



ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI

UNESCO CHAIR  
on Education for Human Rights,  
Democracy and Peace



UNESCO/UNITWIN Award 2002

European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation  
A.Y. 2015/2016

# Who Are We Together if 'We' Are All Different? Constructions of Cultural Diversity and the Multicultural Society in Dutch Educational Material

Author: Eline Westra  
Supervisor: Lia Figgou

## **Abstract**

This thesis attempts to explore the ways in which cultural diversity and the multicultural society are constructed in educational material of Dutch high schools. The research was motivated by a) a growing interest by scholars and politicians in reforming (citizenship) education to respond to the demands of globalised and culturally diverse societies; b) the need to better understand the current constructs of cultural diversity and the multicultural society that students are exposed to; and c) the interest in exploring these constructs in the particular context of the Netherlands, which has faced a remarkable policy shift from strong support for multiculturalism to a more restrictive approach. For the purposes of this research a thematic analysis was carried out of the most widely-used teaching method of societal science in the Netherlands. The results hereof were analysed from a social constructionist perspective, drawing on and discussing the concepts and theories from the field of social psychology. Analysis indicated the simultaneous presence of various, at times potentially contradictory understandings of cultural diversity and the multicultural society. It was concluded that, contrary to declarations in public and political discourse on ‘the death of multiculturalism’, the multiculturalism debate is actually very much alive.

# Table of Contents

Title I: Introduction .....	5
General Introduction.....	5
Representations of citizenship, multiculturalism and multicultural education.....	6
Cultural diversity in the context of Western Europe .....	10
Cultural diversity in the context of the Netherlands .....	11
Contribution of this research .....	14
Multiculturalism from a Human Rights Legal Perspective: A Brief Introduction .....	16
Title II: Methodology .....	20
Title III: Analysis .....	25
Chapter 1: Constructions of Dutch Society .....	26
1.1 Individualistic .....	26
1.2 Comprising two types of citizens: ‘autochtoon’ and ‘allochtoon’.....	28
1.3 Liberal.....	31
1.4 Pluriform: religiously and culturally diverse .....	35
1.5 Modern.....	38
Chapter 2: Constructions of Culture.....	41
2.1 Pre-given elements shaping identity and behaviour .....	41
2.2 A dynamic product .....	43
2.3 Constructions of Dutch Culture .....	44
Chapter 3: Constructions of Immigration and Immigrants.....	48
3.1 Desirable.....	48
3.2 Undesirable .....	50
3.3 A duty .....	51
Chapter 4: Constructions of Integration .....	53
4.1 A problem .....	53
4.2 A success .....	55
Title IV: Conclusion.....	57
Bibliography.....	60