13 The Rise of Competence-Based Learning in the Netherlands and Its Impact on the Implementation of ESD at Marnix Academie

Gerben de Vries, Stella van der Wal-Maris, André de Hamer, and Carlien Nijdam

Abstract

In this chapter we focus on the rise of Competence-Based Learning (CBL) in The Netherlands and its impact on the implementation of education for sustainable development (ESD) in Marnix Academie (MA), Teacher Training Institute for primary education in Utrecht. We conclude that CBL did help with implementing the process, the 'how' of ESD. The content, the 'what', owned by teachers, is harder to change as it affects the autonomy and competence of teachers. Working with the institute's culture, using MA's approach of decision-making and connecting the content of ESD to its mission, proved effective. External influences, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and UNESCO membership also helped to facilitate change. We conclude that implementing ESD successfully is a slow, people-orientated, culture-focussed process that needs a multi-level, whole institution approach. Change agents need to be aware of this.

Keywords

Whole school approach · Levinas · Marnix Academie · Implementing ESD · AISHE/Prise

Introduction

After a brief explanation of some terminology, this chapter gives an overview of the rise of CBL in Dutch teacher training institutes (TTIs) before focusing on its impact on Marnix Academie Teacher Training Institute for Primary Education in Utrecht (MA). From there we move on to developments regarding ESD at Marnix Academie and the role of CBL in it. We do so by using AISHE/Prise (Roorda 2001; de Vries and de Hamer 2014) as a starting point, and the Whole School Approach (van der Meer et al. 2017; Leren voor Morgen 2020) as an instrument for analysis. We end this chapter with conclusions and lessons learned.

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Some Terminology

Competence-Based Learning (CBL) has been discussed elsewhere in this book. Here we need to emphasise that CBL is an educational methodology, an educational approach that has no content of its own and that, according to the Glossary of Education Reform (2014), can take a wide variety of forms. It might answer questions about the *how* of education, it does not answer questions about the *what*. We shall come back to his later.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been introduced elsewhere (Chap. 1). For the understanding of this chapter we need to emphasise that it is characterised in a broad sense, as an education with a specific process, the *how* (Wals and Nolan 2012) and specific content, the *what*, based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Fig. 13.1).

Marnix Academie (MA) presents itself on the internet as a relatively small, open-minded, protestant-Christian University of Applied Sciences (www.hsmarnix.nl 2020); it only serves primary education. Socially, it expresses its identity in a horizontal way with great care for students, staff and interaction between people of different cultures and religions. Keywords are *competent*, *engaged* and *inspired*. Its philosophical, pedagogical and educational identity is exemplified by its emphasis on UNESCO membership, global citizenship, human rights, sustainable development and intercultural understanding. Crucial for its mission is, among others, the work of Levinas in relation to 'The Other' (Levinas 1975; Engelen 1985). Literature (de Kort 2019) and yearly reports illustrate MA's consistency in mission and identity from its founding in 1985 until the present.

Methodology

Data for this chapter have been collected from Marnix-documents and more general literature. These data have been chronologically organised. Where needed, short additional interviews were held with Marnix employees for clarification. These include three lecturers who started paying attention to sustainable development (SD) around the year 2000 and added their own knowledge early in the development stage. The current ESD and UNESCO coordinator added knowledge on recent developments about UNESCO member-

