ABSTRACT
                This paper assesses how three schools' change capacity
influenced the implementation of school reform, specifically Basic education,
a renewed curriculum in the first phase of secondary education. It reports on
a study that examined the relationship between the characteristics of Dutch
schools and their staff, the actual use of change capacity during the
implementation process, and the implementation of a school reform. In May
1997 and in December 1998 qualitative and quantitative data were collected in
case studies of three comprehensive secondary schools. During the initial
visits to the schools, a number of school documents were collected and 10 to
15 interviews were administered at each school. Interviewees included
management, members of the coordinating group, student counselors, and
coordinators from several departments. During a second visit to the schools
more documents were collected and four interviews were administered at each
school. The results indicate that the extent to which a school possesses
change capacity affects its ability to implement reform. However, no causal
relation between this potential for change capacity and the schools' actual
use of it was proven. Each of the three case-study schools is described by
means of some general characteristics. The schools' vision, planning process,
support of learning, and treatment of basic education are briefly elaborated.
(Contains 17 references.) (RJM)

The change-capacity of secondary schools

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Introduction

Literature on educational innovation identifies many factors associated with implementation success or failure. One of the main factors is the change-capacity of a school. Schools differ to the extent in which they possess this capacity. (e.g., Miles & Ekholm, 1985; Louis & Miles, 1990; Fullan, 1991; Van Gennip, 1991; Van den Berg & Sleegers, 1996).

In the present study change-capacity is defined as the capacities a school needs to conduct innovations in both the school organisation and the curriculum, in order to implement a school reform. However, not merely the extent in which a school possesses the change-capacity is important. Additionally, a school must actually use the change-capacity during the implementation process.

The research question of this study is: What is the relation between the characteristics of the school and the staff (including the availability of a certain change-capacity), the actual use of the change-capacity during the implementation process, and the implementation of a school reform? Figure 1 shows the research question schematically.
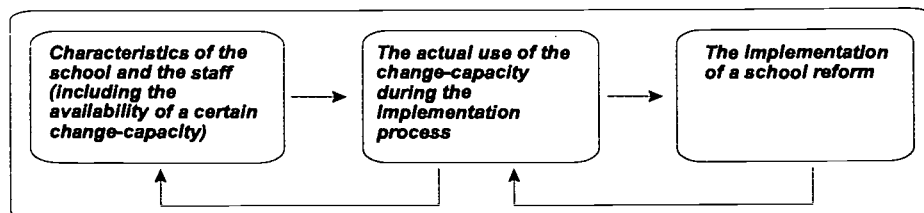
Figure 1 The research question

In August 1993 a governmental school reform was started in the Netherlands. This school reform consisted of the introduction of Basic education, i.e. a renewed curriculum in the first phase of secondary education. The school reform is concerned with creating equal opportunities for students, delaying the choices for a further (educational) career and

enhancing the quality of student instruction (Karstanje, 1996). It is similar to the 'middle school' model in the U.S.

Earlier research indicated that many schools have by now completed the initiation phase and have started to implement Basic education (PMB, 1996). In-depth studies (e.g., Houtveen & Doijen, 1995; Lagerweij et al., 1996) showed that the implementation process differs between schools and that conducting innovations, especially in the curriculum, is still a time-consuming process. As Fullan (1991) notes, it is a process of 'development in use'.

