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Developing teacher leadership and its impact in schools

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Publication date
2014

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Snoek, M. (2014). *Developing teacher leadership and its impact in schools*. [Thesis, externally prepared, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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INTERMEZZO 2

Master's programs for teachers in the Netherlands

1. School-centered versus university-centered development programs

In the previous chapter, we examined learning arrangements within an academic development school and how such learning arrangements contributed to the leadership development of teachers. In our study, we identified conditions in the organizational culture and structure that would influence the impact of such learning arrangements on work and leadership practices. When these conditions are met, individual teacher development may have a catalytic impact on the school organization as a whole, as the research activities of teachers may impact their colleagues. Teachers' involvement in research activities within the school also contributed to a broader sense of professionalism, strengthening the ability of teachers to become change agents and leaders within the school.

The learning environment that was the focus of this case study was dominated by the activity system of the school. Within the academic development school, the university was involved by supporting teacher researchers in developing their research skills. However, the initiative was with school management, as the aims, goals, conditions, and criteria for teacher research were defined by school management. The university played the role of advisor, whereas the management of the school had the overall responsibility for design and outcomes of the teacher researchers' development process. Consequently, the design may be characterized as 'school-centered'. Academic development schools aim to connect teacher research, the professional development of teachers, and school development. However, in this case, the focus on the professional development of teachers remained implicit, as no explicit learning goals or outcome criteria were formulated for the teachers involved, nor was there any explicit assessment. Therefore, the focus was on the teachers' informal and implicit learning.

In this respect, the learning arrangement within this academic development school differs from a Master's program. In a Master's program, explicit outcomes are defined, and participants are assessed against these outcomes.

Universities have an explicit responsibility to set quality criteria based on formal accreditation frameworks. Given that responsibility, universities have a leading role in designing the curriculum and in assessing participants in Master's programs. Therefore, Master's programs may be considered 'university-centered' (Cornelissen, 2011).

University centered learning arrangements are characterized by interaction between two activity systems: university and school. As indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, tension might result from this interaction of two activity systems with different responsibilities and different perspectives. The interaction and shared understanding between these two activity systems cannot be taken for granted. A gap may result between the individual development that is stimulated within a Master's program and the daily reality at the school, limiting the impact of a Master's program.

The issue of the impact of Master's programs on teachers and schools is relevant because there is an increasing focus in Dutch and European teacher policies on Master's programs as a key professional development activity for teachers in schools, as indicated in Chapter 1.

2. Recent developments in Master's programs in the Netherlands

The Bologna process has created a European higher education area with qualifications at the Bachelor's and Master's levels. This process has led to a growing variation in Master's-level programs in all higher education sectors, including teacher education. Because many member states believe that a higher qualification may contribute to an increase in teacher quality, several European member states have developed policies on Master's programs for teachers to raise the overall qualification level of teachers. However, the strategies used by member states differ.

In a response to the European Commission's and European Council's communications 'Improving the Quality of Teacher Education' (European Commission, 2007; European Council, 2007), several member states have decided to raise the minimum qualification level for teachers to the Master's level. In other countries, the initial qualification level for (part of the) teachers remains at the Bachelor's level, whereas new post-initial courses are developed to create in-service opportunities for teachers to raise their qualification levels. Although this second strategy, focusing on post-initial Master's qualification programs, might appear to be less ambitious than the first strategy aiming at ensuring a Master's qualification for all new teachers, the second strategy is important because it focuses on the vast number of teachers who already work in schools.

Not only national or European governments express the ambition to raise the qualification level of teachers to the Master's level. Teacher organizations

also express this ambition. The European teachers' unions state that the qualification level for all teacher education programs should be raised to the Master's level (European Trade Union Committee for Education, 2008), whereas the Dutch teachers' union AOb emphasized in a manifest published in 2006 that every teacher in school should have the right and opportunity to follow a qualification course at the Master's level during his/her career (Algemene Onderwijsbond, 2006). Although there is no clear evidence connecting teacher qualifications to the quality of teaching in schools (Snoek, 2013b; Van Veen, Van Driel, & Veldman, 2011), teachers themselves indicate that they consider 'qualification programs' and 'involvement in individual and collaborative research' as the professional development activities with the highest impact on their development as a teacher (OECD, 2009).

