Working Papers Series

International and Global Issues for Research

How to develop our best theories to empower?
A realist critique of Dutch evaluative policy research

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The Netherlands

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Introduction

This paper takes as its focus recent research relating to the Dutch government's policy on the internationalisation of Dutch secondary school education. The specific focus is on the approach taken in this research which has guided Dutch policy making. In particular, there is a question as to whether the evaluative research undertaken adopts a defensible methodology in the light of the issues surrounding the internationalisation policies. The evaluative research undertaken focuses on narrow policy questions when the changes that may come about as a result of these policies may relate to much wider structural questions concerning inclusion and exclusion in education. This suggests that a different approach and methodology is required.

Concepts such as those of structures imply that they may not be observable. In turn this suggests that we need to adopt a realist methodology (Bhaskar, 1978; 5) which allows for the possibility that while structures may not be seen they generate real effects. This is in contrast to the evaluative methodologies employed to advise the Dutch government on policy. In particular this evaluative research has relied on an eclectic mix of questionnaires and interviews but with a narrow focus.

From a realist perspective such as that developed by Bhaskar and in relation to policy (Lauder, Brown and Halsey, 2004) our best theories constitute knowledge at any given time. The truth claims made in relation to these theories are also provisional. In regard to policy it can also be argued that although it is the politician's job to weigh and decide about the interests of different groups in society when dealing with fundamental problems, researchers today have a dynamic and public responsibility towards these problems (Cornelis. 2000; 672-3; Lauder et al., 2004). This suggests that policy research should take into account the wider implications with respect, for example, of inequality since it can be argued that policies are not just for the domain of policy making elites but to all citizens. This means that research goes against government agendas, that the knowledge they provide is transparently based on a certain *communis opinio*, a broadly accepted interpretation, containing maximum explanatory power.

In this paper, in order to research the relationship between global developments and Dutch education policy processes properly, the ontological, epistemological, methodological and methodical implications of this position will be analysed from a realist perspective. First, a section will follow on evaluative research in general -can it be realist at all, or is it always narrow and more like empiricism in its ontological assumptions? Bhaskar's ontological assumptions -structures and agents- will be outlined, as well as his epistemological assumptions -knowledge is what our best theories provide with- and it will be argued that we need criteria by which to determine what our best theories are -including explanatory breadth and depth. Next, a brief history of the internationalisation of Dutch secondary school education will follow. Finally, the evaluative research on which the Dutch government relies for its policy-making will be analysed. This then raises the question of the scope of the evaluative research undertaken in this case and the argument will be developed as to why a wider (and deeper) realist perspective on this issue is desirable; how our best theories need to be developed to empower policy-makers and politicians to take the right decisions in the interest of all citizens –not just elites.

Throughout this paper, comparative remarks will be made, and insights will be used, from a research into the privatisation and internationalisation of secondary school education in Singapore (Meen Sheng, 2008). This research is particularly relevant because it is a recent, evaluative analysis of similar (policy) developments in a small and internationally oriented country, like The Netherlands. It raises similar wider structural questions concerning inclusion and exclusion in education. So, the structure of this paper is as follows:

● Evaluative policy research and Bhaskar's realism
● The internationalisation of Dutch secondary school education, 1979-2009
● Dutch evaluative policy research, 2009

1. Evaluative policy research and Bhaskar's realism

Evaluative policy research

> 'Unfortunately, there is a strong temptation to impress policy-makers (…) The more reductionist the research, the more strongly it can show correlations between identified factors, (…) and the more it is tempting, but not valid, to interpret such correlations as causes and effects. (…) research influences policy (…) as informing policy rather than determining it.' (Stables, 2003; 898, 901)

Andrew Stables' challenging view of (policy) research as an 'imagined activity' has implications for the approach of the researcher to analyse policy. Can it be realist at all? Or will it always be narrow or 'reductionist', and more like empiricism in its ontological assumptions?

It is argued here that the ongoing development of our best theories provide provisional knowledge and truth claims which politicians need to work with. In order to identify phenomena, the researcher needs to use quantitative data or 'phenomenographic or perspectival fragments' as Stables put it (2003; 900), in order to offer expert support to policy-makers in 'reading' possible patterns. It is in discerning and necessarily theorising about the generative mechanisms (or structures) underlying those possible patterns, that the researcher adds value to the process of policy-making. If this would not be done, (evaluative) policy research could either become an instrument of an extremely 'lazy-thinking' kind of relativism (it is impossible to be certain about any truth claim, so 'anything goes'), or consumerism (a set of skills that can be 'bought' by any policy-maker to guide, support or justify any policy). So my argument here is that a researcher cannot be taken seriously really, *without* theorising. Also Stables admits that '(…) it is inevitable that wholes will be constructed by interpreters from the partial evidence they provide (…) generalising from patterns constructed out of phenomenographic fragments' (Stables, 2003; 900).

