

## **SCHOOL IDENTITY: A LIVING DOCUMENT ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE PRINCIPAL RELATING TO SCHOOL IDENTITY**

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### **Abstract**

Identity, since long a concept used in developmental theories on puberty and early adolescence, in this article is used as a concept describing the situational determined process of creating a distinct profile of the school. In this process, it is argued, the role of the principal of the school is of particular interest. The Self Confrontation Method (SCM) is supposed to play an important role in clarifying the autobiographical aspects of the principal's main life theme in relation to his role of being the leading and motivating person in the creative process of identity development of the school. The principal's life theme and the process of identity development of the school seem to be closely related.

**Key terms:** Identity; School identity; Biographical perspective; Self Confrontation Method (SCM).

### **Resumo**

A Identidade, conceito desde há muito mobilizado em teorias do desenvolvimento humano, é usado neste artigo como descritor de um processo situado de criação de um perfil diferenciado da escola. Defendemos a perspectiva de que, neste processo, é particularmente relevante o papel do líder da escola. Nesta perspectiva, o Método da Auto-Confrontação desempenha um papel importante na clarificação de aspectos autobiográficos do líder. Procura-se evidenciar a relação entre



a história de vida do líder e o seu papel de condução e motivação de pessoas, no contexto do processo criativo que constitui o desenvolvimento identitário da escola.

**Palavras-chave:** Identidade; Identidade da Escola; Perspectiva biográfica; Método da Auto-Confrontação.

## Introduction

The concept of identity has been applied for a long time only to individuals. Identity was seen as an end stage of a developmental process from childhood to adolescence, a development from a situation of complete dependency to a more or less clear-cut status of independency in the sense of a “competency to accept responsibility for and give account of his of her opinions and behaviour according the highest standards of one’s own conviction” (Langeveld 1956, 7). In the last decades of the twentieth century, in the public and academic debate the clear-cut status of identity has been subject of profound discussions, taking notice of the change of view of the concept of development, as well as the change of the position of adolescents in our society. Instead of identity as an end stage of development to be achieved, in our days the concept of identity covers the life-long process of becoming who you are. Identity is influenced by ‘significant others’, marked by ‘critical incidents’, constructed in telling and re-telling about meaningful events, resulting in what is called nowadays a ‘narrative identity’, a concept elaborated upon in the educational context by Bruner (1996). Every person is identified as being “a living document” (Luther, 1992).

Nowadays however, the concept of identity is not only applied to persons. Scholars in organizational theory also make use of the concept, distinguishing between a fixed identity and the process of identity development. In the field of organizations the concept of culture has been more frequently used than the concept of identity, though the definitions of the terms used show similarities (i.e. Morgan 1986/1992, Schein 1999/2000). In recent times the concept of corporate identity is frequently used. The encounter with different cultures in creating a communal organizational culture has extensively been researched by Hofstede (2002). In Holland, de Wolff (2000) phrased the following definition of a school’s identity: the identity of a school is “what makes a school into this school, or what are the outstanding features of this school (both in a characteristic and a distinguishing sense) and what the members of the school have in



common, what they share, what is true for them as members of the collective community and what could be characterised by a certain degree of durability and continuity” (de Wolff, 2000, p. 53). Sharing concepts, the teachers construct the school’s narrative identity. Not only persons are identified as ‘a living document’, but so is the school in de Wolff’s definition.

It should be stressed at this point that in the process of identity development in an organization, be it a factory, an office or a school, the contribution of every participant is considered to be of pivotal significance. The way in which employees behave in their daily professional activities after all presents to outsiders the organization’s atmosphere, gives them an impression of the climate in the organization, in other words shows them aspects of the company or institution which reveals the identity of the organization. The employee in the first place acts as a professional, a kind of behaviour that is imbued with personal values of course. On the base of an accidental combination of the type of single impressions of the individual professionalism of the employees, outsiders construct their image of the organization. This has led to a focus on the individual’s professionalism, in particular to the normative dimension as it related to the biography.

In this article we focus on the above mentioned relationship in the field of education. Central to us is the exploration of the teachers’ and in particular the principal’s concerns. These concerns and their relative weights are the building-stones in the process of identity development of the school. We focus on the nature of the relationship of this concern as it is rooted in the biographies of the teachers and principal(s). In our view identity development is a process of organizational change and it is in a specific way related to the implementation of innovative educational processes. That is why our exploration results in recommendations for the coaching of school leaders who are involved in reading and writing the identity of their organization as a ‘living document’.

In the first section we elaborate on the concept of identity as it is applied in psychological and psycho-social theories on identity development. In the second section we explore the concept of identity as it is used in organizations, in particular educational organizations like schools. Two ways in which the construction of an organization’s identity is described, will be outlined and a third way will be introduced. The individual contribution of each individual employee participating in the organization is central in the third section, which leads to the introduction of the concept of



normative professionalism. This concept is elaborated as being rooted in the biography of the persons involved, in our case in particular as it is embedded in the biography of the school's principal, and as it is constitutive for the organization's identity. In the fourth section we present our theoretical framework being the valuation theory, the research design, as well as the presentation of the results and the discussion. Our contribution is concluded in the fifth section with recommendations for the coaching process of school's principals, as well as with points of particular interest for further research.

