Policy challenges on school leadership from the perspective of equity and learning

EPNoSL

Table of Contents

Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

With the support of the Lifelong Learning programme of the European Union

Introduction

Policy challenges on school leadership from the perspective of equity and learning is developed in the frame of the European Policy Network of School Leadership (EPNoSL) project. This text summarises the policy-relevant outcomes of EPNoSL activities so far: the main question addressed pertains to what do the EPNoSL experience and knowledge gathered during the Network's implementation (2011-2013), mean for European policy/policies on School Leadership, and ultimately, for improving (or safeguarding) school education, teaching and learning and wider student outcomes.

The document is organised in six sections. The first section offers a brief overview of the activities of the EPNoSL project as a whole. In the second section, the principal point of departure of the project is outlined: how that is European policy is increasingly considering school leadership as a major factor in shaping the overall teaching and learning environment. The third section unpacks this notion of school leadership in terms of the diverse educational, societal, and political contexts within the European Union and proposes a common approach on the concept of school leadership that can act as a founding block for further policy reflection and implementation.

Based on this common definition, the fourth section outlines a number of key policy issues on School Leadership, derived from EPNoSL's diverse types of activities (awareness development sessions, National Networks, expert positions and PLA discussions) which engaged various types of actors representing different national contexts.

Drawing from these key policy issues, EPNoSL partners have worked towards identifying and studying in depth critical factors that may shape the capacity and potential of school leaders to exercise effectively school leadership. These critical factors are presented in the fifth section of the text, which calls for the deepening of policy emphasis on issues of equity and learning achievement at school.

In order to contextualise this analysis of the critical factors in policy implementation from the perspective of school leaders, EPNoSL will undertake the conduct of targeted empirical studies on five research themes, namely autonomy, accountability, distributed leadership, policy response and educating school leaders. These research themes are the focus of the final, sixth section of the document, where the main research questions that will orient these empirical studies are outlined.

1. EPNoSL at a glance

The European Policy Network on School Leadership (EPNoSL) is a partner-run consortium created in 2011 in response to the increasing European focus on school leaders' professional development, including preparation and selection of school leaders. EPNoSL aims at improving policy and practice on school leadership in Europe. To this effect a collaborative network in which members co-construct, manage and share knowledge has been set up.

EPNoSL has grown into a network of stakeholders from 42 European based institutions and intends to expand to all EU and Associated Member-States. EPNoSL partners include academic and other experts engaged in key thematic areas, education ministries and other policymakers, as well as professional associations at national, regional and European levels. In addition, research and capacity-building actors serve a fundamental role in enabling and facilitating meaningful exchanges among partners, as well as evaluation and dissemination of findings.

The EPNoSL partnership engages in diverse activities resulting in the production of different types of resources on school leadership, among which are National Case Reports, Synthesis Reports on specific themes, Typologies, Networking at national level as well as highlights on School Leadership issues and related bibliographical references.

EPNoSL has initiated learning exchange events with the participation of a wider community of stakeholders, It has also set up smaller national networks of stakeholders functioning as "Communities of Practice" and has launched an international online forum ,while it annually organizes two European Level Peer Learning Activity Events.

EPNoSL Partners

➡**Become an Affiliate Member**

2. School leadership as a key factor for the implementation of LifeLong Learning Strategies

The EPNoSL project is based on the premise that school leadership plays a central role for the improvement and reform of teaching and learning, educational policies and systems development, as well as school management and administration. School leadership is also essential for creating an all-inclusive education culture by overcoming individual and structural obstacles and inequalities. This view is widely shared within the policy communities at the EU and national levels.

The Conclusions of the Education Council of November 2007, 2008 and 2009 identified, for instance, School Leadership as a crucial factor for improving the quality of education and student/educational outcomes. School Leadership figured prominently in the November 2009 Council Conclusions on the professional development of teachers and school leaders (2009/C302/04), which stipulated that:

> "Effective school leadership is a major factor in shaping the overall teaching and learning environment, raising aspirations and providing support for pupils, parents and staff, and thus in fostering higher achievement levels. It is therefore of key importance to ensure that school leaders have, or are able to develop, the capacities and qualities needed to assume the increasing number of tasks with which they are confronted. Equally important is ensuring that school leaders are not

overburdened with administrative tasks and concentrate on essential matters, such as the quality of learning, the curriculum, pedagogical issues and staff performance, motivation and development."

In spite of country differences among European education systems, Ministers across Europe agreed to devote great care and attention "to defining the required profile of prospective school leaders, selecting them and preparing them to fulfill their tasks" and to assure their competencies are continually updated.

Addressing the challenges of studying, assessing and strengthening the role of school leadership for effective policy implementation, the EPNoSL project aims at stimulating discussion and reflection on the current trends of school leadership under the scope of facilitating policy articulation in the Network's Member States. Based on a collaborative knowledge management approach, EPNoSL launched a series of offline and online discussions and events for the exchange of ideas, research findings, information and experiences as well as for engaging diverse target groups representing different levels and types of education and training in diverse learning traditions. These activities created the ground for a consensus building process that would eventually lead to the articulation of policy recommendations on improving school leadership practices.

