

Competence Development for Community Schools

Jeroen Onstenk, INHOLLAND University, The Netherlands
John van Vliet, INHOLLAND University, The Netherlands

Introduction

The number of community schools (or in literal translation of the Dutch term: 'Broad Schools') in the Netherlands is rising. The same name, however, covers very different kinds of schools. Some focus on social equality, others on educational enrichment, and still others on delivering day care facilities for working parents. Until quite recently, educational policy was not taking an explicit stand with regard to this development. This is changing as a consequence of worries about social cohesion in poor multicultural neighbourhoods.

Community schools are now seen as priority area in youth policy. Community schools make new demands on teachers and other staff. Surprisingly, community schools seem to attract more attention in welfare and social work education than in teacher education. This could be a barrier to the development of curricula in which learning inside and outside of school is connected.

Let us start with some life experience from one of the authors.

After working eight years at a primary school, I worked at a secondary school in Rotterdam-Spangen, a school at risk, where the first steps as a community school were taken. We were pioneers in the world of the community school, which tried to create a 'village to raise a child in', combining three worlds youngsters were living in: neighbourhood, school and home. We organized 'multi-cultural days', so we danced, ate, admired the dress parade and talked with parents. It was a start in the eighties, followed by inviting and visiting all kind of organisations, police, fire-brigade, social work, etc. We gave kids their own room in the cellar in the school to prevent them from robbing shops in case of failure of lessons, so they could play table tennis, use the pc, etc., an extended schoolday activity. We lived and learned as teachers and managers in a community school.

Then in 2000, I started at the School of Education. After eighteen

years of pioneering as a community school, I was surprised to see that in the School of Education students learn to involve others from outside the school only "in cases of problems".

What makes the development of community schools so special that it forms a new challenge for teachers and their skills and for the Schools of Education? It is the aim of the research, reported here, carried out by the knowledge centre Integrated Pedagogics from Inholland University to contribute to a better awareness of and preparation for community schools in teacher education by investigating how the teacher competencies need to get a specific 'colour' and meaning in community schools. What competences are necessary for working in a community school as a shared pedagogical project? Are there major differences between a community school teacher's competences and one working in a 'normal' school, or is it all just a matter of degree?

The paper presents first results from a literature study, which is the first stage of a research project on challenges of community schools for teacher education and professional development. The paper focuses on the consequences of community schools for competence standards of teachers. Several fields of teacher competence, as defined by the Dutch organisation for professional quality of teachers SBL (2004), are analysed: pedagogical and interpersonal, didactical, organisational, collaborative and learning and development competences. What specific characteristics emerge in community school settings? A first challenge for teachers (and students) is to learn how to deal with pedagogical 'gaps' in modern society, with individualism and the need to work on social cohesion. How to contribute to pedagogical dialogue and alignment between parents, teachers, professional educators and other partners in the community school. Three worlds (school, neighbourhood and home) should communicate and work together. A pedagogical dialogue has to take into account communalities as well as differences in pedagogical vision

and practices. For teacher training it becomes important to learn (student)teachers to know and respect those visions and mission statements and to see parents and other partners as allies for their own job.

The second stage of the research project will investigate empirically actual developments in schools and teacher education and will result in design criteria for teacher education and competence development for community schools. The main research method will be interviews of teachers and principals of Community Schools, carried out by students of the School of Education from INHOLLAND University Rotterdam. During November and December 2005 fifty schools will be questioned on:

- their demands with regard to pedagogical and interpersonal, didactical, organisational, collaborative and learning and development competences,
- the relation of these competences with the actual practices and developmental prospects of community schools
- the need for specific competences for community schools.

The research report will be finished in spring 2006.

Community schools as a challenge for teachers

In a community school, new educational opportunities are created to reach substantive as well as pedagogical, educational, and normative objectives. The community school has developed into an interesting environment for many aspects of integrated pedagogical action (Onstenk 2005).

