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Educating for Adulthood or for Citizenship: social competence as an educational goal

GEERT TEN DAM & MONIQUE VOLMAN

Introduction

What education can and should contribute to young people's pro-social development is a question that is receiving increasing attention. Research on the competences young people must develop to function adequately in social interactions, however, shows different approaches and backgrounds (Hansen, 2001; Solomon, Watson & Battistich, 2001; Schuitema, ten Dam, & Veugelers, in press). Under the social competence heading, research on the pro-social development of young people on route to adulthood is primarily carried out from an educational psychology perspective. Pedagogical and sociological studies on this theme have been carried out under the headings of moral education and citizenship education. Every research domain has its own theoretical orientations, research questions and findings. This is not a problem in itself and is inherent to scientific research. What we consider more problematic is that there is scarcely any discussion between the adherents of the different perspectives, most of whom are dealing with the same theme: the social development of young people.

With this article, we want to link research on pupils' pro-social development and research on the societal task of education. The following question was formulated: what are the social competences that pupils need to participate in a responsible and adequate way in a democratic society and how can educational outcomes in this field be assessed? The notion of competence is generally used to refer to the totality of knowledge, skills and attitudes that enables a person to perform tasks and solve problems within a specific social practice (Eraut, 1994). It is, therefore, not about learning isolated knowledge, skills and attitudes, but about integrating these with a view to performing (in our case) social tasks. At the same time, knowledge, skills and attitudes remain discernable components of the competence concept.

In the first part of the article, we discuss the results of a review study on 'social competence'. We analyse how it is defined and its relationship with education, describing the various dimensions of the concept. In the second part, we ask what instruments would be necessary to assess educational outcomes in the field of social competence. We first discuss and analyse which components of social competence should form part of children and young people's development from the perspective of social competence as an objective of education in a democratic society. We then consider what type of instruments are available to measure the components of social competence and what kind of problems are associated with assessing social competence goals. We conclude by formulating a position on the

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normative character of the concept of social competence in the context of education and the consequences for measuring the outcomes at pupil level.

Method

We carried out a survey of the literature to explore the concept of social competence and the various ways of measuring the desired outcome as an educational goal. Data files in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI, accessible via Internet) were checked for potentially relevant studies published between 1990 and 2003, using the following keywords: *social competence, personal and social education, and affective competence*. As we were looking for social competence as an educational goal, we also searched for additional studies on the promotion of pupils' pro-social and moral development in which the concept of social competence did not feature as such. For the purpose of this article, we used a selection of 'key-publications' from studies with the keywords: *moral education, character education, values education, citizenship education, democratic education, civic competence, and civic education*. We restricted our selection to articles published in academic, refereed periodicals, papers presented at international congresses using a peer-review selection procedure, books and contributions to books. On the basis of the summaries in the articles we found, we then made a further selection — is the article really about a theoretical and/or empirical study on social competence and/or a related term? This resulted in 57 articles. In addition, we checked the bibliographies and references in the selected articles and papers for potentially relevant new material published either before or after 1990 (the snowball method). Lastly, we asked several researchers for recent papers pertaining to our research question and screened the important educational congresses (AERA and EARLI) held in the last four years for relevant contributions. In total, the review included 74 studies.

The accent in this article is on conceptualisations of social competence in relation to education and on how the educational outcomes can best be evaluated and assessed. The research results reported in the articles we found are only dealt with here when they illustrate a particular perspective or form of evaluation. Furthermore, in the review study, we explicitly focused on the aspired outcomes at *pupil level*: what knowledge, skills and attitudes are necessary for them to be able to function in society in a socially competent way?

Conceptualising Social Competence as an Educational Goal: two perspectives

All the recent publications about social competence or the pro-social development of pupils make *one* thing very clear: the dividing line between social competence and other competences that are necessary to function in the public and private sphere is very fine. This is not surprising. After all, there are no non-social competences. Every development and everything a child learns contribute, at least ideally, to their functioning in society and thus comprise social development and social learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; ten Dam, Volman, & Wardekker, 2004). Nevertheless, the concept of social competence must be specified further. An infinite interpretation is impractical when it pertains to social competence as an objective of education.