Conceptual framework

Change-capacity is a hypothetical construct, which means that underlying complex phenomena are not directly visible. Therefore, in the conceptual framework as developed (Figure 2), the construct change-capacity is divided into three mechanisms of change: vision, planning and learning. These mechanisms are of crucial importance for the successful progress of a change process (Mintzberg, 1990; Ainscow & Hopkins, 1992). The mechanisms can be regarded as three areas in which the change-capacity manifests itself and can accordingly be distinguished.
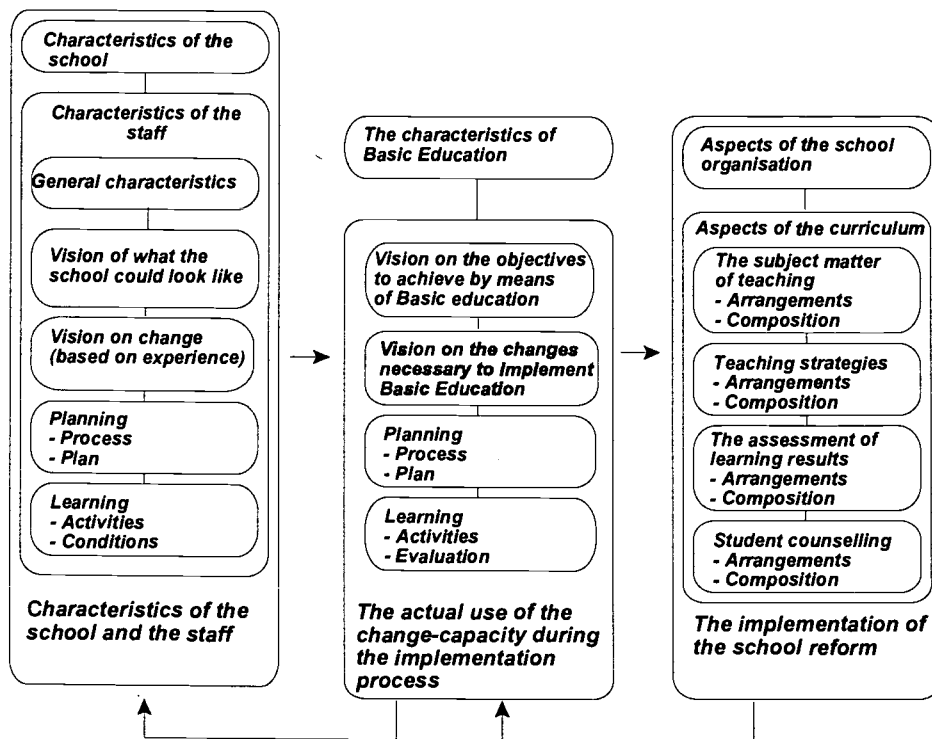
Figure 2 The conceptual framework

A vision is a declaration of a desired situation which differs on several aspects from the actual situation (cf. Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Miles (in Fullan, 1991) stresses that vision involves two dimensions: a vision of what the school could look like and a vision on the change process, the general plan or strategy for achieving that objective.

"Planning is the process of deciding in detail how to do something before you actually start to do it." (Sinclair, 1987, p.1092). The result of such a process is an operational plan. This

plan may vary from broad to detailed and can relate to the short, medium or long term.

Learning can be viewed as a process in which new knowledge, skills and experiences can be acquired. As a result of the newly acquired knowledge, skills and experiences, behaviour changes (Foil & Lyles, 1985) or the possibility that behaviour could change, is established (Huber, 1991).

In the conceptual framework, Basic education is divided into aspects of the school organisation and aspects of the curriculum. The composition of these aspects shows the degree to which the school reform is implemented, i.e. it displays the way the elements of Basic education are being used or executed in practice.

An aspect of the school organisation is for example a (new) time table. Aspects of the curriculum are the arrangements that are made regarding certain elements of the teaching-learning situation and the composition of those elements in classroom learning activities and interaction. The following elements are specified: the subject matter of teaching, the teaching strategies, the assessment of learning results and student counselling.

Method

In May 1997 and in December 1998 qualitative and quantitative data were collected in case studies of three comprehensive secondary schools (age 12-18). In November 1998 a national survey has been conducted.

The execution of case studies with a repeated measurement enables the study and description, both intensively and in detail, of the implementation process of the school reform. The survey will be used to test the conceptual framework by statistical means and to check whether the findings from the case studies can be generalised to the population of Dutch secondary schools. This paper will focus on the case studies.

During the first visit to the schools a number of school documents were collected. Additionally, ten to fifteen interviews were administered at each school. Members of the management, members of the co-ordinating group Basic education, student counsellors and co-ordinators from several departments were interviewed. Moreover, a questionnaire was administered to all the teachers instructing lower secondary classes. The major part of the questionnaire consisted of precoded questions. The response from the schools' teachers varied between 50 and 84 percent.

