 6.1.1), presents this research with the challenge of paying close attention to this tension and responding to Thiessen's (1993) statement that, specifically, the Enlightenment ideas of autonomy, rationality and critical openness need to be modified if they are to be both realistic and philosophically defensible. Only in this way, claimed Thiessen (1993), can it be shown that confessional religious education without indoctrination is possible.

How to handle absolute truth was not immediately a focus of attention for the conversational community. Rather, it became an issue after some time, when it was put on the agenda to be considered separately. At the time, the conversational community had investigated the topic of personhood formational practices and discussed the basic attitude necessary for trainee teachers to adopt towards a modern, fragmented society. In a certain way, the topic of truth handling was already present at the start of the TAR when the baseline survey results were discussed, albeit not in a clear agenda-setting sense. One of the first reactions to the survey report came from a member of the outsider group who was affected by an open student reaction supposing that an open admissions policy on the part of Christian schools and the presence of children from other sociocultural backgrounds corresponded to 'a more progressive, open vision of the faith in school personnel and staff'. To this suggestion, the outsider group member responded as follows:

There would thus be a sliding scale and tension between opening up and maintaining one's own religious identity. In practice, these fears are not unfounded either, although there is certainly no question of automatism. All this triggers because it shouldn't be this way. Going wholeheartedly for one's faith and being meaningful in the neighbourhood can go hand in hand. Our schools are examples of how you can maintain your Christian identity, even at a school where 90 percent of the student population do not share your identity.

Throughout the TAR process, it gradually became clearer to the conversational community why DCU students suffered a certain anxiety about losing

faithfulness when entering a more diverse and multireligious context. Their own social in-group brings them a kind of safety ('safety'-coded quotations appeared 31 times in the minutes and transcripts, including 9 times in conjunctions). This safety has a connection to a kind of social truth-holding in which the social group plays a vital role. To illustrate this truth-holding, one of the TAR participants referred to 'those things which are most surely believed among us', as the Apostle Luke pronounced in Luke 1:1. It is the in-group that is supposed to hold the truth, while the out-group is supposed to walk in darkness. There is, in the student conception as analysed by the conversational community, also a middle-group between the in- and the out-group. This is the group of people who tend to negotiate truth while trying to be open and learning from perspectives present in the out-group. Truth faces immediate danger when the in-group weakens or seems to blend in with the middle-group.

Meeting number	Code appear.	Nature of meeting appearance
11	10	Topic came up and was recognised
12	6	Preparation of special meeting on topic
13	29	Special meeting on topic with students
14	8	Evaluation of special meeting
17	2	Elaboration on the topic in devotion
18	1	Elaboration on the topic in devotion

10	Curriculum documents		X
11	Basic attitude		X
12	Curriculum evaluation		X
13	Dealing with absolute truth	With invited students (10)	X
14	Overview and evaluation		X
15	Pedagogy of longing	insider-outsider separation	X
16	Curriculum documents		X

From the 11th meeting onwards, the conversational community spoke about what this social tendency does to the way a social in-group thinks about (absolute) truth. The code 'absolute truth' appeared 56 times, starting from TAR meeting 11 (10 times), continuing without interruption until TAR meeting 14 (8 times) and afterwards re-appearing in the final coded minutes due to the starting devotions dedicated to the topic by two participants. Meeting 13 was obviously crucial for the topic, as the code 'absolute truth' appeared no less than 29 times during it. This was the meeting that the conversational community specifically dedicated to the topic. It decided to invite 10 senior DCU

students to participate in the meeting, deliberately including students from the most conservative Reformed ecclesial backgrounds in the Netherlands.

The attention paid to 'absolute truth' started in TAR meeting 11, when a member of the insider team referred to the idea of truth-holding within the social in-group as a means of 'black-and-white thinking' and of 'we-and-them thinking'. The other TAR participants recognised this depiction of the way in which DCU students seem to think about truth and epistemology. They tend to be brought up with the idea that absolute truth exists amidst a network of falsehood and deliberate lies; moreover, they are told that it is their calling, especially as Christian teachers, to uphold the truth and pass it on to subsequent generations with care and responsibility. If they want to be open to people who hold other perspectives (critical openness), they may very well do harm to this heavy responsibility. Outside of the safety of their social context, in which the truth seems to be obvious, they place themselves at risk of being influenced to let the truth slide away.

In the second TAR meeting, a question was asked about where the anxiety seen in students in terms of 'adding water to the wine' would have come from. In meeting 11, the conversational community discovered that it had to do with this truth-holding idea. For this reason, it decided to organise meeting 13 with students about absolute truth and epistemology—that is, to look for a way to handle the Christian truth claim between critical openness and faithfulness. This meeting's conversation, among others, will be analysed in Section 2. For now, the conclusion of this sub-section is that truth often seems to be handled by DCU students as something that is present in their cultural in-group and that should be carefully guarded through loyalty to God, parents and social background.

### **7.1.2 Loyalty to (Biblical) world-centredness**

The conversational community encountered not just hesitation in the students when it comes to opening themselves up to other people and perspectives but also an inner motivation to be open towards others and society as a whole. This motivation, however, seemed to be somewhat unspoken, un-worded, almost subconscious. While the students sometimes seemed unable to give words to the experienced need to be open towards society in all its diversity and complexity, the members of the outsider group managed to give words and meaning to a faithful, Biblically motivated reason to be open. This motivated reason was captured in the code 'mission', which presented itself in almost all the minutes and transcripts, as observed in Chapter 6.2, with a total of no less than 59 appearances.



The code 'mission' covers quotations such as 'a sort of drive', 'to let children hear the gospel', 'the chance to reach children with the Bible' (meeting 2) and 'a special gift for children' (meeting 3). However, starting from meeting 6, this connotation seemed to gradually broaden itself, also covering 'a calling to get children to their level', 'to really see children and intend for their happiness' (meeting 6), 'an inner drive to show to people the goodness of God' (meeting 7), 'the deepest question as to what attitude to adopt towards truth and the neighbour' (meeting 12) and 'the sincere interest in other people that belongs to a missionary attitude' (meeting 16). The code 'mission' co-appeared a total of eight times with the code 'openness', covering all of the places that referred to discussions on the importance of critical openness. Especially interesting in this regard is a layered quotation from one member of the outsider group, who described 'my personal mission' to 'teach students in the whole of their formation to choose their battles'. This participant meant to express how students need to learn the ability to distinguish between what is core to the Christian faith and, therefore, must always stand firm, and other aspects that may be important but are less crucial for faith and more for analysis from a multitude of perspectives.

Thus, the conclusion of this sub-section can be that DCU students are convinced of the relevance of critical faithfulness but also of the relevance of critical openness, although the latter conviction seems to exist on a more subconscious level. Students tie critical faithfulness more obviously to the Bible and Christian faith, although for that conviction they rely heavily on their own socialisation processes. They need to learn, through good expression, how critical openness is, just like critical faithfulness, tied to the Bible and Christian faith. In such a manner, they can also come to understand and practice how to combine the two in a relational epistemology that surpasses the socialisation of the Reformed Christian social pillar and accords with what was said in Chapter 6 regarding subjectifying education.

### **7.1.3 Starting points on absolute truth**

At the start of the 13th meeting, all of the (invited) participants were asked to respond on paper to six affirmations pertaining to absolute truth. These affirmations were based on input from the regular participants in the conversational community, which was provided at the end of the 12th meeting and, subsequently, reported in its minutes. In this first brain-storming session about absolute truth, Christian epistemology and the desire for openness, the conversational community formulated the statement that 'deep down the question is what attitude we, as Christians, should adopt towards truth and towards our fellow man'. The statement continued, 'exuding that we, as

Christians, are truth-holders is something that happens frequently but creates distance and is also unjustified'. In one's epistemology, 'cultural forms and conditions' also play a role. This led to the question, at least in terms of the discussion with students in a special meeting on how to deal with absolute truth, of whether truth is not always something subjective, as one member of the outgroup proposed. By contrast, for both students and teachers, it can be confusing to have every truth claim contested in the classroom, as other members of the outgroup suggested.

The elements put forward during the preparatory conversation led to the formulation of six affirmations that steered the 13th meeting on epistemology and truth. All six affirmations criticise the idea of absolute truth as upheld by the Christian teacher(s) within their own person or their social group. They all mean to test how far Christian students and teacher trainers will yield concerning the topic of absolute truth when the tension between faithfulness and openness is deliberately addressed. The first two affirmations suggest there is simply no such thing as absolute truth and that everything is merely subjective. Affirmations 3 and 4 suggest that truth may exist, although it is only partially known, and that adherents of different (religious) perspectives can always learn from each other. The last two affirmations apply the former ideas to practical classroom pedagogy: Can a Christian teacher somehow impose (for example, just by testifying) his or her Christian perspective in a multi-religious classroom (affirmation 5) and, if this is considered necessary, what should be exuded while doing so (affirmation 6)?

The next table shows how 10 students and eight teachers responded to the six affirmations on a scale ranging from one (totally disagree) to five (totally agree). The numbers they could choose in between were two (disagree), three (neutral) and four (agree).

<b>Affirmations</b>	<b>Score general (N=18)</b>	<b>Score students (N=10)</b>	<b>Score teachers (N=8)</b>
There is no such thing as an absolute truth; everything is relative.	1.42	1.45 md=1*	1.38 md=2
Human understanding (comprehension) of truth is always subjective (and thus differs from person to person).	3.89	3.75 md=1	4.06 md=1.5
There is no one who can say that he or she has truth on his or her side.	2.47	2.00 md=1	3.06 md=4
We, as Christians, can learn as much about truth from a Muslim as a Muslim can learn from us.	2.40	2.20 md=3	2.64** md=3
In classes with a high degree of religious diversity, as a teacher, you should not witness to your own faith.	1.34	1.10 md=1	1.63 md=3
Christian teachers especially should not exude that they hold absolute truth.	2.95	2.20 md=3	3.88 md=2

\*MD: maximum deviation between given answers on the five-point scale.

\*\*One of the teachers did not respond to this affirmation (N=7 at this point).

The scores for the first two affirmations show that the participants believe in the existence of absolute truth—the teachers even slightly more so than the students—although they believe the interpretation of truth to be subjectively different in each and every person. From the scores for affirmations 4 and 5, it is clear that both teachers and students find the Christian faith so truthful that it must be shared with others, even children who are being raised with other religious convictions, for example, Islamic belief. It is their collective opinion that Muslims can learn more about truth from Christians than vice versa (affirmation 4) and that Christian teachers should be free to be witness to their faith, even in religiously and culturally diverse classrooms (affirmation 5). For the latter affirmation, the fifth one, in particular, the opinions expressed relatively strong disagreement.

Reviewing the results afterwards, during the 14th meeting, the scores for the third and fifth affirmations especially drew the attention of the regular members of the conversational community. For both affirmations, the student group tended to disagree, whereas the teacher group tended to agree. In both cases, the students seemed to look for more freedom to claim the truth as ‘theirs’ than the teachers did. According to the meeting’s minutes, all of the members present participated in a discussion to identify reasons to explain this difference:

Dealing with uncertainty, according to P1, is what both statements are about. P2 thinks that the two groups score differently on this because adults tend to

think more moderately than young people. This is how he has experienced it himself—as a boy he was fanatical, but later he became more moderate. P3 agrees that life experience has a moderating effect. P4 adds that the more you know, the more you know what you don't know. P2 is reminded of the Biblical story in which the Lord Jesus calls upon the religious leaders of Israel to stone the adulteress, saying to them 'Whoever of you is without sin, first cast the stone at her'. In that history, it is the elderly leaders who first, without throwing a stone, blow the retreat. P1 thinks of another factor that could explain the differences in scores for affirmations three and six between the teachers and students. Besides age and, thus, life experience, the influence of one's social environment could also play a role. Students more commonly come from a monocultural environment. P1 speaks of the refo-bubble in this regard. P5 points out that the MD score shows that there are sometimes also considerable differences between students and teachers. Going into how differently students responded to the last statement, P6 states that students seem to be searching. They are eager to learn (P7), interested and engaged (P8) and looking to meet with each other to exchange experiences (P9). Their experiences with multi-ethnic education apparently raise questions they find relevant, argues P10.

To conclude the discussion, one member of the outsider group (P1) stated that the 'student search' for what a strong belief in absolute truth means 'stems from questioning the images that students have formed based on what they have always heard in their own home situations: Do those images match reality?' Truth is conveyed by people, generally speaking, in a socialising context and, therefore, mixed with unjustified generalisations and biases, especially about other cultural, social and religious groups. When these generalisations and biases are partially or completely broken down by real-life experiences, an interesting but also complex separation between the core of truth as belief in faith and circumstantial ideas is made in the lives of (especially young) students (1). This aspect of the discussion led a member of the in-group (P4 in the preceding quotation) to conclude that 'in that regard there is a lot at stake for the students—the difference between holding on to the truth and making an ongoing search for truth important'. Elaborating on the impact of this conclusion, P4 concluded that 'they suddenly learn to understand that they understand very little'.

This final elaboration brings the present section to its conclusion. The conversational community found conflicting allegiances in themselves as Christian teachers and, even more so, in students of Christian teacher training,

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1 Cognitive dissonance, as at it characterised in the field of psychology.

pertaining to belief in absolute truth and truth-holding, on the one hand, and a longing and willingness for openness, on the other hand. For themselves, the members of the conversational community appear to have found an enduring balance between the poles of critical faithfulness and critical openness. This balance helps them to work as Christian teachers in an environment characterised by high ethnic, cultural and even religious diversity, although thinking through that balance requires active maintenance. At the same time, they realise that, for students, the search for this balance in many cases still has a way to go, which needs to be addressed with clarity in the teacher training's personhood formation.

## 7.2 FOUR THEOLOGICAL VOICES ON RELATIONAL EPISTEMOLOGY

From its 11th through to its 14th meeting (27 June 2022 to 7 February 2023), the conversational community spoke intensively about how students can combine adherence to the truth claims of the Christian faith with open interaction with adherents from other (religious) perspectives. During the 11th meeting, the topic emerged in an extensive conversation about what the desired attitude of Christian teachers in a pluralistic society would be (which will be analysed in the next chapter). Respect for others, including their perspectives on what is true and false in terms of religions and life convictions, brought one member of the outsider group to a reflection on a conversation she had with a group of DCU students during a guest lecture she gave on citizenship education for children in a multi-ethnic classroom:

I noticed that an open attitude is not always there yet (...) So it's especially important that we can create that open attitude in students. And that it doesn't always go the way you want it, maybe, but that you also have to deal with the other party. That you will have to do it together. That really stuck with me, that sometimes I was really shocked by statements about which I thought, 'Oops, this is really still an us-they story, and not a case of we'll take it up together'.

This statement not only led to an ongoing discussion but also to the deliberate thematising of the epistemology to which the 12th and, especially, 13th meetings were dedicated. It also led, finally, in the 14th meeting, to the key moment for the entire TAR process in which the three main topics of deliberation were identified: subjectification, epistemology and attitude (see the introductory remarks in Chapter 6). In this meeting, the conversational community also identified epistemological formation as the second main topic

concerning the formation of Christian teachers for a fragmented society, and asked itself: ‘Which idea of knowing truth should broadly, (w)holistically formed students learn to sustainably connect critical openness and critical faithfulness in super-diverse classrooms?’

It really was a topic that emerged from within the conversational community: ‘We have gradually noticed that tension can then arise between one’s own understanding of truth and the views that others, for example, students and their parents, hold about truth’ (from the minutes of the 13th meeting). From the 11th to the 14th meeting, all four theological voices were heard; however, the order in which the voices came up was not steered by formal theology. Regarding the topic of epistemology, the movement in the research was one from practice to theory. Notwithstanding, this practice, in this case, also fully included the voice of normative theology. The participants in both the insider group and the outsider group all shared a strong belief in the Bible’s truth claims, which was not only proven by their responses to the affirmations presented above (7.1.3) but also by the way they handled the Bible in their meetings. Therefore, to do justice to these dynamics, it seems appropriate to begin this analysis with the voice of normative theology (7.2.1), to then move on to the voices of operant (7.2.2) and espoused (7.2.3) theology, and to end with the voice of formal theology (7.2.4), in which Beech’s (2021) relational epistemology indicated the way the conversational community wanted to go with regard to the citizenship formation of trainee teachers.

### **7.2.1 The voice of normative theology**

The most central meeting concerning the deliberations on epistemology, the 13th, was opened by a devotion by one member of the outsider group. As the minutes reveal, he started off by referring to the meeting’s central topic, stating that ‘all members of the conversational community have to deal with diversity’. He went on: ‘In such a context, the truth question can lead to a struggle: Are my beliefs correct? Can I impose them on others?’ From this perspective, he then led the community in a lecture on 1 John 5: 1–13, afterwards explaining this choice as follows:

This part of Scripture pertains to faith and its fruits. This faith overcomes the world, as verse 4 says. However, in this context, it is really about the core of this faith. Amidst a multitude of views, much appears to be abandonable. What is unnegotiable is the Son of God as the means of salvation. The unchanging goal of Christian education is faith in the Name of the Son of God.

The immediate and spontaneous reactions to this devotion, from students (5 out of 10 spoke during this part of the meeting) and teachers (3 out of 8), revealed recognition within the conversational community. At later points in the meeting, the other members of the conversational community also showed their approval of at least two things that the devotion leader had put forward—namely, in a diverse context, it is necessary to be able to draw a distinction between the unnegotiable core of faith (salvation through only belief in Jesus as the Saviour) and what surrounds that core and can be open for discussion. Teachers may come from different ecclesial backgrounds or traditions, notwithstanding they have to share this conviction because, according to all of the participants, it is fundamental for Christian education. This was also the tenor of the opening devotion in the 17th meeting by a member of the insider group on Genesis 20, the passage in which Abraham distrusts the people of Gerar and their king. Before this devotion, all of the participants read a Bible study by David Smith (2009) that is used at DCU to prepare senior students for their internationalisation tracks.

‘Abraham thinks in terms of black and white’, explained the devotion leader. ‘He sees himself as morally superior because he belongs to God, and the foreign rulers he suspects of evil thoughts and deeds.’ What the devotion leader found especially striking was that God revealed Himself in this story not to Abraham but to the one Abraham suspected of being godless, Abimelech. In the discussion that followed, the participants endorsed this idea. According to the minutes, they all managed to relate the Biblical message of this study to concrete experiences with students. For instance, an outsider group member warned about not only looking at less experienced students: ‘P1 indicates that even after many years of experience with multiculturalism, one can still be very susceptible to developing prejudices’. An insider group member advocated for not taking a harsh approach when students do not immediately manage to avoid prejudices:

Abraham’s fears and ideas about knowledge and power are, at the same time, very human. We are all like that and we live in a society with a lot of polarisation. What is needed, according to P1, is to name this openly, but then also to work on the professional role of the teacher and the awareness that comes with it—namely, to be able to deal with these things. Your job obliges you to do things that you don’t immediately feel comfortable with. This is driven by the Biblical commandment of charity.

The Bible study on Abraham’s prejudices led the conversational community, as proposed by a member of the outsider group, to conclude that Abraham’s

decision to not initially open up to Abimelech and his servants in Gerar ‘blocks the fulfilment of his calling to be a blessing. We conclude that not only steadfastness (faithfulness) but also openness (openness) really belong to the Christian calling’.

When looking for references to the Bible and the voice of normative theology in the TAR meetings, three more opening devotions stand out. At the start of the 14th meeting, an insider group member asked for attention to be paid to Psalm 87 as the Old Testament mission psalm, specifically referring to verse 6, which promises that the Lord will make Himself known to people of all kinds of ethnic or cultural backgrounds and reckon them for His own. Afterwards, she read from Matthew 28, the passage known as the Great Commission, where Jesus sends His disciples to teach and baptise all nations, making all people His disciples. The 12th meeting was opened by a Scripture reading from Genesis 21: 14–21, after which the devotion leader underlined that God also has promises for Arab people and promises to really see them—because ‘seen by God’ is what the name of the well mentioned in this passage means and ‘to see the child’ is ‘the thematic this conversational community is all about’. The 18th meeting was opened with several passages from the Apostle Paul on the appreciation of diversity within the Christian church and how Christians can be enriched if they are open to learning from different cultural forms of Christian professing (Ephesians 3; 1 Corinthians 12).

During the deliberations that followed the opening devotions in meetings 12–14, several members of the conversational community referred to Bible verses to state what, in their eyes, should be seen as unnegotiable within the Christian faith tradition. At the end of the 12th meeting, while preparing the 13th one, the conversational community looked for Biblical examples to underpin its feeling that ‘exuding that we, as Christians, are truth-holders is something that happens frequently but creates distance and is also unjustified’. Two examples were mentioned. The first was the Apostle Paul and his sermon on the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17), where he adapted his discourse with great respect to the perceptions of the Athenian people and to Greek religion and philosophy, claiming to be able to tell more about their ‘unknown god’ and quoting their poetry. This reference was revisited in the 13th meeting when a student asked how to respond to children who place the God of the Bible on the same level as Allah: ‘The Apostle Paul uses without hesitation the statue of an idol to preach the true God to others. You can do that without compromising the faith, because—in fact—you level with your public: You are a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greek’. The second example was the Old Testament example of Naaman, who converted himself to the God of Israel



while visiting the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 5). When Naaman asked what to do when he had to return to his Syrian king with his Rimmon cult and worship, the prophet sent him ‘in peace’ (verse 19).

Another Biblical reference was already quoted above, in Section 7.1.3, concerning how Jesus invited the Jewish leaders, if they were without sin, to throw stones at the adulterous woman. The other five references had a more general nature, for example, pertaining to Biblical scripture. During one of the group discussions, the statement was made that ‘we also said that where another perspective differs from the revealed truth in Scripture, we still think that we are right or, at least, that the Bible is right’. Therefore, the group concluded that scriptural truth has to be ‘sowed’, which is a reference to the Biblical language of spreading the word as sowing a seed. Several participants combined this idea of sowing with a humble attitude. One teacher and one student brought this humility into balance with a strong stance on Biblical truth claims, noting a difference between godly truth and human conveying of it:

- T1: Well, precisely because of what you just said, that modesty, well that sowing, so really making that Bible central and telling about Jesus and pointing out Jesus, but I also do often pray: Please don’t let me be a barrier between the children and God, with my person and attributes or stupid things, or untruths that I tell or things that don’t make sense. Don’t let me stand between that, but just use me to show the Bible, yes, and then God does it, yes.
- St1: I think it’s important to also see the difference between a person and God because, of course, as human beings we are imperfect, so then you can’t rely on anyone, and God is perfect in everything, so there is that difference.

A second student and teacher combination responded to the suggestion that this difference might have a relation with the difference between truth as a set or system of beliefs and—as the Bible depicts it—truth as a person:

- St2: When I think of a system, I think, yes, that’s something I can understand. But a person has many more sides, kind of. A person is something you can get to know better (...) And persons can also make themselves known.
- T2: That also provides for a kind of relaxation. It removes a bit of a cramp. Because if you, with your own inadequacies, succeed in getting a child in your class somewhat interested in Jesus, and you don’t succeed as a teacher in converting that person to Christianity, hey, after a while the

kids are gone too, but you've sown something, that God Himself can then in His time give maturity to it again, because it's about a person and not a system so much. So, as a teacher, you can also give things back to God after a year, or after a day, because He does continue with it.

Based on these considerations, the conversational community concluded that it is important to hold on to Biblical truth; above all, to its essence of salvation only in and through the person and the work of Jesus Christ. The conversational community further considered it part of the Biblical mission for teachers to not move away from this, neither in their teaching nor in their educational aims and ideals. However, Christian teachers also need to feel that the Bible motivates them to do so not in an arrogant or imposing way but in a way that reflects human humbleness before God. As one member of the outsider group summarised, in a spiritually meant way: 'Not through imposition or coercion but through insistence' (2).

### **7.2.2 The voice of operant theology**

As the deliberations on truth and epistemology unfolded on a rather theoretical level, the voice of operant theology was less strong in these meetings. However, besides Biblical references, there were also references made to practical examples taken from classroom experiences. When preparing for the central 13th meeting with invited student guests, at the end of the 12th meeting, three practical examples were mentioned to underpin the strong conviction, as expressed by several members of the outsider group, that 'it can be very confrontational for a teacher when in a pluriform class questions are openly asked' about what is presented during lessons. A teacher from the first participating school was asked: 'Do you really believe that yourself?' Another teacher, from the second of the participating schools, was asked: 'Do you experience it always like that?' A third teacher, from the third participating school, heard: 'Who actually believes this?' In the latter case, a student stood up during a lesson on creation and asked how God did that over six consecutive days. This question was asked openly to all of the attending students, implying a confrontation between the Biblical truth claim, on the one hand, and modern scepticism, on the other hand.

