Teachers and school leaders towards a sustainable whole school approach for quality and inclusive education

Highlights Report 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report highlights the main findings of four research papers and aims to offer a basis for policy development and implementation at different governance levels and inform the work of the European Commission (EC) on the new roles and competences required of teachers and school leaders in the digital age for inclusive quality education in all European Union Member States. To do this, we bring together recent education research with inspiring practice and policy and the views of various education stakeholders.

The research quoted has been developed by members of the European Education Policy Network (EEPN) project partnership, based on resources and examples identified by partnership members. The papers aim to offer a policy and research framework for the analysis of practical examples of inspiring practice, especially for policy transfer and policy learning.

Research carried out in interlinked fields around teachers and school leaders towards a sustainable whole school approach for quality and inclusive education feeds into the work of EEPN to formulate and promote policy recommendations in the field of teacher and school leader careers as well as to the future work of EEPN partners. The primary aim of this work, starting with desk research, is to promote co-operation, policy development and implementation at different governance levels. It supports the European Commission's policy work to assist teachers and school leaders by providing research evidence and evidence-based policy recommendations for European, national, regional and local levels. EEPN has also aimed at offering a unique participatory methodology for future work on policy development.

While EEPN members are aware of the width and depth of research in the field of the complex topic that was assigned by the EC for 2022, these papers are distinctive as a result of the research process described in this report and are validated by this process as well. The interlined nature of the sub-topics researched this year is clearly shown by the fact that a relatively high number of inspiring practices and examples were analysed by more than one research teams, from different angles.

RESEARCH PROCESS

EEPN creates research according to the guidance of the European Commission defining the area of research supported policy of their choice. In Year 3 of the EEPN project this has been 'teachers and school leaders towards a sustainable whole school approach for quality and inclusive education'. When developing the annual workplan, the consortium highlighted four topical areas within this broad field that provided the basis for research and was also to be the starting point for annual policy recommendations formulated later, guided by research. The four research papers produced in the third year of EEPN are based on partner input. This data collection process makes these papers distinctive in the broad research field related to digital age and its impact on education, but it also implies certain limitation given the restricted sample. The process also validates these papers as they are based on policy, research and practice 34 partners from 21 European countries have found relevant and important in this field.

Data collection and delivery process

Collecting input from partners started at the beginning of the project year and ended on 1 April. It took the form of a complex internal survey tacking all five topics. This aimed at all partners to identify relevant research and/or practice for the desk research. Questions guided partners to provide researchers with links to sources they found relevant together with a brief explanation on how and why they found the given resource relevant. The survey was created by the research partners in the first conference call of the year. In the case of resources not available in English, the partners were asked to provide enough detail in a summary for the resource to be used in desk research. All partners were provided with funding to invest working days in identifying these desk research resources. National partners were requested to provide input on national policies, research and practice. In the case of international organisations this input was to primarily focus on countries not yet represented in the network.

This first period of input collection was followed by a State of Affairs meeting with the participation of most partners in Brussels on 21/22 March 2022. The first of the two meetings of the whole network was aiming at ensuring the active contribution of all network members to the research activities and also supported the researchers in focusing their work within the wide topics. It was organised in a way ensuring that desk research coordinators receive as much input as possible in the form of presentation of inspiring practices, research data, national policy examples and outcomes of EU-funded projects in the field. After the State of Affairs meeting, research partners offered a small window in time to share any further input they found important based on discussions.

The research papers were drafted, peer reviewed and edited until mid-August 2022, discussed at a Review Meeting between the research team and EEPN leading partners in Amsterdam on 5/6 September 2022, finalised and published at the end of September 2022. This Highlights Report is based on the final, published versions of the five EEPN research papers.

Research approach and paper structure

During the analysis process, researchers have implemented an impartial and disinterested approach ensuring the independence and objectivity of the process. The papers have been peer reviewed by the research lead who was not involved in any of the research papers this year, and the comments were taken on board at finalization improving the quality of the papers.

All four research papers quoted in this Highlights Report contain a description of existing international and European policy contexts, an analysis of education research relevant for the topic and published in or after 2015. This is followed by an analysis of national examples of policy and practice from Europe using an inductive approach: begin with examples of good and inspirational practice, induce the

principles common to them and identify where they fit with existing frameworks or guidelines. There is a balance between international and national documents representing the diversity of the consortium. The papers would have benefited from inspiring practices from outside of Europe, but the assignment by the EC was strictly about European examples.

