

Cor van Beuningen

SCHOOL COUNCILS AS A FACTOR OF DEVELOPMENT (EXPERIENCE OF THE NETHERLANDS)

In the article author shares with the experience of Netherlands in the sphere of school councils, describes school boards and councils as actors in development. The article leads the readers to the conclusion that the school-community connection is not only beneficial to the school and the pupils, but also to the community.

Public service delivery through non-state, non-market organizations

Let me explain this concept of *non-state, non-market public service delivery*.

Public services are services provided by the government to its citizens, based on the social consensus that certain services should be available to all, regardless of income. Think of education and health care, but also the fire brigade, social housing or care for persons with disabilities. Public services may be provided by government directly, that is through public sector entities, for example state schools and hospitals, owned and run by the government. Public services may also be provided by government in an indirect way, by financing private provision of services, subsidizing either the client or the service provider.

And then, this service provider may either be a commercial enterprise, or a civic association, a church foundation or a clients or parents organization.

This last option is what Socires stands for: *public service delivery through non-state, non-market organizations*. If we focus on education, we at Socires believe that it is wise policy to leave the responsibility for running schools to local communities, parents associations, church communities, civil society organizations. Or to say the same in a slightly different way: we believe that it is wise policy to make citizens, organized in local and church communities and parents associations, responsible for managing their own schools. What we advocate is that, indeed, government promotes and subsidizes education at schools that are owned and run by private non-

commercial entities. Obviously, it is the government's responsibility to set and control certain quality standards that have to be met by those schools. Standards, regarding educational contents, the curriculum and the final qualifications of the pupils; and standards, also, regarding management and administration, with criteria like efficiency and financial transparency. Government funding and control go together. And of course, this shared responsibility between the government and a private non-commercial entity needs a proper legal and regulatory framework.

We think that this is wise policy, because it is good for the quality of education, good for the vitality of local communities and good for the development of society and for the strength of democracy and economy.

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, we have a long tradition of public-private non-commercial partnerships. In fact, this already started in the 13th century, when peasants in the coastal area formed associations to protect themselves against inundations and shared with the government the responsibility for building and maintaining the dikes.

In the field of education, for more than a century in the Netherlands we have what we call education freedom, which allows for a great variety of schools, both state and non-state schools. Regulated by law, Government treats both state and non-state schools in exactly the same way, with the same kind of funding and control mechanisms. Actually, around 70% of the pupils in the Netherlands go to non-state schools, both at primary and at secondary level.

We in the Netherlands are convinced that this educational pluralism has a very positive effect on the quality of the schools and on the education offered. Because parents have a free choice, they may compare the different schools and choose the one that comes closest to their criteria for quality. All schools, both state and non-state schools, will feel stimulated to increase their efforts and to improve and renew their educational offer, in order to attract more pupils. In this way, educational freedom has the effect of raising the overall quality of education.

School boards and councils as actors in development

As I said before, it is wise policy to make citizens, organized in local and church communities and parents associations, responsible for managing their own schools. It is wise policy, not only because it has the effect of raising the quality of education; but also, because it has a positive effect on the vitality of local communities and on the development of society as a whole. Let me elaborate a bit more on this issue.

One of the main assets of non-state schools is the fact that they have their own school boards, mostly composed by very dedicated parents and members of the community. They are appointed by the *owner* of the school, that is, the local or church community or parents association, to which the school board is accountable. Together with the school director or principal and his team, the school board is responsible for running the school and for implementing the religious or ideological conviction which is at the school's foundation and which is communicated and transmitted to the pupils. This in itself provides the non-state school with an extra asset: a board mostly composed of dedicated volunteers who are prepared to assume these responsibilities and invest their time and skills for the benefit of their school.

The school board is not only accountable to the local or church community or parents association by which it is appointed. No, a good school board is very much geared towards engaging and mobilizing those same parents and the other members of their community, for the benefit of the school and for the future of their children and of their communities. A good school board is able to convince these parents and community members that they are given the freedom to run their own school and that this freedom implies their responsibility to make the best use of it. Freedom and responsibility always go hand in hand.

Besides, a good school board promotes the numerous relationships that may exist and blossom between the school and the wider community. In this, they make good use of the personal connections that the board members and the other parents and community members may have with other organizations in the neighborhood,

with sports clubs, church communities, with local enterprises for example for sponsoring or for traineeships.

In doing so, the school itself is redefined. It used to be an entity for the transfer of knowledge and skills; and now it becomes a school community, with a great number of people involved. And through these people, the school is an integral part of the wider community. The frontier between inside and outside is blurred: the community is in the school and the school is in the community.

Good for the pupils, good for the community, good for society

A good school board embodies, promotes and catalyzes the osmosis between school and society. We think that the importance of this osmosis can hardly be overstressed. To begin with, its importance for securing the continuity of the educational development line, from child to adolescent. The strict divide between what happens in school on the one hand, and what happens in the family and local community on the other, has already caused too much harm. As they say in Africa: it takes a community to raise a child. The school can't do it alone. The school community reaches out to families and to the community, for example through the so called pedagogical civil society. This concept involves that the school organizes meetings outside school hours for parents that have trouble in raising their children, to discuss and exchange insights and solutions. Children at risk can be better monitored and supported. Parents may be involved when it comes to correct problematic youngsters without prematurely recurring to the police or other state entities. By involving and engaging parents and other community members, the school not only actively contributes to the security in the neighborhood, but more in general, it has an important integrative effect on the neighborhood as such.

This provides a beautiful example of how the school-community connection is not only beneficial to the school and the pupils, but also to the community.

In fact, this IS how community is created and strengthened. Given the freedom and the responsibility to run their own schools, people get together, they establish working relationships, they organize and cooperate, they involve other persons and organizations, they establish networks.

By doing so, people acquire new skills and competences, they feel taken serious and enabled, they experience the intrinsic relationship between freedom and responsibility. In short, they really become citizens.

And by doing so, they make for a vital community, they raise the levels of interpersonal trust, and they increase the amount of social capital. In short, they embody civil society.

Remember that all this would not happen – or at least not in the same way - if the state is the owner and the school is run by bureaucrats and professionals, reducing the parents and the community to mere clients or consumers of a state delivered public service.

Кор Ван Бенінген

Шкільні ради як фактор розвитку (досвід Нідерландів)

У статті автор ділиться досвідом Нідерландів у сфері шкільних рад, описує органи шкільного управління та ради як діючих осіб, що сприяють розвитку. Стаття приводить читача до висновку, що зв'язок між школою та спільнотою є виграним не тільки для школи і учнів, але й для спільноти.

Кор Ван Бенинген

Школьные советы как фактор развития (опыт Нидерландов)

В статье автор делится опытом Нидерландов в сфере школьных советов, описывает органы школьного управления и советы как главных действующих лиц, содействующих развитию. Статья приводит читателя к выводу, что связь между школой и сообществом является выигрышной не только для школы и учеников, но и для сообщества.