

Changing responsibilities between home and school. Consequences for the pedagogical professionalism of teachers

Cees A. Klaassen & Frederik Smit

The pedagogical task of the school

In the present social and educational debate on pedagogy, the moral task of the school, and the division of labor between home and school, it is often stated that parents, teachers and other socializing agencies in the community have shared responsibility for the education of the younger generation. The development of values, norms and citizenship has been high on the political and education agendas in the recent past. It is currently expected that education contribute to the necessary 'restoration' of values and norms in society by attending to moral education and creating a good pedagogical school climate and teachers functioning as a moral role model. It is sometimes pointed out that teaching is more than simply a profession, it is a calling (Hansen, 1995). Publications on the pedagogical assignment of the school clearly indicate that it is not only different tasks to be performed but also the possession and presentation of certain personality characteristics and even visible 'virtues'. They also point to the fact that school, family and community should work together in nurturing and educating the youngsters. In the Netherlands the most important Advise Committee of the Government has been used, the African proverb, 'It takes the whole village to raise a child', to bolster arguments for greater cooperation between the families, school and community. While overused, the proverb does express the intent of a family/school/community partnership'. The partnerships are based on the notion that everyone

is responsible for the education of the children, and by working together, all children will have a better chance to be successful. In the partnerships, the resources, or 'energies' of the various stakeholders are aligned so everyone is making a contribution to the common goal of learning. However, for the 'whole village' to be involved requires a concerted, sustained, collaborative effort. Family/school/community partnerships don't just happen. They need to be planned, formed, and cultivated (Lueder 1998; Burke & Picus, 2001).

School, family and community must form a partnership. A parents-school-community partnership is a collaborative relationship between parents, school and community designed primarily to produce positive educational and social effects on the child, while being mutually beneficial to all other parties involved. The concept of these partnerships is more far-reaching and complex than such interactions as home-school relations. These kind of partnerships where we are talking about are more process based on a collaborative and helping attitude and belief system than a product. They are 'environments' for people to help each other. A parents-school-community partnership offers the parties involved the opportunity to effectively play their individual roles and fulfil their responsibilities (Epstein e.o. 1997; Lueder, 1998). In the educational and political debate on the moral or pedagogical function of education one can also hear another

point of view. For instance a school leader of a high school in the Netherlands wrote in a regional newspaper that schools should stick to their main and primary task. He said: 'a growing number of parents disclaim too much responsibility for the nurturing of their children and ask the school to take over this task. They can ask the school to teach their children a classical language, but they themselves must contribute to the learning of values and norms, Some time ago I had a discussion with parents who told me without blushing that they really did not have enough time to do that'. Obviously, there are also teachers who do not consider the pedagogical assignment to be part of their task. The statement 'I am teacher and not a therapist or a social worker' clearly illustrates this in a slightly exaggerated manner. In light of these considerations, it is the pedagogical dimension of the professionalism of teachers that is in need of extra attention. Empirically, relatively little is known about this. In the present article, the following questions will be considered: What does the current pedagogical assignment mean for the opinions and task performance of teachers? How do they conceive their moral role?

The social processes as secularisation, individualization, value fragmentation, and the increased multicultural character of many societies constitute an important reason for devoting greater attention to the moral development of the youngsters and tot the attunement of home, school and community (Klaassen, 1996). Parents and children, teachers and students can no longer simply follow familiar paths; they are involved, rather, in negotiation processes that require space for everyone's definition of the situation. Continual reflection and discussion of norms and values have become a critical necessity for parents, teachers and students. The general goal of education in this respect is to instill the specific pedagogical guidance and points of concern pertaining to the personal development and well-being of the student. This educational approach assumes, in

contrast, that schooling is an inherently moral activity and that children are constantly learning and expanding their social values at school. Through constant moral education, children learn how they are expected to act as students and citizens. The pedagogical task is not reduced within this approach to the learning of morals but conceptualized more broadly and in keeping with the original meaning of the word 'pedagogical'. This means the provision of help and guidance for young people on the way to adulthood and a proper role in society. This all occurs thus not only in reaction to a societal concern about the blurring and decline of norms but also as a result of a pedagogical concern for the guidance of young people on their way to adulthood and adequate fulfillment of their role in society. Greater attention in education to norms and values and the communication of values can support and stimulate students in their more or less permanent search, which is the formation of an identity. In addition to explicit attention to questions of identity and life meaning, the stimulation of social responsibility and care for each other can also be undertaken as part of everyday school practice.

