Chapter 8
The Netherlands: futures thinking in innovation, school organisation and leadership development

The Dutch government's steering philosophy in education has combined decentralisation and more autonomy for schools, with a greater influence of the stakeholders – parents, students and the local community. Innovation means that schools have the ability to organise their classroom teaching differently, not following a new "grand design" for teaching. The first Dutch initiative featured in this chapter has focused on capacity building for visionary leadership through the events organised by the Dutch Principals Academy on future thinking for school leaders. The second project focuses on one example of a radical innovation in schooling – Slash/21 – which is a school "redesigned" by KPC, a consulting group working in education and partly financed by government.

Introduction

The Netherlands has participated in the OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" project as a "laboratory of change", both using the scenarios and in other activities aimed at enhancing futures thinking in education.[1] This chapter describes two projects that were carried out in the Netherlands against the background of major changes in the Dutch government's steering philosophy in education. Briefly, this new steering philosophy combined decentralisation and more autonomy for schools, with a greater influence of the stakeholders: parents, students and the local community.

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[1] The Dutch study team for Schooling for Tomorrow were Jan Heijmans, Dutch Principals Academy, Harry Gankema, KPC Group, and Anneke Boot (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science).

One of the ideas behind the new steering philosophy has been that top-down modernisation is not effective, because it is too uniform and does not address the situation in which professionals work. The development of education is a continual process in which a school community determines, from the bottom up, what changes are preferred for their own organisation in their own environment. Innovation means that schools have the ability to organise their classroom teaching differently, not following a new "grand design" for teaching. It means innovation is shaped from and by schools. The first Dutch initiative focused on capacity building for visionary leadership; the Dutch Principals Academy ran a series of events focusing on futures thinking and visionary leadership for school leaders. The second project focuses on one example of a radical innovation in schooling – Slash/21. This is a school "redesigned" by the KPC Group, a consulting group working in education and partly financed by government. One of the consequences of the new steering philosophy is the identified need for leadership capacity at the school level. Decentralisation has meant that school leaders need to think about where they want to take their school.

New educational governance

New educational governance is characterised by: deregulation, a limited setting of frameworks on the part of the national government, greater space given to institutions themselves, incentives for the optimum utilisation of the available space, and the need for accountability to government and society by the institutions about the choices they make and monitoring of compliance with the established frameworks. Government has established clear frameworks, like attainment targets and examination programmes, and provides incentives to work within them; it has reduced regulation in order to give schools greater room to take their own initiative and responsibility. By 2006, every school will be funded through receipt of a lump sum budget to give them greater freedom.

One of the instruments in this new steering philosophy is the development of multi-year policy plans, for each sector of education. These plans outline the general direction for a certain sector over the coming years; they provide a vision of the future for the sector in the short term (the four years of a cabinet term) and the longer term (eight to ten years). The process of developing these plans is important. The close co-operation between the ministry, school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and other public bodies in the neighbourhood of the school enhances the field's capacity for futures thinking. The aim is to develop a common vision and policy programme for each sector. The main themes vary by sector. In primary education, the main themes chosen were: education quality and innovation, teaching staff and

organisation, and the social role of the school in relation to its environment. The plans were discussed in Parliament and subsequently established by government, indicating for each theme what steps will be taken in the short and long term (see Box 8.1).

**Box 8.1. Principles of the new education system governance
in the Netherlands**

- The administration of the educational institution supports its teaching staff and encourages and challenges its staff to assume personal responsibility within their field of expertise.

- The administration, as the competent authority, is primarily responsible for the educational institution, and thus also for the choices to be made between, sometimes conflicting, interests of various stakeholders.

- The duties and responsibilities of administration and supervision must be transparent.

- The involvement of pupils, participants, students and parents is safeguarded.

- The involvement of the social partners – the business sector and social organisations – is safeguarded.

- The organisations acting as representatives within the various education sectors will assume more responsibility.

- More attention must be paid to accountability to the social environment of the educational institution; this accountability, however, can never completely replace vertical supervision by the Ministry of Education.

- The supervision of the Ministry is focused at the legitimacy and quality of education and to a lesser extent governance. The Minister will be able to intervene in the event of a serious failure.

- A proper balance must be found between internal supervision, horizontal accountability and the supervision of the central government.