Different kinds of community schools

'Community school' is not a unitary concept. There are many different kinds of community schools, many different objectives and a great variety of activities (Emmelot and Van der Veen 2003). Schools have become more and more autonomous, while policymakers have chosen a bottom-up strategy for community schools. This requires room to develop various objectives and approaches. Comparable concepts have flourished under a range of names: Community school, Open Wijksschool (Open neighbourhood school), Vensterschool (Window school), Plusschool, Multifunctioneel Centrum, Tweede Thuissschool (Second home school), Kantoor uren school (Office hours school), Forumschool, and the Rotterdam New Community School. Both the objectives and target groups of these community schools cover a broad spectrum. Different kinds of community schools fall under various thematic categories (Education Council 2005) such as: 'the increase of educational opportunities', 'the broadening of the educational and service offerings', 'the strengthening of social cohesion', 'the broadening of the care- and neighbourhood functions of the school', 'day care', 'the multifunctional building' or even 'decompartmentalized intersectional policy', certainly an unattractive term for parents, pupils, and teachers alike. In practice, of course, there shall be a mix of the various activities and objectives. Another possible way of categorising the activities could be: parents, neighbourhood, social care and assistance, day care and prolonged school day, and continuous learning lines.

Integration of learning environments

We propose a minimum definition of the concept of community school consisting of two main parts. Firstly, the community school is characterised by structural and substantive

cooperation between the school and other institutions in the field of care, sport, culture and social work. Secondly, the broadening and integration of learning inside and outside school is a major objective (Onstenk 2005).

Using this definition, it is not a necessity that these institutions house all their functions in one building, although that is often seen as the most characteristic aspect of a community school. There seems to be some confusion here. For example, the department of social development in Rotterdam describes the New Community School as a neighbourhood-oriented and area-focused facility that steers all of the neighbourhood's educational, care and welfare institutions, as supported by a process manager. But they also discuss multifunctional buildings (DSO Rotterdam 2004). Of course, these concepts are not mutually exclusive even though they are not the same with regard to both organisation and daily cooperation. For instance, it can be advantageous for students to not spend all their time in the same building. It is important for pupils to venture outside and learn to find their own ways in their own neighbourhoods (NIZW 2004).

Many community schools do indeed focus on educational and socio-emotional objectives (Emmelot and Van der Veen, 2003). More concretely, community schools focus on the active participation of youth in society by offering a 'day structure' framework, by removing cultural and educational disadvantages and increasing social skills. The popularity of community schools is due to, among other things, the idea that the educational disadvantages of poorer children can be reduced by offering them after-school programmes. Community schools work on the conditions that allow pupils to better profit from their education. They also offer purposeful free-time activities and try to get parents involved in the development of their child.

However, many community-type schools have no explicit pedagogical objectives at all. And many schools are not very goal oriented. Cooperation with non-school partners is often limited to the exchange of information and organisational fine-tuning, which has yet to be oriented to the development of shared objectives or a shared vision. There is seldom a well-articulated idea beyond the basic concept of the community school. Furthermore, it is remarkable that in many cases teachers are not involved in the extra-curricular activities. In many schools (with disadvantaged pupils) it is considered to be an opportunity to ease the teachers' workloads (Emmelot and Van der Veen 2003).

Pedagogical tasks of the community school

The community school as a pedagogical concept reveals many tensions. As stated earlier, there are often very different objectives and motives. Main objective could be to offer day care arrangements to make the lives of working parents easier. Another obvious objective is a new building where the combination of services is considered to be easier. There is nothing wrong with this. But they fail to take into account the question of whether teachers have a commitment to this concept or are willing and capable of adapting their pedagogical methods to this new concept.

The community school can be situated in a 'socio-pedagogical gap' (De Winter 2000, RMO 2002, Education Council 2005) between the family and neighbourhood institutions. Socio-pedagogical and caring functions in this situation are more or less forced upon the school and neighbourhood institutions. It is suggested that the community school compensates for functions that families no longer perform. Teachers and students often express this opinion in very strong terms. De Winter (2000) points to the fact that it is historically remarkable

as well as socially very problematic for the family to be held solely responsible for how involved they are in the education of their children. Meanwhile, the rest of the community, including the schools, have tended to withdraw from responsibility. This situation obviously tests the limits of the family's abilities especially in regard to the situations of post-teens.