What can be 'reductionist' and narrow about a researcher's approach, is a conscious *a priori* and value-laden take on data, phenomena and theory, aiming at solving problems with a particular political agenda in mind. According to some (Rein, 1983 and Greer, 1972) this is inevitable for evaluative policy researchers and politicians alike, since 'One (...) trades in facts, and the other, in values.' (Rein, 1983; 216) However, in realist methodological terms, the systematic collection of hard data, the identification of a pattern in context and perception, and the use of theory have the ability to help discerning '(…) irreducible social elements and societal power structures to human behaviour' (Lauder et al., 2004; 6), in settling educational problems. There is nothing reductionist about that, as these data or 'facts' can be seen as conceptualisations of events by the 'knower', in a 'known' social context, or system. For example, it is a fact when a car stops in front of a red traffic light. A known traffic system makes this event a fact. A car stopping in front of a red traffic light could never be a fact at a time when this system, or social context, did not exist or could not be 'thought'. Elias (1938) for example, showed how the Early Modern elite conceptualised their own reality and 'facts', by creating etiquette, a system, or a framework of rules for the upper strata of society. Emile Durkheim, when researching related issues such as urbanisation and suicide (1895, 1897), was the first to postulate the existence and the autonomy of a 'social system' for its own sake. He introduced new concepts such as 'collective consciousness' and 'collective conscience' to underline the importance and acknowledgement of social context as social reality.

Still, Durkheim can be regarded as 'reductionist' in his focus on the group, such as urban *vs.* provincial, as he rather narrowly viewed his research objects as collective phenomena. Just like others (i.e. Popper, 1962; 98) can be regarded as 'reductionist' in their focus on the individual, and even more so as some of these researchers focusing on individuals, inspired by (neo-) liberal ideas, narrowly view individuals as 'given' research objects, 'unchanged at all times and places' (Hume, as quoted in Bhaskar, 1978; 7). A realist, social ontology considers *relations*, not necessarily groups, individuals or their behaviour, as the core of a researcher's focus. In other words, relations such as between state and individual, public resources and private resources, employer and employee, teacher and student or husband and wife are *real*. From a realist methodological perspective we know about them because we use data to build a model which accounts for the *relational* phenomenon in question. So we know what or best theories tell us about them. Theories are always in competition

with one another; hence it is the theory which is considered the best at any given time which is what comprises knowledge. While the methods of a researcher are secondary to the underpinnings of their use, such 'tools' play an important role in obtaining relevant data. Theories are underdetermined and data will never tell us what the theory should be. However, criteria such as those of explanatory breadth and depth are relevant to judging between theories. So we need 'wide enough' research which takes into account the wider implications of what structures generate. And we need research with enough explanatory depth, taking into account the very core of the generative mechanisms that create and reproduce inequality. I would like to focus on these issues with reference to Bhaskar in the next section, before addressing them in the Dutch (policy and research) context.

Bhaskar's realism

Bhaskar's realism proposes that there is a possibility that while structures may not be seen, they generate real effects. His ontological assumption is that societies comprise structures which we reproduce unintentionally. The essence of science would therefore be the '(...) move at any one level from manifest phenomena to the structures that generate them.' (Bhaskar, 1978; 4). These structures also reproduce inequalities –so as Bhaskar says, we don't go to work to reproduce capitalist relations nor do we get married to reproduce patriarchal relations but we do and they act back on us in terms of various kinds of inequalities. This doesn't mean we are not agents but our agency may have unintended consequences. The point is that these structures are not visible only their manifestations, for example we cannot see power in a social sense, all we see is the label on a person's door (e.g. 'headmaster') from which we infer power. Bhaskar calls this the 'actual' as opposed to the 'structural' because we can see it, while the empirical refers to data patterns which are (re)produced by the generative mechanisms of structures.

These generative mechanisms of structures, in society and in social relations, are *real* because they impose *limits* upon the agent's actions, and because they depend on their *conceptualisation* by the agent. They may therefore be relatively enduring because generative mechanisms, structures, societies and social relations change over time –being open, not closed, systems- and because people have moved on making particular '(...) generative structures , formerly opaque, become more visible to men.' (Bhaskar, 1978; 20) Bhaskar calls this the 'double function' men must perform in their social activity: '(...) they must not only make social products but make the conditions of their making' (1978; 14).

These ontological assumptions are shared by others. Schlesinger in his *Cycle of American History* (1986) optimistically argued that societies and their generative mechanisms may, being like spiral staircases, acquire healthier relations between the public and the private sector through slow but sure learning by its agents. Societal change in particular and organisational change in general, is seen by others (Elte and Marx, 1995) as a constant tension between centralising and decentralising mechanisms: every successful centralisation (needed to create and decide on policy) provokes a necessary decentralisation (needed to distribute and deregulate responsibility and authority for successful policy implementation). Societies and their generative mechanisms have been compared to 'learning organisations' (Morgan, 1986), involved in single loop learning (comparing wants, actions and theory against status quo) and double loop learning (comparing to, plus evaluating the status quo itself). This is, also according to Bhaskar, how social relations are being transformed. Cornelis (2000; 790) applied Bhaskar's ontology to the transformative effects of knowledge production. When we learn, he argued, we run the 'grid' of our experiences through our existing conceptualisations (theories, models) of the world out there. Our emotions serve as a kind of 'dashboard', to indicate the level of congruency. These emotions respectively refer to being (un)safe, being right (or wrong) and being meaningful (or not). At the agent's level Cornelis referred to this transformation as a 'catharsis' (strong release of emotions), as Bhaskar referred to 'periods of transition or crisis', when '(...) ruptures, mutations or more generally transformations in social forms' are generated (1978; 20 and 13).

