Diagnostiek en onderwijsinnovatie. Een onderzoek naar werkwijzen in de leerlingbegeleiding
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SUMMARY

This study addresses the question if pupil counselling can contribute to educational reform. Pupil counselling is carried out by the staff of local and regional educational support agencies (OBDs), at the request of primary schools. Although the main purpose of counselling is diagnosing and hopefully remedying individual learning problems, within the existing didactic situation, counselling in our view can also have a more innovative function, by suggesting changes in the existing didactic situation. This innovative function cannot be taken for granted. Presently, pupil counselling is going through a process of reorientation.

In chapter two we will look more closely into this process and discuss the following topics that are of special interest:

(i) the views on learning problems. This is in the form of a debate concerning the content of the models used to explain learning problems.

(ii) views on taking sound diagnostic action. This takes the form of a debate about formal aspects. At the centre is the question what the function of diagnostics is, and -more specifically- what the benefits of diagnostic statements are to support work.

(iii) views on the contribution of pupil counselling to educational reform. This discussion has consequences for the position which pupil counselling takes on relation to other forms of educational support within the OBD.

(iv) views on educational innovation.

As yet, most discussions have not led to a clear consensus, but certain trends can be observed. In the explanations of learning problems attention is shifting from a static, child-related approach to an interactional one, in which factors in the didactic situation are also taken into account. With regard to the formal
aspect of taking diagnostic action, diagnostics are the application of scientific theories to the singular case is rejected in favour of the developing and testing of ideographic theories. In the development of theories and in research into educational innovation, more and more, stress is being laid on the implementation of reforms, on the influence of features of instruction and on school performance as a criterium for the effectiveness of teaching.

At the end of the chapter we ask ourselves what these trends mean for counsellors who wish to contribute to educational reform with the developing of their methodologies.

The lack of consensus also makes it more difficult to put innovative features of the methodology into operation during the study. Much research into the process of diagnostic action concerns the output of diagnostics, and the thought processes when making a diagnosis. In our study attention is paid to the actual context in which diagnosticians work. The presentation concentrates on the begin fase of pupil counselling: the counsellors’ reactions at the request of teachers to become involved with individual pupils. We motivate this choice from the viewpoint that an immediate reaction in the form of the execution of a diagnostic investigation deprives the pupil counselling of the initial opportunity to take innovative action. The innovativeness of the method is expressed during this fase in the amount of preparatory information (and the sources used and types of information) which the counsellor gathered before deciding to turn to diagnostic investigation. In the following fase the innovativeness of the method is expressed by the degree to which investigations and interventions are directly involved in the didactic situation.

These questions are explored in chapter three, and a number of predictions are formulated. We expect the methods to be influenced on the one hand by the counsellors’ characteristics, such as their education and personal view, and on the other hand by autonomy, the organisational description.

In chapter four the development is comprehensively dealt with and a questionnaire to characteristics.

Chapter five contains a study of 171 counsellors from all the counsellors involved with individual pupils, of which 74 have come from both a group and an education. They carry out tasks, and usually work not often find themselves within the schools, not to mention consultation about pupil.

In chapter six the results are presented, that diagnostic research. Nevertheless, counselling is a matter of discussion within the schools, not consultation about pupil.
and on the other hand by institutional characteristics, such as the counsellors' autonomy, the organisational structure of the OBD and the counsellors' job description.

In chapter four the development of the instruments used in the study are comprehensively dealt with. These comprise a simulation of the methodology, and a questionnaire to determine the counsellors' and the institutional characteristics.

Chapter five contains a description of the study's target group, which consists of 171 counsellors from 20 OBDs with various organisational structures. Far from all the counsellors who are regularly confronted with requests to become involved with individual pupils have followed a course in diagnostics. They come from both a group with practical training, and a group with higher education. They carry out more pupil-counselling tasks than system-support tasks, and usually work with a large degree of autonomy. The counsellors do not often find themselves in situations in which there is a clear policy towards the schools regarding pupil counselling. It appears that in most cases pupil counselling is a matter for the pupil's teacher and the counsellor. Neither within the schools, nor within the OBDs is there regular systematic consultation about pupils with learning problems.

In chapter six the results concerning the first question in the study - how innovative is the methodology - are given. The results of the simulation show that diagnostic research still forms an important part of the methodology. Nevertheless, counsellors seldomly turn immediately to research. With the odd exception, all counsellors begin by collecting additional information. The teacher is the source most often consulted. The counsellors ask for a lot of
information about the classroom behaviour of the pupils, and relatively little about the school situation. Large differences exist in the amounts and sorts of information counsellors ask for, and in the sources used. The content of the research and the interventions is principally aimed at the pupil’s existing didactic situation. But large differences between individual counsellors exist with regard to this aspect also. The differences are not expressed in a clear relationship between the gathering of information on the one hand and the degree to which remembered studies and interventions directly relate to the didactic situation on the other. The counsellors’ methodologies cannot be unequivocably characterised as being more or less innovative by means of the variables used.

In chapter seven the results concerning the second question regarding the conditions which determine the methodology are described. As a result of the small number of respondents and the large number of potential explanatory factors, we were not able to carry out a simultaneous analysis. We selected a number of plausible factors on the basis of predictions previously formulated. Using this method a successive analysis was carried out. As a clear relationship between 'the first reaction', 'preparatory information' (type and source) and 'investigation/intervention' was lacking, these three variables were always included in the analysis separately. In addition a modified contingency table analysis has been used.

The influence of both the counsellors’ and the institutional characteristics on the methodology is not great. Counsellors who attach a lot of importance to factors which directly relate to the didactic situation gather proportionately less information from the parents. This relationship is stronger if the counsellors carry out their work autonomously. Counsellors with practical training attach — unexpectedly— more importance to factors which have an indirect influence on the learning process than those of other counsellors.

The most important results describe the relationship between the first reaction, preparatory information, and methodology. Counsellors who are more involved in counselling, gather facts relating to situational affairs. Methods which they consider important suggest the most important projects for the training of counsellors, and make proposals for research. The relative importance of the counsellors’ and institutional characteristics have also been calculated. The recommendation to reorganise projects is recommended on the basis of which they contribute to the counsellors’ methodology for pupils.
the learning process in explanations of the learning problems, and their methods do not contain a significantly larger basis for educational reform than those of other counsellors.

The most important result regarding the institutional characteristics is the relationship between the organisational structure of the OBDs and the methodology. Counsellors who work in a separate department for pupil counselling, gather from the teacher proportionately more information about situational affairs. Moreover, there is a tendency amongst these counsellors to suggest the most innovative research and interventions.

In chapter eight we summarize the results. We also go into the implications for the training of counsellors, for the counselling practice and for further research. The relatively slight influence on the methodology of the counsellors' and institutional characteristics studied means that for the time being the methodology is higher personal. For this reason training and development projects are recommended. To the slight influence which institutional characteristics have on the innovativeness of methodology we connect the recommendation to assess organisational measures chiefly by the degree to which they contribute to the content of and procedures for an innovative methodology for pupil counselling.