Networker and Intermediary. The Role of the Culture Coordinator in Schools

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Networker and intermediary: the role of the culture coordinator in schools

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the role of the culture coordinator in general formal education, in primary and secondary schools in the Netherlands. This article describes how they function in their professional environment and in contact with artists, providers of educational programs, and cultural institutions. In order to describe the everyday practice of the work of a coordinator and to bring to light the network in which they operate, a group of teachers kept a logbook for one year, describing per week what they did, and which issues concerned them most. The article concludes that the position of the coordinator is fragile, because of its dependency on personal relations with cultural institutions and as a result of the pressure from regular teaching tasks.

KEYWORDS

Arts education; foundational education; collaboration; logbooks

Introduction

Most primary and secondary schools in the Netherlands have appointed one of their teachers as culture coordinator in school (CCS). These coordinators are responsible for cultural activities such as museum visits, hiring external expertise when the school does not employ for instance a dance or drama teacher, and for writing and upholding the school's cultural policy, in which the aim of arts and cultural education is described, as well as an outline of the annual programme. In elementary schools, the position of the CCS has been stimulated by a national subsidy and training programme starting in 2004 in order to provide a counterbalance to the low number of arts teachers working in schools. Government-sponsored training modules for culture coordinators sought to improve both the quality and the status of the function and regular evaluation cycles kept track of the number of coordinators, which nation-wide lies around 90% (Grinten et al., 2008; Hagenaars, 2020; Meerkerk, 2012).

In secondary education, the position of the coordinator is less prominent, but they are nevertheless widely seen. Apparently, schools feel the need for a coordinator to stimulate cultural activities. The work of a secondary-school CCS is mainly focused on exchanges with cultural offerings from outside the school, because in contrast to primary schools, high schools do employ professional arts teachers. In both primary and secondary education, the CCS is the contact person for institutions and arts educators outside school. In most towns and cities, an intermediary institution offers arrangements for both in and after school offerings, traditionally referred to as the 'culture menu'. A CCS will draw from the menu and from possible personal connections to create a programme for guest lessons, workshops, project weeks, and excursions. The basis for this choice is the school's cultural policy, often written together by the CCS and the school director. Within school, the CCS is responsible for enthusing colleagues in participating in the programme they drafted (www.lkca.nl/publicatie/dossier-icc; last consulted 26 January 2022).

Despite the prominent place of culture coordinators in schools in all foundational education in the Netherlands, there has been no detailed study of their work and their position up to now. The same is by and large true for other countries (a notable exception is Miksza, 2013). This article is therefore the first to ask how they function in their school environment and in contact with artists, providers of educational programs, and cultural institutions. To find this out, seven culture coordinators were asked to keep a weekly log of their activities for one year.

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The Culture Coordinator in School (CCS) is a widespread phenomenon in Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world (Carter & Roucher, 2020; McKinley Hedgecoth & Major, 2019; Miszka, 2013; Stankiewicz, 2001; Theriot & Tice, 2008), but even internationally, research on their role is scarce. Articles in which they do feature focus on success factors in bridging the gap with local communities (Carter & Roucher, 2020; Stankiewicz, 2001) or acquiring support from funders and government (Miszka, 2013; McKinley Hedgecoth & Major, 2019). Their role in school, as members of a team and intermediaries between team and school board on one side, and between the school and cultural partners, the community, and local governments on the other, has so far received no special attention, although they occasionally feature in papers on other aspects of education (e.g., Theriot & Tice, 2008).

There is a widely felt need to establish partnerships between schools and cultural institutions in many countries (Bamford et al., 2006). The low status of the school subject (Helton, 2021) has resulted in a low number of teachers and teaching hours for the subject (Meerkerk & IJdens, 2018). At the same time, cultural institutions are hard-pressed by subsidizing governments to attract larger numbers of visitors and to perform an educational role in society (Schrijvers, 2018). Both sides therefore experience a strong stimulus to cooperate: the schools want to supplement their small staff, while the cultural institution may hope to count the children as additional visitors—with the hope of a sustainable relationship later in life (O'Brien, 2001; Rademaker, 2004; Richerme et al., 2012). Indeed, audience reach, measure by ticket sales, in the Netherlands is one of the criteria for government subsidy (Meerkerk & IJdens, 2018).