Bhaskar's epistemological assumption is that knowledge is what our best theories provide us with. We need criteria by which to determine what our best theories are -including explanatory breadth and depth. Ideally, science is 'as useful as dentists' (Keynes, 1931; xxx). But dentistry is an applied science, and social science is not. Research results ideally produce cognitive gains and address fundamental problems in society. They can empower politicians to take the right decisions. This has implications for the underpinnings of a researcher's methods. They need:

- to be normative;
- to have depth of explanatory power;
- to have breadth of explanatory power;
- to be dynamic.

Evaluative (educational) policy research needs to be normative in the sense that it needs to be founded on a number of 'good' assumptions. It is possible to identify 'bad assumptions' too. They belong to a strongly reductionist (e.g. neo-liberal) 'land of values'. They can be labelled as 'bad' because the reason why these false values and beliefs are held can be explained as an 'ahistorical reality' (Bhaskar, 1978; 23). In other words, the values which underpin the explanation are wrong because they don't properly 'fit' with new experience. For example, it can be argued that it is too narrow a focus concerning the output form of an educational process, when the value of teaching and learning power, knowledge, skills and understanding, is transformed into the value of diplomas. One might falsely believe that learning can be 'engineered' (reduced) to a commodity, to be consumed by the learner. This 'utilitarian' or 'functionalist' methodology '(...) provides a self-justifying, rhetorical or circular mechanism' (Lawy and Armstrong, 2009; 13). The boundaries between the theoretical and the political can become blurred. There is a real danger of uncritically accepting concepts, such as 'globalisation' or 'international school', which have become part of everyday life. If knowledge is not developed cumulatively and dialectically, with a keen eye for its underlying assumptions, it is 'information'. It is the researcher's academic mission to systematically collect data and test its (normative) validity by rigorous theory development and appraisal. Educational research is an 'inter-generational conversation', and not directly relevant (Young, 2008; 67) (Furedi, 2009; 206).

'Deep' explanatory power refers to the epistemic soundness of a realist methodology and theory used. For Bhaskar (1978; 3) the depth of an explanation or theory can be measured by the extent to which structures and their generative mechanisms can be exposed creating manifest phenomena. Making use of antecendently existing cognitive materials ('transitive objects of knowledge'), a theory should operate and account for the phenomenon in question. In the process and production of knowledge about 'intransitive objects of knowledge' itself we may be producing a necessarily temporary but *realist* model. On the one hand it could, like the rules of grammar, impose real *limits* upon the agent's actions, and its very existence depends on how it is being *conceptualised* by the agent. On the other, as Bhaskar puts it, structures don't determine reality: 'Just as a rule can be broken without being changed (...).' (1978; 3)

'Shallow' knowledge is information which is explained by a 'one-dimensional' theory, as indeed are some evaluative theories –the objects of this critique- even though it is systematically and coherently explaining (and even predicting) the relations among the variables of particular phenomena (Kerlinger, 1970). It could still be 'shallow knowledge', because the theory is disconnected from a long-term, organically developed intellectual legacy, on which it rests (Tilly, 2002). Growth of knowledge needs to be 'intensive', developed from deeply rooted traces of that knowledge, instead of being 'extensive', developed from more pragmatic considerations. Too pragmatic researchers run the risk of merely producing immediate and practical results, without providing a satisfactory answer to the question 'For whom is a pragmatic solution useful?' (Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; 19). Deeper knowledge rests on an intellectual and often philosophical tradition, such as the political arithmetic methodology going back from the post-war era and Karl Popper, going back to the times of Bacon and Descartes (Lauder, 2004; 9).

Explanatory breadth implies the potential to generate broad implications for many people, and to the quality of having a wide brief, i.e. when it relates to wider structural implications with respect to issues such as inclusion, exclusion and inequality. When 'narrow' theory legitimises the interests of the powerful, and when it cannot be explained nor criticised, it quite easily runs the risk of becoming static, and ideology (Bhaskar, 1978; 23). A 'static' and 'narrow' methodology could easily –under the guise of a methodology with great breadth- legitimise 'authoritarian and holistic ideologies' (Popper, 1945; 157) such as neo-liberalism. Bourdieu (as quoted in Slater, 2009; 705) would have aptly called this an 'internalised domination' on the part of the researcher, or his 'symbolic violence'. As Keynes observed, humans are driven by '(…) morals, conventions, motives, intuition, expectations and psychological uncertainties' (1922-9; 300). Unfortunately there are scientists, like some classical economists, whose view of human nature has been 'violated symbolically' and has become rather static and reductionist. According to these researchers, people act only for economic motives, and they act only rationally

(Akerlof and Shiller, 2009; x). On the other hand, certain essentials of the human sciences may be discerned. Foucault (1970) usefully posited a social science that takes values and power seriously.