In loco parentis: the teacher between home, school and community

Child rearing is not limited to just the family. In the discussion of the pedagogical task of the school, considerable importance is attached to the specific role of the teacher. The teacher is expected to fulfil an exemplary function and represent numerous virtues (Tom, 1984). Pedagogical thoughtfulness is an important characteristic of teacher professionalism (van Manen, 1991). In his book, *The Call to Teach* (1995), David Hansen also assumes certain virtues to be a necessity on the part of the teacher. To describe the 'call to teach', Hansen uses such terms as 'faith, moral imperative, integrity, civility, right, wrong, discipline, caring, empathy'. Parents and school must work together to raise moral children. Parents should view the school as a partner in the tasks of child rearing

and education and, in fact, plenty is known about how and why parents get involved in their children's education. Empirical research into particularly effective schools, for example, has clearly shown parental involvement to create positive outcomes for the children. All of this has fostered greater attention to the influence of parents and then in the areas of values and norms as well. In numerous publications, it is noted that the family has primary responsibility for the instillation of values and norms. Parents have the inalienable right and obligation to raise their children. The school and teachers have a derived function or responsibility. They perform their task *for* the parents. In order for parents and schools to jointly influence the personal development and moral education of students, however, they should clearly be oriented in the same direction. By this, we mean that a certain degree of attunement and cooperation should exist for the shared pedagogical enterprise to possibly succeed. Such cooperation or attunement can be seen as not self-evident when one recognizes that parents and school can also oppose or neutralize each other's influence. Congruent operation and the strengthening - per definition - of each other's influence need not be the case. In many discussions of the moral task of the school, it is simply not recognized that parents need not constitute a single like-minded group. In fact, one can rarely speak of 'parents' as single, undifferentiated category (Munn, 1993). General statements and recommendations must often, thus, be refined when it comes to the social characteristics of the parents, different circumstances, and specific schools. What is also often overlooked is the fact that opinions on the parent-school-community relation and the responsibilities of the various parties can vary considerably. Nevertheless, almost everyone considers cooperation between parents, school and community to be critical and research into the prerequisites for effective cooperation is therefore called for. Research in the field of education for instance could pay attention to the moral and pedagogical professionalism of teachers. This

professionalism should receive expression in their behavior. It is the goal of this paper to elaborate on the empirical evidence of the opinions of teachers with regard to the parents-school-community partnership and their moral role.

The pedagogical professionalism of elementary and high school teachers

The pedagogical assignment is considered an important component of the professionalism of the teacher both by parents and teachers. Under professionalism, the system of teacher opinions on just what constitutes qualitatively good teaching and how this should be realized is understood. These opinions relate to not only the primary teaching process or the micro- level but also encompass the meso- and macro-levels (Van Veen et al, 2001). A common assumption in teacher behavior studies is that teacher opinions have a strong influence upon teacher behavior (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Such content-related and normative opinions regarding good teaching not only steer the behavior of teachers but can also legitimize their behavior at times. What do the teachers themselves think? This question can only be answered with empirical research. In different studies over the past few years, we have examined the opinions of teachers in this domain. Both elementary and high school teachers have been studied. And in almost all of the research reported here, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods has been used¹. The results of a 1997 study of the degree of attunement between the school and the home with respect to the pedagogical assignment among Dutch parents and teachers showed parents and teachers to be of the opinion that the elementary school teacher has a formative task in addition to a teaching task. Parents and teachers see the pedagogical assignment as an important component of the task of the elementary school teacher, and the pedagogical assignment is not in conflict with the school as knowledge institute. Elementary school teachers consider themselves not only professionals in the area of knowledge and skills but also in the domain of value

formation. These teachers are generally of the opinion that they have a better perspective on the development of children as a result of years of experience than parents. The teachers, themselves, also consider themselves to be joint child raisers.