Evaluations of this new and interactive process have shown solid and consistent progress in terms of a "renewal of relations". The relation between the demand side of schooling (parents and students) and the supply side (school leaders and teachers) has become stronger, while existing relations *e.g.* between government and representative organisations of the sector have weakened. Representative organisations are looking for new channels to exercise voice – the Parliament, mass media and specialised

education media. A fundamental change in the style of policy-making and the organisation of education is taking place towards a diverse set of checks and balances at the local, school level and with government in an increasingly remote and supervisory role.

The development of visionary school leadership

As noted, the decentralisation of decision-making in the Netherlands has not only stimulated and provided room for innovation; it has also created a greater need for leadership capacity at the local levels. The Dutch Principals Academy (DPA) is focused on just that. DPA is an independent non-governmental body for leaders in primary education. It stimulates and maintains the professional quality and expertise of management in primary education. The five main assignments of the DPA are: to develop and maintain a professional standard; to keep a register of competent leaders in primary education; to accredit and certify the programmes for professionalisation; to develop the starter qualifications of the profession; and to establish a Dutch Centre for Leadership in Schools.

During Phase 2 of the OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" project, the DPA focused on the core competence of visionary leadership of school leaders in primary education. DPA research made it clear that having a vision is crucial for school leaders but that they rarely have their own strong vision of what good education, good schools and good leadership will be in the future. Their ideas are heavily coloured by national policy and expertise from consultants and advisors. While visionary leadership involves long-term and broad thinking, the visions of school leaders have a limited scope and are internally focused and locally oriented. DPA sought therefore to promote long-term visionary leadership by introducing futures thinking in the initial training of leaders in primary education, through school improvement projects focused on sustainable visions for daily practice in schools. It aimed to develop, try out and evaluate instruments, methods and other working materials that challenge head teachers to develop their own visions, appealing to their role as leaders of a moral enterprise and their professional responsibility to co-create desirable futures. DPA also sought to obtain images and evidence of preferred and disliked futures from different groups of school leaders.

Design and methodology

The original six OECD scenarios outlined what possible school models might be in the future whereas DPA wanted leaders in primary education to create their own images. Therefore, it used the five broad societal scenarios

from the Ontario "Teaching as a Profession" project as a basis, adapted to the European context and combining them with the outcomes of the pre-forward study from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. This resulted in the following five scenarios:

- *In a united Europe*: in this scenario, the structures and processes of education remain similar to what they are now. Government will be more effective and reliable, and sound economic policies result in steady economic growth. The education system is highly standardised with an emphasis on the quality of educational programmes as well as on accountability for quality.

- *In a downward spiral*: in this depressing, unstable future there is great unemployment and labour unrest. Regional conflicts and wars lead to large numbers of refugees and create problems for international trade. Innovation in the education system primarily focuses on efficiency and providing effective low-cost service. The education system becomes smaller and less accessible, and alternative forms of education increase.

- *For community and environmental care*: this scenario focuses on changes in communal life. Due to several environmental disasters, there is a growing and worldwide interest in the environment. Large numbers of self-providing communities develop strong local cultures and take a greater responsibility for education.

- *In a global market economy*: in this vision of the future, the scale of multi-national corporations increases quickly. The borders between corporate and national interests are blurring. Both public and private sectors acknowledge the importance of education for economic development. Lifelong learning becomes the norm.

- *In a high-tech networking society*: in this scenario technology provides the means for the complex networks within which people communicate and learn. Education is aimed at the individuals' changing preferences and interests and its main responsibility is for refining and stimulating people's desire to learn.

Activities

These scenarios were used in diverse ways in different sessions all aimed at stimulating visionary thinking with school heads. To stimulate creative thinking, mixed groups of leaders in primary education were placed in the imaginary worlds of the five scenarios. Different methods were used to let them design and evaluate stories and images of future schools for

2-15-year-old children in 2030. There were three *writing sessions* with over 100 participants. Sessions were held with (deputy) heads – who were asked to write short stories as a team of educational designers to describe schools in one of the scenarios. Another writing session was organised for 20 aspiring heads in initial training to describe a school day of a 4-year-old and a 12-year-old child in 2030.

