



IMPROVING SOCIAL EQUITY THROUGH EDUCATION:

Raising outcomes for low achieving students

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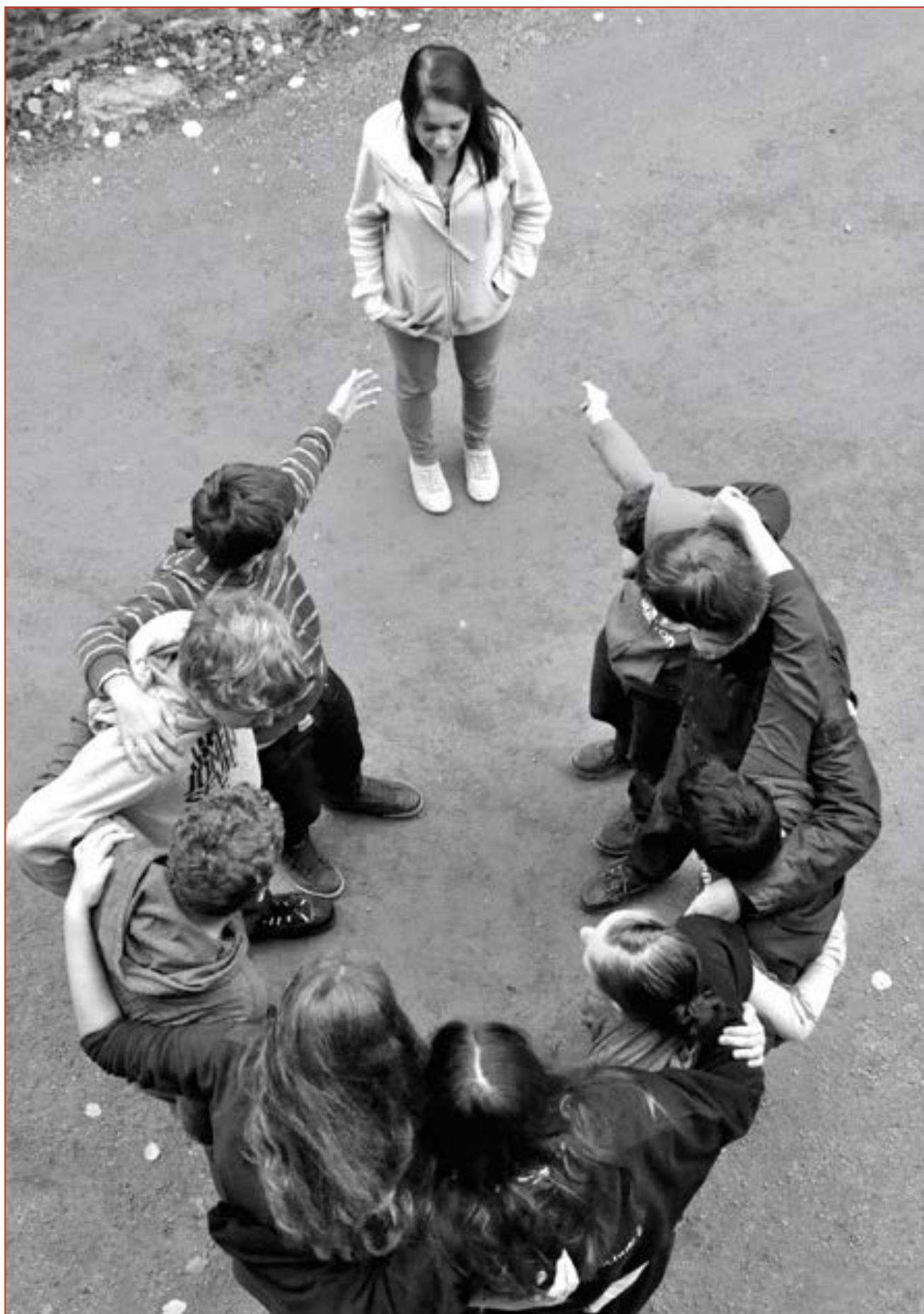




How can we enable each and every child, whatever their starting point, to flourish and lead fulfilling lives and to become responsible and active members of society?

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN CREATING A FAIRER SOCIETY?

