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EUNEC statements on educational change

Preliminary remark: In these statements, we use the term "education" in its broad sense, including all kinds of learning environments. The words "teacher(s)" and "schools" should also be understood as including teachers and trainers, schools and other learning facilities.

1 The success of the educational change induced by the Bologna declaration, is due to the bottom up approach

In a lot of European countries the implementation of the Bologna declaration mobilised all higher education institutions for change. Contrary to the Copenhagen process and the objectives for education and training, the commitment of the educational stakeholders (rectors, heads of department, students) is considerably high. There is a great sense of ownership of the change process given the fact that the process was set up from a bottom up perspective.

2 The sense of ownership is important in thinking on innovation: the whole education sector should be involved in setting up an innovation strategy from the conceptualisation to implementation and evaluation

Research on transformational leadership in non profit organisations (such as schools but also hospitals, social services where the interaction between a professional and a student/client constitutes the core of the "production") teaches us that change in professional behaviour depends on a paradigm shift within an organisation. This shift leads to a new constructed perception/vision shared by all (or most) members of the organisation. This vision consists of a coherent set of shared values, convictions and attitudes. It offers a sound basis for setting up rules, standards and examples of good practice at the working place. The paradigm stands for the cognitive dimension of the culture of the organisation and forms a blue print for (new forms of) interaction.

Initiating effective change in school and classroom practice needs therefore a balanced innovation strategy paying attention to the micro, meso and macro level. The necessity for a sense of ownership at school level implies that changes cannot be realised on an exclusively top-down basis.

3   Educational change balances between societal demands and the educational needs of the learners. This calls for decision making on a participative basis. Within the global lines put forward by the decision makers, schools should be entitled to colour the innovation to the needs of their learners

Educational change is not an aim in itself. Education is not a world apart but one of the main sectors in society. Therefore, educational change is in most cases initiated by a relevant social, economic of political demand and should be an adequate and sustainable response to these needs. On the other hand, education is a service for learners and has to fit to their educational needs. In that respect there might be a contrast between the needs of society and the demands of the learners. This implies a participative decision making process where learners are involved in formulating the common aims. Secondly, schools should have the right to adapt the global framework for change to the needs of their students.

4   The relationship between European policy, central steering organisms (governments) and the need for local autonomy :

- **European frameworks, common goals and a common learning process;**

- **concerted action plans at national/regional level;**

- **respect for the local policy making capacity.**

In order to stimulate the sense of ownership of the educational field, EUNEC emphasises the roles and the responsibilities of the different levels of decision makers: the European level (open method of coordination), the national/regional education policy, the local perspective and the school level. Between those levels, it would be useful to respect the principle of subsidiarity and to consider what kind of decisions should be left to what decision makers to become successful?

All the following levels should be involved in the innovation processes like the Lisbon process

4.1 Europe: the open method of coordination and subsidiarity. Peer learning is a common process of knowledge transfer avoiding policy borrowing. Stakeholders have an important role to play in this learning process.

The open method of coordination is at the moment the most appropriate way for the European level to operate under the rule of subsidiarity:
stage 1 : identify priorities and benchmarks;

stage 2 : conduct benchmarking exercises to gauge the progress of the EU member states towards the identified benchmarks;

stage 3 : identify instances of good practice and best practice;

stage 4 : through peer review, find effective and practical ways to share best practice;

Peer learning is one of the new approaches the Union uses to stimulate Member States to modernise their education systems. The peer learning depends strongly on peer reviews, thematic seminars, study visits and follow-up / dissemination.

EUNEC emphasises the important role of stakeholders (school boards, students, teachers, parents, social partners) in every phase of the peer learning process:
- in defining the strong and weak points of an specific education system;
- in the peer learning process. The peer learning process should mainly focus:
    - at the European level: on defining the criteria for identifying good policy practice;
    - at the national level: on the levers for success (or failure) at the school / local level taking into account the context. Levers for successful renewal beyond the policy making processes at government level should be identified;
    - on the specific areas for peer learning but in the context of a developing lifelong learning strategy.
It is crucial to involve experts operating independent from the government.

EUNEC stresses the importance of peer learning but peer learning should be more than policy borrowing. The specific context, the national history and culture forces Member States to adapt new insights to the own education system.

To avoid policy borrowing the peer learning process should encompass knowledge transfer initiation, knowledge transfer adoption and knowledge transfer building.

Knowledge transfer initiation refers to a situation in which activity creates new approaches, services or products that can create innovation. This could take place by way of collaborative research and development, resulting in new solutions to common problems. We consider this as a long-term development.

Knowledge transfer adoption occurs when an agency engages with an existing knowledge base (perhaps a tool, policy or strategic approach being used in another country) in order to achieve some specific change. This approach may be close to the model envisaged in the European Commission's peer learning pilot. An obvious danger to avoid is the simple trap: 'policy borrowing'. While there are examples of success through policy borrowing, there are many examples of failure. The purpose remains 'policy learning' in most cases. We consider this as a medium- and perhaps short-term development.