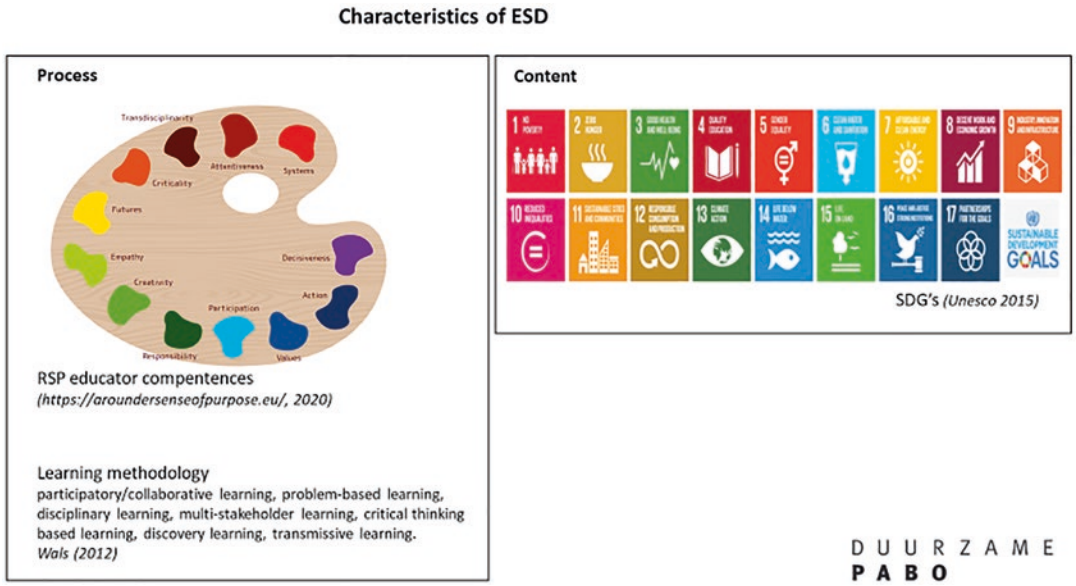

Fig. 13.1 ESD in process and content

ship and its influence on Marnix Academie. The facility manager added knowledge about matters concerning facility management and housing. The endowed professor of 'future-orientated education' added knowledge about Marnix identity, its consistency over the years and social entrepreneurship. Four lecturers, members of the taskforce for curriculum renewal and the UNESCO committee added information on recent developments. Their contributions were woven into this chapter. A concept text of this chapter was sent to them and to the vice dean, for final comments. These comments are woven into the final text, which was sent to the co-authors for approval.

Analysis of the Rise of CBL in Teacher Training Institutes in the Netherlands

In 1985, under a new law in the Netherlands, TTIs for primary education started being reshaped, becoming part of higher education, educating for teaching children aged 4–12 and taking four years instead of three. Traditionally, TTIs had their own curriculum, teaching strategies and systems of assessment with minimal Government oversight. Most TTIs had a modular system, with four semesters a year, several different lessons per day, four days of teaching and one day practice. This could lead to almost 80 different assessment points per year (320 over 4 years) not including practice assessments. Failing one of these would mean doubling some work the following semester in order to keep on track.

From 1992 quality control came under central Government and in 2003 a governmental committee ('visitatiecommissie Pabo') characterised Dutch TTIs for primary education as being broad rather than deep, lacking the theoretical level of higher education, having vague internal quality demands and disorganised assessment systems with only 9 out of 38 institutes functioning sufficiently (Sikkes 2003). As a result of this analysis, the Dutch Government took stricter control of TTIs. From 2006 this was facilitated by the implementation of CBL which included controllable quantitative and qualitative criteria backed up by law. Besides quality, the Government wanted to improve the Dutch economy (linking better teaching to a better labour force) as well as addressing a shortage of teachers (Rijksoverheid 2004).

Because of CBL, by law all TTIs in The Netherlands had to meet the same standards with freedom to add additional content. Against the background of the constitutional right of freedom of education (Rijksoverheid 2008), it is understandable that this led to huge political discussions ahead of CBL being implemented in 2006.

For most TTIs, CBL led to changes in curriculum and teaching strategies, bigger teaching units and fewer assessments. Seven competences were defined by the Foundation for Professional Quality of Teachers and Other Teaching Staff or SBL (Stichting Beroepskwaliteit leraren en ander onderwijspersoneel):

- Interpersonal competence, including indicators such as respect and personal involvement;
- Pedagogical competence, including stimulating behaviour and critical thinking;
- Professional and didactical competence, including content mastery and clear teaching;
- Organisational competence, including classroom management and planning;
- Competence in collaboration with colleagues, including asking for help and giving it;
- Competence in working with the school environment, including relationships with stakeholders and taking responsibility;
- Competence in reflection and development, including dealing with feedback and self-development.

In some indicators, characteristics of ESD appear, such as empathy, responsibility, values and collaboration.