During the second visit to the schools more documents were collected, and four interviews were administered at each school. The interviewed were a member of the management, a member of the co-ordinating group Basic education, a student counsellor and a teacher who has a key-position within the school. Additionally, a questionnaire was administered to the co-ordinators from all the departments. The major part of the questionnaire consisted of open questions, comparable with the questions from the first visit that were put before the co-ordinators. Because the response from the schools' co-ordinators varied between 20 and 30 percent, this data should be taken with some caution. Moreover, the same questionnaire as in May 1997 was administered to all the teachers instructing lower secondary classes. Because the response from the schools' teachers varied between only 10 and 30 percent, it was decided to leave this data out of consideration.

The collected data was analysed for each school by triangulation. The results of the analysis were used to make two interim case summaries for each school, one for the situation in May 1997 and one for the situation in December 1998. In a summary a (first) coherent, overall account of the school was given (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These summaries were returned to the schools and were approved of after some minor adjustments and additions.

The data from the summaries were displayed in different kinds of matrices after reduction and transformation. As Miles and Huberman (1994, p.11) state, the matrices "...are designed to assemble organized information into an immediately accessible, compact form so that the analyst can see what is happening and either draw justified conclusions or move on to the next step of analyses the display suggests may be useful."

Results and conclusions

Below the three case study schools are described by means of some general characteristics of the school and the staff. Furthermore, some remarkable results of the comparative analysis on the data gathered at the two visits are presented. Differences and similarities between the schools, as well as patterns, explanations and/or causal flows are discussed.

The 'North' secondary school, with 90 staff members and 1350 students (1 percent minority) can be characterised as a regional school. The 'East' secondary school is also a regional school. The school has 140 staff members and 1950 students (1 percent minority). The 'West' secondary school is an urban school. The school has 90 staff members and 1200 students (11 percent minority). The 'North' and the 'East' both originated from a merger of three schools in 1993, which coincided with the beginning of the school reform.

VISION

The conceptual framework assumes a school possesses a collectively developed vision of what the school could look like. It furthermore supposes that this vision influences the vision on the objectives the school tries to achieve by means of Basic education. The results revealed that this is not the case in practice:

The 'North' has the roots of the vision of what the school could look like in one of the schools prior to the merger. On that school the vision came forth from the ideology from that specific school, just like on the 'West'. At the 'East' the vision was developed by one of the schools, to have a strong position during the merger. It is remarkable that during the merger processes at the 'North' and at the 'East' no discussion has taken place about the vision of what the school could look like. At the 'North' the difficult nature of the merger pushed aside 'everything else' and at the 'East' the other merger-schools were not even asked about their visions. In addition, it seems that at the three schools the vision of what the school could look like was incorporated in formal documents, and did not play a significant part in the functioning of the school.

Opposite of this is that a recent (1998) process of vision development has taken place at the 'East', initiated by the management, and at two other schools such a process is taking place

at the moment. It is debatable whether the visions of what the schools could look like, that came forth from this (or will come forth), will play a significant role within the schools. In other words will they go through a succesful development and implementationprocess so that a collective vision arises?

The vision on the objectives the schools try to achieve by means of Basic education, played a significant role during the implementation process. The results showed two different visions: on the one hand the vision of the 'North' which was centred on students obtaining general skills, and on the other hand the vision of the 'East' and the 'West' which was focused on the students' skills in independent learning and working.

The way in which the visions were generated and developed within the schools, differs in each school. At the 'West' for example, in 1996 a failed experiment in independent working caused the co-ordinating group Basic Education to decide on a schoolwide in-service training for teachers, focused on the didactics on independent learning and working.

During the first visit, at the schools, a reasonable degree of consensus on the vision existed. The 'East' even displayed a high degree of consensus. This can be called remarkable since staff members communicated little about the visions. During the second visit it has not become sufficiently clear whether the degree of consensus has changed. It is clear however that in all three schools among certain groups of teachers a discussion has started on the vision on the objectives the school tries to achieve by means of Basic education. At the 'North' for example among the teachers instructing lower secondary classes.

All schools prior to the mergers at the 'North' and the 'East', just like the 'West', had no history of change efforts. It can therefore be concluded that at the de start of the implementation process, at the three schools no vision on change based on experience was present. During the first visit it became clear that the vision of the schools on the changes necessary to implement Basic Education, at the start of the implementation process were mainly defined by the characteristics of the school reform. Emphasis was on innovations in the school organisation which are essential in order to implement the school reform. Over the years attention is gradually drawn to the changes which are necessary for the realisation of the vision on the objectives the schools try to achieve by means of Basic education. The schoolwide in-service training for teachers mentioned above at the 'West' is a good example of this.

