



PROJECT MUSE®

Closing remarks

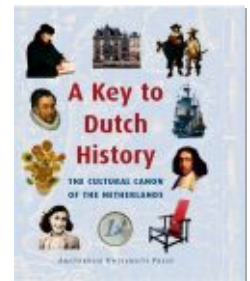
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Closing remarks

A society is defined not only by what it creates, but by what it chooses not to destroy.

**JOHN C. SAWHILL, FORMER PRESIDENT
OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY, USA**

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The canon committee was born under something of a bad sign, with studies showing a declining knowledge of Dutch history and culture among an ever-increasing part of the population. During the year we spent in preparation for this report, we found the scope of this concern to be much broader than the canon alone. We heard similar complaints from a broad range of sources: complaints about poorer knowledge of arithmetic and mathematics, a lack of appreciation for craftsmanship in technology education, managers with no affinity for the products of their sector and higher management staff with no affinity for the shop floor. Content-based knowledge seems to have suffered from an at-times exaggerated focus on global competencies in many parts of our educational system and society. (Seemingly having forgotten that know-how and knowledge can also be vital competencies.) We hope this canon report stimulates further contemplation on the relationship between subject content and skills. As it would appear, the issue of declining knowledge is not limited to the cultural sector alone.

However, the canon in the Dutch education sector deserves better than such a defensive incentive. We hope this proposal will demonstrate that what many initially regarded as cultural “dyke-watching” can take on an offensive character in the positive sense of the word. A revaluation of the canon can stimulate initiatives that help keep important and valuable elements of our past alive and relevant. This will, however require a strong inner conviction: faith, if you will, in the intrinsic value of the canon, in the wisdom, beauty and pure enjoyment it has to offer us all. What started as a problem,

in other words, has become an opportunity: a chance to dwell upon some of the things that truly matter.

The process itself actually confronts our society with a rather profound question. How should we go about maintaining immaterial things, how can we guarantee that this is done properly? We hope this report can serve as a basis for some incisive debates on this issue.

90 One would hope that the process of canon design could also spark a wider debate that transcends our fifty windows: a broad discussion throughout society about what we do and do not teach our children, and the way in which we do so. The educational debate in politics, the sector itself and broader society often seem to be about everything other than the actual contents of the school books and lessons. There may be a historical reason – and even justification – for this phenomenon, but that does not discharge us of our shared responsibility for that content. Freedom of education cannot be a reason to avoid the debate on content, which – in the case of the canon – can be extremely enriching and inspiring. With that in mind, the committee can only look forward to the debate this report will undoubtedly spark.