

EERA: Socialisation at School. The Pedagogical Dimension of the Teaching Profession in Urban Primary Schools.

Author(s):Edith Hooge (submitting/presenting), Debby Collignon (presenting)

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Contribution

Socialisation at School. The Pedagogical Dimension of the Teaching Profession in Urban Primary Schools.

Background

Pedagogical activities have long been an important component of the teaching profession. Each day, teachers are involved with moral, social and emotional dilemmas, and they are confronted with norms and values (Korthagen, 2004). Day-to-day practice in the field of education, the popular media and the academic and practical literature (Turkenburg, 2008) all indicate that primary teachers are facing increasing demands with regard to their socialisation duties. Especially teachers working in urban schools are feeling pressurized to address a wide range of socialisation issues (Tillman, 2005, Singer et al, 2010). The results of a preliminary study involving 80 early-career primary teachers in urban primary schools, however, indicate that these teachers do not want to perform socialisation duties, and they feel that they spend too much time on such tasks. These findings raise the question of what primary teachers in urban schools understand as socialisation, which socialisation tasks are required (or increasingly required) of them and how they consider these tasks to fit within their professional identity.

Problem statement and research questions

This study is intended to provide insight into the meanings that primary teachers in urban schools assign to the pedagogical dimension of their profession. The problem statement is as follows:

How do primary teachers in urban schools perceive the meaning and practice of the pedagogical dimension of their profession, and is it related to personal characteristics of the teachers, characteristics of the educational and school organisation and characteristics of students and their parents?

Theoretical framework

In this study, we apply the concept of professional identity, following the definition by Beijaard and colleagues (2004), as a continual process of interpretation and re-interpretation regarding the experiences of teachers. They conclude that secondary teachers determine their professional identity according to a dimension related to subject area (and combinations of subject areas), a didactic dimension and a pedagogical dimension. In this study, this concept is applied to the context of primary school, focusing on the meaning and task perceptions of the pedagogical dimension. In addition, motivation is addressed according to self-determination theory (e.g. Gagne & Deci, 2005), and the 'self-efficacy' (Bandura, 1977) of teachers is investigated with regard to the pedagogical dimension of their profession.

Given that the professional identity of teachers is influenced by the people, the experiences they have acquired and the contexts in which they teach (Flores & Day, 2006), it is logical to assume that the ways in which teachers perceive their socialisation duties are affected by these factors as well.

Method

Research design As our goal is to chart the motives of primary teachers and the ways in which they assign meanings, embedded within the specific urban context within which they operate, we have chosen a qualitative research design (Bryman, 2004). In order to increase the reliability of the results, we apply the principle of data triangulation (Miles & Huberman, 1994) by having the data analysed and interpreted by several researchers, by interviewing multiple respondents and by using a member check (Meadows & Morse, 2001). We began with a comparative case study. A purposive sample of six urban primary schools was drawn. Teachers were selected in such a way as to ensure the representation of the various independent variables in the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were transcribed in full. In order to increase inter-subjective reliability, the interviews were coded independently by two researchers, who then achieved joint coding and interpretation through discussion. This was followed by a member check (Meadows & Morse, 2001), consisting of a group interview with five teachers, also working at urban primary schools, regarding the tenability of the results. The information from the member check was coded in a similar fashion.

Expected Outcomes

Results and discussion At the time of this writing, the results and conclusions are being finalised. The results listed below are tentative and not yet complete. Perceptions of the pedagogical dimension of the profession can be categorised along two continuums, according to whether teachers 1) fulfil their duties according to personal or professional convictions and 2) the extent to which the distinct duties are integrated into a single pedagogical dimension. All of the teachers had (reasonably) high levels of self-efficacy with regard to pedagogical tasks intended to influence the behaviour of children in the classroom. Their self-efficacy varied for tasks intended to influence the behaviour of children outside the classroom. The role of parents was considered crucial for behaviour and achievement both in and outside of the classroom, although most of the teachers found contact with parents in this regard difficult, which led them to be timid in their actions. All of the teachers were autonomously motivated to perform pedagogical tasks that they considered to support the educational learning process. Their motivation varied with regard to other tasks (e.g. tying shoes and rinsing

with fluoride).

References

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Author Information

Edith Hooge (submitting/presenting)

Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

Research Group Urban Education

Amsterdam

Debby Collignon

Hogeschool van Amsterdam

Pedagogiek

Amsterdam