On the basis of the above analysis, researchers have drawn their conclusions and provided research-based recommendations for policy and practices. These conclusions and recommendations, quoted below, will form the basis for drafting policy recommendations for European, national, regional and local level later on in the project year.

2.1 TEACHERS' AND SCHOOL LEADERS' COMPETENCES AND SUPPORT FOR EFFECTIVE BLENDED LEARNING

According to the European Commission (2021), blended learning in formal education and training involves a diversity of approaches and is to be understood as a school (in primary and secondary education, including vocational education and training), teacher and trainer or learner taking more than one approach to the learning process:

- blending school site and other physical environments away from the school site (either with the presence of a teacher/trainer, or separated by space and/or time in distance learning);

- blending different learning tools that can be digital (including online learning) and non-digital.

For this reason, it is important to consider blended learning within the ongoing development of the whole school and all of its associated stakeholders. Blended learning should not only be linked to digital or online learning or the use of only digital tools. The notion of blended learning has been in place long before digitalisation. Nevertheless, in the framework of this paper, the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators as well as the SELFIE self-reflection tool are referenced as they are well established standards that support the definition of teachers competences as tools for effective blended learning.

When bringing together research, policy, and practice, this research paper was aiming at offering an analysis of various approaches and frameworks in order to identify

- What defines "blended learning"?
- What are the types of teachers' competencies for effective blended learning?
- What are the types of school leaders' competencies for effective blended learning?
- How can school leaders and teachers be supported?

Conclusions

Blended learning instructional models are among the fastest growing trends in education today. The popularity of blended learning is no surprise; it offers an alternative way to engage students with a remarkable array of learning experiences, particularly for students who struggle in traditional classrooms. It also gives teachers an opportunity to facilitate learning in innovative ways.

But the presence of technology alone is no guarantee that students will succeed. Strong, effective blended learning doesn't just happen. It requires the work of thoughtful, engaged teachers who leverage the best of technology and face-to-face instruction to address the unique learning styles of their students.

Teachers foster school innovation with the help of technology in blended learning classrooms. Teachers are knowledge facilitators, mentors, and coaches in these environments. They assess, analyze, and synthesize student work and data to develop unique learning plans for each student, while monitoring and working with small groups and entire classes. They identify learning opportunities for students, engaging them in complex activities and holding them to ever higher expectations. In short, these educators are "becoming true educational designers," harnessing the power of these online tools to make their curriculum resonate with students.

When educational technology is combined with strong, competent teachers, it makes for a classroom where teachers are able to build powerful relationships and direct their attention where students need them most. Teachers can spend their time communicating, connecting, facilitating, providing feedback, and ultimately helping all students learn.

The acquisition of digital competences by teachers is a rather crucial aspect in the quest for digital development and maturity by our schools. A key element in this process is the continuous updating and enhancing of such competencies and the appropriate framework and pathways that this could be achieved. There are 3 rather important avenues that can may support this process according to the relevant research:

- Formal Continuous Professional Development
- Self-assessment tools
- Teacher networks

Continuous Professional Development. In the majority of European countries some form of compulsory continuing professional development is organized centrally by the relevant educational authorities, offering a variety of training courses (traditional face-to-face training, online courses, Massive Open Online Courses) designed and delivered by different public or private CPD providers such as schools, universities, teacher associations or private institutions and covering a range of topics, from basic skills in IT to targeted training on how to use advanced digital technologies and content in the classroom. Priorities tend to be heavily influenced by national policies and agendas with a number of countries allowing for schools to set their own digital training agenda according to their needs, while other opt for a more top-down approach

Self-assessment tools. A specific reference is made to the value of self-assessing digital competencies. Self-assessment tools facilitate the appropriate evaluation of the use of ICT tools and digital skills of teaches and may detect certain areas that improvement is needed, and in a way that allows for the consideration of professional development targets.

Teacher networks. Teachers often report involvement in professional development activities that are organised and delivered by communities of peers and networks.

Teacher networks may reinforce collaboration and facilitate the exchange of teaching practices, experiences and methods. They are often used to share teaching materials and didactical resources. Usually teacher-specific digital communities operate on-line and are part of wider digital resource platforms or portals that provide other types of support such as digital learning resources, including open education resources (OER), and informal online professional development opportunities.

