

**A matter of perspective: The failure or success of Dutch integration policy
The case of Minority Language Teaching**

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Introduction

In the Netherlands it is widely believed that policies aimed at the integration of immigrants have failed, although research is not conclusive. In September 2002 the Socialist Party in the Netherlands moved a motion stating that the integration policy that had been pursued by the Dutch government over the last years had failed and that research should be carried out to find the causes of this failure. The motion was accepted and the government installed a temporary commission to investigate the matter. Last January this commission published its report which was immediately fiercely criticised, in both public and political spheres. Although the report states that the integration of many immigrants has been successful it also notes that “this is not owing to government policy; the success is primarily due to efforts of both indigenous and non-indigenous citizens alone” (Blok 2004). The enormous amount of criticism was directly related to the fact that the commission did not formally conclude that the integration policy had failed. Surprisingly, it had even been successful in some areas.

Consensus on the failure of integration policy remains, although a thorough investigation by a commission the government itself had installed, led to conflicting conclusions. This discrepancy between general opinion and official research is at least striking. Where does it come from? Therefore my research question is: *How can the discrepancy between the general opinion about policies regarding the integration of immigrants and the results of official research be explained?*

I will argue that different actors at different times have used different definitions of what integration should be about. As social problems change constantly so do their definitions. The debate and the objectives of integration policy have undergone many changes over the years. Integration policies in the Netherlands are no longer regarded as outspokenly multiculturalist as they have been in the past (Entzinger, 2002). Moreover, it has been suggested that cultural issues are increasingly being related to the problem (Snel 2003). The political climate has changed, it has hardened (Pels & Velde 2000). Furthermore, the political debate on the integration of immigrants has become harder and to the front more (Holsteyn, 2003). Nowadays, when talking about integration one seems to automatically refer to assimilation as if this is the only possible meaning of the concept (Wansink, 2004). Political parties have all written new notes on integration with assimilistic features. From this new assimilistic perspective integration policy may seem a big failure; while taking the different objectives of the past into consideration integration policy may seem a big success. In other words, people now ‘frame’ the integration issue differently, therefore having other expectations and conclusions. By illustrating the changes in objectives of integration policies over the years, I will shed some light on the controversially nature of the debate showing that a success or a failure is a matter of perspective: It depends on your view of integration. In order to reduce the complexity of the text and to make it better to read I have chosen to illustrate the general trend by means of a specific case: Minority Language Teaching.

By means of a discourse analysis my aim is to describe the shifts in problem definition and as much as possible about the context in which it evolved, in order to give possible explanations. Drawing on the definition by Maarten Hajer, discourse can be defined “as a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorisations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to

physical and social realities” (1995: 44). Therefore the primary focus will be on the language in the different story-lines that the different actors have used in framing the concept of integration in politics and political institutions. This way, the dominant discourse in the different periods can be found.

History

I will first start with a brief overview of general integration policies before turning to the specific case of Minority Language Teaching. This overview provides sociological insight in the ways problems and their solutions concerning the integration of immigrants were seen at that time. The case is meant to illustrate that point. Having first been introduced to the general overview allows for a better understanding of the changes in the specific case. In order to make a sociological distinction between the difference in focus of the different periods I want to point to the work by Peters (1993) who distinguishes between the functional, the expressive and the moral dimension of integration (Engbersen & Gabriels 1995). The functional dimension deals with adjusting means to objectives in an economical way. It concerns the question of how to co-ordinate human interactions in a successful way. The expressive dimension is about the acknowledgement of personal values by others and about the satisfaction of needs in so far as they are crucial in developing a stable individual and collective identity. The moral dimension consists of the norms that allow for peaceful interactions among individuals.