Fiona Carnie, Vice President, EFFE

What is the role of education in creating a fairer society? This was the key question addressed at the 35th international conference of the European Forum for Freedom in Education (effe) which took place in Edinburgh on 5 May 2015. This is a challenge for governments and education systems the world over. With many societies, including Britain, becoming more rather than less divided, effe's commitment to children's rights and the pursuit of social justice underpins its concern with this critical theme.

Effe elected to hold this conference in Scotland because of the professed determination of the Scottish Government to increasing social equity. The percentage of children who struggle to engage with education for a range of reasons, often connected with poverty, is well documented. There is a clear recognition that unless the difficult questions about how to improve outcomes for these children and their families are tackled, the aspiration to build a more equal society cannot be achieved.

“A nation's greatness is judged by how it treats its weakest members”

Mahatma Gandhi

Educationally speaking, Scotland is currently an exciting place to be. With the development of the Curriculum for Excellence with its focus on developing independent and creative learners, and the acknowledgement of the need for transformative change in order to meet the needs of children and young people in contemporary society, there is a genuine spirit of optimism and hope. Certainly it provided an inspiring context for our deliberations.

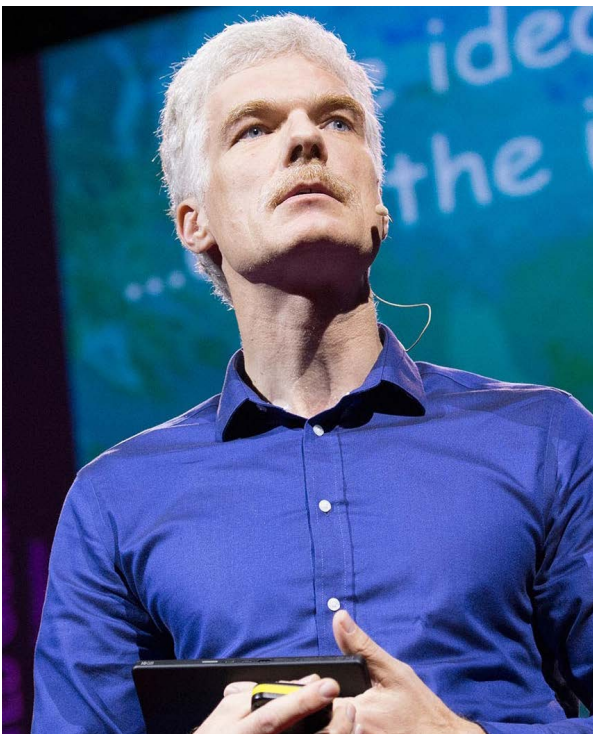
With internationally renowned speakers and participants from a wide range of educational backgrounds from across the UK and from 10 other European countries, the Symposium was well-placed to explore constructive and innovative ways forward. The purpose of this report is to summarise the presentations and discussions with a view to identifying the main issues for policy makers, for education leaders and for practitioners alike in seeking to create a better future for all children and young people. Links to all the presentations are given and it is our hope that this timely event and this short report can support colleagues in bringing about the educational transformation that is so clearly needed in order to create a more just society.

Effe is grateful for the support of its partners, Education Scotland, the British Council, the University of Edinburgh and Human Scale Education in the organisation of this Symposium.

IMPROVING EQUITY AND QUALITY IN EDUCATION

Dr Andreas Schleicher and Beatriz Pont, OECD

Andreas Schleicher is known to educationalists across the world primarily due to his involvement with the OECD PISA programme. However, the OECD's longitudinal analysis of education systems has enabled the organisation to build up a wealth of data in order to identify what makes an education system successful. Their examination of the relationship between equity and quality in education formed the basis of Andreas's presentation.



Dr Andreas Schleicher

Andreas began by talking about the kinds of skills that are key to leading successful lives. Having the right mix of skills such as creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration and communication enables people to flourish. Given the increasing socio-economic challenges facing society, not least from increased migration, he recognised that schools cannot just be responsible for children's academic education but also need to foster well-being in order to mitigate some of the effects of deprivation. In order to meet these challenges, schools must move away from curriculum-centred approaches to learner-centred approaches, encouraging student responsibility and engagement and having sensitivity to individual differences. He went on to discuss how schools can foster both equality and equity and noted that in some places such as Singapore, Korea and Shanghai, young people can do well even if they come from deprived backgrounds. Developing resilient students and having high expectations of all, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are drivers of improved outcomes.