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Developing into a Socially Competent Adult

The concept of social competence is primarily rooted in a developmental psychology tradition. This is evident in both the various descriptions of the concept and the importance that is attached to it. Three elements are characteristic of this perspective. Firstly, social competence is related to the age or specific phase of development of a child. The developmental tasks become increasingly complex (Jackson & Bijstra, 2000; Allen, Weissberg, & Hawkins, 1989). In other words, social competence is a 'developmental construct' (Englund *et al.*, 2000). Secondly, it concerns the interaction between an individual and others, particularly with peers. Thirdly, it pertains to the ability of children who are growing up to deal with the social demands that are made on them. Hence, the developmental tasks of children and young people on route to adulthood that have to be learned in the different phases of life are usually mentioned (Allen *et al.*, 1989; Elias & Weissberg, 1994; Raver & Zigler, 1997; Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Formulated in general terms, social competence is viewed as the result of children's and young people's 'normal development'. More attention should therefore be given to children with psychosocial problems and young people 'at risk' (Weissberg, 1990; Epstein *et al.*, 1997; Jackson & Bijstra, 2000; Caplan *et al.*, 1992).

The emphasis on 'being able to function adequately', on 'reacting adaptively' and on 'coping behaviour' from the developmental psychology perspective makes social competence an inherently normative concept. Its meaning depends on the person assessing it. Generally, the social group to which a person belongs plays a role in determining its specific interpretation (Halberstadt *et al.*, 2001; Allen *et al.*, 1989). Arsenio and Lemerise (2001) state that definitions that only encompass the perspective of the person in question (Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999) are too restricted. The opinions of others (peers, adults) are also necessary: what do they think is effective/competent (Crick & Dodge, 1999; Gallagher, Millar, & Ellis, 1996)? Research indicates that there is a close correlation between what is considered to be socially competent in a particular society in relation to adults and in relation to peers (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001).

The context in which specific behaviour occurs (at home, on the street, at school, etc.) also influences the interpretation of social competence. In a school context, it is soon understood as 'adequate social behaviour in the classroom', 'following instructions', 'paying attention', 'volunteering to answer questions', etc. This interpretation is mainly found when endeavours are made to relate pupils' social behaviour to their educational achievements (Wentzel, 1991). A socially competent pupil is one who is able to adopt a 'school identity'. Foster-Clark and Blyth (1992) accentuate the reciprocal influence between peoples' competence and the context in which they are acting. Following Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological approach, they state that the influence of different contexts on social competence cannot be properly understood without analysing the reaction and interactions that the developing person in question evokes and criticise the fact that research on social competence pays little attention to differences between pupils (gender, ethnicity, etc.).

Lastly, the normative character of social competence concerns the social context in which young people must fulfil developmental tasks. For example, the ability to have interracial friendships in modern society requires multicultural

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sensitivity (Hunter & Elias, 2000). Young people must be able to cooperate and communicate with people from a different cultural background and demonstrate respect and understanding for cultural diversity. According to Schneider, Ackerman and Kanfer (1996), the context-bound character of social tasks does not alter the fact that many tasks are so universal that consensus as to what is socially effective in a particular situation is possible. The underlying structure of social competence and the processes at the basis of its development are considered to be independent of the phase of life and culture (Halberstadt *et al.*, 2001).

Developing into a Social Competent Citizen

In recent decades, attention has been paid to the role of education in pupils' pro-social development under the heading of the 'moral task of education' or, more recently, 'citizenship education' (Solomon *et al.*, 2001; Schuitema, ten Dam, & Veugelers, in press). Typical elements of this approach, which we refer to as an 'educating for citizenship' perspective, are first and foremost the accent on social participation and on the democratic and multicultural character of society (see also Boyd & Arnold, 2000; Naval, Print, & Veldhuis, 2002; Print & Coleman, 2003; Rychen & Salganik, 2003; Gordon, 2003). 'Adequate participation' does not mean behaving according to a fixed set of norms, but being able to deal flexibly with differences and other choices and possibilities. Several authors stress the importance of 'being able to change perspective' and 'self-regulation'. In our individualistic society, young people must learn, in interaction with their surroundings and others, to give direction to their own development (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). Furthermore, 'reflection' is an essential aspect of social competence, not only in directing one's own development but also society's. Socially competent citizens must also be able to make their critical contribution (Wardekker, 2001).

