

Making a Difference in the World

Global APS

Teaching the Client to Fish

APS National Center for School Improvement

Co-operation aimed at school improvement, that is what our work with our international contacts is basically about. The majority of that work consists of providing training, which was originally APS's main task. Increasingly, however, our work involves consultancy, offering advice and helping to devise projects and courses of action. APS International works with schools, school managements and school improvement institutions and counts government bodies and ministries among its clients.

Boudewijn van Velzen
Director of APS International

APS's international activities and contacts extend across the globe. Close to home, APS operates in England, Germany and Switzerland. A little further away there is Eastern Europe, where APS is involved in projects in Hungary, the Ukraine, in nine Balkan states and further away still in the Caucasus and in Russia. In Africa and Asia, APS works in South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, India and Indonesia. In South America in the Antilles, Aruba, Surinam and Brazil. Projects have also stemmed from the longer-standing dynamic contacts with institutions and people in the United States. An example of this is *Werken met de Stad* for vocational education. "Cityworks" in Cambridge/Boston furnished APS with the basic concepts for its Natural Learning programme, which was first put into practice at *ROC Friesland College*. *Werken met de Stad* won the Dutch education award *Nationale Onderwijsprijs* in 2003. Other projects that have come over from America include the simulations *Het Spel van Verandering (Making Change for School Improvement)* and *The Real Game*.

Attractive

There is no model for establishing international co-operative partnerships. In some countries APS has a permanent presence, such as in the Dutch Antilles and Aruba. Indeed APS is co-owner of a school improvement bureau there. APS has had long-standing contacts with Brazil and Germany. In England and Russia the partnerships are more recent.

International contacts often start on a small scale. A few people from an organization meet up with a few people from APS. Their enthusiasm is aroused by a particular form of school improvement and commitments are undertaken. It is this way of working that makes APS so attractive to foreign partners. Another attractive feature of APS is its focus on training school managements, which inevitably leads to APS becoming redundant over time.

APS likes to base its training and advisory work on the foreign partner's own experience. The approach is never one of copying APS methods; instead it is a

process of adaptation. Copying implies disregarding the quality the foreign partner already has. Such an approach renders a relationship on an equal footing impossible. Moreover, every country has its own views on education, and standards and values vary greatly. Even in Belgium and Germany, which are only just across the Dutch border, views on the function of education, the meaning of education for the individual, expected behaviour of children and the way in which school managements handle teachers are very different. APS always strives to remain as faithful as possible to the institution's own mission, which is improving education in classrooms and schools.

Learning to fish

APS sells a way to learn to fish. It is a joy to see how international partners use this art and put it to their advantage. This is how a lasting relationship is formed. When difficulties arise, the client gets in touch again. That is a more interesting way of working than providing training repeatedly. APS's policy has for years been that 'We teach you to fish. As soon as you've got the hang of it what's most important is that you keep at it. If you need us, the ensuing exchange is brief and succinct. You know us and the way we work, so it isn't difficult to pick up where we left off.'

And this is something we at APS must also continue to bear in mind. You work intensively in another country for a week and then you leave the client to get on with things themselves. APS International is there to answer questions and give help, responding quickly to such requests.

People often comment on the fact that our approach is very humanistic in that it is geared towards people as human beings. We at APS may teach, but we are never pedantic; pedantry is not part of what we do.

The Cecip Institute, set up by Paolo Freire, has a long history in which some truly magnificent products have been developed. These Brazilians have something to say, so it isn't up to APS to tell them how to do things. What we can do is share some viewpoints. Showing a slightly different way of doing things and preferably also demonstrating how it works; that kind of human approach is extremely interesting.

Own knowledge

In countries like Brazil, Hungary and Uganda it is not so much about discovering the extent to which they are lagging behind, but what they can and can't do. While they were under dictatorship they had all the time in the world to acquire knowledge. The problem was they couldn't do anything with it. There is an intellectual discussion in these countries; they know the philosophers and have studied history. Translating this knowledge into a systematic way of working is the difficult part.