In response to the Bologna agreement, Dutch universities for applied sciences transformed several post-initial programs for teachers into Master's programs (HBO-raad, 2006). In addition to existing programs focusing on special needs education, school management, and teaching in upper secondary schools, the universities for applied sciences developed a new Master's program focusing on teacher leadership in all educational sectors (Snoek & Teune, 2006). This program focused on three key elements: being an expert on teaching and learning while contributing to the development of knowledge on teaching and learning, being an initiator of curriculum development in relation to developments in the wider local context, and being supportive of colleagues (Snoek & Teune, 2006, p. 114-115).

This Master's program 'Learning & Innovation' started in 2007 at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam and similar programs are now offered at 10 universities, with an annual enrollment of approximately 600 teachers (data from www.hbo-raad.nl).

To increase the number of teachers with a Master's level qualification, the Ministry of Education, Culture & Science initiated in 2008 a bursary system – the '*Lerarenbeurs*' – , where teachers working in schools could apply for grants for post-initial Master's programs. These grants may be used for programs with a maximum duration of three years, and they cover the study fee as well as replacement costs for a half-day per week. The bursary system has become enormously popular; from 2008 to 2012, 18,000 teachers applied for funding (Ministerie van OCW, 2012). In 2013, the national budget for the grants was 100 million Euro.

In national policy documents, the Master's programs are expected to contribute to a wide variety of teacher qualities, covering pedagogical and methodological qualities of the teacher at the classroom level, subject expertise, school development, research, and general professionalism. In addition, Master's programs are expected to contribute to career possibilities, status and the attractiveness of the profession (Snoek, 2013a).

3. A Master's program in co-operation with schools

In 2008, a group of secondary schools challenged the teacher education institutes to develop Master's programs that would fit with their ambitions concerning school development and in which the professional development of teachers was in direct relation to the change agenda of the school. Graduates of the Master's programs were expected to be able to act as change agents and teacher leaders within their schools.

The programs were intended to focus on educational design and innovation, on the pedagogical role of the teacher in relation to diversity, on performing research and collecting evidence on the level of the classroom and the school, and on (subject related) teaching methodologies. Because the programs should take the school of the participant as the central learning environment, part of the Master's program should be focused on developing knowledge about and sensitivity to organizational and change processes and on supporting colleagues (NIME, 2008).

With the support of the national Council for Secondary Schools, the Netherlands Institute for Masters in Education (NIME) was created. The NIME started a tender procedure in which universities could offer their proposals for Master's programs. From these proposals, three consortia were selected to offer one Master of Education program and three Master of Science programs. The first of these programs started in Amsterdam in 2009 (Snoek & Galjaard, 2011).

Because the aim of these Master's programs was to connect the Master's program to the change agenda of the school, the explicit ambition was to connect the activity system of the school and the university. Nevertheless, the programs may be characterized as university-centered because they were designed by the university. Although the program was initiated by a tender procedure, the involvement of the schools was limited, and the program was dominated by general criteria set by the government. This process implies that the NIME Master's programs fit in the bureaucratic scenario.

For the next case study in this research project, we take one of these Master's programs – '*Professioneel Meesterschap*' – as a context in which to investigate the extent to which and the way in which a formal university driven Master's program for teacher leadership contributes to teacher development, to new leadership roles for teachers and to school development.

The Master's program *Professioneel Meesterschap* is a two-year part-time program leading to a Master of Education (MEd) qualification. The program was designed by a consortium of three universities and validated by the NIME. The content of the program focused on theories on learning and pedagogy and on school organization and innovation. The participants were challenged to connect the theories presented in lectures to their own local context through a variety of assignments. Their thesis research focused on a specific issue within their local context and was designed as a red thread running through the program. This red thread began with a careful theoretical and practical analysis in the

first year, followed by the design and evaluation of an intervention in the second year. Given the background of the NIME master, the assumption was that school management and the direct supervisor of the participant would be closely involved in the Master's program, would act as closely involved stakeholders in the thesis research, and would create the conditions for applying the developed leadership competences in the school.

The first cohort of 9 participants started in February 2009 and graduated in February 2011, the second cohort started with 15 participants in September 2009 and graduated in September 2011.