

# **Vision on the language policy**

## **First Notation**

Minister of Education and Culture

Ms. O.V.E. Leeflang

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## **VISION**

**The current cabinet promotes the Netherlands Antilles as a multilingual community**

**The Netherlands Antilles has always profiled itself as a country in which more languages are spoken. This has been our social-economic weapon and our strength.**

**Knowing that boundaries are fading and that there are practically no barriers for interaction with the world, we must keep investing in that which has always given us an advantage, namely our multilingualism.**

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## ***Language of Instruction in Foundation Based Education***

In 2002 the government began to improve primary education substantially. All organizations, actors and stakeholders were convinced that education must be renewed. A shift had to take place from education based on method to education based on the child. In 2002 Foundation Education was introduced in all schools in the Antilles.

The vision about the language of instruction in foundation education has been altered many times.

The first version of the bill-national ordinance comprises a language model in which in the first cycle Papiamentu is the language of instruction, with the exception of four schools in Curacao and two in the other islands (totaling 6 schools).

In case that 75% of the parents on an island wish to have another language of instruction than stated in the National Ordinance, the schoolboard on that island can use another language of instruction in the second or third cycle.

The last version of the National Ordinance states that the language of instruction in cycle 1 and 2 will be Papiamentu, with the exception of the six schools. The proper authority can request the government to maintain another language of instruction in the second cycle. The island council will decide about this request. This second draft impedes the introduction of bilingual schools. The explanatory statement along with the most recent draft states the following with regard to the status of exception of the seven schools:

*“Since prior to this national ordinance a deviating situation is apparent for the schools stated in the third clause, consideration has been given to this deviating situation in the third and fourth clause.”*

This motivation does not comply with the Court’s criteria that making a distinction is only permitted if one can indicate a reasonable and objective justification ground. A sole reference to the past, without the support of educational arguments does not seem sufficient. The explanatory statement will first have to have clearer arguments. At any rate, the explanatory statement must explain if the schools concerned are sufficiently unequal to other schools in order to be treated as unequal schools. This means that one will have to see if this argument is valid in order to place the schools concerned in another position. Depending on the reasons to be formulated, it is conceivable that these schools should not be made an exception or that more schools should in fact be made an exception. As it is known, more schools wish to use other languages of instruction than the one proposed.

In the dossier that the Directorate for Education and Culture has compiled, an application is at any rate found in the Foundation Catholic Education St. Maarten for two schools, while the Romerschool in Curacao applies for an exception.

## ***Educational Tools***

The educational tools that had to be developed for the language development of Papiamentu have not been delivered complete. Nothing has yet been produced for the subject Dutch or for the other foreign languages. The subject Arithmetic does not have new material and neither do the other educational areas.

The backlog in the production of material in Papiamentu and Dutch, whereby a crash program is being developed to eliminate the backlog, will have a negative impact on the development of the pupils in foundation education and will subsequently endanger the support for the reforms and in particular for the status of Papiamentu.

## ***Language policy***

Although the language of instruction is a recent topic in foundation education, the language policy comprises more than only the language of instruction. The language of instruction gives guidance to the all-embracing language education<sup>1</sup>.

The language of instruction encompasses different languages relevant in Antillean language education, such as: Papiamentu, English, Dutch, but also languages relevant in our geopolitical reality, such as: Spanish.

The language policy will also consist of objectives formulated for the subject items; originally reading, spelling, pronunciation and for example even argumentation study in secondary education. In the language policy an opinion must be formed about the diversity of goals and contents of a particular subject for a particular type of education. In order to achieve this, domain descriptions will be developed<sup>2</sup>.

## ***The current state of affairs in the language policy***

A document for school language policy has been discussed in different schools. The implementation of this project is in an advanced stage and must be completed. **In this respect, the language vision of the current cabinet, namely a multilingual community, will be processed. The Netherlands Antilles, in particular Curacao, has**

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<sup>1</sup> Besides language proficiency language education comprises subjects of which the primary goal lies in a direct enhancement of the language proficiency. An example is literature education

<sup>2</sup> In a domain description one tries to join the goals with the contents of a certain subject for a certain type of education in a clear manner.

**always profiled itself as a country where many languages are spoken. This is our social-economic weapon and our strength. Knowing that boundaries are fading and that there are practically no barriers for interaction with the world, we must keep investing in that which has always given us an advantage, namely our multilingualism.**

Therefore, the second language, Dutch, and the foreign languages Spanish and English will assume a clear position in the law concerning foundation education in the Windward Islands.