Aside from the obvious areas of intervention, such as curriculum, teacher training and assessment, there are few other steps that could accelerate this process. A number of these are rather crucial towards digitally mature open and blended schooling settings:

- investment in IT infrastructure
- requirements for school digital plans
- digital leadership in schools (school heads and digital coordinators)
- parental involvement
- availability and quality of digital learning resources
- the place of digital education in external school evaluation frameworks

A wealth of recent research in cognitive psychology and the neuroscience of learning presents new pathways to efficient and meaningful education: leveraging such techniques as blended-learning scenarios allows schools to operate more effectively. From whole-of-school transformation to innovative learning solutions, open and creative environments can cultivate effective and engaging learning. A commitment to personalized learning includes providing solutions that empower all students. Inclusion, accessibility and sustainability should be included in the key functionalities of the educational activities in the open school environment. In our view the school environments should provide more challenging, authentic and higher-order learning experiences. It should enrich and

transform the students' concepts and initial ideas, which could work either as resources or barriers to emerging ideas. The schools' environments should offer opportunities for teaching tailored to the students' needs while it should provide continuous measures of competence, integral to the learning process that can help teachers work more effectively with individuals and leave a record of competence that is compelling to students.

Before schools can embark on change, they need a clear vision and leadership. More specifically school leaders need to create a shared vision for how science education best can meet the needs of all learners and to develop a plan that translates the vision into action. This vision and planning processes should be based on holistic view of the current innovation status of the school. This transparent overview will allow for more targeted planning to address the specific issues that each school is facing, thus optimizing the efforts to overcome them. The vision begins with a discussion of how and why a school's community wants to transform learning. Once these goals are clear, the findings from the Self-Reflection process can be used to open new possibilities for accomplishing the vision that would otherwise be out of reach. Responsive and creative use of the self-reflection process is a powerful way to improve curriculum and assessment outcomes for students, teaching practices and for the school as organisation. Focused assessments and support mechanisms based on analytics could support learning and teaching by communicating evidence of learning progress and providing insights to teachers; school leaders, policy makers; parents; and, most importantly, the learners themselves. These assessments can be embedded within learning activities to reduce interruptions to learning time.

Recommendations Based On The Conclusions

Blended learning has the potential for teachers to redefine their practice using a range of tools, including digital technology, where learners can engage in self-directed learning around issues that are meaningful to them. This embraces the contemporary educational perspective that students are not merely passive receivers of information and the teacher is not the only facilitator. Tools that facilitate greater student autonomy in the learning process can stimulate and support student agency (sense of own competence), personalised learning, and intrinsic motivation. Where relevant tools are used, it can also support the development of digital competences.

A blended learning approach recognises the value of school education as a collection of shared spaces for personal and social interaction, which itself is important for learning as a way of understanding and making meaning in the world. In a blended learning approach, shared-space learning – whether the same physical space or online - makes the most of the opportunity for interaction between pupils, between staff, and between pupils and staff.

Teachers and school leaders have a key role as change agents at school, local and regional, or national level. The prior experience and current competence (knowledge, skills and attitudes) of the teacher will have a significant impact on the effectiveness of their own individual, their school's, or their system's approach to blended learning not least because of their empathy for the learners, colleagues and other members of the local community. This aligns with the understanding that teachers are not merely passive facilitators of learning, rigidly following a prescribed curriculum, but are designers, constantly adapting their own approach based on the needs of others – some with a strong capacity for more provocative change and innovation.

Encouraging teachers and schools leaders to be change agents requires a level of autonomy for schools to make some of their own decisions about their strategy for a blended learning approach. The variety of education systems in Europe should always be taken into account as there are major differences in terms of autonomy granted to each education institution. Not every situation or opportunity can be predicted or planned years in advance; hence   schools and their staff need some liberty with guidance to act as they see appropriate for their learners in any given context.

Combining effective school site teaching and facilitating flexible distance learning for all pupils in a way that functions as a coherent pedagogical approach requires a high level of competence of teachers and school leaders. This needs to be coupled with clear guidance, some degree of autonomy, and sufficient time and other resources to create an appropriate learning design in advance.

School self-evaluation has emerged as a key mechanism to support whole approaches to change and innovation. School self-evaluation and the diagnosis of school needs, insight and understanding followed by action for improvement and review can be effective in implementing a blended learning approach.