The literature mainly refers to concepts such as character education, moral education and democratic education in relation to the societal element of social competence. The term character education is used in the US for programmes in the fields of moral values, ethics and the development of citizenship (Lickona, 1991; The Character Education Partnership, 1998). Two approaches can be differentiated (Benninga, 1991; Solomon *et al.*, 2001). The so-called 'direct approach' emphasises the transmission of specific moral values. It is based on a vision of moral development as a process of internalising social norms and values and the development of internal mechanisms to regulate one's behaviour. The 'indirect approach' emphasises the active construction of moral meaning by young people and becoming personally involved in the principles of fairness and concern for the welfare of others. The ultimate objective is that pupils will see themselves as part of a broad, democratic, moral community (Duncan, 1997; Solomon *et al.*, 2001). The 'Just Community' approach (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989), and the Child Development Project (Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, & Delucchi, 1992) are well-known programmes in the latter approach.

Knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding pupils' own functioning and that of others in the community are also found under the headings 'civics' and 'democratic citizenship'. OECD has designated 'civics' as one of the four cross-curricular competences that all pupils need for their personal development and future citizenship (OECD, 1997). Authors who discuss the social task of education under the

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heading of 'democratic citizenship education', interpret democratic citizenship as a way of life that is centred on a willingness for dialogue and the desire to make your voice heard, whilst wanting to listen to others (Kaplan, 1997). Glass (2000) also emphasises the importance of 'critical citizenship', i.e. actively and critically functioning in and contributing to a just and open democracy. This means being able to reflect on community relations and criticise the state. In contrast to an 'educating for adulthood' perspective, phases in the development of social competence are not formulated in an 'educating for citizenship' perspective. The demands made by society on young people, however, vary from one phase of life to another.

Social competence is also a normative concept from the perspective of citizenship but, in contrast to an 'educating for adulthood' perspective, it is a *chosen* normativeness. The norm for social competence is derived from the demands made by a democratic society on its citizens. It concerns a society that is heterogeneous in the sense of encompassing different socio-cultural groups and that aspires to having citizens who are able to function in diverse contexts. The observation that explicitly chosen norms are involved in this perspective does not mean that there is no danger of 'hidden aspects' of normativeness creeping in (e.g. the imposition of the norms of one group on another group). Who, for example, is capable of assessing what is socially competent behaviour? The teacher, fellow pupils, pupils themselves? How can justice be done to the socio-cultural group to which an individual belongs and to the context in which specific behaviour is demonstrated? A multicultural society does indeed encompass a diversity of groups and various contexts. The different codes involved here must be included in the definition of social competence as an educational goal.

Social Competence as an Educational Goal

Social competence is an irrefutable objective of child rearing but it does not automatically receive adequate attention as an educational goal. This can be seen in studies from an 'educating for adulthood' perspective. School seems to be one of the challenges in young people's life for which they must develop social competence (Allen *et al.*, 1989; Mize & Cox, 1990), but it has not been assigned a specific task in stimulating this competence. Some authors see a role for the school in relation to pupils who lack social skills. They base this on the fact that a link between social skills and cognitive learning achievements has been identified (Rotheram, 1987) and that social skills prove to be sensitive to training (Schneider *et al.*, 1996). Training in social skills is not integrated into the curriculum, but is provided in special courses and projects (Jackson & Bijstra, 2000).

From a citizenship perspective, education must not only prepare pupils for a future profession, but also for participation in the community (citizenship) and must contribute to personal development (Rychen & Salganik, 2003). Social competence in this sense is an educational goal for *all* pupils, regardless of the type of education and socio-cultural background. More specifically, it is argued from a socio-cultural perspective that social competence is inherently linked to pupils' learning and development processes. Learning is conceptualised as the increasing ability to participate adequately in the social and cultural practices which are considered to be important in society. Participating should not only be a goal of education but also a means (Sfard, 1998). By participating (as a 'peripheral

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participant' in order to become a more centrally situated participant, Lave & Wenger, 1991), pupils can develop the knowledge that is relevant in particular social practices, the cognitive and social skills that are necessary in daily life, the motivation to participate, and confidence in their own ability, norms and values, etc. Every activity, either in or outside the school, can, in principle, teach young people both cognitive and social competences. The school should pay more explicit attention to social competences.

To summarise, two types of approach to social competence or the pro-social development of pupils have been described in this section: 'educating for adulthood' and 'educating for citizenship'. In the former, social competence is related to the specific phase of development of children or young people linked to their age. The interpretation of social competence from the citizenship perspective pays little attention to this aspect. The accent is not so much on 'becoming an adult' and age-related demands, but rather on the demands that being able to function as a citizen in a democratic society make on young people. While an 'educating for adulthood' perspective principally pays attention to social competence as an educational goal for young people with social deficiencies, an 'educating for citizenship' perspective is directed at all young people.

