

TEACHER APPOINTMENT CHARACTERISTICS AND PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT

Cees Vermeulen, & Roel Bosker, Centre for Applied Research on Education (OCTO), University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands

Introduction

In 1985 a new law was introduced in the Netherlands, governing primary education. This law entailed the merging of kindergarten schools and primary schools in order to form one continuous form of education: the new 'basisschool'. Another aspect of this law was the fact that all teachers in the new primary education were, from that moment on, legally qualified to teach children of all age groups, regardless of their professional training. Since teachers who work with the 4-5 year old received, up to that date, a different training than teachers who work with the 6 to 12 year old, this meant that teachers could be called upon to teach children for the teaching of which their professional training did not equip them. This phenomenon is referred to as the 'complete usability of teachers'. The situation in which school principals are forced to use teachers in this way is mostly brought about by a change in the number of pupils, as well as by the need to replace teachers who are sick or who are of duty by reason of short time working. The new law has thus increased the options a school principal has to deploy teachers throughout the school. Combined with the effect of an growing number of teachers working part-time, the total number of teachers who share the task of educating the pupils has considerably increased. As a result of this development the traditional image of a primary school in which a group of children is taught throughout the week by one single teacher is rapidly superseded by an image in which the bemused pupils are confronted with a multitude of different faces. This development has evoked widespread concern with regard to the well-being of the pupils as well as to their level of achievement. This in turn has led to a research being commissioned into the scale of this phenomenon and the effect it has on the pupils.

Method

This paper will focus on the possible negative effects of complete usability of teachers on the well-being and achievement level of their pupils. In a first step towards studying the possible negative effects, the scale in which the complete usability of teachers occurs was determined in an sample of 800 'basis schools' (the combination of kindergarten and primary school). We received data

on the teachers appointments characteristics from 500 schools, which enabled us to determine the scale of part-time working and complete usability in primary education. The data furthermore allowed for the selection of about 50 schools containing grades 2 (the five year old) and 3 (the six year old) with the right characteristics for a quasi-experiment, aimed at determining the effects on the pupils. In this experiment the schools, for grade 2 and grade 3 separately, were divided into two groups, i.e. a group of schools in which the pupils are taught by two or more teachers who did not possess the adequate training and a group of schools in which the pupils are taught by one teacher with the 'right' training (the control group). In the experiment we focussed on teachers who made use of the regulation concerning the complete usability for only a part of their appointment. We argued that the problem would lie with teachers who had to alternately teach kindergarten children and primary school children and not so much with teachers who teach the 'wrong' pupils for the whole of their appointment. In the first place very few teachers are in this position, and those who do will quickly adapt to this teaching situation.

The two type of schools were compared, by means of multi-level statistical analyses, on the basis of the average language and numeracy skills of the grade 2 and grade 3 children, as well on their level of well-being. The comparison was controlled for the age, ability, ethnic and social economic background of the pupils and for differences in their opportunity to learn (the overlap between the implemented curriculum and the tests used) and the teaching style (e.g. the way the teaching was geared towards individual differences between pupils and the achievement orientation of the teacher).

Results

In comparison with earlier research in this field, this survey indicates a decrease in the level in which schools employ the possibility, offered by the new law introduced in 1985, to let teachers teach pupils for which their professional training do not equip them. In 1988 74 % of the schools questioned, reported the occurrence of complete usability of teachers, compared to 55 % of the schools in our survey held in 1991. In the quasi-experimental research conducted in 50 schools, no significant differences were found between the two types of schools, i.e. schools with and without complete usability of teachers in grades 2 and 3. This lack of effect proved not to be induced by differences in teaching styles.

Conclusion

Despite the often proclaimed negative effects of teachers without the proper training background for the job at hand on the results and well-being of their pupils, no such effect could be found in this study.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the quality of primary education is not impeded by the fact that circumstances force school principals to let part of the education be performed by teachers without the proper training. Pupils, as well as teachers, apparently adapt well to this situation.