A realist, broad perspective also implies that it is interdisciplinary in its orientation and interests. Although good research is 'disinterested', not driven or influenced by policy-makers, it does need to be a collaborative process. For research results to have explanatory power, they need to be based on theory development and appraisal between the researcher's world of academia and the practitioner's world of action (Robinson, 1992; 12 and Eggleston, 1980; 164). The researcher-practitioner critical dialogue is a crucial one for contributing to the solution of educational problems. Powerful, dynamically produced knowledge is transparently based on a certain *communis opinio*, a broadly accepted interpretation. 'Static' research is not a collective enterprise, and could suffer from top-down, 'colonialist' tendencies. Research then runs the risk of becoming self-congratulatory, blind ideology and, worse, totally out of touch with the constant flux of reality. A modest, 'evolutionary' approach (Popper dubbed it 'piecemeal engineering') is necessary to avoid imposing oversimplifications of what are, in essence, efforts to unravel complex social relations.

Making an effort to come to grips with recent Dutch evaluative policy research, we now turn to the Dutch situation with regards to the internationalisation of its secondary school system. How did this happen in the last thirty years?

2. The internationalisation of Dutch secondary school education, 1979-2009

Dutch International Schools and TTO bilingual Schools

The Dutch International Schools (tDIS) provide government sponsored international education in The Netherlands. tDIS cater for the educational needs of over 4000 primary and secondary Dutch and foreign students whose parents temporarily work in The Netherlands. In 1979 the Dutch Minister of Education, looking for ways to attract foreign multinationals with appropriate schools for the children of their employees, hosted the first European Ministerial Conference on the IB (International Baccalaureate) in The Hague. It launched the IBO (IB Organisation) on the international scene and, in 1982; it led to the setting up of the first three Dutch International Secondary Schools (van Elderen et al., 1996; 5).

Before tDIS started, two other types of international education –in terms of management and governance- existed in The Netherlands: privately funded international education (e.g. British, French, German, U.S., and Dutch); and European international education [*Europese School*], sponsored by the European Union.
In the course of the 1980's, 'in the slipstream' of the development of tDIS, it became clear that many Dutch, often professional middleclass parents who did not temporarily work in The Netherlands, were also interested in international education. In 1989, this trend marked the birth of internationalised, government sponsored, predominantly Dutch-English, bilingual education [*TTO* or *TweeTalig Onderwijs*]. TTO went on to be developed at tDIS locations initially, but rapidly spread to many regular Dutch schools after the mid-1990's, making it one of the most well-developed in Europe (Fruhauf et al, 1996; 177-187).

In 2008, in The Netherlands, tDIS, the private international schools, the European School and the TTO schools, catered for the educational needs of around 25.000 Primary and Secondary students (Innovatieplatform, 2009a; 5). The Dutch private international schools have around 6.000 students altogether; the European School in The Netherlands has about 650 students. More than 15.000 students attend TTO schools.

In 2004 two Members of Parliament, urged the Dutch government –supported by a Parliament majority- to:

● acknowledge the international reputation, monitoring of assessment and university access opportunities of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP), an international secondary school programme;

● consider the limited access to the IBDP of diplomat's children and children from abroad only;
● bring the IBDP within reach of normal Dutch children;
● enable schools to offer the IBDP as a regular programme.

In 2005 the Minister asked its main Advisory Body, the *Onderwijsraad*, to research this proposal in more detail and advise. Their conclusion, in 2006, was that the IBDP should be accessible to 'cosmopolitan' students only, students who aim for an international career and future (Onderwijsraad, 2006; 9). The Minister decided in favour of the introduction of a so-called IBDP Pilot at government sponsored schools for a period of four years, starting in 2007. With this decision, she wanted to increase diversity and innovation (EK, 2006; 5-6). The advice of the *Onderwijsraad* to restrict the IBDP to 'cosmopolitan' students only was dropped. As a result, six tDIS locations (Amsterdam, Arnhem, Eindhoven, Groningen, Hilversum and Oegstgeest) can now enrol a maximum of twenty students each who:

● need to be 16+ year-olds, due to Dutch language considerations;
● do not need to be 'cosmopolitan' students necessarily;
● need to be taught Dutch at the highest [Language A1] level;
● can only make use of an existing legal financial aid arrangement [WTO];
● cannot have free access to the IB DP because of the extra costs and the law [WVO, art.75b];
● can only go to experienced tDIS/TTO schools with higher secondary and pre-university education;
● need a higher secondary education diploma/ or a certificate of successful completion of their fore last year of pre-university education.

The issue

In 1979, when the Dutch government hosted the first European Ministerial Conference on the IB in The Hague, and subsequently introduced tDIS to the Dutch education system, it responded to the needs of the international labour market. In doing so, it also created and regulated a new education market in The Netherlands. It provided its internationally mobile community with a government funded international education system, and prescribed access opportunities to it. Nation-states are expected to regard education as an important contributor to national development. Countries are still the key policy-making domains. Education, according to this governance model, has an important role to play when it comes to issues like winning public support, creating social solidarity, national identity and national economic development.