### **Identity Development**

In current literature the concept of identity is used in different ways, such as in the expression self-image as well as self-concept, or ideal self in combination with real self; all of these notions point to the concept of identity. 'Self-realisation' is also meant as a product, though at the same time it refers to the process related to identity development. The concept of identity is becoming a collective term, bringing under one roof a variety of processes and products. We start our contribution with an explanation of the way in which we use the concept of identity in our research project.

In many theories on identity development, identity is seen as an entity to be produced by the end of puberty, or a stage to be attained finally. Children and youngsters are seen as persons on their way to a fixed identity; adults are seen as persons "having" an identity. Some theorists have stressed the role of establishing commitment as a constitutive part of identity, which is to be reached after a period of exploration of commitments in different fields (Bosma & Graafsma, 1982). In this latter view some more dynamic is introduced on the – still more or less linear – way to identity.

Even more dynamics and flexibility in the process of (identity) development had already been articulated by Werner (1948), introducing his heuristic concept of development. According to Werner not the final stage of development is the standard, the stage that is considered to be better, but the global starting point. In Werner's view the development of identity is identified at the moment of a more differentiated and hierarchical integrated identity as compared to the starting point. Differentiation and integration are the key concepts in his developmental theory: *'Wherever development occurs, it proceeds from a state of relative lack of differentiation to a state of increasing differentiation, articulation, and hierarchic integration'* (Kaplan, 1983 in: Breeuwsm



1994, 351). Whenever identity at  $t_2$  is more discrete, more articulated, more stable and more flexible than at the starting point  $t_1$ , he speaks of an ongoing development of identity. The characteristic of stability is related to the position ascribed to the person himself of herself in the context he or she operates in. Werner speaks of instability whenever the person himself perceives his role and influence in the context as fragmented; perceiving oneself as 'the same' despite of changing contexts, characterizes a stable person. Stability is seen as characteristic of progressive development. As Werner interprets the interaction between person and context as the motor of development, it is the persons' subjective interpretation of the perceived reality that forces him to decide upon necessary adjustments - be it accommodation or assimilation – which stimulates development.

Werner's view on development is characterized as a prospective way of thinking, since it is not the end stage that is the reference point, as is the case for example in the theory of Piaget on cognitive development, the theory of Kohlberg on moral development, the theory of Goldman on religious development and the theory of Fowler on faith development. Werner's reference point is the self chosen starting point. His theoretical frame shows a contextual approach which results in a diversity of developmental processes having a wide range of preliminary end stages, that are at the same time new starting points for the continuation of the developmental process, generated according to the orthogenetic principle. This principle focuses on the uniqueness of each individual developmental process, as well as the deviation which is not an abnormality but which is standard. According to the prospective view on development there are no stages nor phases to be identified beforehand they are to be articulated in the course of the process: '*... the course of ... development may be more multilinear, the end state of development more problematic, and the nature of mature functioning more pluralistic than has commonly been supposed*' (Chandler, in Baltes, Reese & Lipsitt, 1980). Identity emerges out of this process. It is in this dynamic way that we use the concept of identity. Having elaborated in this section on the process of identity development for persons, in the next section we will focus on the identities of organizations, in particular the identity development of schools.

### **School Identity**

Characteristic for schools as organizations is their professional contribution to children's education. Schools are organizations that are involved with institutionalized



and intentional education in a professional way, in addition to the educational and socialising tasks parents fulfil in a more accidental and incidental way. In the micro system of the family, education is much more informal, although a kind of fit and purposive behaviour according to the parents' life view can not be denied of course. School identity in the Netherlands is shaped by what was called the 'pillarised society' of the past century. Even today school identity in Holland is organised along the dividing lines of religions and denominations. One of the 'typical characteristics' of Christian schools is that they organise their education according to the ideas of 'the good life' as conceived under the shared horizon of the Christian religious tradition. The Christian tradition is perceived as being at the base of the cherished set of values and regulations. The tradition is seen as the basis of the education in these schools. In schools these values and regulations are rendered concrete in a narrow sense by means of explicit interpretations of the Christian identity, like celebrating religious feasts and morning prayers, as well as in broad conceptions of identity, such as the reasons for choosing new teaching methods or the decisions regarding the destinations of school excursions. In The Netherlands Christian schools are even further differentiated by categories of schools of the Protestant Christian tradition and the Roman Catholic tradition. Originally, children from protestant or catholic families, respectively, attended these schools. Until the end of the last century the fundamentals of the school were prescribed deductively as to the way in which education was concretised in the classroom. Nowadays the school's teacher-team tends to decide more inductively, let us say through dialogue, how to express the religious dimension of education. We will come back to this later.

In addition to Christian schools, state schools are another category of schools in the Dutch educational system. In these schools there is not one worldview that dominates the educational design, but diversity is presupposed and standard. In the last decades of the twentieth century Islamic schools have also been founded in the Netherlands. In these schools education is shaped according to the ideas of the 'good life' as they are worded in the Islamic religious tradition. In all primary schools the subject or the so called learning area of 'Worldviews' (Geestelijke stromingen) is compulsory, which means that according to the curriculum every child is expected to be exposed to intercultural and interreligious education, be it in a rather phenomenological interpretation as defined by the law.