You find the same thing in Eastern Europe. You have top people there and they are highly trained. Implementing this knowledge into pro-active measures in schools and the curriculum is something they have not yet succeeded in doing. Eastern Europe is a quick learner, however, a very quick learner. An example of this is the institute of public education *OKI* in Budapest, a research and support organization with whom APS is working on a number of projects. They are developing at an astonishing rate. There is no doubt that they could become trendsetters. Now that Hungary is part of the EU, the momentum is even greater. It is for good reasons that *OKI*'s director

Gábor Halász is chairman of CIDREE in 2005, a consortium of fifteen leading institutions in the field of curriculum development and research in Europe.

Discussions

This human approach by APS also has its limitations. It means for instance that APS does not feature prominently in major tenders submitted to the World Bank. These are mostly defined at government level and are therefore abstract. Only in the implementation phase does it become clear with whom you will actually be working. Projects like these are usually designed without consultation with those directly involved, the end-users, who often know nothing about them and end up reading in the paper that millions of dollars have been earmarked for education improvement. It has no real meaning for them at that point. A few years later they then find themselves in a training programme that is related to that project. During that time the participating institution is controlled by the central organization or the consortium. There is nothing wrong with that per se. APS is in such instances interested in taking part in such a consortium but we would want to have a particular niche assigned to us, such as training the teachers for instance. APS then develops co-operative relationships within that structure. We always need partners, we always want to work with others, in countries that commission projects and pay for them themselves as well as in those who receive aid.

Large contracts

APS will have to determine with which large consultancy bureaus, who try to acquire large-scale international contracts, it wants to work. We then also have to have something to offer, to make co-operation interesting for these bureaus.

APS sets conditions, as do the bureaus. Take a recent project in Bulgaria as an example, commissioned by the Bulgarian government and the World Bank. A large German bureau asked APS to provide the training for the teachers. Here we have a true learning process. The bureau together with the Bulgarian government set a number of preconditions. You find there are a number of things that are not satisfactory about it but criticism at this early stage is of course not appropriate. You have to be able to work within the conditions you have been set.

Our experience in a country like that leads us to think about the conditions under which we have to work in the Netherlands. You learn to accept them. But in fact they too are the result of a similar process as abroad. We take it as a given and then set to work with the schools. This is much more obvious in a large foreign project like the one just mentioned. The conditions are stringent. You don't get paid if you don't come up with the goods. Planning often gets completely out of hand. APS has to learn to be subservient to this. 'We have to be careful that we don't force our way too much,' a colleague once said poignantly. Certainly not in Aruba, the Antilles, Surinam, Brazil, Eastern Europe and Uganda. The concept of 'planning' is different there. In Eastern Europe it is different again from in the Caribbean. Eastern Europeans sometimes view planning from the part of the ministry with suspicion. If someone there says: 'this is the plan,' then everyone shouts: 'we'll see about that!' Keeping your promise is not a concept with which they are familiar. It is therefore important to apply this wonderful standard to ourselves, because in doing so we foster a splendid image of reliability.

Following in Paulo Freire's footsteps

Brazilian dreamers collaborate with APS do-ers

APS' activities in Brazil began in the state São Paulo. APS was called in to train school heads in connection with a large-scale renewal project. The project was inspired by the Brazilian education minister at the time, Rose Neubauer. In the ten years preceding her coming to this post, São Paulo had seen eleven education ministers come and go. Neubauer withstood 7½ years in the position. Her political career was not without mishaps, but she gave the impression of a politician who learned from her setbacks. She is now head of a São Paulo based organisation involved with the primary and secondary educational processes within schools. And once again, she is enlisting the help of APS.

Seven hundred schools were involved in the São Paulo project, or 8% of the state's schools. Just as in the Netherlands, and for that matter all over the world, school heads had, as a rule, been neglected. APS was asked to train their team-forming skills. How can school heads spur on their team members to take action, and how can the resulting action result in innovation?