The Government determined that from 2021 the CBL approach would be replaced with 'startbekwaamheidseisen' or starting competence demands (Rijksoverheid 2017, p. 148). These demands focus on content (especially Dutch language and Mathematics) as well as teaching methodology and pedagogy (including moral

development, citizenship and social-cultural awareness). CBL is no longer compulsory, instead it is a matter of choice for each TTI. According to the Government, the new indicators are clearer, more concrete and better assessable than the seven SBL competences. Again, the aim is to improve quality control (Korthagen 2004, p. 14); however, to date these changes have not raised the quality of primary education as The Netherlands ranking in international comparisons of basic skills—language and maths—has worsened (van Nieuwstadt 2019). That said, the latest changes again show some characteristics of ESD, such as responsibility, cooperation, inspiration, moral development and critical reflection.

Marnix Academie and CBL

In 1998, as a result of internal evaluations with staff and students, MA implemented Highly Self Responsible Programming (de Kort 2019). Its aims were improved quality, better feasibility, integration of disciplines and improving students' responsibility. This meant that the step to CBL in 2006 was a small one. To express MA's mission, in addition to the seven SBL competences, an eighth competence was formulated: *Competent in inspiring, wise and value orientated doing* (van den Berg et al. 2009/2014). The eight competences together include many characteristics of ESD.

The criteria of the new law in 2017 also proved a good fit for the MA profile—and MA reacted as usual: an all-staff meeting to initiate changes in policy, curriculum and more, preparing for a new start in September 2021. These changes, described by Luijns (2019), still include Levinas and 'The Other' as basis for mission, policy and curriculum.

Analysis of the Implementation of (E)SD at MA

Piecemeal work on sustainability began in 1997 when, with the Dean's permission, three young teachers started actions to 'green the campus'. They achieved some success and the Dean signed a national covenant promising that MA would pay attention to sustainability before he retired. In 2003 his successor established a small taskforce to come up with a plan; this coincided with the development of AISHE, an auditing instrument for sustainability in higher education (Roorda 2001) so this was adopted. AISHE has twenty criteria and five levels; MA's target was set by the Dean on level three. Although action was taken, ultimately the approach failed because it was too complicated, top-down, instrumental and disruptive of the change towards CBL that was occurring at the time.

An alternative Plan B involved two components:

1. A strategy based on a review of literature concerning the implementation of ESD as a voluntary and possibly unwanted innovation. This led to a checklist (Fig. 13.2), published internally in 2012 with one of the most important messages being *work on school culture*.

2. An instrument to monitor progress: AISHE again, but now used as a model of support and development through dialogue rather than top-down control. The MA taskforce simplified it and later published it as 'Prise' (de Vries and de Hamer 2014). AISHE/Prise included much more than 'product' and 'process', showing aspects of a Whole School Approach (WSA) (van der Meer et al. 2017), as shown in Fig. 13.3.

The strategy and monitoring tool transformed MA's Plan B into something akin to a 20-board simultaneous chess game, which led to an internal report stating that '*It is unlikely that students after their studies at Marnix Academy will be teachers with an affinity for knowledge of sustainable development*' (de Vries 2004). This report resulted in new developments. The following analysis of these developments is structured in a variation of the WSA (Fig. 13.4). This includes: vision; curriculum; didactics; facility