Opposite of this is that during the second visit it has been established that five years after the start of the merger-process and the implementation process, at the three schools a vision on change based on experience has developed. At the basis of this vision the 'East' and the 'West' for example have chosen to emphasize from the start on changes in the contents of education and on teaching didactics to teachers, during the preparations of the implementation process of a new governmental school reform. This school reform consisted of the introduction of a renewed curriculum in the second phase of secondary education (August 1999).

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PLANNING

During the first visit it was established that experience with planning a school reform such as Basic education was not available on the three schools. It is open to discussion whether the capacities to plan innovations either were present but had never been used or that these capacities were absent at the start of the school reform.

The results showed that at the start and during the first years of the implementation process the group of staff members responsible for co-ordinating the process differed in composition between the schools. For example, at the 'North' two management members co-ordinated the implementation process whereas at the 'West' a co-ordinating group consisting of management members and teachers were responsible. In practice it seems that on each school one person was the 'real' initiator. This could be either a management member or a teacher.

During the second visit it turned out that at the 'North' and the 'East', just like at the 'West', the initiation and co-ordination of the implementation process was in the hands of a co-ordinating group Basic education, who focused only on that process. Such a co-ordination group consists of management members and teachers, and has an explicit assignment/task. The group functions as an advisory organ on behalf of the management, which usually accepts the propositions.

Additionally, it seems that the introduction of the renewed curriculum in the second phase of secondary education, that has pushed attention for Basic Education into the background, assures that at the three schools a 'new start' of the implementation process will be made. In the manner of dealing of this 'new start', when compared to the first start, a few changes/shifts have occurred: During the first years the schools hardly used step-programs. At the moment all three co-ordination groups use it. Also different than before, teachers are more involved in 'making plans' and practical usage comes first.

LEARNING

The results showed the three schools differed as to the extent in which two conditions in support of learning were present during the first visit (Table 1). For example, the 'West' used a bottom-up approach to a greater extent than the other schools, while the 'East' had the possibility to learn from mistakes to a greater extent.

Table 1 The presence of conditions in support of learning (May 1997)

Conditions ᐞ	'North' Mean	SD	N	'East' Mean	SD	N	'West' Mean	SD	N	Sig. $p \leq .05$
Bottom-up approach (A)	2,4	.64	26	2,6	.64	48	2,8	.61	55	*
Learn from mistakes (B)	2,5	.41	24	2,9	.60	43	2,6	.61	47	*

ᐞ Both conditions were measured on scales which consisted of four items (A) Cronbach's α = .76 and (B) Cronbach's α = .84. The answer categories varied from (1) not present up to (4) in a high degree present.

At all schools prior to the mergers at the 'North' and the 'East', and at the 'West', standard learning activities took place, such as in-service training courses and counselling from

educational support institution(s). The results revealed that during the implementation process of Basic education, the type of learning activities at the three schools did not change. The contents of the activities were attuned to the reform. Additionally, during the first visit the 'North' and the 'East' were working on starting a new learning activity, i.e. peer coaching between teachers. At the 'North' this never got off to a good start, for no apparent reason; while at the 'East' during the second visit there was talk of coaching-projects.

During the second visit it was determined what can be learned from participating in the learning activities, in other words has participation in the activities led to changes in opinions and functioning of teachers, and the processes that take place within the group of staff members. The results showed that it is difficult to get answers to those questions. Learning activities are seen as a term to bring about changes, but it seems to have a marginal effect because the step to practise is the most difficult and mostly absent. There is no such thing as long term impact. Opposite to this is the trend of having/organising 'custom made' learning activities within the schools, which makes the step to practice easier.

Five years after the start of the school reform no schoolwide evaluation has been held at the 'North' and the 'East'. At the 'West' an evaluation took place by the Education Inspection in 1998, the results of this evaluation were used in the step-program for the 'new start' of Basic education. Additionally, in all three schools the co-ordinating group Basic education has taken up the evaluation of the activities in their step-program.