Second, there were three *walking sessions* with around 50 participants in which mixed groups (deputy heads, heads of innovative schools), walked in different environments like a museum of modern art, a zoo, a history museum and a space centre, in order to get impressions and experiences of learning in the future. They made pictures for a powerpoint presentation on five school design dimensions (see Box 8.2), and the presentations were then used to discuss possible futures.

Box 8.2. Five school dimensions

To create images of possible future schools in the scenarios and to be able to analyse results in a systematic way a framework with five school design dimensions was used:

-   Why should one learn? – expectations from education in the future.

-   What does one have to learn? – contents and curricula in the future.

-   Where and how can one learn? – learning environments and resources in the future.

-   How can learning be organised? – leadership and governance in future education.

-   How can learning be supported in the future? – the role of parents, local community and society.

Third, an *information processing session* with a mixed group of around 20 aspiring superintendents in their initial training phase took place in a computer facility with Internet access. The intention was to get impressions and experiences of learning in the future on the Internet and make a powerpoint presentation on the five school design dimensions for presentation and the means to discuss possible futures.

Fourth, two *evaluation sessions* were held each with similar numbers to the previous session. The first was with head teachers of a large federation of schools, who had just put together their policy strategy, in order to assess

those plans against the five scenarios and to experience how "future proof" they are. The second brought together head teachers of schools of different denominations, working closely together in an educational region, to discuss what shared opinions they had on preferred or disliked futures.

Results

While there has been no formal evaluation of the initiative; feedback suggests that many school leaders have used the materials and their experience in the session to create a vision for their own school. Beyond building leadership capacity, the sessions give us some raw material to shed light on ideas about futures for education.

The "united Europe" scenario has led to the realisation that knowledge of languages and different cultures is becoming more important. At the same time the growing importance of regions within Europe points towards the need to strengthen the ties with the local community. Reactions to the "downward spiral" scenario have shown how difficult handling major change will be for the educational system, but it has also led to the realisation that schools are havens of safety and would play a key role in handling the fear and stress engendered by this future. The "community and environmental care" scenario has led to the suggestion that the boundaries between school and environment are blurring, that learning takes place both inside and outside the school, and that it is important to strengthen the relation between school, society and family. The "global market" scenario has led to the realisation that lifelong learning requires the building of attitudes supportive of it in primary education. Responses to the "high-tech networking society" have resulted in the realisation that society will be too complex for any single actor – whether government, companies or another – to guide an individual throughout life.

The whole exercise has also led to a number of core questions to be explored in the future. Who "owns" education? What is the role of politics, ideology and the professional? How to create variety without this leading to segmentation? How to strike a balance between the demand and supply of education – what do children want to learn and what must they learn? Free will of the individual vs. the uniformity of regulating processes? Educating world citizens and cherishing the local community?

Slash/21: a re-engineered school model

The new governance philosophy of clear but limited government frameworks, in combination with institutions that must account for their

results, produces considerable room for innovation from below. There are, however, a number of factors which have coincided and made the Dutch education system more innovative. The first factor is related to governance changes, whereby the new external orientation brought into the system by the greater influence of stakeholders has encouraged innovations. Also, many teachers have come to understand that the transfer of pre-defined knowledge (*i.e.* teaching) is very different from making the individual learning process relevant (*i.e.* learning). There has been, in a time of economic growth, an intense exchange with innovative initiatives in countries like Canada, Sweden, Finland and especially the work of Arthur Andersen in the Alameda school in San Francisco. Finally, representatives from national industries had an increasing influence on curricula; they promoted the idea that there should be less emphasis on formal knowledge and more on a broad range of competencies.

Slash/21 is one of the first examples of this generation of innovation in schooling and has had a substantial influence on innovations that followed. It was strongly supported by the Minister, and parents and pupils where enthusiastic. Slash/21 not only stood for a new learning approach but also for a new way of organising learning processes at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels and for new definitions of staff functions within a school. It became accepted that others worked with students, not only teachers, and that a school could operate without timetables or subject-based curricula.

The greater openness to educational innovation notwithstanding, the developers of Slash/21 perceived the school system as lagging behind fundamental changes in society. They point to substantial social changes like for example the rise of ICT that has changed the world since the 1980s while schools, the obvious institutions to deal with information and communication, are still struggling to identify what significance ICT has for education.

