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ABSTRACT

Vision and vision building play a central role in the construction of a professional culture. Vision concerns the goals that an organization wants to achieve, and indicates a shared consensus about the value of daily activities and decisions in relation to some goals and the future of an organization. In this paper, the degree of goal consensus is considered as the main indicator of the existence of a vision. Using the case study of one school in Belgium, a concrete and specific vision is portrayed. High-vision and low-vision schools are then compared in a study of nine elementary schools in Belgium. Interviews with 63 principals and staff members and site visits identify patterns of organizational culture in these schools. The results show that the high-vision schools have a clear degree of goal consensus while low-vision schools are characterized by a low awareness of common goals beyond those of the individual classroom. Interventions by principals, resulting in increased communication, can strengthen the vision of a school, and increase the potential for working toward common goals. A 19-item list of references is included. (SLD)

VISION AS A CORE COMPONENT IN SCHOOL CULTURE

Symposium : Professional Culture in Schools : types and processes

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INTRODUCTION

In recent literature and studies on school improvement and school culture vision is a central theme (Herriott & Firestone, 1984; Wilson & Corbett, 1983; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Pettigrew, 1979; Bormann, 1983).

In the first part of this paper the concept vision and development of a vision is presented. Next, based on one case-study, a concrete and specific discription of a vision is elaborated. Special attention is given to the daily events and activities as reflections of a vision. In a third part of the paper high-vision and low-vision primary schools are compared. These schools are involved in a large scale improvement project (the so-called Renewed Primary School; for more information, see Vandenberghe 1987; 1988).

The study of "vision" as it is reflected in the daily routine of a school is important, since vision became an issue where there is more often rhetoric than data-grounded descriptions. As Louis and Miles point out : "However we need to understand more about what themes and visions are, how they work in a school improvement project, and how they can be orchestrated, or we risk introducing abstract concepts, that have little practical meaning for educators" (Louis & Miles, 1990, p. 217).

VISION AS DEGREE OF GOAL-CONSENSUS

According to Schein, culture is : "The deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an

organization, that operate unconsciuosly, and that define in a basic 'taken-for-granted' fashion an organization's view of itself and it's environment" (Schein, 1985, p. 6). The shared basic assumptions and beliefs are the result of daily interactions among teachers and other staff members. In other words : members of an organization create their own culture. This means that culture can be considered as a socially constructed reality. It is a reality which has a serious impact on the daily behavior of those working in an organization (e.g. a school). (For a more elaborated presentation of the underlying conceptual framework, see Staessens, 1991).

"Vision" and "vision building" play a central role in the construction of a professional culture. Vision concerns the goals an organizations wants to achieve; it concerns also statements about the future development of an organization. Looking at a vision from a culturally defined perspective, means that in a school there exists a set of shared goals by all or by some of the organizational members. In other words : vision as a set of shared goals does not mean the sum of individual goals, but it concerns a degree of consensus among staff members about the value of daily activities and decisions in relation to some goals and about the future development of an organization. In this paper, the degree of goal-consensus is considered as the main indicator of the existence of a vision.

In studies looking for the impact of characteristics of an effective school on student results, goals consensus seems to be an important variable. There is the general assumption

that a continuous attention for goals to achieve by a school, has a positive impact on student results (Purkey & Smith, 1983).

Goal-consensus has (and in some cases still is) been considered too rationally. When teachers, principals, consultants and others talk and think about the role of goals in a school, there is sometimes the temptation to elaborate long lists of written statements about the mission of a school, to devise plans and procedures which are very rationally linked to the official mission, to suggest plans for evaluation which are again strongly linked to the goals. In other words, there is a tendency, taking into consideration the importance of goals (vision) and goal-consensus, to build up a set of rational activities (long discussions; official statements; evaluation activities; etc ...). The assumption is that this rational approach of explicitly stated and measurable goals has a positive impact on the organizational effectiveness. Goal consensus is, however, more than a rational aiming and a rational consensus (Staessens & Vandenberghe, 1987, 343-344).

