

## ***Heritage Education, Plurality of Narratives and Shared Historical Knowledge***

### **Summary**

*This research program examines how heritage education in a culturally heterogeneous and globalizing society can contribute to the construction of shared historical knowledge, while acknowledging different perspectives on the past. The research program has two aims. First, the program intends to investigate and reflect on the opportunities of heritage education with regard to disciplinary foundations, goals and approaches. Second, on a practical level the aim is to develop a benchmark model for dynamic and professional heritage education and to stimulate its integration in the curriculum of primary and secondary Dutch schools.*

### **Structure of Proposed Research**

The research program consists of three projects and a synthesis

Project 1 Post-doc	<b><i>Heritage educators and history teachers: concepts and ideas</i></b>
Project 2 PhD	<b><i>Heritage and history teaching: Dutch and English curriculum practices</i></b>
Project 3 PhD	<b><i>Heritage and entrance narratives: constructing shared historical knowledge</i></b>
Synthesis applicants	<b><i>Heritage education, plurality of narratives and shared historical knowledge</i></b>

### **Problem, Central Question, Aims**

Heritage is originally a legal concept that refers to property or the status acquired by a person through birth (Grijzenhout 2007). After the 1970s "heritage" developed into a concept denoting those aspects of public history concerned with experiencing and celebrating the past in contrast with the critical approach of history. Today interest for heritage has increased substantially and features monuments, archives, landscapes, traditions and identity, embracing even more engagements with different pasts (Lowenthal 1998, 2005). Obviously the boundaries between history and heritage are blurring.

Recently heritage education has become very popular as well. Politicians consider this field promising. They expect a growing respect for national heritage and a renewed sense of national connectedness. At the same time social and cultural minority groups claim their "own" heritage and the possibility to identify with their "own" roots. In this context heritage education generates a decentralizing tendency with local sites and local canons, in some countries evoking public clashes about the ownership of history (Davis 1999; Peckham 2003; Van der Laarse 2005; Jonker 2008). Educational experts see new opportunities to teach and learn about history and culture. They indicate that children are sensitive to heritage and "living history". Showing replica's of Roman sandals in the classroom or visiting an old windmill appeal to their imagination and frequently offer a fruitful entry into a sense of the past. By directly experiencing and examining artifacts, buildings, monuments, and other historic sites children gain knowledge and intellectual skills that enlarge their historical understanding.

At present, however, heritage education is a highly understudied subject. There is hardly any research about meaningful heritage education programs within a globalizing society and how to implement these in schools. England and Denmark have a tradition of heritage education integrated into the school curriculum. The Flemish Ministry of Education published a state of affairs on Flemish heritage education (integration in schools, collaboration networks and methods). The Netherlands Institute for Heritage launched a policy plan to encourage heritage education. Despite these and other initiatives the field is empirically and theoretically little substantiated, with the risk of becoming vulnerable to commercial and political uses. Research is badly needed. Based on Hunter (1988) we present a working definition which should be elaborated during this research: *heritage education* is an approach to teaching and learning about history and culture that uses information available from the material and immaterial culture as

primary instructional resources to strengthen students' understanding of concepts and principles about history and culture, nourishing a sense of continuity and connectedness with historical and cultural experiences with a view to the future.

Although heritage education offers interesting opportunities, in heterogeneous settings - in terms of nationality, ethnicity, religion, class and gender (Ten Dam et al 1991; Ghorashi 2006) - it might also frustrate learning processes. Students have a sense of the past before they enter educational settings, inspired by stories of their families, folktales, movies, cartoons and so on. They mentally structure this information in narrative schemes that make sense (Wertsch 2004; Barton and Levstik 2004). These so-called entrance narratives (Doering and Pekarik 1996) often comprise interest in the subject and knowledge about it. Hence students from heterogeneous backgrounds will bring different entrance narratives into the classroom. In this context the plurality of perspectives on the past, an important characteristic of history teaching, might be easily ignored due to the overall aim to construct shared historical knowledge. Under such conditions heritage education might result into petrified versions of a national past. Therefore, we need a dynamic approach of heritage education.

Important is what shared knowledge means. Is this national history per se? Barton (2007) argues that in modern society common historical knowledge should go beyond simplistic national 'grand narratives' and should reflect on complexity and diversity. In the Netherlands the Active Citizenship and Social Integration Act (2005) requires that primary and secondary schools educate all students about Dutch culture. Furthermore, one of the key-concepts underlying the history curriculum of Dutch secondary schools is "plurality of perspectives". Acknowledging plurality and drawing on these in teaching practices are important conditions for profound learning opportunities (Seixas 1993, 2007; Grever 2007). Quality depends also on conceptual clarity, consensus about goals and understanding of educational practices, criteria that make a benchmark model for education. The American Historical Association is developing benchmarks for history teaching; nothing similar exists for heritage education.

