



The Dutch schoolsystem

A (very short) introduction, March 31, 2025

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A typical Dutch primary school → every year you move on one classroom. After 8 years you're at the end of the corridor, the end of your primary school "career".



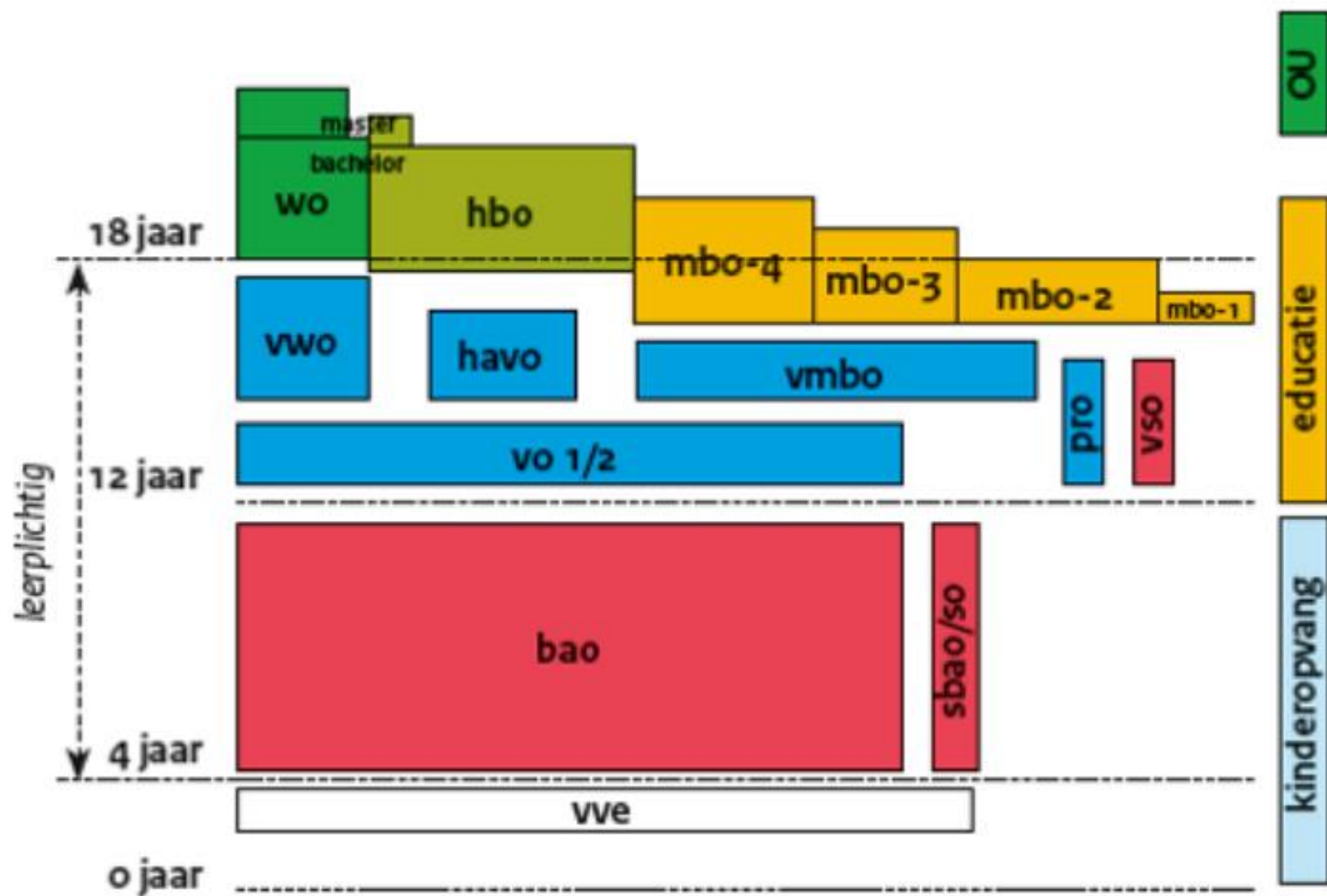
A “pillarized”, and hierarchical system

- Very specific for Dutch education is the so-called “**pacification**” of 1917
- In 1917 it was established that religiously-inspired schools and “public” school are **treated equal** financially – if they comply to certain regulations of quality, i.e. regarding level of teachers, curriculum, housing etc.
- In article 23 of the Constitution it says a.o. that education/schooling is “an ongoing concern for the government”