3. Defining school leadership

EPNoSL has highlighted the importance of taking issue with the contested concept of "School Leadership" in order to arrive at a tentative definition of the term that can act as the basis for further cohesive reflection on policy implications and recommendations. Through conducting analysis of country-specific academic and policy contexts, EPNoSL partners provided a European wide reflection on how "school leadership" is perceived and acted upon in diverse educational, societal, and political contexts. In general, as was originally expected, perceptions as to the role of the school leader were found to vary among EU countries; school leadership was thus sketched by EPNoSL partners as a "concept with multiple meanings", strongly dependent on national cultures and contexts.

The synthesis of EPNoSL's country specific analyses highlighted several of these national conceptual differences:

- In general, perceptions translate overlapping concepts to identify the position of the one responsible for running the school.

- They are named Principals, Head teachers, Directors, Managers, Leaders – These are titles for those who have authority over staff, the power of deciding over the many facets of the school organization, facilities, resources, curricular activity, and indirectly, over teaching and learning, over people, and the power of sharing decision making and leadership.

- In some statements school leadership is referred to as function (to lead, to manage, to represent, to encourage), role (to represent, to be an interface, a colleague, a *primus inter pares*, to encourage, to motivate, to support) and responsibilities, most of them related to policy, strategy and micro-politics.

- Multiple areas of school leaders' responsibility, such as the school mission, globally, and specifically, school planning, teaching and learning, meeting goals and standards, evaluating and assessing performance of staff and students, caring for wellbeing and for the school image, leading on the level of what is legally defined.

On the basis of mapping these divergences, EPNoSL partners held online and offline discussions on how to arrive at a common understanding of school leadership that would concomitantly be valuable for further policy reflection and implementation at the European level, but without brushing aside the distinct dynamics that are essential for political interventions at national or local policy contexts.

The approach proposed by EPNoSL, after these discussions took place, sees "School Leadership" (SL) as a multi-faceted process of strategically using the unique skills and knowledge of teachers, pupils, and parents, toward achieving common educational goals. Within the framework of educational goals, leadership is present at all levels of an organization, directed at serving the most important stakeholders, through inspiring others in the organization to take part in the management process. Likewise, management in leadership involves making the best use of human, material and financial resources available.

School Leadership is inextricably linked to reform and change in order to achieve more efficient education, taking into account the needs of each individual, institution, society and culture. As such, it coveys dynamism and pro-activity and is not restricted to principals or school heads but also includes other leaders in education, such as members of a formal leadership team and other persons who contribute towards the aims of the school, even including student leadership .

This common understanding of school leadership formed the basis for analysing the knowledge gathered during EPNoSL's initial outcomes, including the current trends on school leadership, evidence-based outcomes of existing research, country cases and comparisons amongst member states., as well as for articulating a set of key policy issues for improving school leadership practices in Europe.

School Leadership
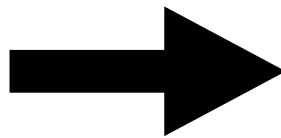
→ multi-faceted process of strategically using the unique skills and knowledge of teachers, pupils, and parents, toward achieving common educational goals

4. Identifying key policy issues on school leadership

Attempting to intervene in contemporary policy debates around school leadership, EPNoSL articulated a set of initial key policy issues to be addressed by policy makers for improving school leadership practices in Europe (EPNoSL 2012). This section provides a brief discussion of these key policy issues that are considered to be crucial for policy design and implementation. EPNoSL partners arrived at this selection of issues through a collaborative process: the collaborative gathering of expert knowledge and sharing and exchanging views and experiences on research evidence and existing practices with the purpose of bridging the gap between stakeholders of different backgrounds so as to establish common grounds for consensus-based articulation of policy discourse.

4.1 Diversifying policy considerations

First of all, EPNoSL emphasized the diversity of the current modes of governance and the historical, social and cultural contexts of schooling within Europe (Horner et al 2007). Along these lines, it cautioned against the notion of a universal policy implementation model in relation to school leadership practices, highlighting the fact that the success of educational change/reform is influenced by distinct societal contexts and local or national educational histories. EPNoSL placed importance on considering what leadership policy model or legislative context is applicable in a given country or local area, or what structural or policy changes may be desirable in order to improve school leadership practices on the basis of the following four dynamics.

- *Leadership forms and models.* Leadership policy models both outside the wider framework of educational governance, but also in relation to how school leadership is conceptualized and practiced cover a large range of differences in European states.

- *Policy implementation structures.* The key question here is: "What happens when national policy meets local implementation structures?" Research has identified, in many European states, a time lag between the national policy decisions to change the school systems in order to improve them and the time when the change are implemented out in the schools

- *Policy tensions.* There are often tensions between policymakers, politicians and received policy and the school and these tensions make it difficult to implement policy and to understand the different interests involved; therefore more attention should be placed upon exchanges and interactions involving these groups.

- *Contexts.* Policy implementation and the work of school leaders are strongly influenced by the wider and closer school context, and leaders and policymakers need to be aware of this context and be updated so that local school needs can be met and student's best interests and particular needs accounted for. Adaptations may be necessary. Contexts include: Socio-economic, cultural, influential restructuring and reform scenarios.