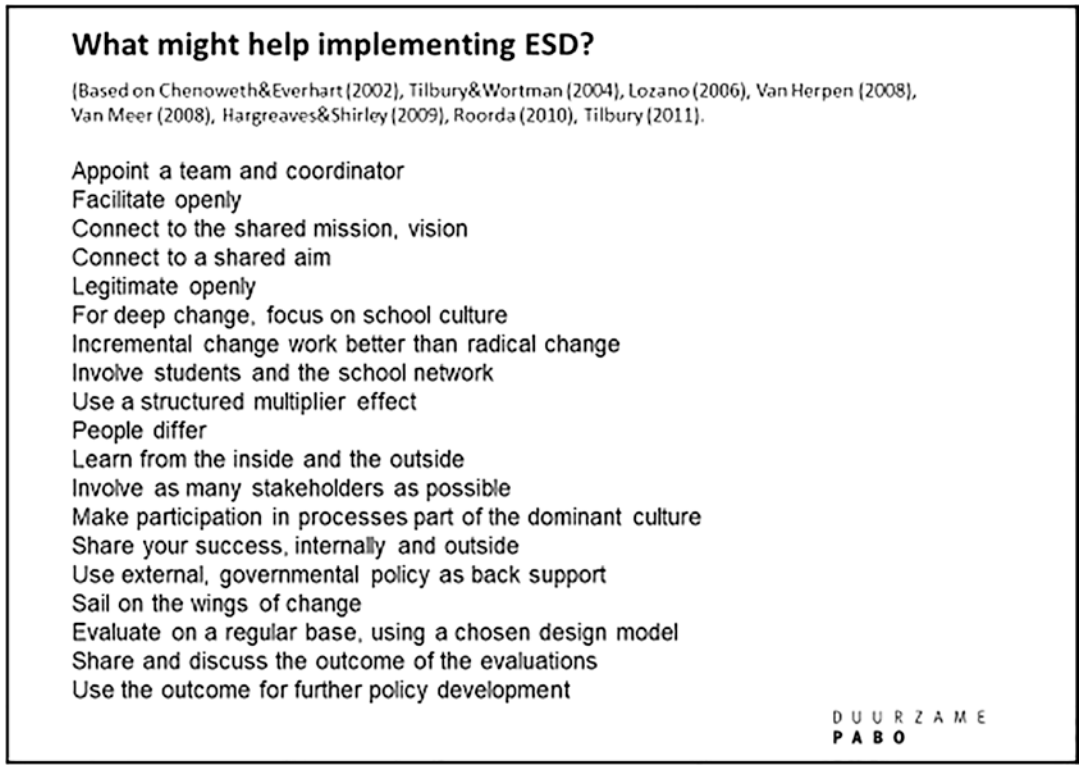

Fig. 13.2 Strategy list for implementing ESD (de Vries 2012)

management; professional development (including Human Resource Management); community.

Vision

For MA, as a strongly mission- and values-driven organisation, connecting ESD to that mission was crucial for acceptance. MA's vision, focussing on Levinas and the other (van den Berg et al. 2009/2014) was summarised into MA's definition of ESD: '*awareness of, respect for and taking responsibility for yourself, The Other and the other, here and there, in past, present and future*' (de Vries 2014). This connection is still valid (van der Wal-Maris 2019).

Curriculum

ESD, based on the research of 2004, found its place within the competences in 2006 with one word: sustainability, as part of the professional and didactic competence description. ESD content at the time was provided by the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and by 'Vensters op de Wereld' (Beneker et al. 2009). Its eight SD themes were used on an annual basis as 'theme of the year', helping teachers to turn the mission statement into concrete teaching that influenced the curriculum. In 2017, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) took over with changes in society also having their influence such as working with refugee children and dealing with diversity. Being a UNESCO school from 2017 is reflected in programmes, research and postgraduate courses, as shown in reports and emphasised by the UNESCO coordinator. Most notable here is 'social entrepreneurship at MA' (Marnix Academie 2020a, b, c, d), which reflects the MA definition of ESD, mentions the SDGs, has methodologies that resemble Wals and Nolan (2012) list and competences that resemble A Rounder Sense of Purpose (RSP)