The Biblical story of creation also appeared in a classroom example offered by a student during the 13th meeting. When this student told the story, a Muslim boy responded by saying that he marvelled that Allah had

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2 In Dutch, this is a well-known rhyming phrase: 'Niet dwingen maar dringen'. It means conviction through testimony by words and personal behaviour, not by pressuring other people, neither by physical nor by social or verbal pressure.

created a world so beautiful. The minutes also present the trainee teacher's reflection: 'He feels in himself at such a moment, on the one hand, the urge to say something about the difference between Allah and the Christian God and, on the other hand, to do justice to the child and respect him'. A member of the outsider group pointed to the fact that many Islamic parents choose a Christian school because of its insistence on traditional norms and values, willingly accepting that explicit Christian references to the Biblical God and His Son Jesus Christ will be made. In the course of the meeting, this student asked concrete questions about how to present one's own Christian convictions in a Christian school with religious and cultural diversity in the classroom. In the 14th meeting, a member of the outsider group reported that she had seen the same student almost overcompensating afterwards. The minutes show, from her perspective, what he had learned: 'She gives the example that one of the students now emphasises over and over again towards the children what his religious beliefs are but also that they themselves will have to and can make their own choices'.

The relating of Bible stories could be pinpointed as a specific area of practice to reconcile faithfulness and openness in a Christian school with religiously and culturally diverse classrooms. As observed by a member of the outsider group in the 14th meeting when looking back at the meeting with the students: 'Students indicate that they, in their telling of Bible stories at our school, have to go all the way back to the very core'. A member of the insider group added: 'Familiar terminology doesn't work here'. The point at stake is not that students feel threatened by it, stressed another participant. The minutes reveal her feeling: 'She hears from students that being forced to the core is, in fact, often experienced as refreshing and awakening'.

On behalf of one of the discussion groups in the 13th meeting, it was suggested that it is not only good to testify to the Christian faith in diverse classes but also to challenge students to study their own faith basis, even if it is, for example, an Islamic basis. 'It is good for a Muslim to read more in the Koran because, as you begin to discover more of your own faith, you can also ask more'. This observation was based on experiences with Islamic parents too. The subsequent part of the meeting's transcript shows how the practical reference led to a reflection between three regular participants and one of the invited students:

P1: Someone who is more convinced or conscious about something, if he deals, he deals completely (...) A lukewarm Muslim likes everything, but if he is totally into it and you engage in the conversation, then maybe such a person is more likely to be touched.

P2: So what can be perceived as hostility can also be explained as engagement?

P1: Yes, and to also just encourage them to go into their own faith so that they know what it means, because if that's the case, you can also have a more equal conversation with each other. You don't have to convince, because you keep the faith to yourself and you testify to that. In that way, and also to respect one's own faith.

St1: As a teacher, you really want to testify to what you stand for, I believe that, and not necessarily impose that on the children. And encourage children to also ask questions about their own faith, so that they themselves know what they actually stand for and can enter into conversations from there.

P3: That you give them that space, actually.

St1: That they also have to have a real conversation at home.

P4: Ask about their faith, about what they believe. Because sometimes they don't know. Their own celebration days, for example, if they can explain them, sometimes they don't know. So go ahead and ask.

From the voice of operant theology, as heard in meetings 12–14, it can be concluded that practical examples show that religious diversity in the classroom can be considered a helpful challenge. More specifically, it challenges Christian teachers to focus on the core of Biblical truth and, through their pedagogical action, it challenges students to deepen their knowledge and experiences of their own faith to be able to interact about it with others in the classroom and the teacher who leads the process. The voice of operant theology in terms of epistemological formation could have been stronger. In its 17th meeting, the conversational community evaluated some guest lectures that members of the outsider group had given as part of DCU's renewed second-year module on diversity. They presented a series of practical case studies or educational dilemmas that (partly) related to Biblical truth claims and epistemology, as discussed in meetings 12–24. The conversational community did not discuss them separately, but nevertheless decided that it would be good to include them in this module as part of DCU's curriculum.

### **7.2.3 The voice of espoused theology**

What was said within the conversational community by the gathered practitioners on Christian education in religiously diverse classrooms and highly diverse cultural and ethnic contexts about how (trainee) teachers should handle truth knowing and truth claims? This sub-section focuses on the espoused theology expressed by both students and teachers, both regular participants and guests at the conversational community's meeting(s)

on absolute truth and epistemology. The conversation about this topic started in the 11th meeting, when one member of the outsider group indicated that she had heard DCU students reflecting on their first experience with her school in a way she did not like: 'I hear among those students comments such as our faith is unquestionably the good one. Of course, that's in the Bible. But it's how you deal with it in practice'. A few moments earlier, she had observed that, in a religiously and culturally diverse context, 'it does not always go the way you would like it, maybe, but you also have to reckon with the other party'. A little later, the same teacher further explained her meaning as follows:

Because if you bring that to the kids in the classroom, that the Christian faith is the way it should be and the other's faith doesn't matter, then you close all of the doors. And that's what I mean a little bit by creating that open attitude, that you can also have respect for how they are in life and that you get further with that. Also, if you want to bring them to God, you get further with that this way than if you immediately close all of the doors.

In this quotation, the open attitude functions as an elementary aspect of presenting the Christian truth claim, although the nature of this open attitude is more strategic than substantive and theologically driven. Yet, the transcript of the 11th meeting shows the start of a gradual shift by the conversational community from perceiving an open attitude as strategically necessary (to not close doors, as the quotation references) to validating elements of an open attitude as substantive—that is, as part of what the Christian message and Christian theology are about. In the 11th meeting, this process of openness as not only strategically but also theologically driven began with some pedagogical notions, as made clear in the following reactions from two members of the insider group (P1 and P2) and two members of the outsider group (P3 and P4):

P1: We had a staff day at DCU last Thursday and social safety is a theme with us now. That woman also said, connect first, communicate first....

P2: Slow down as well.

P1: Communicate first, slow down, connect. You don't have to agree right away, but seek contact. And you actually say that too. They don't have to leave out their own beliefs, but open up to the other person first.

P3: Yes, exactly.

P4: And I think, before you can do that at all, you first have to know who you are yourself. You have to know very well what you yourself stand for. Because only then can you be flexible, can you be open, and if you know that very well, you won't immediately fall over when someone says or thinks something

different, and you can also move with that in the sense that you can listen to someone else. I wrote that down, that it is also important that you know yourself and know why you stand for something, why you believe something.

In the latter response, by a member of the outsider group, the mentioned pedagogical notions of delaying and connecting are tied to personhood formation, the growing of a self and of a Christian faith or life conviction. Openness in matters that really matter and bother the person is only possible when knowing what one's own position on the topic is—and religion is the type of topic that, to the person who takes it seriously, really matters and bothers. The members of the conversational community agreed on two things, as formulated by two different participants: 'It is also important to know yourself and to know why you stand for something, why you believe something' and 'That doesn't take away from, I think, that you may still be in the middle of a search yourself'. To the last asseveration, the member that expressed the first responded:

Yes, I don't mean that you have to be completely sure of everything yourself. It's okay to search. But that you have some kind of ground somewhere or something. Or that you at least think about it. At least, that you're not immediately blown away when someone claims something you've never heard before or something like that.

From this point on, the minutes and transcripts show a consensus within the conversational community that searching and continuing the development of one's deepest convictions are part of an attitude that is Christian in and of itself. Analysis of the coding process reveals how the participants started to tie this ongoing truth-searching process to values that were consistently related to Christian theology. Values such as respect, humbleness, non-judging and reliance on God started to increasingly co-occur with absolute truth itself, as the following statements depict:

- Respect – absolute truth (6 co-occurrences in meetings 11–14). Example: P1: If you are listening to the other's perspective just in a way like, oh, but I don't agree with that, how can I react to that... P2: Yeah, you almost feel like, I know much better how it is. P1: Yes, but then you don't listen to the other person anymore.
- Humbleness – absolute truth (four co-occurrences). Example: Well, indeed, the objective truth, on the one hand, and the subjective truth of people, on the other, is always something of an interpretation. We also said, yes, there are also fragments of truth in other religions that you can sometimes learn from, and that they perhaps see certain things more sharply in the conversation. And we

talked about how adamant you can be as a Christian teacher with all kinds of non-Christian children in your class. So that balance...

- (Non-)judging – absolute truth (five co-occurrences). Example: That reminds me of a meeting at DCU with some Roman Catholic fathers. Then, we were warmly welcomed into a Catholic environment and those people told us what good deeds caused them to follow Jesus, and by now, they had the entire Heidelberg Catechism slapped around their ears by the students. That was pretty sad, that you have such a hard time connecting with those who are different from you. All the while you have the responsibility for forming children.
- Dependency – absolute truth (three co-occurrences). Example: I cannot convince them, but at the same time, from your conviction, you are praying for them. I think we can also take that into diversity in all things. Because that is the entrance. And in the end, it is God Himself who convinces.

The final quotation reveals how the conversational community found a way of handling the tension between critical faithfulness (and its theology of mission) and critical openness (and its theology of respect) in an attitude of dependence (a theology of humbleness). It can be seen that all of these elements have a relation to the Biblical keyword love. Although love, as a code, does not appear in the minutes and transcriptions of meetings 11–14 more than two times, it does so in other meetings, even in connection to (non-)judging and respect. In meeting five, a teacher–student duo stated that studying the Biblical concept of shalom helps them to ‘be in the city without judgment. You do not try to measure other people but try to shine something of love, trying to be a place of shalom’. In meeting 15, the outsider team stated that, in a pedagogy of longing, ‘the accent lies on love, attention and respect’. In the central 13th meeting, which was dedicated to absolute truth, love appeared one time in relation to knowing. This was when a student explained how she likes to handle knowing as a personal thing pertaining to a relationship:

Suppose, I have a sister. And suppose, we love each other very much. Yes, I love my sister very much and can tell you a lot about that. I can make it completely clear to you that this is what she looks like, this is what she can do normally. But if you don’t really see her and don’t really speak to her, then you don’t really get to know her. And then, as a teacher, you do try to get everybody—yes, it is, of course, a flawed example—but to get everybody excited to start asking more questions and to start looking, but the real work of getting to know, you can leave that. I can’t do that myself either. But just do your job.

At this point, it can be concluded that the espoused theology of the practitioners of Christian education in a context of religious and cultural diversity is to be faithful, however, they feel that this cannot be accomplished in a way of imposition and negating the child's own background, religion and culture or the convictions that are based on it. When thinking about this feeling, the conversational community started to discover pedagogically and theologically driven motivations for combining openness with faithfulness, not only strategically but also substantially. To respect the child, to be humble truth seekers themselves, to not judge or condemn others and to depend on God for the results of their personal truth sharing are all values that the participants start to combine with the Biblical core value of love. At an unconscious level, this was clear at the start of the 11th meeting, which began with the issue of what should be the basic attitude of Christian teachers in a fragmented world but ended with the emerging topic of handling absolute truth, when a member of the insider group stated that in God's kingdom 'serving proves to be more important than knowledge' and that 'this is also true in teaching and dealing with children: Christian education is not just about passing on certain knowledge but is also characterised by service'.

#### **7.2.4 The voice of formal theology**

As indicated at the start of Section 2, the voice of formal (scholarly) theology did not play a major role in the conversational community's deliberations on epistemology and absolute truth. Rather, the conversation moved from the Bible and practice to a scholarly approach. Crucial moments occurred during the discussions on several occasions when Biblical truth was denoted as not merely a system or ideology but as something that flourishes in a personal relationship with Christ, which can be located at the interface of normative and formal theology. All of the participants agreed that it is not they, as Christian teachers, who are truth holders, but that Christ—as a person—is the truth Himself, as He claimed in John's gospel (14:6). Christ was mentioned three times in the crucial 13th meeting: first, in the opening devotion as 'the unnegotiable core of Christian faith'; second, in one subgroup's summary of the affirmations, which stated that 'there is an absolute truth, it is Christ, and that counts for everybody'; and, third, in another subgroup's statement that 'promoting respect for otherwise religious believers' means that 'we do not try to convince' the other to abandon his or her belief system but 'to gain the other for Christ' 'and there we noted: conversation'.

Approximating the truth not as a system but as a person, and knowledge as not just cognitive but also personal, spiritual and relational knowledge, brought the conversational community close to the ideas of Geoff Beech



(2021), as explained in the theoretical part of this dissertation (Chapter 1.3.3). One member of the outsider group explained that, in this idea, ‘one’s first perspective is not “you there and we here” but “we together, as people, seeking for truth”’. In addition, the fundamental difference between God/Christ, on the one hand, and man, on the other, a distinction that could be heard in the normative theological voice, coincided with Beech’s (2021) relational epistemology. The conversational community underlined the necessity of an individual pedagogically and theologically driven epistemology as a fundamental ingredient of Christian-holistic teacher formation for a modern, fragmented society in its 14th meeting, terming it a ‘doctrine of knowledge that broadly and holistically formed students need to learn to sustainably combine critical openness and critical faithfulness in super-diverse classroom situations’.

The subgroups of teachers and students that met during the 13th meeting also recognised the three-dimensional geometric figure or octahedron to represent Beech’s (2021; visualised in: van Olst, 2023b) relational epistemology. Time was, however, short due to the vivid talks on Biblical truth and the handling of truth claims, leading to only a superficial acquaintance with the model. At first sight, the octahedron seemed too complex to be compelling to the teacher trainers and trainee teachers. Notwithstanding, they recognised the idea of the interconnectedness between God as the Creator, creation as representing His works and teachers, students and others as relational learners from creational reality. ‘The model makes you think more and see more connections’, said one of the students. ‘More broadly’, added one of the teachers, it is ‘a network of relationships’.

All this leads to the conclusion that a relational epistemology can be embraced as a working title for the kind of truth believing, holding, studying and presenting previously identified as necessary when the voices of normative, operant and espoused theology are heard. This accords with another finding—namely, that creation, as a code, appeared in all of the minutes and transcriptions no less than 14 times, 6 times during the 15th meeting, when the topic of longing—and a pedagogy of longing—was deliberately put on the agenda by members of the conversational community, in addition to what was said about the attitude of humble servitude necessary with a relational epistemology. In this sense, the conversational community showed its adherence to the Belgic Confession, as part of the Dutch Reformed tradition, where it says (in Article 2) that there are two central fountains of revelation of divine truth, which is not only Scripture but also nature.

### 7.3 CONCRETE ELABORATIONS FOR DCU'S CURRICULUM

For DCU's process of curriculum renewal, the conversational community indicated a number of targets to ensure that trainee teachers can sustainably combine critical faithfulness with critical openness. One existing curricular element that the conversational community showed itself to be enthusiastic about was students' first-year assignment to interview a person with a fundamentally different political or religious view on life. It advised keeping this interview in the curriculum; however, it also advised specifying the assignment and relating it to both personhood development and the ongoing line of learning concerning world citizenship formation. A clear observation from the outsider group played a role in this decision in the 14th meeting: 'P1 notes that (...) not too much can be expected of students who have only just completed their secondary education'.

In line with the decision to start the integrated line of learning for citizenship formation by focussing on teaching students how to handle diversity in their own Christian social circle, the interview assignment was specifically directed towards Christians who hold fundamentally different views than one's own. One of the main goals of this interview was said to be 'not that students change their minds, but rather that they learn to open up to the motives of others'. What the conversational community wanted from as early as its start-up meetings was for students to realise that, amid cultural and religious diversity, it is important to sharply distinguish between listening to others' perspectives and adopting those perspectives. Listening carefully and being interested are both elements that belong to the loving attitude the Bible calls for, although they do not mean that other views are adopted. Sincere listening shapes a safe space for putting forward one's own deepest life convictions. Practicing sincere listening without early judgement involves a skillset derived from a formed attitude that, in several meetings, the conversational community identified as necessary for teacher training, as evidenced by the following quotations:

- In meeting 2, a member of the outsider group asked for attention to be paid to the pedagogical side of such a skillset and attitude: Because if we start judging, your faith is not good, yes, then children will also judge each other for that. Whereas if we say, look, everyone can be as they are, then children are more likely to adopt that.
- In meeting 5, a member of the outsider group indicated how really meeting people from other cultural and religious backgrounds leads to more care being paid to non-judging: But it's always different when you look at it from


the outside than when you know the people because you meet them every day. Then it's harder to deal with or judge them very radically.

- A mixed teacher–student group identified non-judging in meeting 6 as one of the main traits for learning to handle cultural and social diversity: You need to know the culture, be compassionate with the target group, suspend judgment and get behind the motivations.
- In meeting 7, the outsider group concluded based on student experiences that listening carefully really helps them: Students said, 'My eyes were really opened to other situations, prejudices falling away, appearances being less important, the great hospitality of parents and the school'.
- Meeting 8 was opened with a devotion on Ezequiel 34 (1–6 and 11–16) and the metaphor of the shepherd, resulting in this conclusion: It is important that we look like the good Shepherd, who does not judge based on origin, status or talents, but who has an eye for what differs from the norm.
- During meeting 11, a member of the outsider group spoke about the goal of having an interview with a fundamentally different Christian: You don't have to agree with each other, do you? That's not the purpose of such a conversation. One member of the insider group added: Indeed, without judgment. To which yet another insider group member responded: It would be nice if they would discover something like 'I don't agree with that person, but he is actually much more consistent in his person, his teaching and his life than we might be sometimes'.


To ensure that, with all this attention being paid to careful and non-judging listening, students will also learn that this creates space to maintain their own convictions, a special song was prepared for a masterclass as part of DCU's personhood formation. The text came from an old American gospel song, composed in 1873 by Philip P. Bliss under the title 'Dare to Be a Daniel' but famously quoted in Dutch Parliament in 1875 by Abraham Kuyper to challenge the Minister of Education to show his stance on the contradictory demands from Christian and public schools. Kuyper (1875) quoted the song as 'Dare to Be a Straight-Out Man'. As it was not known at the time that it was not just a poem but an already composed song, at DCU, the department of music collaborated in putting a melody to the text that could be sung in canon. The idea was to teach students in a vivid and memorable way that, even when confronted with an assignment to listen without judgment, they could be a clear self with their own stance for which they had no need to be ashamed—that is, critical openness does not automatically imply harm to critical faithfulness, as it can also generate space to be a truthful self.

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**Liedje Abraham Kuyper**



ASAP/ALC/GENE/02

Driestar hogeschool  


*Critical openness & faithfulness*  
*Principeel pluralisme*

Dare to be a straightout man  
Dare to stand alone  
Dare to hold a purpose firm  
Dare to make it known

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The vivid canon proved to be successful in the first year of DCU's curriculum renewal (2022–23) and was, following more careful preparation, even more successful in the second year (2023–24). In the conversational community's 18th meeting, two members of the insider team who had recently considered the practice of the song reported their experiences, stating that 'the canon makes an impression and helps students remember that the idea is that they are really allowed to be themselves, even though the assignment expects them to listen uncritically to the fundamentally dissenting Christian'.

Another element of the new curriculum intended to support critical faithfulness was the integration of special chapel hours in the first year of teacher training. The idea behind these chapel hours was to challenge students to not depend on their teachers for morning devotions. From the start of their teacher training, they were given responsibility for preparing a short morning devotion. During each semester, they received (for the first time in 2022–2023) instructions from a teacher of Christian education on how to do so. The conversational community endorsed this idea of motivating students to give form and words to their own faith and to handle any differences within their classes and learning communities. Although the choice of learning communities will be considered in the next chapter, it is important to note that every class was now split into two smaller learning communities where differences could be examined and joint responsibilities, such as the morning devotions, organised. In this way, the curriculum now places students much earlier in an active role with regard to practicing and explicating the Christian faith.

These first-year elements are elaborated while the curriculum continues. Along the lines explained in Chapter 6.3, diversity and complexity are gradually increased. The conversational community helped with the development

of the second-year diversity module and ensured that its accent was on real encounters to go on practicing open listening and keeping one's own convictions. In year 4, real internationalisation tracks are offered, with a masterclass that, once again, returns to the principle that giving space to cultural and religious otherness secures one's own space. The element added at this point is that students learn that not every element deemed formational and valuable within their own Christian tradition is core to the Christian faith and practiced by all Christians. Thus, they learn to identify what is core for themselves and what is dependent on how the core of faith has, over time, been translated differently within different cultures.

## 7.4 CONCLUSION

The epistemological formation of Christian trainee teachers requires continuous attention as part of their broad citizenship formation. This is especially true in the case of DCU students because they come from a relatively homogeneous Christian background in which Biblical truth is seen as a given that, many times, remains unquestioned while in wider society there is hardly any public acceptance of Biblical truth claims. As part of their loyalty to their upbringing, DCU students generally want to be faithful rather than open, although they also feel on a more subconscious level an urge to be open to society. To combine critical faithfulness and critical openness—which is fundamental for them to connect simultaneously to themselves, their own (faith) communities and to people and groups with fundamentally different convictions—the analysis of the conversational community's work proves that they need to learn at least three things.

In the first place, they need to learn that critical faithfulness and openness can be combined because they are both related to the Biblical mission of Christians in society and the world. As such, they both need to be part of the training of Christian trainee teachers. This mission, however, has to be explained in its Biblical broadness: not only as spreading the gospel—which focuses on sending—but also as listening and seeing others in their otherness and showing sincere interest in who they are and what their viewpoints are. It is this sincere interest—or Biblical love—that enables to really connect on different levels and with very different groups—including the own—without harming one allegiance by another.

In the second place, they need to learn that neither the Christian mission nor the Christian truth claims mean that the Christian teacher holds the truth in his or her person, or in a social network with other Christians. Through bringing

together normative, operant and espoused theology, the conversational community learned not to consider truth in its Western, rationalistic sense of a system but as a person—Jesus Christ—and that Christian teachers need to practice humbleness, being truth seekers on a daily basis rather than truth holders. Trainee teachers need to learn that exuding being a truth holder keeps others away from the Biblical truth more than that it generates an interest in it.

In the third place, they need to learn that it is good to arm the teacher training curriculum with elements that incite students to practice listening without judging, in combination with the conviction that this creates space to be oneself as a Christian. At the same time, there is always more to be done. A theology of mission that accords with critical faithfulness and a theology of respect that goes hand in hand with critical openness must both endorse a theology of humbleness that is able to learn from others and distinguish between when sincere listening to others should be applied and when the core of the Christian faith should be actively defended. Such a theology of humbleness should inform pedagogical action in the classroom that is able to delay, where necessary, to connect with each other. Together, all of this underlines the need for a far more relational epistemology than is common in Western society and churches, as Beech (2021) proposed.







# Chapter 8

## Basic Attitude and the Art of Living Together

‘Ein Christenmensch ist ein freier Herr über alle Dinge und niemand untertan. Ein Christenmensch ist ein dienstbarer Knecht aller Dinge und jedermann untertan.’

*Martin Luther, Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen, 1520*

‘What right do we have to let the need for protection win out over the mission we have been given?’

*Member of the outsider group on TAR*

After having analysed the conversational community's deliberations on both subjectifying education and epistemological formation, it is now necessary to shift the focus to the basic attitude that trainee teachers need to adopt in order to function well within a modern, fragmented society. This represents the third main topic identified by the conversational community during its 14th meeting. The question it formulated during the same meeting with regard to attitude formation is as follows: 'What attitude fits shalom-seeking citizenship formation for a modern, fragmented society?' This question related to the keyword character, similar to how subjectifying education was tied to the more practical keyword ability and epistemological formation to the keyword knowledge. These three keywords were supposed, by the conversational community, to accord with the triad heart, hands and head.

More attention will be given to these keywords, the triad heart, hands and head, and, specifically, the connection between character and basic attitude formation in the first section of this chapter. This section explains how basic attitude formation appeared on the conversational community's radar and how it is tied to, but also separated from, subjectifying education (Section 1). To accomplish this, the section focuses, first, on the need for character formation (8.1.1). Second, it explains the importance of a pedagogy of longing to enable students to resist the tendency for the renunciation of their ideals and prevent them from uncritical insertion in the existing system (8.1.2). The next section seeks to answer this chapter's central question on what attitude should be pursued in teacher training (Section 2). It does so by analysing the four theological voices on attitude formation: the normative (8.2.1), the formal (8.2.2), the operant (8.2.3) and the espoused voice (8.2.4). As in the preceding chapters, the third part of this chapter is dedicated to the practical elaborations the conversational community made in relation to DCU's curriculum renewal process (Section 3). Each section leads to some concluding remarks that will be brought together in a final conclusion at the end of this chapter.