So far we described the school's identity as something fixed and decided upon by others: school governors and school boards and written down in 'powerful



documents', prescribing in a deductive way the ways in which this formal identity had to be materialized in daily rituals like morning prayer, telling Bible stories and celebrating religious (mainly Christian) feasts. However, observing the actively performed classroom activities, diversity seemed to be the standard in the implementation of the rather detailed specifications of the realization of the school's Christian identity. A certain influence from or at least a dependent relationship with the personality of the teacher could not be denied, in particular a relationship with his or her valuations and the proposed and produced regulations. Teacher behaviour in the classroom results from the personal beliefs that penetrate the way(s) he or she looks at children and their developmental processes. At the same time, in teacher behaviour these beliefs become visible as they are expressed in every day practice. In this respect concrete actions constitute the school's identity not in the way as it is explicitly written down, like e.g. in formal and official school documents, but as it is perceived by the pupils and their parents, informally, as a living identity. Life view is motivating the actions of the teacher and at the same time life view shows itself in the actions of the teacher.

Not only a relationship with the personality of the teacher urged itself upon us, even more so the influence of the interaction between teachers among themselves on the topic of school identity, and to a still larger extent the interaction of the teacher's views with the principle's view on identity. Our theoretical views are 'work in progress', developing along the way of the process of our coaching activities as facilitator of Structural Identity Consultations (SIC). As a result of this we formulated a most carefully worded statement on the relationship of the principle's view on identity, rooted in his or her biography, and the course of the identity development of the school. Before we outline the research design to explore the above mentioned relationship, in the next section we first elaborate on the concept of normative professionalism, being a key concept in our views on the construction of school identity as a communal developmental process.

### **Normative Professionalism**

In recent years many researchers have focused on the professional identity of the teacher and the relation to his or her biography (e.g. Kelchtermans 1994, 2000). The relationship with the way the school's identity is experienced and made concrete in daily practice in the classroom is extensively researched and described by Bakker & Rigg (2004). In this section we start with a first paragraph focusing on the normative



dimension of the professional identity of teaching as it shows itself in the classroom and is rooted in the biography of the teacher. As such it is contributing to the constructive process of the image of the school as it is understood by children and their parents. The constitutive role of the normative professional identity of the teacher will be the key subject in the second paragraph of this section.

#### Normative professionalism, rooted in the biography

As noted above classroom practice and its relation to the biography of the teacher has been described by Bakker & Rigg (2004). One of the teachers of their research project lively tells of her personal experience of the continuous change of the educational context she is working in. To her the most important change appears to be that teachers nowadays are no 'real believers' anymore. As far as she knows even most of the pupils hardly ever go to church and they are not socialised in the Christian tradition. 'The single solitary pupil who makes his first Communion does not know any prayer by heart, not even the prayer of "Our Father", because at home prayer is not said anymore' (Bakker & Rigg, 2004, 66).

This part of the interview reveals an explicit view on the Christian identity of the school and its teachers and pupils. To this teacher the transfer of knowledge, beliefs and values of the Christian religious tradition is considered as part and parcel of a teacher's task in a Christian school. At the same time, however, she wishes to create a sphere of openness for the beliefs of others 'whether the parents socialise the child in the Christian or the Islamic religious tradition, or adhere to secular principles' (ibid., 71). In the life story of this teacher we find cues for her life view. Very often in personal narratives situations in adult life are identified as 'critical incidents' and shed new light on earlier child experiences, which in retrospect still become 'critical incidents'. This teacher, participating in a drawing course, became aware of her self-effacing behaviour. All of a sudden she noticed that most of the time she had given the greatest part of her attention to others. To her this felt like a disclosure and this breakthrough opened her eyes. A new light was shed on classroom situations. She felt cramped for space and decided to be alert on giving air to her own views and convictions in team meetings, as well as to any of her pupils in her own classroom (Bakker & Rigg 2004; Ter Avest, Bakker & Bakker 2005).

Is the influence of the teacher clearly present in the classroom as shown in the example above, the influence of the principal exceeds the classroom. In order to allow



various dimensions of identity to become part of the discussions on this topic in team meetings, the position of the headmaster is pivotal. It is the principal who facilitates the teachers to tell about their actions and re-tell them to each other in a process of retrospective and anticipating reflection and reflexion. The alertness and sensitivity of the principal opens up until then hidden religious aspects of everyday practice, changing them into overt signs and symbols of the essential aspects of the personal as well as the communal identity. It is in the biography of the principal that this sensitivity is anchored.

In an era where traditional frames of reference have disappeared, and where there are more questions than answers, the question 'How to teach about, in or from religion?' is the linking pin in a team of teachers who are committed to a diversity of (religious as well as non-religious) philosophies of life. That is why the school's principal is central in these discussions, as we have mentioned above. The headmaster is like a director of an orchestra; just like the director conducting a multi-voiced choir, so is the director of the teachers managing the multi-voicedness in the school. The word 'director' originates from the Latin word 'dirigere' and points to steering, guiding, leading and directing, interpreted by us as encouraging autonomous behaviour of the teachers inviting them in this way to actively participate in the process of knowledge construction (Kessels, 2001). This interpretation of leadership caused us to explore in more detail the life story of the principal, being the school's director, as far as it is related to the process of identity development of the school. In the setting of an interview we will invite the principal to cooperate with the researcher as co-researcher of his or her own life story.