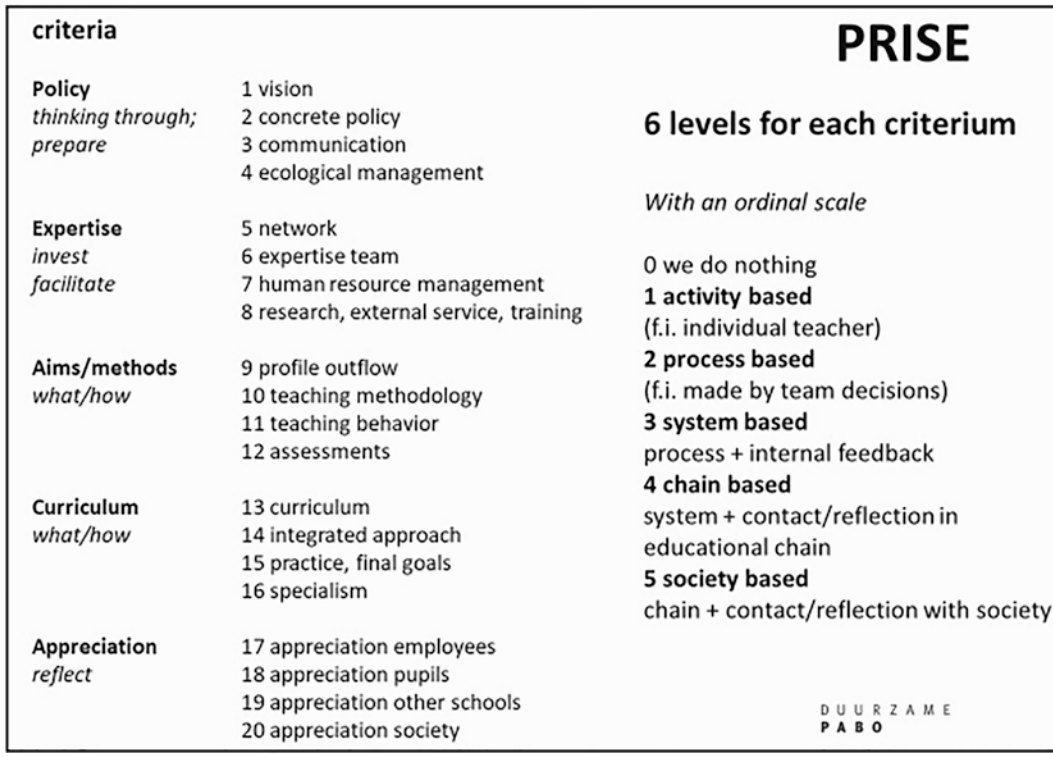

Fig. 13.3 Indicators for progress: prise criteria, based on AISHE (Roorda 2001)

Fig. 13.4 Whole school approach (van der Meer et al. 2017, as adapted by Leren voor Morgen 2020)

(Vare et al. 2019). It describes a 'LEV' learning line, in which 'LEV' stands for Levinas, Guts (Dutch; 'lef') and 'heart' in Hebrew. This will be part of the curriculum from September 2021.

In 2018, MA appointed two professors with designated assignments (www.marnixacademie.nl 2020): 'value-based leadership' and 'future-orientated education', enabling students to take their responsibility in co-creating a more righteous, democratic and meaningful way of life (van der Wal-Maris 2019). Their work is action-oriented and closely related to the 'LEV' line. This is not to suggest that things have always worked positively. In 2007 the Al Gore film, *An Inconvenient Truth,* was shown in the largest lecture hall to only three students and two teachers. Student involvement proved hard to achieve. Attempts to put on postgraduate courses in 'green' sustainable development failed because of a lack of interest from primary schools. Conversely, the social side of ESD, such as peace education or working with refugee children is strongly supported.

Teaching

Thanks to SBL, the eighth competence and MA policy, teaching in 2006 already met many of dimensions of ESD with subsequent developments such as a methodology for teaching ESD (de Vries and de Hamer 2010). The national changes proposed in 2017, to be implemented in 2021, represent the next step, yet MA does not view this as a way of achieving ESD; it simply fits into the ideology.

Facility Management

Changes towards CBL and self-steering brought about changes in buildings and facilities such as more smaller meeting rooms and individual working places. MA has also paid attention to eco-management for some years (de Vries 2004). According to the facility manager, these activities became more systematic and efficient over time. Curriculum changes, a growing student population and, more recently, COVID-19 have all served to open discussions about achieving even more environmentally friendly ways of working as well as cheaper housing.

Human Resource Management (HRM)

Changes to CBL and ESD were prepared the MA way: democratic, bottom-up, involving all staff, from dean to cleaning personnel, as respectfully as possible (de Kort 2019), in order to improve acceptance and support. Changes were not always greeted enthusiastically and sometimes led to frustration, particularly where it affected staff autonomy and competence. Careful HRM, retirement and job changes helped as ESD and concern for world citizenship became criteria in new appointments. While the ESD taskforce was reduced to one member with only 40 h a year due to diminished management support, progress is facilitated by a Plan C: implementing (E)SD through a process of constant dialogue with all colleagues, thereby contributing to a broad acceptance. Rethinking strategies for securing acceptance became important; this led to the UNESCO membership while all successes, large or small, were supported and communicated internally making all staff part of the success. Success has also been communicated explicitly to the outside world, which has built MA's reputation as an ESD-TTI.