In order to make clear the meaning of 'goal-consensus' within the cultural perspective, the distinction made by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) between 'cognitive goals' and 'cathectic goals' is very useful (see also Dornbusch & Scott, 1975). Cognitive goals are specific statements about the desired end results. They are specifically formulated, clearly measurable goals which function as a control mechanism. They are related to particular activities and are translated into evaluation criteria. Unlike cognitive goals, cathectic goals concern the

'mission" of a school; they present a general description of the organization's primary values. These goals serve mainly as a source of identification and motivation for the teachers. They give meaning to their work and bind them to the organization. According to Hallinger and Murphy successful or effective schools are charaterised more by 'a clear mission' (a degree of goal consensus) than by the existence of a list of specific measurable goals.

Vision, defined as the degree of goal-consensus, which is the result of daily interactions among staff members (see the process of social construction) will be illustrated by case-study-data. From this case-study we will learn how a vision is reflected through the daily activities, but also how daily activities are shaped by the existing vision. By doing so, we try to avoid a rather abstract description of a vision. It is the intention to describe the content (what is it about ?) as well as the underlying process (how has a vision an impact on daily activities and decisions ?).

Next, we will compare some primary schools in order to describe differences between schools as far as vision is concerned. For this purpose we compare "high vision" - with "low vision"-schools.

A CASE-STUDY : VISION AT THE CORNFLOWER

The context

This case-study is part of a larger study in which 116 primary schools were studied. In these schools the school culture was

assessed using a written questionnaire (Staessens, 1990). In nine of these schools a more in-depth study was conducted (interviews, observations, analysis of written documents; etc ...). In one of these nine schools the junior researcher spend six weeks and near the end of the schoolyear, visited the school every fourthnight for one day.

During these six weeks, all meetings were attented. All teachers were observed several times; teachers, clerical personnel and the principal were interviewed several times. And all relevant documents have been collected. All the data were stored in a specific format so that an analysis by computer was possible using the FYI-3000-programm (Nimmel, a.o., 1986). (For a more elaborated description, see : Staessens, 1990.)

The school

The school was founded in 1963. Since then the number of pupils increased almost every year. Nowadays the school is considered by the teachers and by the public as "a high quality school where it is good to work and to live". The school building is relatively new (constructed in 1980) and is very well equiped. Already during the first meeting with the principal, it became clear that the staff is working very hard, because they want to meet some standards. And as a visitor, walking through the school, one is confronted with many memories of important school happenings. The history of the school is kept alive through pictures, manifestations, a video, etc ... The play ground is very well kept. The school

is situated in a quiet area, at the border of the village. There are five teachers in the nursery section (for children between 2,5 and 6 year). In the primary school (6 - 12 year) there are eight teachers. Besides these full-time teachers, there are colleagues working part-time (physical education; religion). The principal is relatively young and is at the the school since three years.

Description of the vision at the Cornflower

"Image-building based on internal quality

The question : "What do you consider important for your school ?" was used during the interview as the main cue for collecting information about the vision existing at the school. Unlike in many other schools teachers at the Cornflower immediately answered that question. They were able to talk about the goals they want to achieve, not in a general way, but in terms of specific teaching activities. It was also clear that they used frequently the same words and identical terms of phrases. This is an indication for the existance of a shared vision or goal consensus. From the interviews we also learned that this shared vision is the result of many common experiences among the teachers.

The teachers, and also the principal, consider two goals as very important. Firstly, the school has to deliver good education" (see below). They are willing to work very hard in order to be perceived by the local community as a very good

school. So, image-building is considered as a valuable goal for the school. But, secondly it is more than window dressing. The image must be grounded in good pupil results and in good teaching activities. Both goals are complementary : good results and teaching activities are a condition for a good image. According to the teachers, the goal image-building based on internal quality" is the result of a process that started in 1963. Right from the start, the school had to survive in a rather hostile envirmonment, given the fact there already existed another Primary School (of another denomination) in the village. So, the competition between the two schools, led to extra efforts by the team. The fact that the number of pupils increased gradually every year, has reinforced the importance of the two goals. And, when the principal arrived three years ago, he was able to support the existing vision and to reinforce the goal consensus. So, understanding the vision of a school implies understanding the historical strenght of the school and its staff (Louis & Miles, 1990, p. 31-31).

Asked for a more specific definition of "good education", the teachers as well as the principal discussed three elements. Firstly, providing good education implies to be informed about recent developments in the professional (educational) literature. And according to some teachers, this is more important for primary schools teachers than for nursery schoolteachers. During an interview, after a fourthnight holiday, one of the teachers remarked : "I feel good, because I've had the opportunity to read a lot."