The remainder of the presentation focused on teachers and their role in fostering both quality and equality. Andreas drew attention to Finland where teaching is one of the most sought after professions. Teacher education in Finland consists of an ongoing cycle of theory and practice in which teachers develop a deep understanding of how learning happens and are encouraged to be reflective and to work collaboratively with other professionals.

More collaborative learning, more social learning and a focus on longer term projects would certainly benefit students.

In order to adopt and embed these practices, Andreas argued that schools need to move away from hierarchical structures to distributed and collegial forms of leadership. Interestingly however, he highlighted the considerable difference between what teachers believe is important and what they say that they do. There is thus a need to align these aspirations with the reality of what goes on in the classroom. More collaborative learning, more social learning and a focus on longer term projects would certainly benefit students.

In conclusion, Andreas insisted that success in education for all students is possible so long as we focus on ensuring that there are high expectations for all, that the focus is on the development of complex skills and on learning how to learn and that we have high calibre teachers who are able to work within flatter and more collegial structures.

As Andreas was unable to join us in person at the Symposium, his colleague Beatriz Pont who was head of the Equity programme at OECD, joined us to add her thoughts on our theme.

Beatriz talked about the benefits to society of investing in equity and reducing school failure and drew attention to the range of policy options that different education systems are implementing to reduce disadvantage and raise outcomes. However only one in ten of these initiatives is properly evaluated and so much effort is therefore expended – and by implication wasted – in introducing reforms without understanding whether they are having any effect.

Beatriz drew attention to data relating to the different kinds of reforms but maintained that there is no single model for success as reforms are specific to and dependent on different national contexts. However there are key factors which underpin success such as :

- **Placing the student and learning at the centre**
- **Investing in teacher capacity**
- **Developing leadership and coherence**
- **Encouraging stakeholder engagement**
- **Drawing up clear and actionable plans**

Further details of this research are available in the OECD Report:

Equity and Quality in Education:
supporting disadvantaged students and schools
www.oecd.org/edu/equity



LESSONS FROM FINLAND AND ELSEWHERE

Professor Pasi Sahlberg, Harvard University

The success of the Finnish education system as indicated by OECD's PISA data has shone a spotlight in recent years on Finland's schools. Pasi Sahlberg's seminal book, *Finnish Lessons*, provides an inspiring account of the factors underpinning this success. Far from an obsession with a narrow vision of education and rigid teaching to the test which characterise many other education systems across the globe, Finland prides itself on a more holistic approach which prioritises the health, well-being and care of young people and which values its teachers.

In his talk, Pasi took a broad look at education systems which are deemed to be high-performing and posited that those systems which emphasise collaboration over competition, personalisation over standardisation, trust-based responsibility over test-based accountability, teacher professionalism over fast-track teacher preparation and equity over choice are more likely to be successful. However he is not just concerned about success in terms of PISA scores but is looking at an altogether broader vision of achievement on a wide range of outcomes. It is interesting to note that the comparators he specifies exemplify Scotland's education system on the one hand and England's on the other.

If Pasi Sahlberg is right – and the extent to which he is in demand across the world would lead one to believe that many think he is – the Scottish system which puts students, learning and equity at the centre, is better placed than the English system with its focus on targets and testing, to make the kinds of improvements needed in order to close the gap and improve outcomes for all children.

Pasi insisted, as did Andreas Schleicher, that school choice and competition are not related to better performance. What is more, greater autonomy of schools over curriculum and assessment, is seen to improve outcomes for children and young people.

However, as one questioner noted, the comparative statistics as shown by both Pasi and Andreas currently reveal little difference between England and Scotland. This could be explained by the fact that the divergence in education policies of the two countries is relatively recent. It will be fascinating therefore to watch what happens to the data in the coming years.

Endorsing Andreas Schleicher's core message, Pasi Sahlberg stressed that excellence and equity go hand in hand: you cannot have one without the other: a clear challenge to all to pay close attention to meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged in society.