Research into cultural partnerships with schools focuses mostly on external relationships, without paying attention to the role of the person in school who functions as the intermediary, while stressing the complex nature of the outside partnerships (Bowen & Kisida, 2017). The fact that schools employ a CCS is, however, an indicator that the school has an interest in maintaining the relationship but needs someone to make the relationship sustainable. It has been suggested that partnerships between schools and cultural institutions benefit the latter most (Bumgarner Gee, 1997) or threaten the position of arts educators in school (Davis, 1994). In the same vein, Hanley (2003, p. 14) criticizes the "drop-in basis of artists-in-the-schools-programs," for their failure to generate long-term effects of the cooperation. In other words: the CCS may also serve a role of protecting the school's interests.

The specific goals of arts partnership programmes differ per time and country. Three overall trends can be distilled: firstly, partnerships for social purposes, such as community building and prevention of dropouts (Carlisle, 2011; Davis, 1994). Secondly, partnerships have been organized to stimulate creativity, both in terms of personal development and to stimulate the creative industries (Hall & Thomson, 2007; Colley, 2008). Improving the quality of education is the final type of intended outcome of cultural partnership programmes (Bowen & Kisida, 2017; Griffiths & Woolf, 2009; Hanley, 2003). In some cases, the goals encompassed all of the above (e.g., Charlton, 2007). Browsing through all these articles makes it clear that assessing the outcomes of such partnerships is far from easy, given the different backgrounds and interests of the parties involved.

In the case of the Netherlands, arts education has played an important part in cultural policy since the 1990s (Meerkerk & IJdens, 2018). While arts and culture are part of the official end terms of the curriculum of elementary schools, most elementary schools do not employ arts teachers, and arts and culture programmes rely solely on additional, temporal funding (Ibid.). Over past decades, there has been a continuous tension between the policy goals and the bandwidth in which schools were able to operate (IJdens, 2018; IJdens & Hoorn, 2014). This has resulted in a crucial role for school partnerships (Konings & Heusden, 2014), which has been noted elsewhere as well (Carter & Roucher, 2020).

This raises questions on the intermediary making the exchange possible: the CCS. Miszka (2013) concluded that the CCS indeed plays an essential part in the status of the arts in school. This conclusion makes it important for arts education policy programmes to stimulate the appointment of a CCS in school. The lack of understanding of the everyday practice of a CCS, on the other hand, makes it problematic for such a policy to determine the focus of the task and training of these functionaries. What we do know is that the work of a CCS relies heavily on the individual collaborations taking place. Purnell (2008) was one of the first to explicitly address the interpersonal relationships involved in teacher-artist collaborations. She concluded that both teachers and artists attribute most value to a pragmatic communication between informed professionals, in which equality and trust are valued mutually. These conclusions from interviews with teaching artists and teachers leave unanswered what the everyday practice of the collaboration looks like and which relations in this collaboration exist are important for the direct

interaction between a teacher and the artist teaching her or his class. The present article will look into this side of the organization of arts education in schools. The main questions are: how do CCS perceive their own role and who are they working with most and closest and what does this mean for arts education policy? Even though this article draws from a case study in the Netherlands, the above referenced examples indicate that the situation is similar elsewhere and can also benefit from a deeper understanding of the practice of culture coordination in school.

Materials and methods

By snowball sampling, starting from the personal network of the author, seven CCS were recruited to keep a weekly log of their daily work—both as coordinators and as teachers. One participant had to withdraw from the project after half a year due to personal circumstances; her logs were used in this article nonetheless, as the entries in the first half year provided adequate information for the analysis. Though statistically a small number, the participants represent a variety of schools and communities that enables us to give a clear description of the daily routines of most CCS in the Netherlands, especially when considering the high consistency of their responses. This makes the results meaningful also outside the Netherlands. By taking the respondents as a sample for the entire population, differences between different (types of) areas within the country cannot be accounted for, such as the influence of the social make-up of the school population or the difference between the metropolitan area in the West, with a high density and differentiation of cultural offerings, and the provincial areas, where a local marching band and a music school in a nearby town may be the only options directly available.

The contributions resulted in almost 260 school weeks (40 per teacher per year) being described in the logbooks. At the beginning of the year, the participants wrote a self-portrait as a culture coordinator, based on a series of questions (Appendix A). The coordinators then wrote a weekly logbook following a semi-structured format (Appendix B), answering a number of factual questions, with space for personal additions and reflections. Logbooks were used because they offer a detailed insight in the everyday practice of the participants. Using logbooks as a research tool has been described as an effective way of approaching the lived experiences of subjects without direct, on site, intervention by the researcher, also in the context of education (Meerkerk, 2017; Sheble & Wildemuth, 2009).