A second common element in the definition of good education

concerns the special attention for each pupil individually. This is related to a specific vision about pupils and problems. Pupils having problems are perceived as challenges. As soon as a problem is diagnosed (e.g. a reading problem) the principal and teachers - and in some cases in collaboration with an external consultant - develop an action plan. During the interviews, several teachers gave examples of this kind of immediate reaction leading to an adapted action strategy.

The necessity to be informed about the recent professional literature and the individual approach of pupils implies also, according to the teachers, that each team member has to work very hard. This is the third element. The quality of the individual teachers ("We are professionals") is considered as a necessary condition for good education. But, individual professionality is only possible if there exists a supportive climate. During the interviews, several illustrations were given by the teachers which illustrated the individual responsibility, but also the supportive nature of the professional relations among the team members.

In summary : "internal quality" is defined by the teachers in a common way. Teachers share the same expectations and accept these expectations as common goals. They all underline in one or another way that this goal-consensus is the result of a long history. Through several experiences and activities, the team has constructed a vision which is indeed more than rethoric. This internal quality is used as a mean for the creation of a positive school image to the local community.

"Strong engagement"

But, all teachers underline the fact that "good education" and the positive perception of the school by the parents, is also the result of many years of hard work. The willingness to work hard is supported by the good achievements of their former pupils in Secondary Education and by the gradual increase of the number of pupils. Asked for an explanation for the succes of the school, one of the teachers said to the interviewer : "By working very hard, and by doing so we are accepted by the community. They know us and they trust us . For the parents as well as for the teachers the school is characterized as a hard working team. The staff has created a system for social control : extra work, even after school time, is considered as the norm. And the willingness to work extra is considered as an indication for professionalism.

"The teaching staff as a socialize

Vision, defined as goal consensus, is not the result of a rational analysis and planning but it is the result of daily activities and experiences which shape the way the teachers perceive their tasks and their school. In other words : teachers "create" a vision. So, we can expect that teachers also become bearers of that vision. This was very well reflected in stories in which teachers told the interviewer about the way they react to new teachers who try to minimize their efforts. Some of the teachers told the same story about a substitute teacher who did little or no planning and who

left the school rather early. The staff felt offended and decided to inform this teacher very explicitly about the existing norm. By doing so, the staff defends and pepresents very explicitly the existing culture in general and the existing vision about "being a good teacher". Again, teachers create for themselves a kind of social control; they protect the existing norms and values. And several teachers believe that, in case the principal would leave the school, this vision about good education and professionalism would continue. Culture and vision is not linked to one person (e.g. the principal), but it is an organizational characteristics which is refelected in what the team does and thinks.

From this description of vision as goal-consensus at the Cornflower, we learn that firstly a vision has a comprehensive nature. The vision is clearly linked to the history of the school. The vision concerns several elements of the school, such as the norm for good education, the quality of the individual teacher, the quality of the team and the way the school interacts with the local community.

Secondly, goal-consensus is a shared reality. It is a shared vision which is constructed trough several activities during a long period of time and which is supported and reinforced by the principal. The principal as well as the teachers are the builders and the bearers of a vision. And thirdly, the goal-consensus has a dynamic nature. It is a joint endeavour and a motor for individual practice. This is reflected in the concern for permanent improvement; the principal stimulates

the teachers daily in their efforts to be up-to-date and to try new teaching activities. So, goal-consensus creates a future-directed climate.

Role of a vision as goal-consensus

A vision, as we find it at the Cornflower, creates coherence and a feeling of unity. Some of the interviewed teachers talk about the Cornflower-family; all those who are willing to work hard and to support the school are members of one big family. The vision as unifier is supported through all kinds of material elements such as an emblem which is found throughout the school and on all official letters. The Cornflower is identifiable as an unity through the emblem. There exists also a school-sticker designed by the pupils. At the end of every school year the staff organizes a goodbye party for all the children. In his opening speech the principal gives them an overview of all the important activities during the past schoolyear. By doing so he has the opportunity to focus on these goals which are important for the school. Special attention is paid to the pupils who leave the school. For the teachers this is a very meaningfull activity, because they experience very lively the results of their past efoorts : again they have been able to educate a generation which is ready for the Secondary School.