## 8.1 CHARACTER AND LONGING TO PURSUE

What kind of attitude towards a modern, fragmented society should Christian trainee teachers learn to adopt? The conversational community addressed this question throughout its meetings as an important and inalienable part of the bigger whole of teacher training. Special attention, however, was dedicated to this topic in its 11th and 15th meetings. In the 11th meeting, it spoke extensively about 'which attitude fits a Christian teacher in a multi-ethnic context the most, accords with the shalom idea and does justice to the broad formation

of children in primary education?’ In the 15th meeting, the conversational community asked itself ‘what role a pedagogy of longing could have in the formation of students for a pluriform, fragmented society, as we also find today in education’. In these meetings, two characteristic features emerged from the deliberations. In the first place, the conversational community wants students to adopt a deliberate—and in that sense *strong*—attitude, to not turn their backs on society’s challenges but rather to actively respond to them. In the second place, it wants students to adopt a position of servitude and humbleness, which at first seems to be a relatively *weak* attitude.

What was presented in Chapter 6 on subjectifying education and the shalom idea asks for the *strong* attitude that emerges from the person as a strong self. This can be tied to the keyword ‘character’. By contrast, what is presented in Chapter 7 on relational epistemology, wherein humbleness or humility was a crucial element, asks for the *weaker* approach. This can be tied to the keyword ‘longing’. Sub-section 8.1.1 will first introduce the keywords ‘attitude’ and ‘character’ a bit more, revealing how they emerged in the conversational community’s meetings in relation to both attitude formation and a person’s heart. Sub-section 8.1.2 then shows how the conversational community broadened its quest for attitude formation by paying attention to the keyword ‘longing’ and a pedagogy of longing.

### 8.1.1 Felt need for character formation




Holistic education, especially in a context of fragmentation, aims to see and take into account the whole person and educate him or her simultaneously on the levels of heart, head and hands. This conclusion from Chapter 2, which presented WCD as a necessary instrument to combat reductionism in education, also emerged in the crucial 14th meeting of the conversational community, wherein subjectifying education, epistemological formation and attitude formation were identified as the three main topics of interest up to that point. (W)holistic education seeks to do justice to all three pillars in the context of education because it has a clear eye for the shortcomings of approaches that only focus on the acquisition or enhancement of skills or knowledge, not on the broad formation of the person for which knowledge and ability are an integral part. A (w)holistic approach, therefore, places (trainee) teachers in a position of tension with regard to the dominant education system.

In the conversational community, the three main topics were initially presented using keywords derived from an educational vision statement by Tilburg University (2022). This statement presents Tilburg University as unique in the Dutch context due to paying more attention to character formation than other universities. Three key concepts helped the conversational community to

develop a deeper understanding of the relation between its own main topics: knowledge, ability and character. These keywords start, in Dutch, all with a 'k': kennis, kunde and karakter. In an underlying exploratory document, de Regt and van Lenning (2017) tied this triad to approach 'the complete being-human' to the Roman Catholic priest and founder of what would later become Tilburg University. This approach warns against seeing the student just as a 'homo economicus', on the one hand, or just a 'scientist who absolutizes his professional studies', on the other hand (de Regt & van Lenning, 2017, p. 25).

Where Tilburg University (2022) tied 'kennis' to expert knowledge, 'kunde' to academic skills and 'karakter' to intellectual independency and public responsibility, the conversational community saw, according to the minutes of its 15th meeting, clear coherences between 'kennis' and 'epistemological formation', 'kunde' and 'subjectifying education', and 'karakter' and 'attitude formation'. In each case, the accent assigned by the conversational community was placed on the question of how it could be achieved during the teacher training process—that is, how students could learn to practice subjectifying education from a Christian perspective, how they should be formed epistemologically from the same perspective and how a basic attitude could be formed in them that would be helpful in supporting and fostering both subjectifying education and epistemological formation. At that point, in the 14th meeting, a member of the outsider group observed the following, which a member of the insider group and others responded to:

P1 recognises in the three distinguished pillars the triad of head, heart and hands. She connects character to the heart, skills to the hands and knowledge to the head. P2 thinks this is a beautiful thought and points to Church Father Augustine's statement that the heart precedes the head and the hands. P1 indicates that education does still primarily focus on the head. However, P3 says that it is carried by desire. P4 refers to what she thinks are golden moments in education. This is when the task-oriented nature falls away for a moment and there is real attention paid to each other and things that really demand attention.

	KNOWLEDGE COGNITION (KENNIS) FRAMEWORKS	EPISTEMOLOGICAL FORMATION
	CHARACTER PREDISPOSITION (KARAKTER) OTHERNESS	ATTITUDE FORMATION
	ABILITY PRACTICES (KUNDE) SOCIAL JUSTICE	SUBJECTIFYING EDUCATION

In short, the above quotation shows how the conversational community, from that moment onwards, focused on three concept triads: (1) subjectifying education – ability – hands; (2) epistemological formation – knowledge – head; and (3) attitude formation – character – heart. The attitude it looked for within these relations can be considered a basic attitude, basic because it underlies the practice of subjectifying education and strengthens from a deeper level the epistemological formation that the preceding chapter argued for. Moreover, it precedes the knowledge of the head and the practices of the hands. They both need to arise from a basic attitude willingly adopted by the deepest source of the individual person's will: the heart. As a person, a trainee teacher needs to develop a deliberate standpoint in life, a fundamental predisposition that can withstand the test of the critical opposition of adversity. As Petty et al. (1997) noted, at the core of defining 'attitude' is the notion of evaluation, as attitudes are 'commonly viewed as summary evaluations of objects (e.g. oneself, other people, issues, etc) along a dimension ranging from positive to negative' (p. 611).

However, this deliberate and, therefore, strong stance, if it combines the intended features of a relational epistemology (i.e. critical faithfulness and critical openness), also needs to be a humble stance. This reflects one of the main findings of Chapter 7. The basic attitude that the conversational community aimed at implies a predisposition in the trainee teacher towards positive openness with regard to society in the sense of willingness and ability to serve, which goes hand in hand with deliberate humility to respect otherness. To conclude, it can be stated that the conversational community sought a deliberate and, in that sense, strong attitude on the part of the teacher as a self that deeply wants to engage with the challenges of a modern,

fragmented society, albeit from an epistemologically humble and, at the same time, deliberately serving position. All this comes together in a type of character formation that works towards a serving attitude as the basis for relational epistemology and subjectifying education—and, therefore, is critical of the educational system and its demands, situating the pedagogical task as the centre of attention.

### 8.1.2 Felt need for a pedagogy of longing

When, during its 14th meeting, the conversational community looked back on its previous meetings, it realised that it had already paid clear attention to this basic attitude, especially in meeting 11. When one member of the outsider group observed with regard to the three main topics that special attention was still necessary concerning the topics of ‘longing’ and ‘a pedagogy of longing’, others agreed, although they proposed placing it on the agenda as both a part and a deepening of the pillar of attitude formation – character – heart. The following quotation summarises the feelings of eight members of the conversational community who were present during the meeting on the topic of longing:

P1 exhibits the opinion that longing actually has to do with all three pillars (...)  
 P2 brings up the dominant culture of measurement in education. ‘We are too much concerned with keeping a grip and assessing, and too little with desire.’  
 P3 finds assessment models with whole series of checkmarks too central to students’ education. P4 notes that this is a problem with all the designated pillars—that is, they are all difficult to measure. P5 quotes a school principal he recently heard say that, at his school, some things are measurable and other things are noticeable. P6 wishes that noticeable things would also count in the contact with the inspection. P7 refers to James K. Smith and how he writes about desire. P8 promises to send round an article by Els van Dijk on the pedagogy of the heart, which makes connections with practicing desire and the importance of broad education.

After having discussed the topic of basic attitude during its 11th meeting, the conversational community decided to dedicate its 15th meeting to longing as an important and pedagogically driven aspect of this attitude. As the minutes show, ‘We decide to put the theme of desire on the agenda for the next meeting of the learning community in order to further strengthen the pillar of attitude/character in particular and to further connect the heart with head and hands’. What this concluding part does not show, although the quotation featuring the eight opinions above clarifies, is that longing is seen as an instrument with which to resist the intrinsic socialising forces of the educational system.

P2, in the quotation, juxtaposes desire with maintaining a grip and assessing. Nobody present in the meeting contradicted this juxtaposition. Instead, P3, P4, P5 and P6 followed up on it as if it were completely clear how this juxtaposition works. In the earlier quotation from the same minutes, as presented above in Section 8.1.1, a comparable juxtaposition is suggested by P4, with regard to task-oriented action, on the one hand, and real attention to each other, on the other.

What is meant becomes clearer through a joint statement issued by the outsider group during the 15th meeting, when the conversational community elaborated on the topic of longing. The group stated that a pedagogy of longing ‘puts the accent on love, attention and respect’, which should not be forgotten when teachers ‘work in an action-oriented way to help children move forward’. This resulted in the conclusion on the part of the outsider group that, ‘for Christian teacher training, it seems important that students engage in conversation on these themes, asking inquisitive questions about systems’. The word ‘system’ appears 27 times in the minutes and transcripts, especially in meetings 15 and 16. The tenor of the usage of this word is initially neither positive nor negative. The education system being what it is, it should be considered a given that it structures one’s educational work, but one’s educational practice need not solely be directed by the system. This tenor starts, however, from the 15th to the 16th meeting onwards, to have a more negative connotation, with members of the conversational community realising that the system can be crippling in relation to their personal ideals and longing.

Elements of the education system that are considered contrary to personal educational ideals and longing are ‘the child as a project that must succeed’, ‘children as entrepreneurs of themselves’, ‘the portfolios and coaches in education’, ‘the centrality of assessment that constantly compares children with the average child’, ‘the accent on rationality’, ‘the requirements that schools have to face’ and—again—the focus on measurable results. As one of the practitioners of multi-ethnic Christian education explained:

I also have to say to parents who are not angry with us but sad about the system: Look, I don’t like the system either, but we have to work with it. I’m talking about a little boy who gave a wonderful speech about the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, for which we gave him a nine out of ten, which he really deserved, but he couldn’t do well on his CITO reading comprehension test (1) because it contains such complicated questions and

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1 This refers at regular testing in the Netherlands by Centraal Instituut voor Toets Ontwikkeling (CITO).

texts about subjects that are not yet very important to him, so it takes more time for him to understand them. This little boy with that nine out of ten for his presentation could be at the highest level, right? No, he can't, because we look at it in a narrow way. It is another one of those examples where I don't want to say that this boy should go to the highest level per se, but that it falters, that it constantly falters, and that it makes me rebel and that I actually just want to say to the students: It's not bad if you feel that rebellion, but hold on to that.

What this teacher wishes is for trainee teachers to learn to hold on to their pedagogical ideals, even when the system directs all of their energy towards other things. The extra attention paid to longing and even a pedagogy of longing that the conversational community decided on in relation to the basic attitude, including character and heart, should be viewed from this perspective. The conversational community wishes for character formation in students that makes them humble when possible but fierce when necessary. As a conclusion, it can be stated that when the conversational community paid attention to the basic attitude, it looked for an attitude of service to both child and society, situating these elements as strong ideals in front of trainee teachers—to care for and to stand by. What is meant exactly will become clearer through the analysis of the four theological voices on attitude formation as heard throughout the conversational community's meetings.

## **8.2 FOUR THEOLOGICAL VOICES ON BASIC ATTITUDE FORMATION**

In the analysis of the minutes and transcripts, the topic of basic attitude formation can be approached along the lines of the code 'basic attitude' or of the broader code family surrounding it. The code itself appears a total of 62 times, while the broader code family, which includes a total of 31 codes such as 'attention', 'hope', 'longing', 'love' and 'mission', appears no less than 358 times. While the code 'basic attitude' does not appear in the reports of all the meetings (six are missing), the broader code family appears in all of the reports starting from the second, only being absent from the first warm-up meeting. The topic of basic attitude formation is, therefore, present throughout the whole process that the conversational community engaged in. Notwithstanding, its appearance reveals a clear outlier in the report of the 11th meeting, where the code 'basic attitude' is counted 28 times (roughly half of its total appearances), while the broader code family scores 69 appearances in that same meeting.



The reason for this clear outlier is that the conversational community, in its 11th meeting, discussed the four basic attitudes that British theologian Samuel Wells (2015) distinguished for a Christian presence in a public society: ‘working for’, ‘working with’, ‘being with’ and ‘being for’ others who need attention. In so doing, the conversational community delved into the issue of what formal theology could add to their ideas about the basic attitude to strive for in teacher training for a modern, fragmented society. As in Wells’ (2015) book *A Nazareth Manifesto*, which focuses on Jesus’ lifelong presence on Earth, formal theology emerged from the normative. The 11th meeting started with a meditation on the Good Samaritan, taken from Wells’ (2015) book and leading to a broad discussion on how the presence of Christian teachers in a modern, fragmented society should be theologically informed. In later meetings (14, 15 and 16), the conversational community broadened the scope, adding insights from Christian pedagogy and studying a pedagogy of longing, as reflected in the analysis of the code word ‘longing’.

For these reasons, the closer analysis of each of the four voices presented in this chapter will start with the voice of normative theology (8.2.1) and then proceed with formal theology (8.2.2). Next, attention will be paid to operant theology (8.2.3) and then to espoused theology (8.2.4), as the latter seems to emerge from operant theology, especially in relation to the topic of basic attitude. The treatment of operant and espoused theology will, however, be relatively short here due to the conceptual level at which the conversational community approached the topic of basic attitude formation.

### 8.2.1 The voice of normative theology

Of all the starting devotions during the meetings, five were directly related to the code ‘basic attitude’. Two of the selected Bible passages <sup>(2)</sup> for these devotions came from the Old Testament, while three came from the New Testament. From the Old Testament, Jeremiah 29 was read in the fifth meeting. It pertains to the start of the prophet’s letter to the captives in Babylon, applying the shalom idea that the Jews knew only with regard to Jerusalem to the dominant and even hostile kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar. ‘In the letter, Jeremiah calls on the exiles not to resist, not to escape, nor to turn away from society’, explained an insider group member. ‘He calls on them to pray for the peace of Babylon and to seek the peace and wellbeing (shalom) of the city’. The basic attitude that Christians need to adopt in a modern, fragmented

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2 As on all occasions, the participants were free to choose a Bible passage, with the only indication being to look for something that they—personally—combined with the central theme(s) of the research (see Chapters 4.2 and 4.3).

society should be, according to the minutes, similar. In pairs, the members of the conversational community studied verses 1–7 and, afterwards, shared their insights. The following is what they said about the basic attitude:

P1: If you see shalom as God's counterpart to the Fall: peace with Him, with your neighbour, loving God above all else and the neighbour as yourself, if that is your driving force in contact with other people, then this helps put words to that.

P2: Shalom is about all of your relationships, whoever comes your way. I think we need to talk to students about that.

P3: What appealed to us in the Biblical concept of shalom or peace is that it includes the other, that you pray for the other, that you look around for the other in the place where you are placed, that you are not only focused on Jerusalem but equally on Babylon. The Jews had to pray for the city, not only for a return but also for the place where they were.

P4: That's exactly why we think it would be nice to spend four years talking with students bit by bit about this theme: Shalom. That's about more than just your relationship with God. We have a professional profile ready to go and in terms of personality formation that is about the cores that all have to do with relationality: I am connected to the Christian faith, to the neighbour, the world, myself, tradition from past and present to future. If you are going to load that with the concept of shalom, you are indicating that, for good connectedness, something is needed. What then is your mission with regard to your neighbour, the world and so on.

P1: Agreed, and that should go together. Again, of course, you shouldn't go overboard like some humanitarian clubs. It is both – shalom is both peace with God and peace with one's neighbour.

P4: How do you avoid going completely in one of the two directions?

P1: That's very personal, I think. The challenge per person is that you are in such a way in life that you always know how to make the connection. That you also have the boldness to bring that forward openly with an example or however you can. For example, in kindness, in hospitality, attractiveness that makes people dare to confide in you so that you can tell something about your faith.

The basic attitude that the participants in this conversation were looking for is closely connected to the shalom idea (P1). This idea functions as a driving force when it comes to working on one's openness (as P2 said), which starts with prayer and attention to others (P3), boldness to engage in an exemplary

manner, and practicing kindness and hospitality in a way that appeals to others (P4). This is a mission (P4) that includes empathy with people and children who suffer injustice, as other parts of the same transcript reveal. This final remark ties the devotion in the fifth meeting to the devotion in the seventh meeting, on 2 Samuel 4:4 and 19 (24–27). ‘Both passages are on Mephibosheth and how King David treats him’, summarise the minutes of the devotion leader’s explanation. ‘David’s basic attitude in this regard is characterised by an eye for the weak’. The devotion leader, who was from the outsider group, presented a fivefold conclusion on this basic attitude:

David actively seeks out the underprivileged, he overcomes barriers that have sometimes been there for years, he has an inner drive to make his fellow human beings familiar with God’s goodness, he comes up with practical solutions to problems that are difficult for Mephibosheth himself to solve and he continues to be interested, which manifests itself in, for example, continued questioning.

It is interesting to note how David’s attitude reflects what the participants claimed to see most perfectly in Christ. Two of the New Testament devotions focus on how Jesus Christ as the risen Lord motivates His disciples to follow Him. In the fourth meeting, an outsider group member opened with John 21: 15–19, where Jesus restores Peter as His disciple, asking his love and commanding him to feed His lambs and sheep, and, as the minutes report, ‘applies this part to teaching and interacting with children’. In the ninth meeting, another outsider group member read from Luke 24 verses 17–34. This devotion leader asked children what kinds of questions they would have asked the risen Christ if He were to walk suddenly besides them, as He did with the couple from Emmaus. This gave rise to some very deep and personal answers that showed how, with both Christian and non-Christian children, ‘something really happened, sometimes unnoticed, in the years they were here at school’. It is the presence of the living Jesus that caused this, and Christian teachers can learn from how He behaved Himself during the three-hour walk to Emmaus: ‘Really, as a teacher, quite rigorous, with questions that challenge further thinking’.

The third New Testament devotion was the one that opened the 11th meeting, with its special attention on basic attitude formation. An insider group member read Luke 10: 25–27, on Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan. The central message that the devotion leader saw in this ‘pictorial lesson about the Kingdom of God’ is that ‘serving turns out to be more important than knowledge’. The priest and the Levite knew more than the Samaritan, but they did not act as they should have done. The Samaritan probably knew much less about theology and the law of God, but he acted according to the will of God.

For Christian education, this means that it 'is not just about passing on certain knowledge but is characterised by service. In it, loving God above all else and one's neighbour as oneself is central'. According to the minutes, the devotion ended with the conclusion that 'this is also why we must together pay much attention to the broad citizenship formation of children and future teachers' to 'be prepared and equipped for Christian service in (non-Christian) society'.

When analysing the voice of normative theology on basic attitude formation, it can be concluded that the conversational community wants to teach students to be teachers like Jesus. Their attitude should be open and bold to act as a healing shalom presence amidst human brokenness. All of the analysed devotions circle around this notion and can, therefore, be termed Christocentric. A Christocentric attitude is a shalom attitude that inclines itself to service, realising that the first thing required is to be served by Christ Himself.

### 8.2.2 The voice of formal theology

Prior to the 11th meeting, the participants were sent a brief overview of the four basic attitudes that British theologian Wells (2015) distinguished when he wrote about the standing of Christians in a pluralistic society. This overview was the fruit of the theoretical part of this dissertation, although it was not included in the final text of Chapter 1. The agenda that the participants received, included the following text:

**Samuel Wells – A Nazareth Manifesto (2015, p. 23)**

**Nazareth: 30 meaningful years in the life of Jesus**

**Attitudes of Christian serving/Christian service/dealing with people. Starting with the example of a homeless person:**

1. 'Working for': You are working for, helping, clearing obstacles; the helped person is not active, so on behalf of this person you are improving his or her wellbeing.
2. 'Working with': You work with the same energy, removing obstacles, involving others in the process; the helped person is actively involved and is also responsible for his or her own wellbeing.
3. 'Being with': Meeting and availability are central, assume both, although it is sensitive to the helped person's own development and demand.
4. 'Being for': The initiative should come from the person who needs help; in this case, you are available and willing to contribute to improving his or her wellbeing.

**Question: Which attitude suits the Christian teacher in a multi-ethnic context most, fits the shalom idea and does justice to the broad formation of children in elementary school?**

After the meeting's starting devotion, the participants were all invited to share their opinions on these basic attitudes and the formulated question. Because the meeting (27 June 2022) took place at the end of the project's second year, during the conversation that unfolded the participants connected their insights to the broader project and its central question of how a holistic approach to education reinforces Christian citizenship formation for a modern, fragmented society. The conversation was fully transcribed and all eight members who were present for the meeting actively participated in it. The following paragraphs present a summary of the conversation before some analysis is performed. In the summary, PI stands for participant insider group and PO for participant outsider group.

PO1 starts by saying that she learned from the project that, while the Dutch government obliges elementary schools to provide citizenship education, it should not be given as a separate or added subject but as an integral part of the whole interaction between teachers and students within the school community and directly tied to the Christian identity of the school. When PI1 asks what this means for the choice between the four presented attitudes, she chooses 'being with', although she often feels inclined to just act. She sees in 'being with' a really accepting attitude towards other people. When asked again by PI1, she says that she wants this attitude to be an active one because she would find it hard to have colleagues who reserve their energy for only things that strictly pertain to their job description. PO2 adds that action and being cannot be separated and that, in her experience, meeting children appeals to one's heart to collaborate where possible and necessary, which PO1 affirms. PI2 says that 'working with' makes her think of the pedagogical mission that is so central to WCD thought.

PO3 sees a certain stratification in the presented attitudes. Not all children are ready and able to engage with a 'being with' attitude of the teacher and some need a teacher's 'working for'. PO4 responds that an active role for the child, which pertains to 'being with', is the educational goal. Together, they formulate the goal as helping children get ahead, letting them be a competent self and, eventually, enabling them to help themselves and ask for help where necessary. PO2 formulates this as an ongoing process, to which PI3 responds that this means to be present and available. PI1 stipulates that this includes not only an interest in the cognitive part of the child but also in the whole child, including his or her social and cultural background. This requires an attitude of openness, which PO2 observes to be lacking in many DCU students. A short conversation on openness follows, which was analysed in Chapter 7, in which PI2 and PI2 together advocate for the pedagogical principles of

good communication and, within this communication, intentional pedagogical delaying and connecting. PI4 moves the conversation back to the four attitudes, proposing a pedagogical process that shifts from 'working for' via 'working with' to 'being with' as the pedagogical goal. To prepare students for managing this process, he found particularly helpful what he saw in the project as deliberate exposure to high levels of diversity to elicit an attitude of readiness to act, like the Good Samaritan from the devotion.

According to PI1, exposure has more to do with 'being' than with 'working', and it starts with paying good attention to others. PI4 adds presence, while PI2 thinks of presence without judgement. Again, the conversation switches to the topic of epistemology, as already analysed in Chapter 7. PI1 relates how DCU students initially resisted an assignment to visit a mosque, exhibiting an attitude that had both defensive and offensive elements but lacked a tranquil being. PO1 thinks that being a real self in the first place supports this kind of tranquil being and makes the person more relaxed when handling differences. According to PO3, the homogeneous composition of the DCU student groups is a challenge, as much of society's diversity is relatively new for most of the students. At multi-ethnic schools, students learn to handle these differences much earlier. For PI2, this underlines the need for good student guidance. PI1 asks how, because this really pertains to the core of the formational process. PO3 answers that it happens throughout the day, although it specifically emerges from the Christian identity and its consequences for behaviour. In this context, it is important to open oneself up in the sense of being vulnerable. PI1 and PI2 ask whether vulnerability should be seen as a key quality, which PO3 confirms, stating the importance of deliberately creating spaces for students to come forth with their vulnerability. PO2 adds that much of the initial attitude of hesitation or defence is motivated by a fear of vulnerability.