BASIC EDUCATION

It can be concluded that the innovations in the school organisation which are essential in order to implement the school reform, are conducted at the three schools. In addition the schools acquired new textbooks. Choices were made for a one or two year transition period and a new organisation structure, partly due to the merger.

It seems that during the implementation process attention was gradually drawn to aspects of the curriculum. In the conceptual framework the aspects of the curriculum are specified by the arrangements that are made regarding four elements of the teaching-learning situation and the composition of those elements in classroom learning activities and interaction. The results suggest that not only do schools differ in the degree to which certain the aspects are implemented, they also accentuate aspects differently. Within the measured aspects of the curriculum there are, over four elements of the teaching-learning situation, three different areas, as regards contents: independent learning/working, general skills and learning results. These three areas are, each in their own way, characteristic of the school reform.

Figure 3 shows the way in which at the three schools during the two visits arrangements were present for the three areas. This figure has been established by, in each arrangement, the plusses and minuses from the case-ordered meta-matrices (see the method section) scoring on a 5-point scale and thereupon per area calculating the average outcome on the scale of the arrangements.
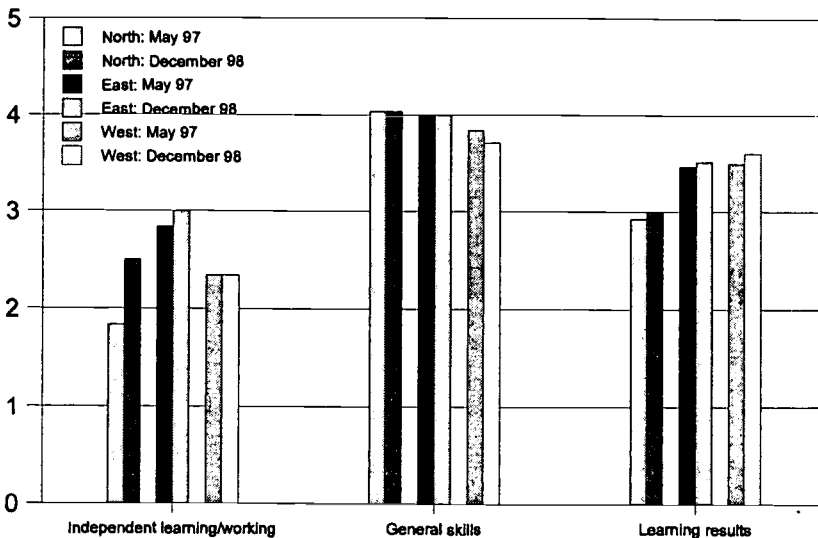
Figure 3 The presence of arrangements

For all the three schools it was established that between the first and the second visit relatively few or no shifts have occurred in the arrangements; at intervals a new arrangement was created, or an existing one altered.

Opposite to this, during the first visit schools differed in arrangements on independent learning/working. At the 'North' clearly less arrangements were found in comparison to the 'East', the score of the 'West' was exactly between the scores of the 'North' and the 'East'. During the second visit the score of the 'North' has risen with more than half a point, the score of the 'East' rose with .16 and the score of the 'West' remained the same. At the 'North' more arrangements were present in the area of independent learning/working than at the 'West', while the 'East' in comparison with the other two schools still has the highest score.

The differences in the schools in arrangements in the area of general skills are minimal, both during the first and the second visit. In the area of learning results both the 'East' and the 'West' score half a point more than the 'North' during the first visit. The difference has not increased during the second visit, nor has it decreased. It can be stated that in comparison to the other two schools, the 'North' has the least arrangements on learning results.

The results showed that at the three schools at certain points a discrepancy existed between the arrangements on the three areas and the composition of the areas in classroom learning activities and interaction. In extension of the vision on the objectives the school tries to achieve by means of Basic education, for example at the 'East' and the 'West' arrangements existed to use teaching strategies aimed at (the increase of) students' skills in independent learning and working. However, in practice the teachers were free to use the strategies they preferred. The results of the first visit (Table 2) showed that the teachers during teaching activities used directing as often as guiding.