The vision behind Slash/21

Slash/21 rests on a particular vision of the future. This vision hinges on two core concepts: the rise of the knowledge society and increasing individualisation. The *knowledge society* means that people will need the ability to apply their knowledge quickly. When new technology is introduced, those who benefit most are not those who enrol in the first available course (lifelong learning) but those who already have enough tacit knowledge to incorporate new technology into their existing knowledge set. The belief behind Slash/21 is that the knowledge society does not so much call for people who can learn quickly and throughout their lives, but more who have received basic concepts that last a lifetime. *Individualisation*

means that the highly standardised nature of traditional schooling, in terms of standardised contents, levels, location and time of instruction, no longer fits with the individualised nature of children. This results in high drop-out rates, by those who fail because of school specific norms which they will never have to comply with in life outside and after school.

On this analysis, the developers envisaged Slash/21 as a service organisation for students in need of skills to operate in the society of the future. Students are treated as consumers and knowledge as something that belongs to these consumers and therefore has to be personalised. There is an emphasis on blended and informal learning and the whole world is viewed as a resource for learning. Learning is seen as something which cannot be planned in rigid time schedules and knowledge as something which cannot be defined within subject-matter boundaries. Importantly, knowledge, skills and attitudes are not derived from central curriculum goals developed from inside the system but from crucial learning moments that people have to go through on their way towards and within the world of work. In other words, the Slash/21 model sees effective learning as depending on the ability to make connections. Learning combines subjects from different disciplines and aims to create insight in the bigger picture. Energy, for example, is such a key concept: to understand it, it is important to use insights from chemistry, physics and biology and Slash/21 presents those insights in an overall setting and not separated into different subjects. Slash/21 also follows the principles of intensive language teaching: in a twelve-week period, the students work intensively in four, three-hour periods a week on one modern language. From Day One, they are motivated to speak in a foreign language, encouraged by an English, French or German native speaker who stimulates, interests and corrects the learners whenever necessary.

Slash/21 has tutors instead of teachers, assisting and stimulating students if and when necessary. For a number of reasons, tutors have more time to spend with the students. First, the teaching system is flexible and tutors are complementary to one another. Second, teaching assistants take over certain tasks and responsibilities from the tutor which traditionally the teachers would do themselves. Third, the use of an electronic learning environment provides tutors with more time and they have the opportunity to completely focus on their key roles as coach, guide, companion and supporter. Together, tutors and teaching assistants form a team guided by a team leader. They are responsible for the education of a group of students for three years, thereby encouraging a close bond between students and staff. Students too are encouraged to form groups, for group assignments are central at the Slash/21 model. Within these groups, they learn from each other and feel free to expose their opinions and emotions. There are no classes in Slash/21, just "home groups" of about 50 students. Three "home

groups" of three subsequent course years are combined to one "learning community" under the supervision of a staff team. The members of the "home group" quickly know one another; therefore it is easy to split them into small and changing groups to carry out work projects. In order to give course-like tuition, "home groups" from several "learning communities" will be joined together from time to time.

For this type of education, where the pupils are expected to work in smaller or larger groups, a new type of school building is required. A central space in this school building is the "home base". Students and staff of the same "home group" meet one another in the "living room" of the school every day. Ample room is available for (groups of) students to work on their projects. The school also contains a theatre, where projects can be presented, large groups can be taught together, and plays can be produced. It has a media and information space, a discovery room with a laboratory, a technical corner as well as an art corner. The building is designed for desk-independent computer usage.

Developing Slash/21

Slash/21 was developed using futures thinking techniques of Business Process Redesign (BPR) from the world of business. It relied heavily on scenario-building, giving the process a strategic externally-focused orientation. The focus chosen was akin to the OECD scenario in which schools are seen as "Core Social Centres". However, while the OECD scenarios assume that change will happen as a consequence of tensions between societal demands and what schools are actually supplying, the designers of Slash/21 decided that they could intervene proactively. In this, they were like IBM when it decided it no longer worked in the business for office equipment but in the field of information processing, and introduced the personal computer. As one of the leading persons involved stated: "Society did not have to take over things: schools had to make a fundamental decision about the new business they were in."