PO4 is convinced that this is part of the normal development phase that, specifically, the youngest trainee teachers are going through. PI1 sees a need for the development of more nuanced thinking, although PO4 responds that there is a much deeper need to develop an interest in the world behind the words that the other brings to the table. PI3 confirms that conversations wherein students practice real listening skills help them to engage with this world. PI1 adds that, in the new curriculum, there is a first attempt to let the youngest students practice interviews with people who are fundamentally different to them, in combination with lessons on community formation. PI4 again stresses the importance of exposing students to levels of diversity that are challenging to them, with the intention of enabling them to learn how complexity can add to their personal growth. If that lesson is learned, while not every prejudice

will vanish, a new awareness of one's susceptibility will be helpful throughout a teacher's whole career. PO3 elaborates on PI4's comparison of the formational process with the kneading of clay that should not become too hard, which is a much better metaphor than another commonly used metaphor—namely, to see one's identity as a wooden ship. The clay metaphor is open for kneading, while the wooden ship metaphor is fearful of change. If the wooden ship is missing a plank, it takes in water and will soon capsize; if the clay is kneaded, its core is not in immediate danger.

PI1 agrees that the clay metaphor is better but observes that students often think of themselves as being really open towards others, whereas what they are actually saying shows more of an interest in getting their message across than in really listening to others. PO4 and PI4 recognise this and think that the latter is exactly what students need to learn, not only in terms of the religious other but also as part of citizenship formation in general. To accept that one can learn a lot more from others can be a difficult lesson, but PI1, PO2, PO3 and PO4 all agree that a context of diversity can be especially confusing but, at the same time, helpful in generating this insight. What students need, according to the analysis of PI2 and PI3, is to mirror themselves with regard to others and to share that mirroring within the safe space of their own community. PO4 adds that they need others they trust to come back to. PI2 concludes that small steps outside of the comfort zone are more helpful than huge steps. PI1 summarises that, for younger children, a teacher's attitude can be one of 'working for' and 'working with', although students need to practice the attitude of 'being with'. For PO4, this conclusion is in line with the basic pedagogical triad of relation, competence and autonomy. While this triad is always important, as the student grows older the goal of being an autonomous self becomes more urgent. PI2 and PI3 underline this need, especially for the training of teachers.

Based on the summary of the conversation during the 11th meeting, it can be concluded that the conversational community stresses the importance of students learning to be with others. An attitude of 'being with', as described by Wells (2015), creates space for real interest in others, vulnerability in oneself and the possibility of creating a community in which one can be with others to be finally able to live and work together. This conclusion offers some details to the more general wish for an attitude of openness. As the conversational community experienced that students sometimes fear this openness and feel obliged to put forward as soon as possible the central message of their own religious identity, it decided to elaborate on this topic further. This decision was made, as described in Section 1, in the crucial 14th meeting and put in practice in the 15th meeting. The topic the conversational community selected

to add to the basic attitude that students need to learn was longing/a pedagogy of longing, as talking about this topic helps to overcome for a moment the dominant focus on cognition and achievable goals.

### **15th meeting, on longing**

One member of the insider group took the initiative to provide the conversational community with an inspirational text on longing (van Dijk, 2015). Before the 15th meeting, all of the members had read the text and indicated which phrases appealed to them or raised questions. The same insider group member started the meeting with a devotion that was not directly coded as 'basic attitude' but held several codes from the broader code family, including 'attention', 'seeing' and 'longing'. It is interesting to see that this devotion was also on a Bible passage on the risen Jesus (John 20: 1,2,11-18). The devotion leader showed the group a painting of Maria looking at Jesus, one part of her face expressing confusion and sadness, the other part full of joy and longing. The minutes say: 'Looking leads here to really seeing—and that is the image P1 has of WCD. Broad-based education is about arousing desire, and art can play a big role in that'.

After the devotion, the conversational community split up into the insider team and the outsider team to discuss the text and then share their findings. The summary of the findings by the outsider group shows a remarkable coherence with the motivating idea of heavenly citizenship that Chapter 1.3.2 was concerned with. It connects this heavenly citizenship to the attitude of 'being with'. As one member of the outsider group provided a written summary, it is possible to quote the outsider group on this topic with accuracy:

Contemporary society can be characterised by fragmentation (in conjunction with polarisation and individualism). Against this, the Christian perspective is characterised by a sense of community, responsibility for one another. For Christian education, this means that the emphasis is not on the individual child (the child in the eyes of many parents is a project that must succeed). Children have primarily become entrepreneurs of themselves. In the living world, it is often about 'being yourself'. It is reinforced by having to shine on social media, the portfolios and coaches in education, the CITO score system that constantly compares children to the average child, the urge to perform better and better. The personal formation in a Christian school takes place mainly in groups. Children should know that they themselves are not the centre of the universe, but that there is Someone higher (God) and that the interests of fellow human beings count. So, being there for



people is a very important aspect of citizenship education in the Christian elementary school. Deeply, children may learn what it is to be a citizen of heaven, to live a life to the glory of God and to the blessing of one's neighbour. For Christian teachers, this also means that they do not do the work for themselves (focused on their own success, to earn money, emphasis on the all-knowing teacher who just tells how everything is) but that there is a 'big story' to tell wherein children can be included. In a pedagogy of longing, the emphasis is on love, attention and respect. Action-oriented work to help children move forward is good, but it must be balanced by the above. Teachers should be aware of their leading role model. Every child/ every human being needs others to get excited about/inspired by. Teachers should, therefore, be transparent about their doubts. At the same time, they also live the gospel, speak with enthusiasm and amazement about all that can be taught. The goal of education is more than conversion to God (too much emphasis on this can lead to passivity), and also more than 'doing good things' (too much emphasis on this can lead to activism without a vertical line upwards). The goal is to form children into the 'image bearer of God', thus arriving at the destination/meaning. For Christian teacher training, it seems important to us that students engage in conversations on these themes, asking inquiring questions about systems, each other's motives, etc. They too need a role model—that is, an engaged mentor who speaks to and knows the students.

The underlining in the quotation is not original; rather, it has been placed in the text to analyse how the outsider group managed to combine the question of societal fragmentation with the faith-based answer of heavenly citizenship; the problem of polarisation and hyper-individualism with active community-building starting in groups of students; a pedagogy of longing with the gospel's big story; and the teacher's role of being present for students with children's goal of finding happiness and flourishing in being an image bearer of God. The core elements of this statement by the outsider group not only show a remarkable coherence with the theoretical part of this dissertation but also with the parallel statement—without the interchanging of ideas during the period of separation of the two groups—by the insider group. The statement made by the insider group is much more staccato in its formulation and, therefore, harder to cite, although below is an overview, again with the keywords underlined afterwards:

The insider group started elaborating on the devotion, describing how a pedagogy of longing can be helpful for the intended attitude of 'being with'. Broad, good education arouses the desire to know more, to become more

deeply introduced into a reality that is greater than we see or know (God's reality) (...) School is a place where you are invited and challenged to awaken in them the desire to serve God in society as they are intended by the Creator. The insider group first found a problem. Starting teachers indicate that with ideals/desires they cannot win the battle in the classroom; they would rather like to learn the basics of educational practice. For seniors and teachers with more life experience, however, desires/ideals are often a source of energy to sustain the profession, which makes it meaningful for them. Another problem the insider group encountered: Students obtain qualifications to be able to add to the economy, although the roles have shifted in church, parenting and education (...) Contemporary teachers have to pick up on many things they could leave in previous times to the church, to the state (...) Today, out of necessity, you are working on a number of subjects because otherwise students won't hear it. From the presented text the insider group picked four relationships that matter in teacher training—namely, the other (God), yourself (personhood formation), others (living together in society) and the other (things such as money, nature, stewardship, creation). To practice these relationships, some schools are becoming missionary because they have that desire (...) You are at work in the kingdom of God. School is where you reinforce education in the family. Christian education is laid out on becoming a Christian/being a Christian. That starts close by, in the mini-society. A good attitude for students and their teachers is, therefore, important. Every work has its uninspiring elements since the Fall. Students need to learn to do their jobs out of inner drive (...) I don't need to change the world on my own. Encounters with people who move on play an important role in that (...) Relationships and contact are meaningful. The role of a teacher is inspiration, passion, helping to flourish. Never cynical, but longing, wanting to make a difference. To make space for real encounters with others and for inner and outward conversation. The insider group also finds it necessary to address the problematic use of smartphones. You can interact with smartphones in two ways: Teach how to use it; putting it away for increasing attention (...) Eliminate outside stimuli more. Meeting. Places to practice silence.

Similar to the outsider group, the insider group connects the topic of longing with relationships and making students aware of the bigger wholes they need to partake in. In its widest sense, the whole network of relationships is connected to God as God's reality. The statement above distinguishes a driving force or motivation to introduce students to their role as teachers in this reality—namely, to do their jobs in the light of God's kingdom in the world, a missionary drive. Although much is asked of teachers, perhaps be

even more than is reasonable, this inner drive provides motivation and thus needs practicing. It can be practised in one's own classroom, which is called by the insider group—as in the introduction to this dissertation—a mini-society. In addition to what the outsider group formulated, the statement of the insider group advocates for investing in students' offline time, without the impulses stemming from digital technology, for example, smartphones, to stimulate relational longing in trainee teachers.

## **Conclusion**

The conversational community, thinking through the four basic attitudes presented by Wells (2015) and the pedagogy of longing suggested by van Dijk (2015), recognised the need for Christian trainee teachers to learn to live in a relationship with others as part of how God asks people to live. For this reason, they need to learn during their teacher training to participate in small communities in which they, in a sphere of trust and perhaps even vulnerability, help each other to proceed and which help them to take the steps necessary to be exposed to higher levels of diversity. These higher levels of diversity can be confusing and maybe even threatening, but that is where the topic of longing is brought into the picture. Longing proceeds from the shalom belief that what originally belongs together needs to be healed, and it stimulates a process of subjectification. The conversational community perceived the Christian identity as a strong motivation for students to participate in the world and sought to stimulate in them the longing associated with heavenly citizenship—of loving God above all and others like themselves.

### **8.2.3 The voice of operant theology**

It is especially difficult to separate the voices of operant and espoused theology from the voice of formal theology with regard to the topic of basic attitude. Section 8.2.2, which focused on the voice of formal theology, presented the reflections of the conversational community's members on the input from formal theology—taken as broadly as announced in the methodological Chapter 4—including their own practice, ideas and examples. The specific meetings that, in that context, were analysed—the 11th and the 15th—do not contain any codes that directly link the text of the minutes and transcripts to the code 'operant theology'. Another difficulty that pertains to the voice of operant theology is that no co-occurrence was found between the codes 'basic attitude' and 'operant theology'. For these reasons, this sub-section will not only be short but will also follow up on what was presented above (2.2), along the lines of the broader code family surrounding the code 'basic attitude'

and where the voice of operant theology appeared during other meetings of the conversational community.

According to the minutes of meeting 2, wisdom is an important part of the intended basic attitude. It entails knowing the time and place to put forward one's own opinion—after having been able to listen to the voices of the students. Only knowing the time and place, students can relax, which is another element of the 'basic attitude' code family. Multi-ethnic Christian education is an example of how the Christian identity can peacefully coexist with other convictions, provided differences are handled well and respect, openness and singularity are really seen as part of the Christian worldview and motivation (meeting 3). Teachers at this kind of school can be role models for Christian trainee teachers, just like they have to be role models for Christian children in a pluriform society (meetings 4 and 7). As a role model or identification figure, it is necessary for students to learn to be vulnerable and to give space to a double-sided pedagogical relation in which the teacher can also learn from the student (meeting 8). From meeting 9, it became clear that the latter can also be said of the relation between experienced teachers and students engaged in teacher training—that is, new and starting teachers could, for some time work, in a master-apprentice relation. According to the same minutes, attentive commitment and authenticity are elements that belong to the basic attitude formation, similar to maintaining the balance between activity and patience, because the formational process needs both time and rest.

### **8.2.4 The voice of espoused theology**

While Section 8.2.2 provided some insights that can be associated with espoused theology, on the co-occurrence of 'basic attitude' and 'espoused theology' there is more to be said. The two codes co-occur thirty-seven times: in the second, fifth, ninth, 10th, 11th, 12th, 14th and 15th meetings. The co-occurrences that belong to the minutes and transcripts of the 11th and 15th meetings will be considered in this sub-section because they formed an integral part of the discussions that originated from the input of formal theology and were included in the analysis presented in Section 8.2.2. This sub-section summarises how the other co-occurrences demonstrate a close connection between the voice of espoused theology, as heard in the conversational community on basic attitude (formation), and the core of Christianity, as described at the end of 8.2.1 as a Christocentric element. The following part of this sub-section elaborates on that topic by focussing on the code word 'mission' to clarify how the conversational community approached this topic. It then focuses on 'WCD' as a separate code to indicate the extent to which these approaches cohere.

In the second meeting, a member of the outsider group advocated for good professionalism with the words 'high-quality education'. She perceived it as 'education based on connection'. Somewhat later in the same meeting, another outsider group member stipulated that it is possible to do the educational job and fulfil educational tasks 'devoid of feeling'. In the fifth meeting, yet another member of the outsider group, when speaking about the kind of teacher that is needed for multi-ethnic Christian schools, stated that it should be people 'with a heart for: I want to mean something for this neighbourhood'. In all three cases, the different participants underlined that the deep motivation for the intended attitude comes directly from the combination of a Christian faith and a highly diverse context:

- PO1 mentioned the person of Jesus: You have to show Jesus' love, and more I need to not do.
- PO2 mentioned the Bible and the telling of Bible stories: I'm just thinking back to my time in teacher training, with lesson preparations. After my Bible story, I always had to think neatly about my application at the end of the story. Well, I wrote it down neatly, but without any feeling, so to speak. But here I really think: Yes, but what is the real application, now, here in this neighbourhood? Then there really is a story, an image.
- PO3 mentioned the heart with the adjective Christian: But at such a time I think you do have to show your Christian face (...) That is why we never had so much trouble in times of teacher shortages. Because within the Christian church there are always people who have this in their heart. And these are often people with a heart for: I want to mean something for this neighbourhood.

In a broader sense, the members and other (invited) participants spoke of 'an attitude of service'. When the 10th meeting very specifically discussed a letter to help sophomores from the teacher training programme to enter multi-ethnic schools for an exploratory internship, the originally used term 'service learning' was criticised. From the outsider group, the advice was to keep the language used accessible to school staff and students. The group indicated that 'it can be used, but it must be clear that it is really about the attitude of service'. One invited participant added after the ninth meeting's deliberations on personhood formation that it would be helpful to include the terms 'responsibility' and 'discernment' in what needs to be said on personhood formation and, especially, attitude formation. A responsible and discerning attitude is meant to be helpful towards others, to be of service, wanting to be there for others. For all of the participants, it seemed to be perfectly clear that this attitude is driven by Christian, Christocentric love.

This partial conclusion receives more colour when the analysis is focused on how the code 'mission' functions in the whole of the minutes and transcripts. As mentioned in previous chapters, this code appears a total of 59 times and plays a major role in each of the main topics selected and considered by the conversational community. It also forms part of the broader code family surrounding 'attitude formation', and it co-occurs no less than 43 times with the code 'espoused theology'. When approaching this co-occurrence specifically through the lens of the formation of a basic attitude in trainee teachers, the following motivational expressions can be noted:

- PO1, meeting 2: Yes, we have freedom for Christian education in our country, not only for one's own social pillar to be allowed to do what suits you, but also, I think, as an opportunity to reach those children with the gospel in whatever way we can.
- PO2, meeting 2: If we have a discussion with the board, such as this weekend, then, yes, that is also mentioned—the wonderful message that we can give to children. So, yes, that is what is behind it.
- PI1, meeting 2: It is perhaps also my belief that I really am there for that child, even though that child thinks very differently from me, and that I really pay attention to how he or she experiences things.
- From the minutes, meeting 3: PI2 summarises that, on the one hand, this arose from the baptismal promise and need for Christian education in a protected atmosphere, while, on the other hand, there has always been the missionary aspect—Christian education wants to be a salting salt<sup>3</sup>).
- A mixed group of regular and invited participants, meeting 6: The vocation of Christian education is to bring children up to their own level.
- From the minutes, meeting 6: St1 sees it as a calling for Christian education to truly see children and aim to achieve their happiness.
- PO3, meeting 14: What right do we have to let the need for protection win out over the mission we have been given?
- From the insider team, meeting 15: Some schools become missionary because they have that desire.

All of the above quotations show how much importance the conversational community's members assigned to a missionary attitude. It is central to their motivation to not dedicate their teaching skills and talents within their own social pillar, as the traditional Christian in-group, but to be active in a

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3 'Salting salt' is a common Dutch reference to Matthew 5:13 where Christ calls upon His disciples to be 'salt of the earth'.

much more diverse context. It can thus be concluded that the same strong preference for Christian education that motivates others to remain in a far more homogeneous context is for them the central motivation to step out of that context, engage with others and share the goods of Christian education with them. These goods pertain not only to the transmission of Christian knowledge and values but also to how good education is considered. In particular, the quotations from meeting 6 point this out. This brings the present analysis to its final step, which involves placing the focus on the very general code 'WCD'. One could question whether this code represents too broad a category<sup>4</sup>. For the moment, however, it is helpful to show the connection the conversational community makes between its espoused theology concerning basic attitude, the identified driving force behind the missional idea in it and education as broad, integrative and even holistic education.

The code 'WCD' has 16 co-occurrences with 'espoused theology' and one with 'basic attitude'. The latter comes directly from the above analysed discussion in the 11th meeting (2.2). It combines the focus on the whole child, not just on his or her cognitive achievements, with the basic attitude of presence, of 'being with' the children. The 16 co-occurrences begin with the statement of one insider group member in the third meeting that 'WCD provides for a more complete perspective' on the education of children than 'the actual teacher training curriculum due to it being too cognitive in approach'. In the same meeting, two more outsider group members declared seeing clear leads in WCD for Christian education, especially when it comes to how the child is seen and approached. During the 16th meeting, one outsider group member, who in the third meeting was still a bit hesitant regarding the coherence between WCD and Christian education, declared experiencing WCD as 'a countermovement that invites us to look at the other side', which means that 'what needs to be corrected is that it feels like a failure if a child does not immediately achieve high cognitive performance'. Another outsider group member added that 'children who do not meet the set of standards do often, in fact, have great achievements that go unnoticed'.

The latter brought the discussion during the 16th meeting round to the earlier analysed shalom idea. This idea asks for a shalom attitude that is, like the term itself, driven by faith-based education. The conclusion of this subsection can be that Christian faith, according to the espoused theology of the participants, motivates stepping outside of the comfort zone of Christian education for only Christians, just to be able to share its internal goods (the

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4 The use of this code has been criticised in the process for possibly being too general.

gospel content but also the approach of the broad formation of the whole child, with a sincere interest in his or her social and cultural background) with others.

### 8.3 CONCRETE ELABORATIONS FOR DCU'S CURRICULUM

If the attitude that best fits the goal of shalom-seeking citizenship for a modern, fragmented society is a Christ-centred and community-based attitude that focuses more on 'being with' than on 'working for' and aims to see the whole child, as determined from the analysis of the conversational community's deliberations on basic attitude formation, then the question that immediately follows is how to shape such an attitude in the teacher training curriculum. This question prompted the conversational community, over the course of its existence and meetings, to engage in several actions with regard to DCU's ongoing curriculum renewal process. In two cases, the previously chosen directions for DCU's curriculum were endorsed, whereas in another two cases new elements were successfully brought into the curriculum renewal process. First, a brief overview of these four interventions will be presented, which will be followed by a more thorough description and explanation of them. The conversational community chose the following:

1. To endorse the choice DCU made, based on its new professional profile, to work on its personhood formation not primarily with measurable outcomes but with ideals.
2. To strongly endorse DCU's decision to work on its personhood formation with small learning communities, splitting classes with 20–25 students into groups of a maximum of 12 students.
3. To include in the new curriculum's third year a social internship that enables students to practice an attitude of presence and service towards society, which will be called a civic internship.
4. To include WCD in the new curriculum as both a concept (in the personhood formation process) and a practice for educational design (as one of the professional duties to be learned).

The professional profile referred to in the first point was presented in Chapter 6.3. Its blue inner circle contains five connections or relationships, which explain that DCU wants students to be connected to themselves, others, the Christian faith, the world and the three-way past-present-future. The question that emerged for the developers of DCU's personhood formation was how to set the goals to be met—that is, via measurable standards or otherwise. One question was how to deal with students who are not willing or able to relate to, for example, the Christian faith, or to do so only in a negative way.



**Being with:**

- God
- the Self
- Others
- the World
- Time

The objective was never to exclude these students or force them to demonstrate a certain hypocrisy to obtain their grades or diploma. Therefore, the choice was made to work with ideals that represent DCU's vision and goals, inviting students to freely reflect on them. This matches the basic attitude identified by the conversational community of not forcing students, but inviting them to live the good life as promoted by the Christian faith and a Biblical focus. Working with ideals places the teacher

not in a position of power but in a position of guidance, where the teacher functions as an example of his or her own ideals.

One of these ideals is connectedness to others, to 'those around' the Christian teacher. With regard to this connection, DCU formulated in its professional profile: 'Our ideals require the teacher to be concerned about and subservient to the students and their parents or guardians on the basis of the commandment of love' (Driestar hogeschool, 2020, p. 4). What stands out in this formulation is the direct connection it makes with one of the core elements of the Christian faith—namely, the great commandment to love the neighbour—and that, according to DCU's ideals, an attitude of service belongs to it. To practice this attitude from the start of teacher training, DCU decided to work on its personhood education process with small learning communities. In these communities, students learn to put their individual talents into service to learn with and from each other. A permanent supervisor is always present to guide each small group and pay clear attention to the needs of every student. Relationship and community building are crucial elements of a learning community's existence. It appeals to students to perceive both their studies and their jobs (e.g. internships) as not just an individual but also a joint responsibility. At the same time, they learn the importance of the feeling of just being one more student but really being seen and really seeing each other.

The learning communities function as the mini-society that the conversational community promoted and perceived as exemplary for classes in primary schools. In its seventh meeting, the conversational community concluded that 'these learning communities provide a good place for working together to articulate and internalise the Christian faith'. This conclusion was repeated in the 10th meeting. It was especially connected by several insider group members to the pedagogical need to delay, interrupt and support the educational process to enable the personal growth of the individual student and the group. This three-way approach was found within the overarching WCD project and brought into the conversational community and the TAR

process, where its importance was recognised and its value emphasised. In its personhood formation, since the curriculum renewal, DCU worked in these small learning communities with permanent supervisors, joint and individual tasks to complete, free space for being together and helping each other with different types of peer reviews, and masterclasses to feed the process with insights intended to open up new perspectives. Several outsider group members participated in these masterclasses and in the training of the learning communities' supervisors, after which they expressed enthusiasm in the conversational community (meetings 11, 12 and 17).

To strengthen an attitude of broader presence in and service to a modern, fragmented society, the conversational community collaborated with an initiative of TIP to enrich DCU's curriculum with a new social internship. The idea behind this internship is for students to learn not just to be focused on an educational job but also to, in a broader sense, contribute to society. At the intercession of the conversational community, this idea was not only adopted by DCU's management but also renamed a civic internship and connected to (world) citizenship and the shalom idea. It was, therefore, situated within the third-year curriculum in connection to the shalom title 'Shalom in action'. In the 15th meeting, the outsider group, after a separate session, advised specifying its central aims as 'to gain insight into opportunities/diversity (in addition to or instead of problems) in society and to promote personal formation and growth—clarify exactly what you mean, for example, broadening one's social outlook'. It asked DCU to not set the goals too high, but to stimulate students to just be present in other parts of society and to be open to their demands. This recommendation was adopted by DCU and incorporated into a citizenship internship of approximately 50 hours for each student.

The final concrete elaboration for DCU's curriculum in order to foster a basic attitude of presence and service was paying explicit attention to WCD as a concept and a leading principle from the practice of designing lessons and education in general. At this point, the insider group was leading, feeding DCU's developers with ideas. It did so with the explicit support of the outsider group, to teach students to be critical about what the education system asks of them, to be true to their initial motivation to opt for a job as a teacher in primary education and to never lose sight of the pedagogical mission, which means developing a certain toughness to not give up on the central task of inviting children to be in the world. The crucial elements for such an attitude were shared, especially in the sixth, 14th and 16th meetings. The insider group managed to have WCD included as leading principle in a broad module, also delivered in the third year, on educational design. In this module, students

work together to design rich education that relates several subjects and shows students how they are connected.