That is because individualisation and the knowledge economy have led to a much more demanding society, with newly evolving methods of socialisation. Sometimes there seems to be great resistance to the very concept of the community schools pedagogical or educational objectives. One could say that the community school is a good way of fulfilling the pedagogical mission of a school. The community school makes resources available for reaching the core objectives of the school itself. Thus the very objectives of the community school make it easier to reach its objectives. In other words, schools and teachers cannot reach their objectives without the cooperation of others.

Pedagogical dialogue

A pedagogical dialogue regarding the stimulation and development of pupils should be the guiding principle of each community school (Van Oenen and Studulski 2005). A central concern should be that pupils themselves play an active role in this (Naber 2005). The community school can contribute to both the educational and physical development of its pupils. Many community schools offer indoor or outdoor sports, for instance. Last but not least, they must also contribute to their psycho-social development by developing their social skills and levels of participation by offering alternative forms of education. The Dutch Institute for Care and Welfare NIZW calls that 'life real learning' which implies that educational activities occur both inside and outside of school. This is important for the pupils, but also for the other involved players as well as the environment in general. There is an active role for pupils by which they can acquire a whole range of skills.

The actual realisation of pedagogical objectives deserves specific attention. The partners outside school (companies, institutions, services) are seldom called upon to supply real life learning experiences. Activities are seen as 'meaningful leisure time' or (re)creative in-betweens as a welcome change from 'real education'. Even when schools are involved in developing 'new' learning activities (Duffy, Van der Linden and Simons 2000) they often do this on their own (Emmelot and Van der Veen 2003, Van Oenen and Valkestijn 2003). It seems more attractive to schools to organise realistic simulated activities in school than organising learning situations in other contexts and reflecting on that in the schools (NIZW 2004).

Van Oenen and Studulski (2005) emphasise that a structural pedagogical dialogue is needed to support the various parties involved in the community schools in developing strong and meaningful cooperation. The community school should be constructed as a shared enterprise and the multifaceted discussions about new, social-constructivist learning practices opens up new opportunities in this regard.

Working together in the community school

The bulk of this work must be done by teachers in cooperation with other professionals. The actual quality of the community school activities depends on the people who perform them. This remains a neglected aspect in the community school discussion, especially with regard to the evolving tasks and skills of the teachers. One could say that the teacher's tasks become less complicated, as others assume some of their former tasks. But at the same time, they are becoming more

difficult as well, as the community school teacher is expected to address and integrate the child's three worlds.

The community school team's membership is characterised by a variety of backgrounds that includes teachers, socio-cultural professionals, sports trainers, arts educators and child or youth care workers. They each have their own responsibilities as professionals or volunteers, co-ordinator, manager, or board member. Support network organisations in the areas of welfare, education, sports, and culture may be involved in a community school. Because there are so many experts and expertises involved, it is important to take into account cultural differences between the different professions. Cultural differences include jargon, focus, views, training, organisational structure, and pedagogical vision. It is essential to have a co-ordination of both the content and the organisation of the activities in the community school.

Alignment of professional tasks has to be built on a shared pedagogical vision, which evolves over time, while the parties work together and communicate concerning school activities.

Mutual exchanges should occur at a practical day-to-day level. The professionals involved have to learn to communicate and work together. That has thus far proven to be more difficult than expected, not only because of cultural differences, but also because a professional culture has a built-in sense of territoriality. Real cooperation occurs when interactions include not only one's own approach, strengths, and successes, but also other questions and problems. This includes questions like whether the involved parties can explain and take responsibility for what they do as well as how and why they do what they do. Can they accept (critical) comments from other professionals? That is already difficult within the educational profession itself, let alone when one is dealing with another profession. In the community school there is a variety of professionals who work with the same children. But even when different professionals are aware of each other's roles towards the same child – which presupposes more communication than there in fact may be – this does not mean that they are paying attention to the same details, draw the same conclusions, or propose the same strategies. And, of course, the whole point of involving different professionals is the fact that there is a broad spectrum of details to keep in mind. But, in this situation, one has to learn to communicate one's professional judgement to other professionals and to non-professionals.

Competences for the community school

In The Netherlands various fields of teacher competences are distinguished (SBL, 2004): pedagogical and interpersonal, didactical, organisational, collaborative, and learning and development competences. Do all of these acquire new characteristics in community school settings?

