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Care for Citizenship: An Analysis of the Debate on the Subject Care

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ABSTRACT

In 1993 the subject Care was introduced as a compulsory subject in Dutch secondary schools. This article analyzes the heated discussion preceding this decision which raised fundamental issues concerning "citizenship" and the objectives of education. Both opponents and proponents used the same oppositions in the debate, namely, the private sphere versus the public sphere, and cognitive education versus practical and moral education. We argue that these oppositions limit the potential of the subject Care. Therefore, we also explore ways to avoid these oppositions. An approach avoiding the first opposition can be found in a broad definition of care, as proposed in recent feminist theories. This approach extends the definition of care from caring for oneself to caring for others and the environment, and from care in the home and community to care as a sector of the labor market and as a responsibility of the state. In our opinion, the further development of the subject Care should be based on these theories. The second opposition can be avoided by conceptualizing learning as a process in which cognitive, affective, social, and practical elements are inextricably linked.

INTRODUCTION

Debates on citizenship seem to have acquired a new urgency in recent years. There is a strong connection between these debates and the question "What should a national curriculum or 'basic education' include?" The traditional relationship between state, citizenship, and education no longer seems to be relevant in the postmodern society of the 1990s. Although attempts have been made to define an educational basis for citizenship by formulating a homogeneous cultural literacy (Hirsch 1987), this was generally considered to be an ahistorical and apolitical approach. It was felt that a democratic society should be characterized by diversity and debate

(Aronowitz and Giroux 1988). Critical pedagogues in particular made a plea for giving “new” groups of citizens a voice, arguing that their cultures also include elements that are relevant for every citizen or that “every citizen should know.”

In The Netherlands, the political decision made in 1993 to introduce a common curriculum, known as “basic education,” in the first stage of secondary education was a reason for paying renewed attention to the question “What should every Dutch citizen be taught?” The Advisory Council on Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid; hereafter abbreviated and cited as WRR), the author of the proposal on which the new system was based, defined “basic education” as “[a] common, general education in the intellectual, cultural, and social spheres providing a foundation for further development of the personality, for the meaningful functioning as a member of society, and for making responsible choices on further schooling and an occupation” (WRR 1986, p. 77). According to the WRR, knowledge and skills should be included in a common curriculum that (1) cannot be acquired later if they have not been learned during basic education; (2) in that case, will be a continuing impediment to functioning as a full member of society; (3) are essential for the further development of knowledge and skills; and (4) cannot be acquired outside school (WRR 1986). These criteria obviously imply notions of citizenship.

A “new” group making itself heard on the issue of “what every citizen should know” was the women’s movement. The debate on the common curriculum that preceded and followed the WRR proposals was seized upon by feminists as a means of advancing their claims for the inclusion of a subject called “Care,” thereby explicitly promoting “care” as an aspect of citizenship. This proposed new subject was to be based on the traditional subjects home economics and health education. These existing subjects would, however, be modernized and expanded to include topics such as relationships, the environment, leisure, and (un)paid work.

In this article, we analyze the heated discussion instigated by the proposal to introduce a new compulsory subject, Care, in the Dutch common curriculum. We interpret this discussion as a struggle about the meaning of “citizenship” and the function of education in relation to different elements of citizenship. First, we will briefly introduce recent feminist approaches to the concepts of “citizenship” and “care,” paying particular attention to the “public–private” dichotomy. Then we will describe the subject Care and its history, and follow this with an analysis of the Care debate. Finally, we will discuss the strategies used by the subject’s proponents, focusing not only on the way in which they used the opposition private versus public sphere, but also on a second opposition in the debate, namely, cognitive versus practical and moral education. We will argue for a broad definition of the subject Care that transcends the opposition between the private and the public spheres, and in which cognitive, affective, social, and practical elements are inextricably linked.