Via publicity, the project came to the attention of the Centro de Criação de Imagem Popular (CECIP) in Rio de Janeiro, founded by the renowned Brazilian educational reformer, Paulo Freire. Up to that time, CECIP had produced interesting material in book form, which in turn was explained in workshops. Despite serious doubts about the appropriateness of APS training for São Paulo, CECIP invited Boudewijn van Velzen to meet with them. This resulted in a project in which APS, in cooperation with senior CECIP staff members, educated fourteen individuals as trainers. These trainers are now teaching instructors how to make the best use of the educative materials with which they have been supplied. Judging from the questions the trainers e-mail to APS, they are now encountering problems completely different from those with which they were dealing at the start of the project.

Reality-based materials

Claudius Ceccon of CECIP explains how the experience the organisation has gained in the training of trainers has significantly altered its methods in general.

“Originally, we created materials. If we saw that, e.g., there was a need for better teaching materials for young children, we would define what sort of materials were needed, and then had them produced. Now, we call in the people from the field, the teachers working on the frontline. Only after we have heard their advice and suggestions, do we put people to work on the actual materials. I can guarantee you that this yields reality-based materials.”

Dark red

A few years ago, APS and CECIP were once again called in São Paulo. Neubauer's term in office was nearing its end, and she began to sense that her political days were numbered. She wanted to do one more important thing before leaving, preferably for the most poorly performing – and typically economically poorest – schools of São Paulo. There, schools are classified by means of colours: from sky blue to dark red. Those classified as red are considered to be in a kind of educational hell. They are

located in the poorest neighbourhoods, are characterised by much violence, poor instruction, dreadful working conditions and an absence of good teaching personnel.

CECIP and APS took on the challenge, organising a seminar for the heads of 190 dark-red schools. The school heads, who had in fact been forced to take part, were angry and defensive: not the ideal situation in which to spur them on to create positive changes. CECIP and APS, who had anticipated such a situation, asked the teachers if they would be willing to participate in *one* session. “Then they would not have to come again and would be free to seek improvement on their own,” Ceccon explains. “Of 190 schools, only one chose not to stay.”

The project continued for only six months, as Neubauer had to retire from office, and her successor ensured that the project ended, this for political reasons and as a favour to Neubauer’s opponents. “Even after only six months, though, the first positive results were already visible in the schools. And it provided insight to those who had participated about how education could be improved – even under extremely difficult circumstances.”

Tapping new resources

According to Ceccon, this success is attributable to the new methodology employed in the project. “One must show people that they themselves can make a change in their circumstances. That they can analyse both their situations and the effects of their own actions. A teacher can be regarded as a resource, but the same can be said of a pupil and his/her family. One needs to tap these. Whenever a school starts involving itself with the needs of people in its own area, this always elicits positive reactions.”

Ceccon takes as an example the physical circumstances present in the poor neighbourhoods. “Typically, the schools there were surrounded by high walls and fences, which were closed on the weekends – inaccessible fortresses. Now, the fences are open and the schools function as neighbourhood centres on the weekends. In São Paulo, we initiated a process for increasing the level of knowledge. We went into the poor neighbourhoods with a small van with a big TV screen mounted on the roof, shot videos and then showed them at the market square or at streetcorners. People came there and started talking to one another about their own experiences, and about the things that were important to them. Following the presentation, it was possible to view the video material again. The resulting exchange helped them to become more clear about their own situations. It was TV about their own reality.”

CECIP wants to stimulate more of this kind of change in Brazilian society, something which should come as no surprise, in view of the institute’s origins. Following the end of dictatorship in Brazil, and the return of intellectuals and others who had fled the regime, CECIP was created to fulfil such a task: to help the lower classes in Brazilian society to gain their own voice.

Added value

The added value APS had to offer in this case lay in its ability to train teaching staff. According to Ceccon, the methods employed by APS staff fit CECIP well. “They let others see how they can overcome their difficulties. It’s a combination of knowing what needs to happen and how to have it happen without having to be cold and

technocratic. I believe that they have the ability to stimulate people to develop capacities and talents they were not even aware of.”