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Table 2 The use of teaching strategies during teaching activities (May 1997)

Activities △	'North' Mean	SD	N	'East' Mean	SD	N	'West' Mean	SD	N	Sig. p ≤ .05
To present the subject matter of teaching (A)	2,6	.65	22	2,9	.66	47	2,7	.64	52	
To motivate students (B)	3,0	.53	24	3,1	.61	47 ·	3,1	.67	49	
To direct the learning process (C)	2,7	.59	25	3,0	.66	50	2,7	.65	56	*

△ The activities were measured on scales which consisted of (A) 7 items, Cronbach's α = .73; (B) 8 items,Cronbach's α = .75; (C) 6 items, Cronbach's α = .67. The answer categories varied from (1) mainly directing up to (5) mainly guiding.

At the three schools relatively most of the arrangements are on general skills during both visits. The results of the first visit (Table 3) showed that the teachers indicate that generally they find it important that students obtain general skills which are characteristic for Basic education. However, they succeed in actually paying attention to learning those general skills in their lessons in a lesser amount. It is remarkable that the schools use textbooks which teach the general skills insufficiently, according to the teachers.

Table 3 Paying attention to general skills (May 1997)

General skills △	'North' Mean	SD	N	'East' Mean	SD	N	'West' Mean	SD	N	Sig. * p ≤ .05 ** p ≤ .1
Research activities (A)										
Opinion	1,5	.50	22	1,5	.39	48	1,7	.52	51	*
Action	1,8	.49	18	2,0	.42	44	1,9	.47	38	
Textbook	2,0	.59	22	1,9	.54	48	1,8	.52	39	
State an opinion (B)										
Opinion	1,4	.52	20	1,4	.53	47	1,5	.54	53	
Action	2,1	.66	17	2,0	.50	38	1,7	.50	38	*
Textbook	2,3	.71	20	1,9	.67	47	1,9	.78	36	**
Work collaboratively on tasks (C)										
Opinion	1,3	.48	25	1,3	.47	50	1,5	.47	55	*
Action	1,7	.60	23	1,8	.52	47	1,8	.62	46	
Textbook	2,2	.74	24	1,9	.65	49	2,1	.72	43	
Gain insight in further education and professional practice (D)										
Opinion	1,3	.42	25	1,4	.49	47	1,5	.47	55	
Action	1,9	.44	23	2,0	.60	44	1,7	.61	47	
Textbook	2,3	.58	24	2,1	.76	46	2,2	.79	42	
Judge (their and others) papers and projects (E)										
Opinion	1,6	.45	26	1,6	.48	49	1,6	.49	55	
Action	1,8	.53	23	2,0	.49	45	1,8	.53	47	**
Textbook	2,1	.70	26	2,3	.65	47	2,2	.76	44	

△ The general skills were measured on scales which consisted of (A) 5 items, Cronbach's α for action, opinion and textbook respectively .74. .70 and .75; (B) 5 items, Cronbach's α' respectively .89, .84 and .92; (C) 4 items, Cronbach's α respectively .85, .82 and .88; (D) 3 items, Cronbach's α respectively .72, .81 and .86; (E) 4 items, Cronbach's α respectively .72, .74 and .86. The answer categories for opinion varied from (1) very important up to (3) not important, for action from (1) sufficiently in succeeding up to (3) insufficiently in succeeding and for textbook from (1) sufficiently up to (3) not.