#### Normative professionalism, constitutive to the school's identity

In previous lines we made a distinction between the formal identity of the school as it is written down in documents, and the informal identity as it is practiced by the teachers. This might be called 'practical wisdom on identity', since the daily routines are the boundary markers of the school's identity – shown in daily practice, without structural reflection, and without wording what is practiced'. This could be seen in the light of the 'classical' distinction, as it is made by Socrates, between 'epistème' and 'phronesis'. A theoretical framework is found with pragmatist authors like Dewey, James and Peirce. In the first paragraph of this section we demonstrated that the teacher's practice is value laden, rooted in the biography of the teacher. The



interaction in the team of teachers plays an important role in raising awareness amongst the teachers of their individual 'subjective educational theory' and the collective and communal 'educational theory', in particular its religious and philosophical component. The Nijmegen theologian Chris Hermans (2001) uses the concept of abduction to indicate this type of process in which school identity emerges along the lines of non-rational, often intuitive and affective experiences, replacing and sometimes complementing logical reasoning on identity in a deductive way. What is needed is the phrasing of everyday's practice, a 'theory-in-use' (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Replacing the slogan 'Practice what you preach', we suggest the statement 'preach what you practice' in order to give a voice to people's actions, since without words the school's living identity cannot be communicated to outsiders, like new parents and young teachers who apply for a job. The deductive way of qualifying the identity of the school leaves out the teacher in favour of the school governors. And in the case one persists in a deductive approach, then the spectre of individual interpretations of the concept which should be applied shows a huge variety. The individual interpretation proves to be crucial. The inductive way, expressed in the motto 'Preach what you practice' sheds a new light on the school's identity, including the normative professionalism as it is rooted in the biography of each participant. 'Preach what you practice' does justice to the everyday efforts of the committed teacher, articulating the personal identity in formal lines on school identity.

### **Research on Identity Development of Primary Schools**

To explore the influence of life events of the professional's identity in an educational context, in particular in the context of the school and school identity, the interview is in general use as a research instrument. Most of the researchers are acquainted with interviewing as a method of data collection, but a wide range of types of interviewing can be distinguished. In this connection we mention the semi-structured and the open interview. The first form of an interview, the semi-structured interview, consists of a set of open and/or closed questions. The questions function as a lead through the interview. The interviewer invites the interviewee to give his or her answer to the questions, and asks for clarification if necessary. Semi-open interviews are used for example in research on a specific topic like the school career of newly arrived youngsters from abroad under the terms of family reunion, emergency measures for battered housewives, or professional career of women in a male context (Denzin, 2005). This type of interview was also used by Bakker & Rigg (2004) in the exploration

of the influence of life events referring to the development of their religious life view, in relation to their profession as a teacher of a formal Christian school.

The second type of interview, the open interview, is exemplified by the biographic interview of Kelchtermans (1994, 2000). Characteristic for this type of interview is that the interviewer has formulated some questions in advance, sentences however which do not call for straight answers, but act as elicitors for brainwaves and intuitive reactions to the question. It is the task of the interviewer to keep in mind the theme of the interview. The questions, formulated in advance, serve as a guideline for the interviewer.

Our so called dialogical interview used in the technique of the Self Confrontation Method (SCM) elaborates on the biographic interview technique of Kelchtermans (1994) which we have briefly mentioned above. However, it should be stressed at this point that there is an important difference. In both types of interviews mentioned above, it is the interviewer who asks the questions and interprets the given answers. In the dialogical interview there are no questions to be answered, but 'elicitors' to be reacted upon. The interviewer assists the interviewee to formulate in a succinct way the core of the answer that was formulated as a reaction on the 'elicitor'. Is it in Kelchtermans' approach that the researcher is identifying what incidents are characterized as 'critical' with respect to the life story of the person, in the SCM it is the person himself who, in close cooperation with the interviewer, decides upon the ultimate meaning of events and/or persons. The person concludes on the meaning of certain incidents not by logical reasoning, but by their non-rational and affectively experienced commitment, be it positive or negative. In a so called 'valuation', closely related to the concept of 'critical incident' as Kelchtermans uses this, the interviewee phrases important and at the manifest level still remembered incidents. In this way the interviewee reconstructs his life story. In relating to these incidents his feelings and emotions in affect scores, he unlocks the life story as it is there in a state of unawareness, at the so called latent level. Affects bridge from overt experiences to what had been hidden until now which makes the person aware of not yet known aspects of his life story, which shows up evidently in the correlation matrix. It is not the interviewer who interprets the reactions and the kind of commitment of the interviewee, on the contrary it is in a cooperative and dialogical process of the interviewer as researcher and the interviewee as co-researcher that meaning is given to the reactions of the interviewee and the quality of the relationship to the 'critical incidents' and 'critical persons'. The dialogical process is



external with the interviewer as well as an inner voice in the interviewee. The relationship between these two processes is supported by the correlation matrix.