FEMINISM, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE CONCEPT OF CARE

The concept of citizenship has been criticized over the last fifteen years from a feminist perspective (Pateman 1989). The criticism focuses in particular on the assumed gender-neutral definition of citizenship in classical liberal and democratic theory. Although liberalism has contributed a great deal to feminism, particularly in relation to individual equal rights, and references to the continuing emancipatory potential of liberalism are increasingly made (see Okin 1989), the liberal concept of citizenship presents problems from a feminist point of view. The ideal, typical citizen is in fact the independent, male householder; employment is the key to citizenship (Pateman 1988, pp. 238–239). In such a definition women are readily seen as lacking the characteristics, qualities, attributes, and identity that full members of the political community are supposed to have. At the same time, domains and values traditionally ascribed to women are not considered to be politically relevant (see Jones 1990). Feminists have therefore called for a more diversified and pluralistic model of citizenship that can encompass these “feminine” domains and values. Besides arguing for a broader definition of citizenship, feminists have criticized the dichotomy in modern society between private and public life. In liberal theory, the public sphere is defined as the sphere of politics while the private sphere, which is the sphere of the family, is assumed to be free from political interference. “Citizenship” is seen as being exclusively related to the public sphere. Feminists have tried to undermine the oppositions private versus public and personal versus political by pointing out the political determination of private life, and by emphasizing that women’s activities in the private sphere are relevant to the functioning of (public) society.

The traditional model of citizenship and the separation of the private and the public spheres associated with this model have also been criticized from other perspectives. For example, Habermas proposes replacing the dichotomy public–private with a model in which four different spheres are distinguished, as modern welfare states are characterized by a strong interrelatedness of the public and the private (see Fraser 1991). At the level of the “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*), he distinguishes between political participation (public) and the family (private), and at the level of the economic system he makes a distinction between the welfare state (public) and the market (private). However, Fraser (1991) argues that this greater diversity of social roles is also not gender-neutral; these roles are typically the roles of women and men. Women in particular occupy the roles of consumer (market) and caretaker (family), men those of employee (welfare state), citizen (political public sphere), and breadwinner (family).

Feminist criticism of equal opportunities policies in education in Western countries is often based on the idea that citizenship includes more than the traditional activities of men in the public sphere. Equal opportunities policies are frequently aimed at stimulating girls to participate in all sectors of society to the same extent as boys. On reflection, it is clear that “all

sectors of society” actually refers to the labor market and other activities in the “public” sphere. From the feminist perspective outlined above, this approach to encouraging girls to participate in the labor market can be criticized because it only offers a partial emancipation strategy. It reflects the concept of citizenship that favors the values, experiences, and practices associated with men and masculinity.

First, the emphasis on participation in the labor market marginalizes care activities. These activities are traditionally associated with women’s work and are undervalued accordingly. Second, the limitations of the equal educational opportunities policies place girls in a double bind. Girls are asked to conform to a kind of citizenship that values the masculine more highly and that is constructed in opposition to the feminine (Foster 1992). Not only does this leave the concept of citizenship undiscussed, it also results in the idea that there is something wrong with girls and women. It implies that they lack the attributes, values, and motivations that *real* citizens ought to possess (Volman, ten Dam, and van Eck 1993; Walkerdine 1989).

A central policy concerning equal opportunities in education has existed in The Netherlands since 1979, when the first policy document on this issue was published (Ministerie van Onderwijs en Wetenschappen [Department of Education and Science] 1979). The government, concerned about the conspicuously low level of participation by Dutch women in the labor market, formulated three policy objectives on gender equality: (1) reduction of factors that hamper freedom of choice, including breaking with traditional sex-stereotyped roles; (2) reappraisal of feminine qualities; and (3) improved educational opportunities for women to enable them to “catch up.”

In spite of the diversity of their policy objectives, Dutch feminists have always felt that the emphasis was placed primarily on the aim of “catching up with boys.” The objective of “reappraising feminine values” has proved to be far more difficult to incorporate into policy (ten Dam and Volman 1995). Policy measures were mainly aimed at influencing the educational choices of girls, even when it was acknowledged some years later in the Dutch Equal Opportunities Policy Plan of 1985 that ideally education should qualify girls and boys both for employment in the labor market and for domestic and caring tasks.