He is positive about APS’ attitude. He himself lived for several years in exile as a refugee from the Brazilian dictatorship, amongst other places, in Geneva and Rotterdam. He has a thorough knowledge of European culture. And, as well, of Europeans’ approach to countries on other continents. “In Brazil, we have much experience with and knowledge about the production of educational methods and materials in accordance with scientific methods. In that sense, we are a highly developed country. There are many people now living here who, during the dictatorship, were, for a variety of reasons, unable to stay in the country. They wound up all over the world, receiving their training in London, Paris, the United States, etc., etc. All of these people have returned and are now sharing their experiences. This has yielded an incredibly rich environment, including in the field of education science. It is often the case that when people come here from other countries they think that their analyses are complete and that they have comprehended everything. In turn, they start lecturing and preaching to us. Obviously, this approach is doomed to fail. And then, sometimes foreign advisors just want to tell you things you want to hear. To have a good relationship with foreign advisors, it is necessary to make it clear that you, the client, know who you are and what you need. You have ultimate authority. APS staffers are well aware of this. CECIP’s relationship with APS is characterised by mutual recognition: a horizontal relationship. We’re a good match: we know what we still need to learn and what we need. That is the value of our common experiences. For APS it is perhaps a challenge to see what they can learn from CECIP – they don’t actually regard us as just the receiving party, but also as a source of ideas and things of use to them.”

A world apart

“Brazil is a world apart. Here one is presented with a picture of what happens when everyone must be completely reliant on himself. The differences between rich and poor are incredible. Nevertheless, you also see that people return each time to school determined to help that one pupil. In all kinds of towns and villages, one sees examples of school administrators and heads who have started with nothing and created something fantastic. Collaborating with CECIP is fascinating. They are inspired by the renowned educational innovator, Paulo Freire, who is also one of my own important sources of inspiration. The Brazilians as dreamers and we from APS as do-ers: that inspires me. I want to keep that picture in mind. Everyone there who takes risks in the interest of class improvement, regardless at which level, deserves respect. Whatever mistakes he may make. When you see how this country is searching to redefine itself. It’s wonderful. And being able to observe this from close by, and take part in such a dialogue: that’s something I find deeply enriching.” (Boudewijn van Velzen, APS)

Distant education

Brazil is a country of unlimited possibilities – and problems, when it comes to education. According to CECIP, greater and greater emphasis will be placed in the coming years on distant education. The scale is immense, as with everything in this country of 200 million and a surface area big enough to fit all 25 countries of the EU (with room to spare). There are 200,000 schools for primary education with an estimated 8 million teachers. The internet is still getting off the ground here, but is

growing rapidly. TV will be playing an ever greater role, and if there is one country for which distant education via TV was made, it is Brazil. The need to train teaching staff properly in the use of modern teaching tools is especially great. Via the internet and TV, one can also find out what's on offer and see that it is effective. But using it yourself is something altogether different. Here, CECIP and APS have their work cut out for them. CECIP has been working on establishing a joint effort with the University of Rio de Janeiro to create a centre for educating teaching trainers. Much money is needed. At this stage, the primary goal is to find a clear location for this institute and to connect it to the national educational infrastructure. Then the real work can begin.

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Toward a new generation of teachers

Education cornerstone of development in Uganda

Education shall form the cornerstone of all future development in Uganda. This was the conclusion drawn by the present government of this African country when it came into office in the early 1990s. And the educational system was truly in dire need of revamping. Following a terrible period of dictatorship, the country and all its institutions were left in a deplorable state. Everything had to be built again, as it were, from the ground up. And from the very beginning, it was clear that the people in the field were of crucial importance, in other words, teachers would have a key role to play.

Many countries in Africa have a very centralised form of government, on the local, regional and national levels. This was not formerly so widespread, but is the result of the destruction of many traditional structures in the process of colonisation. Where this was in turn followed by some decades of dictatorship, as in the case of Uganda, modern forms of democratically controlled and decentralised government require a substantial period of time before they can become successful.

Correspondingly, Uganda's educational system and its institutions are centrally controlled. The same applies to the training of instructors and teachers, the control over such training and the examination and certification processes. In Uganda, this has, since the mid-1980s, all been in the hands of ITEK (Institute of Teachers Education Kyambogo), which now forms part of the Kyambogo University, Kampala.