## 8.4 CONCLUSION

The central question that the conversational community asked itself with regard to the analysis presented in this chapter was as follows: What attitude fits shalom-seeking citizenship formation for a modern, fragmented society? Based on the analysis in Section 2, the answer to this question needs to contain the following elements, as they formed a constituent part of the theological voices heard during the conversational community's meetings: Christ-centred, community-based, child-oriented and subservient towards society. They all refer to a predisposition focused on presence—'being with' is the ideal, although 'working with' and 'working for' can be necessary steps, especially during the pedagogical process. A certain thoroughness has to form part of the student's character, ensuring he or she will be loyal to the initial motive for primary education to work with children rather than just functioning as a part of an education system with its own, sometimes dehumanised, requirements. Students need to learn the pedagogical importance of *being*—in the sense of delaying, interrupting and supporting the process in the child's best interests.

In an exemplary way, students need to learn and practice this attitude from the very start of their studies and throughout their years of teacher training. They have to meditate on its connectedness to the Christian faith and the command to love one's neighbours. A good context in which to do so is provided by the small learning communities that DCU opted for in relation to its personhood formation. In these learning communities, students learn not just to study for themselves but also to be present and collaborate with others. The learning communities also provide space for personal attention and the feeling of being seen by others. The presence of a permanent supervisor or guide is, in this sense, exemplary of the presence of teachers in their primary school classrooms—seeing the child, being attentive to his or her needs and to what he or she can contribute, inviting the child to fully participate in the community of the mini-society the school needs to be.

To foster an attitude of idealistic presence and service, a special civic internship with a broader focus than the common educational internship would be helpful. Another element that is believed by the conversational community to create space for a subservient and self-aware presence in the world and in society is knowledge and experience of WCD as a concept and a practice. Notwithstanding, the conversational community considered it fundamental

that students relate their attitude to the Christian mission as a deep motivation to be and act in such a way. A in the teacher training consciously awakened longing for wholeness, directly associated with God's global kingdom and with the notion of heavenly citizenship, needs to fuel this deep motivation permanently.





# Chapter 9

## Theology of Disclosure for Christian Citizenship Formation

'As Christians we can live in every culture, because we have lived in every culture.'

*W. Robert Godfrey, Reformed Christianity. A Survey of Church History (podcast, 16-11-2023)*

'The Law teaches that justice and rectitude are a delight, injustice an abomination to Him, and therefore as we would not with impious ingratitude revolt from our Maker, our whole life must be spent in the cultivation of righteousness.'

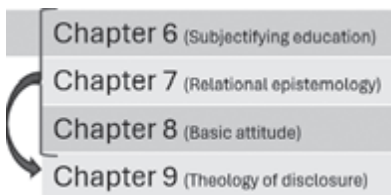
*John Calvin, Institutes, Book 2 Chapter 8.2 (1559/2008)*

**T**AR offers more than just an analysis of four different theological voices brought together through (ongoing) conversation. As explained in Chapter 4.1, it both discloses theology and has the potential to transform theology. This occurs when an adequate understanding of the four voices leads to authentic new practical-theological insights that, in the end, can be transformative for operant, espoused and formal theology, as well as for the interpretation of normative theology. The new theological insights for an ever-changing sociocultural reality that surface through the fruitful meeting of the four theological voices can be termed a theology of disclosure. This chapter, which is the last chapter of the practical-empirical part of this study (Chapters 4–9), presents the conversational community’s theology of disclosure. It precedes my own conclusion to the entire study, which will be presented in Chapter 10.

To adequately present the conversational community’s theology of disclosure, the process that led to its establishment will first be explained (Section 1). Afterwards, the actual theology of disclosure, as established by the conversational community, will be presented without further explanation or interruption (Section 2). A brief personal reflection by me on the joint theological insight of the conversational community will wrap up this chapter (Section 3). Because Section 2 can be read as the conversational community’s conclusion to its deliberations, there will be no separate conclusion to this chapter. Indeed, as this chapter focuses on theological insights, the conclusions pertaining to the practical elaborations for DCU’s curriculum will be left for Chapter 10.

## 9.1 PROCESS TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF DISCLOSURE

As described in Chapter 4.5 and at the start of Chapter 6, the conversational community distinguished three main themes that it had discussed or wanted to discuss—in some cases—more deeply. During the process of thematic coding, these three themes functioned as lenses for viewing the central question concerning the citizenship formation of Christian trainee teachers. After having analysed the theological conversations about these three themes, Chapters 6, 7 and 8 were written, each of them separately presenting the voices of operant,



espoused, formal and normative theology on these themes, before bringing them together in each chapter’s conclusions. During this process, the minutes and transcripts of the first 18 meetings supplied the necessary data. The 19th meeting of



the conversational community, which was scheduled for 12 March 2024, was prepared to discuss the joint theology of disclosure. The central aim of this meeting was to check if what was found and presented by the main researcher matched the memories, knowledge and experiences of the participants.

A draft text of a theology of disclosure was sent by me, as the main researcher, to all of the participants a month before the meeting was scheduled to take place. They were asked to read the text closely and respond, individually, to five questions—and to bring their answers to the 19th meeting. The questions were as follows:

1. Is the entirety of this theological insight recognisable to you from the meetings?
2. What do you recognise very strongly from the meetings we have had?
3. What do you not recognise from the meetings we have had?
4. What should be emphasised more strongly?
5. What should be phrased differently?

The 19th meeting was opened, as usual, with a short devotion by a member of the outsider group. Inspired by the draft text, she chose to read Matthew 9: 35–38. In her personal explanation, she pointed to Jesus' compassion, as shown in verse 36. Jesus did not shut Himself off from the needs of the people but was passionate with them. That is what compassion means. The devotion leader saw a connection with one of the pillars of citizenship education—namely, solidarity. It is compassion or solidarity that produces social cohesion and counteracts social fragmentation. It all starts with seeing. Jesus saw the multitudes and was moved with compassion for them.

After the devotion, the nine participants were split into three groups to discuss their findings concerning the above-mentioned questions. In each group, both the insider and outsider teams were represented. After this group session, a plenary session followed (and was recorded with unanimous consent). In this plenary session, each group reflected on each of the five questions. To the first question, all of the groups responded positively. Elements from the draft text that were explicitly recognised included the following: the attitude of service, learning to connect, the shalom idea, the relational epistemology, the need to respond to fragmentation and individualism with cohesion, and the challenge of high ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. In addition to these elements, in response to question two, the following were strongly recognised: the feeling that differences are to be welcomed at school, the idea that good practices with diversity provide formative moments for students, the necessity of students stepping outside of their comfort zones to make this happen,

faithfulness and openness being crucial elements that belong to the Christian identity, the idea that Christian teachers should be able to distinguish between the core of their faith and side issues, and the idea that students need to learn that confessing the truth differs from truth holding *per se*.

In response to question three, some elements were identified in the draft text that were not clearly mentioned in the earlier meetings of the conversational community, instead being the product of the broader study. It was decided that the following should be erased from the draft text: the explicit reference to culturally responsive teaching (although the idea itself remained part of the text) and the explicit reference to animistic religions. A critical remark regarding the lacking of a strong social justice approach in certain Christian schools led to a more mild and general (and less offensive) proposal. One group suggested clarifying in the text that its content is mainly aimed at (trainee) teachers because, in some contexts and in the early phases of child development, a more protective approach may be necessary. In fact, a more protective approach had been part of the conversational community's discussions. Responding to question four, the conversational community proposed placing the shalom idea not only at the end but also at the start, and using less complicated terminology (jargon) in the text where possible. The conversational community also chose to add a very short explication of what the text means practically with the delaying, interrupting and supporting triad. Finally, the fifth question led to some small, more detailed technical proposals to clarify the draft text.

After the 19th meeting, the draft text was modified and sent to all of the participants. They all responded positively to the changed text. Thus, the text could be established as the theology of disclosure recognised and authorised by the conversational community after almost three years of ongoing conversation about the citizenship formation of Christian trainee teachers. The final text will be presented in Section 2. This will be done, as previously mentioned, without further explication or interruption.

## 9.2 THEOLOGY OF DISCLOSURE – THE FINAL TEXT

‘The Biblical concept of shalom (peace, wholeness) inspires, especially today, the formation of trainee teachers for Christian citizenship. It points out that human beings are created relationally and can only achieve true meaning and flourishing in connection with others. This is also true when the people who surround us differ from us culturally, ethnically and/or religiously. In our time and context of great diversity, complexity, polarisation, exclusion and

fragmentation, shalom demands that we seek connection in the field of education as well. It is, therefore, of great importance that trainee teachers learn not to turn their backs on society, but to be there for others—and to be exemplary for their students in doing so. They can achieve the latter by inviting every student to contribute to the greater whole through their own uniqueness and talents. This starts small and slowly grows. By constantly inviting students to belong to the group and the community, teachers work purposefully to foster a sense of belonging in their students.

Zooming out, then, we are talking about nothing less than a sense of belonging concerning the whole world. We see it as a large, coherent whole (ecosystem) that is God’s originally good creation. This has the characteristics of both a preordained good (moral) order and a degree of brokenness due to sin and injustice. Respect for creation, as well as for God’s order, laws and provisions, is indispensable in counteracting fragmentation and promoting true coherence. This very thing gives meaning to life and, therefore, cannot be missed. We find adherence to this spiritual, religious element of education to be of fundamental importance. We recognise this awareness in other cultures, sometimes also stamped by other world religions. We miss it quite often in the modern West, where we signal that people (and, therefore, students) are regularly thrown back on themselves. This process of individualisation is fuelled by secularisation and a conception of school and education strongly focused on (economic) performance.

The premise that living together begins with seeking connection is, on the one hand, a critique of the way in which the public debate on citizenship is conducted and of the rules that flow from it. Treating the key citizenship themes linked to measurable objectives as an addition to existing curricula is an approach that fails to address the deeper problem of social and societal fragmentation. Proposals to push religion back into the private sphere are counterproductive. On the other hand, this premise also includes a critique of religious schools that turn away from the broader whole of society and focus solely on their own grouping and/or faith education. While it is necessary for Christian schools to follow their own pedagogical course, unilateral opposition to other groups encourages further fragmentation. The existing problems in education and society are thus magnified. This does not contribute to the goal of Christian education of preparing students to serve in society.

From the above, it becomes clear why both *faithfulness* and *openness* substantially belong to the vocation of Christian education. Indeed, they come together where the sense of belonging is central—a person comes to the destiny of being human in connection with God, creation, other people and

the self. A pluralistic, fragmented society makes it clear that Christian teachers in particular must have (or cultivate) the courage to step outside their comfort zone to meet others. The two great commandments of the Bible deserve to be central in a time characterised by super-diversity and super-complexity. They have everything to do with each other—that is, to love God above all else implies loving one's neighbour as oneself. At this point, religion has something to contribute to citizenship education. This is certainly true of faith in Christ. While this calls for a distinctive way of life (through love of God), it also urges us to follow Jesus in His love for fellow human beings and the world.

God's involvement in the world and, especially, Christ's presence in the world call for reconciliation with God, restoration of relationships and a **servant attitude**. These three elements form the heart of the Christian faith identity and demonstrate that broad citizenship education begins with the cultivation of a basic attitude of service. In terms of this attitude, 'being' has a more central place than 'doing'. The 'doing' (e.g. working for, working with students) is all about relationships—being able to 'be' in the world with each other, being connected to each other. Students learn to cooperate and live together despite and also because of their differences (e.g. ethnic, cultural, social, political, sexual, religious). Education is not merely intended to serve the economy or the labour market and, therefore, success in this regard cannot be determined solely based on scores and measurable results. In a classic sense, schools serve family and society. In a time of great diversity and fragmentation, when the socialising effect of social groups, churches and society as a whole has diminished, the classic function of the school as a mini-society should again strongly come to the fore.

Pedagogically and educationally, this means that teachers must recognise the importance of community building. In the broad personality formation of students in particular, it must become clear that preparing for education is not an individualistic event through which you, as a student, move as effectively and efficiently as possible towards gaining a diploma. Experiencing education as a vocation or assignment does not allow for such an approach. As man is a relational being in need of the other, teaching should be exemplary when it comes to practicing the central commandment of love. Pedagogically, this means seeing others truly, valuing fellow students in their uniqueness, inviting them to belong to the group (the mini-society), helping them to be there for others themselves, and realising that their own personhood is also served by it. Where educational processes and systems urge rapid ongoing action to achieve new goals each time, this requires a basic attitude of slowing down, interrupting and supporting—slowing down learning processes to come to each

other and take each other with them, daring to interrupt the tight schedule and supporting the learner in getting a grip on what is happening and growing as a person in it.

In the mini-society of the classroom, each child has something to contribute from their person. It is important that teachers do not ignore this; rather, they should notice and make use of it. This requires Christian teachers to take an exciting and, therefore, courageous step. They have to learn that allowing (a high degree of) diversity does not have to represent a threat. From a strong reliance on the socialising effect of one's own, homogeneous circle, this fear is historically understandable, but it does not have to be so theologically. Openness and faithfulness belong together Biblically, and this becomes possible when Christian teachers learn to interpret and approach their work spiritually. Not by force or violence, but only by God's Spirit will the Christian message and way of life have recruiting power. Very importantly, Christian teachers must realise that they do not hold the truth within themselves. Regarding truth as a system of conceptions of reality that should be guarded and defended tooth and nail by Christian teachers is a modern rather than a classical Christian approach. In fact, the classical Christian stance involves confessing truth as a person and recognising that human knowing will always be partial and have more to learn.

All this leads us to embrace a **thoughtful epistemology** (doctrine of knowing) that is neither modern nor enlightened; rather, it is relational. For knowing, man needs others and, ultimately, God. God reveals Himself, as the Belgic Confession elucidates in the first two articles based on the Bible, in nature (cosmos) and in Christ (unto salvation). This confession indicates that people never have a monopoly on truth and can always learn from each other, no matter how contrary their views may be. As people of other faiths and beliefs also think carefully about the cosmos and the meaning of existence, the supernatural and what their deity asks of people, it is good to have the conversation with dissenters and to let older elementary school students bring their questions and insights into the classroom. That redemption and salvation really belong to Christ as the Truth in Biblical terms encourages teachers to specify in this conversation (pedagogically) what is peculiar to the Christian faith. Doing so is entirely legitimate in the context of a Christian school and the constitutional freedom of education in the Netherlands. In this way, it is necessary for teachers to know how to distinguish between things that concern the core of the Christian faith and are, therefore, unnegotiable, and things that are good and useful in themselves but cannot or need not be required in every situation.

From 'being' with others, the Christian teacher must also 'do' something. Living together and cooperating is only possible when injustice cannot run rampant openly or under the surface. In addition, in this respect, the teacher must learn to interrupt and support where necessary. All forms of exclusion, which can be seen as deliberate fragmentation, must be denounced. Biblically, this is closely related to the call for justice. Where justice is not done to individuals or groups, no sense of belonging can emerge. When things occur in a Christian school that lead to children or groups being deliberately marginalised or excluded, Christian teachers have to act against such things, to stop injustice and sin. Sin is everything that goes against God's law, further breaking down relationships and deepening the gaps between people, fellow human beings, creation and God. Sin prevents people from being truly human and achieving the purpose of being human. Social justice must be practiced in the whole of a socially safe classroom and the school as a mini-society, in attitudes towards people outside the school and in dealing with creation as a whole.

This poses major questions for the Christian school. Where good, substantive reasons are found to adopt a closed admissions policy, the school will have to ask itself very consciously how it teaches students to deal respectfully with the large and highly diverse non-Christian majority in the country and how it shapes its responsibility towards a pluralistic and fragmented society. Likewise, adherence to the Bible and the preordained moral order, especially in developments that have led to the establishment of different norms and values in the whole of society, should be performed with care. At these points, tension can be experienced between *faithfulness* and *openness*. In such tension, it is important to ensure that one's own contribution to the social and public debate is based on the conviction that the given moral order, which from a Christian perspective has everything to do with God's Word and law, is good for the whole of society and that its denial will be disruptive.

All of these elements, which belong to broad Christian citizenship education for a modern, fragmented society, can be subsumed within the **subjectifying shalom idea** articulated for higher education by Nicholas Wolterstorff. Christian teachers today must be trained for shalom, which means learning to be agents of shalom. This refers to the Biblical concept of shalom, which stands for wholeness, restoration of relationships, connectedness and peace. The shalom idea fits well with the many calls in the Bible for peaceful coexistence with others and for neighbourly love. Moreover, the shalom idea offers a direction for dealing with differences between students and with students who sometimes feel left out. At the same time, it also gives shape to

the more distant goal of the educational mission—to contribute to peace and justice in society. In becoming acquainted with the shalom idea, it is important for Christian teachers to realise that this peace and justice have everything to do with each other and that they begin, at their deepest levels, with the righteousness and peace of Christ, which reconciles man with God and, from there, with others.

Western European and North American societies cannot be described as homogeneously Christian anymore, not even a little. This can lead to a feeling of alienation or an experience of loss or threat among Christians. It is important to take this feeling (among students and the families from which they come) seriously but also to realise that the survival of the Christian church and Christian education does not depend on the human ability to hold on to what is left of the structures from the history of Christianity. In addition, in countries and cultures outside of Christian Europe, Christian communities have had recruiting power precisely because of their citizenship attitudes stamped by the love of God and neighbour. A fragmented society needs this. This citizenship does not imply an escape from the world; rather, it places both feet on the ground of society in order to be present in it, out of communion with and desire for heavenly justice. It does so not as a political ideology but as a form of service in a broken world. Christian teachers may live and transmit this attitude to their students through their teaching practice.'

### 9.3 A PERSONAL NOTE

As the main researcher, I inevitably had an influence on both the process and the outcome of the TAR that was presented in the previous chapters. In the members of the conversational community, however, I found the strength, the willingness and the experience to correct my personal influences where necessary, to achieve a really shared process. During this process, over time, we found a joint language and vision. The ongoing conversation among our operant, espoused, formal and normative theological voices led to a theology of disclosure that reflects not only my own, personally gained new theological insight but also an insight that, over time, emerged from our deliberations, was analysed by me and, finally, was phrased into the text above in close coordination with the whole conversational community. This renders the text our text, which is based on our joint experiences and findings. In the conversational community's last meeting all participants, both from the insider and from the outsider group, evaluated the TAR process we went through

together as enriching for our professional formation as Christian teachers and teacher trainers.

The theology of disclosure presented in Section 2 is not a completely new theology. As indicated in the discussion at the end of Chapter 4.1, a really new theology was neither expected nor—from a Reformed Christian perspective—possible. In loyalty to both normative and formal theology (with the latter including the tradition of the church), however, new theological insights were developed to connect theology as we know it to new sociocultural circumstances. In our time and age, we witness and experience a diversity and complexity that, at the least in relation to the recent process of globalisation, is unprecedented. Analysing this new sociocultural reality with intentional openness and relating it to the Christian identity with intentional faithfulness, we developed insights that urged themselves on us as representatives of the (Reformed-)Christian faith community. Where it was (and is) our concern to prepare trainee teachers for Christian citizenship in a modern, fragmented society, we observed the need for a less cognitive and more relational epistemology, a less protective and more vulnerably serving attitude, and a less self-defensive and more justice-oriented behaviour on the part of, especially, Reformed Christians in Dutch society.

As is clear from Section 1, the members of the conversational community were somewhat hesitant to criticise their more protective and sometimes antithetic colleagues and schools with (especially) closed admissions policies. I consider it a good thing that they caused me to bring more nuances into the text, for example, with regard to the legitimacy of protecting young children from confusion or the legitimacy of a more antithetical stand in life. This reflects the conversational community's deliberations and does justice to the diversity within the Reformed Christian group. However, having added the necessary nuances, the need for the faith community to mirror itself in terms of the above-mentioned topics is firmly indicated. The shared theological insights gained by the conversational community call upon the broader faith community behind Reformed Christian education to determine whether we are doing things right with respect to sociocultural reality in the 21st century.

After having emphasised this, I want to add just one more personal theological note. As the elements of the text presented above started to emerge from the conversational community's deliberations, my personal vision of wholeness began to connect to my theological vision of God's law. God's 'law' appears three times in the text of the theology of disclosure and its meaning is, at least in two of those appearances, much broader than a reference to a certain set of norms or rules. It refers to the whole of God's teaching and the



order it establishes. This is the pre-given order that presents the good life—life as it has to be lived to really flourish in the blessing of God the Creator. To experiment for myself as a teacher trainer with this idea of wholeness as related to the whole of creation, which I learned to see more sharply in the conversational community, halfway through the research project I wrote a Bible study on Psalm 119. In this booklet, which was published under the title *Hoe lief heb ik Uw wet* (van Olst, 2022a), I approached the psalm as a work of art that could be directly connected to actual Christian citizenship in a diverse world.

The interesting thing about the psalm is that it uses a variety of words for law that, in the end, are all connected to the Hebrew word ‘Torah’, which has a much broader connotation than the English word ‘law’ and refers to the whole of Biblical teaching. The cover text of the book, which I was able to study with several student groups and youth groups, reads:

How do you live today, in a secular society, as a Bible-believing Christian? And how do you contribute to good citizenship from there? From an awesome love of God’s Law, Psalm 119 points the way. The psalm is a work of art that wants to take you with it to walk God’s way through life with steady steps. The Bible studies, written to accompany each of the 22 stanzas of the psalm, are contemporary and accessible to young and old, Christians and non-Christians. They aim to promote conversation about living a good and serviceable life. They are therefore suitable for personal use, Bible circles and for Christian citizenship education. (van Olst, 2022a)

My experience over the last year and a half, in terms of young Christians studying this Biblical text in relation to their own standpoint in life and society, is that a more broad and, therefore, positive approach on the part of the law helps them to understand the above-mentioned combination of faithfulness and openness within a servant attitude. Enabling them to approach the law as the whole of Biblical teaching, including both the morality for the good life and the promise of grace to live it, somehow frees them of the, as described in Chapter 7, cramp of modernist truth holding and defending. It teaches them a way of serving in society without immediately feeling threatened by its cultural, ethnic, directional or religious diversity. The whole of the Torah is not lurking around them to punish them for not being completely faithful; rather, it shows them how grace makes it possible to be both faithful and open.