Dimensions of Social Competence

In this section, we discuss aspects or dimensions which are used in the literature to categorise the various elements of social competence. A differentiation is often made in the literature between an *intrapersonal and interpersonal* dimension of social competence (Raver & Zigler, 1997). The accent is generally on the interpersonal dimension. This is because many studies analyse young people's relationships with others and the quality of these relationships. These include contact with peers, friendships, and working and solving problems together (Beelman *et al.*, 1994; Englund *et al.*, 2000). With regard to the intrapersonal dimension of social competence, attention is mainly paid to self-respect (Rotheram, 1987) and self-control or self-regulation (Beelman *et al.*, 1994; Schneider *et al.*, 1996). Halberstadt *et al.* (2001) also argue for attention to be paid to the intra-psychological or relational aspects of emotions (see also Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001). A third dimension can be derived from the citizenship perspective: the *societal* dimension. This refers to a democratic attitude, knowledge of and insight into society and its structure, and being able to deal with cultural differences (Kaplan, 1997; Kerr, 1999; Solomon, Watson, & Battistich, 2001; Rychen & Salganik, 2003).

A second type of differentiation is between *knowledge*, *skills* and *attitudes*. Research on social competence primarily pays attention to skills, especially social skills with an interpersonal focus: social-communicative skills and the ability to change perspective (Beelman *et al.*, 1994; Hunter & Elias, 2000). Both types of skills are necessary. Young people must be able to follow the rules which apply in certain social situations. They must be capable of understanding and respecting others' viewpoints. Lastly, from a citizenship perspective, 'self-regulation' is considered to be an essential element of social competence (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). Present-day society changes rapidly and presents many choices. To participate, young people must be capable of giving a new direction, in interaction with others and the environment they live in, to their own development.

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The 'attitudes' dimension principally pertains to intrapersonal aspects such as self-image or self-confidence. A certain level of self-confidence and a positive self-image are essential to be able to behave in a socially competent way. The literature also deals with young people's attitude towards others as a meaningful aspect of social competence. In a study on bullying, Arsenio and Lemerise (2001) define children's attitudes in terms of their moral values: what do they consider to be 'good', 'wrong', etc.? In a similar way, someone's self-image can be understood as a value orientation. It concerns ideas, convictions and values regarding 'yourself'.

The concept of social cognition (young people's thoughts, attitudes and ideas on relationships and social situations, see Raver & Zigler, 1997) is generally used in the literature for the knowledge aspect of social competence. Knowledge of the world is necessary to be able to act in a socially competent way (OECD, 1997). Differentiating a separate knowledge, i.e. a social cognition dimension, does not mean that the skills aspect of social competence does not have a cognitive component (Lenhart & Rabiner, 1995). But social knowledge and social skills and social behaviour are relatively independent components (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001).

Explicit attention to 'reflection' is urged from the citizenship perspective (Wardekker, 2001; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003). This knowledge component stems from the position that it is essential for critical citizenship.

Lastly, a differentiation is made in the literature between people's *capabilities* (social skills and/or social abilities) and their *social behaviour* (Raver & Zigler, 1997). This is based on the idea that someone's behaviour in a specific situation is not by definition the same as what he or she is capable of. Under-performing may be due to the social situation in question being threatening.

To summarise, we conclude that social competence is a multi-dimensional concept. Firstly, a differentiation is made in the literature between its intrapersonal, interpersonal and societal dimensions. This differentiation is between the substantive aspects of domains: what pertains to aspects within a person, to aspects between persons and to aspects regarding people's social functioning? A second differentiation is between knowledge, skills and attitudes. It cuts right across the differentiation between intrinsic domains. Lastly, a differentiation is made between social capabilities and social behaviour.

Systematising Aspects of Social Competence

In this section, we will summarise the findings of the review study in order to answer the following questions: what is the social competence that young people need to be able to participate adequately in a democratic society? And which of its components can also be considered to be goals of education?

We first formulate two criteria for the choice and categorisation of such components:

1. *Contribution to social chances;*
2. *Contribution to social responsibility.*

The first applies to those elements of social competence which, when aspired to and realised as educational goals, give young people a better chance of social

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success (education, work). It concerns social skills, following the rules of decorum, etc. The 'contribution to social chances' refers mainly to learning cultural codes and acquiring elementary social and cultural capital. In present-day society, coping and communication skills are also increasingly necessary to function socially. The second criterion stems from the position that young people's behaviour should not only be directed at social success, but also at taking responsibility for society.