A vision not only creates a unity, but is also a mobilizing force. The positive results experienced by the teachers, prove that the shared vision is very valuable. Teachers do

believe that they have the "right" vision. There exists a strong identification with the school which makes it easy for the teachers to work very hard. Teachers are proud to be a member of the team and to be a teacher at the Cornflower. In other words : what is expected from a teacher at Cornflower becomes meaningfull and is easily accepted through the shared goal-consensus.

Vision as goal-consensus : an interim assessment

What do we learn from this case-study ?

It is quiet clear that a case-study creates room for a rich and thick description of a vision and the processes underlying the creation as well as the impact a vision has on daily activities. In other words : through a well designed case-study one can avoid a rhetoric discussion about the importance of a vision. We also learned that vision, as goal-consensus, is indeed an important part of the culture, but also that the existing culture shapes a vision.

Vision is created by the principal, but only to some extent. Vision is also communicated through teacners interactions and through daily decisions and activities. Teachers are also creators and communicators of a vision. In other words, a vision is not only created by leaders, but is developed collectively by actions and reflections. So, a schoolleader can try to create a vision and to support intentionally all activities which reinforce and communicate a vision, but teachers are not "sold" a vision, they know they help to create a vision and they know from experience that they can

influence a vision (see also Louis & Miles, 1990, p. 236).
In summary, vision as part of a school culture is "socially constructed".

HIGH-VISION SCHOOLS VERSUS LOW-VISION SCHOOLS : A COMPARISON

Context and the instrument

As we already indicated this paper is part of a larger study about the professional culture in primary schools involved in a large-scale improvement project (The Renewed Primary School - R.P.S.). In nine schools an in-depth study was conducted. In this third part of the paper some results of the in-depth study are presented.

In order to obtain concrete and specific information about the school culture and the implementation of some of the R.P.S.-goals, a semi-structured interview was constructed (for more information, see Staessens, 1990; 1991). Two different types of questions were distinguished : informative and exploratory questions. The former concern factual, objective situations and information about events, such as : 'How often is there a staff meeting in your school ?' or : 'Can you give an overview of the various activities which have taken place since the beginning of the schoolyear up until now ?'. The 'exploratory' questions concern experiences and perceptions of the interviewees, such as : 'Can you tell me what your principal finds important ?"; "How would you describe your school to the parents ?", Etc...

Selection of the schools and data collection

The selection of the nine schools was made in consultation with members of the Central Pedagogical Teams of the R.P.S.-project. The size of the school, geographical character, starting year in the R.P.S.-project and the willingness to take part in the study were all taken into account. Further more, it was considered necessarily that the principal had worked in the school for at least one year.

In each school the principal and at least half of the number of teachers were interviewed. This resulted in 67 interviews. The researchers were at least two and at most three days in the school. The schools were always visited by two researchers at the same time. Conversations lasted on average an hour and a half and were systematically tape-recorded. In each school a guided tour was organized by the principal. Immediately after the visit first impressions and context information were noted by each researcher independently.

Processing and analysis of the data

All transcribed interviews were coded into a coding scheme specifically designed for this study. The codes and code combinations were then processed by the FYI-3000-plus computer program (Kimmel, e.a., 1986). With this program interview fragments which refer to the same code combination can be recalled per teacher, per school and across all the schools.

This processing resulted in a written "culture portrait" per school (we called this the vertical analysis). During this first stage some preliminary hypotheses were formulated about the character of the culture and about the impact of the culture on the implementation process.

In a second stage the schools were studied from a comparative point of view (the horizontal analysis). The main aim was to detect some culture patterns and to describe comparable or contrasting mechanisms which shape the culture and which have an impact on the implementation process and results.

The second stage resulted in three groups of schools, with a typical professional culture. These three types of professional cultures are described in more detail in Staessens (1990; 1991). The descriptions are structured around three variables which are the three basisc elements of the conceptual framework underlying the study. These three variables are : the principal as builder and bearer of the culture; goal consensus; and professional relationships among teachers.

In this paper we focus on goal consensus and the two extreme groups of schools as far as goal consensus is concerned. We found in two schools very clear indications about a high degree of goal consensus : this is the "high vision -group described as "schools with a mission". In four other schools, many observations and interview data indicated a lack of goal consensus : this is the "low vision -group described as

"schools sailing without a compass".