Also in 2007, the Dutch government set some real boundaries and formulated some clear and informed regulations in order to 'guard' the amount of losers. Access to the tDIS and the IB DP Pilot is restricted to those who really need it, so public funds are not wasting the educational opportunities of others. The Dutch government clearly searched for the preservation of national social cohesion and a sense of national identity, of which equality of opportunity for all Dutch students is one element. This might arguably lead to high quality, diversified, internationalised and innovative schools.

However, the Dutch government accepts no extra financial responsibility and leaves internationalisation of Dutch schools to the networks that exist. The Dutch government has been 'playing' along with, and has been being driven by, global educational market concerns, thereby maximising education as a commodity. It has also focused on competitiveness and integration of Dutch elites into the global economy, of which equity of opportunity for global elites is one element. This might lead to expensive, elitist, market-driven, bastions of upper middle-class power. It is for this reason that research questions about social class structures and education become relevant and warrant the need for a realist methodology.

The Netherlands is not the only country in the world that opens up its education system to the IBO. Also in the U.S.A., the U.K., South Korea and eventually Australia (Victoria) the IBDP programme is being tested to co-exist with the national exam programme at government sponsored schools. In Germany, the IBDP is being tested to transform the national exam system into a bilingual (German-English,-Spanish or -French) system. In Hong Kong, South-Africa and Wales, the IBDP programme is being used as a benchmark to transform national education systems.

In Singapore, the introduction of the IB in 2005 was part of a process of decentralisation and privatisation. As in The Netherlands, the new Singapore international schools were to stimulate international business, increase diversity and stimulate educational quality and innovation (Meen Sheng, 2008; 233). Unlike in The Netherlands, the new international schools in Singapore are completely privately funded. They are open to local students who can afford them, although this was not the original intention (Meen Sheng, 2008; 246). On the one hand, the new international schools created a 'growing concern regarding competition, choice and social stratification (...)', they were seen as '(...) distracting from meeting the needs of the local Singapore students', and as results of a weakened '(...) public social responsibility against catering to individuals' quest for personal emancipation and actualization' (Meen Sheng, 2008; 233 and 247). On the other hand, as the Singapore education researcher Meen Sheng (2008; 249) points out, the new international schools were also seen as a '(...) practical mediation measure in bridging the gap between the centralised and standardised public education system, and the decentralised and diverse private education system.'

In his thesis, Meen Sheng analysed Singapore's 2001-2006 privatisation and internationalisation education policies, focusing on origins, processes and effects of policy construction and enactment (Meen Sheng, 2008; 84). He mainly drew from Bowe, Ball and Gold's cyclical framework (1992; 20), defining policy as both a process and a product: policy 'is' what is continuously being made and done in contexts of influence, production and effects. Epistemologically, Meen Sheng's research largely rested on the work done by Vidovich (2002; 9) on using macro, meso and micro inter-linkages, constraints and agency. His method was to collect and triangulate analysis and findings from three main types of data: documents, semi-structured interviews and surveys. The underpinnings of their 'proper use' were founded on Punch's advocacy of a 'thick description' of both the research phenomenon and the research context (2000; 192). The position of the researcher is relevant in this respect too. He was both practitioner (middle manager at one of the new schools) and researcher in the process of privatisation and internationalisation of education in Singapore.

The next section will discuss the Dutch evaluative policy research regarding the internationalisation of Dutch secondary education. Can a case be made for developing a realist methodology to research this issue?

3. Dutch evaluative policy research, 2009

The issue concerns the scope of the research on which the Dutch government is depending for its policy-making regarding the internationalisation of Dutch secondary education. The two research agents involved are a government-sponsored research group called *E&S*, and a privately (McKinsey & Company) and publicly sponsored think-tank called the *Innovatie Platform* (platform for innovation).

The E&S research and the issue of scope

E&S (Keersemaker, 2009a and b) has been assigned by the Dutch Ministry of Education to carry out an evaluative research of the IBDP Pilot. Their aim was to research the question: *to what extent do the IBDP Pilot experiences of the school leaders and the Pilot students generate reasons to change the IBDP Pilot policy in order to achieve its intended aims and objectives?* This research had a narrow focus in the sense that it mainly evaluated (experiences with) the IBDP Pilot only (Keersemaker, 2009a and b; 3), and in the sense that it was not so much concerned with the wider question of whether it attracted the 'right kind' of students. E&S used semi-structured interviews with all the school leaders of tDIS IBDP Pilot schools, and web based qualitative questionnaires to obtain data from a little over half (52%) of the IBDP Pilot students.