Both approaches described in the section above manifest relevant elements when analysed with the help of the *contribution to social chances* and *contribution to social responsibility* criteria. The importance of 'educating for adulthood' is that social competence is related to the specific, age-related phase of young people's development. Social competence and its separate aspects are necessary to be able to fulfil children's developmental tasks. The following aspects are found in the literature. The intrapersonal dimension includes 'self-confidence' and 'self-respect', the knowledge aspect 'self-knowledge', and the skills aspects 'controlling one's impulses and emotions', 'self-control' and 'self-discipline'. The interpersonal dimension includes 'social values', 'social cognition' and 'social problem-solving skills' (including the ability to include different perspectives in the solution) and 'social-communicative skills'.

The criterion that social competence as an educational goal must also aspire to social responsibility indicates that the developmental psychology perspective is too limited. To be able to function in a socially competent way in a democratic society, not only are intrapersonal and interpersonal knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary, but also societal ones. With its emphasis on the demands made on young people to be able to function as citizens in a democratic society, as opposed to the demands made by becoming an adult, the perspective of 'educating for citizenship' does have elements which give substance to the societal dimension. Social competence is not primarily viewed here in the light of developmental tasks, but rather in the light of 'social tasks'. Social tasks refer to functioning in a group or, more broadly, in society. They are tasks that everyone will always have to fulfil and are of an inherently 'societal' nature. This requires knowledge of society, a democratic attitude (being open to the opinions of others, willingness to enter into dialogue) and values such as equality and equity. The importance of wanting to participate actively in society is also emphasised in the citizenship perspective.

The citizenship perspective likewise emphasises that present-day society requires its citizens to make their own choices, to give self-direction to their lives, to develop their own identity and, in doing so, make a critical contribution to society. This makes demands on the sort of knowledge people have of themselves, their relationships with others and their place in the world. It demands reflection: reflection with an eye to acquiring insight into the social structure of society, one's own position in that society, identity, the possibilities for agency, and the cultural and historical definitions of social practices. Furthermore, the citizenship perspective of social competence places other accents within the attitudes component than the developmental psychology-oriented perspective. Values and attitudes such as trust, respect, involvement and a feeling of responsibility come to the fore here. Although expectations regarding children and young people's social competence also vary with age, clear phases have not been defined.

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We have summarised our interpretation of the literature in a table which shows the components of social competence as encountered in the review study, categorising them under the intrapersonal — interpersonal — societal and attitude — knowledge/reflection — skills dimensions (see Table I). This has an analytical objective. The components of social competence that have been differentiated represent everything that is required to be able to *act* and *behave* in a socially competent way, in other words, to fulfil *social tasks* (Rychen & Salganik, 2003).

Measuring Social Competence

Different instruments have been developed to monitor and measure social competence. We will restrict ourselves to discussing the different *types* of instruments in relation to the dimensions differentiated above. Instruments that try to chart aspects of social competence at school level (e.g. school culture, moral climate) do not fall within the scope of this article. We will then discuss some questions regarding the measurement of social competence.

Existing Instruments

Concerning the *intrapersonal dimension* of social competence, most existing instruments measure the skills component, such as self-control and self-regulation (Beelman *et al.*, 1994; Schneider *et al.*, 1996) or emotional control (for an overview see Raver & Zigler, 1997). There are also instruments for measuring self-respect (Rotheram, 1987). Surprisingly, we did not find instruments for charting self-knowledge. Halberstadt *et al.* (2001) argue strongly for more attention to be paid to the affective component of social competence. Knowledge about one's own emotions can also be included in this.

With regard to the *interpersonal dimension*, there are instruments for measuring social-communicative or social interaction *skills* (Beelman *et al.*, 1994; Englund *et al.*, 2000). The most well-represented, however, are those for measuring the social or interpersonal problem-solving skills. This is linked to the reason why social-competence instruments have been developed, namely to be able to identify children whose social problem-solving ability is deficient. These instruments often have a long history, sometimes dating back to the 1950s and 1960s (Pellegrini, 1985). Instruments explicitly aimed at developmental tasks that involve the interpersonal components of social competence pertain to the making and maintaining of friendships, relationships with peers and adults, etc. They are generally based on self-assessment or assessment by others. An example is Allen *et al.*'s 'Teacher rating scale for social and emotional adjustment' (1989) which involves teachers giving each pupil a score for items concerning constructive conflict solving with peers, controlling impulses, popularity and assertiveness in relation to adults.