Not only the active part the interviewee takes in this process is characteristic for the dialogical interview technique we used in elaborating the principal's role on the 'writing' of the school's identity, it is also the depth of the reconstruction process of the principal's biography and its 'critical incidents'. *Reflection* is focused on a string of events. At any point in the chain the person asks himself why he did what he did, whether it had been possible to act in a different way, with what kind of results. To raise awareness of one's own actions and reactions, to cause and effect, is the aim of this type of reflection. Thinking over events and situations that happened in the past and the effects they had and still have on the subjective theory on education, the SCM stimulates the *reflexion* upon the 'critical incidents' and the influence of 'critical persons'. Is *reflection* used to analyse relationships of cause and effect, *reflexion* is focused at the meaning a certain action has to the person, or what sense it makes to him to react in this way and not in any other way. In the process of reflexion questions on relationships to earlier 'critical incidents' in the person's life as a professional or even in his personal life are central. Not the question 'What did you do, and could you have acted in an other way, with what kind of consequences?' has to be answered, but the exploration of the question 'What made you choose this way of reacting out of your rich repertoire of reactions, what triggered you in this situation, what tender place was touched upon in this situation, what caused you to get stuck to an old groove?'. The SCM has proved to be a suitable instrument for reflexion, in facilitating the formulation of valuations and exploring their affective commitment (Hermans & Janssen, 1995). Reflexion is more than analysing the role and job responsibilities; besides that reflexion transcends the daily course of events and studies in depth the narrated life story of the teacher as a normative professional. With the help of the SCM the interviewee re-lives important moments in his live, is anew moved and becomes aware of their relatedness to today's processes of meaning construction. Is reflection aiming at finding out about cause and effect, reflexion is directed towards the (re)construction of meaning. In this dialogical process the principal's subjective theory on education and its religious components becomes more articulated as his life becomes clearer.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For over three years now and related to approximately ten primary schools, we

have been working on the construction of a theoretical framework to analyse the development of school identity in Christian primary schools, in a multicultural and multireligious context, and its relationship to the narrative identity of the principal being a strategic character in the process of the school. The above described dialogical interview has served as an instrument in facilitating the process of gaining insight into the development of the personal as well as the professional identity of the school's principal. The starting point of the narrative interview is in the biographic interview of Kelchtermans but its detailed elaboration is mainly inspired by the Self Confrontation Method (SCM), which has been developed by Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995). Apart from functioning mere as a method and diagnostic instrument, the SCM also contributes to the *development* of the principal's theme of his leadership, in particular the inevitably close relationship with the development of the school's identity. As the 'primus inter pares' the principal is not just taking part in the talks and discussions on the school's identity. The principal plays a distinct role. The biography of the principal in particular seems to be of importance in the process of articulating clearly the identity of the school. In the next paragraph we will explore this inter-relatedness: the process of putting into words aptly the identity of the school as it is related to the biography of the leader of that process. The 'Self' of the principal and his life theme are at stake.

#### The valuation theory

The concept of the 'Self' takes a central position in the valuation theory. Hermans describes this concept as 'an organised system of valuations' (Hermans and Hermans-Janssen, 1995). The terminology already shows that Hermans' starting point is the valuation by the person of events, situations and other persons in his or her life. As people cannot not communicate, in the same way people cannot live without appreciating, valuing and interpreting; it is the way to construct meaning, to make sense of one's life. The actions as they are told of in the life story and – in the dialogical interview with the help of the SCM technique - phrased in valuations, according to the valuation theory always are motivated either in favour of strengthening the Self (the S-motive) or in favour of commitment to the Other (the O-motive). We will come back to the distinction between these two motives in the paragraphs four and five, commenting upon the data of two of the principals participating in our research project.

The influence and effectiveness of both motives in the Self concept is described



by Hermans in the valuation theory (1981, 1985, 1986, 1995). Central to the valuation theory is the person as a motivated storyteller. Hermans states that people's behaviour is always – either conscious or pre-conscious – intentional behaviour. In some way or another behaviour is always motivated either by a need to recognise one's own strength (or by the shortage of it) or by solidarity with others (or a lack of it). Hermans speaks of the S-motive, in the case that the person is oriented towards (the expansion of) one's own strength, for example in joining a political party to feel more secure about one's fundamental life view. Although, whenever active participation in a political party is focused upon belonging to the party or adhering to the fundamentals of that party, Hermans speaks of an expression of the O-motive. Significant in that case is the aspect of 'belonging to', the need of commitment from persons or a higher order. Dependent upon the context, the S- or the O-motive can be dominant in the person. Characteristic of Herman's approach is the fact that neither of the two motives is more valued than the other. On the contrary, he states that both motives are essential in the healthy person via flexible cooperation, alternation and complementarity. The two motives, active and recognised in a variety of intrapersonal voices, are in a permanent dialogue with each other, resulting in a pattern of alternating dominance of the motives. In one situation it is of importance that a person behaves in an assertive way (S-motive), other occasions may ask for more altruistic behaviour (O-motive).