Key Issue 1:

Context is fundamental to school leadership — at school and in the surrounding national and local context. Leadership does not operate in a vacuum, and leaders need to take account of the context and needs of the students when mediating external demands and translating them into school policies.

Key Issue 2:

The broader leadership policy framework (including governance structures and school context factors) and policy implementation structure and actors in a given country are crucial for accounting for potential time-lags and the reception of policy at school level.

Key Issue 3:

Relations amongst politicians, different policymakers and the school, are critical for the effective implementation of educational policies on school leadership. Policy design should acknowledge the primary role of the school in developing a broad curriculum and rich learning among future democratic citizens.

Key Issue 4:

Shared leadership forms (distributed, democratic) are practiced in many European countries and encouraged by partners, and policies, research and legislation need to reflect this.

4.2 Equity and social justice as leadership imperatives

Arguing for a wider approach that does not equate school leadership to a bureaucratic, managerial exercise, EPNoSL proposed the substantial inclusion of the values of equity and social justice as key considerations in all discussions about improving school leadership and the quality of education (Woods 2011). More concretely, EPNoSL has highlighted:

- The need to strengthen equity as a mainstream component of all competences and activities in school leadership. Currently, in some schools, it is rather marginal.

- The need to strengthen policy to create greater equality in relation to gender and ethnicity amongst school leaders and to create a robust European database to monitor progress.

- The need for policies to embed the rights and participation of parents more strongly in the development of school leadership

Key Issue 5:

Policy should work harder to find ways to implement equity goals and processes, and consider effectiveness in this perspective (e.g., school completion relates to effectiveness and efficiency), in particular in how resources are used to achieve these goals.

Key Issue 6:

Policy design on school leadership should not privilege the economic role of education, but be equally directed at developing pedagogical leadership and other high-order tasks directly related to school and social processes such as learning and combatting inequalities.

4.3 The Contemporary School Leaders' Toolbox

EPNoSL partners proposed a generic toolbox for school leaders, a set of resources and that they can tapped into for devising practices for the improvement of the quality of learning and education in their schools:

- *Social and governing technologies.* A set of documents and practices (school mission statements, personal development plans, continuous professional development plans or schemes, moral or ethics statements or agreements, school or local plans, resource plans, quality assessments/ evaluations, etc) used by school leaders to define their objectives and outline the principles behind their leadership. School leaders' use of social and governing technologies are essential for defining school objectives, outlining the principles behind school leadership, and for legitimizing present and future action.

- *Communication technologies.* School leaders should be involved in the creative incorporation of ICTs in the everyday learning activities within the school as a means for improving educational outcomes and supporting student inclusion.

- *Networking.* School Leaders in many countries make use of - or are obliged to make use of - partnerships and interrelations with stakeholders and networks, and these relations are inputs are often regulated in national and local legislation.

- *Collaborative learning.* School leaders benefit from being able to develop and progress as leaders through learning and support from colleague school leaders and others.

- *Policy knowledge.* As school leaders can, and often do, act as mediators of external policy or demands, translating these into actual practice in schools, it is critical that they understand these policies (their genesis, rationale and envisaged impact)

- *School data and statistics.* As school data and statistics become increasingly important for analysing educational/student outcomes , school leaders need to have access to these datasets, but also have the capacity and sufficient training for their interpretation.

Key Issue 7:

Contemporary school leaders need to make creative use of all the above tools and resources. More support should be given to school leaders by local, national and European educational authorities to foster development of these resources, including training and education.

4.4 School Leaders' Training Needs

The mapping of the contemporary European scenery undertaken by EPNoSL partners showed that in many EU countries school headship is not a desirable option for many possible candidates (OECD 2008, ETUCE 2012, Huber 2011). This occurs mainly due to:

•

- Low remuneration or heavy teaching load in addition to administrative or other tasks

- Excessive administrative or managerial duties in comparison to higher-order leadership or pedagogical leadership tasks

- Lack of experience

- Perception of expected tensions between teaching staff and head — and loneliness and frustration resulting from this

- The nature of appointment — that in some cases teachers take the position rather unwillingly as a result of pressure from staff who want to avoid external candidates

The concern for an increased level of professionalization — more work needed in clearly identifying the competences and skills that are required by school leaders in today's changing circumstances and finding ways to make the necessary training and competence development available to school heads. School principals need to recognize the need for them to continue to learn throughout their career — self- development programmes are very important in the context of continuous professional development of leaders as well as teaching staff.

Key Issue 8:

Skills and competencies of leaders need to be updated, clarified and made flexible, and specific continuous professional development opportunities and requirements should be created to meet needs in schools of today, which are often operating in difficult and challenging circumstances.

4.5 Autonomy in the context of decentralisation/recentralisation

School leadership and school learning benefit from having discretion and freedom to develop the school in the light of its context and circumstances. However, school leadership also needs access to advice, help and opportunities for professional development in order to do this to the best level possible – from central and local government, and other agencies. It is crucial that a climate of *support* is created, rather than one of *distrust*.

> Key Issue 9:
> Autonomy should be supported by the central level and the philosophy behind autonomy and decentralisation should be made clear in leadership professional training.