In the next section these two groups will be compared. This comparison is structured around three questions :

(1) Are teachers and principals aware of the existence (or non-existence) of a vision (goal consensus) ?

(2) How is a vision communicated among the staff members and what are typical interventions by the principal supporting the communication process ?

(3) What are the differences between "high" and "low"-vision schools as far as the implementation process is concerned ?

These three questions reflect the basic assumptions about school culture in general and (the role of) vision in particular. Vision, defined as goal consensus, is the result of communication among team members. It is created through common experiences and shaped through daily activities (question 2). So, we can expect that actions and reflections related to goals and expectations which are considered as very important for a school, will rise the awareness (question 1). Given the nature of goal consensus in a school and the way it is constructed, one can expect that a shared vision has an impact on the way an innovation is adopted and implemented (question 3).

Awareness of the existence of a vision (question 1)

The "low-vision"-schools are charaterized by a very low degree

of awareness. An analysis of the interview data led to two different indications.

Firstly, some teachers considered the question "What do you consider important for your school ?" as a very difficult one. Sometimes this question was followed by a rather painfull silence: after a while they asked to repeat the question. The answers given by the teachers and the principal are general and vague, they vary considerably and concern very obvious issues such as : "the curriculum is important"; "children should learn something"; "children must be controlled", etc ...

It is striking that in most of the answers, we found expressions, such as "I believe ..."; "I think ..."; "I suppose that ... ". It seems very difficult for those teachers and principals to reflect or to talk about the school as a professional organization which is more than the sum of the individual classrooms. Reflections about goals and the future development of their school, are limited to individual tasks, and to individual teaching activities.

Secondly, some teachers working in "low-vision"-schools immediately understood the question as well as the fact that this question concerned the school and not the individual teachers. Their responses were very clear : "Here in our school, there are no common expectations or goals, and I regret this". Some of the teachers told stories about other schools they know or where they had been teaching for some years, and where there existed indeed a common concern for the future development of the school. In other words, those teachers are clearly aware of what they are missing : "Here,

in our school, we lack a vision; we really don't know in what direction we should go." Or : "We discuss many issues during our staff meetings, but at the very end it is impossible for me to tell you what we find important." And it is also striking that most of the interviewed teachers accused the principal for this low degree of awareness and point out very clearly, that goal-consensus is only possible when there is a person who is stimulating and coordinating reflections and actions.

The lack of goal-consensus in these schools, does not imply that individual teachers don't have any personal ideas about goals which are worthwhile to achieve. Most of these teacners work very hard and sometimes know exactly wnat they want to achieve in their particular grade. It is typical for thes schools, that most teachers focus exclusively on individual teaching activities. As one principal told the interviewer : "In our school each teacher is working very hard. But if you asked me : for the classroom or for the school, then I should say for the classroom. Most of my teachers exclusively think about the work they have to do in their classroom; there exists no reflections about the school."

The "high-vision"-schools on the contrary are characterized by a high degree of awareness of the common goals perceived by the staff as very important. During the interviews, teachers almost responded immediately. Here it is typical that they talked about individual teaching activities, but they associated what they personally were doing with common expectations and shared goals existing in the team. Although

there were some differences between the schools, it was striking that teachers were used to talk about their school, and not only about their individual tasks. There were many indications that actions and reflections are based on a commonly accepted school philosophy or vision.

So, besides the awareness of a goal-consensus, we also should underline the fact that the vision has a real impact on what teachers are saying and doing. To some extent, goal-consensus can be labeled as "active" goal-consensus. In other words : most of the teachers of the "high-vision"-schools are used to discuss what they are doing, what they find important; they are used to propose suggestions for improvement and to implement activities and suggestions proposed by colleagues. There exists a kind of a "we-feeling". In summary : these teachers are creating a "mission" for their school.

Communication of a vision through principals' interventions (question 2)

In "low-vision"-schools the communication among teachers about goals or a vision is very weak. As a result there exists a low degree of common concern for the school. Most of the interviewed teachers explained that there is no specific reason to invest extra time and effort for activities beyond the classroom borders. They mainly focus on their classroom duties and indicated that it is very difficult to find colleagues who are willing to collaborate.