Valuation theory offers a coherent instrument to describe the nature and the strength of the commitment persons experience in relation to important life events (Hermans and Hermans-Jansen, 1995). The nature and the intensity of the S- and O-motive, as well as the flexibility between the two motives, according to Hermans, are a measure of development. Hermans describes development as a process, in which the person is alternately dominantly focused on the need for belonging (attachment behaviour, the O-motive) or the need for strengthening and stimulating self-esteem (competitive behaviour, the S-motive; see also Hermans 1981, 1985, 1986). The ultimate aim of development in this view is the flexible interaction between the S- and the O-motive. Typical for the valuation theory is that none of the two motives is seen as more important for a healthy person. In contrary, according to the valuation theory the identity of a person consists of a characteristic flexibility of interaction between two equally important basic motives, the S- and the O-motive represented as inner voices of the Self. Voices that are heard in the life story of the person and constitute his narrative identity being a dynamic process of progressive insight in the relation of the multi voiced Self to his context. In the multi-voiced Self a harmonious balance

alternates with situations of cacophonous imbalance.

With the concept of 'valuation' in the valuation theory, Hermans points at the meaning that is given by the person – the narrator – to some well described events or well identified persons out of his life story, or out of collective stories. Some of the highly interesting valuations of two of the principals participating in our research project are presented below as an example. These valuations are interesting in relation to their life theme as well as to the course of the SIC<sup>1</sup>, to which we will return later.

Principal Willem Boer:

*'The teachers explore different new methods on teaching geography; I don't interfere.'*

*'The view of the management on self steering education is not known by the teachers. I give them freedom to develop their own view.'*

Principal Greet Tempelman:

*'I see a mother at the entrance of the school, in former days she looked like a grey little mouse. Now she feels at ease with me, and she shows that with pride to others. I see her flourishing'*

*'At the end of the holiday I arrived at school, seeing an empty office. I say to myself: OK, what are we going to do first?'*

To arrive at the phrasing of the valuations like this the interviewee and the interviewer (the 'helper') work together in close cooperation. 'Elicitors' are used to start the narration of the person, resulting in his autobiography phrased in some twenty or thirty valuations. In our research the focus is on the professional biography of the person. 'Elicitors' comprise the past, the present and the future. An example of an elicitor inquiring the past is: 'Whom are you still now and then thinking of, or to what event do your thoughts dwell upon now and then?' An example of an elicitor exploring the present is: 'What gives me a lot of fun', or: 'What irritates me severely'. Directed towards the future is the elicitor 'This is how I see myself in ten years time'. In a dialogical process the person and the 'helper' arrive at the phrasing of the valuations. A valuation is a statement about an important experience in a certain period in the life of the person. Above we quoted anonymously some valuations of the principals who

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<sup>1</sup> The process of the SIC is extensively elaborated upon in Bakker & Ter Avest, 2005.



participate in our research project. In general some twenty or thirty valuations together form the autobiography of the person, called the valuation system. To gain insight in the leading theme of the principal's thoughts on his subjective educational theory is the aim of the dialogical interview. Insight in the underlying motivations of his actions is developed by relating his feelings to the phrased valuations. Out of a list of twenty four affects (like joy, anger, self esteem and helplessness) the person indicates for each of all the valuations of his valuation system to what extent he experiences the marked feeling. The pattern of experienced and marked feelings refers to the basic motives underlying all human actions.

Of the above given evaluations we present now the affect pattern as it refers to the underlying S- and O-motive (S= affect terms referring to the Self; O= affect terms referring to the other; P=positive affect terms; N=negative affect terms):

	S	O	P	N
Principal Willem Boer:				
<i>'The teachers explore different new methods on teaching geography; I don't interfere.'</i>	3	1	6	18
<i>'The view of the management on self steering education is not known by the teachers. I give them freedom to develop their own view.'</i>	2	0	6	20
	S	O	P	N
Principal Greet Tempelman:				
<i>'I see a mother at the entrance of the school, in former days she looked like a grey little mouse. Now she feels at ease with me, and she shows that with pride to others. I see her flourishing'</i>	13	15	35	0
<i>'At the end of the holiday I arrived at school, seeing an empty office. I say to myself: OK, what are we going to do first?'</i>	17	9	35	0

The next step in the SCM is the computation of the correlation of the scores of the set of valuations, the valuation system, which is the starting point for the modality analysis in the second meeting of the researcher and the principal. It is in this meeting



that the life theme emerges out of the process of clarification of the underlying motives as it is indicated by the correlating valuations. At the end of this second meeting most of the time persons have gained insight in the state of affairs in relation to their concern as they formulated it at the start of the SCM. In this case the concern always was related to the (religious aspects of the) SIC.

Above we have elaborated upon the theoretical framework of our research project. In the next paragraph we present the research design we developed in order to answer our questions on the relationship between the personal and professional identity and life theme of the school's principal and the process of identity development of the school.