4.6 Perspectives on educational shifts and effects on leadership

Paradigmatic shifts in education are challenging views of how educational systems work and how we have to act in them. Learning at all levels, including the role of school leadership, needs accordingly to be transformed in order to meet the news demands brought about such shifts.

The growth of collaboration between and across schools can be seen as such a paradigm shift in recent years with school leaders recognising that sharing learning, excellent practice and innovative ideas supports school improvement whilst simultaneously supporting school improvement in other schools (Hopkins 2013).

Decentralisation in particular has opened up new paradigms in education, particularly for leaders to develop strong networks and collaboration skills (OECD 2008; Sugrue and Solbrekke, 2011).

> Key Issue 10:
> Policy needs to account for paradigmatic shifts in education and learning and reconstruct school education accordingly, and good leadership is crucial in this process.

4.7 Effective Networking among Leaders and Schools in Europe

European documents related to school leadership and professional development stress the importance of Europe-wide and national networks for improving school education, and EPNoSL partners have benefited from these experiences, and outline further uses of networks. Possibly one of the key overlooked areas is the fact that EU countries need to have a policy developed on sustainable, effective networking.

> Key Issue 11:
> Effective and sustainable networking across Europe is essential, and dissemination of policy and practice should be encouraged in policy.

5. Critical factors for policy implementation from the perspective of equity and learning

This section provides a short analysis of a set of factors on policy implementation that have been agreed by EPNoSL partners as being critical to shaping the capacity and potential of school leaders to exercise effectively school leadership in order to implement strategies and initiatives that are targeting to combat inequalities in access, opportunities and learning outcomes and promote learning performance (EPNoSL 2013). The discussion of each critical factor is followed by a brief exposition of key issues that are pertinent to the debates on the development of policy indicators on school leadership from the perspective of equity and learning.

The critical factors in policy implementation identified and discussed below are viewed from an "inner" and an "outer" perspective, although these two are not always easily distinguishable because of their interconnectedness. The outer perspective has to do with the ways each factor is assumed to play a critical role in policy implementation in a cluster of schools according to the organisation and management of schools in regions, education systems and whole countries. The inner perspective has to do with the ways each factor is assumed to play a critical role in policy implementation at individual school level.

Given the high diversity in the political, social, cultural and economic realities and traditions between and even within EU countries, some of the factors identified may be less important than others in different countries or school education systems; it is also to be expected that the relative importance of different factors even in the context of a single country or education system may change with time or circumstances.

One should also keep in mind that policy implementation is a complex and dynamic process in nature and therefore at different implementation phases it is likely that some factors may be proved more critical than others for its success.
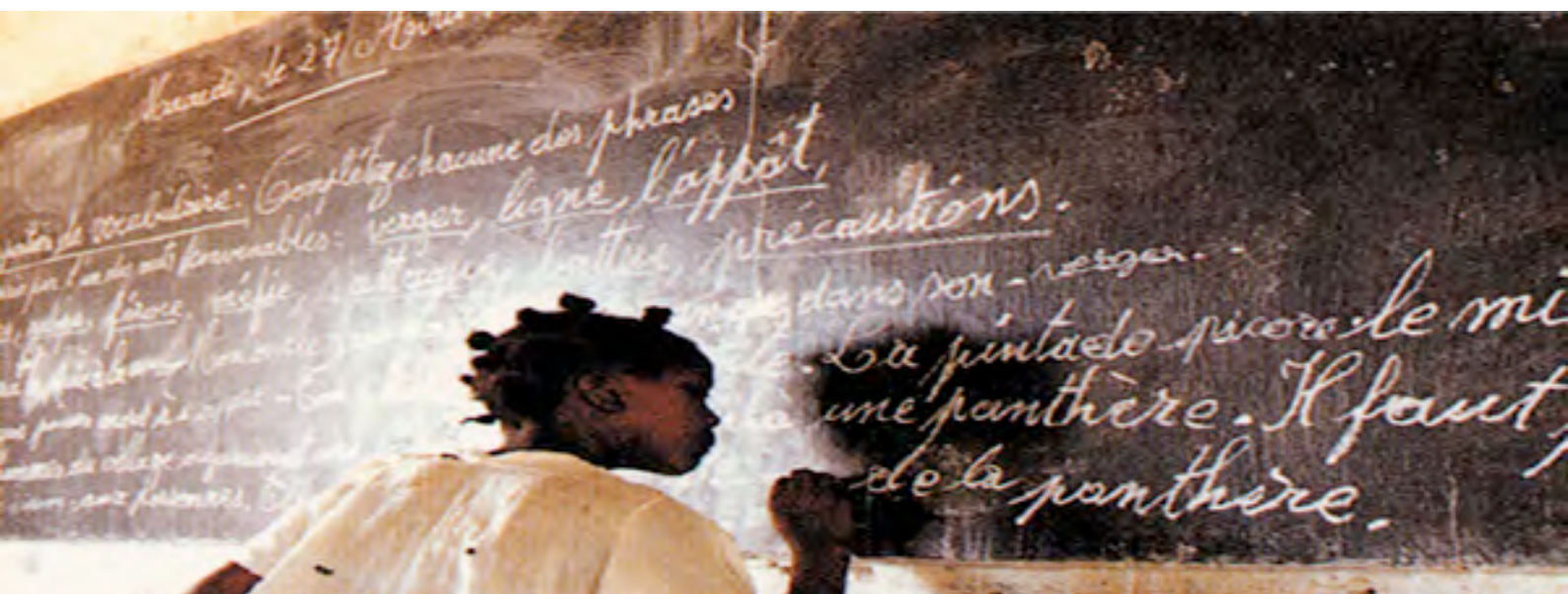
5.1 POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND PRIORITIES

Within the wider context of political debate over how to distribute limited public resources, it is important that governments clearly recognise the need to combat inequalities in access, opportunities and outcomes of schooling and prioritise measures that are aimed to address this problem.