This situation results in a lack of communication, not only about a vision, but also about the future development of the

school. Confronted with this situation some teachers are unhappy: others accept this situation and are satified with "just being an ordinary school". It is very difficult for these teachers to image common discussions about goals which result into a redefinition of the mission of their school.

The teachers of the "low-vision"-schools do not consider their principal as a team member who supports activities which lead to a shared vision. During the interviews, we asked teachers if their principal has specific expectations for their school. In general, the answer is very simple and short : "We don't know if our principal has any particular expectation". There is more : teachers explained that the communication between them and their principal is superficial and sometimes of a conflicting nature. They especially underlined the fact that their principal has no interest in what's going on in the classrooms, because they believe he or she is not capabel to support the daily teaching activities. A lack of professionalism is perceived as the main reason for a low degree of communication between the teachers and the principal.

During the interviews with teachers of the four "high-vision - schools, many indications were given for the existence of communication channels of a different nature. In general, the principal was considered as the main "communicator". For instance, he permanently asks questions, he visits regularly classrooms, makes short notes, communicates clearly why a decision has been taken. This does not mean that every teacher always agrees: also in these schools there exist some

conflicts between teachers and the principal (see below). It does mean that teachers can indicate many daily interventions by the principal which result into a reinforcement of expectation and the creation of a shared vision. So, the principal is perceived by the teachers as a builder and bearer of a vision.

The vision is also communicated by a written school work plan or other documents which give an overview of the goals the school wants to achieve.

In summary, through the principal and trough all kinds of written documents, goals and expectations are daily communicated. In other words, in these schools one can indicate vision-"storages" and vision-"channels". As a result, there is a continuous reflection and assessment of what's going on in the school. Critical reflections are considered as a natural part of an organization looking for improvement.

Related to the existence of a goal-consensus, teachers talked frequently about the requirement to justify their personal decisions and teaching activities. Teachers are expected to justify why they do or why they don't agree with some proposals. And in one school, teachers indicated that sometimes they felt frustrated by the permanent pression for justification ("Our principal knows only one question : Why are you doing this ?").

So, conflicts are not unusual. But they are used as channels through which reflection and discussion become possible. In other words, in the "high-vision"-schools conflicts are not

experienced as negative events. They create room for reinforcement of the goal-consensus and also, if needed, for a redefinition of the vision.

What has been said about vision can lead to the observation that in these four schools, vision is an abstract phenomenon or is something which is formulated in a written document. On the contrary, it is very striking that teachers are actually talking - during the interviews - about concrete teaching activities and about their concerns. But they explain very well that their activities are the result of common decisions, that they know why they have changed a part of the daily routine, etc ... In other words, vision as goal-consensus is part of the daily life and activities. One could say that the vision is 'internalized' in the professional life of each teacher.

This "looking beyond the classroom borders" results into a high commitment for the school. Teachers are willing to work extra hard when a school problem has to be solved. Common and extra effort is a shared norm. And this attitude and also the shared belief about the quality of the school, support each individual team member.

Character of the implementation (question 3)

As we already indicated, low-vision schools are characterized by a lack of 'goal-consensus'. Teachers are not used to reflect about common school goals. There is no clear idea about the future development of the school.

This lack of a platform for common reflections creates many

difficulties when schools are confronted with an innovation, especially with an innovation which is a complex one. The R.P.S., being a multidimensional and complex reform, can only be started if the team is able and willing to assess the existing quality of their school and try to come to shared and clear decisions. For a "low-vision"-school this is a very unusual requirement. Shared consultation creates so many difficulties that it is almost impossible to design a workable implementation plan.

In some schools the confrontation between a "low-vision"-school and a complex reform, results into individual initiatives by some teachers. In other words, a reform such as R.P.S. creates no commonly accepted task for the renewal of the school.

Since in "high-vision"-schools, teachers are used to reflect and to think about common goals, a reform creates almost immediately a common reaction. Teachers are used to reflect critically about external porposals and to assess the consequences for their school and their teaching activities. The existence of a "goal-consensus" allows teachers to translate the general goals of the R.P.S. into school-adapted activities. During the interviews many questions concerned the way a school has organized the early implementation activities. From the answers, we learned that the early implementation acticities are a blend of critical questions, preliminary planning of a limited number of teaching activities, reshuffling of plans, evaluation of first experiences, etc... All these activities are supported by the

principal. The end result is that the innovation is, to some extent and for the time being, integrated into the daily school life.