Interpersonal *attitudes* are mostly measured with the help of instruments that endeavour to chart young people's 'social values'. Allen *et al.* (1989) developed a questionnaire about values in the fields of sexuality, drugs and delinquent behaviour.

Various instruments are available to measure social-cognitive *knowledge*, although according to Raver and Zigler (1997) they are not always sufficiently valid and reliable, especially for young children. The instruments cannot always be

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TABLE I. Components of social competence

	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal	Societal
Attitude	Self-confidence	Confidence in other people	Democratic
	Self-respect	Respect for other people	Equality and equivalence
		Involvement with other people	Equity/care
	Willing to take responsibility for one's own actions	Willing to take responsibility for relationships with other people	Willing to take responsibility for and to participate in society
	Self-reliance, in the sense of daring to set one's own course	Willing to enter into dialogue with other people	Willing to listen to other people
Knowledge	Self-knowledge	Knowledge of social rules and manners	Knowledge of society
Reflection	Critical insight into one's own wishes, abilities and motives	Critical insight into the wishes, abilities and motives of other people	Insight into the social structure of society
		Insight into group processes	Insight into social processes (inclusion and exclusion)
		Insight into the influence of one's own actions on other people	Insight into the influence of the social structure of society on intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning
			Insight into one's own capabilities and incapabilities to act in relation to the social structure of society
Skills	Regulation skills (regulation of one's impulses and emotions, self-control, self-discipline)		
		Social-communicative skills	Being able to handle cultural differences and differences regarding social position/status
		Being able to change perspective	Being able to handle social tensions

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unequivocally placed in one category or the other. Mize and Cox (1990) describe an instrument that aims to measure children's knowledge about social strategies. An awkward social situation is presented to them (e.g. a child wants to play with a toy that another child is playing with) and they are asked to name as many social strategies as possible that provide a solution. Similar instruments are aimed at measuring social problem-solving skills. The Preschool Interpersonal Problem-solving Test (Spivack & Shure, 1974, mentioned in Beelman *et al.*, 1994) does not have separate items for knowledge and skills but claims to measure social-cognitive knowledge and skills.

There are few instruments within the societal dimension of social competence. One exception is the instrument that was developed in the framework of the PISA/OECD project to measure knowledge of one's society, so-called 'civics' (Van der Wal, 2004). The scales of this instrument relate to women's rights, political discussion and involvement, criticism, tolerance and political self-confidence, and measure both knowledge and attitudes.

Instruments can also be categorised according to how a score is obtained or who assesses the pupils' competence. The most striking characteristic of the majority of instruments for measuring social competence is that they do not measure knowledge and skills but are based on other people's perception of the social functioning of a child or young person — parents, teachers, practitioners, researchers or peers (Hunter & Elias, 2000) — or of the individual in question (Caplan *et al.*, 1992; Epstein *et al.*, 1997).

Instruments that endeavour to chart pupils' behaviour are scarce; they are mostly used in a specially designed test situation. An example is the instrument that Englund *et al.* (2000) developed to measure the functioning of young people in a group. During a specially organised weekend, the youngsters were given the assignment, working in groups, to consider the best way of spending a specific amount of money on the last day. The discussions were recorded on video and the assessors coded each person on a number of five-point scales for the assessment of behaviour. Some of the instruments discussed above assessing social-cognitive knowledge and skills can be interpreted as looking at self-reported behaviour. Children are given vignettes that describe an awkward social situation (e.g. an argument with a friend), questions are then asked about it and the answers are coded. Caplan *et al.* (1992) developed a similar instrument to measure 'coping skills'. When working with young children, dolls are often used to act out a story. The children are then asked what they should do (Mize & Cox, 1990).

The scoring of the behaviour observed or children's answers in the test situations described here and in the test on social-cognitive knowledge often requires training or expertise in psychology or special needs. This is an obstacle to using these instruments in the classroom (Raver & Zigler, 1997).

Questions about Measuring Social Competence

We will now deal with the most important questions discussed in the literature. One problem is that the accent is mainly on attitudes and skills which are difficult to delimit precisely. Tests that are commonly used in the cognitive domain are not suitable for measuring these attitudes and skills. We have already seen that most instruments for measuring social competence are based on the assessment of others or self-assessment. A second reason for not using tests is the lack of objective

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criteria to determine what is good/wrong. In the social domain, assessments are more likely to be in terms of more/less than in the cognitive domain.