However, within the EU different national governments are facing diverse economic challenges and circumstances and there is clearly the need to recognise that issues of equity in schools are likely to have become much more pressing in some of them after 2008. The austerity measures that have been introduced by several EU governments, notably Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland and more recently Cyprus, as a response to the economic crisis as well as the slow or even negative economic growth have hit harshly their spending on education. In these EU countries where cuts in education spending have been introduced there is a need to reformulate a wider consensus on the place of education in national policies and its role in the new economic environment. Such a consensus will also be helpful to orient school leadership policies and to establish priorities regarding equity and learning.

A new analysis of the PISA 2009 datasets undertaken in the context of EPNoSL shows that, in several EU countries, and most prominently in Malta, Bulgaria, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Luxemburg and Slovenia, there are wide gaps in average student performance in reading, mathematics and science between schools with low, medium and high share of low SES students.

The above findings indicate that in these countries there is clearly the need to reaffirm policy commitment and devote more efforts aiming to reduce such gaps. Among other things, policy commitment and prioritisation of action targeting schools with a high intake of low SES students has to be accompanied by a heightened focus on the specific needs and challenges that school leaders face in such schools in order to better inform school leadership policies. International cooperation and knowledge and experience sharing is also important. On this front there is a lot to be learned from the cases of Finland and Poland, but also of Latvia and Denmark, which managed to achieve both comparatively high average overall performance and low variation in the average performance of students in schools with low, medium and high share of low SES students.

At school level, school leaders and teachers, though often sincerely convinced of their commitment to equality, sometimes tend to prioritise other aims, such as maintaining their subject, the school's prestige, their own daily professional survival. The causes of inequality are multiple and complex and not all under the control of educators, but school leaders have their own share in minimising or exacerbating the effects of economic inequality and exclusion within their schools. It is their determination to minimise these effects and the degree to which they prioritise this aim that is the foundation of action for equity and improved performance at school level.

Developing indicators: Key issues

Practically, political commitment and priorities regarding the promotion of equity and learning can be signaled through various ways, many of which have to do with other factors and indicators identified in this text. For example, the level of funding that is actually available from various sources to set up and implement initiatives targeting equity and learning in schools gives an indication of the commitment and the priorities of the funding agents, such as the central government, the local authorities, the parents, NGOs or other for-profit and non-profit organisations. Commitment and priorities on behalf of school leaders and teachers can also be identified in actual everyday school practices and in the wider school culture. Shared values and traditions that promote inclusive excellence in schools are a good indication of lasting commitment and prioritisation of equity and learning over other sometimes competitive demands that are made on school leaders, such as demands for complying strictly to the curriculum and the timetable.

5.2 FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The level of spending, the sources of funding, the processes through which funding is becoming available to schools and the flexibility with which school leaders can use school funds to promote equity and learning are particularly important parameters to policy implementation. Across EU countries the level of public expenditures varies widely as percentage of GDP and it is to be expected that in countries where public expenditures are comparatively low less funds are becoming available to schools to promote programmes and interventions, such as extra classes for weaker pupils, greater variety of learning opportunities, meals to poorer pupils etc, that would scaffold school leaders and teachers' efforts to promote equity and learning.

The capacity of school leaders to implement such programmes is further threatened by drastic cuts in public spending on education that have been introduced in the past years by governments, particularly in Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Cyprus but also others. Things are becoming worse in countries hit by the economic crisis given that increased unemployment and cuts in salaries and pensions have reduced the capacity of many families to spend more on the education of their children and hence offer financial support to improve school services and infrastructure.

Developing indicators: Key issues

In times of economic crisis that has hit several EU countries and in the context of austerity measures taken by governments it is difficult to define a set of indicators that would be relevant to all. Public expenditures on education can offer such indicators but these are often too general or too vague in some cases to show reliably and validly how much of the spending is actually streamed to the promotion of equity and learning in schools. On the other hand, at the local and school level, indicators on the financial resources that are allocated to equity and learning can be much more reliably and validly identified. For example, the level of local communities and schools' funds that are made available to initiatives such as extra classes for weaker pupils, greater variety of learning opportunities, meals to poorer pupils etc, could be an indication of the financial capacity and commitment of schools to promote equity and learning. Further, such capacity can also be signaled by the autonomy and the flexibility with which school leaders can manage the school's financial resources to offer more and better learning opportunities, particularly to weaker pupils.