As a first step we analysed the descriptions of competences, as defined by the Dutch Organisation for professional quality of teachers SBL (2004) and compared these competences with the needs of community schools.

Central in the existing descriptions of interpersonal and pedagogical competency is 'the group and the lessons', 'the association with each other and the responsibility for each other'. There are no other persons outside group or school mentioned. Only when the teacher 'observes developmental or behavioural problems, he must be able to judge where he can find help inside or outside school'. We will investigate in what aspects interpersonal and pedagogical competency in a community school exceeds the capacity to create a safe and pleasant living and learning climate in a classroom. Should teachers (and students) learn how to deal with pedagogical

'gaps' in modern society, individualism, and issues of social cohesion? Should teachers (and students) be able to contribute to the pedagogical dialogue and the links between parents, teachers, professional educators, and other partners in the community school system? How can they contribute to effective communication and cooperation between the three 'worlds' (school, neighbourhood, home)? A pedagogical dialogue has to take into account commonalities as well as differences in pedagogical vision and practices.

Also: do the principals of community schools agree that it becomes important for teacher training to teach students to understand and respect those visions and mission statements and to see parents and other partners as allies?

Under investigation is also the didactical and content-related competence for community schools. What does it take to be able to link and integrate educational components inside and outside school and to contribute to powerful learning environments? Could methods like experiential learning or the 'storyline approach', help teachers to simultaneously draw the world into the classroom and the pupils into the world? The organisation of authentic practical situations surpasses the organisation of lessons between the four walls of the classroom. Teachers need to explore the educational potential of the region and to build a network of contacts. They must stimulate on-going reflection on a changing society. That includes knowing the possibilities of the organisations, the partners outside the school, the neighbourhood, the society etc. and using them to create a 'community school curriculum'.

Organisational competence in community schools includes class management, but also the management of learning outside the classroom. The teacher has to integrate or co-ordinate the work of a team of education professionals. As stressed before, perhaps the most important difference between the past and today is in the area of cooperation. All teachers today must have cooperation competence (SBL 2004): the ability to work together as part of a team and organisation and to use, support, and strengthen their relationships with parents, neighbourhoods, and institutions. In community schools teachers are required to work with colleagues both inside and outside school. Teachers can no longer view themselves as the king or queen of the classroom, because they are expected to be participatory, exploratory, and co-operative. Firstly, teachers have to work with colleagues. This implies the ability to co-ordinate one's work with that of other school colleagues. He or she must contribute to the functioning of the school's organisation. A competent teacher contributes to a good pedagogical, content-rich and didactical climate at his or her school, as well as fostering cooperation. The teacher makes constructive contributions to meetings and other school facility deliberations as well as to tasks that must be performed to ensure a smooth functioning school. Also important is the teacher's ability and willingness to contribute to the development and improvement of his or her school.

Secondly, teachers must work co-operatively with other relevant school personnel. Also important are parents (or other caretakers) as well as youth care, welfare, or culture professionals, involved in the school's network. Competent teachers must ensure that their professional actions match those of the professionals outside the school. Starting from the interest of his pupils a teacher contributes to good cooperation with people and institutions in the school environment. The vision developed by the City of Rotterdam on the Rotterdam New Community School aims at forcing schools and their partners to agree on a contract to be a real new community school. Research questions are: do they actually make these contracts, what is in it and how and what are the consequences for teachers?

Cooperation competency has received relatively little

attention in the recent debates concerning the new competency demands for teachers. At the same time, it is clear that many of the problems in and around education concern cooperation. Without cooperation a teacher (and education in general) can deliver neither the pedagogical nor the substantive objectives. Cooperation demands a good communication. This is an important issue for all actors, not only politicians, local authorities and management, but also the partners, the school teams, the parents. Especially the teams, the executors of the 'community school plan', mostly forgotten, should communicate about the realisation of learning inside and outside the school. Helping students to develop communicative and cooperation competency is another important challenge for the School of Education.

The research also aims at investigating ideas and expectations of school principals with regard to the competences of their staff and to teacher training. Do they emphasise the ability of a starting teacher to survive within the four walls of the classroom (effective class management) or do they value (also) cooperation competence?