### Research design

The evaluation of our pilot project on identity development in Christian primary schools in one of the big cities in The Netherlands uncovered the important factor of the principal's central role in the SIC (Bakker & Ter Avest 2003, 2005). From this insight we developed our research design to explore in more detail the principal's subjective educational theory, its religious components and the way this is embedded in his biography. Starting from the academic year 2003-2004 we interviewed each principal who decided to start the SIC in his school. In this interview we focus on the development of Self-insight by means of the actualisation of until then hidden experiences in relation to the topic of identity development of the school. We expect these insights to play an important role in the SIC-process. In sum twenty one principals accepted the invitation for the dialogical interview, preceding the start of SIC. This interview is structured according to SCM-protocol: one session to phrase the valuations, one session to discuss the outcome of the computerised analyses of the valuations, the so called modality analysis, followed by the so called validation period in which the persons allow themselves either to direct the attention to any topical moment of their life theme or to experiment with newly developed behaviour. The starting point of the SIC process is the dialogical interview of the principal. The exploration of the possible relation between the narration of the principal and the SIC process is central in our research project.

The questions we wish to answer are:

1. What is the main concern of the principal related the SIC to be started?



2. In what way is this main concern related to the plot of the (professional) biography of the principal?
3. In what way and to what extent is the principal's plot related to the dynamic process of the SIC in his school?

In the next paragraph we will present as an example the portrait of the two principals, introduced above by their valuations. In this paragraph we also give an impression of the process of SIC of the principal's school. The portraits and the fragments of the SIC will be put in a meaningful relationship.

#### Presentation of results and discussion

In this paragraph we portrait the principals of two primary schools. This portrait emerged out of the dialogue on the computed correlations in their valuation system.

The schools these two principals work at, belong to an organisation for Christian primary education in one of the biggest cities in the Netherlands. The organisation is an independent body (even in the juridical sense) with its own governing board. Both are working on school with a high percentage of immigrant children, whose parents are Muslims. Two different persons who shape the SIC process in their school, with their teachers in a unique way in an interdependent relationship with their narrative and personal life theme(s).

#### *Willem Boer*

Willem Boer is forty years of age. On educational issues he supports to make way in the forming of opinion of his teachers. He argues that people should practice activities they excel in. 'I efface myself', is his statement, 'For example I don't give my opinion on a new method in reading or geography, in order to allow each teacher to show her qualities in analysing the pro's and con's of the new method. In relation to the school's identity in a changing multicultural context he says: 'I do not take a vigorous position'. 'I am not a strong and straight person', he says, talking about his own personality. He knows that some of his teachers do have some expectations in relation to leadership and shaping the school's identity, resulting from his position of headmaster. 'I do not wish to live up to those expectations', he says, summarizing in this way his life theme. 'Of course I do have ideas about the school's identity. It can't be the same as some twenty or thirty years ago'. 'It's just like a dress of the sixties, it may



not be worn out, but you don't dress with it anymore'. His point of view has not yet been communicated to his team of teachers, 'I will do that after the others have been able to speak themselves out on this topic'.

His leadership style shows a shadow of democracy. He asks his team members to give their opinion on important school affairs, but refuses to give his own opinion as an input for the process of construction of a shared view on the affairs under discussion. As a result the process of identity development in the school was hold up. This was demonstrated very clearly by a voting procedure on a complex, closely related to the Christian identity of the school. The question decided on by vote was whether or not during classes a Muslim assisting teacher might be given permission to wear her headscarf. All team members, the Christian teachers as well as their Islamic colleagues, felt highly involved in this topic. The principal however refused to give his well underpinned arguments. Without a thorough reflection and reflexion upon the subject, it was decided by a majority of votes that headscarfs would be forbidden during classes. For fear of an emotional discussion on religious education, a decision was taken that no one felt did justice to the authentic religiosity of each of the participants. Although every one involved expected to be released from such a complex topic as religious diversity in a Christian school, in fact, everyone, including the principal felt uneasy with the decision taken.

### *Greet Tempelman*

Greet is an open minded person, forty-nine years of age. She is always willing to have a chat, waiting at the school's entrance to meet the parents who bring their children. She very strongly feels committed to the parents, originating from Turkey or Morocco and facing many difficulties in raising their children in the Dutch society. 'I know how difficult it is to raise children, I myself am a mother!', she uses to say to the mothers. She takes the perspective of the parents and shows empathy towards them. Characteristic in Greet's attitude is that she usually makes room for others, in a space though she herself occupies it with assertive behaviour. Monopolizing as well as sharing space, in both senses of the word literally and figuratively, is central in her life theme. She characterizes her behaviour as 'emancipated', a way of doing she would like her teachers also to show.

Her friendliness is not only directed towards the parents of her pupils, she is also a very empathetic person to her teachers. In the same way that she takes the



perspective of the parents, she does so for the teachers: 'I know the classroom situation, I was a teacher myself!'. This attitude results in the willingness to help others to cope with difficult situations, which sometimes results in the finding of solutions for the problems the teacher was complaining about. On the other hand she expects her teachers to act autonomously and she actively stimulates them in self-steering behaviour as well as exploration of new pedagogical attitudes. The assertive behaviour that is her part, she'd like to see from each teacher in her team. 'Your own opinion, that's what I like to know. Do express to me what you want me to know!', is what she tells her teachers.