- This (financial and judicial) equality has led to a great **diversity** of schools: (roman)catholic; protestant (multiple orientations); inter-christian “co-operative” schools; jewish; islamic; and hindu schools ...
- ... **plus** what we call “algemeen bijzonder onderwijs” [religiously neutral], governed by private boards (i.e., not by a political body)
- ... **plus** what we call “openbaar onderwijs” [public], governed by municipalities (although in recent years they also have turned over their governance to private bodies)

- From the 19th Century to the 1960s, Holland was a “**pillarized**” country: catholics, protestants etc: each had their own schools, newspapers, radio-stations, unions etc.
- In the 1960s this crumbled, but esp. in education a hard battle was, and is being fought over the **autonomy** of the former pillars
- There are still influential organizations of catholic, protestant etc schools and Boards, both on the local levels and the national level

- Pillarization was/is a phenomenon on **all levels** of education: from KITAS up to the universities (i.e. the catholic universities of Nijmegen and Tilburg, and the protestant Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)
- Parent (organizations), churches, political parties and scientists have had a significant influence in keeping this tradition alive
- Most children go to primary school when they are 4 y.o.; schooling is **compulsory** from 5 to 18 (from 16 to 18 there is a “qualification obligation” i.e. be qualified at level mbo-2 or havo/vwo)



A “hot topic”

- As you can see there is a sharp division between basic/primary education, and what comes after that: vwo, havo, vmbo
- How are pupils **selected**? → this is



one of the big debates at this moment in Holland, and has to do with testing (and its quality); equality of “chances”; so-called “basic skills”; vertical mobility, etc. etc.

Some numbers (national level)

- Around 6000 primary schools, 1.367 mln pupils, 135.000 FTE
- Around 9300 child day care locations, and around 8000 after school locations, estimate of 125.000 workers (this excludes “guest-parents care” locations, some 16000...)
- Both in primary schools and child care there are shortages in staffing

Schools as a market

- The Dutch schoolsystem is a **mix** of centralized and decentralized governance. E.g., for primary schools there are what we call “core goals” (laid down by law), but schools are free in how to attain these
- **However!** Here the “market” has a great influence, esp. educational publishers with their (multi-media) methods, learning-packages etc.
- And – unescapable today – the **Big Tech** companies of this world...

Another “hot topic”

- There are intense debates about the influence of (national) legislators and law on everyday practice. E.g. “**citizenship education**” is compulsory for primary, secondary and vocational education
- The debate is about (a.o.) the “image” of “the ideal citizen” that is promoted in official government publications
- In recent years many tasks have been added to the already (over)loaded program, esp. in primary schools. Q: “Are schools there to solve all kinds of societal problems...?” It seems so, if we look at what goes on in many schools today

(Main)stream(s)

- Typical also for Dutch education system is that most schools are “mainstream”
- There are however rather powerful “alternatives”, esp. in the *Big Five* of Reformpädagogik: Jenaplan (Petersen), Montessori, Dalton (Parkhurst), Freinet and Steiner (Waldorf)
 - All together 815 primary schools w/ 181.300 pupils
 - And 77 secondary schools w/ 55.500 pupils
- There are no “Korczak schools” in Holland... with one exception: in Middelburg (Zeeland province): Continued Special Education for 12-18 y.o.

System beside system

- Roughly stated, today there are still two major educational systems ***living apart together***:
 - schools
 - all other institutions, e.g. child-care (Kita), health-care, etc etc
- There have been **experiments** to let them work together (“Brede school”) or, today, in the “IKC”: Integral Child Center
- Many (incl. “mainstream”) schools have a range of **specialists** indoors, from language-specialists to behavioral therapists, parent-consultants etc.

- However, there are certain categories of children that the schoolsystem is somehow not able to “handle”: children with severe personal(ity) problems, behavioral issues etc. There are **long waiting lists** for specialized help. Many of these “at risk”-children end up at home [“thuiszitters”]
- Lastly, a part of the schoolsystem that has become increasingly important in the last years is that for so-called **newcomers**. Part children of migrant-workers from Eastern-Europe, others are refugees from many parts of the world



Our Constitution
 "Vreedzame school" (frieðsam,
 peaceful)

You can compare both.



Our agreements.

More ...

- https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bildungssystem_in_den_Niederlanden