5.3 POLICY COHERENCE

Socio-economic and cultural factors that cannot be controlled directly by school leaders and teachers can gravely affect equity and learning in schools. From this perspective, it is of critical importance in EU countries were austerity measures have been introduced as a response to the recent economic crisis, to take efforts so as to ensure that these do not further deepen inequalities in income distribution, especially in communities and regions where there was already a high share of low income households.It should be stressed and become better understood by all stakeholders involved in policymaking and implementation that in order to promote equity and learning in schools there should be a deepening of sectoral coordination between education policies and other government policies that target to improve the socio-economic situation of the most socio-economically disadvantaged regions and communities through, for example, welfare policies, employment policies,LLL policies etc.

At school level policy coherence can be exemplified through coordinated leadership action involving the formulation of the school's mission, development plans and priorities, school spending, curricula, staffing, professional development, extra-curricular and out of school activities, networking, engagement in community projects etc targeting specific school and community needs in relation to equity in access, opportunities, and outcomes and improved learning performance for all. At this level, given that the socio-economic and cultural background of students has been found to play a considerable role in student performance in many EU countries, leadership policy coherence particularly in schools with a high share of low SES students, is greatly enhanced through the deepening of involvement of schools in the local community, serving its needs as community learning centres.

Developing indicators: Key issues

Indicators of policy coherence on equity and learning in schools can be located in the complementarity and synergies of policies at national, regional and local levels which are targeting to support different kinds of disadvantaged groups, such as the unemployed, the low educated adults, immigrants, Roma and travelers, people with special needs etc as well as regions and communities that are faced with pressing socio-economic challenges such as high unemployment, low education attainment, high school drop-out rates and early school leaving, difficult housing conditions, and more generally low standards of living among the population.

Policy coherence at school level can be identified in leadership strategies and actions that orient the school life in its totality towards the goals of equity and improved learning performance. Coherence is evidenced in the synergies and complementarities between the school's mission, development plans and priorities, the school's spending priorities, curricula, staffing, professional development, extra-curricular and out of school activities, networking, engagement in community projects etc targeting specific school and community needs in relation to equity in access, opportunities, and outcomes and improved learning performance for all.

5.4 POLICY OWNERSHIP

Policy ownership can be conceptualised as a (perceived) state of belonging to, and responsibility for, the implementation of a strategy or initiative. A dispersed, rather than a top-down, model of implementation is more likely to ensure that various stakeholders (e.g. school leaders, parents, pupils and local authorities) view policy as benign, rather than an alien interloper, and terms such as 'influential stakeholders' and 'policy community' are used to describe the multitude of individuals who must be "on-board" with a policy message in order for it to be embraced. An initiative that is adopted willingly, even though it may have arisen externally, is much more likely to be successful than one that is imposed externally or internally on unwilling or unconvinced staff. The way that people perceive change will affect the way that they respond. Therefore if they perceive

that the change has been forced on them they may well resist it, particularly if they feel it is counter to their interests. It follows from this that it is important to ensure that implementers at least understand what the change involves and that ideally they should feel some involvement with, and ownership of, the policy.

Policy ownership at school level can be greatly enhanced through distributed leadership and the widening of participation of school level stakeholders in decision making and in implementation of policies and projects aimed to promote equity and learning.

Developing indicators: Key issues

One important set of indicators regarding policy ownership has to do with the degree and scope of responsibility that different level and different categories of stakeholders believe they have in the implementation of a given policy initiative.

5.5 EMPOWERMENT OF DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS AND TRUST IN THEIR PROFESSIONALISM

Policy ownership is supported and enhanced by the sharing of power between different stakeholders.Policy empowerment and trust in different "key actors" shapes the degree and the nature of their involvement in the implementation of a policy or initiative. In school education systems where power is more widely shared and devolved it is likely that the implementation of strategies and initiatives targeting to promote equity and learning will be handled more smoothly and successfully than in highly hierarchical systems.

At school level, school leaders must try to empower staff by making explicit their own professional and educational values and sharing them. This way, an agreed collegiate culture can be created, encouraging a learning environment for all staff and pupils. Commitment and collegiality in others has to be developed, and leaders need to involve staff in decision making, allowing them to take ownership of their work, valuing them, and translating clear vision and purpose. Trust, empowerment and engagement are key components of collegiate cultures where change is not seen as a threat but as part of everyday practice.

Developing indicators: Key issues

An important set of indicators regarding empowerment and trust has to do with the formally defined and widely acknowledged power that stakeholders have to shape decision-making at different levels of policy, from planning to implementation and evaluation. Indicators of empowerment and trust can be located in the representation and voting rights that different stakeholders have in decision-making bodies, from the school level up to the central government level. Important questions are: do different groups of stakeholders have a formal role to play in decision-making and, furthermore, do they actually exercise their formal power to affect decisions? This is because empowerment and trust do not only have to do with rights but also with the degree to which these rights are recognised as important by those who have them and also with the degree to which they feel that their opinion matters.

5.6 SUPPORTIVE SHARED DISPOSITIONS TO INCLUSIVE, NON SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY SEGREGATED SCHOOLS

Beliefs about capacity to learn and how far it relates to innate ability or to effort and beliefs about the impact of families on early learning are culturally shaped. School leaders who, for example, give entry preference to learners with higher attainment, or who allocate the most inexperienced teachers to classes of those perceived as having lower academic potentials are enacting inequality. Unpacking one's own culture and its assumptions about people and about learning may move school leaders out of their habitual thinking and behaviours, raising awareness of how they are shaped by gender, ethnicity, class and societal culture.