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Epilogue

The study systematically assesses the influence of the change-capacity on the innovations demanded from schools in order to implement a governmental school reform. It seems that the extent in which a school possesses a certain change-capacity is important, as well as the actual use of the capacities. However, not for all capacities a causal relation between the extent in which schools possess and actually use the change-capacity has been proven. On the basis of results and conclusions stated in the section above, the conceptual framework of this study has been adjusted (Figure 4). The most important topics and the mutual relations between those topics are being studied in the national survey of this study, conducted in November 1998. The results of this survey will be available in June 1998.
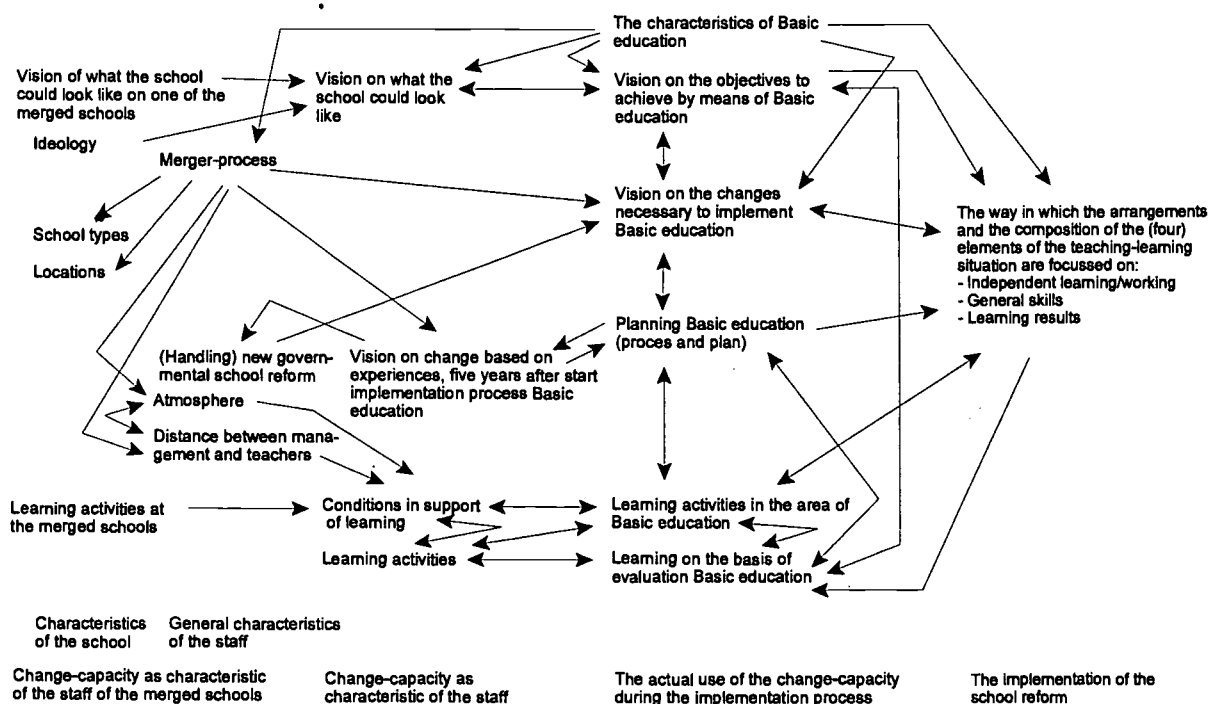

Figure 4 The adjusted conceptual framework

On the basis of the results and conclusions some remarks are made below with reference to the research question of this study, particularly the relation between the availability of a certain change-capacity, the actual use of the change-capacity during the implementation process, and the implementation of the school reform.

It seems as though the impact of the vision on the objectives the schools try to achieve by means of Basic education, on the presence of arrangements on the three areas, and the composition of those areas in classroom learning activities and interaction, is smaller than one would expect. For example, the vision of the 'East' and the 'West' was focused on the students' skills in independent learning and working. Indeed, the 'East' has striking arrangements in the area of independent learning/working, and the use of teaching strategies. The school seems to rise above the other two schools, but in comparison to arrangements on the other two areas, the score is relatively low. However, the vision on the objectives the schools try to achieve by means of Basic education, does give direction to the vision of the schools on the changes necessary to implement Basic Education.

During the second visit all three schools had a co-ordinating group Basic education, which works on a step-program. It seems as though the three schools are taking on the further implementation process according to plan, with a focus on practical usage. This is contrary to the way at which at the start and during the first years of the implementation process planning was handled, when at the schools there was rather a garbage-can decision-making idea. It seems that because of the absence of experience with planning a school reform such as Basic education, the schools needed five years to learn how such a school reform can be tackled.

Basic education requires teachers not only to update their knowledge and skills, but also to totally transform their roles as educators. The question is whether this can be achieved if teachers' participation in learning activities does not lead to long term effects. The step from knowledge to arrangements on the three areas, and/or to the composition of the areas in classroom learning activities and interaction, has not 'really' been made within the schools (yet), because part of the group of teachers can not make the transition on their own. Custom made coaching is necessary.

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