This, for me, new insight does not in any way remove or alienate me or other Reformed Christians from their faith tradition; instead, it reconnects us all with the insights of its founder, John Calvin. As is clear from his quotation at the start of this chapter, in his *Institutes* (Calvin, 1559/2008) he treats God’s

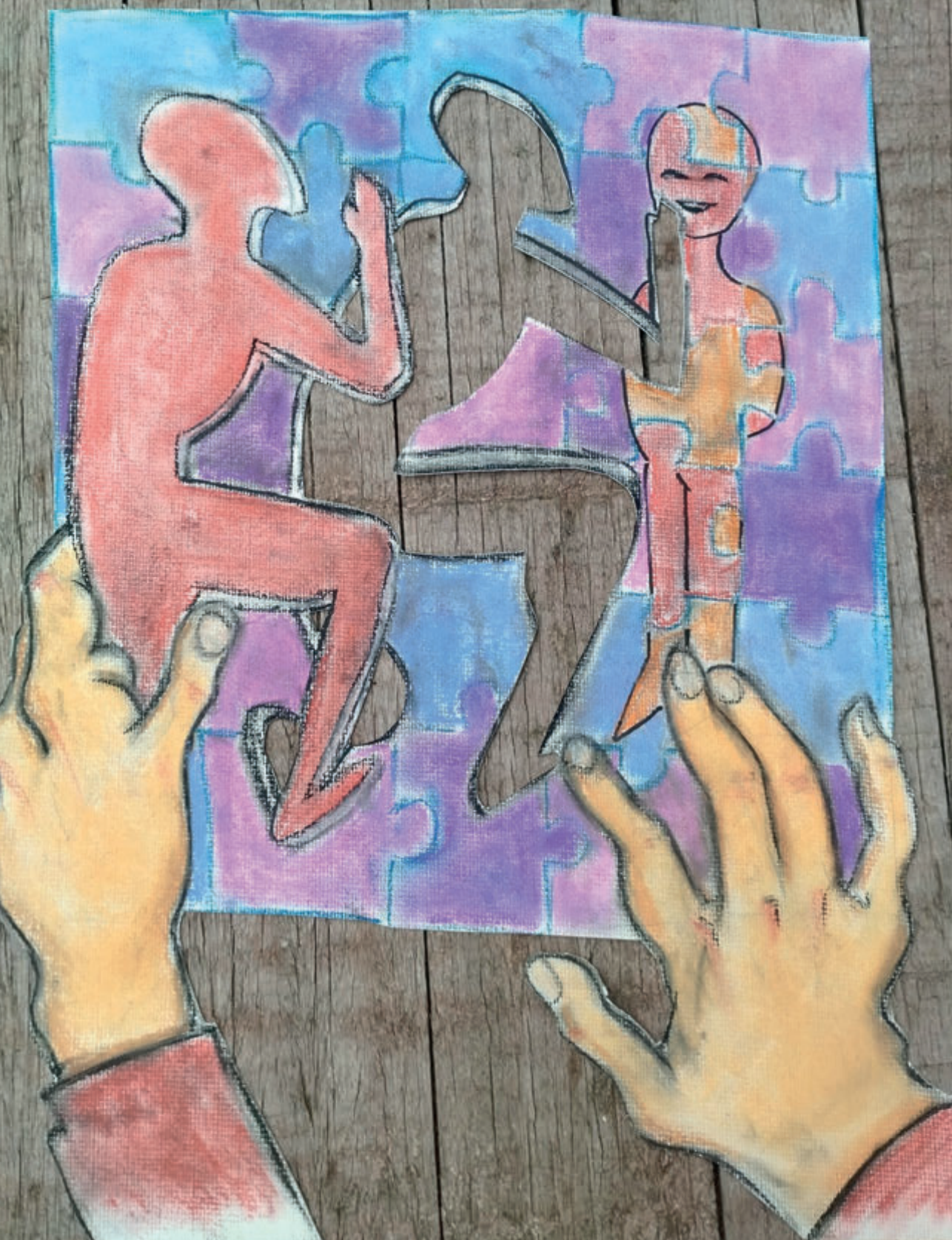
moral law likewise. In Book 2 Chapter 8.2, Calvin (2008) completes the quoted thought: 'As He (God) can only require what is right, we are necessarily under a natural obligation to obey. Our inability to do so is our own fault'. In Chapter 9.4, he elaborates on the relation between the law and the gospel, stating that 'the gospel has not succeeded the whole Law in such a sense as to introduce a different method of salvation. It rather confirms the Law, and proves that every thing which it promised is fulfilled' (Calvin, 2008). This brings Calvin (2008) to directly refer in the same paragraph to Christ and His spiritual Kingdom on Earth: 'By His advent the Kingdom of heaven was erected on the earth (Matt. 12:28)'. It also brings me to validate God's moral law as the whole of Biblical teaching aimed at bringing people to Christ to be renewed for the Christian *politeuma* in a fragmented world.

This is, I believe, what Aalders (1977) meant when he warned Christian schools for the dangers of sterile sectarianism, on the one hand, and featureless worldliness, on the other (p. 226; see Section 1 of the introduction). According to Aalders, today's descendants of the Reformation have 'not sufficiently recognized' that 'the great teachers of the Church, the Church Fathers and Reformers, were not only concerned with faith and salvation, but also with culture; not only with the Gospel, but also with the Law; not only with the Kingdom of God, but also with Creation' (Aalders, 1977, p. 223) (1). As a result, Christian education in the Netherlands developed too little connecting power and Christianizing effect, and 'fell short of the high expectations that Groen [van Prinsterer] set in her' (p. 223). In order for the Christian school to truly be a cultural forum (*cultuurgestalte*), stated Aalders (1977), 'chosen and gifted teacher-educators are needed who prepare the teachers pedagogically for their striking ministry and who, taught by Church Fathers and Reformers, dig up the building blocks for it from Scripture and Confession' (p. 223). So far, Aalders argued, this has been lacking: 'Where are the teachers of the teachers?' (p. 223). The hope of this study is that it is not too late for that.

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1 Translation of quotations from Aalders (1977) is mine.





# Chapter 10

## Conclusion and Discussion

‘When I look back at the 10 years I have been your king, this has been the constant factor: people who, based on their personal ideals or convictions, dedicate themselves to bridging divisions and contributing something positive to society. They make the future habitable.’

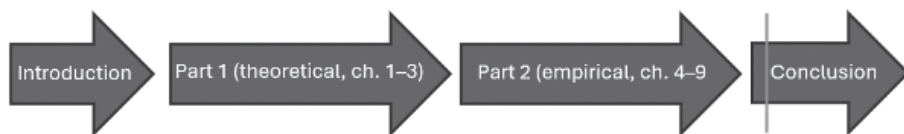
*King Willem-Alexander of Orange, Christmas address to the Dutch people, 2023*

‘Bringing people together is what I call “ubuntu”, which means “I am because we are”. Far too often people think of themselves as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.’

*Archbishop Desmond Tutu, ascribed to him, 1999*

This dissertation's central topic has been the formation of Christian trainee teachers concerning citizenship and citizenship education in the context of a modern, fragmented society. The layered problem of fragmentation, as described in Chapter 1, demands an approach that can be characterised as broad, connecting and aiming at a sense of belonging. Therefore, the central research question asked how a holistic approach to education could reinforce Christian citizenship formation. With citizenship defined as 'the art of living together respecting fundamental differences in culture, ethnicity and basic life conceptions' (based on Prideaux, 1940) and citizenship education as 'the art of creating social cohesion by inviting students to connect; to each other, the community, society and the world; and to flourish within these connections' (as I did in the introduction), the central quest was for core components for citizenship formation that, within teacher training, would fit holistically together in a practice-theory.

This final chapter presents that practice-theory, as based on the findings of both the theoretical chapters (1–3) and the empirical research conducted at DCU as a case study (chapters 4–9). Both parts belong together, were simultaneously elaborated and are the fruit of a constant back-and-forth movement between theory and practice, between vision, intentions, design and practice—as the lemniscate presented in the introduction phrased it. They led to the identification of three core components that fit together holistically and provide an educational answer to the problem of fragmentation (Section 1, based directly on the theology of disclosure presented in Chapter 9). They also led to a number of practical applications that proved to be effective in DCU's curriculum (Section 2). Together these sections form the conclusion, which leads to a discussion that also consists of two parts—namely, a discussion of the methodology used (Section 3) and of directions for future research (Section 4).



## 10.1 CORE COMPONENTS: A PRACTICE-THEORY

The world we live in is a fractured world. This has been the case, as I argued in Chapter 1, since the introduction of sin to God’s originally good and whole creation. In our late-modern times, however, we witness an increase in it, which is aptly characterised by Alasdair MacIntyre’s (2007) predicate of modernity as *fragmented*. As a result of rapid changes in both the natural and the social worlds (the Great Acceleration and Great Transformation), we now face high societal diversity and complexity (super-diversity and super-complexity). In this study, I investigated how to handle these developments, not considering them as threats but as interrelated challenges that call for a broad, coherent educational response. From a Christian perspective, this implies a holistic Christian response that does justice to the stratified problem of fragmentation. *Christian*, because the study proved that religion, for both the participants in the TAR and the broad DCU student population, forms the deepest motivation to be in education and to connect to the world. *Holistic*, because any intention to foster social cohesion without taking into account wholeness or the whole is bound to fail—because it only addresses a part of the problem, sometimes at the cost of another part.

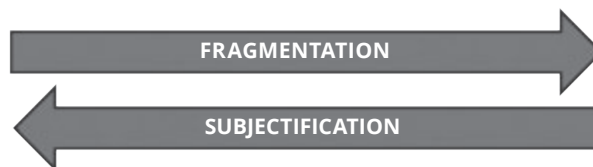
This leads to an answer to the first sub-question as formulated in the introduction (Section 3) to this dissertation: *What are the challenges of a fragmented society that confront Christian citizenship formation on both the intrapersonal and interpersonal (social and cultural) levels?* To phrase this answer, I will return to Chapter 1, where I illustrated the layered problem of fragmentation with this conceptual scheme:

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### Conceptual scheme of fragmentation and subjectification

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<i>Level</i>	<i>Structure</i>	<i>Threat-Outcome</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Direction to take</i>
Macro: World	Ordered framework	Disintegration-alienation	Communicating frameworks	Relational epistemology
Meso: Society	Peaceful coexistence	Atomisation-detachment	Healing civic allegiances	Heavenly politeuma
Micro: Person	Relational flourishing	Alienation-atomisation	(Re)connecting persons	Personhood as communion






The challenges of a fragmented world and society for (Christian) citizenship formation present themselves on the macro-level of the world in the form of a disintegration of a dominant ordered framework into a multitude of differing frameworks, which causes alienation between persons and—through a loss of sense of purpose—from the self as well. On the meso-level of society the same trend leads to atomisation, which is a radical individualisation, through a process of detachment between different persons and social groups that, in the end, threatens peaceful coexistence. On the micro-level of the person, fragmentation presents itself in the form of—again—atomisation and alienation of others and the self that hinder the (relational) flourishing of the person. What the conceptual scheme shows is that attempts to increase social cohesion and foster the art of living together should simultaneously aim at (re) connecting persons (micro-level), at healing civic allegiances (meso-level) and at (facilitating) communication between different frameworks (macro-level).

The second sub-question formulated in the introduction asked: *How can WCD, approached from the perspective of Christian anthropology, be used to enrich the citizenship formation of trainee teachers?* The (w)holistic approach of WCD, as studied in Chapter 2, represents a clear and relatively new attempt to integrate the abovementioned level in a pedagogical intent to connect the whole child to itself, to others and to the world. However, when assessed from the perspective of Biblical Christian anthropology, pedagogy and theology, WCD needs to be enriched with a clear spiritual teleology, connecting its (w)holistic approach to the Christian view of life and sense of meaning. Chapter 3 clarified that this teleology should be connected to stronger attention paid to the heart as the transcendental root entity of the human being *coram Deo* and, therefore, of the Christian cosmivision. By adding these insights to the WCD approach, the necessary space is created for especially the first two of the three theological elements found at the end of Chapter 1, which aligned with what is necessary on the different levels of fragmentation—namely, to foster *personhood as communion* (micro-level), *heavenly citizenship* that inspires earthly civic allegiances (meso-level) and a *relational epistemology* instead of a modern one (macro-level).

Approached from the perspective of Christian anthropology, WCD can be endorsed as a means to correct reductionism and fragmentation as it shows itself both in secular and in Christian education. Nevertheless, WCD needs a clearer spiritual and theological focus to invite the student not only to connect to the self, the other and the world, but to do so first and for all in God, taking into account the theological nature of these connections in Him. Christian anthropology needs to abide by Prideaux' (1940) claim presented at the start



of this dissertation, namely, that God as ‘the originator of the whole process of life’ (Prideaux, 1940, p. 203) cannot be left out of (holistic) citizenship education. It is, in the end, God who invites the student to be a self in the world. The need for subjectification, as found in Chapter 1 and represented in the conceptual scheme, stands in a direct relation to God’s command to honour Him and love one another. Intentional pedagogical action by the Christian teacher, therefore, is on behalf of God primarily aimed at the student’s heart—intrapersonally—and, from there, at inviting the student to connect—interpersonally—with others and the world, to serve God through all these connections. The Christian telos or ideal behind such an approach can be described as shalom-seeking citizenship (Chapter 3.3).

	KNOWLEDGE COGNITION (KENNIS) FRAMEWORKS	EPISTEMOLOGICAL FORMATION
	CHARACTER PREDISPOSITION (KARAKTER) OTHERNESS	ATTITUDE FORMATION
	ABILITY PRACTICES (KUNDE) SOCIAL JUSTICE	SUBJECTIFYING EDUCATION

The third sub-question—*How can future teachers in Christian schools be holistically trained to holistically form children in a fragmented society?*—moved the study from its theoretical to its empirical part. Three key elements were identified in it. Over time, as a result of the adopted TAR methodology, the theoretical and empirical insights started to approximate each other and to match (see Appendix 5 for a visualisation of that process). In TAR terminology, the voice of formal theology—including insights from Biblical anthropology and Christian pedagogy—started to merge with the voices of operant, espoused and normative theology. The approach that emerged from this was one aimed at the heart—to appeal to a basic attitude of presence and service in society—but simultaneously at the head—to enable communication between different frameworks through a relational epistemology—and at the hands—to foster social justice practices through the practice of subjectifying education. In Chapter 8, this led to a table in which the levels of the head,

heart and hands align with what are seen as necessary directions to take on the macro-, meso- and micro-level of the fragmentation scheme. The three terms in the third column can be identified as the core components for the holistic Christian citizenship formation this study aimed to achieve. They accord with the three key elements of the conversational community's theology of disclosure presented in Section 2 of Chapter 9: a servant attitude, a thoughtful epistemology and the subjectifying shalom idea.

The three identified core components fit together holistically. This means that they are all part of the same integrative approach, from which not one can be isolated, let alone be missed, to really foster social cohesion in a fragmented world. They are all guided by subjectification, which means that they honour one's personal freedom but at the same time strongly invite to respond to the challenges of otherness and thereby idealistically aim to achieve a sense of belonging. However, subjectifying education with the aim of practicing social justice becomes highly superficial if it is not based on attitude formation aimed at the heart—as an invitation to be in society and to respond to its needs. When talking about others, we should talk of real otherness, which makes it necessary to understand how to connect with people who exhibit very different life conceptions than our own. This reveals the need for an epistemological formation that stimulates humbleness and frees students from the experienced need to uphold truth all by themselves. A relational epistemology helps to be faithful to one's own convictions and, at the same time, to be open to—and really interested in—others from whom we, as relational creatures, can always learn something. Critical openness and critical faithfulness form, through their balanced tension, the central dynamics of the practice-theory that includes the three identified core components.

To train (future) teachers for Christian citizenship in a modern, fragmented society, we need to invite them to be true to themselves, their personal faith and their own cultural and religious background. At the same time, they must be open towards others, otherness and society's ethnic, cultural and directional diversity. This means inviting them as clear selves to adopt the attitude of service that a fragmented society and fragmented world ask for. To enable them to do so, we need to simultaneously work with them on their epistemological formation. A relational epistemology will help them to combine faithfulness and openness not only in their actions but also in their cognition and emotions. Understanding that the truth they believe in does not stand or fall with their adherence to it—as the strong reliance on socialisation rather than on subjectification currently visible among DCU students suggests—provides a way to open up towards others with vulnerability, to learn from them and

to even deepen the own faith convictions. It also helps them to put their faith convictions into practice outside of their own Christian comfort zones, which belong to the third core component—namely, the practice of social justice in a fragmented world and society. The order in which this paragraph presents the three core components shows that, while the processes are meant to be exercised simultaneously, the order within the practice-theory is that the heart (basic attitude) precedes the head (epistemology) and the hands (social justice).

A fundamental premise of this practice-theory is that acceptance of and acquaintance with otherness create space for the real self and its deeper formation. This premise deserves further attention from the Reformed Christian faith community in the Netherlands, given that its strong reliance on the implicit socialising forces of the own group is severely challenged by radical individualisation. The combination of openness and faithfulness that this practice-theory proposes does justice to citizenship when defined as broadly and dynamically as ‘the art of living together’ (Prideaux, 1940) and accords with citizenship education as ‘the art creating social cohesion by inviting students to connect; to each other, the community, society and the world; and to flourish themselves within these connections’. It corrects a distorted interpretation of the old adagio by Groen van Prinsterer (1876) that ‘in our isolation lies our strength’, which does not refer to the social and geographical isolation that has become visible in Dutch society, but to the ability to stand alone as a small, faithful, confessing minority in the midst of and at the service of a broader, ideologically disagreeing society.

To practice the combination of faithfulness and openness—and be challenged and formed personally, epistemologically and socially—trainee teachers from the Reformed Christian faith community need to practice with real, personal and physical encounters outside of their safe social comfort zones. These encounters with higher levels of diversity and complexity form a necessary part of faith-based teacher training today. To adopt that as a leading principle for the curriculum is, in the first place, a holistic thing to do, in the sense that it includes knowledge and respect for democratic values, the development of social and societal competences, knowledge about and respect for all types of diversity, including religious views on reality, and the establishment of a school culture that stimulates such practices. In the second place, it is a theological thing to do, in the sense that it establishes a spiritual link between one’s own flourishing and one’s connectedness to others, which, based on God’s creational law, starts with reconciliation with God Himself.

This approach responds to the central research question formulated in the introduction to this dissertation: *How can a holistic approach to education*

*reinforce Christian citizenship formation in the context of a modern, fragmented society?* The summarised answer to this question is that a holistic approach to education reinforces Christian citizenship education through subjectifying education towards social justice practices, through the formation of an attitude of presence and service in society (starting within the school's mini-society and growing from there) and through the teaching of a relational epistemology that enables students to interact openly and faithfully with others outside of their comfort zones. Practical elaborations for the curriculum, as summarised in the next section, were found to be effective for the citizenship formation of students during teacher training. Together, these elements stand for something that is best characterised as *shalom-seeking citizenship*, which refers to the art of living together based on the fundamental idea that seeking wholeness and peace is the duty of the human existence and represents its chance of flourishing (Chapter 3.3). To seek shalom means to seek a connection—with God, others, the community and the whole of creation. It connects what Christian teachers have to do to equip students for the fragmented society with their deepest religious motivation for the teaching job; and thus it connects the aforementioned practice-theory directly to their Christian identity.

## **10.2 CORE COMPONENTS AND THE TEACHER TRAINING CURRICULUM**

With the help of the conversational community and my colleagues at DCU, I have made practical elaborations of such an approach for DCU's curriculum, as made visible in 6.3, 7.3 and 8.3. The idea is that they form active elements within teacher training to provide for subjectifying education and the consequent attitude formation and epistemological formation work. They should fit together holistically, which is supported by the new professional profile that the curriculum renewal process was built on (Chapter 6.3). However, reality has shown that it is difficult to create an entirely holistically fitting curriculum. Within the conversational community, the participants at times complained about the obstinacy or unruliness of the existing system. As a consequence of that reality, what I present in this section can be seen as some practical elements for holistic Christian citizenship formation that match the above-mentioned practice-theory. They have (partly) proven to be working in the DCU curriculum renewal and they form part of an ongoing process.

- Make room for idealistic personhood formation
- This elaboration mainly belongs to the practice-theory's core component of

attitude formation. Personhood formation has always received significant attention at DCU. This enabled me to integrate the ongoing line of learning for (world)citizenship education, first and foremost, with the existing curricular element of personhood formation. I was able to help with phrasing the ideals for the student in the blue inner circle of the new professional profile (for this personhood formation) as follows: connected to the faith, the self, the other(s), the world and the past/present/future. The ideas of the above-presented practice-theory made me hesitant concerning the addition of a short series of indicators to each of these ideals. At this point, the system did show its unruliness. Personhood formation, including citizenship formation, needs to remain idealistic—based on ideals that provoke longing rather than on achievable indicators that suggest manufacturability. A strong need for measurability undermines the centrality of the pedagogical relation between the teacher trainer and the student that it requires.

- Work with small learning communities

This elaboration belongs to all three core components—namely, attitude formation, epistemological formation and subjectifying education. DCU started its new curriculum by splitting larger classes of students into smaller learning communities. Within these communities, 8–10 students work together on their personhood formation assignments. These assignments are sometimes for the group, sometimes highly personal. In both cases, students learn to share, to collaborate and to give feedback. They learn to make use of the diversity within their group. The idea these learning communities convey is that studying to be a teacher is not an individualistic matter. Teachers learn to form a team in which attention is paid the whole person, including his or her wellbeing and connectedness to the group. For teachers, it is important to give space to the dynamic of the group. Where pedagogically possible, the initiative to take concrete action should be left to the student group.

- Enable and incite students to practice their own faith in Chapel activities

This elaboration mainly belongs to the core component of epistemological formation and partly to those of attitude formation and subjectifying education. Resulting from a special Chapel memo, which was strongly endorsed by the conversational community, the daily morning devotions were, from the start of the new curriculum, left to the students instead of to their teacher trainers. In their first year, they receive some practical guidance and instruction from their religion teachers. They choose a short Biblical passage, pray, propose a Psalm to sing and express a personal message based on the Bible passage. In so doing, they learn to give words to their own faith and to handle their

differences—as they give others the floor to react to what they have said. The conversational community's conviction and the early experiences in the curriculum revealed this to be very important for both attitude and epistemological formation—and for the dynamics of critical faithfulness and openness. Still lacking, however, is a physical chapel at DCU in which students can practice more liturgical or embodiment forms to practice their faith in relation to music and art.

- Get students to engage with others outside of their comfort zones

This elaboration mainly belongs to the core component of subjectifying education and partly to those of attitude formation and epistemological formation. As experiences outside of one's comfort zone have been proven to be eye-opening and, therefore, highly formational, extra space was assigned to them in the curriculum renewal. The construction to start within the Christian community and expand the acquaintance with diversity gradually was recognisable for students through the used shalom terms: shalom at home (year 1), shalom in the city (two), shalom in action (three) and shalom worldwide (four). In year 1, an older interview assignment was included, but the new curriculum specified interviewing a Christian with very different conceptions than one's own. In year 2, dialogues with people from other religious and sociocultural backgrounds were included. In addition to their personhood formation, students in year 2 or 3 are now obliged to do at least one internship at a school that does not belong to their comfort zone because of its multi-ethnicity or its educational philosophy. The experiences the conversational community obtained with students in a multi-ethnic context were very positive in terms of taking this step.

- Enable students to serve society through a civic internship

This elaboration mainly belongs to the core component of subjectifying education and partly to those of attitude formation and epistemological formation. For the third year of teacher training, a new type of internship was included in the curriculum. On the advice of the conversational community, it had the title of a civic internship. In this internship, students learn to contribute to society not just via the type of school they are being trained specifically for but also in a much broader sense. They are free to choose or to obtain an exemption, but the idea is that they learn to dedicate themselves somehow to the common cause of the common good—to have that experience and to be able to take it to their education of children.

- Connect intercultural and international experiences to their personhood formation

This elaboration belongs to all three core components—attitude formation, epistemological formation and subjectifying education. Each year of DCU’s teacher training already had its own working week, in which students go to other locations than the university and learn from society. These working weeks previously existed rather separately from each other. In the new curriculum, they are tied to both personhood formation and citizenship formation, and they are connected thematically to the shalom line. The personal reflections that students were already experiencing in the past concerning their international experiences in the third or (mainly) fourth year are now thematically connected to the shalom line as well. In this way, students learn to interpret their highly formative experiences from the perspective of shalom, of social justice and of both faithfulness and openness.

These elements of DCU’s new curriculum proceed directly or indirectly from this study. Other, smaller elements were included with them, as a close reading of 6.3, 7.3 and 8.3 shows. Notwithstanding, these six can be considered the main elements of the application of the above-mentioned practice-theory in DCU’s curriculum. Together with the practice-theory itself, this creates a body of knowledge for DCU and, at the same time, for other, faith-based teacher training institutes that want to relate their curricula and formational practices to the sociocultural reality of fragmentation. At DCU, where the preparative and early real-life experiences were positive, this body of knowledge needs further testing and fine-tuning between the intended and the realised curriculum. To serve the wider educational ecosystem, a synthesis between this particular body of knowledge—in the form of a practice-theory with concrete curricular elaborations—and other bodies of knowledge on broad citizenship and personhood formation is recommended.

### 10.3 DISCUSSION OF THE METHODOLOGY USED

Two fundamental decisions were made with regard to the method used for this study. In the first place, the choice was made of an approach that was in and of itself holistic. This led to a research design along the lines of a lemniscate, which provided for a constant back-and-forth-movement between vision, intentions, design and practice. Based on this choice, the first three chapters offer the results of a deep theoretical analysis of the challenge of fragmentation and the need for a Biblically holistic response in citizenship education. Chapters 5–9 present the results of empirical action research for

DCU's curriculum, conducted as a case study of faith-based teacher training in a modern, fragmented society with high levels of diversity and complexity. Given the continuous movement caused by the lemniscate, however, there is no chronological order, as there would be if the theoretical chapters were to precede the empirical chapters in time. The insights from theory were constantly influencing the deliberations of the conversational community, especially via the voice of formal theology. Moreover, the deliberations of the conversational community led to new elements of theoretical study that enriched the theoretical chapters.