The group of participants consisted of five women and two men. Their schools are in three larger cities and four smaller towns, spread over the Netherlands. Coordinator A was a 43-year-old male working in a school in the downtown of a large city who had been working as a teacher for thirteen years. Becoming a CCS was his own initiative. He described himself as a 'searcher' who is strong in organizational matters, but who finds it sometimes hard to find inspiration. Coordinator B was a 42-year-old female working in a smaller town in the relative vicinity of larger cities for sixteen years. She was asked to become the school's first CCS by the director, and she describes herself as 'enthusiastic, slightly chaotic, and active'. Coordinator C was a 55-year-old female working for 13 years at a school in a mixed neighborhood of a larger city. She had taken the initiative to become a CCS and she describes herself as having the ambition to anchor cultural education in the curriculum and in the minds of her colleagues. Coordinator D was a female in her late fifties, working part-time in school and part-time as a drama teacher. She had been working at her school for 32 years by then and had been the first CCS in school, having had to apply for the function. She describes herself as someone pushing others on, connecting people and organizing things. Coordinator E was a 28-year-old male working at this school for three years. He was asked to become a CCS by a colleague and has since fulfilled the task with her as a team. He did not want to typify himself as a coordinator but given his entries in the logs it is clear that he is an efficient worker as well as someone who is ambitious in pursuing an administrative career in school. Coordinator F was a 59-year-old female working for this school for 38 years. She describes herself as committed, inspired, and at times impatient.

The participants kept their logs from January until December 2017, sending in a total of 259 logs of between 400 and 2,000 words each. The logs were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti (version 8). The logs were coded selectively for references to people the coordinators were in contact with (both names and functions, individually and collectively), as well as for references to the kind of contact (a meeting, a talk, etc.). It was also marked whether individuals were referred to by their names or by their function, as an indicator for the degree of familiarity of the contact. The codes were then connected to other (in-vivo) codes. These codes appeared during the coding process. Whenever they appeared in the same sentence as the a-priori codes

they were marked in order to establish the interconnection of certain groups and/or individuals, as well as the interconnection of ways of contact and the groups or individuals (Saldaña et al., 2013).

The final field in the form for the logs asked what concerned the CCS most at the moment, split between their coordinating role and their work as a teacher. The answers to this question were analyzed more deeply, in order to put the results from the analysis described above into perspective. These answers were coded via open coding and axial coding (Saldaña et al., 2013) in order to reveal the patterns in the urgent matters the coordinators felt or experienced and to contextualize the findings from the first round of coding.

Results

In the following, the results from the analysis of the logbooks are presented. First, the self-portraits written by the participants are presented, giving a background for the other findings. Next, the logbooks are analyzed for the contacts mentioned by the respondents. Finally, the answers to the question 'What concerns you most at this moment' are analyzed in order to put the other findings in perspective.

Self portraits

The self-portraits contain mostly factual information, but also ask for the participants' view of their role and the practice of coordination. The formal tasks were very much in line and reflect a primarily bureaucratic nature of the task of a CCS: budgets, task allocation, planning, etcetera. There is a considerable agreement among the coordinators regarding their (intended) role in drafting the school's cultural policy. In three cases, the coordinator was the (co) author of the document, in two cases the document predated their appointment, and they expressed the ambition to rewrite it. In only one case, there was no formal policy document, and the coordinator was the first in this role. This is also reflected in the way they became a coordinator: most had explicitly taken the initiative and one of the coordinators had been asked by the school director as the obvious candidate. Only one of the participants had taken up the task as one of the extra jobs that needed doing in school. Four coordinators worked alone, two with a small team of colleagues and one with one other colleague. One item where the answers agreed was the amount of freedom they experienced in their work as coordinator (which they experience as considerable), although two of them mention organizational or financial restrictions to their autonomy. While the above indicates a strong personal involvement of the CCS in their work, it can also be a risk. When working alone and independently or with a small team of colleagues, they run the risk of everyone else remaining uninterested, as we shall see below.