"Business Process Redesign" is a technique where an organisation is designed as if it had to be built up for the first time. In comparing the existing organisation with the designed one, redundancy and illogical structures and processes can be traced which have grown into the organisation. Re-engineering an organisation starts from the most fundamental processes in the organisation: in schooling, this is learning. Taking the analogy with business one step further, the designers of Slash/21 were struck by the differences between the type of knowledge schools were offering and the types of knowledge the environment (*e.g.* employers) demands. Slash/21 was designed as a school where the focus was on tacit knowledge and knowledge structures rather than formal knowledge. The

necessity of dealing with increasingly individualised children meant that the organisation was built up as a service organisation rather than a production organisation, with more flexibility and a greater sensitivity to demand.

Implementation of the concept was based on plans created by a business consultant, with intensive training of newly hired personnel and very intensive communication with parents and the local community.

Results

Slash/21 was easily accepted by parents and the direct environment of the school. The message of the school was intensely communicated and understood by most parents. The school has been evaluated from the beginning by two universities in terms of reaching traditional cognitive objectives as well as the new objectives related to the Slash/21 concept. The Inspectorate has recently judged the school positively. The language curriculum – based on not more than one foreign language at one time, communicating for half the day in that language – has received a European Prize for curriculum innovation.

Innovations like Slash/21 are now replicated by around a dozen secondary schools in the Netherlands. They have had great influence on many more schools which were not totally redesigned but which introduced important elements of the original model – learning based on projects, not teacher-driven knowledge transfer; projects not based on subject-matter content; and schools with many non-teacher staff members working within the classroom.

In other sectors of education, there are comparable innovations to Slash/21, partly stimulated by its development. At the primary level, there is an increasing number of schools which organise learning processes fundamentally differently from the traditional system. There is a chain of schools with no formal curriculum, where pupil learning starts by their own motivation and energy. Many institutions of vocational education too are working on redesigning their education. Changes in the area of vocational education are characterised by the greater influence of local industries on the curriculum, competence as the basis for curriculum development, and more personalised learning inside and outside school. There are vocational institutions now with competence-based learning projects with almost no timetables and students working in learning communities, and without firm boundaries between secondary and tertiary (vocational) education for students with a weak theoretical orientation. These developments in turn may be expected in the long term to have an influence on secondary education.

While most schools in the Netherlands still operate more traditionally, re-designed schools are no longer perceived as strange phenomena but as realistic

alternatives. On the other hand, there is a public debate on the effect of "new learning" on the cognitive skills of students. Primary education institutions which abolished the curriculum altogether tend to come in for particular criticism and the Dutch Inspectorate gave some of these school warnings for the lack of content in their (non-existent) curricula. Re-designing has sometimes become a goal in itself and thus no longer aimed at societal demands.

Scaling up the innovation is difficult because of a certain conservatism in society and because schools as professional organisations tend to resist change. In business chains, fundamental paradigm shifts are provoked by chain leaders, usually the elements of the business chain in direct contact with consumers. The school system has no "chain leader", especially in the Netherlands where the government has stopped playing this role.

Conclusions

Considering the current governance philosophy and the reshuffling of responsibilities involved, the two initiatives described can be seen as valuable examples of the new steering paradigm in practice. Both innovation of the primary process of learning and teaching and developing school leadership are carried out by the professionals in the education field themselves instead of by the government. As a result, futures thinking is practised on the "shop floor" where it belongs. However, as this is still work in progress, there are important questions to be answered.

A first question is: how to encourage all schools to take greater pains over the development of the education they offer? While it may not be necessary for every school to complete a full makeover of themselves, all are obliged, with their main stakeholders, to establish a clear view on the future of their school and their contribution to the knowledge society. A second one is: how to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of innovations? Do we want every school to re-invent the wheel for themselves? Or, is it possible to establish smart mechanisms through which schools can learn from each other? And how can we strengthen the relation between the education sciences and practitioners?

The theme for our continued participation in the OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" project is "sharing knowledge for innovation", partly shaped by the experiences described above. Government still has the responsibility for the education system as a whole and the ways in which knowledge are produced, disseminated and applied in practice are crucial for the performance of the system. Therefore "sharing knowledge" will be the main issue for future Dutch work in this field in the coming years.

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