From a policy perspective the capacity of governments to devise policies that would promote schools with balanced student intake in terms of their socio-economic background is rather limited because of the complexity and the highly controversial nature of the issues involved.

What they can do is to promote among the population the belief that all schools, irrespective of their intake and hence irrespective of the economic and social conditions in the place where schools are located, can promote equally well the well being and learning performance of students. Such beliefs can be established through strategies and coordinated policy initiatives that aim to reduce inequalities in income distribution, to improve the standards of living in poorer neighbourhoods and regions, to enhance the quality and diversity of the services and infrastructure (schools included) available to the citizens living in such areas etc.

Developing indicators: Key issues

Indicators of supportive shared dispositions to inclusive schools can be specified at different dimensions. Such dispositions can be identified in school leaders, teachers, parents and pupils' views regarding the importance and desirability to provide fair opportunities to all pupils, irrespective of their socio-cultural and economic background, gender, race, health conditions etc. Prejudices and negative stereotyping of pupils or families and even teachers and school leaders depending on their skin colour, their religion, their gender etc can also be indicators of the degree to which inclusiveness is a shared goal in a school.

Dispositions can also be traced in every-day school practices, for example in practices that allow or do not allow room for negative discrimination at various levels, from enrollment to allocation of resources, to behaviours that exhibit negative or preferential biases in the treatment of groups of pupils, teachers, parents or even school leaders, depending on criteria identified above.

5.7 SOUND SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF POLICIES

Policies and initiatives are often shaped and crafted not on the basis of research evidence but simply on the beliefs and commitments of policy-makers and their advisers. At the level of policy design sound empirical evidence can be proved of great help to top and middle-level policy makers as well as to school leaders, to, for example, identify areas where targeted policy initiatives are mostly needed and orient policy priorities, identify existing good practices, and indicate strategies that have been proved effective in the past given the context of their implementation. In the implementation of policies research evidence can also be very supportive. However, within the literature on school leadership and equity, there is paucity about the actual *practice* of social justice leadership,

the capacities needed by school leaders to engage in social justice and the kind of guidance that is necessary for practitioners on how they might enact leadership strategies for social justice. As it was also stressed, the processes of policy enactment involve ad-hockery, borrowing, re-ordering, displacing, making do and re-invention. Overall, the complexities involved between policy and implementation need to be better understood in order to ensure that the intended outcomes are indeed realised. Therefore, research evidence that would inform formative and summative evaluation of specific policy initiatives is of outmost importance.

Developing indicators: Key issues

Indicators of this kind can be located in practices of policy formation, implementation and evaluation. To what extent policy formation is grounded on empirical research that is relevant and sound? To what extent there are synergies between groups of implementers and researchers during the implementation phase? Is the implementation of a policy monitored and assessed on the basis of sound evidence that would allow for informed decision-making at various phases and steps? Is there a summative evaluation phase put in place so that stakeholders will be able to know on the basis of evidence the degree to which a certain policy and its implementation succeeded in its original goals?

5.8 HUMAN RESOURCES: SCHOOL LEADERS' CAPACITY BUILDING

The capacities of school leaders but also of teachers is one of the most crucial factors to the implementation of policies promoting equity and learning performance in schools. However, only in a few EU countries school leaders have the opportunity to participate in pre-service, induction and in-service training programmes and other capacity building activities that are specifically aimed to enhance their knowledge and skills on how to deal with every day challenges related to equity and learning, and, even more importantly, to plan and implement strategies at school and local level that would target inequalities in access, opportunities, and learning outcomes.Repeatedly, research has found that those who lead training programmes feel that they do not have the time or skills or sometimes the necessity to address equality issues explicitly as a priority in leader preparation programmes and that leaders themselves see the issues as taken-for-granted, and not demanding specific attention. *Leaders and those who prepare them should genuinely wish to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills that would allow them to tackle inequalities* head on and to withstand the resistance they are likely to encounter in their school community.

Research evidence from the analysis of PISA 2009 datasets indicates that in many EU countries school leaders in schools with a high share of low SES students face more pressing challenges as compared to school leaders in schools with a more privileged student intake, particularly regarding the learning strategies of their students and also their learning performance in reading, mathematics and science. In contrast in the vast majority of EU countries there were not recorded differences between students in low SES schools and more privileged schools in terms of teacher shortages in the schools, the quality of the schools' resources, the disciplinary climate, students' attitudes towards school, and teacher-student relations (as judged by principals or students depending on the PISA questionnaire). The above findings indicate that school leaders' capacity building in schools with a high share of low SES student intake should be predominantly focused on matters of pedagogy and the quality of the learning processes in the school.