As far as "vision" is concerned, we observed that the existing vision was a good basis for discussion and evaluation of the R.P.S.-goals. But we also observed that the early implementation activities reinforced the existing vision. As one of the teacners indicated : "At the beginning we were very critical and considered the R.P.S. as very complex and unclear. But, after a while, we were able tc translate some of the general goals into activities which reinforced the importance of what we were doing for children having reading problems." This process of integration helps teachers to understand what they are doing; apparently distinctive elements are integrated into a broader improvement effort (see also Louis & Miles, 1990, p. 223).

Conclusions

Schools do differ in many ways; they also differ as far as "vision" or "goal consensus" is concerned. In some schools there exists a high degree of goal-consensus. Teachers are able to talk about the common goals and to give many examples of teaching activities which reflect the commonly accepted goals. In other schools, teachers have many difficulties to talk about goals beyond the classroom borders. The daily school and classroom routines have not created an awareness of a shared vision.

From the analysis presented until now, it is quiet clear that vision is more than an abstract concept. "vision" or "goal consensus" is socially constructed. Communication, shared experiences, conflicts, practical planning, ongoing evaluations and other activities are part of an ongoing process that support teachers and principals in their daily efforts to construct a vision.

The quality of the implementation process and implementation results are determined by the existing vision. A degree of "goal consensus" offers a platform for discussions among teachers when they are confronted with an innovation and it offers also a basis for the planning of early implementation activities.

In "low-vision"-schools, teachers miss this consensus about goals and a tradition of collaboration which allow shared decision-making and planning.

DISCUSSION

Vision is indeed a core component of a school culture. Vision as goal-consensus is reflected in many indications. It is part of the daily school life.

From a research point of view, this means that it is possible to differentiate schools as far as vision is concerned. But since vision is the result of a process, it is not always easy, as an outsider to describe the existing vision and to explain the impact of that vision in a reliable way.

A good understanding of a vision implies a research plan in which many different factors are taken into consideration. The analysis of a vision and an understanding of the impact of a vision on the daily life of school, is only possible through a process of continuous confirmation of different observations, events, etc. ... The main task from the researcher's point of view is finding a way to reconstruct the process which creates common expectations among the teachers. One of the consequences is that a researcher has to collect different kinds of information and to be at the school for a longer period of time.

But one can also look at vision from another point of view. Experienced change facilitators are aware of the importance of a vision. And some change facilitators can describe very detailled the existence (or lack) of a vision in a school. In this context, it is an obvious question to ask for strategies for the creation of a vision : in other words some change facilitators are looking for strategies to increase the degree of goal-consensus. It seems, from the data we have, that this is a very difficult task. As we indicated in the introduction of this paper, vision is not the result of rational planning and discussions; vision is far more than a list of written statements.

Vision is related to the history of the school and is shaped by many different factors. It seems almost impossible to influence vision in a "direct" way. But we found in our data some indications about "indirect" strategies which increased slightly the degree of goal-consensus. In some schools,

principals succeeded in organizing meetings during which decisions were taken about small and specific changes in teaching activities, to set up a precise time-line and to organize discussions about implementation successes and difficulties. These types of interventions, aiming at increasing the collaboration among teachers, have a positive impact. Teachers experience, through sometimes difficult collaboration, some positive successes. Step by step they become aware of the potentialities of collaboration among colleagues. And as a result of this growing collaboration, they gradually talk and think about goals which are important for the school.

This finding confirms other researchers who have suggested "dailiness" as a strategy to increase the perception of vision. Manassee (1986) says : "that principals use small, mundane daily tasks and interactions, that leadership involves the infusion of routine activities with meaning and vision . Dwyer (1984) has found attenting to the vision through daily activities enhances the development of a shared vision. And also Bolster (1989) came to the conclusion that the principals for whom dailiness was an important aspect of their plans communicated their visions more effectively".

To some extent, principals and (external) change facilitators can create room for a "construction process". Vision is shared understanding, shared decision making, shared evaluation, etc... As long as there are no opportunities for this type of "sharing"-activities, one cannot expect any impact of interventions. In other words, trying to increase the degree of goal-consensus in a school, always means

developing interventions which give room to common consultations and decisions. So attention to vision is demonstrated by identifying and creating a focus (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

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