Parents and teachers are of the opinion that the teacher has a formative task in addition to a teaching task. Teachers are always viewed as formative teachers. In the words of one teacher: *'You cannot teach without attention to the formative aspect as well... Teachers who only teach have problems keeping order in the class.'* Concerning the primary school teacher as moral role model both teachers and parents agree that teachers must provide a 'good example' by, for instance, sticking to agreements and observing the rules of etiquette. Both parents and teachers consider it important that the teacher present him/herself as a 'man of flesh and blood' with both strengths and weaknesses. According to both parents and teachers, it is pedagogically desirable to show the 'person' behind the teacher. They want to underscore the relevance of the person who occupies the role. One parent says: *'I didn't hire a robot. I want people to interact with my children. They are, after all, at school for a very large part of the day.'* Collaboration is the concept that underlies a parents-school-community partnership. The collaborative relationships are formed on the assumption that education is a shared responsibility and that all partners are 'equal' players. 'Equal' in this case, means that each partner contributes in major ways to the success of young people, and that everyone has a say in determining the path to the common goal of learning (Lueder, 1998). That means creating two-way communications, enhancing learning at home and at school, providing mutual support and making joint decisions.

Many parents and teachers are nevertheless of the opinion that pure teaching is the most important task of the school and that the responsibility for child rearing lies first and foremost with the parents. *'The teaching is still your primary task ... I want the children to have mastered that package*

after 8 years so that they can go further. One should connect up with the things that happen, consider conflicts but not react to every conflict with: we have to talk about this.' One teacher put it as follows: *'The basis lies at home. And at a certain point, things come to an end at school; cause you are the teacher and something has to be learned. And I think that the learning is most important. You sometimes have groups of children in which too much time goes into child-rearing behaviors. And then you say: that's enough, we're going to do math 'cause something still has to be learned.'* A number of teachers still think that their tasks have gradually shifted over the course of time from teaching to the rearing of children. They point out that parents have less time than earlier for the rearing of their children. *'I think that it is being shifted more and more to the school, also by the parents. I sometimes see that in the morning. Such a parent shoves her child inside: he's in a bad mood, have fun. A conflict has already occurred at home and that's how you start the day. I have troubles with this. It is simply shifting the problems that have not been talked out at home to the school. Parents simply have no time for this.'*

In a qualitative study of 15 high school teachers involving in-depth interviews we explored some further details of the result of a preceding quantitative research project. Some of these teachers we interviewed had very explicit opinions with regard to their pedagogical assignment. *I have always seen this as part of my task. I would almost say that it is almost always your main task. This has nothing to do with the subject matter in my eyes. Yeah, my job is to teach, to interact with kids.* According to a different teacher: *I think that the development of values and norms is equally important as conveying the relevant subject matter, it's all part of the package. The one is no more valuable than the other, in the opinion of another teacher. You try to make your students more complete people in any case, and this has to do with your particular subject. I mean, that's what you are doing here in this school.*

While teachers generally consider the pedagogical assignment to be part of their task, they emphasize different aspects. Some are very conscious of the fact that they transfer norms and values or, in any case, attempt to stimulate the development of these in their students. Others emphasize their task as the pedagogical guide of students and student learning processes. The pedagogical and didactic aspects of their task are viewed as closely connected by a number of the interviewed teachers). Teaching has everything to do with values and norms. One teacher states that as the group gets smaller, the influence of exemplary behavior gets larger and, in light of developments towards more guided instruction, the influence of exemplary behavior will only grow. This teacher sees the normative aspect of teaching as *'almost the main task'*.