THE SCOTTISH CONTEXT

Dr Bill Maxwell, Education Scotland

Effe decided to hold its Symposium on this specific theme in Scotland at this point in time because of the determination of the Scottish Government to address social inequity and its preparedness to explore the role of education in this overarching aim.

When the Scottish Parliament was re-established in 1999 there was a wide-ranging debate about the purposes of education which led to comprehensive reform and the establishment of national agencies with clear roles to drive the change. Work was undertaken to redesign the curriculum and assessment and also to reconfigure inspection and self-evaluation. The subsequent changes have taken education policy in Scotland in a very different direction from England, as mentioned earlier. Underwriting this difference is the fact that education is seen in Scotland as a common societal good rather than a market commodity and this has a significant effect on decision making at national level.

Dr Bill Maxwell, Chief Executive of Education Scotland, the national body supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education, outlined Education Scotland's strategy for encouraging school improvement and tackling inequity. He spoke about the tradition of respect for education and the value placed on teachers by society and drew attention to the priority that has been given to the development of the teaching profession. The aim has been to build a system which drives innovation,

learning and the spread of new knowledge about professional practice in a continuous cycle of improvement.

Bill's talk laid out the main factors in developing this system and identified the key challenge of eradicating the link between background and educational outcomes. The vision is that

"learners in Scotland will progress in one of the most effective education systems in the world, renowned for the ability of national and local partners to work flexibly together to achieve high quality and equitable outcomes for all".

Education Scotland's understanding of the need for transformative change as outlined later in the day by School Inspector, Aileen Monaghan, ensures that education in Scotland will not stand still but is well placed to embrace contemporary challenges and find new ways to meet the complex and varied needs of its young people. Aileen gave an insight into how ICT might be used in Scottish schools which highlighted the important role that new technologies will undoubtedly play in education in the future. She invited participants at the Symposium to contribute to Education Scotland's ongoing dialogue about how to work with schools to bring about the kinds of changes that are needed. This commitment to ongoing debate and development means that Scotland will certainly be a place to watch in the coming years.

SHORT BLASTS FROM AROUND EUROPE

- examples of inspiring practice

- **Developing teachers for their role in creating a fair and democratic society**
Ole Pedersen, Free Teacher Training College, Denmark
 - **Building an inclusive school community for lifelong growth and participation**
Mike Davies, Human Scale Education, UK
 - **Comparing a school based on Freinet pedagogy with standard state primary provision in a deprived area**
Dominique Lahanier-Reuter, University of Lille, France
 - **Postcard from an inclusive school in Münster**
Irmtraud Schnell, Department of Science of Education, University of Frankfurt, Germany
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The short blasts from around Europe provided an opportunity to showcase examples of inspirational practice from different European countries with a view to highlighting different approaches to addressing social inequity.

Developing teachers for their role in creating a fair and democratic society

Ole Pederson, Director of the Free Teacher Training College in Denmark described the rigorous 5-year development programme that prepares students to teach in Danish Free Schools [NB these schools are very different from English Free Schools, as they are based on the educational philosophy of Grundtvig and Kold]. The course ensures that students have deep subject knowledge as well as a thorough grounding in pedagogy. One compulsory aspect of the course which came as a surprise to British participants at the Symposium was the inclusion of a module on storytelling as a key teaching method. It is used extensively in Danish Free Schools as a way to engage school students in a living interaction whilst also nurturing a consciousness of the world beyond school.

A major feature at the Danish Free Teacher Training College is the attention given to the development or transformation of the student teacher into a “teaching human being”, someone who has strength of character, is able to inspire others and who lives and breathes democracy as a way of life, in other words a true citizen of the world. It is through this thorough and wide-ranging preparation that teachers who graduate from the College have the skills, confidence and utter professionalism needed to be able to educate and support children and young people from a wide range of backgrounds.

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Building an inclusive school community for lifelong growth and participation

Mike Davies of Human Scale Education in England took up the Danish theme, describing SPF Copenhagen, a small, state-sponsored experimental school in which democratic and student-centred approaches to learning and teaching were thoroughly embedded. The school was set up as a test-bed for new ideas. The key feature was its commitment to democracy as a way of developing its culture and as a way of engaging students in activities that had meaning for them.