The background of the respondents varied from being a trained artist, via having been brought up in a culturally active family to personal preferences. All express the desire to be more active as a culture consumer. Two are not active as an (amateur) artist, the other five describe themselves as an actor, a painter, a costume designer, a DJ, or a musician. They view themselves as enthusiastic colleagues, seeking to inspire their team. Interestingly, only two of the participants mention artistic or cultural talents as a personal characteristic. In other words, they consider themselves amateurs at best, despite being relatively active in the arts. This does not indicate a high degree of self-esteem.

The self-portraits revealed that the participants generally experienced a lot of autonomy in their work, which went hand-in-hand with the fact that most of them had to (re) write the school's cultural policy and received little if any support from colleagues other than the director. In other words, the CCS feel that their work mainly rests on their shoulders: "Taking responsibility […] is considered too difficult." (Coordinator F, 2–6 October 2017) While they did not complain about this, the analysis of the issues that concerned them most revealed that their work as a CCS is under pressure from their regular teaching tasks. And while all participants—not unexpectedly—expressed a personal interest in the arts, none of them were trained as arts teachers; each had to rely on (mostly outside) professionals, and occasionally parents, to provide the content for the arts classes.

Contacts

Of the codes indicating regular contact, the code 'meeting' ('overleg', 'vergadering') appears most often. These and other more formal contacts happen mainly with the school director, as well as with the 'duo' (a co-teacher with whom a class is shared when working part-time), colleagues, the intern, and the cultural coordination team. The art teachers, however, are seldom mentioned. The word 'together' (Dutch: 'samen'), separately and in the compound 'samenwerking'/'samenwerken' ('collaboration'/'collaborate') also appears frequently in the logs. The code co-occurs

Table 1. Contact frequency and familiarity.

	Occurrence	First name	Rel. familiarity
Director	363	144	39,7%
Colleague	315	83	26,3%
Cultural institution	339	39	11,5%
Pupil	1,206	34	2,8%
Intern	332	33	9,9%
Culture team	151	15	9,9%
Parents	677	8	1,2%
Arts teacher (int.)	37	5	13,5%

most often with 'colleague', 'cultural partner organization', and 'parent(s)'. The school director, arts teacher, or team leader do not co-occur strongly with 'together'. A third code indicating direct contact, 'conversation' ('gesprek'), co-occurs most strongly with parents, colleagues, pupils, and the school director. Bilateral contacts clearly take place mostly on occasion of teaching matters, also when it concerns the art teachers. These first numbers suggest an inward-directed sense of collaboration of the coordinator when it comes to active contact and cooperation. In more formal contacts, the school director is the most important contact by far, while the more informal contacts happen with other colleagues, which is a first indication of a hierarchy of contacts.

Contacts who were referred to by first name have also been coded, to see whether patterns of familiarity might arise that could indicate something about the nature of different contacts. 606 references to first names were found, some in the same sentence, for instance in referring to members of the culture team in school (Table 1). The table shows the co-occurrence of a contact code with the code 'first name'. The results show that the CCS refers to the director by first name far more than to any other contact. The co-occurrence of first names with pupils is almost completely explained by the fact that they are mentioned as part of a reference to a colleague (or team leader) with whom the CCS speaks about children. The same is true for the co-occurrence of parents and first names, with one exception, where a parent had an arts background and helped with in-class workshops. So, while the school director is associated with more formal occasions, they are at the same time the most familiar in terms of first name use.

The first name references further indicate a relatively strong familiarity with the director, the arts teacher in school, the contact person of cultural institutions, interns, and members of the culture team in school. In an absolute sense, however, colleagues, pupils, and to a lesser extent parents are mentioned far more than the other contact groups. This allows us to draw a network map of the contacts of the CCS (Figure 1), in which the thickness of the lines

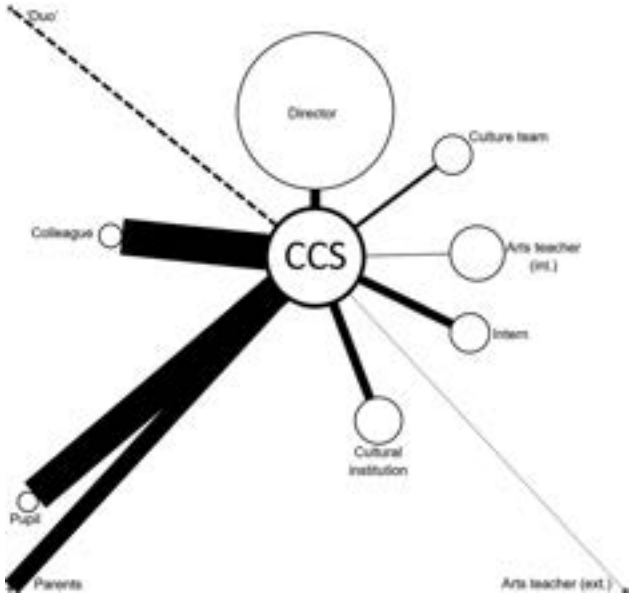

Figure 1. Familiarity and frequency.