As for the process of identity development (SIC) in her school her stimulating of emancipatory behaviour accompanied with solving the problems for the teachers, results in an ad-hoc identity, shaped by the daily troubles that need solutions and never are thoroughly reflected upon.

### **Preliminary Findings, Discussion and Recommendations**

As we have indicated in the beginning of this contribution, we understand identity as a process rather than a product to be reached after puberty (for individuals) or after thoroughly orchestrated organizational processes. We took as our starting point the definition De Wolff phrased, that has as its central concept 'characteristics'. The schools that participated in our project all are schools with a formal Christian identity, which in a narrow conception of school identity points at morning prayer, biblical stories that are told and Christian songs at the opening of the day. What strikes us when we analyse the SCM interviews and the life themes the principals formulated, as well as the SIC discussions that it is not these daily routines that are subject of deliberations, but far more often personal opinions, subjective educational theories and aspects of the mutual cooperation. In the schools of Willem Boer and Greet Tempelman these were the topics that showed in a clear way the characteristic of the leadership style of the principal that resulted in a characteristic of the school. Characteristic in the school of Willem Boer is their indecisiveness caused by his life theme to hide his opinions resulting in teachers' awaiting attitude. As is known from literature (Lewis, 2002) stress may cause a back fall in earlier routines as might be the case for Willem Boer. In the interview he stated that he is aware of certain expectations from his teachers concerning appropriate behaviour for a principal, mentioning at the same time that he is not willing to live up to those expectations. Different inner voices are heard by Willem



Boer, voices that are involved in a contradictory dialogue and that create a dilemma for him. Which voice should he allow to give dominance in his multi voiced self? This dilemma might result in stress causing the back fall to recurrent dialogical routines learned in earlier periods in his life, that today put sincere limits on the dialogical process with his teachers.

In Greet Tempelman's school her double mindedness of stimulating emancipation of her teachers while at the same time solving any problem they mention, results in a school's characteristic of ad-hoc identity. In Greet Tempelman's valuation system we find a clear statement on the attitude of her teachers in which she says:

	S	O	P	N
'Marlies said: I have to talk with you, you should not stop me in doing my own thing'.	9	17	18	27

As we see in the affect scores of this valuation there is a high negative score. What strikes most is that this is mainly caused by high scores for anger and powerlessness. Literature shows that such feelings hinder recently acquired but still to be established routines, they block attitudes to live up to professional standards or obstruct highly desired behaviour. We know from Greet Tempelman that her own emancipatory behaviour and her wish to train her teachers in that way, interferes with her friendliness to solve anybody's problems. Two voices are speaking in a contradictory way: as a friendly person she wishes to solve problems for others, as a principal she wishes her teachers to solve their own problem. These voices are triggered to speak up by contextual aspects, like a teacher who calls for a friend's chat instead of a professional conversation. Greet Tempelman mixing up these voices creates an attitude of learned helplessness of her teacher, which she does not appreciate at all in her strive for emancipated colleagues. She is aware of this contradiction which makes her angry for herself. This might be the hindrance to make way for the teachers to develop their own characteristic way of being an emancipated woman.

These preliminary findings of our research project would seem to call for focused coaching of principals in their role of leader of the SIC. Not only should this coaching process focus on aspects of situational leadership and explore the variety in the repertoire of actions the director already has at her or his disposal. What we learned from our research process, the new knowledge we constructed on the base of



our data, strengthens the position that in our view the focus of the coaching process should be on the life theme of the principal, in particular on the old grooves persons easily stuck into when stress is induced. We suggest a method in which the validation process of the SCM should be shaped according to the two characteristics of the validation process: starting from the diagnostic point and aiming at encouraging further flexibility in S- and O-positions of the Self. Needed for that is the further exploration of the valuation system of the principal, in which the search for possibilities to overcome the signalled hindrance must be central. This will stimulate the development of the principal as a reflective as well as a reflexive professional who will be able to actively mobilize her or his strength in respect to developing the identity of the school in an inductive process.

As for Willem Boer this might result in articulating his hiding for taking up the responsibility that belongs to his role as a leader. A leader who is responsive to his team, and answers their need to be inspired and motivated, and adds from his knowledge and experience to their process of professional development.

As for Greet a coaching validation process might stress the need to separate more clearly the two messages that she sends with her behaviour, and to flexibly make use of them according to the context. At some moment Greet definitively should be an assertive, or emancipated, person; other moments ask for a withholding attitude. Flexibility can be developed by stimulating her to take the perspective of the opponent person in situations that she empathizes strongly with parents or teachers.

Instead of making use of real life events in taking the perspective of the other, also stories can be of use for this identification process. Willem and Greet, being principals in Christian schools, might profit from working with biblical stories<sup>2</sup>.

The above described process of SIC as well of SCM is strongly influenced by constructivist theories. The actor in these theories is the autonomous person, open to the opinion of others, prepared to learn from others or even change his mind, More research is needed in the (im)possibility of applying these ideas on identity development in Islamic schools with an Islamic principal, in order to facilitate them to play an active role in writing and reading their school's identity as 'a living document'.

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<sup>2</sup> This aspect is elaborated upon by Vloet & Ter Avest, 2006.

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