Learning was an active process in which students decided on the topic or orientating question of their enquiry through discussion and debate which was mediated by their teachers for breadth and balance of topics researched over time. Once the theme was secured the next stage was for individuals or small groups to generate and plan their own contribution to the whole class project. Parents were involved in helping students to turn the plans into reality, the idea being to bind parents into their children's work as partners and contributors.

Mike went on to talk about Bishops Park College in Clacton, a secondary school which he had founded and led in a deprived area of Essex and which was successful in mitigating the effects of social disadvantage. Through the creation of three "human scale learning communities" – three separate schools of 300 students each on the same campus – the school ensured that all the students were known, valued and supported as individuals. Quoting American educator Ted Sizer who said "I cannot teach a student whom I do not know well" Mike emphasised the importance of paying attention to relationships which are at the heart of successful learning.

The school had a transformative curriculum known as the "tartan curriculum" which integrated learning across the subjects. All school leavers from Bishops Park progressed on to further education or employment which was a remarkable achievement given the high level of drop out usually experienced at schools in deprived areas.

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Comparing a school based on Freinet pedagogy with standard state primary provision in a deprived area

The next presentation, from **Dominique Lahancier-Reuter of the University of Lille in France** outlined a longitudinal research project which compared an innovative school at Mons en Baroeul, a relatively poor area in northern France with standard state primary provision in schools in similar socio-economic circumstances. This school for children aged 3-10 has been working for 14 years on the basis of Freinet-inspired pedagogy, has pioneered different ways of teaching and learning and has achieved higher than expected results in national tests and the almost total disappearance of violence. As a consequence it has received much attention from the national media.

The research project sought to identify the principles that underpin the school's practices and noted the following:

- **coherence:** whoever the teacher and the pupil are, their relations are governed by the same set of rules. Sanctions are the same for everyone.
- **the central place of work at the heart of the school:** the well-being of the students is absolutely not the main concern of the organisation of classes and practices, but a consequence.
- pupil **autonomy** is also at the root of the teaching methods.
- **"just distance"** in which teachers often remain somewhat in the background, intervening only when they think it necessary.

Whilst it is generally not the norm in working class neighbourhood for parents to participate in school life, parental involvement is encouraged. Finally, it seemed to the researchers that learning democracy with its many challenges is at the heart of the school's practices.

The school has constantly progressed in national tests and shown marked improvements in behaviour and yet it is still not among the "best" in the area in terms of raw results, indicating that they have not fully overcome social disadvantage. The research appears to demonstrate that the Freinet approach is more effective on a range of measures than standard pedagogy (among schools in similar social conditions), but doesn't completely overcome the social deprivation experienced by students.

Democracy with its many challenges is at the heart of the school's practices.

Postcard from an inclusive school in Münster

The fourth and final short blast came from an inclusive school in Münster in Germany, from **Irmtraud Schnell of the University of Frankfurt**.

Primus Münster is a school which is open to all regardless of ability. The school is highly unusual in the German system where children are generally segregated at the age of ten into two or three different kinds of school and at which stage children with special educational needs or language problems are sent to special schools. Whilst segregation is seen to be along intellectual lines, in reality it generally divides students according to social background, as indicated by PISA and other international comparative data. The teachers at Primus Münster regard the age of ten as too early for such an important decision, especially since many of its pupils grow up in difficult circumstances.

The school works in unorthodox ways teaching children aged 6-11 together in one class. Learning is highly personalised with the younger children often learning from the older children giving teachers time to work with children on a one-to-one basis. Sometimes older students are given the task of introducing a new topic.

Children themselves decide when they need a break and as they get older they become increasingly responsible for their own progress.

Teachers work as part of a highly supportive team in what is seen as a circle of support around the child. Irmtraud's presentation described the key features of the school and spoke of the need for children from families with social problems to have a place where they can feel safe. As in previous presentations in this section, the concept of democracy is clearly visible at the school with both class councils and a school council. Every child's voice is heard and has consequences.

Irmtraud concluded by saying that their model shows that children growing up in challenging circumstances can and do achieve on a range of measures, given the right support. The secret, staff feel, is to trust children, to believe in their strength, and to give them the support that they need, creating a rich environment in order to inspire children to work and to learn.