School self-evaluation has been shown to lead to greater sensitivity about areas in need of improvement. It is found to lead to more frequent and open consultation about the quality of education and more classroom visits by the school leader. The process of school self-evaluation allows teachers to develop a perspective beyond their own classroom, particularly when they are involved in decision-making. In addition, policy makers can also provide various tools, guidelines and approaches, adapted to local contexts and needs, which can support schools in their self-evaluation and organisational development. Human and financial resources and time also needed to be made to conduct effective school strategies for blended learning

2.2 A WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT AND NETWORKING TO ENSURE SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR ALL

A whole school approach (WSA from now on) belongs to a learner-centered vision of education, within the frame of a communitarian sense of learning and development. International bodies and their declarations introduce WSA as a key factor for quality education as well as to build up an inclusive system which provides education for all.

This was guiding the research aiming at finding answers to the following research questions:

- What practices promote a positive school culture, teamwork and collaborative atmosphere within the school community?
- What policies support school leaders to bring school actors and stakeholders together to ensure educational success?
- What are the most effective models to involve the entire school community, stakeholders, multi-professional teams, external local services, parents and families?
- What policies facilitate a continuous professional development of school leaders, teachers and other school staff with a focus on a whole school approach?
- What practices are the most effective to make sure that each child and young person has an equal chance to access, participate and benefit from high quality and inclusive education under a whole school approach?

Conclusions

All the analyzed practices promote a positive school culture, teamwork and a collaborative atmosphere within the school. The evidence shows that these dynamics are not pre-conditions for a WSA implementation but the outcomes of a process, and this process has to be focused on a topic related to a human rights approach: the SISL facilitates a positive school culture through building a inclusive school project, the Toolbox emphasizes the intercultural view, both the Inclusive Schools Project and Multinclude give attention to the emotional development, ChildUp is strong in democratic participation, and Reflecting4Change embraces open sciences and free access to knowledge.

The experiences are also inspiring to change our minds in some key issues. For a successful WSA, the relationships between teachers and parents have to be bidirectional – not only from parents to teachers (Parent'R'Us), and equity measures are a requirement (TEIP). A positive culture and a collaborative atmosphere also implies the construction of a shared framework between the formal education (inside the school) and the non formal education (outside the school) (PMOE, Education 360).

The evidence suggests that a policy that supports school leaders to bring actors and stakeholders together in a WSA have to:

- Promote actions for curriculum development as a participatory process (Toolbox, Reflecting4Change)
- Introduce mechanisms for self-assessment through qualitative methods (SISL, Inclusive Schools, Reflectng4Change)
- Facilitate global communities of learners beyond the local (Multinclude)
- Links school innovation to social innovation (Nemesis)
- Acknowledges not only the students' diversity but also the schools' diversity (TEIP, PMOE)

We have learnt about how to implement effective models to involve the entire school community. Our sample provides evidence that helps us suggest:

- The most effective models are those that set a clear educational goal, and a WSA is a mean/ framework to achieve it (not the goal) (Toolbox)
- The models that foster horizontal participation between school leaders and decision makers are powerful (SISL, Education 360)
- The models must combine reflection and action as a whole (Inclusive Schools)
- We cannot expect that stakeholders meet, we need to create formal and informal chances for them to meet (Nemesis, Parent'R'Us)
- The effective models are those that move from the current status to new scenarios, by facilitating children's agency (ChildUp), enlarging the scope of a WSA from the school to the community (TEP), and valuing non formal education as an essential part of it (PMOE, Education 360)
- The models combine face-to-face and online activities, especially after the pandemic (Reflecting4Change)

The continuous professional development is revealed as a key factor for implementing a WSA. If we have a look at our chosen experiences, we realize that this continuous professional development is more effective when the learning experiences are open and they propose an ongoing process of creation and re-creation of teaching materials (Toolbox, Multinclude). There is also a strong accent in increasing staff competences on diagnosis and initial assessment (SISL, Inclusive Education, Education 360), as well as in improving the knowledge of relevant stakeholders – families – beyond the academic (Parent'R'Us).

The digital dimension appears to be an emerging framework to foster continuous professional development. Online training is consolidated as a practical and powerful model to facilitate an effective training of trainers (Reflecting4Change, Multinclude, Nemesis). Training is also rich when materials come from evidence-based policies and connects with real cases to be explored (ChildUp).

The practices that are most effective to make sure that each child enjoys the right to an inclusive education are those that:

- Are student-centered (Toolbox)

- Run a socio-emotional methods: we experience/we reflect on the experience/we act according the reflection (Inclusive Schools)
- create a sense of a team and work in the same direction among all the stakeholders (Parent'R'Us, Education 360)
- facilitate the access to high quality learning contents, scientific and/or cultural (Reflecting4Change, Nemesis)
- foster the agency of those that are in clear disadvantage (ChildUp)
- introduce the access to non formal education as an essential part of the right to education (PMOE)
- monitor the coordination processes and the resources (TEIP, Education 360)

Recommendations based on the conclusions

The evidence-based recommendations have been designed regarding the main conclusions, and they reflect some strategic dimensions to be covered.