Unavoidable problems and limitations are linked to the use of peer ratings and parent and teacher reports, which are, by definition, subjective (Allen *et al.*, 1989). Peer ratings are mainly used in sociometric instruments. Raver and Zigler (1997) point out that these are not stable. Another problem is that the position of the pupil in the class plays a role in the way in which his or her social competence is perceived by classmates: ethnicity, gender, being younger than the rest of the class and having a minority status in the class are factors that influence the scores. Englund *et al.* (2000) mention the following problems concerning sociometric methods: they do not give precise information about the social competence of pupils and lack correlation between different ratings on one child. They also point out the problem of bias. Solutions that would make these data more reliable and more informative (e.g. ratings by all the children on all their classmates on specific items, instead of rankings and peer nominations) are both time consuming and complex. Despite these problems, Raver and Zigler (1997) ultimately chose sociometric methods as the most suitable way of measuring children's social competence.

Similar problems are partly associated with assessments by teachers. Cultural bias can also play a role with teachers, and the position of a child in the class can influence the scores. An important problem in teacher assessments is that they are context bound. When interpreting the data obtained via teacher assesments, we consider it important that the subjective, normative aspect of the assessments be made apparent where possible. When measuring the social competence of pupils, data on their background and on the context of the school should also be collected. Information on the motives of the school to work on social competence is also useful. Are there problems, for example, concerning safety, conflicts between pupils, etc.? When it comes to searching for ways of dealing with the problem of subjectivity, we repeatedly found strong arguments in the literature for combining different methods of measuring social competence (Raver & Zigler, 1997). In our opinion, this does not provide a conclusive solution. To begin with, this makes the measurement procedure more time consuming. Furthermore, the assessments of different assessors (e.g. pupils and the teacher) often do not correlate (ten Dam, 1995). There are no criteria to determine which assessment is correct. Nevertheless, we believe that working with the assessments of teachers should at certain times be accompanied by self-assessments by pupils in order to obtain more information on the extent to which pupils' assessments differ from those of teachers. The extent to which they do *differ* can be considered to be an indication of the social distance between teachers and specific groups of young people. Information about such divergent assessments can be useful for teachers. They can use it to modify their actions and behaviour to promote social competences in relation to groups of pupils or individual pupils.

Raver and Zigler (1997) point out that the validity of measurements for the social and emotional development of children from families with a low socio-economic status and from minority groups must be looked at more critically. Children develop in a specific socio-economic, ethnic and cultural context in which there are specific expectations that do not always conform to the norms on which psychological tests are based. Cultural factors also play a role in assessing certain behaviour. Huge differences exist between the norms for adulthood and the associated patterns of upbringing. Matters such as autonomous behaviour, depen-

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dence and shy behaviour are valued differently in different cultures. Aside from the fact that assessors evaluate on the basis of their values and norms, all instruments for measuring social competence are normative.

An important question in the use of self-assessment is at what age can reliable assessments by pupils be expected and about what subjects. A certain distance that develops with age and cognitive ability is necessary. Not surprisingly, most self-assessment instruments are used for adolescents.

The question of transfer of social competence from one social practice to another applies to all instruments (Ralph *et al.*, 1998). Do children also demonstrate the socially competent behaviour that they show in the classroom in the playground and on the street? This problem is even greater for instruments that are used in a specially created test situation.

To summarise, it is primarily the developmental psychology perspective of the concept of 'social competence' that is used in measuring instruments. Instruments for measuring the interpersonal dimension of social competence and the skills within that dimension predominate. There are relatively few instruments in which social competence is operationalised from the perspective of 'educating for citizenship'. This is not surprising, given the more recent history of this perspective and the fact that a line of development for social competence has not yet been developed.

The instruments we found in the literature, as in all studies on behaviour, are predominantly based on self-assessments or assessments by others. Sociometric methods are a special form of the latter but are difficult to use for measuring social competence, as they are time consuming, have complicated procedures for use and scoring and are limited in scope. The same applies to organised test situations. Self-assessment is not suitable for young children and by definition subjective, as well as being sensitive to social desirability with regard to some topics. This method is particularly suitable for the intrapersonal domain. Teacher assessment appears to offer the most possibilities for measuring social competence as an educational goal. Cultural bias and the influence of the class context are, however, a cause for concern.

Conclusion

In the first part of this article we identified two approaches to social competence: an 'educating for adulthood' perspective and an 'educating for citizenship' perspective. On the basis of the categorisation used in the literature on the one hand and the *social chances* and *social responsibility* criteria on the other, we then selected and structured the components of social competence that should form part of children and young people's development in a democratic society. Both approaches have elements that contribute to this.