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DISCUSSION TOPICS

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- 1 Creating a supportive and inclusive school environment for learning
 - 2 Evaluating students and schools in different ways
 - 3 Engaging parents and communities
 - 4 Democratising school leadership and organisation
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The themes for the discussion groups were broadly taken from the OECD Report on Equity and Quality in Education. Short summaries from each of the groups are included on the following pages.

1. Creating a supportive and inclusive school environment for learning

It is inevitable that like minded people will be attracted by a conference with a powerful and relevant theme and one of the bonuses is that it allows exploration without polarisation. So it was in the group considering Creating a supportive and inclusive school environment for learning. We explored the potential opposition and synergies that emanate from the pursuit of freedom and that of equity. Interestingly much of the conversation was an expression of a series of dilemmas ...'yes/but' - the potential of new technologies to enable greater access to a wider range of experiences but also the danger of isolation and control: the investment in early intervention but the danger of this being too formal and formulaic: the espoused equity of school uniform and the reality of school rules as barriers.

Many of the issues raised and questions posed related to a lack of clarity and consensus on the purpose of education, especially the contribution of the school experience to the development of the citizen. Inevitably at an effe event the primacy of relationships, the rights of individuals, the need for the experience of school to hold meaning and clarify issues in an often contradictory and puzzling world were at the fore. Given that much of the programme revolved around the impact and meaning of PISA tables and charts it was inevitable that group discussion constantly underscored the need to respond to learners as people first and not simply as widgets to be fed into data analysis or undistinguishable cogs in societies where the market economy defined so much.

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In practical terms the group sought to urge greater democratic planning of learning, involving children in setting the learning agenda alongside their teachers. This was seen as part of the transition to more open schools, places where different agencies, eg mental health, social work, worked with teachers in supporting families and where the community could come together. The main message was very clear. The culture of school needed to change, from one of externally set curriculum and internally set rules to one of participation and co-construction. It was suggested that for those wishing to change and model the new, adopting restorative approaches to conflict resolution could be a good place to start to build confidence and trust in creating a new student-centred ethos.

Report by Mike Davies

2. Evaluating students and schools in different ways

The urgency expressed by members of this group - made up mostly of teachers - to find new ways of evaluating students and schools was powerful. Most were familiar with the practices of authentic assessment which innovative schools in New York and Boston had developed in the early 2000's before high stakes testing took its toll. Authentic assessment, which includes portfolio work and exhibitions and demands a much greater involvement of students in how they present their work and in how they come to select and work on their own projects, was seen as an important way ahead. Peer assessment which encourages students to reflect on their own work and that of others leads to both improvement and engagement. The use of profiling which emphasises the 'process' rather than the 'product' was also seen as another way of working with the child rather than doing things to the child.

The whole tenor of the discussion was geared towards trying to involve the student in the learning process so that he or she could fully engage in how and what they were learning. Engagement, motivation and ownership were seen as crucial in leading to student success. There was insufficient time to really explore what we all meant by 'success' but the feeling was that we were talking about the 'whole child' and his or her well-being rather than merely the metrics of academic attainment. Developing the skills of collaboration, communication and respect for others were seen not only as essential human qualities but also as essential to building the good citizen.

The culture shift that would come about with different approaches to student evaluation would necessarily make schools more collaborative and open places. The involvement of parents and of the local community would hasten this process. Schools would change from competitive examination factories to communities that saw themselves as part of a lifelong educative process. As yet very few schools had attempted to develop an alternative set of criteria. One such was an English comprehensive school whose founding headteacher had spoken at the Symposium. This school had looked more at the 'success' of its students in what they went on to do after school. The school was unique at the time between 2004 and 2009 for enabling all its leavers to enter employment, training or further education. Partly because of the school's emphasis on personal well being there were also no teen-age pregnancies at this time. Perhaps school policy makers need to look at broader ways of evaluating student 'success' and take seriously what really makes a difference to all young people's lives.

Report by Mary Tasker

Engagement, motivation and ownership were seen as crucial in leading to student success.

3. Engaging parents and communities

This group focused on the need for teacher education to prepare teachers to work with other partners, such as parents and social workers. As it is, many teachers lack the confidence and the skills to collaborate with parents, feeling that their training equipped them only to work with children and young people. In dealing with children from challenging backgrounds it is particularly important that schools are able to collaborate with parents and families so that they can work together to support the child.