The starting questions for the school leaders were about their expectations of and (re)commendations for the IBDP Pilot, about their Pilot student numbers and their experiences, and enquired about additional measures taken with regards to the running of the IBDP Pilot at their schools (Keersemaker, 2009a; 16). The school leaders expected the IBDP for regular Dutch students to become a structural, extra option at tDIS (not TTO) schools only; it should be restricted to students who have the ambition to study and work abroad; they recommended to put a limit to the admission (of around 30% of the

total) of regular Dutch students at tDIS, in order to preserve an 'international atmosphere'; they further recommended a national PR campaign to undo the elitist image of the IBDP; they attracted, on the whole, relatively few, but motivated and able students; and they did not (expect to) have to take any additional measures to accommodate the Pilot students, apart from a few (Dutch language) curricular modifications.

In assuming that additional measures don't need to be taken, the school leaders accept the limitations and possible effects of existing class structures in relation to international education. It can be expected that advantage of this assumption is being tilted towards students from professional middle class backgrounds since they are the ones with the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1974) and motivation to capitalise on the IBDP programme. Education reproduces structures, power relations and inequalities in society. This is done by using resources ('capital') that have value in an education system (or 'field'). Cultural capital can be 'embodied' (e.g. dress, accent); institutional (e.g. academic qualifications); or 'objectified' (e.g. appreciation of art or music). Along with Bourdieu, a correlation can be identified between the deployment of these resources by the middle classes and their creation of access opportunities to potentially advantageous (international) programmes.

The student's questionnaire asked the IBDP Pilot students about their (educational) backgrounds, about the payment of their tuition fees, about their (first) experiences with the programme and their (post IBDP schooling) plans and expectations (Keersemaker, 2009b: 8-11). The students responded that most of them knew about the Pilot because their schools and parents pointed it out to them; the vast majority of the Pilot students came from TTO schools liaised to tDIS, and they had a certificate of successful completion of the fore last year of Dutch pre-university education; most of their parents (68%) paid the full tuition fees and the others received financial aid from tDIS; most of them commented confidently about the high (English language) expectations of the IBDP; they were predominantly very positive about the breadth and scope of the IBDP, the small class sizes, the amount of individual attention they received and the pedagogical climate and international atmosphere of tDIS; a small majority (55%) of first year Pilot students expected to study abroad. This percentage dropped steeply (to 20%) when (second year Pilot) exam candidates were asked the same question.

There are class presuppositions at work here because it may be concluded that right from the start Dutch students from professional middle class backgrounds, coming from TTO schools liaised to tDIS, are assumed to be the 'right kind' of students. They are the ones geared towards doing the IBDP. Again, it seems that advantage is being tilted towards these students, and that existing class structures in relation to international education are being reinforced. Immigrant students for example, have a more international background but they are without the (cultural) capital of these 'instrumental cosmopolitans' (Weenink, 2005; 203). They seem to be disadvantaged. In contrast to what has been assumed (Dronkers, 1993; 298) it may unfortunately be the class of the parents, not the degree of cosmopolitism -judging from the steep drop from DP1 to DP 2 in students with cosmopolitan ambitions- which is the decisive factor in choosing English language education.

For E&S, the phenomenon in question was the relationship between the IBDP Pilot experiences of school leaders and students and the stimulation of business, educational quality, diversity and innovation (i.e. the aims of the IBDP Pilot). Knowledge was sought about a mechanism between these people's experiences and possible effects on the attractiveness of Dutch society for foreign business and the level of diversity, quality and innovation of the Dutch educational system. E&S' epistemic underpinnings of its research methods seem to be that an object of human scientific research (i.e. the effects of an educational experiment on the economy and educational system of a society) can be reduced to individuals (i.e. interviewees). This type of 'methodological individualism' (Bhaskar, 1978; 5) can be seen as ignoring a crucial aspect of the reality of all social phenomena: they all operate in a wider social context. Therefore, this poor and superficial conception of the social threatens to play down the fundamental role of relations (between individuals, groups and structures –and the natural world-, and the relations between them). As a result, the explanatory power of the E&S research approach lacks depth and breadth. It therefore seems to fail to address wider societal issues concerning inclusion, exclusion and equality. And what is more, the ontological underpinning of E&S' research methods seems to be an underlying –static (i.e. non-dynamic)- belief that all men apply instrumental reason (wherever and whenever). The result of this assumption is that underlying (class) relations and structures were overlooked. E&S chose an empiricist 'toolkit', so it researched observable phenomena (using questionnaires with a limited scope) only.

In contrast to Meen Sheng's research, E&S did give 'voice' to students at the micro level. Meen Sheng admits that '(...) the views of the local students and the international students would provide a good data source for investigating the dynamics of the privately-funded schools in relation to their intended role espoused in policy rationale, objectives and outcomes' (Meen Sheng, 2008, 244). Yet, the E&S research would have greatly benefited from a more comprehensive, theoretically informed approach such as Meen Sheng's. When Meen Sheng started researching the internationalisation of the Singapore educational system, he 'simply' wanted to know what was going on at the different (micro, meso, macro) levels and in different contexts of the policy trajectory (Meen Sheng, 2008; iii). His qualitative approach was far more realist in its orientation. He aimed at detecting agency and (un) observable social and policy structures at work, exposing 'dynamics underlying social relations' (Meen Sheng, 2009; 82-83). He used a triangulation method of cross-checking and –referencing data (documents, interviews and surveys), by continuously collecting, displaying, verifying and reducing it (Miles and Huberman, 1994; 12). The epistemic warrants of this method was based on Silverman's idea that reliability refers to '(...) the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasion' (2000; 175).