Before the 1980s: Remigration

After the second World War the policies that were aimed at immigrants differed per group. While the policy for immigrants from the former Colony of Indonesia were aimed at integration the policies for so called ‘guestworkers’ were aimed at remigration (Trappenburg 2003). It was generally assumed that the guestworkers were to stay on a temporary basis. After they had earned enough money they would return to their country of origin. The objective for this group was therefore not integration but *preservation of cultural identity* (Fermin 1997). Maintaining as much of one’s cultural identity would facilitate the return.

Clearly, the emphasis was on the expressive dimension of integration. This means that questions about the relation between identity groups were central issues concerning the integration of immigrants. The emphasis was on the cultural sector of society. Immigrants were not conceived of as individuals but as groups sharing a collective identity. Policies were aimed at the preservation of that identity.

The 1980s

In 1980 the Dutch government recognised that most immigrants would stay for good. Because the government had to deal with this fact, it began to develop a coherent policy to promote immigrant integration. This allowed for the period of the Ethnic minorities’ policy to start. Under this policy migrants were still perceived in terms of their group membership and not primarily as individuals, although formally the policy objectives were not stated in this manner. The policies were clearly targeted at well-defined groups that were lagging social-economically. The main goal was the struggle against these arrears in order to create equal opportunity for everyone.

The formal overall objective of the minority policy became: “ Achieving a society in which all members of minority groups in the Netherlands are in a situation of equality and have full opportunities for their development” (Entzinger 2002: 63).

Equality in opportunity did not mean equality in culture or moral norms. It was merely a matter of social redistribution. The emphasis was clearly on the social-economical sector

of society. Integration was to be achieved through improvement of the positions of immigrants on the labour market and in education. The functional dimension of integration was being stressed. This policy objective became known as *integration with retention of identity* (Fermin 1997). It was in this period that policies in the Netherlands became known for their multiculturalism.

The 1990s

By the early nineties several major changes had taken place. Firstly, the number of ethnic minorities had increased enormously, new immigrants such as asylum seekers were now coming, and a new generation within the groups emerged (Entzinger 2002). A policy that targets a limited number of clearly defined groups becomes more difficult to implement under these circumstances. Moreover, the social-economical situation of minorities remained bad. Secondly, there was a large public debate initiated by Frits Bolkestein, leader of a Dutch conservative liberal party on whether Islamic and Western values were irreconcilable. It was argued that immigrants had different moral standards from the Dutch, and the first sentiments of adjusting these standards to the Dutch norms were now being expressed.

Finally, there had also been a large debate on Minority language Teaching (Fermin 1997), which will be discussed later.

Until the nineties the term integration had almost been taboo. These new developments however led to the formulation of an integration policy. Integration was defined as “ a process leading to the full and equal participation of individuals and groups in society, for which mutual respect for identity is seen as a necessary condition” (Entzinger 2002: 72). In the beginning, integration was still to be primarily achieved through an increased participation in education and labour. However, the group-approach was replaced by a more individual approach. Institutionalised multiculturalism was replaced by an integration policy that in practice demanded much more efforts from the migrants than from the receiving population. The approach that focused on caring for specific groups was replaced by an approach that emphasises participation and individual responsibility (Entzinger & Moolenaar, 2000). In line with the general changes in the welfare regime, integration policies intended to activate immigrants. Not only were higher efforts concerning social-economical integration expected, newcomers were also demanded to take the so called ‘Inburgeringstest’¹. For new immigrants this test meant that they were obliged to follow classes in the Dutch language, societal orientation and labour market orientation (Entzinger & Moolenaar 2000). Immigrants were also considered to be more frequently engaged in criminal activities. Moreover it was often stated that ethnic minorities lack social association with Dutch citizens. Therefore, all kinds of efforts were made to make immigrants abide by the Dutch legal and moral rights. In other words the emphasis was now more on the moral dimension of integration. The debate was often framed in terms of moral and legal rights. The social order had been disturbed and it needed to be restored.

On the next page a schematic overview is presented.