In the second place, for the empirical part of the study, the choice was made to apply TAR. This was helpful in rendering this empirical part not just holistic but also Biblically holistic, in the sense of holism that specifically includes the spiritual or theological domain. In TAR, the whole process is theological and theology is understood as not just the science of theologians but also as the faithful practices of Christians. Therefore, four voices are brought together to disclose theology through conversation—namely, the voices of normative, formal, operant and espoused theology. This conversation leads to the formative transformation of practice and, potentially, to the transformation of theological insights themselves. All of these elements have proven their usefulness for this study. The central characteristics of TAR matched both the content of the study (faith-based teacher training in a changed society) and its holistic approach. Its conversational method matched well with the decision to work with a conversational community along the lines of the lemniscate. The latter was especially helpful in strengthening the voice of formal theology in the conversational community's meetings.

Strengthening the voice of formal theology turned out to be necessary because the voices of operant and espoused theology were already strongly present for two reasons. First, all of the participants were educational practitioners themselves. Second, as the research was conducted with and for DCU, it was relatively easy to invite students to participate the meetings or respond to questions. Through the baseline survey (Chapter 5.2) and the exploratory student research (5.3), there was considerable input from the investigated practice from the very start of the project. The decision to strengthen not only the voice of formal theology but also of normative theology (by starting each meeting with a free Biblical devotion by one of the participants) proved to be an especially fortunate one. It provided the study with useful data regarding what the conversational community's members considered to be normative theology, both for DCU and for their own educational practice. The idea of starting with short Bible study devotions,



which I did not find in the TAR research projects I studied, could be a new contribution to enrich the TAR methodology.

What seemed more difficult when it came to applying the TAR methodology was the positioning of the insider and outsider groups. In its most common elaboration, TAR means that a faith-based institution is visited by external TAR researchers. The researchers form the outsider group, while the participants from the institution form the insider group, which owns the practice. In this study, however, such a clear distinction could not be made. Indeed, it was the insider team that owned the practice of Christian teacher training, whereas the outsider team owned the practice of Christian primary education for a highly diverse child population—experiences that were lacking in the teacher training. This dynamic made it difficult to decide when it was time for separate meetings of the insider and outsider groups. In practice, this was mainly (albeit not exclusively) done when specific ideas for DCU's curriculum were considered. The same dynamic also led to the subsequent choice of insider leadership during the study. This could have rendered the position of the main researcher too strong, although this was avoided through the specific knowledge and character of the members of the outsider group, some of whom had many years of experience in primary education and leadership as well as a strong affinity with the central topic of preparing Christian trainee teachers to deal with higher levels of diversity and complexity.

What I fully realise is that the whole of this study, as presented in this dissertation, may come across as having such a broad scope as to be somewhat superficial in the sense that the identified core components for Christian citizenship formation still leave significant space for further interpretation and application. However, I contend that this was inevitable, given the holistic nature of the study. This study should be appreciated for what it is—namely, a broad analysis of a broad, interdisciplinary topic with consequences for one's whole educational approach in relation to the changing sociocultural reality. It leads to a practice-theory that is neither closed nor ready. A number of core components have been presented. The claim is that they fit together holistically, which is not the same as presenting a completely new paradigm in education. New sociocultural developments indicate the need for a new approach—and this study presents both its need and its general outline, meaning the characteristics that it requires. In so doing, it discloses the broader movement towards WCD for Christian education with a concrete proposal of certain core components for citizenship formation as part of Christian teacher training. The fact that this leaves many questions unanswered leads to this dissertation's final section.

## 10.4 DISCUSSION OF FUTURE RESEARCH

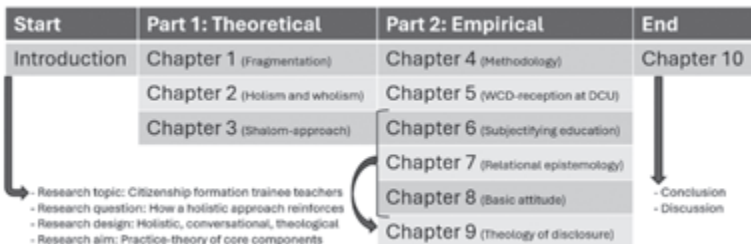
As this research has indicated a general direction for faith-based teacher training in a modern, fragmented society, several aspects require further investigation. Two of these aspects pertain to the above-mentioned core components for Biblically holistic citizenship formation. One such core component was epistemological formation, which aims at enabling students to communicate openly and faithfully with people who perceive life and the world via a very different framework than their own. This element surfaced in the conversational community, where a connection was made with the relational epistemology proposed by Geoff Beech (2021). The conversational community dedicated several meetings to this specific topic, which proved effective for the scope of this study but also revealed that the topic itself requires much more attention from the perspective of faith-based teacher training in modern society and, in a broader sense, from Reformed Christian theology that—as this study indicates—is both historically and substantively blended with the epistemology of modernity.

The second aspect that requires more investigation pertains to the core component of subjectifying education. In the theoretical part of this study, subjectification was found to be a necessary counterweight for the layered challenge of fragmentation. Within the scope of this study, it was applied to citizenship formation within Christian teacher training. The way in which this study elaborated subjectifying education in that context leads to the intentional movement of students outside of their social comfort zones in order to learn to respond freely and with responsibility to issues of social justice and to take that kind of experience to also practice social justice within those comfort zones. Other instruments for subjectifying education in teacher training could be investigated. Also unanswered is the question of what subjectifying education means in the context of primary education. What instruments could teachers employ to educate children in a way that is truly subjectifying? What pedagogical practices do they require to ensure that their own education will be subjectifying, taking into account that subjectification highly depends on one's age and maturity? To better relate subjectifying education to specific cultural and religious perspectives, further investigation of the topic could possibly relate it to Alhanachi's (2023) recent proposal for culturally responsive teaching.

Among the related topics that need more investigation are how subjectifying education helps to overcome adversity and what kind of assessment accords with it. The first topic has already inspired the starting publication that I co-authored (de Voogd et al., 2024), although it requires a follow-up study.

The second topic departs from the realisation that a (w)holistic approach places the pedagogical relationship at the centre of attention. The way in which the development of children is currently being measured (through academic outcomes and achievement) is justly criticised by WCD because it seems to damage the centrality of the pedagogical relation. This leaves open the question of what type of assessment really provides space to the pedagogical relation without subjecting the student to the arbitrariness of the individual teacher he or she encounters. Above, I mentioned the joint experience of the conversational community’s members to be that the system sometimes seemed unruly or obstinate and, in that sense, difficult to transform. It is my impression that this has a lot to do with the high reliance on standardised testing and measurability. I can only hope that further research will shed more light on how to address this dilemma.

While Chapter 5 presents quantitative and qualitative data from the baseline survey, it would be interesting to measure in a later phase, with DCU’s new curriculum fully established and operating, whether the abovementioned practical elaborations for the curriculum generate a significant impact on the student’s citizenship. As this study represents an application of WCD to Christian teacher training, it would also be interesting to see how other faith-based institutes relate to it from the perspective of their religion. It would also be interesting to determine if their own research would lead to similar conclusions regarding the focus on the human heart and transcendent teleology. Moreover, it would be helpful to find out how the broader movement for WCD would respond to the contention that an overarching teleology for wholeness and stimulating a sense of belonging is still lacking. This would, possibly and hopefully, lead to a fruitful exchange of vision, intentions, design and practices through communication between different frameworks, as this study wished for.



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# Summary (English)

How can Christian trainee teachers be prepared to fulfil their duties towards students in a society that can no longer be called Christian? This question refers to the rapid cultural changes in Western Europe and North America in particular. Since World War II, processes of secularisation and globalisation have caused the disappearance of a situation of relative socio-cultural homogeneity there. In its place emerged a high degree of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. To designate the newly emerging situation of the 21st century, scholars speak of super-diversity and super-complexity; and to characterise the rapid processes of change underneath, they use terms like Great Acceleration and Great Transformation.

These developments raise the question of how Christian faith communities can shape their connection to the wider society in this changed and ever-changing reality. This is especially true for faith communities involved in training Christian teachers. After all, teachers are supposed to equip students to take their place in society. How do you do that from a Christian perspective when that society has changed dramatically from relatively homogenous-Christian to super-diverse and complex? This question comes on top of the legitimate questions that governments ask of schools, for example to promote active citizenship and contribute to social cohesion; or to promote world citizenship and pay attention to the United Nations Sustainability Goals (SDGs formulated by UNESCO).

The introduction to this dissertation contains an exploration of the changing sociocultural reality and the processes underneath. Citing authors such as Biesta and Arendt, attention is drawn to the broad classical function of schools as transit homes positioned between the relative homogeneity of the home environment and the great diversity of society. Super-diversity and super-complexity lead to schools constantly facing new questions and tasks. In the field around (Christian) schools, social cohesion and cooperation have crumbled in recent decades. Data from planning agencies show that families and churches are less powerful than before and that society as a whole shows less social cohesion. The newly emerging situation can be referred to as fragmented, a term coined by Scottish philosopher MacIntyre. This characterisation is preferred in this thesis to designations such as secularised or post-Christian, which have a negative connotation from a Christian perspective, or pluralistic or intercultural, which describe but do not problematise the emerging situation.

From the perspective of training Christian teachers, the fragmented society demands Christian citizenship formation for trainee teachers to enable them for citizenship education themselves. This goes beyond responses that are

fragmentary in themselves, such as adding citizenship education to existing curricula or a one-sided cognitive approach to it. Citizenship is defined in this study as the art of living together and citizenship education as creating social cohesion by inviting students and learners to connect with others, the community, society and the world. This emphasis on connection calls for a broad, holistic, well-integrated approach to citizenship education for trainee teachers. This leads to the central question of how a holistic educational approach can strengthen Christian citizenship education in the context of modern fragmented society.

In order to approach this question methodologically broad and holistic as well, the choice was made to start a continuous pendulum movement between theory and practice. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 present the results of the theoretical study, Chapter 4 presents the methodology for the practice-based research, Chapter 5 outlines the situation of Driestar University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands as a typical case study of an explicitly Christian (Reformation) teacher education in a modern and fragmented society and describes the first experiences with a more holistic approach there, after which Chapters 6 to 9 present the results of the empirical research for the benefit of the Driestar curriculum. The pendulum swing, which is simultaneously a movement between vision, intentions, educational design and educational practice, leads to a concluding answer to the main question in Chapter 10.

Chapter 1 describes fragmentation as a multi-layered problem. It does so using the partly overlapping cultural critiques of philosophers MacIntyre (notably in: *After Virtue*) and Taylor (notably in: *Sources of the Self*). Fragmentation has in some sense always been there and can be interpreted from a Christian perspective as a consequence of the fall of mankind. However, it is greatly facilitated by modernity. On the macro-level of the world, it leads to the lack of a shared framework for moral judgement and a shared vision of the good life. On the meso-level of society, it leads to individualisation and polarisation. Fragmentation also becomes visible on the micro-level of the person and his intra- and interpersonal connectedness, generating atomisation, alienation and a sense of meaninglessness. Schools and education as such are part of the trend of fragmentation, leading to reduction of education to measurable achievements and, in particular, cognitive development and skills development.

Fragmentation calls for a stronger emphasis on subjectification. At first glance, this concept of Biesta's seems typically modern, but actually leads to broad formation of pupils aimed at voluntarily entering into connections with others. Elements from Christian theology that fit into this are the emphasis on the formation of the whole person as a relational being (at the micro-

level), paulinic heavenly citizenship as stimulating the assumption of various citizenship responsibilities on earth (meso-level) and a relational epistemology rather than a typically modern theory of knowledge (macro-level). Chapter 2 offers a description of an international movement for whole child development (WCD), aimed at countering reduction in education by putting the whole child (cognitive, physical, emotional, social, creative, moral and spiritual), and thus the pedagogical relationship with and the pedagogical mission of the teacher, at the centre. This movement, which emerged since 2005 in response to the strong social engineering emphasis in US education legislation, united traits of holism (focusing on the spiritual and ecological) and wholism (focusing on the social and emotional).

Whereas WCD ultimately leads to a strong emphasis on broad formation and connectedness (with oneself, the other and the world), from a Christian perspective it lacks the explicit connection with God, the sense of purpose (telos) it gives to broad formation from a Christian perspective, and proper attention to the heart as the transcendent root unit of man, where thinking, doing and feeling converge. Chapter 3 shows how contemporary advocates of the whole-person perspective (J.K.A. Smith, Hábl and Troost, respectively) draw on the work of Christian thinkers Augustine, Comenius and Dooyeweerd. A synthesis of the whole-person perspective of these three shows how they establish an immediate connection between the inner and connectedness of human beings to each other and, ultimately to God and the predetermined moral order that characterises His creation. This notion gives direction to the broad formation approach from a Christian perspective and leads in Chapter 3 to the examination of the Old Testament concept of shalom, which stands for wholeness and for peace based on justice. The shalom concept has been applied by American philosopher Wolterstorff to education and formation for citizenship in a pluralistic society. Chapter 3 concludes that, precisely from the above, this approach is appropriate to the question of social and personal fragmentation, as well as to the previously identified need for a combination of broad formation and subjectification.

Chapter 4 marks the transition to the empirical part of the study. For this, theological action research (TAR) is employed. This can be called holistic and theological. In particular, it lends itself to the search for renewed connection between the religious identity of organisations or institutions and the changed social climate in which they operate. TAR aims to bring together four theological voices: the operant voice (theological insight hidden in practical actions, in the context of this study of Christian teachers), espoused theology (what the teachers themselves say about this from their religious identity), normative

theology (what the Bible and other scriptures they accept as authoritative bring in) and formal theology (what insights science, broadly understood in this study, can bring in). A research group (conversational community) consisting of internal researchers and curriculum innovators and external experts with extensive experience of providing explicitly Christian education in a context of high ethnic, cultural and religious diversity has been set up for the teacher training for primary education at Driestar University of Applied Sciences (DCU).

Chapter 5 shows that the latter expertise was not or hardly present at DCU. Because of its Reformed Christian identity, DCU attracts students from all over the country who particularly want to prepare for Reform-Christian schools and in usually still rather homogeneous contexts, often also protected by a closed admissions policy. A baseline survey among DCU students and teachers demonstrates this, but also shows that among both groups there is a broad conviction that, in the current social climate and towards the future, more is needed in the sphere of learning to deal with higher measures of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. Exploratory research at Driestar, in which six graduating students conducted their own research and were subjected to a focus group interview, shows that WCD's broad formative approach can be helpful in connecting one's own formation to the current questions of society in a better and positive way.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the main points of the conversation within the conversational community. For almost three years, four representatives from DCU and four to five representatives from first two and later three multi-ethnic Christian primary schools talked intensively with each other (twenty meetings in total) about vision, intentions, design and practice of the broad citizenship education of trainee teachers at DCU. Regularly, students were involved in the discussions or student experiences were analysed. Main topics that emerged clearly along the way, partly also due to input from formal (scientific) theology as expressed in the theoretical chapters mentioned above, are: subjectivising education (Chapter 6), relational epistemology (Chapter 7) and a basic attitude of service (Chapter 8). Together, these three topics form the core of the theory of practice to which this thesis leads in the conclusion (Chapter 10). They call for an integrated formation process focused respectively on the hands, the head and the heart of the Christian teacher, who realises that he or she may contribute to his or her students' connectedness with themselves, each other and the world.

Before the final conclusion was drawn, the lines from empirical Chapters 6, 7 and 8 were first brought together in a newly created theological insight (theology of disclosure). This insight has been discussed with and is shared by



all members of the research group mentioned above. Leading the way is the shalom idea that makes it clear that teachers should not have their backs to society, but be formed into persons who are at the same time principled and open to others. Fragmented society needs Christian teachers who know what they stand for, but also realise that dealing with differences and staying in contact and cooperating with those who think differently is an essential part of their biblical assignment. From that assignment, they learn to have space for the other, to truly see children in their individuality and to pursue social justice, both in the classroom and in the larger society. An important tool for practising this is deliberate experiences outside one's own social comfort zone during teacher training and beyond.

From Chapters 6, 7 and 8, practical proposals emerge that the research group discussed, (sometimes) concretely tested and proposed to give a place in the ongoing process of curriculum renewal at DCU (its teacher training institute for primary education). Chapter 10 specifically mentions: making room for ideals-based person formation, working with small, activating learning communities, promoting the practice and articulation of one's own religious beliefs in so-called Chapel activities (e.g. daily devotions), engaging in internship experiences outside one's own comfort zone (e.g. at multi-ethnic primary schools), learning a service attitude towards the wider society through a civic internship and closely linking internationalisation activities to one's own personal development and reflection on one's own diversity competences. All these elements contribute directly to broad education, focusing simultaneously on head, heart and hands, linked to the ideal of shalom-oriented citizenship as the art of living together amid profound ethnic, cultural and religious differences.

# Summary (Nederlands)

Hoe kunnen aanstaande christelijke leraren worden voorbereid om hun taken richting leerlingen te vervullen in een maatschappij die niet langer christelijk kan worden genoemd? Deze vraag verwijst naar de snelle culturele veranderingen in met name West-Europa en Noord-Amerika. Sinds de Tweede Wereldoorlog hebben processen van secularisatie en globalisering daar gezorgd voor het verdwijnen van een situatie van relatieve sociaal-culturele homogeniteit. In plaats daarvan kwam een hoge mate van etnische, culturele en religieuze diversiteit op. Om de nieuw ontstane situatie van de eenentwintigste eeuw aan te duiden, spreken wetenschappers van superdiversiteit en supercomplexiteit; en om de snelle veranderingsprocessen die daaronder liggen te typeren, gebruiken zij begrippen als Grote Acceleratie en Grote Transformatie.

Deze ontwikkelingen stellen christelijke geloofsgemeenschappen voor de vraag hoe zij hun verbinding met de bredere samenleving gestalte kunnen geven in deze veranderde en steeds verder veranderende werkelijkheid. Dit geldt in het bijzonder voor de geloofsgemeenschappen die betrokken zijn bij het opleiden van christelijke leraren. Leraren worden immers geacht om leerlingen toe te rusten om hun plek in de samenleving in te nemen. Hoe doe je dat vanuit christelijk perspectief als die samenleving ingrijpend is veranderd van relatief homogeen-christelijk naar superdivers en complex? Deze vraag komt bovenop de legitieme vragen die overheden stellen aan scholen, bijvoorbeeld om actief burgerschap te bevorderen en bij te dragen aan sociale cohesie; of om wereldburgerschap te bevorderen en aandacht te besteden aan de Duurzaamheidsdoelen van de Verenigde Naties (SDG's geformuleerd door de UNESCO).

De inleiding op dit proefschrift bevat een verkenning van de veranderde sociaal-culturele werkelijkheid en de processen die daaronder liggen. Onder verwijzing naar auteurs als Biesta en Arendt wordt aandacht gevraagd voor de brede klassieke functie van de scholen als doorgangshuizen gepositioneerd tussen de relatieve homogeniteit van het thuisfeer en de grote diversiteit van de maatschappij. Superdiversiteit en supercomplexiteit leiden ertoe dat scholen steeds voor nieuwe vragen en taken komen te staan. In het veld rond (christelijke) scholen zijn sociale cohesie en samenwerking de afgelopen decennia afgebrokkeld. Data van planbureaus wijzen uit dat gezinnen en kerken minder krachtig zijn dan voorheen en dat de samenleving als geheel minder sociale cohesie vertoont. De nieuw ontstane situatie is aan te duiden als gefragmenteerd, een term van de Schotse filosoof MacIntyre. Deze typering wordt in dit proefschrift verkozen boven aanduidingen als gesecculariseerd of post-christelijk, die vanuit christelijk perspectief een negatieve connotatie hebben, of pluralistisch of intercultureel, die de ontstane situatie wel beschrijven maar niet problematiseren.

De gefragmenteerde samenleving vraagt vanuit het perspectief van de opleiding van christelijke leraren om christelijke burgerschapsvorming voor burgerschapsonderwijs aan leerlingen. Dat gaat verder dan reacties die in zichzelf fragmentarisch zijn, zoals het toevoegen van burgerschapsonderwijs aan bestaande curricula of een eenzijdig cognitieve benadering ervan. Burgerschap wordt in dit proefschrift gedefinieerd als de kunst van het samenleven en burgerschapsvorming als het creëren van sociale cohesie door studenten en leerlingen uit te nodigen zich te verbinden met anderen, de gemeenschap, de samenleving en de wereld. Dit accent op verbinding vraagt om een brede, holistische, goed geïntegreerde aanpak van de burgerschapsvorming van aanstaande leraren. Dit leidt tot de centrale vraag hoe een holistische onderwijsbenadering christelijke burgerschapsvorming kan versterken in de context van de moderne gefragmenteerde samenleving.

Om deze vraag ook methodologisch breed en holistisch te benaderen, is ervoor gekozen om een voortdurende pendelbeweging in te zetten tussen theorie en praktijk. De hoofdstukken 1, 2 en 3 geven de resultaten van de theoretische studie weer, hoofdstuk 4 presenteert de methodologie voor het praktijkgerichte onderzoek, hoofdstuk 5 schetst de situatie van Driestar hogeschool in Nederland als een typerende casus van een expliciet christelijke (reformatische) lerarenopleiding in een modern en gefragmenteerde samenleving en beschrijft de eerste ervaringen met een meer holistische aanpak aldaar, waarna de hoofdstukken 6 tot en met 9 de resultaten van het empirische onderzoek ten behoeve van het Driestar-curriculum weergeven. De pendelbeweging, die tegelijk ook een beweging tussen visie, intenties, onderwijsontwerp en onderwijspraktijk is, leidt in hoofdstuk 10 tot een concluderend antwoord op de hoofdvraag.

Hoofdstuk 1 beschrijft fragmentatie als een gelaagd probleem. Het doet dit aan de hand van de deels overlappende cultuurkritieken van de filosofen MacIntyre (met name in: *After Virtue*) en Taylor (met name in: *Sources of the Self*). Fragmentatie is er in zekere zin altijd geweest en kan vanuit christelijk perspectief worden geduid als gevolg van de zondeval. Het wordt echter sterk bevorderd door de moderniteit. Op het macro-niveau van de wereld leidt die tot het ontbreken van een gezamenlijk framework voor morele oordeelsvorming en een gezamenlijk gedragen visie op het goede leven. Op het meso-niveau van de samenleving leidt dit tot individualisering en polarisatie. Fragmentatie wordt ook zichtbaar op het micro-niveau van de persoon en diens intra- en interpersoonlijke verbondenheid, wat atomisering, vervreemding en een gevoel van betekenisloosheid opwekt. Scholen en onderwijs als zodanig maken deel uit van de tendens van fragmentatie, wat leidt tot reductie van het onderwijs tot

meetbare prestaties en met name cognitieve ontwikkeling en de ontwikkeling van vaardigheden.

Fragmentatie vraagt om een sterker accent op subjectificatie. Dit begrip van Biesta lijkt op het eerste gezicht typisch modern, maar leidt juist tot brede vorming van leerlingen die is gericht op het vrijwillig aangaan van verbindingen met anderen. Elementen uit de christelijke theologie die hierbij aansluiten, zijn de nadruk op de vorming van de hele persoon als relationeel wezen (op het micro-niveau), het paulinische hemelburgerschap als stimulerend voor het aangaan van diverse burgerschapsverantwoordelijkheden op aarde (meso-niveau) en een relationele epistemologie in plaats van een typisch moderne kenleer (macro-niveau). Hoofdstuk 2 biedt een beschrijving van een internationale beweging voor Whole Child Development (WCD), gericht op het tegengaan van reductie in het onderwijs door het hele kind (cognitief, fysiek, emotioneel, sociaal, creatief, moreel en spiritueel), en daarmee ook de pedagogische relatie met en de pedagogische opdracht van de leraar centraal te stellen. Deze beweging, die sinds 2005 opkwam als reactie op het sterke maakbaarheidsaccent in de Amerikaanse onderwijswetgeving, verenigde trekken van holisme (met aandacht voor het geestelijke en ecologische) en het wholisme (met aandacht voor het sociale en het emotionele).