Professor James Lutalo Bosa, vice-chancellor of this university and dean of ITEK, explains why his institute needs outside support in connection with the reforming of the educational system. "Uganda needs teachers who can help get the country's development really going. It was, however, widely assumed that many of our teachers would not be capable of doing this. Thus, a thorough study and analysis of the actual situation were needed. But as the means to carry out such a study were lacking, we went about seeking external help." A study of the international literature in the field of instructors' qualities however revealed to the Ugandans that there were very few countries which had experience in the field of defining these qualities or implementing them in education or practical applications.

One of these countries was the Netherlands, and APS played an important role when so-called instructor profiles began being created. They also left their mark on the process whereby trainers are educated so that they in turn can train teachers in the context of processes of change. This notwithstanding, it was sheer coincidence that brought ITEK into contact with APS: an encounter with a Dutch consultant signified the start of a formal relationship in the area of development assistance. The Dutch government is presently supporting a project whereby a new generation of teachers is being trained by means of the HOB programme, coordinated by NUFFIC in The Hague.

No studies – just rolling up your sleeves

Why must extensive and expensive studies first be carried out into things which are actually already well understood? Why not undertake immediately the steps needed to

improve the quality of teaching staff? This was the gist of APS' advice following their first encounter with ITEK staff in Kampala. "This recommendation was consistent with the findings of our former students," confirms Lutalo Bosa. "They leave the institute as qualified instructors, but are immediately confronted with a methodology at odds with their training. For this reason, our objective needed to be changed. It was necessary not to study teachers for their qualities, but, rather, to attempt to define what their qualities needed to be. I.e., a search for the right profile for an instructor."

ITEK is presently training instructors in Kampala for its 47 teachers' training courses for primary education. In addition, there are training institutes for secondary education, which in Uganda consists of four years' lower secondary education and two years' higher secondary education. ITEK is responsible for the curricula of all of these institutes, the assessment of the training, the examining of teachers and issuing of diplomas.

It is, thus, essential to know what the training institutes producing all these instructors need to teach. "However," Bosa points out, "this is not possible without first describing the requisite profile for both instructors and teacher trainers. You need first to have good teacher trainers before you can produce a good instructor."

Commitment

Experience with fundamental educational innovation all over the world has shown that it is first necessary to ensure that involved parties become committed to the operation in question, this according to Boudewijn van Velzen. "And this applies as much to Uganda as anywhere else, and for this reason Lutalo Bosa and his people have invested a great deal of time into creating *committees*, or work groups. One for describing the profiles, one for gathering the data necessary for creating profiles, one for arriving at guidelines for a new curriculum and one for dissemination. These work groups included people from ITEK, coordinated by a core team. The project was closely followed by a kind of policy advice group which included experts from outside ITEK, so that all institutes and organisations involved, the teachers' union, the university, the responsible cabinet ministers and foreign financial backers could really become partners in the operation."

"If you involve as many people as possible with the project, it subsequently will be easier for them to consider themselves stakeholders in it," Bosa explains. "For Uganda, this is a complicated and, in several respects, new path. But it works. The project started in 2000 and the teacher profiles and teacher trainers were approved and adopted at the ministerial level in 2004.

We have been informed that describing a teacher profile is quite similar to creating a curriculum for a training programme. I.e., it is not something which cannot be changed later. In fact it will have to be changed after a time. But when the time comes to do this, we will not automatically be requesting help from the Dutch. Such revisions will have to be made by those who are now involved with teaching how it must be done. This is the basis of our philosophy."

Implementation

The real work has yet to begin in Uganda. Now that the instructor profiles have been created, they will have to be assimilated into the training programmes and the

curricula. Uganda is a large country with enormous regional differences. And limited means. This is why the decision has been taken to begin at the primary education level. A method which has been effective at a primary school in a city can turn out completely useless somewhere far away, in the country. Just as with the creating of teacher profiles, it is also necessary to bear this in mind when implementing different ideas. The relevant curricula must be revised. School inspectors must learn to pay attention to the right things. And parents are entitled to information: e.g., what can they expect from the school – and why?