- Teamwork and a collaborative atmosphere are both pre-conditions and outcomes of a whole school approach. Governments should promote mechanisms to place this collaboration beyond the schools as a unit of action, and facilitate the interaction among several schools from the same community.

- A whole school approach reflects a communitarian perspective of education. National curricula should prioritise the implementation of school methods that require a whole school approach.

- The relationship between parents and teachers is a key issue for implementing a whole school approach. Governments should facilitate conditions for parents to participate at school and build up a shared ethos with teachers in terms of school project.

- A whole school approach requires the engagement of all the stakeholders. Formal participation bodies should integrate those stakeholders that are not joining them, such as non-formal education institutions, cultural entities and social clubs.

- There is still little evidence and knowledge about how to implement successful whole school approach frames in local communities. More research and diagnoses should be done in order to increase the scientific and cultural background on whole school approach in Europe.

- The school leaders are the key actors to articulate the implementation of a whole school approach in a local community. More continuous training on whole school approach should be offered to these leaders, together with a normative acknowledgement of their role as whole school approach promoters.

- School leaders, teachers and policy makers do not share spaces for a joint work. Governments should encourage school leaders, teachers and policy makers to meet regularly and set common goals and targets for their National/local communities, by implementing multilateral, horizontal and collaborative processes .

- A whole school approach exists to give the students the chance to be at the core of the curriculum development processes. A more inclusive orientation and relevance should be promoted.

- A whole school approach is not new in Europe, we count on numerous experiences on that across the countries. However, these experiences are not acknowledged enough. More visibility and acknowledgement should be given to those who already implement whole school processes.

- Teacher mobility should be fostered to enrich whole school approach backgrounds.

- A whole school approach requires teachers' intercultural and inclusive awareness, as a way to strengthen their sense of belonging to their schools. More training and more mentoring processes should be implemented by educational administrations to foster this dimension.

2.3 A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, WITH A PARTICULAR FOCUS ON THE ROLE AND COMPETENCES OF SCHOOL LEADERS TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IT

When bringing together research, policy, and practice, we are aiming at offering an analysis of various approaches and frameworks in order to identify the role and competences of teachers and school leaders to support the implementation of a whole school approach for sustainable development, with a particular, bringing together policy examples, good practice and research evidence.

The research undertaken investigates successful holistic models in the field of ESD and in the broader sense of sustainability from the perspective of the role of teachers and school leaders, and their support needs concerning further training, tools, resources, etc. to establish successful ESD initiatives such as "green schools". The authors are making an effort to analyse the success factors and provide inspiration for schools to become leaders of necessary changes, building their own local and wider networks. The research aims to bring together policy and practice solutions to the Berlin Declaration's definition of the whole school (whole institution) approach: "recognizing that learners and the school community become meaningfully engaged in sustainable development through democratic participation when their institutions become living laboratories for participation and active citizenship, equity and gender equality, health, connections with nature and respect for the environment, energy efficiency and sustainable consumption, and where learning is experiential, action-oriented, localised and culturally specific, allowing learners to learn what they live and live what they learn".

- What are the main elements of education for sustainable development?
- What approaches to education for sustainable development have been proven to be successful?
- How can a whole school approach support ESD?
- What is the role of different stakeholders in successful ESD?

The main challenge ahead has been articulated by Daniella Tilbury, former UNESCO Commissioner on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). She has urged educators to acknowledge that the schools considered exceptional have been educating political and business leaders who are not agents of sustainability, but rather contribute to an unsustainable governance. It can also be illustrated for example by the total lack of critical thinking around the mask mandates that have been defined as one of the greatest recent dangers to the environment while implemented without any sound scientific argument on their benefits to public health.

Conclusions

The projects reviewed and presented above have shown that there is a plethora of projects that support ESD or at least support aspects of it, but many with limitations. The EU-focussed nature of the current

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paper did not allow for widening the scope to countries outside of Europe that may be ahead in the field of ESD while it might have been beneficial.