indicates the strength (frequency) of the connection and the distance from the CCS as well as the size of the circle the relative familiarity. We have chosen for relative familiarity to indicate in how many instances of the total number of contacts first names were used, to circumvent the influence of frequency on familiarity. The rings are positioned with teacher-related contacts on the left and arts-related contacts on the right.

This visualization helps to reveal the connections and oppositions between familiar, first-name based, contacts and frequent contacts. The greatest difference is that between the director, who is referred to (far) more often than any other contact and who is at the same time the person called by her or his first name most, again with considerable difference with the rest. The second most frequent contact, colleagues, likely benefits from being a group—for each individual contact the frequency would of course be considerably lower. This is not so much the case for cultural institutions, as the CCS each mention a relatively small number of institutions. In the case of parents and children the frequency is also influenced by the group size, where in the case of the children (as mentioned above) the first-name frequency is obscured by the mention of colleagues in the same sentence.

After the director, the most familiar contacts appear to be the arts teacher, contact persons from cultural institutions, interns, and the culture team. In the case of interns this is probably explained by hierarchical relationship and age difference. In the other cases, it could indicate a closer connection to these contacts compared to other contacts. It is interesting to note the difference between the network that exists in the everyday life in

school, in which the 'duo', other colleagues, and pupils are nearest, and the network that is important for a CCS. Figure 1 visualizes how a relatively distant contact, the director, appears closer, both in frequency and in familiarity. Contact persons from cultural institutions are also more familiar than for instance the 'duo', who is never referred to by first name. Obviously, the participants and their 'duo' were all on first-name basis (in Dutch elementary schools teachers are even addressed by first name by their pupils), but as they kept their logs in their capacity as a CCS, they apparently experienced a distance between this role and the colleague who, in the end, is the most important person when it comes to their 'real' job: teaching.

The exceptional position of the director prompts further investigation. The code co-occurs most often with codes relating to communication (meetings, chats, phone, email) and conversation. These exchanges most often concern pupils and subsidies. The code colleagues is also often mentioned in the same sentence, referring to colleagues who were either present or with whom the meeting or email had been discussed beforehand. The references to children all come from the logbooks of one of the participants, who must therefore be considered an outlier in this case. In other words: contact with the director nearly always concerns permissions and subsidies for the CCS tasks. This direct and frequent involvement with facilitating the work of the CCS may explain the high score on familiarity of the director. As coordinator A wrote: "It is a difficult question. Will the school management give us carte blanche? Or is it wiser to do a smaller production?" (Coordinator A, 28 January–3 February 2017)

The other relatively familiar contacts are in order of first name use the arts teacher in school, the contact person from a cultural institution, the culture team, and the intern. The code for arts teacher in school co-occurs most often with 'colleague' and 'communication'. These references reveal a clear hierarchical relation between the CCS and the arts teacher where the latter is tasked, instructed, or briefed on their role in activities that have been planned by the CCS (with the approval of the director). The code for the contact person of a cultural institution co-occurs most with 'communication': most references are for emails written or phone calls made. So, while the contact person is familiar enough to be referenced by first name, the connection is physically distanced. The code for culture team co-occurs most (by a considerable length) with meetings. The sentences in which this occurs clearly reveal the role of the culture team as a sounding board for the work of the CCS. First-name references to interns are all about instructing them and giving them feedback on their lessons and are less relevant to the CCS task.