It is crucially important that schools are welcoming places where parents feel supported rather than judged. Very often teachers only make contact with the child's home when something negative happens and this can set up an unhelpful home/school dynamic. Instead there should be greater emphasis on developing an ongoing dialogue between home and school so that a shared understanding about the child can be developed. It can be the case that unhelpful language can be used when discussing parental engagement particularly with reference to poverty and need and so there needs to be sensitivity around this.

Transition from primary to secondary school is a critical time and school staff need to share information and understanding that has been built up when a child moves on. Inevitably as children get older the form that home school collaboration takes will change. However it is no less important that the partnership continues and schools must find appropriate ways to draw parents in throughout their children's education. The role of the school leadership in this whole area is key so that teachers and other school staff understand the need and the expectation that they will collaborate with parents and feel supported in this work.

Finally, it was mentioned that parents and other family members often have skills, experiences and talents which can be valuable to the school. It is incumbent on schools to find out what parents are able to contribute in terms of time and expertise and encourage their involvement for the benefit of the whole school community.

As it is, many teachers lack the confidence and the skills to collaborate with parents, feeling that their training equipped them only to work with children and young people.

4. Democratising school leadership and organisation

For this group, the main premise of the discussion was that successful learning and improved attainment and achievement is based on improved teacher collaboration, improved teacher leadership and improved remuneration for classroom teachers. The political and financial considerations cannot be ignored: successful systems value teachers and remunerate them adequately for a number of reasons including quality recruitment and the avoidance of teacher shortage.

Teacher collaboration in terms of the democratisation of school leadership was seen as key to securing teacher engagement, effective professional learning, improved job satisfaction and well-being.

Teacher leadership has to be defined with reference to but distinct from delegated management and administrative duties. Issues pertaining to learning and teaching and the planning and effective delivery of curriculum need to be shared and based on equity and parity of esteem. This approach was not seen to compromise line management responsibility.

Teacher leadership, in addition to effective school leadership and management, needs to be more fully described and understood and head teachers need clear advice and resources in order to promote teacher leadership. Teachers themselves must have a clear understanding of what this entails, and see it as separate from traditional career “progression” to management and administrative posts. The evolving Scottish Framework for Educational Leadership may support and enlighten this debate.

The need for improved remuneration for classroom teachers is self-evident in terms of the perception of how classroom teachers are valued and to help with improved workforce planning. No matter how sensitive this is in the present economic climate, this matter cannot be ignored if commitment – as opposed to compliance – to innovative policy on learning and teaching is sought. Further discussion was seen to be needed to consider existing formal structures.

Interestingly, this discussion did not touch on the roles of students and parents within more democratic structures. Undoubtedly though, given the earlier presentations, giving teachers a bigger stake in school development is key to addressing questions of equity and excellence.

Report by Hugh Donnelly

Giving teachers a bigger stake in school development is key to addressing questions of equity and excellence.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS FROM EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY

Professor Cristina Iannelli¹ from the University of Edinburgh led a session showcasing recently completed research on social inequalities in education that had been undertaken by teams at the university.

The first study conducted by Professor Iannelli and Dr. Markus Klein² of the Applied Quantitative Methods Network (AQMeN) Centre focused on social inequalities in subject choices among secondary school students in Scotland. To explore this topic, Iannelli and Klein analysed data from the Scottish Longitudinal Study (SLS), a large scale survey with links to administrative school data and the UK census. The findings show that, in the lower secondary school years, students are more likely to choose science and languages if they have highly educated parents than if they have parents with no formal educational qualifications. Students from families with less educated parents are more likely to choose technical and vocational subjects.

In their second study, Iannelli and Klein analysed data collected between 1987 and 2005 for the Scottish and Irish School Leavers Survey. This study examines the relationship between subject choices in secondary education and entry into higher education among students from different socio-economic groups in Scotland and Ireland. The findings show that in both countries, there are significant social inequalities in access to higher education.

Taken together, these findings have direct implications for educators, policy makers, and academics as they demonstrate the role curricular flexibility plays in the reproduction of social “gaps” in student attainment and may suggest ways to combat inequalities in access to higher education.