Although triangulation of interview, survey and document data did help him to detect the more visible side of the Singapore policy trajectory, his analysis of data pointing at unobservable phenomena at work seems limited. For example, the '(...) absence of active and critical voices against the perceived threat of elitism from the introduction of the privately-funded schools', which was evident from his findings, was left unexplored as some kind of '(...) invisible transaction of power between people and government' (Meen Sheng, 2009; 215-216).

His simultaneous involvement as a practitioner enacting the very policy he was researching (he was a middle manager at one of the new international schools) may have complicated addressing the sensitive issue of going against Singapore government agendas. He admits that it was difficult for him to play a 'neutral role' and 'to ensure as much objectivity as possible', especially when he was '(...) bound by his statutory obligations as a civil servant to observe the confidentiality of certain information and the "out of bound markers" in the ways the information is gathered, analysed, published or used' (Meen Sheng, 2008, 89-90). For example, he had great difficulty recruiting respondents from the Singapore Ministry of Education because of '(...) legal trappings of the bureaucracy to exercise discretion, sensitivity and due diligence (...) in accessing any information' (Meen Sheng, 2008; 96). This did not prevent him though, from critical recommendations for agencies at the meso and macro levels. He recommended for example, to give more 'voice' to (micro) grassroots stakeholders at meso and macro levels, by instituting better consultation methods through a wider representation of students, parents, teachers and educationists (Meen Sheng, 2008; 237).

The Innovatie Platform research and the issue of scope

The *Innovatie Platform*, with four CEO's as the steering committee, has been assigned by the Dutch Ministry of Education to carry out an evaluative research of the internationalisation of Dutch education (Innovatieplatform, 2009b). Their aim was to research the question: *how can the (reputation of) international education in The Netherlands be improved to attract more significant international businesses and talent to the Netherlands?* This is not a 'disinterested' question about wider societal issues such as access opportunities to international education, but it is a 'government driven' question within a narrow frame for evaluative research, i.e. about how to attract (the children of) global elites.

The Platform based their research on qualitative and quantitative data from various sources like the Dutch national statistics agency (CBS), consultants (e.g. *Berenschot*), newspapers (e.g. *The Guardian*), organisations for international schools (e.g. the Council of International Schools -CIS), and unstructured interviews with stakeholders to assemble 'key insights' (e.g. tDIS, private international schools, the Dutch Inspectorate and the *Onderwijsraad*).

The Platform started with conducting the interviews, followed by gathering information about the characteristics and location of international schools in The Netherlands compared to regional industrial developments (source: consultant agency); about admission policies of top universities (source: www.Topuniversities.com); about characteristics of top international schools in the world (source: *The Guardian*); about the ranking of CIS accredited schools in The Netherlands worldwide (source: CIS website); about growth rates and waiting lists for international schools in The Netherlands (source:

CBS statistics agency and www.sio.nl); and about the expectations of expatriates (source: consultant agency). Next, the Platform pulled the information together, called the report *Open the doors!* and formulated three 'key hypotheses': Dutch international education can attract more significant businesses and talent by (1) a more comprehensive marketing strategy; (2) improving their quality (e.g. IB programmes at TTO schools for regular Dutch students and increased level of facilities); and (3) increasing the capacity of existing international schools and the total number of international schools in The Netherlands (Innovatieplatform, 2009b; 23).

What can be said about the scope of the Platform's research, given the questions asked which framed it? For the Innovatie Platform, the phenomenon in question was the relationship between the reputation of international education in The Netherlands and the attraction of more significant international businesses and talent to the Netherlands. Knowledge was sought about a mechanism between the (perceived) 'state' of the current international education system in The Netherlands and an increase in the number of foreign commercial talent's children coming to the Netherlands. Again, it is important here to stress Bhaskar's (1978; 4) pledge that the epistemic underpinnings of research methods and the epistemic warrants of the sources used need to answer to a 'continuing dialectic, three-phase schema of development' in order to create superior explanatory power. In short, the 'activity of knowledge production' is a continuum of the transformation of a 'proto-scientific set of ideas' (1) by 'social scientific theory' (2), to a new (proto-) scientific set of ideas (3), making formerly invisible, society-dependent, generative mechanisms visible (Bhaskar, 1978; 20).