This analysis reveals the important role of the director for the work of the CCS. Other important people in this 'web of sustainable relationships' (Carlisle, 2011) are direct colleagues, mainly those in the 'culture team', and representatives from cultural institutions. These contacts are both relatively familiar and frequent. While the central role of the director in school may seem obvious, it is also a critical factor in the sustainability of the cultural partnership: the arrival of a new director can easily change the landscape fundamentally (Meerkerk, 2020). The importance of the director for the work of a CCS also serves to nuance the relative autonomy the participants said to experience in their work. In the end, a CCS will need the back-up of a director, especially when colleagues are unwilling: "The director has been angry about it with the rebellious colleagues, I can understand that, but it does not give the intended atmosphere. We shall see, maybe it is not so bad." (Coordinator B, 16–22 October 2017)

Concerns

When expressing their present concerns, the CCS spent roughly the same number of words for their work as coordinator and their work as a teacher, although this varied per participant per week. The entries were analyzed by open coding, using the same categories for both answers, to be able to compare the relative frequency. Only one code was (almost) evenly distributed between the two roles: refresher courses. The codes are shown in Table 2, listed from the (relatively) most frequent mentions for the CCS task (left) and as a teacher (right). The codes are ordered by their relative frequency, with a column in between for the absolute number per role. The concern that is nearly equally distributed between the two tasks, refresher courses, is marked in the table with ≫, to show how many of the other concerns take up more, or rather less than half the mentions in both categories. Their co-occurrence with positive or negative emotional expressions is indicated with plusses and minuses (see below).

A striking difference between the two lists of answers is that the list of concerns as CCS contains more 'teacher-elements' below the mean, while the teacher concerns are nearly all predominantly teacher-related. Only school activities (such as excursions) are mentioned as a teacher-related concern that is predominantly a CCS concern. This indicates that the work as a CCS is influenced more by teacher activities than the other way around. This was to be

Table 2. Matters of concern.

What concerns you most					
…as a CCS					…As a teacher
Cultural activities +	80	100%	100%	48	Beginning/end of term, holidays +
Institutional collaboration	46	100%	100%	29	Personal circumstances +/−
CCS tasks +	37	100%	100%	15	Class management −
School cultural policy	37	100%	100%	8	Class atmosphere −
Subsidy	26	100%	100%	2	Scheduling and rosters
School activities +	12	80%	98%	53	Assessment and exams −/+
≫ Refresher courses +	37	48%	88%	35	Task allocation +
Meetings +	18	38%	86%	30	Parents −/+
Methods and materials	4	29%	82%	31	Working conditions −/+
Teaching and preparation +	26	28%	78%	18	Extra tasks +/−
Colleagues −	9	26%	69%	25	Colleagues −/+
Extra tasks	5	22%	72%	67	Teaching and preparation +
Working conditions	7	18%	71%	10	Methods and materials
Parents +	5	14%	63%	30	Meetings +
Task allocation	5	13%	52%	40	≫ Refresher courses −/+
Assessment and exams	1	2%	20%	3	School activities +
Beginning/end of term, holidays	0	0%	0%	0	Cultural activities
Personal circumstances	0	0%	0%	0	Institutional collaboration
Class management	0	0%	0%	0	CCS tasks
Class atmosphere	0	0%	0%	0	School cultural policy
Scheduling and rosters	0	0%	0%	0	Subsidy

expected, as the CCS task is allotted only a few hours per week and all participants had considerable teaching tasks. Both tasks have an equal number of five concerns that are only mentioned in that category. These concerns confirm what one would expect in either task. In their role as CCS, participants were concerned with cultural activities, collaboration with cultural institutions, and their task as a whole. They also worried about the school's cultural policy and their budget, which relates to the dominant position of the director mentioned above. As a teacher, on the other hand, they were occupied with start and end of term, schedules, pupils, class management, as well as with (their own and other people's) personal circumstances. All in all, the CCS task comes across as a highly bureaucratic one, revolving around organizing and planning activities, while as a teacher their pupils and class, as well as their personal life comes to the foreground.

When we look at emotive indications in the text, illustrated in Table 2 with plusses and minuses, we see that in their role as CCS participants tended to be more positive in their wording, whereas in their concerns as a teacher they connotated several codes both ways. Overall, working conditions, colleagues, refresher courses, and parents are most often connotated negatively. The list of positively connotated items is longer and contains cultural activities, (again) colleagues, task division, meetings, (again) refresher courses, and teaching. The overall impression is that in these answers, the participants were inclined to emphasize positive things more than negative. The double emotional value of colleagues and refresher courses is explained mainly because in the negative mentions of both, participants complain about the unwillingness of colleagues to partake in cultural refresher courses, except when they are happy (or relieved) that their colleagues have enjoyed them. An example of the former is the following quotation from one of the logs:

> I am greatly frustrated that every study day ends with the same discussion (initiated by the same person(s)). The criticism is always that the direction is unclear, that pupil care is compromised, the pressure on the schedule, and general work pressure. (Coordinator C, 25–29 September 2017)

Positive emotions as a coordinator nearly always refer to successful cultural activities, sometimes with colleagues ('Heritage lessons are being taught reasonably enthusiastically by my colleagues and I am glad', Coordinator B, 26 June–2 July 2017), but mostly in museum visits and workshops for the children:

> Enjoying the success of the first round of workshops. Parents, teachers and children were all very enthusiastic. There were many happy children's faces to be seen. Of course, there are also some points for improvement. Improve my own painting workshop, because I felt it lacked preparation/rest. (Coordinator G, 2–6 October 2017)

These examples highlight the tension in which the CCS find themselves: between the (dominant) interest of the curriculum and their (part-time) responsibility to ensure a structural position for art and culture in school.

The entries for 'concerns' thus confirm the crucial role of the contact person in the cultural institution and of the director as key contacts in the work of a CCS. Meanwhile, their cultural tasks were, these

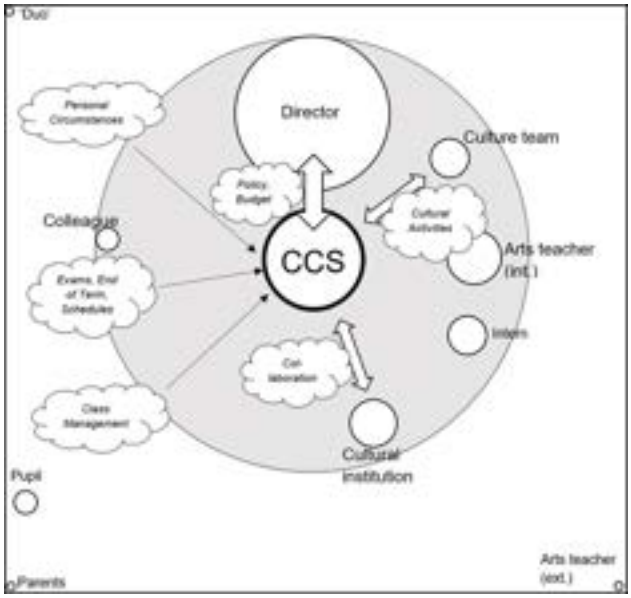

Figure 2. Contacts and concerns.

answers show, interfered by regular duties as a teacher, far more than their work as a teacher was influenced by their work as a CCS. This can be visualized as in Figure 2, in which the most important influences on the work of a CCS are indicated with arrows. The zone of CCS-related concerns is indicated with a gray disk.

What Figure 2 shows is how the emphasis in the work of a CCS lies within the school rather than on the outside. As has been suggested in the introduction, the primary incentive for appointing a CCS may very well come from a need to counterbalance the unequal relationship with cultural institutions. In the case the focus lies outside the school, it is mainly through close and familiar contact with a representative of a cultural institution, more so than with arts teachers, even those working in school. While this confirms Purnell's (2008) conclusion that teachers and artists value pragmatic, personal forms of collaboration, it also makes the position of arts education vulnerable. The coordination tasks are under pressure from regular teaching tasks, while their role in school is heavily dependent on the willingness of the director to approve and finance the activities. The content of arts education, meanwhile, depends on a personal relationship with a representative of an institution, generally working in an organization working under a political regime that over the past years has not proven itself entirely trustworthy in terms of finance and political demands (Meerkerk & IJdens, 2018).

Discussion

This article asked the question how Culture Coordinators in School perceive their own role and the context in which they are working. In order to answer this question, we have looked at the everyday practice of the collaboration and the relations in the collaboration between school and cultural institutions that exist beside the direct interaction between a teacher and the artist teaching her or his class. The self-portraits and logbooks written by the participants offered an insight in the weekly activities of a CCS and the matters that concerned them most. The question 'What concerns you most?' helped to add relief to the log entries.