The introduction of a compulsory subject Care for all pupils was seen by Dutch feminists as an opportunity to conduct a policy that goes beyond equal opportunities, that is, a policy focusing on education (the curriculum) instead of on girls, and giving substance to the idea that education should contribute to the reappraisal of feminine values. Inclusion of the subject Care in the common curriculum would mean that all pupils—boys as well as girls—would learn to take on domestic and caring tasks, and to take care of themselves and others. This would be a contribution to demolishing the idea that caring is the exclusive task of women. Moreover, inclusion of the care domain in the formal curriculum was assumed to reflect and contribute to its recognition as a domain of societal relevance.

In recent discussions of “care,” however, feminist scholars have incorporated the criticism on the oppositional conceptualization of the private and the public spheres more effectively than the arguments mentioned above. Fisher and Tronto (1990) define care as an activity involving everything we do to maintain, sustain, and adapt our world to improve the quality of life (Fisher and Tronto 1990; Tronto 1993, p. 118). These authors do not restrict the definition of care to caring for oneself or caring for other people; they also apply caring to objects and the environment. More importantly, they do not restrict care to the private sphere. Processes of care are not only to be found within the home or community, but also in the labor market (professional care), as well as being provided by the state (the welfare state).

We would like to promote this concept of care (in which care is not restricted to a specific sector of the community or a way of life, but is seen as a dimension to every aspect of society) as the basis for the subject Care. This would provide an alternative means of deconstructing the unequivocal and exclusive association of women and care to that advocated by the Dutch feminists mentioned above. It defines many phenomena as care that at the moment are not associated with women and femininity at all. Moreover, the association of women and care is denaturalized by showing that similar tasks can be performed by different institutions and people, paid or unpaid, depending on how society is organized. In this article we will argue that the proponents of the subject Care were moving toward this point of view in their arguments, but were distracted by the course of the debate, and ultimately even contributed to an image of the subject that reinforced rather than reconfigured the boundaries of the public and private domains.

Before presenting our analysis of the Care debate, however, we would like to make two further remarks on Care as an element of the curriculum. First, from a feminist point of view, the somewhat sudden receptiveness of politicians to the subject Care can be viewed with skepticism. The introduction of the subject, and more generally, the development of the discourse that boys should also learn how to care for themselves and others, have coincided with a process in which the government is relinquishing to the ordinary citizen the responsibilities of the welfare state adopted in the 1960s; this parallel development should arouse suspicion. The population at large no longer enjoys the traditional safety net provided by the family and the community, yet the state grows less and less willing to care for the individual. That education has been assigned the new task of teaching care skills can also be seen in the context of the changed relationship on matters of care between the individual and the state. We are of the opinion, however, that a broad definition of care will indeed enable this sort of process in the subject Care to become the explicit subject of discussion.

Second, in this article “care” is mainly discussed as an element of the curriculum. However, “care” in the sense of “caring for” can also be considered as a pedagogical dimension. Including “care,” whether narrowly or broadly defined, as an element in the curriculum is not the only contribution education can make to preparing pupils for this aspect of citizen-

ship. "Caring for each other" can also be considered as an explicit aspect of the social climate of the school. From this perspective, "caring" can be added to the list of attitudes, such as responsibility, respect for others, and tolerance, that authors who want to develop the school into a "just community" (Power, Higgins, and Kohlberg 1989) or an "ethical school" (Starratt 1994) want to encourage in pupils (see Noddings 1988). In our discussion of the "Care debate" in The Netherlands, however, we focus on "care" as an element of the official curriculum.

THE SUBJECT CARE

Prior to the introduction of "basic education," a subject also called Care was taught in some lower secondary schools for home economics education and in some schools offering a broad range of vocational courses. The Care curriculum in these schools could vary from pure home economics to a combination of home economics and health education. Sometimes there was an emphasis on practical aspects of care, like cooking, doing laundry, and the like, and sometimes there was an emphasis on theoretical subjects like dietetics. Care in this sense can be placed in the tradition of courses like home economics or health care, which aimed at preparing pupils for traditional female work in the family and in the labor market. The *new* subject Care, however, was meant to include more than what had been taught in the subjects of home economics and health education.