The Platform seems to have turned this dialectic around. It started by formulating a new (proto-scientific) idea that in a globalising world more students (Dutch and foreign) students need to attend international education in The Netherlands (Innovatieplatform, 2009b; 20). It then made no serious attempt at discerning generative structures or mechanisms at work except, perhaps, pointing at a 'rapidly globalising, knowledge-working elite which needs us to catch up with them' (Innovatieplatform, 2009b; 4). So, without informed theory, the Platform went about collecting data, sources of various kinds, to justify ways to expand the current Dutch international education system. The sources (more or less random data from statistics, consultants, newspapers, organisations for international schools and unstructured interviews) have erratic and limited epistemic justification. As a result, also with regards to the work of the Platform, the ontological underpinning of its research methods seems to be an underlying –static (i.e. non-dynamic)- and individualistic belief that all men apply reason (wherever and whenever in a globalising world) in their pursuit of the maximisation of appetites and pleasures, and the minimisation of aversions and pain (Bhaskar, 1978; 7).

This leaves the Platform's research, even more firmly than the E&S research, in the realm of a nearly 100% 'blue collar job', as assigned by the Dutch Ministry of Education, in its attempt to justify preconceived generalisations, a 'bigger picture', from randomly collected source material. In terms of the limited scope of the research results of the Platform's report and in addition to what has been stated above, no 'intransitive' objects of knowledge (existing and acting independently of it) were, by building a theoretical model, made into 'transitive' ones (existing cognitive materials) (Bhaskar, 1978; 3). What the Platform's research may have exposed is the governments 'bad' (research) assumptions that (international) education is an 'interested' commodity in a globalising world, and that existing ideological tensions (such as between the global/economic and domestic/social; between meritocracy and choice ideologies and between elitism and equality) are being steered into the 'wrong' direction. These assumptions could belong to a strongly reductionist (e.g. neo-liberal) 'land of values' and could refer to the perpetuation of an 'ahistorical reality' (Bhaskar, 1978; 23), i.e. an educational structure (re)producing inequality of access opportunity mechanisms to international education.

Conclusion

It may be concluded that recent evaluative research the Dutch government relies on regarding its policy-making on the internationalisation of Dutch secondary school education is narrow in its scope and deserves better. The Dutch government would be ill-advised to 'open the doors' of international education to anyone who can afford it. A scenario of Dutch international schools becoming even more like 'expensive, elitist, market-driven, bastions of upper middle-class power' could well be the result.

Evaluative policy research can be realist, and does not need to be like empiricism in its ontological assumptions. Bhaskar's realist assumptions are useful because they give a wider (and deeper) perspective on the issue. It does so by identifying structures and agents, and by searching for the kind of knowledge our best theories provide with. We need criteria by which to determine what our best theories are -including explanatory breadth and depth.

This realist perspective was used to outline the implications of the (lack of) theoretical underpinning in the Dutch evaluative research. It can be concluded that it has not adopted a defensible methodology in the light of the issues surrounding the internationalisation policies. It focused on narrow policy questions when the changes that may come about as a result of these policies may relate to much wider structural questions concerning inclusion and exclusion in education. It is to be hoped for and expected that (research guiding) the internationalisation of Dutch secondary school education will be based on better theories as the ones critiqued in this paper. This would empower policy-makers to take into account wider societal issues such as equality of access opportunity. The IBDP Pilot and the research which guided it may therefore be best considered as unwelcome and narrow respectively.

Therefore, if the Dutch government acts wisely and assigns better quality research in the future, it can be expected that the focus of research will shift from a narrow 'market', or 'Mc Education' view of (international) education to a broader, more complex 'portal', or 'transformative' view of (international) education. As Donald Gillies (2008; 694) put it: 'Children and young people are not clients whose one-time needs are to be satisfied but active participants in constructing a school experience which has the transformative potential to shape and develop their very personality, character and future.'

Based on the E&S and Platform's research, tDIS wrote a letter to the Dutch State Secretary of Education (IGO Archives, 2009) and issued an IBDP Pilot evaluation report (IGO Archives, 2010a). Also the Dutch Inspectorate issued an IBDP Pilot evaluation report (IGO Archives, 2010b), based on the tDIS IBDP Pilot evaluation and the results of their own questionnaires and interviews with all participating tDIS in the IBDP Pilot.

The relevant results of tDIS' and the Dutch Inspectorate's reactions can be summarised as follows:
● tDIS would like to be part of a 'marketing offensive' to promote tDIS abroad;
● tDIS would like the IBDP to be structurally accessible to local Dutch students at tDIS only;
● tDIS would not like the (bilingual) TTO schools to run any IB programmes fully in English;
● tDIS expects the tuition fees to increase when the level of tDIS' facilities has to increase;
● tDIS does not support the setting up of new tDIS at the expense of existing tDIS;
● the Dutch Inspectorate concludes that the limited interest (a participation rate of 17% of the potential admission capacity in 2007-2011) in the IBDP Pilot is due to the extra costs, being unfamiliar with the IBDP Pilot and restricted admission opportunities to certain Dutch universities' programmes with numerous clauses;
● the Dutch Inspectorate concludes that IBDP Pilot students are successful because of their 100% pass rate so far, and because of their high level of English and Dutch.

Opening up the IBDP for 'all' Dutch local students could predominantly favour the children of professional middle-class parents. Consequently, further research may have to involve a comparative study between tDIS and TTO schools of the broader dynamics of the 'privatisation of "international" learning' and its impact on social stratification and social justice in The Netherlands.

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