¹ Dutch for: test to become a citizen

	Before 1980s	1980s	1990s
Policy	Remigration	Ethnic minorities	Integration
Dimension of integration	Expressive	Functional	Moral
Sector	Cultural	Economical	Political/legal
Questions relating to	Identity groups	Social redistribution	Social order
Level	Group	Group	Individual

Minority language teaching

Language and integration are connected to each other in one way or the other. In public debates it is often assumed that learning the Dutch language is essential for a successful integration of immigrants in Dutch society. Some even argue that the lagging Dutch language skills of immigrants are among the main reasons for the supposed failure of integration policies (Koopmans, 2003). On the other hand, over the years, the Dutch government has also offered large groups of minorities the possibility of mother tongue teaching. About 63 million Euro is spent each year on it (SCP, 2002).

Since the 1970s the Dutch government has been contributing in different ways to the formation of an educational policy that concentrates on the language and culture of ethnic minorities. Native language instruction has always been a subject of discussion. Its objectives, organisation and implementation have undergone many changes over the years. These changes have been prompted by the changed situation of migrants in the Netherlands, changes in the political climate, changed views regarding language acquisition, including the importance of one's mother tongue, and by the perception of the lagging academic achievement of minority students (SCP, 2002).

The arguments for Minority Language Teaching are mostly of a didactical nature. It is argued that a child who speaks his mother tongue fluently has less difficulty in learning other languages. Secondly, this type of education could operate as a cultural pedagogical bridge-function because the school environment and the home environment can be better matched. Furthermore, it stimulates the development of a cultural identity in a multicultural environment. Finally it is a friendly gesture to minorities and it therefore has symbolic value. Arguments against Minority Language Teaching are that there is no proof for the didactical arguments and that it is an extra ballast for children who are already behind (SCP, 2001).

International treaties

On a European level the emphasis is on the importance of a development of transnationalism or transnational identities. Citizens of Europe will increasingly not identify with one single nation-state but of multiple accounts. Being able to speak more languages is considered to be a core competence of being able to deal with increasing diversity (Extra, 2003). In this way immigrants can be considered as role-models instead of lagging in achievements.

The European Union advocates an approach aimed at inclusion. Language diversity is considered to be a condition for a Europe in which all citizens are equal. A treaty for the protection of minority languages therefore exists. It includes those languages that originate within a European Union nation-state. In the Netherlands the Friesian language is an example. Languages that do not originate in the nation-state are not included. Immigrants therefore do not have the legal right to claim Minority Language Teaching (Extra & Yagmur, 2002).

Before 1980s

At the end of the 1960s education in mother tongue language and culture to certain groups of students with a non-Dutch background started. It was privately organised with

an emphasis on the return to the country of origin (SCP, 2002). With the emphasis on the expressive dimension of integration, Minority Language Teaching was focusing on culture and to a lesser extent on learning the language. As mentioned before the overall objective was preservation of cultural identity. The case of Minority Language Teaching constitutes a perfect illustration of the overall policy trend.

The 1980s

In the eighties it had become clear that most immigrants would stay. Therefore the orientation on the country of origin, or culture, shifted to an orientation on Dutch education. The policy was now focusing more on language than on culture. The policy was named Education in Mother tongue Language and Culture (EMLC). EMLC was supposed to uphold a bridge-function between the home- and schoolenvironment in order to stimulate learning the Dutch language and thereby improving the chances of academic success. Furthermore, it was supposed to stimulate a positive self-concept and self-consciousness and contribute to intercultural education (SCP, 2002).

School with immigrant children could choose to include EMLC in the educational program. EMLC consisted of a five hour weekly program, with a maximum of 2,5 hours during school time and a maximum of 2,5 hours after school time. The minimum amount of participants was 8 children. If needed, schools could work together in forming a program. The teachers had to be native speakers and were recruited in the countries of origin. Because the emphasis was on improving Dutch language skills, it is clear that the functional dimension of integration was being emphasised. EMLC was seen as a means to achieve the goals.