Concluding remarks

Community schools put new challenges to competences of teachers. However, community schools are nowadays not very visible in teacher education. This is because it is often considered as something 'outside' the real job of teaching (i.e. day care, or free time activities) or even as undesirable ('parents should take care of feeding and raising their children'). However, even our preliminary results show that community schools have consequences into the heart of the teacher profession. So it should be a major concern in teacher education too. We think that cooperation in the community school is essential because it is inextricably bound to didactical and pedagogical objectives. In other words, teaching becomes more of a collective issue. Working together with other organisations and professionals requires a broader view of one's own tasks and those of others. There should be an awareness of shared tasks. In this sense, the community school can be seen as an intense example of the necessity of co-operation for every teacher in every school, which must respond to the pedagogical challenges of modern society. Teacher education should prepare student teachers for this. It could contribute to the further development of community schools by steering prospective students in that direction and then coaching them as well and at the same time by contributing to in-service professional development of school staff. This helps students and teachers in learning and development, reflection and 'self steering'. Students learn to respond to developments in society and relate them to the experience of the profession. Starting teachers should from the beginning be stimulated not to maintain themselves for several years between the four walls of the classroom.

Notes

- ¹ And also because of worries about working women. Recently a proposal was accepted in parliament to make it an obligation for schools to offer day care facilities and to be open from 7.30 a.m. till 6.30 p.m. The economic, labour market orientation of this proposal became clear in the lack of attention for pedagogical or quality issues. As stated by the liberal party leader when making the proposal: "When school offers the space, unemployed persons can take care of the children".

References

DSO Rotterdam (2004), *Opgroeien in Rotterdam: steun en grenzen* (Kadernotitie jeugdbeleid 2004-2006), Rotterdam, gemeente Rotterdam.

Education Counsel (Onderwijsraad) (2005), *De stand van educatief Nederland*, Den Haag, Onderwijsraad.

Emmelot, Y. and Veen, I. van der (2003), *Brede basisscholen uitgelicht*, Amsterdam, SCO-Kohnstaminstituut.

Geurts, G., Lier, L. van and Naber, P. (2005), *Als ze ons vragen, doen we mee. Over betrokkenheid van leerlingen van het vmbo bij de Brede Buurtschool*, Den Haag, Hogeschool INHOLLAND.

Naber, P. (2005), *Leerlingenparticipatie in de brede vmbo-school* (lezing Brede Schoolconferentie Rotterdam, 8 Februari 2005).

NIZW (2004), *Startnotitie voor de conferentie 'Brede school: streven naar meer levensecht leren'*, Utrecht, Expertisecentrum Brede School NIZW Jeugd.

Oenen, S. van and Hajer, F. (2001), *De school en het echte leven*, Utrecht, NIZW.

Oenen, S. van (2001), *Sociale competentie en de brede school*, Utrecht, NIZW.

Oenen, S. van and Valkestijn, M. (2003), *Welzijn in de brede school; partners voor levensecht leren*, Utrecht: NIZW.

Oenen, S. van and Studulski, F. (2005), *De pedagogische dialoog: werken aan een pedagogische visie van de brede school*, Utrecht and Den Haag, NIZW/Sardes.

Onstenk, J. (2003), *Werkplekieren in de beroepsonderwijskolom*. Den Haag, Onderwijsraad.

Onstenk, J. (2005), *Geïntegreerd pedagogisch leren handelen. Een uitdaging voor opleiding en professionalisering van leraren*, Haarlem/ Diemen, Hogeschool INHOLLAND.

SBL (2004), *Competenties van leraren*, Den Haag, SBL.

Smit, F.C.G. Driessen, G.W.J.M., Vrieze, G.J., van Kuijk, J.A.M. and Slegers, P. (2005), 'Opvoedings- en opvangactiviteiten van scholen in primair en voortgezet onderwijs: een inventarisatie van de stand van zaken met betrekking tot de relatie onderwijs-opvoeding-opvang in het Nederlandse onderwijs' in: *Onderwijsraad, Onderwijs in thema's* (studie), Den Haag, Onderwijsraad.

Weenen, H. van (2004), *Ontdekkingsreis naar duurzaamheid; Bouwproces van een duurzame basisschool*, Alkmaar, Hogeschool INHOLLAND.

Wenger, E. (1998), *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