The **central question** of the proposed research is: *How can heritage education in a culturally heterogeneous and globalizing society contribute to the construction of shared historical knowledge, while acknowledging different perspectives on the past?* The research intends to investigate and reflect on the opportunities of heritage education with regard to disciplinary foundations, goals and approaches. On a practical level the aim is to develop a benchmark model for dynamic and professional heritage education and to stimulate its integration in the curriculum of primary and secondary Dutch schools.

## Theory

Three problems must be addressed, concerning conceptual, epistemological and empirical issues.

First, to assess the potentiality of heritage education we need to know what we mean with the term. Is heritage education an analytical category or a new buzzword for history education? It is perhaps no coincidence that the heritage cult resurfaces at a time of a fundamental change in historical consciousness, accompanied by commercialized heritage tourism (Hewison 1987), booming memory studies (Fritzsche 2004; Den Boer 2005) and a crisis of the historical discipline that turns on the questioning of the theoretical foundations of its truth claims (Rüsen 1989, 1994; Hutton 2004). Tollebeek and Verschaffel (1992) reintroduced Huizinga's notion of "historical sensation", referring to his experience after seeing an exhibition of Flemish Primitives when he was overwhelmed by a sense of unmediated contact with the past. Ankersmit (2007) enlarges this notion with "the sublime historical experience", describing traumatic feelings of loss due to a deep awareness of the inaccessibility of the past. The issue in the context of the proposed research is to what extent history refers to what Herodotus' has called "Istoria", and heritage to "exposure" with presentations of moral values (Bal 1996) and staged authenticity (MacCannell 1999). Several scholars (Kammen 1989; Barton and Levstik 2004; Seixas 2004) point to the hierarchic character of this distinction. Others also emphasize the importance of a dynamic approach of heritage and portable relics to avoid essentialism (Zerubavel 2003; Legêne 2004; Frijhoff 2007). Although it would be an artificial dichotomy to identify history with critical inquiry and impartiality versus heritage with present-centeredness and instrumentality, the aims of the two enterprises, their audiences and modes of persuasion seem to imply inherent contradictions (Lowenthal 1998,

2005).

Second, if both fields have a different engagement with the past, then what are the consequences for education? An important issue is when and how history teachers actually use heritage in their teachings, and under what conditions history teaching and heritage education might be (in)compatible. Museums, archives and heritage organizations present interactive exhibits, hands-on activities and educational websites as resources for teaching (Huysmans and De Haan 2007). Several publications offer rich descriptions of existing practices of heritage education and guidelines for teachers and heritage specialists (e.g. CANON 2007; Thomése 2008). The implementation of the Dutch Canon in the history curriculum – and in the near future – the National Historical Museum provide new opportunities to include heritage education in both primary and secondary schools. Yet a profound analysis of how the past is addressed is lacking. History teaching materials in which heritage is used may contain unique learning opportunities in which history teaching and heritage education are complementary activities (Carter 1988). However, teaching materials may also reflect localism, presentism, romanticism and anti-intellectualism (Patrick 1992).

Third, Western countries are facing a heterogeneous historical culture. In the Netherlands, the debates about the significance of the Dutch role in the Atlantic slave trade, the role of the Dutch East India Company in Indonesia, and Moroccan involvement in the Second World War show that these are 'contested memories', linked to global processes. The integration of these memories in the new historical culture requires an open approach for education (Locher-Scholten 1999; Ribbens 2004). Thus heritage education increasingly takes place within heterogeneous settings. At the same time policy-makers emphasize patrimonial pride (VanSledright 2008; Grever 2008) and re-invent national canons (Stuurman 2000; Grever and Stuurman 2007). Obviously there are both centripetal and centrifugal forces involved. This makes it difficult to commit heritage education to the rich diversity of the current student population. Common knowledge is - perhaps especially - needed in a multiform and globalizing society. To discuss issues of the common good, people should be informed and share some common basis for evaluating and debating.

### **Methods and sources**

We will review relevant academic discourses since the 1980's to clarify the implications of the theoretical predicament of history and heritage for the feasibility of history teaching and heritage education. As the theoretical issues will inevitably affect views among teachers, this study will also explore the strategies to cope with the possible tensions between the needs for identity in the field of heritage education and the contingency and narrative content of historical knowledge.

On the level of empirical research we will: analyze and compare Dutch and English history textbooks, websites and other educational materials; conduct and analyze interviews with Dutch students, history teachers and heritage educators; observe Dutch students' conversations during heritage education activities to identify the knowledge and experiences they use as a frame of reference and the way heritage contributes to shared historical knowledge. Three topics will be selected to investigate the actual practice of heritage education: *Christianization*, *Black slave trade*, *World War II* (see projects for explanation). Based on a framework for assessing professional history teaching (Frankel and Stearns 2004), the research will generate benchmarks (criteria) for heritage education.