There are projects that focus on material development with main focus on environmental issues, seen ESD as an environmental educational approach and not as an approach that is cross-curricula, interdisciplinary, that touches on sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

There are some projects that contribute to the whole school approach from a different perspective by seeing the school integrated to the society and the community such us Parent'R'us, ParENTrepreneurs, NEMESIS, Plastic Free Heroes to mention a few. These approaches are far closer to the Berlin Declaration's definition of the whole school (whole institution) approach: "recognizing that learners and the school community become meaningfully engaged in sustainable development through democratic participation when their institutions become living laboratories for participation and active citizenship, equity and gender equality, health, connections with nature and respect for the environment, energy efficiency and sustainable consumption, and where learning is experiential, action-oriented, localised and culturally specific, allowing learners to learn what they live and live what they learn". They contribute to a deeper understanding of the two other main elements of ESD: fighting poverty and promoting social inclusion.

However, in all the projects that have been reviewed their approach to ESD focuses on the different aspects through engaging in problem-solving, and taking measures to minimize not only the environmental impact but the sustainable development of resources and communities. Hence, their goal is to develop in individuals a deep understanding of environmental problems as it can raise awareness for responsible decisions.

There are some important points that educators should take into account on the topic of ESD. Cultivating environmental attitudes is considered to be an essential prerequisite to pro-environmental behavior, which is one of the ultimate aims of ESD while the other two main pillars need equal consideration. In addition, children and young people are regarded to have a well-shaped mindset in order to achieve success in ESD, teachers need to consider and draw on children's agency, on their competences as citizens and human beings. What is more, the evaluation of learning outcomes in ESD should go beyond the traditional processes and should focus mainly on the development the relevant competences rather than measuring their knowledge.

ESD should be cross-disciplinary, participative, interactive, related to life, conducted in a non-authoritarian environment, cognizant of the challenges of societal diversity and co-constructed with parents and the community as well as the school.

One of the main outcomes of the some of the projects was the notion of "Classrooms linked to communities". ESD and other innovative approaches such us experiential learning, inquiry-based learning, SIE, etc. can support students to co-create social change projects together with adults and thus develop as community leaders and innovative problem solvers. In this process, a key element is the development of new partnerships among schools and local communities by opening up classrooms and facilitating collaborative social action projects among students and community members.

For example, empirical data has shown that this process helps students elevate their voice, develop changemaking competences and build their civic efficacy as they collaborate with adults to tackle a real

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challenge facing their community (Kalemaki et al. 2919; Kalemaki et al. 2021). That said, such approaches offers a genuine model to link classrooms to communities by channeling student energy and passion into projects that benefit their communities.

Creating meaningful relationships between classrooms and communities requires new ways of thinking and acting at multiple levels, from personal to systemic. At a personal level, individual teachers may need to reconsider their roles related to students, as well as how they interact with and engage them in learning. At the systemic level, head teachers might need to rethink how various structures and processes are designed to open schools to societies and elevate student's voice.

Many teachers, children and other stakeholders are not aware of the benefits of ESD as a whole school approach. However, the notion that you can develop essential competences and open up the same time to your community makes the approach very attractive.

Furthermore, the review showed that scientifically evidence-based recommendations support the adaption of successful practices and make it easier to convince teachers, and all other stakeholders to adopt novel educational practices, at regional, national and trans-national levels. However, it has also shown that there is a need for relevant teachers training. The majority of the projects have demonstrated the positive impact that ESD and innovative approaches have on teachers and their professional development. Nonetheless, they noted that understanding such pedagogical approaches and how to apply their philosophy in the classroom needs exploring, explaining and practicing. Teachers training for pre-service and in-service teachers is essential, while online teacher training courses might facilitate trans-national and trans/European teacher training.

Another finding was that ESD by its nature focuses on social needs and includes all the people from all the spectrum of society, it was especially beneficial to the students with migratory background as it enables them to think outside the box and nurtures unconventional talents and competences through participatory educational model. Therefore, ESD as a whole school approach is a valuable method to promote and address inclusion in educational settings.

ESD has been shown from the reviewed project that focused on the competence development that supports the development of 21st century skills[1]. So, an ESD approach that focuses on generic, relevant competence development will support the integration of the ESD into the curriculum and make it more interdisciplinary.

Furthermore, education is not an isolated affair, the collaboration between all stakeholders can support the development of a variety of educational materials and make schooling part of the society and teachers and students can connect their learning activities to real life. However, schools very often are not aware of how to introduce changes. An organisational change model will help them to identify the areas they are strong in and the areas they need to improve, introduce these change themselves, and implement only those changes that are appropriate to their school and needs.