Developing indicators: Key issues

Indicators of this kind can be located in the prior qualifications that school leaders need to have in relation to equity and learning achievement in order to apply for the job, in the induction training that is demanded from them to undertake and in the continuing professional development activities that they are expected to engage in. Such indicators are focused on the established rules (for selection, career advancement etc) that are followed in each national context and level of education. Another set of indicators has to do with availability and access. Are there quality programmes on offer for school leaders and teachers specifically designed to raise their awareness, to promote their knowledge and skills and to cultivate their positive attitudes on issues related to equity and learning? How school leaders and teachers are enabled and motivated to participate in them? A third set of indicators has to do with the actual professional development practices of school leaders and teachers. What is the degree to which school leaders and teachers undertake such kind of training? Do they form formal or informal communities and networks aiming to promote their professional knowledge and skills on issues of equity and learning? How do they share their experiences and what are the different channels they use to discuss such matters? A fourth set of indicators has to do with the strength of the relationship between professional development needs and research. How new research findings become available to school leaders and teachers and what is their role in shaping the research agendas and actual research programmes according to their needs?

6. Renewing the research agenda on school leadership

In order to contextualise the above analysis of the critical factors in policy implementation from the perspective of school leaders, EPNoSL partners are set to undertake the conduct of targeted empirical studies within five research themes, which are considered as critical for supporting evidence-based policy design and implementation. This final section offers a brief outline of these research themes, focusing on the main research questions that will orient the forthcoming EPNoSL empirical studies. In all these five themes promoting learning and equity are considered as key educational goals.

These themes reflect long-standing (or emerging) policy areas where in most, if not all, EU countries an on-going policy discourse is taking place during the past years. Along these lines, EPNoSL does not purport to treat these thematic areas as if they were unexplored territories, but will attempt to build on existing research work and results (e.g. OECD 2008, Eurydice 2013, Johansson 2011). The main goal of these forthcoming studies will thus be to supplement and expand the existing evidence base under the perspective of the comprehensiveness and coherence of school leadership policies and will be utilised for further networking and policy discourse by the EPNoSL stakeholders.

5.1 Autonomy

Financial restraints and public sector restructuring can often lead to more autonomous schools. Does financial and operational autonomy help school leaders to develop teacher practice and student outcomes? Are curriculum decisions being centralized or decentralised to schools? How are school leaders educated to lead autonomously and manage finances, operations, staff and curriculum for better learning outcomes and equity?

5.2 Accountability

As educational systems enter into a global competition, they also enter into international comparisons of student outcomes (e.g.:PISA) and are subject to elaborated national accountability systems. Are these systems providing tools for school leaders so they can enhance teacher practice, student outcomes and equity? How are school leaders educated to make use of such tools?

5.3 Distributed leadership

Many schools develop forms of distributed leadership. Which forms of distribution are helpful for furthering teacher practice and collaboration, for student learning and for greater equity? How are school leaders educated to establish and lead structures and cultures in distributed leadership formats?

5.4 Policy response

How do local school authorities (e.g.: municipalities or boards) and school leaders actively respond to policy decisions in systems, schools and classes? How are school leaders educated to include staff in the chain of implementation and to translate external expectations in to internal sense?

5.5 Educating school leaders

Are available leadership education programmes inclusive of different kinds of school and school leadership tasks and responsibilities? Are programmes for pre-service, induction, newly-appointed and continuous professional development in place to support leadership for improved learning and greater equity?

REFERENCES

Council of the European Union (2009), Council conclusions on the professional development of teachers and school leaders: http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st15/st15098.en09.pdf

EPNoSL (2012), *Lessons Learnt: Contribution to European Policy Network on School Leadership*, Prepared by Kathy Kikis-Papadakis and Cynthis Villalba: http://www.schoolleadership.eu/sites/default/files/del5.2.pdf

EPNoSL (2013), *Critical Factors in the discourse on School Leadership from the perspective of equity and learning*, Edited by Andreas Kollias: http://www.schoolleadership.eu/sites/default/files/epnosl-del-2.1-2013_1.pdf

European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) (2012). *School Leadership in Europe: issues, challenges and opportunities*, Brussels: ETUCE: http://etuce.homestead.com/Publications_2012/03.2012_FINAL_ETUCE_School_Leadership_survey.pdf

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, (2013). *Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe.* 2013 Edition. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/151EN.pdf

Hopkins, D. (2013). *Exploding the Myths of School Reform.* Milton Keynes: Open University.

Horner, W., Dobert, H., von Kopp, B., and Mitter, W. (eds) (2007). *The Education Systems of Europe*, Dordrecht: Springer.

Huber, S. G. (2011). School Governance in Switzerland: Tensions between New Roles and Old Traditions. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership.* 39 (4) 469-485.

Johansson, O. (2011) *Svenska avhandlingar om rektor 2000 – 2010 .* I Johansson, Olof, red (2011): Rektor – en forskningsöversikt 2000 – 2010 . s 27 - 42. Vetenskapsrådets rapportserie 4:2011. Dnr U2011/1198/S. Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet

OECD (2008), *Improving School Leadership - Volume 1: Policy and Practice, Volume 2: Case Studies on System Leadership*, Paris: OECD: http://www.oecd.org/education/school/improvingschoolleadership-home.htm

Sugrue, C. & Dyrdal Solbrekke, T. (eds) (2011). *Professional responsibility. New horizons of praxis*, London: Routledge

Woods, P. A. (2011) *Transforming Education Policy: Shaping a democratic future*, Bristol: Policy Press.

For additional information visit the:

EPNoSL Portal