When the debate on the common curriculum started, teachers and curriculum designers involved in the development of the subject presented their views on what they thought the subject Care should be about. It was argued that Care should contribute to redressing the imbalances between the importance attached to private and public life and between practical, moral, and cognitive elements in the curriculum. The range of topics proposed by the Landelijk Platform Verzorging (National Care Platform; hereafter abbreviated and cited as LPV) and the Stichting voor de Leerplanontwikkeling (Organisation for Curriculum Development; hereafter abbreviated as SLO) was to include sexuality, relationships, consumer issues, the environment, leisure, and work in and outside the home in addition to such topics as food and clothes. At first glance this interpretation of the subject may be reminiscent of Fisher and Tronto's (1990) broad, feminist definition of care.

However, although the new subject does indeed go beyond home economics and health care, a closer and more critical look at the curricular content reveals that self-care and care for others in private life still constitute the core of the subject. As eventually introduced in 1993, the subject has twenty-three core objectives that can be divided into three categories: health and well-being, consumer issues, and the basic necessities of life. A core objective in the category health and well-being is, for example, that "pupils should be able to apply basic skills in personal hygiene." Objectives

in the other categories include “pupils should know the rights and obligations of consumers” and “pupils should be able to assess the composition, nutritional value, packaging information, quality, and price of food.”

The curriculum developers endeavored to make links between care for oneself, care for others, and social citizenship. Hence, core objectives were formulated connecting the private and the public spheres: for example, “pupils should be able to point out social and emancipatory aspects of paid and unpaid labor.” This gave rise to the impression of a broad interpretation of care. A more precise analysis of the core objectives, however, reveals that this is mainly due to the attention paid to societal *influences* on private life (LPV 1987). Aspects of care beyond the private sphere, however, are almost totally neglected. For example, the proposed curriculum deals with how to submit a request for unemployment benefits but does not discuss unemployment benefits in terms of state care for citizens. Consequently this aspect of the subject is associated with “life skills education” or “civics.” The accent is on acquiring a number of “citizen” skills; reflection on the social phenomena and developments that make these skills necessary has not materialized.

In addition to the fact that the subject Care should contribute to a more balanced place in the curriculum for the private and public spheres, another essential characteristic of the proposed subject was the inclusion of both cognitive learning objectives and objectives for skills and attitudes. “Head, heart, and hands” should be treated in a balanced way. Moreover, many proponents of the subject Care were of the opinion that these elements could not actually be separated (Veneberg 1987; see also Ledoux, Robijns, Volman, and Meijer 1988). According to them, the type of knowledge pupils acquire in the subject is applied knowledge aimed at improving pupils’ problem-solving skills. The knowledge and skills that caring requires are inextricably linked with moral values, thereby giving the subject an inherently value-linked character.

Initially, the subject Care was not included in the plans for restructuring the first stage of secondary education; the WRR’s proposal did not give care the status of a separate subject. Consequently, it was also omitted from the Basic Education Bill of 1989 that was based on the proposal. Thanks to the work of an action committee founded in 1991, the subject Care was included in the common curriculum at the very last moment. Core objectives, which had been developed over a number of years for the other subjects, were formulated immediately. A curriculum proposal was published in 1993 and several educational publishers presented teaching materials just before the beginning of the 1993–1994 school year.

Schools are now obliged to include the subject Care in the curriculum. A total of 100 hours is recommended in basic education. (In comparison, 120 hours are recommended for biology and 200 hours for physics.) For most general secondary schools, this means the introduction of a completely new subject. Until now, only some aspects of Care have been dealt with in other subjects in these schools, for example, sexuality, dietetics, and

environmental questions in biology class, and consumer and labor issues in economics classes. Some of these issues also figured in the social studies curriculum in upper general secondary schools.

THE DEBATE

The debate on the introduction of the subject Care was in fact about *what pupils should learn* in the common curriculum and *why*. What are the principal objectives of education (or what should they be) in relation to preparing pupils for their future role in society, that is, as citizens? The debate, however, was not actually conducted in these terms. In this section we will analyze the positions taken from this perspective in the debate on the subject Care during the last decade. We will see that this debate was quickly narrowed down to the question of whether it should be the responsibility of schools to prepare pupils for domestic and caring tasks.