The review has revealed that curriculum integration of ESD is very important for its successful adoption. Though, different countries and regions have different needs and different education systems and as a result, different approaches are needed. As a result working together with head teachers is very

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[1] https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2019/02/14/integrating-21st-century-skills-into-education-systems-from-rhetoric-to-reality/

important for independent schools, while working with educational authorities and ministries where the educational system is centrally controlled.

Finally, evidence suggests that schools may face problems to contact and connect with stakeholders from the local communities. Local authorities and parents could play a key role as intermediaries between schools and local communities. Furthermore, parents that are involved in the educational process can offer their skills and networks to local stakeholders and communities.

Recommendations based on the conclusions

The main policy recommendations arising from the reviewed work are:

- **Raise awareness of holistic educational approaches for social, entrepreneurial and digital competences.** Many teachers and children are not aware of what these approaches are. However, the notion that you can develop essential competences and support and engage at the same time your community makes the approach very attractive. Therefore, having ESD and other relevant approaches such us SIE on the agenda of educational institutes and teacher training organisations will help to raise awareness and spread the benefits of this approach. Raising awareness first on a regional and national levels where the local and national governments are able to support and develop novel educational approaches will accelerate the adaptation of such approaches. Furthermore, it is essential that these efforts should include the parents and the general public so they can become agents of change and ambassadors of a more holistic educational approach. Promoting evidence-based, long implemented programmes from outside of Europe can help mutual learning and awareness raising.

- **Provide evidence of the impact that ESD and other relevant approaches can have on the educational process and on competence development.** The evidence revealed for example in the case of the project NEMESIS that there is a positive effect that SIE has on students' competence development and on teachers' professional capacity. Scientifically evidence-based recommendations support the adaption of successful practices and make it easier to convince teachers, and all other stakeholders to adopt novel educational practices, at regional, national and trans-national levels. However, more research is still necessary in this field in Europe and Europe can learn from the global experience.

- **Provide relevant teachers training.** The majority of the projects have demonstrated the positive impact that ESD and innovative approaches have on teachers and their professional development. However, they noted that understanding such pedagogical approaches and how to apply their philosophy in the classroom needs exploring, explaining and practicing. A mix of theoretical and practical training courses would be necessary, primarily a co-creating, collaborative and hands-on approach would be best according to their own suggestions. Teachers training for pre-service and in-service teachers is essential, and provides a teacher training approach with the necessary materials. Furthermore, online teacher training courses might facilitate trans-national teacher training. Teacher training can be achieved at regional and national levels if universities and teacher training organisations include relevant courses.

- **Promoting ESD and innovative approaches is an approach for Inclusion.** ESD by its nature focuses on social needs and includes all the people from all the spectrum of society. It benefits students from all socioeconomic backgrounds as it enables them to think outside the box and nurtures unconventional talents and competences through its participatory model. Therefore, ESD as a whole school approach is a valuable method to promote and address inclusion in educational settings. Local and regional initiatives can assist in developing such plans and demonstrating their value.

- **Promoting ESD as an approach to competence development.** ESD has been proven through various projects that supports the development of 21st century skills. The findings need to be

disseminated to all relevant stakeholders regional, national and international in order to promote ESD in primary and secondary educational settings.

- **Support collaboration between local communities, parents, local authorities and educational stakeholders.** Education is not an isolated affair, the collaboration between all these actors can support the development of a variety of educational materials and make schooling part of the society and teachers and students can connect their learning activities to real life. However, there are schools that are open to such actions but they are few and far between. Schools together with local authorities can introduce flexible zones, for example as project zones that encourage such collaborations and expand these activities to all schools.

- **Promote Organisational Change in schools.** Schools very often are not aware of how to introduce changes. An organisational change model will help them to identify the areas they are strong in and the areas they need to improve. In that way, they will be able to introduce change themselves, implement changes that are appropriate to their particular school and therefore introduce ESD to fit their needs. An organisational model can be applied at a school level, at the regional and trans-national levels.

- **Intergrade ESD into cross-curricula and interdisciplinary activities/topics.** A very important step for the introduction of ESD into education is its integration together with the relevant competences into the cross-curricula and interdisciplinary activities and subjects. The integration supports the seamless development of the competences because they will be part of the everyday educational activities crossing the narrow borders of topic specific teaching and as a result the relevant competences will be developed in parallel to knowledge and other skills.

- **Different curriculum adoption approaches in different settings and countries.** The curriculum integration of ESD is very important for its successful adoption in educational settings. However, different countries and regions have different needs and different education systems and as a result, different approaches are needed. In regions where schools are autonomous and independent working together with head teachers is very important in introducing those changes. While for countries where their education system is centrally controlled working together with the educational authorities and ministries is crucial in introducing changes in the curriculum.