Knowledge transfer building refers not to a specific product but to building the capacity for change. Activities in this area emphasise building the drivers for change, overcoming barriers and building capacity, rather than zoom in on particular initiatives. We consider this as a medium- to long-term development.

In this respect networks, learning communities consisting of practitioners and researchers, communities of practice, epistemic communities are adequate models for learning, constructing new paradigms and sharing expertise and new insights.

EUNEC stresses the importance of the valorisation of insights generated through action research and projects. Learning communities, be it at international, national/regional or local level should be able to have access to this knowledge. The Union could support the development of accessible knowledge management systems.

4.2   National/regional level: trust schools and open them up to the outside world by setting forward concerted action plans. Action plans should both set forward steering mechanisms and respect the autonomy of schools.

If the innovation should reach the classroom level, Member States should go further than an administrative reporting process. Within the Member States, there is a need for a national/regional and concerted innovation action plan. In that plan, the focus should be on setting clear policy goals, accepting schools to bring in their own concerns, values, needs and solutions in the local approach. We need a balance between steering mechanisms (financial incentives, inspectorate and accountability, standards) and the recognition of the autonomy and the ownership of school teams. In the setting of goals the national/regional level(s) should guarantee the principles of equal opportunities for all children with respect for diversity (multicultural, plurilinguistic) and social cohesion.

The plan should also be an instrument to discuss the coherence of the national reforms. Lack of coherence and rapidly changing attitudes in policy-making towards schools are important factors of future reluctance towards innovation. Action plans should consult representatives of school teams in setting out goals and standards.

4.3   School level: a growth path to a real policy making capacity

Innovations should be developed within the school. Educational teams have to be active partners in the innovation process. Taking into account the local needs and local autonomy is an important factor for a successful innovation strategy. Within the global European frameworks and the national steering mechanisms (see above), schools should be entitled to bring in their own concerns, values and "paradigms" on teaching into the innovation process. In this context, governments should not expect an overall successful change measurable at class level within a few years. The innovation process (and the accountability towards the subsidizing authority) should incorporate a school development perspective. Authorities

should recognize that innovation is usually a slowly moving social construction between all members of a school team and other stakeholders.

4.4   A participative and consultative approach at all levels

EUNEC emphasises the importance of consultative procedures, involving all educational stakeholders at every stage of the decision-making process (at European, national and local level). We can define three stages in decision-making processes where consultative bodies have a role to play: policy preparation, policy implementation and policy evaluation. This participative approach constitutes the basis to enhance the sense of ownership of those responsible for the implementation of a change process. Education councils, as platforms for a broad consultation of educational actors and the broader society, should become privileged players in the setting up of educational renewal.

5   The national/regional policy should enhance the policy making capacity of schools by providing support/learning platforms and rethinking teacher education

Teachers experience change as an enrichment if they are entitled to add their own perception, understanding and professionalism to the innovation process. Their concerns and questions about the meaning and the consequences of the change should be part of the innovation process itself. Therefore, educational change at a national scale is the result of a complex process of setting standards and common aims, of convincing and negotiating and of upgrading the competences of the school organisation and individual teachers by school improvement partners.

At the beginning of an innovation process, support services or school improvement partners should be designed to help schools and school teams making the right decisions and to enhance the level of professionalism of school teams. These counselling structures should also focus on the educational leadership of the school head.

One of the preconditions for these processes is educating teachers (initial teacher training and in service education and training) to reflect on their practice. Thanks to a reflexive attitude of teachers, they are at the heart of educational change. Therefore, stimulating future teachers to reflect on their conduct and behaviour is a main asset for the new organisation of teacher education and professionalisation.

6   The benefits and the dangers of upscaling 'projects' (local level) and 'good policy practices' (national level) to a national and international scale

Both the EU and the Member States have experimented with innovation using 'projects'. We should recognise that this method raises important obstacles to system wide innovation: sometimes projects only exist during a project life, sometimes they take place in silo

environment, bottom-up initiatives may prove incompatible with general policy lines or initiatives in other areas.

For several reasons, it is difficult to link results of projects to an effective strategic and global approach for innovation.
- projects are strongly linked to a local context;
- projects mostly may benefit from extra financial sources which are not available at the moment of a generalisation to all education institutions.

Projects offer an opportunity of peer learning. Schools and teachers have the opportunity to learn from colleagues experiencing (or having experienced) the same difficulties and obstacles. Projects generally are useful in the knowledge transfer initiation phase. The knowledge transfer from projects towards other schools is to be carefully developed e.g. by setting up school improvement partnerships. However, counsellors should focus more on the school building capacity than on the content and the goals of the innovation as such. From a regional/national perspective, the results of successful projects offer an evidence based concept that can be translated into balanced steering mechanisms, still leaving some autonomy to schools to set up their own innovation.

The Commission should identify successful European methods for upscaling local innovations.

7   Developing benchmarks for innovation processes

Educational changes needs to be adequately evaluated and assessed. This offers a basis for learning and for knowledge building. We emphasize the relevance and the need to investigate the feasibility of formulating benchmarks on building knowledge on permanent innovation and on educational change at a system level.