Two groups of *opponents* to the inclusion of the subject Care in the common curriculum can be identified. The first group argued against the inclusion of elements of Care altogether, while the second group agreed that some elements were important for all pupils but was of the opinion that these elements should best be integrated into other subjects (e.g., economics, biology, or social studies). Both groups used the fact that the curriculum was already overloaded as their main argument; according to opponents, there was no time available for the introduction of either new subject material or new subjects in education. We will now explain the position of both groups of opponents in more detail.

Many teachers in general secondary education totally opposed the introduction of the subject Care. The union representing many of the teachers in this sector was one of the main opponents to the introduction of elements of Care in the common curriculum. Its principal objection was that care issues are of a practical nature and would therefore not be useful for the educational and societal careers of pupils. A number of educational scientists supported these arguments, emphasizing the fact that the task of education is to teach cognitive and metacognitive skills and knowledge based on the academic disciplines. Learning about care would make no contribution to this goal (see Ledoux et al. 1988, p. 72). Care was derisively depicted as “learning how to fry an egg.” It was argued that knowledge and skills in the field of care are so readily accessible in the home that teaching them at school is unnecessary and that the already limited time available at school would be better spent on something else.

Most of these opponents also objected to the value-linked connotations of care-related issues. According to them, the school is not the appropriate place for the development of attitudes and values (the element of “heart”) and is, in fact, unable to fulfill this function. Nor is it desirable that it should do so, because values are subjective. Teaching care-related attitudes would constitute influencing pupils.

A second group of opponents did not dispute the importance of care-related issues in education, but questioned the singularity of Care as a school subject. Critics pointed out the subject's lack of tradition and the heterogeneity of its constituent elements. Moreover, according to them, topics in the field of care were already included, or could be included, in other subjects. The WRR, the author of the proposal for the common curriculum (WRR 1986), was the most influential exponent of this view. The WRR was of the opinion that a number of cognitive aspects of the subject Care, for example, budgeting, dietetics, and environmental issues, could be or were already included in economics and biology. Many biology and economics teachers were in favor of the integration of care issues in their subjects, but in fact only wanted to teach those issues that were already part of their curricula (Robijns and Volman 1991). Moreover, they feared that the inclusion of the subject Care in the common curriculum would come at the expense of the time available for their own subjects and even their jobs.

To sum up, the opponents' arguments were based on two premises. First, they assumed that work in the "private sphere" does not require special knowledge and skills, and that therefore it is unnecessary to teach how to care. This line of thought stems from the supposition that women merely have to rely on their innate qualities to perform care work in the home, which is reinforced by the fact that such work is usually unpaid. Second, the opponents assumed that the task of education is restricted to the cognitive development of pupils. They relied on educational theories that question the value of teaching skills to pupils and the possibilities and responsibilities of education beyond the realm of the cognitive, approaching learning as a purely cognitive phenomenon (Leune 1983; see also Noddings 1988). This was not necessarily a conservative position. Leune, one of the educationalists who participated in the debate about the subject Care (Cornelisse 1983), explicitly argued from the perspective of equality in education: "Providing a deep and broad cognitive education for people from socially deprived groups is an important contribution to their emancipation, more so than stimulating their creative-artistic interests, their physical development, or their emotional life" (Leune 1983, p. 115).

In terms of citizenship and the role of education, the opponents of the subject Care were usually adherents of a narrow concept of citizenship and the associated traditional educational model in which preparation for functioning in paid labor and as an independent responsible citizen is central. The first group of opponents were against the inclusion of *elements* of the subject Care; they argued that these elements belonged in the private sphere, a domain in which education, in their view, has no role to play. They defended a construction of "care" as a private issue that belongs in private life, and is not therefore a relevant subject in the common curriculum. The second group of opponents accepted the idea of care-related elements in education, but their proposal to integrate the subject in other areas of learning meant that these elements would be incorporated in the

traditions of existing subjects. Because attention to the private sphere and to “heart” and “hands” are not part of these traditions, these aspects of the subject Care would be lost. In both cases, the relevance of care as a distinct and important phenomenon in society was denied.