- **Involve local authorities as intermediaries in connecting schools and other community authors.** Evidence suggests that schools may face serious problems to contact and connect with stakeholders from the local communities. The lack of structures and organizational dynamics at schools constrain the development of these connections. Local authorities could play a key role as intermediaries between schools and local communities.

- **Strengthen relationships with parents and engage them as active contributors in SI projects.** It has been evident that the involvement of parents in the learning process is an important strategy not only to empower students but also to facilitate the creation of links with the local communities. Parents are involved in co-creation processes by offering their skills and networks to local stakeholders. In fact, empowering families as active contributors at school could be essential not only to create and maintain a positive school climate for implementing ESD but also to advance community – school linkages.

2.4 SCHOOLS AS LEARNING COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT TEACHERS' AND SCHOOL LEADERS' PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND WELL-BEING

Under the umbrella of the whole school approach, desk research 4 and its policy recommendations focus on teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being, thus extending the topic provided by the European Commission. Furthermore, following the whole school approach we grounded topic 4 researching professional learning and well-being from the perspective of system theory. This conceives educational organisations as open systems in interaction both with their external and internal operational environments (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Snyder et al., 2000; Weick, 2001).

The main research questions to better address the topic were:

- What defines professional learning and well-being?
- What is the status of professional learning and well-being?
- How does the educational system support professional learning and well-being?
- How do educational organizations support professional learning and well-being?
- How should professional learning and well-being be supported sustainably?

Recommendations based on the conclusions

The recommendations below were constructed as an outcome of the whole research process for this study. It started with the overall topic of Teachers and school leaders towards a sustainable whole school approach for quality and inclusive education from the European Commission. The EEPN network constructed four desk research studies to provide education policy recommendations to advance education policy within the overall topic. The topics and research questions of the four studies are presented in their respective reports. This study focused on the topic of schools as learning communities to support teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being and included five research questions as presented below. As for the final education policy recommendations, they were compiled based on the answers to the research questions as presented in the Review and conclusions section of this report.

Recommendation 1

When forming and enacting educational policy recommendations for teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being, it is essential to leave enough space and opportunity as well as sufficient resources and support to contextual negotiation and enactment on all levels of the education system. This is due to both concepts being complex and contextual. Because of this, it is also vital that we study them from various perspectives and always in connection with their contexts. According to research, we can identify their core features as well as their inter- and intra-connectedness.

Recommendation 2

It is essential to regularly study the status of teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being, and, based on the results, provide support and resources to meet the identified challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected students' and teachers' professional learning and well-being, but not all the effects are negative. For example, there has been more support to well-being, and teaching has better focused on core issues as well as been able to renew itself. The harmful effects have targeted more those countries that have not been able to afford to

renew their teaching and those educational organisations that have not had the educational leadership to enable their professional learning communities to renew themselves as needed.

Recommendation 3

It is essential to note that the educational systems can support teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being and that there is significant variation in this. Research and policy measures are needed to act accordingly. The COVID-19 pandemic has both affected teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being and shown how teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being demand many-sided support and resources from the education system. In addition, particularly in affluent countries the educational system has been able to support teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being in ways that has supported students' and their families' learning and well-being. There is significant variation though.

Recommendation 4

It is essential to note that educational organisations have a significant role in supporting teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being. This support may have various forms. These must be identified and based on the results, provide support and resources to meet the identified challenges leaving enough space and opportunity as well as sufficient resources and support to contextual negotiation and enactment. The reviewed data may not have provided an amplitude of examples of how organisations are supporting teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being. However, they provide a rich pool of what has been essential, for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic and, hence, how organisations should be supporting teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being. These are beautifully in line with how the data described teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being in general: complex and contextual.

Recommendation 5

To support teachers' and school leaders' professional well-being and professional learning, it is essential to apply a systemic approach that takes into consideration contextual factor and to leave enough space and opportunity as well as sufficient resources and support to contextual negotiation and enactment. The reviewed data provided explicit evidence for the complexity and diversity of teachers' and school leaders' professional learning and well-being. This complexity and diversity are manifested in various ways in different contexts that comprise at least the national, organisational, professional learning community and individual levels. There is need for tailored interpretation, contextualisation, and enactment. No one situation nor solution exists.

REFERENCES

Detailed reference lists can be found in the relevant section of the five research papers quoted.