A mega-operation with which ITEK certainly still needs help from APS. Lutalo Bosa is very pleased with ITEK's partnership with the Dutch institute. "Sure, we have no experience with external support, but APS and their staff have fulfilled our expectations exactly."

As satisfied as this Ugandan education expert was about recent development, he is nevertheless concerned about what has yet to come. "In many developing nations, all kinds of projects are initiated and in turn left uncompleted. We must invest a great deal of time in the carrying out of our ideas and in the people they embrace. It is equally important to devise a good follow-up programme. This, too, requires a great deal of money. We are now seeking support for this. A follow-up project would enable us to show that our ideas work. Otherwise they will just gather dust on a shelf."

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Collaborating with THILLM

Searching for the missing links from a divided philosophical platform

At the THILLM (*Thüringer Institut für Lehrer Fortbildung, Lehrplanentwicklung und Medien* or Thuringian institute for advanced teacher training, curriculum development and media), developments at APS are followed avidly. Due to its basis in private law, APS' position differs diametrically from that of THILLM, which is firmly anchored in the German state bureaucracy. The direction of the Bad Berka based institute are particularly interested in how APS staffers are recruited and selected. This is attributable to the fact that they are impressed by their “competent and authentic Dutch colleagues, who are continuously developing professionally” and are “easy to reach and highly flexible.” How, then, does APS organise the professional development of its staffers and how does it give guidance to its staffers and supervise the projects it executes for clients?

The partnership between THILLM and APS dates from the early 1990s. THILLM was founded in 1992, following the fall of the wall dividing the two Germanys, and their re-unification. A radical break had taken place with the old institutional practices of the communistic regime, just as with the figures who had played the boss there, including, incidentally, all of those who had headed the schools in the Länder of the GDR.

THILLM staffer and psychologist Constanze Creutzburg relates how the organisation began its search for partners in the field of educational innovation. “We have comparable institutes in Germany, such as in Baden-Württemberg or Bavaria, but personally I don't find Germany very innovative in this field. If you don't have good institutes at your disposal, you can never aspire to great achievements. So we wanted to look further than Germany itself – for partners who had already realised interesting concepts. At the same time, we sought an institute with an organisation and structure from which we could learn. How should one stimulate staffers? How should one work together in a project context? Barbara Menger, a colleague of mine at the time, had made the acquaintance of the APS staffer, Kees Vreudenhil. This contact laid the basis for a variety of contacts between THILLM and APS staff, and ultimately the two institutes came to form a partnership.”

ALL Concept

THILLM needed a good concept like APS' *ALL*, a powerful project for the primary education process, and one embodying a new way of thinking about education. With APS' help, two THILLM staffers got to work. In turn, twenty promising instructors were selected and trained. They are now senior instructors at THILLM and work as trainers in Thuringian schools. In parallel with the introduction of *ALL*, training programmes for school heads were initiated.

Creutzburg explains why. “At a number of schools that wanted to create their own type of instruction, we worked together with APS. The training of the supervising instructors was coupled to the development of the material and the instruction style. This automatically stimulates questions about the role of school heads. What is the connection between all these facets, and how does one give form to that innovation

process? It is not a question of one-off training, but, rather, the big question as to how schooling can truly change daily practice. And how a training programme can lead to a learning process. I myself was confronted by the question of how an originally Canadian concept like ALL can work in all 1,200 schools in Thuringia. Without continuous support from an APS staffer. This gave birth to the idea of producing our own trainers. 'In 2000, that was even new for APS itself,' I thought."

Training

The agreements between THILLM and APS are each for a period of two years. The emphasis is on the production of didactic trainers and supervising instructors who can start the process of educational innovation in the schools. But, according to Creutzburg, there is certainly room for new initiatives. "We also have contact with other institutes outside Germany. In Thailand, Hungary, Poland and Switzerland, for example. But our relationship with APS is definitely much more tailored to us. Partly because we've now worked together for so long. With the other institutes, we sometimes collaborate on a common project. When it comes to APS, it's different. Then we say: this is what we have, this is what we need, and that is what we can do in collaboration. Then we think about the problem together and start working."