Those *in favor* of including the subject Care in the common curriculum were to be found in the more progressive education trade unions, in consumers’ and environmental protection organizations, and in the women’s movement. Like the opponents, the proponents were not a homogeneous group. Among teachers, proponents of the subject Care were mainly to be found in vocational education, especially teachers in home economics and health care education. Their professional associations played an important role in the debate. In particular, they defended the interests of pupils in basic education who in the old education system would have gone into lower vocational education. Besides pedagogical arguments, motives like job security played a role in their arguments. Many of the organizations mentioned above collaborated in the Action Committee for Care that was founded in 1991. The committee based its arguments on both educational and emancipatory principles that will be discussed in more detail below.

Some teachers’ unions and educationalists were in favor of the subject Care because it aimed to integrate “head, heart, and hands,” which supported their plea for their own hobby-horse, namely, a broad educational model. A broad education embracing “head, heart, and hands” was considered to be important for all pupils, but particularly for pupils of the former vocational schools. Few subjects originating from vocational education were included in the common curriculum; technology was the notable exception. This was a reason to argue for the inclusion of more educational aims at the practical and socioemotional level. From this perspective, the subject Care was presented as a “counterbalance to the one-sided emphasis on cognitive development” in the common curriculum (Ledoux et al. 1988).

The strongest proponents, however, were to be found in the equal opportunities lobby. Their basic argument was that the introduction of this subject would contribute to the redistribution of work in and outside the home between women and men, and of paid and unpaid labor (Extra and Veneberg 1987). Men lag behind in the field of caring tasks and this impedes women’s participation in paid labor. Education should, therefore, aim to include boys in caring subjects. Boys should learn a number of caring skills at school, with the expectation that they will also learn to value and respect these skills. An important argument for the inclusion of the subject Care in the curriculum was that it would contribute to the social status of traditionally female skills and tasks. It was also assumed that the addition of a subject in the curriculum in which girls “have a head start” would be good for their self-confidence (Weeda 1987).

The supporters of the subject Care disproved some of the arguments of its opponents. As to the argument that pupils learn care as a matter of course at home, they pointed out that this was far more likely to be true of girls than of boys. Studies on how girls and boys spend their time

show that girls spend far more time on domestic tasks than do boys. With reference to the relevance of training in skills, attitudes, and values, the opponents of the subject Care were reminded by the proponents that before the introduction of the common curriculum, the suitability of the subject for some pupils, namely, girls in home economics education, was not questioned. Moreover, the argument against teaching practical skills was seldom used in relation to the subject "technology." Just like the subject Care, this was only taught in vocational education prior to the introduction of the common curriculum. The "feminine" nature of the skills in question appears to have been the main justification for the argument that practical skills should not be taught at school. At the same time, it was disputed whether care was primarily a "practical" subject. Care is an entity of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that only make sense as a whole.

An argument against integrating the subject Care in economics and biology was that some aspects of Care were already dealt with in these subjects. How such aspects are taught in biology and economics, however, is not consistent with the aims of the subject Care, as they are merely presented as biological and economic phenomena. The environment, dietetics, and stimulants, for example, are considered as aspects of everyday life in Care. Moreover, topics in Care are structured differently from topics in biology and economics. A thematic approach in biology or economics means that different aspects of a specific economic or biological concept, such as metabolism or production, are taught together. In Care, according to its proponents, a thematic approach means that topics related to a specific situation in everyday life are considered together. For example, sexuality as a theme in biology concentrates on venereal diseases and reproduction, whereas the physical, mental, and social changes occurring during puberty would be discussed in Care. Finally, knowledge, attitude, and skills are of equal importance in Care while, according to the proponents, biology and economics give priority to the acquisition of knowledge (Robijns and Volman 1991).

To sum up, the proponents were adherents of a broader concept of citizenship and education than the opponents. First, their notion of citizenship includes the whole range of activities in society (public and private). In their opinion, one of the objectives of education is to prepare pupils to function in society and in the labor market, and prepare them for the private sphere. Second, their opinion about the relationship between cognitive, practical, and affective elements in education is different. Those who argue against a broader concept of education comprising both cognitive and noncognitive educational aims, including the opponents of the subject Care, approach learning as a purely cognitive phenomenon. They view learning as a process of "transmitting knowledge" in which cognitive and noncognitive elements can easily be isolated. The proponents of the subject Care have their roots in the reform pedagogical tradition; their aim is not simply to add noncognitive topics to the curriculum, but to integrate cognitive and noncognitive elements. In their view, cognitive elements are

intrinsically linked with other domains; head, heart, and hands constitute an inseparable unity (see Wardekker 1986).¹ Although the proponents in the Care debate emphasized the idea that the subject is particularly suitable for integrating head, heart, and hands, their position does in fact pertain to the whole curriculum. In the next section, however, we will show how the proponents' position in the discussion was eroded to a plea for the *addition* of elements from the private sphere and of practical skills and values in the curriculum. This was due to the fact that their arguments were not consistently based on either their concept of citizenship or their educational model.