Professional Development

Professional development at MA is organised through all-staff meetings almost every 5 years plus smaller events for more specific aims. Furthermore, each employee has a personal development plan. ESD slowly became part of this agenda. Most teachers were not interested in 2003. All kinds of activities were organised, working on change of culture; the UNESCO membership helped while wider societal changes (e.g., the Paris agreement of 2015) also raised awareness.

ESD-related professional development at MA was monitored from 2003 using AISHE/Prise. Imposing this approach failed in 2003 but success was achieved by aligning ESD with the description of the SBL competences. AISHE2, including a special governmental tribute, was welcomed in 2008. AISHE3 was reached in 2012, which made MA officially the highest ranking ESD-TTI in the country (Marnix Academie 2013). Each AISHE audit led to a report that was discussed and became a reason for change. In 2017, MA left the AISHE system and became a UNESCO school (Marnix Academie 2018).

There were several reasons for change: MA policy moved towards world citizenship, UNESCO was more appealing, fitted better into MA's mission, was less competitive and was not viewed as a tool of management.

Community

Here, Duurzame PABO, an NGO that promotes networks of TTIs for pre-school and primary schools that are actively involved in ESD proved to be crucial. It was the main connection to organisations and meetings, providing MA with contacts such as guest speakers and keynotes. Eventually it was this connection that led to the UNESCO membership. During a visit to the TEESnet conference in 2017, with almost all science and humanities teachers, the SDGs were introduced and became part of MA's curriculum ever since. The UNECE competences (de Hamer and Leussink 2012) also became part of the curriculum, as did the RSP competences in 2017.

Governmental policy on CBL also helped as do new general aims for education in The Netherlands (Curriculum.nu 2020). This might give a boost to implementation of ESD into primary schools and TTIs and makes implementation easier than was the case 20 years ago. In the coming years MA will work on dealing with diversity by using its network of over 350 primary schools, including inner-city schools.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned: Did CBL Help with Implementing ESD?

At first sight, in 2003 it did not help; CBL was being implemented at MA and implementing ESD was seen as a threat to the CBL process. However, in 2006, with the official start of CBL, it did help. Not so much because of the CBL system, but because of the way the government described the indicators and the way MA added an extra competence with additional indicators, filling it with its mission. Changes in MA's competence profile in 2009 and 2014 further strengthened the implementation of the process, the *how* of ESD.

The content, the *what*, owned by teachers, was harder to change as it affected the autonomy and competence of teachers even further than the SBL competences and ESD was not forced by the government in the same way. Working on the school culture, using MA's ways of decision-making and connecting the content of ESD to the mission, the concept of The Other, proved successful, supported along the way by the SDGs and the UNESCO membership.

In 2017, preparing for implementation in 2021, the two came together. ESD finally became a mainstream part of MA. Again, the change was forced by law and filled by MA in its own way—with LEV (Levinas, guts and heart). To make this all possible, a clear goal (AISHE3, later UNESCO membership) and a clear strategy were helpful. An almost constant effort to influence the culture, in a multi-level process, working both bottom-up and top-down and adjusting to the MA way of working slowly made change happen. Connecting ESD to MA's mission proved to be crucial, something which may be unique among Dutch TTIs.

Despite the single-case character of this study, we might distinguish some conclusions that can be transferable to other situations:

- Implementing ESD can be seen as a non-compulsory, unwanted change; it needs to be

approached in this way. Do not expect it to be fun unless you make it fun.
- External pressures, such as laws, can make things happen but these need a careful translation to fit in the school system and culture.
- Implementing ESD successfully is a slow, people-orientated, culture-focussed process that needs a multi-level whole school approach.
- Change agents/ESD innovators should be aware of the need for positivity, stubbornness, wisdom, perseverance and a sense of strategy, keeping their eyes on the prize over the long term; they might learn how to play chess first.

CBL can be of help in implementing ESD, although other approaches might fit even better. Almost a century ago and unknowingly, Parkhurst, Freinet, Petersen and Boeke were already on the move (see Ahlers 1982). It might be interesting to see what we can learn from these reform educationalists.

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