

**Kienstra, Natascha/ Berendsen, Desiree/ Rombout, Floor/ Poortier, Kirsten (eds.) (2021): Filosofie op School. Handboek Vakdidactiek Filosofie, Amsterdam: Boom Publishers.**

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As philosophy can be seen as “the slowing down of the thinking process”, it is perhaps understandable that it took almost half a century before a handbook of didactics of philosophy saw the light in the Netherlands. In the end, this event took place in April 2021 when “Filosofie op School. Handboek vakdidactiek Filosofie” was published by Boom publishers, Amsterdam.

At Dutch universities there is no specific chair for didactics of philosophy. Hence, the project was based on a partnership of didacticians from several universities and teachers of philosophy at secondary schools. They all wrote about parts of the curriculum in which they had developed expertise. The editorial board consists of Desiree Berendsen, Natascha Kienstra, Kirsten Poortier and Floor Rombout.

In Dutch secondary schools Philosophy is an exam subject in the upper grades of HAVO (higher general education, five years) and VWO (preparatory academic education, six years). Both types of education have quite different curricula. HAVO focuses on practical philosophy while VWO combines practical and theoretical philosophy. (Oosthoek 2018)

Philosophy has been a school subject at Dutch secondary schools since 1973. The handbook marks an important step in the development of a common language to talk about the subject shared by didacticians and teachers. The structure of the book is a triad. The first part is about the history and fundamentals of the subject and consists of five chapters. The first two chapters deal with the history of the subject in the Netherlands (Dirk Oosthoek) and Belgium (Griet Galle), the third is about the relation between conceptions of philosophy and teaching style (Pieter Mostert), the fourth about the pedagogical task of a teacher of philosophy (Eva-Anne Le Coultre) and the fifth about ways of doing philosophy in classrooms effectively (Natascha Kienstra). These chapters alternate with paragraphs on good reasons for students to choose philosophy (Don Kwast), the character of philosophy in the lower grades (Jos Hogenbirk), in preparatory vocational education (VMBO, four years) (Margot Ellenbroek) and in HAVO (Olle Spoelstra).

The second part of the book focuses on philosophical skills and the contents of the curriculum. It consists of seven chapters about critical thinking (Floor Rombout), philosophical dialogue (Kristof van Rossem), writing a philosophical essay (Floris Velema/Teodora Groza), philosophical reading (Arjan Koek), philosophical thought experiments (Philippe Boekstal),



didactical strategies to elaborate the contents of the curriculum (Hans Wessels), and testing of philosophical thought competences (Frans van Dorp).

The third part of the handbook consists of topics that transcend the subject of philosophy, such as moral judgment between indoctrination and relativism (Jaron Schoone), citizenship education (Lotte Michielsen/Sven Gellens), and teaching philosophy in relation to subjectification (Kirsten Poortier). These chapters alternate with paragraphs on good practices such as a philosophical lesson in media literacy (Sake van der Wall), the question as to what makes sciences scientific (Tjeerd van de Laar), and philosophy and film (Joan de Ruijter).

It may be surprising that the handbook does not contain pure philosophical subject matter or methodological tips to design lesson plans. The reason for this is that the subject matter of the curriculum has been shared in official open access documents.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, an extensive open access database of examples of lesson plans can be found on the website of the association of teachers of philosophy (VFVO).<sup>2</sup>

The editors expect this handbook to be of use for starting as well as more experienced teachers of philosophy: a handbook which can be used for the preparation of and reflection on lessons and will induce inspiration as well as a feeling of community with other teachers of philosophy. One should add to this list students who are educated to become teachers of philosophy. As such, the handbook on teaching philosophy will undoubtedly become one of the cornerstones of Dutch philosophy education in the next decade.

## **References**

Oosthoek, D.H. (2018). Country Report: Philosophy at Secondary Schools in the Netherlands. *Journal of Didactics of Philosophy* Vol. 2, 2018, 18-20

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.examenblad.nl/examen/filosofie-havo/2023> and <https://www.examenblad.nl/examen/filosofie-vwo/2023>

<sup>2</sup> <https://vfvo.nl/lesmateriaal/>