The 1990s

In the nineties EMLC became subject of a large public debate, especially in educational and academic circles. On one hand there were linguists and educationalists who argued that a child who speaks his mother tongue fluently has less difficulty in learning other languages. On the other hand there were people who claimed the five weekly hours of mother tongue teaching in practice took place while the Dutch children were following their lessons on core subjects. The lessons were therefore considered to be a handicap rather than an advantage. That would also only increase the gap between both groups. Furthermore, there were discussions about the contents of the lessons. They were considered to be amateurish and largely inspired by textbooks used in the countries of origin and therefore reflecting their lifestyles and their dominant political and ideological views. The lessons were given by teachers who were recruited in the country of origin and therefore they mostly did not speak the Dutch language. They were also not familiar with Dutch culture. Moreover, determining a child's mother tongue became increasingly problematic for two reasons. Firstly, children of for example Berber or Kurdish origin who lived in the Netherlands did not always speak the official language of their country of origin, being Arabic or Turkish. However, this was the language in which the lessons were given. Secondly, an increasing number of children born and raised in the Netherlands learned to speak Dutch better than what the educational authorities assumed to be their mother tongue (Entzinger, 2002).

During this time a commission which had been installed by the government, called the commission of 'van Kemenade' concluded that research showed no indications that

EMLC had positive effects on the struggle against arrears in education. The arrears in education are related to social-economical factors and not to ethnicity. The commission emphasised the importance of the implicit autonomous cultural function of education in the native language. The government then introduced the term Education in Living Ethnic Languages (ELEL), referring to every language that does not originate in the Netherlands but is used by citizens of the Netherlands (SCP, 2001).

Most ethnic minority children attended the classes in mother tongue language and culture, although it had never been compulsory. This was probably the result of strong social control within the ethnic communities. However, under ELEL its voluntary nature was stressed and it was gradually put outside the core school curriculum. The government also added the demand that the ELEL teachers were supposed to speak the Dutch language sufficiently. This led to a dramatic decrease in the number of children who attended the classes.

Since then ELEL has been a subject of political and public discussion. Central discussion points are the right to existence, the goals and the implementation. ELEL has been placed under culture policy which illustrates how its intrinsic value is now being recognised. Learning the mother tongue and getting in touch with mother culture is the primary target. ELEL is considered to contribute to the emancipation and participation of ethnic minorities in Dutch society and to the intercultural character of Dutch society as a whole. The main difference with EMLC is that culture and language are now officially separated. Culture takes place outside the school curriculum and language can take place within but only in primary school as a tool in the struggle against arrears. By recognising its intrinsic value the government actually states it is no longer part of a general integration policy strategy. It is considered to be a right that ethnic minorities have. Its symbolic value is perhaps its most important feature; it is used as a political tool. The emphasis is therefore on the moral dimension. The right to existence is seen as a legal or moral right that ethnic minorities have. It is not about its function, its value is purely intrinsic.

Having no clear goals to achieve, the evaluation of ELEL could not be performed successfully. This factor in addition to general trends in political climate and other changed views led to the fact that ELEL's right to existence has come more and more under attack. This probably influenced the new government as it has stated the intention to abolish ELEL in the Central Agreement (van der Hoeven, 2003).

Conclusion

In this paper I have made clear that different dimensions of integration were stressed in different periods of time. Not only were problems relating to integration conceived of in a different way, the policy aims clearly differed as well. The term integration was not even used in policy documents until the 1990s, while it dominates the current debate. What people expect from a successful integration of an immigrant nowadays is very different from what was expected in the 1970s or 1980s. As former policies were not aiming at the cultural or moral adjustments that are asked of immigrants nowadays, they should not be judged according to current standards. It is better to evaluate the different periods separately by the objectives that applied during that time, instead of only by one set of goals that happens to generate a lot of support today.

In short we should not speak about *the* integration policy of the last thirty years, because that does not exist. The commission therefore concluded with rightly caution when it claimed that *the* integration policy had not failed. However, in today's climate this is not appreciated.

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