The entries in the logbooks show a strong consistency over the different participants and over the year, in which the tasks of coordinating and teaching are clearly demarcated, but in which the latter has a direct influence on the former. This influence is only seldom addressed, but when it is, participants express frustration and disappointment or refer to colleagues that are angry or annoyed. Combined with the heavy reliance on the school director and repeated references to being alone at their coordinating task, this can be taken as an indication of the relatively weak position of the CCS, confirming. In this light it is also important to realize that the one-directional relationship between teaching and coordinating also relates to the absence of, for instance, references to colleagues expressing support for the CCS work. The fact that the 'duo' remains nameless is a striking example of this imbalance. This nuances the suggestion by Miszka (2013) that the presence of an arts coordinator in itself has a strong effect on the quality of arts education in school.

As has been mentioned at the beginning of this article, the presence of a CCS is a logical conclusion from the combination of a political ambition to strengthen the position of the arts in school and the absence of expertise in school. By offering subsidies and training for coordinators and the collaboration between schools and cultural institutions, the Dutch government supports the claim that the arts are important to a well-rounded education. The analysis of the logbooks in this article reveals the vulnerability of the way this is currently organized. If the success of this arts education policy rests on the shoulders of one culture coordinator in school, who in turn is highly dependent on who happens to be the current school director, the grand ambition of a well-rounded education in which the arts play a prominent role rests on a weak foundation, as Hanley (2003) already warned.

This article aimed to give insight in the everyday practice of culture coordinators in school. Previous research in which coordinators feature, mainly focuses on their intermediary role with partners outside the school: cultural institutions and governments (Bowen & Kisida, 2017; Carter & Roucher, 2020; McKinley Hedgecoth & Major, 2019; Theriot & Tice, 2008).

The CCS is seen as a success factor in building such relationships. This article focused more on the relationships within the school, mainly because that was also the focus of the logbooks themselves. Here, we can also see the intermediary role of the CCS, this time toward colleagues and (to a lesser degree) parents. Because the CCS functions as a hinge on both sides of the relationship between community and cultural field on one hand and teachers and pupils on the other, they are at the same time the weakest link when they stand alone in their jobs. This conclusion thus underlines what we knew from earlier studies but makes it more problematic from the perspective of a government support programme, and even more so for the classroom practice that is of course the goal of such support programmes.

The logbooks analyzed in this article have given an insight into the everyday practice of culture coordinators in school, their networks and their most prominent concerns. Although the number of participants is relatively low, the amount of detail provided in the logbooks and the degree of consistency between the participants does allow to draw conclusions that have a wider impact than the individual cases studied. The imbalance between the in-school relations and those with cultural institutions is an important observation regarding the underlying intentions of appointing a CCS, namely, to establish a good and sustainable relationship with the cultural field, based on a clear school vision on arts and culture. While the relationship with cultural institutions appears to be relatively personal and pragmatic, other school tasks are a clear influence on the tasks as a CCS. Without the support of the school director, it seems, the position of arts and culture in school is far from secure.

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Appendix A

Questions for self-portrait

1. What is your main job?
   a. employer
   b. job description
   c. commencement date of employment relationship'
   d. task size
   e. main task
   f. ancillary positions within the appointment
2. What is your previous education?
3. How did you become a culture coordinator?
   a. was it your own initiative or were you asked?
   b. were you the first or did you follow someone up
   c. are you the only one, or is there a team?
4. What is your task as culture coordinator?
   a. what formal duties do you have
   b. is there a school culture policy plan (please enclose)
   c. who wrote that policy plan
   d. How much freedom do you have in the performance of your job?
5. Who are your main collaboration partners as a culture coordinator?
   a. within school
   b. outside the school
6. How do you characterize yourself?
   a. as a teacher/teacher
   b. as culture coordinator
   c. as a person?
7. What is your relationship to art and culture?
   a. education and training
   b. active practice
   c. as a culture consumer
   d. as a citizen, member of society?
8. What is your ambition for ten years from now?
   a. as culture coordinator
   b. as a teacher/teacher
   c. as a person?

Appendix B

Questions for log entries

1. What did you do this week? Indicate per day the activities that you have undertaken in the context of your job. Please indicate briefly:
   a. what the content of the activity was (topic of a lesson or consultation)
   b. how long it took
   c. who you did it with

d. where you did it
e. (possibly:) other relevant information about the activity

2. What activities did you undertake as a culture coordinator? Please indicate in as much detail as possible:

a. whether it was a regular activity
b. who initiated the initiative
c. whether it was a stand-alone activity, or whether it was part of a longer process or project
d. how you prepared it (and with whom)
e. how the execution went
f. other relevant information and documentation about the activity

3. What occupies you most at the moment?