Waar WCD uiteindelijk leidt tot een sterk accent op brede vorming en verbondenheid (met zichzelf, de ander en de wereld), mist het vanuit christelijk perspectief de expliciete verbondenheid met God, de doelgerichtheid (telos) die deze geeft aan brede vorming vanuit christelijk perspectief en goede aandacht voor het hart als de transcendentie wortelen van de mens, waar denken, doen en voelen samenkomen. Hoofdstuk 3 laat zien hoe hedendaagse pleitbezorgers voor het hele-mensperspectief (resp. J.K.A. Smith, Hábl en Troost) zich baseren op het werk van de christelijke denkers Augustinus, Comenius en Dooyeweerd. Een synthese van het hele-mensperspectief van deze drie laat zien hoe zij een onmiddellijk verband leggen tussen het innerlijk en de verbondenheid van mensen aan elkaar en, uiteindelijk aan God en de voorgegeven morele orde die Zijn schepping kenmerkt. Deze notie geeft richting aan de brede vormingsbenadering vanuit christelijk perspectief en leidt in hoofdstuk 3 tot de bestudering van het oudtestamentische begrip shalom, dat staat voor heelheid en voor vrede op grond van rechtvaardigheid. Het shalom-begrip is door de Amerikaanse filosoof Wolterstorff toegepast op het onderwijs en op vorming voor burgerschap in de pluriforme samenleving. Conclusie van hoofdstuk 3 is dat deze benadering, juist vanuit het bovenstaande, passend is bij de vraag van sociale en persoonlijke fragmentatie, alsmede bij de eerder geconstateerde noodzaak van een combinatie van brede vorming en subjectificatie.

Hoofdstuk 4 markeert de overgang naar het empirische deel van de studie. Hiervoor is Theologisch Actieonderzoek (TAR) ingezet. Dat is holistisch en theologisch te noemen. Het leent zich in het bijzonder voor het zoeken naar hernieuwde verbinding tussen de religieuze identiteit van organisaties of instellingen en het veranderde maatschappelijke klimaat waarin zij functioneren. TAR is gericht op het samenbrengen van vier theologische stemmen: de operante stem (theologisch inzicht dat schuilgaat in praktische handelingen, in het kader van dit onderzoek van christelijke leraren), de espoused theology (wat de leraren daar zelf vanuit hun religieuze identiteit over zeggen), de normatieve theologie (wat de Bijbel en andere geschriften die zij als gezaghebbend aanvaarden inbrengen) en de formele theologie (wat de wetenschap, in dit onderzoek breed opgevat, aan inzichten kan inbrengen). Voor de pabo-opleiding van Driestar hogeschool is een onderzoeksgroep opgericht bestaande uit interne onderzoekers en curriculumvernieuwers en externen met een grote ervaring met het geven van expliciet christelijk onderwijs in een context van hoge etnische, culturele en religieuze diversiteit.

Hoofdstuk 5 laat zien dat die laatste deskundigheid bij Driestar hogeschool niet of nauwelijks aanwezig was. Driestar trekt vanwege de reformatorisch-christelijke identiteit studenten uit het hele land die zich met name willen voorbereiden voor reformatorisch-christelijke scholen en in doorgaans nog vrij homogene context, dikwijls ook beschermd door een gesloten toelatingsbeleid. Een nulmeting onder Driestar-studenten en docenten toont dit aan, maar laat ook zien dat onder beide groepen breed de overtuiging leeft dat er in het huidige maatschappelijke klimaat en richting de toekomst meer nodig is in de sfeer van leren omgaan met hogere maten van etnische, culturele en religieuze diversiteit. Explorerend onderzoek bij Driestar, waarbij zes afstuderende studenten eigen onderzoek deden en aan een focusgroep-interview werden onderwerpen, laat zien dat de brede vormingsbenadering van WCD helpend kan zijn om de eigen vorming beter en op een positieve manier te laten aansluiten op de actuele vragen van de maatschappij.

In de hoofdstukken 5, 6 en 7 komen de hoofdpunten van het gesprek in de conversatiegroep naar voren. Gedurende bijna drie jaar spraken vier vertegenwoordigers van Driestar en vier tot vijf vertegenwoordigers van eerst twee en later drie multi-etnische christelijke basisscholen intensief met elkaar (in totaal twintig bijeenkomsten) over visie, intenties, ontwerp en praktijk van de brede burgerschapsvorming van aanstaande leraren bij Driestar. Regelmatig werden studenten bij de gesprekken betrokken of werden studentervaringen geanalyseerd. Hoofdonderwerpen die daarbij gaandeweg duidelijker naar voren kwamen, mede ook door de inbreng vanuit de formele (wetenschappelijke)

theologie zoals verwoord in bovengenoemde theoretische hoofdstukken, zijn: subjectiverend onderwijs (hoofdstuk 6), relationale epistemologie (hoofdstuk 7) en een basale houding van dienstbaarheid (hoofdstuk 8). Deze drie onderwerpen vormen samen de kern van de praktijk-theorie waartoe dit proefschrift in de conclusie (hoofdstuk 10) leidt. Ze vragen om een geïntegreerd vormingsproces gericht op respectievelijk de handen, het hoofd en het hart van de christelijke leraar, die zich realiseert te mogen bijdragen aan verbondenheid van zijn of haar leerlingen met zichzelf, elkaar en de wereld.

Voordat de conclusie wordt getrokken, zijn eerst de lijnen vanuit de empirische hoofdstukken 6, 7 en 8 samengebracht in een nieuw ontstaan theologisch inzicht (theology of disclosure). Dit inzicht is besproken met en wordt gedeeld door alle leden van de bovengenoemde onderzoeksgroep. Leidend is de shalom-gedachte die duidelijk maakt dat leraren niet met hun rug naar de samenleving mogen komen te staan, maar gevormd moeten zijn tot personen die tegelijk beginselvast en open naar anderen zijn. De gefragmentariseerde samenleving heeft behoefte aan christelijke leraren die weten waarvoor ze staan, maar ook beseffen dat het omgaan met verschillen en het voortdurend in contact blijven en samenwerken met andersdenkenden wezenlijk behoort bij hun Bijbelse opdracht. Vanuit die opdracht leren zij ruimte te hebben voor de ander, kinderen in hun eigenheid echt te zien en sociale rechtvaardigheid na te streven, zowel in het klaslokaal als in de grote samenleving. Een belangrijk instrument om dat te oefenen, is het doelbewust opdoen van ervaringen buiten de eigen sociale comfort-zone tijdens de lerarenopleiding en daarna.

Vanuit de hoofdstukken 6, 7 en 8 komen praktische voorstellen naar voren die de onderzoeksgroep heeft besproken, (soms) concreet uitgetest en voorgesteld om een plek te geven in het lopende proces van curriculumvernieuwing bij Driestar hogeschool (de PABO). In hoofdstuk 10 worden concreet genoemd: het ruimte maken voor op idealen gebaseerde persoonsvorming, het werken met kleine, activerende leergemeenschappen, het bevorderen van het beoefenen en articuleren van de eigen geloofsovertuiging in zogeheten Chapel-activiteiten (bijvoorbeeld dagopeningen), het aangaan van stage-ervaringen buiten de eigen comfortzone (bijvoorbeeld aan multi-etnische basisscholen), het aanleren van een dienstbare houding richting de bredere samenleving door middel van een burgerschapsstage en het nauw verbinden van internationaliseringsactiviteiten met de eigen persoonsvorming en de reflectie op de eigen diversiteitscompetenties. Al deze elementen dragen direct bij aan brede vorming, tegelijkertijd gericht op hoofd, hart en handen, verbonden aan het ideaal van op shalom gericht burgerschap als de kunst van het samenleven te midden van diepgaande etnische, culturele en religieuze verschillen.

# Appendices



# 1. Matrix of Studies and Reports on Whole Child Education


WCD source	2004 ASCD Position Statement	2005 ASCD Educational Leadership: Scherer	2005 ASCD Educational Leadership: Needells	2005 ASCD Educational Leadership: Eisner	2005 Fry Learning, Ziger, Bishop	2007 ASCD Learning at the center of education	2011 ASCD Making the Case	2017 AIE WCD mapping (P)	2018 Aspen – national commission Report	2018 NIVOC Good Education (P)	2019 ACER MAMA Report Australia (P)	2019 LEI /NAESL DE Winkler (P)	2019 NIVOC Winkler (P)
Goal(s)	Comprehensive approach	Comprehensive approach	Historic treatment	Historic, organic and humanistic orientation	Comprehensive approach including play	Whole Child at the center of education	Whole Child initiative	Whole Child Development Framework	Social, emotional and cognitive learning	Whole Child Development Framework	Definition of WCD in education policy outside N.A./N.E.	Stand-alone principles of WCD in teacher training	Integrate WCD in teacher training
			Demands of democracy			Demands of globalization	Students and their needs first	Integrating WCD in W.L. and N.A.	Prioritize the Whole Child learning	Broken the focus beyond cognitive	Conceptual framework	WCD in disadvantaged contexts	
								Historic, integrated approach		Perspective on the world we are aiming to create		Historic approach	
Repeatedly mentioned aspects of the child	Healthy	Physical well-being			Physical systems, physical health	Healthy physically and learning book, healthy, healthy, healthy	Healthy	Physical-based learning		Physical-based learning	Health	Physical dimension	Physical dimension
	Knowledgeable	Academic well-being	Think, critically	Intellectually responsive	Cognitive skills	Intellectually challenged, critical and creative thinking	Challenged	Cognitive-based learning	Academic well-being, domain and skills	Cognitive-based learning	Academic knowledge	Cognitive dimension	Cognitive dimension
	Motivated	Emotional well-being	Competent worker, happiness	Emotionally responsive	Emotional systems, mental health, emotions	Healthy emotionally	Safe	Emotional-based learning	Emotional well-being, dimension and skills	Emotional-based learning, happiness	Social and emotional learning (SEL)	Emotional dimension	Emotional dimension
	Engaged	Social well-being	Sound character, social conscience	Socially responsive	Social systems	Actively engaged and connected to school and community	Engaged	Social-based learning	Social well-being, domain, skills, engaged	Social-based learning	Social and emotional learning (SEL)	Social and civic dimension	Social dimension
		Ethical well-being	Morality					Values-based learning	Character and values	Values-based learning	Values	Ethical, moral/civical dimension	Moral dimension
								Spiritual-based learning		Spiritual-based learning	Spirituality	Ethical, moral/civical dimension	Spiritual dimension
				Imaginatively responsive								Aesthetic, artistic dimension	Creative dimension

Other mentioned aspects	Family	Government	Volunteers	Structure	Climate	Made commitments	All parts in the organism are interconnected	Curiosity	Development through experiences	Supported	Attitudes, beliefs and mindsets	Interconnectedness of social, emotional, cognitive and health-factors	Life skills
						Aware of global problems	Confidence	Innovative and creative acting			Sense of ownership	Talent comes in many forms	
						Thoughtful, active citizens					Find purpose in learning		
											Contribute to school and broader community		
											Master academic concept and concepts		
Mentioned elements of support	Family	Government	Volunteers	Structure	Climate	Isolate perspective	More holistic environment	Nutrition	Good, challenging and engaging curriculum	Awareness among educators, families, policymakers, local community members	Safe, relationship-based, equitable learning settings	Pedagogical role of the teacher	Student engagement
						Sense of community	Good nutrition	Services for families	Connected schools and community	Engagement of whole child supporters	Larger family, community, and societal contexts	School leadership in the framework of inclusive education	Safe environments
								Community involvement	Safe and trusting schools	Action at local, state, and national level	(Bio-ecological) environment	School leadership in the framework of inclusive education	Adult support
								Parental involvement	Intellectually challenging environment	Stands in commissions to secure policies and practices	Secure relationships	School leadership in disadvantaged contexts	Community
								Focus on goals, experiences, and materials	Physically and emotionally safe environment	Alignment of services, resources and data	Pedagogical fact	Broad teacher development	
											Align resources and leverage partners in	Character education	Academically challenging learning



## 2. Informed Consent Form for the Research Participants

**INFORMED CONSENTFORMULIER**

 **Informed consentformulier**

Formulier voor onderzoek Theological Action Research WCD-project 2021-2022  
Vink aan wat van toepassing is

Deelname	JA	NEE
• Ik ga akkoord met deelname aan het onderzoek.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Ik begrijp dat mijn deelname vrijwillig is. Ik kan mij op ieder moment terugtrekken uit het onderzoek zonder opgave van reden.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Gebruik van de informatie in het kader van dit onderzoek</b>		
• Ik begrijp dat de resultaten van dit onderzoek anoniem zullen worden verwerkt. Mijn persoonlijke gegevens zullen worden vervangen door codes. Uitsluitend het onderzoeksteam zal toegang hebben tot de lijst waarmee codes gekoppeld kunnen worden aan persoonsgegevens. De geluidsopnamen zullen niet toegankelijk zijn voor mensen buiten het onderzoeksteam.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Ik stem ermee in dat mijn uitspraken, op anonieme wijze, kunnen worden geciteerd in publicaties, verslagen, boeken en andere vormen van onderzoeksoutput.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Ondertekening</b>		
<i>Deelnemer</i>		
Naam	Handtekening	Datum
<i>Onderzoeker(s)</i>		
Naam	Handtekening	Datum
Naam	Handtekening	Datum
<b>Contactgegevens:</b> P.C. (Peter) van Olst		
<div style="background-color: black; width: 100px; height: 1em; margin: 0 auto;"></div> <div style="background-color: black; width: 200px; height: 1em; margin: 0 auto;"></div>		

### 3. STRUCTURE OF THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW WITH SIX SENIOR DCU STUDENTS

The focus group interview was held from 16:00–18:00 on December 8, 2021. At the time, the majority of students had already finalised their study and were working in the field. The interview questions were grouped into five separate blocks and handled by the interviewer with care according to the time schedule for the session and the atmosphere of the conversation.

1. Opening question (from each participant, a short personal reaction):
  - a. How are you doing with regard to your study and your job?
  - b. Where do you work now, which school, which grade?
2. Introduction to the topic:
  - a. You have studied WCD. What meaning has this concept had for you?
  - b. What did it mean for your personal formation process?
  - c. What did it mean for your formation as a Christian teacher?
3. Transitional questions:
  - a. How would you define WCD after your acquaintance with the concept? Choose your own words.
  - b. Does WCD fit with Christian education? Why or why not?
  - c. Which elements specifically match and which elements match to a lesser extent?
4. Key questions:
  - a. What can or should DCU do with WCD in its teacher training?
  - b. How could your suggestions be adopted into the curriculum?
  - c. For which types of situations students should know more about WCD?
  - d. Does the new professional profile of the Christian teacher offer enough clues to that end?
5. Concluding questions:
  - a. What parts of your thesis would you highlight for my research, particularly concerning the new curriculum?
  - b. Do you have any other suggestions?

## 4. LIST OF CODES USED IN TAR

Code Report

### Code Report – Grouped by: Code Groups

All (103) codes

#### Groupless

20 Codes:

- Operant theology
- Espoused theology
- Formal theology
- Calling
- Classic freedoms
- Comfort zone
- Conclusions
- Cultural change
- Dependency
- Destiny
- Eyeopener
- Fragmented
- Gap/social bubble
- Language
- Obviousness
- Pluriform
- Practicality
- Safety
- Silence
- Story

#### 1. Absolute truth

25 Codes:

- Absolute truth
- Agency
- Challenge
- Clarity/  
transparency
- Creation
- Critical thinking
- Diversity
- Doubts
- Faith(fulness)
- God
- Imagination
- Inquisitiveness
- Judging
- Knowing
- Meeting
- Nuances
- Openness
- Polarised
- Reflexion
- Relativism
- Secularisation
- Sense giving
- Transparency
- Vulnerability
- Wisdom/experience

## 2. Attitude

32 Codes:

- Basic attitude
- Agency
- Attention
- Balance
- Being
- Being an example
- Boundaries
- Delaying
- Doubts
- Emotions
- Flexibility
- Focus on result
- Hope
- Humility
- Identity
- Imagination
- Inquisitiveness
- Invitation
- Judging
- Longing
- Love
- Mission
- Motivation
- Passion
- Patience
- Relax
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Seeing
- Talents
- Values
- Wisdom/experience

## 3. Subjectifying education

22 Codes:

- Subjectifying education
- Active participation/doing
- Adversity
- Agency
- Community
- Defence mechanism
- Dignity and equality
- Flourishing
- Inclusive education
- Individualism
- Inquisitiveness
- Internship
- Meeting
- Mini-society
- Practices
- Relationships
- Responsibility
- Service learning
- Shalom
- Talents
- Telos
- Urban

## 7. Normative theology

10 Codes:

- Normative theology
- Bible
- Faith(fulness)
- God
- Hope
- Kingdom
- Mission
- Prayer
- Shalom
- Telos

## Critical thinking

1 Codes:

- Reflexion

## Identity

1 Codes:

- Personhood formation

## WCD

18 Codes:

- Achievement
- Art
- Assessment
- Delaying
- Emotions
- Flourishing
- Focus on result
- Integrated approach
- Knowing
- Love
- Profit
- Profit thinking
- Seeing
- Skills
- Social justice
- Socialisation
- Urban
- WCD

## 5. CONCEPTUAL INFLUENCES FROM THEORY AND PRACTICE

To illustrate the constant back-and-forth movement that has been made between theory (Chapters 1–3) and TAR practice (Chapters 6–8) the following visualisation was made. When arrows come from the left (theory) and reach to the other side (practice), concepts were formally and literally introduced in the TAR conversations as part of the voice of formal theology. When arrows point towards both sides, concepts arose both in theory and in the empirical study and were later matched. Where there are just lines (not arrows), concepts could be matched without making explicit this match. When arrows just reach to the middle, concepts were not formally or literally introduced in the TAR conversations, nevertheless had a general and implicit impact.





## 6. EXPLICATION OF ARTISTIC IMAGINATION

For each chapter of this dissertation, a work of art has been created. Inspired by the text of the chapter, these works were made by Martijn Boer, my colleague at DCU's Teacher Training Institute in Gouda, and by Thomas van Olst, the art teacher at Guido de Bres Secondary School in Rotterdam—and the son of a very proud father. With regard to each work of art, a brief explication:



### **Introduction – Teaching and the Art of Living Together**

The image of the diverse, ever-changing society as a diverse and living city. The city is overwhelming, but also looks inviting. It invites the teacher to step into openness.

*Thomas van Olst, 2024, 60x42cm, ink and ecoline on paper*



### **Chapter 1 – Fragmentation and Citizenship Formation**

Fragmentation of society and the individual. It approaches both the individual person and society from the perspective of separation, depicting society as an archipelago of different islands.

*Martijn Boer, 2024, 16x21cm, acrylic paint and pencil on paper*



### **Chapter 2 – Whole Child Development as a (W)Holistic Response**

Development in a broad sense. In that development the interpersonal and the intrapersonal are being aligned. The person learns from the environment, with a simultaneous focus on head and heart.

*Martijn Boer, 2024, 35x50 cm, gouache directly on paper*



### **Chapter 3 – Christian Anthropology and the (W)Holistic Approach**

Augustine as a symbol of the inner peace and contemplation. With bright colours because of his lasting significance, also for our time and age, including this study.

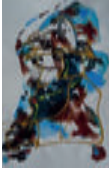
*Martijn Boer, 2024, 35x50 cm, gouache directly on paper*



### **Chapter 4 – The Methodology of Theological Action Research**

An imagination of the TAR with its four voices theology as four people in conversation, from which a new theology grows. A strong tree emerges in the negative space, speaking of growth, but also constancy.

*Thomas van Olst, 2024, 60x42cm, acrylic paint on paper*



### **Chapter 5 – Preliminary WCD Reception at Driestar Christian University**

The homogeneous student population from the Duth Bible belt in a heterogeneous world. DCU serves as a source of connection and broadening in the midst of a world in flux.

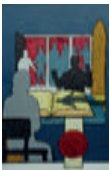
*Martijn Boer, 2024, 40x27 cm, collage technique with ecoline, gouache and marker*



### **Chapter 6 – Subjectifying Education and the Art of Living Together**

Connecting two plants to form a person, looking forward expectantly. The attitude is purposeful; from the mission of the Shalom approach. The personal growth identified as a goal by the students is linked to the connection between faithfulness (left bank) and openness (right bank).

*Thomas van Olst, 2024, 60x42cm, watercolour and pencil on paper*



### **Chapter 7 – Relational Epistemology and the Art of Living Together**

A passive, a defensive and an open student attitude towards a diverse context. A visible shadow of Truth as a person and the seal of the Holy Spirit, as a firm base for faithfulness and loyalty.

*Martijn Boer, 2024, 25x19 cm, acrylic paint and marker on paper*



### **Chapter 8 – Basic Attitude and the Art of Living Together**

The learning community for personhood formation and preparation as a means to foster a longing to be of service as a Christian in the fragmented society.

*Martijn Boer, 2024, 2024, 40x30 cm, collage technique with acrylic paint, marker, coloured paper and copy*



### **Chapter 9 – Theology of Disclosure for Christian Citizenship Formation**

Four people enter into connection by holding each other's hands. Together they are forming the cross, each taking their place in God's plan.

*Thomas van Olst, 2024, 60x42cm, acrylic paint on paper*



### **Chapter 10 – Conclusion and Discussion**

The teacher finding his place in society as a piece of the puzzle of the practice-theory. In his kneeling position the servant attitude becomes visible, in which he helps a child: a small and humble task in the world.

*Thomas van Olst, 2024, 60x42cm, pastel crayon on paper*

# Curriculum Vitae

Peter Christiaan van Olst (Zwolle, 1976) studied political science at Leiden University (1994-1999) and worked as a political journalist for the *Reformatorisch Dagblad* in The Hague (1997-2005). In 2002 he started a bachelor in Theology (CGO-E) in Gouda, which he completed after being prepared and sent in 2005 by *Zending Gereformeerde Gemeenten (ZGG)* as a missionary church worker/evangelist to Portoviejo—Ecuador. In Ecuador he continued with a theological master that belonged to *Miami International Seminary* (Florida, USA), which he completed after returning to the Netherlands in April 2016.

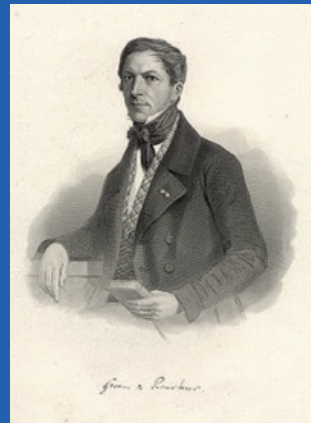
During his first year back in the Netherlands, he edited together with Jan-Kees Kooiman a bundle of missiological articles for ZGG. In 2017 he joined the department for religious education at *Driestar Christian University (DCU)* as a VELON-registered teacher trainer, from where he was committed to the personhood education of trainee teachers for primary education, subject didactics for prospective religion teachers for secondary education and the coordination of the international experiences and internships of junior and senior students. From 2020 until 2024, part of his job was to lead DCU's participation in the whole child development research project. In 2024, he started teaching in the master Learning and Innovation (track Christian Education) and was appointed as director (regisseur) of identity, formation and citizenship education.

Peter is married since 1998 to Sofieke Vogelaar. The couple got four sons (Theo, Thomas, Thijs and Thimo), the oldest two of whom married in 2023. With their youngest sons they live in Waddinxveen. Since April 2017, Peter is active as an elder in their church, the *Gereformeerde Gemeente Moerkapelle*.



How can a holistic approach reinforce the Christian citizenship formation of trainee teachers in a modern society that bears the traits of fragmentation? Investigating this question, this PhD study leads to the conclusion that subjectifying education is necessary to strengthen social justice practices in the life and work of the trainee teacher. These practices need to be supported by a relational epistemology and an underlying attitude of service and presence. This requires a holistic, integrated formation process that aims simultaneously at the hands, the head and the heart of the student.

To fulfill their duty in a modern, fragmented society Christian (trainee) teachers need to combine critical faithfulness and critical openness. In this way, they can teach children to deal with the diversity and complexity of society while remaining true to their own religious upbringing. To achieve this, it is necessary to go back to the historically correct interpretation of the life slogan of the father of Christian education in the Netherlands, Mr



Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer. With his 'in our isolation lies our strength', he did not mean social or geographical isolation, but daring to stand alone in connection with society. That is what *Faithfully Connected* describes.

Through theological action research these notions are already impacting teacher training at Driestar Christian University in Gouda (the Netherlands). The research was facilitated by Porticus Foundation and by Driestar, where Peter works as a teacher trainer. The study is illustrated with art works by Martijn Boer and Thomas van Olst.