This form of collaboration has clearly left its mark on THILLM. It has particularly influenced them as regards the theoretical aspects of school development. The APS advisers' working methods have also had an exemplary function. "They are not just competent, but they also never cease developing. And everything they add to their knowledge is immediately put into practice. Starting out from a common philosophy, they proceed to look for *the missing links*. When they come to Thuringia, they really get involved in the project at hand. Further, the advisers from APS are always curious, and fun to work with. That's very important."

More thorough

The advent of e-mail/internet has improved and simplified contact with one another. Asked about her opinion on this development, Creutzburg says, after a moment's reflection, that the processing and documentation of the work done could be better, more detailed and systematic. But what predominates in her comments is, aside from an element of envy, praise for the APS staffers. "They are so good at 'translating' problematic aspects into clear language – they're so capable! In many respects, THILLM is the same as APS, except that we also do curriculum development and media. We are the only institute in the state of Thuringia doing work in this field. We supply training for both instructors and school inspectors. So we do a greater number of things than APS. The biggest difference, however, is that THILLM is state-run, which has both advantages and disadvantages. But in comparison with APS, the disadvantages are what particularly comes to mind. Our staff cannot be dismissed, regardless of the quality of their work or contributions. And everyone's is paid on a pro rata basis, based on the number of years they've worked for us. That's difficult to understand for someone from Holland. It was from APS that I learned about the concept of 'recognised inequality,' but it will never take root here."

THILLM-director Bernd Schreier:

APS has commercial culture

THILLM director Bernd Schreier: “We have been given the opportunity to create an institute to provide support to schools. Following re-unification, the cards were all re-shuffled. From the start, we wondered whether it would be possible to build an independent institute within an existing and essentially bureaucratic and administrative state system. That is why we went about searching in the countries around us for institutes which had done this successfully, and we found that they were not very numerous. Ultimately we came to APS. APS is no longer state-financed, and must depend on itself to acquire orders. And for us, the fact that this works well is an eye-opener. [...] It’s important for us to have a partner with which we can exchange notes on a high level. This inevitably always leads to a sort of verbal game: we say that we intend to become the best institute in our field in Europe, and Alex van Emst, who used to be APS’ director and now advises us, always corrects this with: ‘the second best.’”

When asked to characterise APS, Schreier points to the difference in cultures between the two organisations. “APS is imbued with the Dutch commercial spirit. On the one hand, this means a high degree of reliability when it comes to agreements, on the other, their thoughts are never far from the bottom line. The traditional German notion of a partnership is that you give everything for free and both parties will benefit from this. Our notion of a business structure is much simpler than AP’s concept of one. If APS can be characterised as semi-professional, then we can be characterised as *semi*-semi-professional. We are fully supported by state funds, but act as if we were very economical with money. There are definitely differences in culture between us.”

Not only is APS’ reliability in business matters a plus, but also the fact that they have a quality product and are always searching for new possibilities and developments. “APS never operates in a cheap, market-oriented manner, but always tries to bear in mind the needs of the school in question. This is why we like being their partner. Their philosophy on school development is also close to ours – we talk about the same things. In addition, when we were searching for a partner, I was looking for an institute that worked on a project basis and was oriented toward a modern commercial culture.”

Schreier does not deny that working on a project basis also has disadvantages. For example, this can lead to staffers becoming excessively specialised in one field, whilst in his view it is of paramount importance for professionals also to be generalists when it comes to educational support and development. The project principle can also lead to a concentration on bringing out successful projects on the market, and shying away from more risky things. According to Schreier, at institutes like APS and THILLM, the main thing is to feel connected to one another’s tasks and to have a communal work philosophy. At THILLM, operations are divided into three core areas: curricula and curriculum development, schooling and training in the schools, and one’s own professional training and research in the field of school development, a scheme which, to a degree, is comparable to the market windows which APS employs. All of THILLM’s staff work in two of the three core areas, making it possible for staffers to become familiar with one another’s work, and strengthening mutual cohesion. Above

all, Schreier is curious to see how APS does this. According to him, at institutes like APS and THILLM, it is all a matter of the kind of leadership you give.

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