At this moment Dutch should receive enough attention to simplify the transference in secondary education to Dutch. Secondary education is still given in Dutch and this requires, if Papiamentu is the language of instruction, sound familiarization as from the first cycle and subsequently a rapid transition from the language of instruction Papiamentu to the language of instruction Dutch.

## ***Bilingualism***

The term bilingualism should also be clearly defined. The parent committee of Romerschool in Curacao has indicated in their letter to the government that they prefer bilingual education. In this letter the committee stated they wish to have Dutch as the language of instruction at school and Papiamentu should be taught as a subject. The reality of bilingual education <sup>3</sup> is that a school considers itself to be bilingual **if enough attention is paid to both languages as subjects as well as languages of instruction.**

Longitudinal study into language acquisition of Papiamentu and Dutch by Severing demonstrates that the bilingual educational model, such as advocated by R.K. Centraal Schoolbestuur, enjoys great preference.<sup>4</sup>

*(...). Given the fact that the acquisition of literacy in a language requires a certain level of oral proficiency in that language, pupil must be given the opportunity to build up elementary skills of literacy in their first language, for most children in the ABC islands this is Papiamentu. After the children have learnt how to read and write in their first language, reading instructions in the second language should be given the moment the children master the basics of oral proficiency in this language (Verhoeven, 1990b). The results of the current study show that in high school pupils read and understand better in Papiamentu. On the basis of the supposition that the original acquisition of literacy in the strongest language will be most effective, it is recommended that pupils read and write in Papiamentu in primary schools in Curacao, irregardless of choices*

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<sup>3</sup> *The conclusion appears justified that within the language situation in Curacao, the onset of bilingualism can be distinguished at a toddler's age. The toddler, whose language at home is Papiamentu, stands at the onset of a continuum of bilingualism, with a dominant language of his own. (Taal in ontwikkeling, een studie naar het Papiamentu en het Nederlands in de kleuterperiode op Curaçao en in Nederland. The thesis by Ms. Goretti Narain to acquire her doctorate, November 1995).*

<sup>4</sup> *Geletterdheid en onderwijssucces op Curaçao; Een longitudinale onderzoek naar verwerving van Papiamentu en Nederlands; Theses by Mr. Ronald Severing (born in Curaçao) to acquire his doctorate, July 1997.*

*with regard to the further organization of education. The study also stipulates that the degree of literacy of the pupils in Dutch is one of the most important conditions for educational success in primary and secondary schools in Curacao. Papiamentu also plays a role as a predictor, albeit in a lesser manner. Additionally, a good command of reading and understanding in Dutch is essential. In view of infants' weak development of vocabulary (Narain, 1995) and the poor vocabulary acquired at the end of primary school, such as has been confirmed in the study, specific attention should be paid to the child's increase of vocabulary in both languages. In this respect, the status of Papiamentu as a dominant language must be profiled(...).*

### **“Clear language”**

The decision about the language of instruction in Foundation Education can no longer change each time. In a number of notes about language policy, the minister of Education intends to discuss one aspect every time. In addition, an attempt will be made to submit the national ordinance on Foundation Education, in which the language policy is stipulated, to Parliament in the first half of this year.

## ***More languages of instruction in Foundation Education***

### ***Decision points***

1. The languages Papiamentu, English and Dutch can all be languages of instruction in Foundation Education from the first cycle. This decision is not totally new because at this moment Dutch, Papiamentu and English are languages of instruction in Foundation Education. In previous policies, however, limitations have been imposed for a number of Dutch schools whereby the legal right of all citizens to be treated equally has diminished. As it is known, the signals in the community of waiting lists in Dutch schools and the fact that a few hundred children could not be registered in Dutch schools because the number of Dutch schools is limited to four in Curacao, are clear signs of the scarcity created as a result of the limitation imposed by the policy, and not by law<sup>5</sup>.
2. *The bilingual model proposed by RK Centraal Schoolbestuur enjoys preference*<sup>6</sup>.
3. The Proper Authority, and not the Central Government, will determine the number of schools that have Dutch, Papiamentu or English as their language of instruction.
4. The national ordinance will stipulate requirements for the quality of language education, final terms and the teachers' qualification.
5. Additionally, language proficiency tests will be developed in order to monitor the children's language development.
6. As a result of this policy parents will be able to choose the school with the language of instruction that they prefer.

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<sup>5</sup> *According to the present national ordinance on primary schools Dutch is still the language of instruction.*

<sup>6</sup> *Language of Instruction Papiamentu in the first cycle  
Language of Instruction Dutch in the second and third cycle  
Familiarization with Dutch in the first cycle*