CONSTRUCTING OPPOSITIONS

Two twin concepts in the form of oppositions were at the center of the discussion preceding the introduction of the subject Care in the common curriculum. Both opponents and proponents used the same oppositions in the debate, namely, the private sphere *as opposed to* the public sphere, and skills and values *as opposed to* the cognitive aspects of education.

The proponents argued strongly for a broad educational model. Feminists maintained that schools should educate pupils for all areas of life, not only for public life, but for private life as well. This objective of schooling is a criticism of employment as the core of citizenship. It implies a broader definition of citizenship encompassing both "masculine" and "feminine" domains and values. While opponents dispute the relevance of the subject Care because of its connection with the "private" sphere, it is welcomed by proponents for more or less the same reason. The proponents themselves defined Care as a subject that is particularly suitable for accommodating the skills, knowledge, and values from the private sphere in education. Both those for and those against the subject drew a clear line between the "public" and "private" spheres, clearly placing "Care" on the private side. By defending the importance of knowledge and skills for functioning in the private sphere, the proponents adopted the opposition "public" versus "private" of the opponents, and thus paradoxically adopted a concept of citizenship that did actually not fit their own educational model.

The second opposition is the dichotomy cognitive education versus practical and moral education. In the proponents' educational model, in particular the model used by proponents in vocational education, "head, heart, and hands" cannot be separated in learning processes. This also applies to the subject Care. But because this separation was made by the opponents, and because they argued that cognitive learning ("head") is the primary task of education, the proponents were seduced into emphasizing the importance of "heart" and "hands" and of defining head, heart, and hands as isolatable elements. Although they were of the opinion that the image of Care as constructed by its opponents did not do justice to the subject, they often presented Care as a practical and value-linked subject themselves, presenting "skills" and "values" as the counterpart of "knowledge."

The opponents tried to concentrate the debate on the question of whether cooking should be taught in schools. In response to this provocation, the proponents stated that Care includes more than just cooking. This “more,” however, was never clearly defined in their arguments. For example, should “cooking” in basic education concentrate on teaching pupils how to make a smooth sauce, or more generally how to use a cookbook, or should cooking as a task be approached from the perspective of gender-specific divisions of paid and unpaid labor in view of the fact that most chefs are men while it is usually women who do the cooking at home.

With regard to values as the object of teaching, from the perspective of the proponents’ educational model, it would have been more appropriate for them to emphasize the fact that other subjects are also not free from values. Those who argue that education is not a suitable medium, or is not even in a position to develop attitudes, deny the fact that attitude development is intrinsically linked with education. The present curriculum is a historical product involving implicit choices about what all pupils need to learn to function in society later, and thus concerning what a good citizen is. Yet by associating values exclusively with Care, the proponents were still constrained by the opposition knowledge versus values. Moreover, by claiming that “values” are a speciality of Care and by defining Care as a subject pertaining to the private sphere, the idea that values are a private issue is reinforced.² Approaching values as a phenomenon to which attention may or may not be paid in education is not without consequences. With the introduction of Care, value-linked emancipatory objectives of other subjects, such as economics, have been transferred to the new subject. Such normative objectives (e.g., “pupils should be able to point out the social and emancipatory aspects of paid and unpaid labor”) are isolated and presented as a separate subject, instead of being incorporated in the curriculum as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The “Care lobby” was successful in their objective of making the subject Care a compulsory subject in secondary education. But it was included at the last moment, which caused a lot of practical problems. The subject is not taught in all schools yet. General secondary schools in particular were less willing to introduce the subject and did not have suitable classrooms and qualified teachers. Care has lagged behind in terms of the development of curriculum materials and of in-service training in comparison with other subjects. It is open to question whether Care will acquire the status of a fully fledged subject.