We did not find any instruments in the literature which were suitable for measuring social competence as an educational goal in the broadest sense of Table I. There are, however, instruments with elements that can be used to chart different components. They are mainly for measuring intrapersonal and interpersonal attitudes and skills. The societal dimension of social competence has scarcely, if at all, been translated into instruments for measuring learning outcomes.

Schools cannot turn to one single instrument for measuring social competence which is too diverse a concept for this to be possible. Moreover, assessing the

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effects of education can serve various purposes. An instrument to gather and analyse data on large groups of pupils, for example with a view to monitoring the results of working on social competence nationally, can only provide global information. It will virtually always involve the assessment of teachers *about* pupils' social competence, an assessment made retrospectively and that will more or less remain global. The assessments are not based on careful observation in specific situations, but on general impressions of pupils based on experience. It would also be good for schools if they had instruments at their disposal with which they could follow pupils' *development* and with which the *developmental goals* of individual pupils could be determined. This demands instruments that chart social competence in more detail, such as observation instruments or portfolios.

In this article we have made an inventory of the possibilities for determining the educational outcomes in the field of social competence and the related problems. To conclude the article we shall pay attention to the inherently normative character of social competence as an educational goal.

Firstly, a relevant question from a sociological point of view is to what extent a particular norm is imposed on pupils under the general heading of social competence. For example, the imposition of the norms of the middle class on pupils from other socio-economic groups or those of adults on young people. In this article, we have explicitly stated the objective of promoting the social competence of pupils. It is unavoidable that middle-class norms and the norms of adults come to the fore to a certain extent. By emphasising that not only 'adaptation' but also 'critical participation' are implicit in social competence and including the element of reflection, we tried to make clear that this is not about norms that can be passively adopted without further reflection.

Various considerations play a role when deciding whether to integrate social competence into the school's curriculum and way of working. The necessity of working on this issue is often prompted by problems, such as safety and conflicts in the classroom or in the playground, particularly in schools in the big cities with a relatively large number of pupils at risk. But this is not to say, however, that working on social competence is the same as a 'civilizing offensive', as some critics claim. Promoting the social competence of pupils is not only a question of 'dealing with socially incompetent pupils'. Social competence is, in our opinion, a general educational goal that is derived from the 'moral task of education' and concerns the social development of all children and young people. Schools may also have their own specific motives for making it a spearhead for their pupils at a given moment. The one does not preclude the other. What is important is to ascertain whether schools formulate different objectives of social competence for different groups of pupils. Lastly, it is important to know more about the differences between pupils regarding social competence. Such data, provided they are not merely interpreted in terms of personal deficiencies, give insight into social inequality and can orientate school policy and school development.

In the discussion on measuring social competence, it is repeatedly emphasised that what is considered to be socially competent depends on the context. For teachers, socially competent pupils are those who are capable of adopting a 'school identity'. They actively participate, volunteer answers, follow instructions, avoid conflicts, etc. Within one and the same context there are also differences between groups of young people. Most teachers will expect, for example, different social

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behaviour from boys from an ethnic minority background than from middle-class girls from the majority population. Such expectations will influence their reactions to pupils and in turn elicit specific forms of behaviour. Social competence and context cannot be considered independently: the context partly determines the definition of the social competence of pupils and groups of pupils and their social behaviour in that context.

The fact that social competence is context bound does *not* mean, however, that nothing can be said about social competence in a general sense. First and foremost, the 'social chances' and 'social responsibility' criteria make it possible to deal with the different aspects of social competence in such a way that general comments can be made. When necessary, the context in which a specific goal or sub-goal should be seen must be further defined. Secondly, citizens in this society must be able to function in *different* contexts. Different cultural codes apply at school and on the labour market where other codes again apply than on the street; different codes apply within one's own social group than in another social group. 'Being able to switch' is an essential aspect of social competence.

Social competence as an educational goal presupposes that schools prepare their pupils to participate in different social contexts. The starting point of schools, however, differs in this respect. Those with a heterogeneous pupil population, for example, can offer a more natural context in which to learn how to deal with cultural diversity and social tensions than those with a homogeneous pupil population. What can be expected of all schools, however, is that they exploit their own possibilities. With this article, we hope to provide the impulse for designing learning environments that enhance pupils' pro-social and moral development, as well as the development of evaluation instruments that schools can use to assess whether their expectation has been achieved.

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