How a teacher relates to individual students and their parents is critical for building a supportive and nurturing environment for students' academic success (Schmitt & Tracy, 1996). There is no doubt that the relation between parents and schools have changed the last ten years and have influenced commitment to the concept of a 'school that learns' with parents. Inspired by the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1986)

researchers emphasize the cooperation and complementarities of schools and families, and encourages communication and collaboration between the two institutions (Deslandes, 2001). A school can provide the 'open forum' for learning activities and become the place where the community can find a voice (Senge, 2000), particularly where parents can be heard (McGilp, 2001)

Unfortunately, most teacher preparation programs provide only limited training to teachers in how to approach, educate and support parents and community volunteers. Empowered and well-informed parents are often active supporters of their school's administration, working to help solve problems, make policy, or raise additional funds for the school. When a student does not have a parents available to support his or her academic needs, community volunteers can be instrumental in providing academic mentorship and assistance. Community volunteers include students from other grades, college students, community members, parents of children in other grade levels, and employees from local companies. To successfully use community volunteers, it is important for a school to have a appropriate policies and procedures that support community volunteer programs (Burke & Picus, 2001).

Note

1 In the elementary school research project, the similarities and differences in the opinions of parents and teachers with regard to pedagogy and the division of child-rearing tasks across home and school were examined both quantitatively and qualitatively. A questionnaire was completed by 275 parents and 53 teachers in six elementary schools to inventory the opinions of parents and teachers with regard to pedagogical issues/objectives and the relations between parents and teachers; interviews were held with 48 parents and 36 teachers to gain greater insight into their respective viewpoints; and panel discussions were undertaken with parents and teachers to identify alternative solutions for the differences in opinion and child-rearing practices (see Klaassen & Leeferink, 1999).

In the high school project a number of 452 teachers were approached by way of a written questionnaire (see Theunissen et al, 1998) and a selection of 15 teachers was invited to participate in a qualitative study involving in-depth interviews. In this paper we only present the results of the qualitative study (Klaassen et al, 1999).

References

- Burke, M.A. & L. Picus (2001). *Developing community-empowered schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development : Research perspectives. *Development Psychology*, 22, 723-742.
- Clark, C. & P. Peterson (1986). Teachers' Thought Processes. In: M.C. Wittrock (Ed.) *Handbook on Research on Teaching* (3rd ed).(pp. 255-296) New York: Macmillan.
- Deslandes, R. (2001). *A vision of home-school partnership: three complementary conceptual frameworks*. International Conference. Collaboration between families, schools and communities. Rotterdam 22-23 November, 2001.
- Hansen, D. (1995). *The Call to Teach*. New York. Teachers College Press.
- Klaassen, C. (1996). Education and Citizenship in a Post-Welfare State, *Curriculum*, 17(2), pp. 62-74.
- Klaassen, C. & H. Leeferink (1999). Pedagogical attunement: parents, teachers and the pedagogical assignment of the school. In: F. Smit, H. Moerel, K. van der Wolf and P. Slegers, *Building bridges between home and school*. Nijmegen. Institute for applied social sciences.
- Klaassen, C., M. Theunissen, K. van Veen, P. Slegers (1999). *Het is bijna je hoofdtak. (It is almost your main task)*. University of Nijmegen, Department of Educational Sciences.
- Manen, M. van (1991). *The Tact of Teaching: The Meaning of Pedagogical Thoughtfulness* Albany, NY. Suny Press.
- Munn, P. (Ed.) (1993). *Parents and Schools: Customers, Managers or Partners?* London. Routledge.
- McGilp, E. J. (2001). *Lifelong learning: schools and the parental contribution*. International Conference. Collaboration between families, schools and communities. Rotterdam 22-23 November, 2001.
- Senge, P. (2000). *Schools that Learn*. London: Nicholas Brealey.
- Schmitt D.M. & Tracy, J.C., (1996). *Gaining support for our school: strategies for community involvement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Theunissen, M., T. Bergen, C. Hermans, C. Klaassen, P. Slegers & K. van Veen (1998). *Wat bezielt ons? [What inspires us?]*. University of Nijmegen.
- Tom, A.R. (1984). *Teaching as a Moral Craft*. New York: Longmans.
- Veen, K. van, P. Slegers, T. Bergen, C. Klaassen (2001). Professional orientations of secondary school teachers towards their work. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 17, p175-194.