But the weak position of the subject cannot be attributed solely to the timing of the decision. In this article we have pointed out problems of a more fundamental nature. There is a problematic side effect to the strategy and arguments used by the proponents. For them, education should prepare pupils for all spheres of life, both private and public, in a way in which

“head, heart, and hands” are integrated. In the debate, however, they themselves gave form to the oppositions private versus public and cognitive versus practical and socioemotional. As their opponents emphasized the futility of issues pertaining to the private sphere in education, the proponents responded by stressing their importance in the subject Care. Likewise, because the opponents appealed for a cognitive emphasis in the common curriculum, the proponents pointed out the importance of practical skills and values. The inseparability of public and private, and of knowledge and skills and values, disappeared from the debate.

Finally, we will attempt to formulate a way out of these oppositions in relation to the subject Care. The aggressive approach outlined in the previous section provides a possible strategy for tackling the opposition of values and knowledge in education. It can be argued that there is a value dimension to all educational content, one that should be recognized, so that implicit values can be made explicit.

A solution to the opposition cognitive knowledge versus practical skills could lie in the idea that the subject Care should improve pupils’ capacity to behave with insight and understanding in care situations. Learning processes with this aim cannot merely comprise the acquisition and application of practical skills; equally they cannot focus exclusively on studying theory. *Training* pupils in practical household skills to a highly advanced level, for example, teaching them how to make a roux, or *studying* a recipe for this in a cookbook, in our opinion should not be included in the subject Care in basic education. What should be included is an *introduction* to such tasks that teaches the requisite knowledge and skills, both theoretical and practical. Making a thickened sauce could be included, for example, in a lesson on how to prepare a healthy meal, during which pupils themselves prepare and cook an example of a healthy meal. Such a lesson could discuss what should be included in a meal, how to use a cookbook when planning and preparing meals, what ingredients and equipment are required, what shopping needs to be done, and how to plan these activities.

In this article we have dealt with the opposition private versus public in most detail. We have argued that the recent feminist insight that care is not confined to the private sphere (Fisher and Tronto 1990) contributes to overcoming this opposition. This idea should be used far more systematically in the further development of the subject Care than it has been until now. From a feminist perspective, the idea that “caring” must be regarded as a task of every citizen is not the only issue. We think that every endeavor should be made to base the subject on a broad definition of care. Feminist theories suggest that the identity of the subject Care should not be sought primarily in the fact that it concerns knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are useful in the private sphere. The identity of the subject should emanate from a concept of “care” in which “care” in public life and paid work are just as important as private and domestic “care,” and in which the links between these two levels are made clear. This subject could include issues like development cooperation, care leave, the welfare state, secondary conditions of employment, and the like.

More specifically, the idea that the gender-specific division of paid work and unpaid care is a matter of personal choice could be discussed in a Care lesson in relation to an analysis of the social construction of the association between women and care. Other topics for discussion could include how care as a matter of public responsibility and care as a task of women are often closely interrelated; or how when the government does less, the load on women's shoulders becomes heavier; or when the government takes more responsibility, women have more chance of developing their talents in other fields.

In short, the subject Care should be aimed at a broader understanding of the many manifestations of care and at improving pupils' insight and potential agency in this field. The link can then be made again with care as a pedagogical or ethical element at school. Care as part of the curriculum must be consistent with the social climate of the school. The school as a community can then function as both object and training ground for care skills and attitudes.

NOTES

1. Recently these traditions seem to have moved closer together. In cognitive educational psychology the emphasis is more and more on the construction of knowledge by pupils (and thus on the individual meanings they attach to the subject matter) than on "transmitting knowledge."
2. A similar problem arose when women's history was introduced as a compulsory examination subject in all Dutch secondary schools in 1990 and 1991. In the eyes of pupils and teachers, women's history has very obvious normative connotations. This has resulted in girls and boys being quick to express opinions about the position of women and how it has changed. The normative nature of women's history has prevented students from considering it as a body of knowledge (ten Dam and Rijkschroeff 1996; ten Dam and Farkas-Teekens 1997).

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