

Interview with Markus Davidsen about his Comenius project

By: Merel Vlak

Dr. Markus Davidsen has received a Comenius grant, with which he wishes to improve secondary education on religion. In this interview, he will tell more about the content of his project and its aims.

You are currently involved in a Comenius project. Can you tell me about the project and what its aims are?

The Comenius scheme's aim is the innovation of higher education. People who work at universities or universities of applied sciences can apply. There are three different degrees of projects. Our project is of the smallest degree and runs for three semesters. The aim is to develop innovative teaching material that can be used in teacher training programs, at both university (of applied sciences) and secondary school levels.

Could you take us through the process of how your project came to be?

Since 2018 I have been working for the "Expertise Centrum Levensbeschouwing en Religie in het Voortgezet Onderwijs" ("Centre of Expertise on Worldview and Religion in Secondary Education), abbreviated LERVO. We come together in LERVO intending to strengthen the threatened school subject 'Worldview and Religion' in secondary education. One way that we try to do that is by making a national curriculum, which isn't there because of the Dutch Constitution. The curriculum we are making, we cannot force upon schools, but they can use it, which would help create a stronger profile for the school subject. However, for this reform of secondary education to work, you also need to have teachers who can teach the school subject with the new curriculum. That's where the idea to apply for the Comenius Project comes in. We aim to improve the teacher training so that they can teach our new curriculum.

So, to summarise, with this Comenius Project, you educate teachers. What types of ways do you use to go about that?

We're currently making a set of analytical models that pupils can learn to use to analyse primary sources, texts and rituals. The model is currently called the 'mountain model', but will probably become a spiral model in time.

Het 'bergmodel' van werken met bronnen

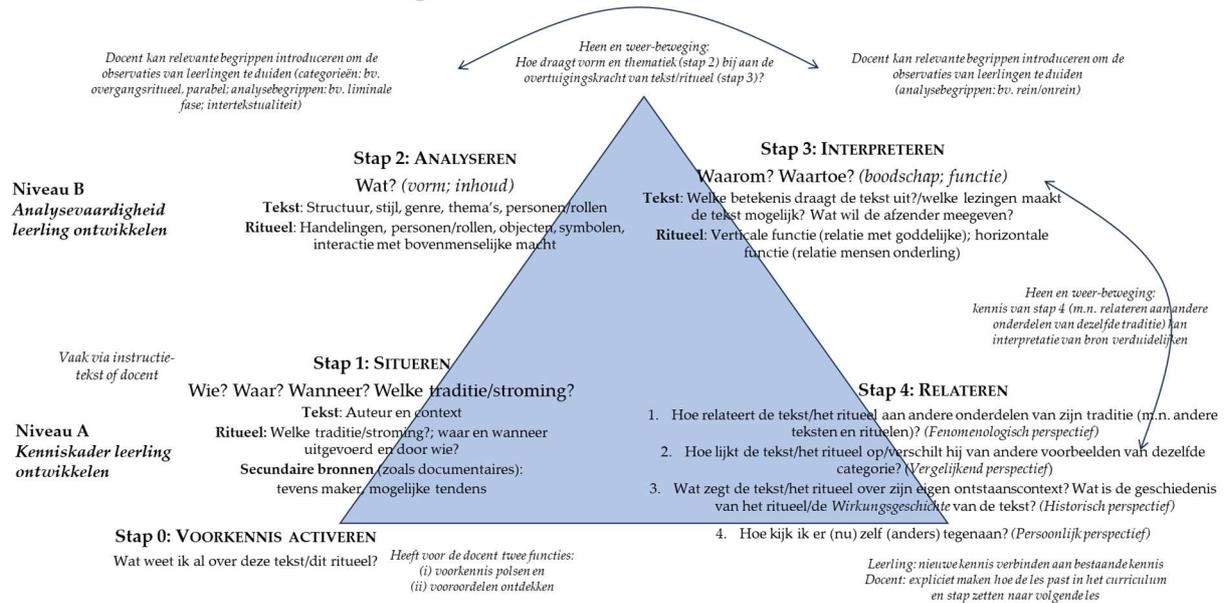


Figure 1: The "Mountain Model" for analysing primary sources

We want to take pupils through four steps when they are working with a primary source. First, you *situate* the source in its context. The next step is the *analysis* of content: 'What does the text say?', 'What happens in the ritual?' – that kind of thing. Then follows *interpretation*. You look at what's the meaning, the author, the function. After you can *relate* the source to, for example, rituals or texts within the same tradition. So, we want to use some of the methodologies used in the study of religion in the curriculum.

Analytical models are one of the things we are working on. We are also making a collection of useful sources because teachers experience difficulties with identifying useful primary sources. They don't know where to look and don't have the time. We're helping them with that.

The concrete goal is that we work out a practical way of analysing religious texts, and rituals. By making the school subject more solid, and more anchored in the study of religion we can help the school subject survive.