Professor Sheila Riddell³ and Dr. Elisabet Weedon⁴ of the Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity (CREID) then presented findings from a large research project exploring the relationship between additional support needs (ASN) and social deprivation in Scotland. The project critically evaluated recent policies aimed at improving the educational outcomes of under achieving students and promoting the inclusion of students with additional support needs in mainstream schools.

1 Cristina Iannelli is Professor of Education and Social Stratification at the Institute for Education, Community & Society (IECS) and Co-Director at the AQMeN Centre in Scotland.

2 Markus Klein is an AQMeN Research Fellow at the Institute for Education, Community & Society (IECS).

3 Sheila Riddell is a Professor of Inclusion and Diversity at the Institute for Education, Community and Society (IECS) and Director of CREID.

4 Elisabet Weedon is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Education, Community and Society (IECS) and Deputy Director of CREID.

Students who live in Scotland's 20% most deprived areas are more likely to be identified as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or English as an additional language, than peers living in the 20% least deprived areas.

By analysing policy documents, administrative data and interview data, Riddell and Weedon show that, since 2009, there has been a considerable growth in the number of students identified as having ASN. In 2013, 20% of all school-age students in Scotland fell into one or more ASN category, with many more boys than girls identified as having ASN.

The researchers show that the Scottish ASN framework has expanded from 12 'types of need' categories in 2004 to 24 in 2013, with some categories increasing more rapidly than others. For example, the proportion of students falling into the "Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties" category increased from 1.2% in 2008 to 4% of the total pupil population in 2013, while the proportion of students identified as having a mental health problem, visual impairment or hearing impairment remained under 1%.

Furthermore, Riddell and Weedon show that the distribution of students with ASN across the levels of area deprivation differ by difficulty category. Students who live in Scotland's 20% most deprived areas are more likely to be identified as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or English as an additional language, than peers living in the 20% least deprived areas. Conversely, there are no associations between deprivation and dyslexia, hearing impairment and visual impairment.

The researchers discuss the declining use of statutory co-ordinated support plans (CSP), especially among parents who live in the most deprived areas. It appears that parents of children with ASN experience difficulties in negotiating their entitlements with the local authority and the school. They suggest that working class parents may experience greater difficulties than middle class parents because they lack the social, economic and cultural resources needed to effectively and successfully represent their child's needs.

In conclusion, this research project highlights the strong relationship between families' socio-economic circumstances and the likelihood of having a child with ASN. It demonstrates the need for policies that take into account the disadvantaged conditions in which many school-aged children in Scotland live. In addition, the findings stress the need to address inequalities in the process of allocating resources for families with ASN students⁵.

Report by Dr Gitit Kadar-Satat

⁵ A list of outputs from the project can be accessed via CREID website:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/education/rke/centres-groups/creid/projects/sp-educ-n-policy-change/sp-educ-n-policy-change>

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

What then were the main messages from the Symposium in terms of what needs to happen to ensure that each and every child, whatever their starting point, can flourish and lead fulfilling lives and become active and responsible members of society? Three key points emerged relating to the learning environment, the position of teachers and the organisation of the school.

Firstly, we need to create supportive and inclusive environments for learning, places that do not only focus on academic achievement but which provide the care, nourishment and support that children need in order to do well. This is particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds who require a place to feel safe and secure in order to be able to learn. There is much to be gleaned from Finnish schools in terms of the attention given to health and well-being and the recognition that “small is beautiful” when it comes to providing calm and nurturing spaces for learning.

Secondly, it is clear that the way in which teachers are respected and valued by society is an important determinant of the success of an education system. Teachers must be properly prepared if they are to be able to fulfil this highly demanding role, particularly in terms of being able to meet the needs of children from challenging backgrounds. Extensive and on-going training which combines theory and practice, an understanding of child development and pedagogy as well as subject knowledge,

and opportunities within schools to reflect and collaborate with other professionals are all key to teacher effectiveness. Again Finland points the way. By making teaching one of the most sought after professions it ensures that children, and society as a whole, are well served by those people who are entrusted with developing minds and fostering skills for the future.

And thirdly, the way in which schools are organised is crucial. Gone are the days when governments can be arbiters of all that takes place in the classroom and where hierarchical school structures demand conformity and compliance. Andreas Schleicher and Pasi Sahlberg both drew attention to the need for professional autonomy so that schools have the freedom to respond to the needs of the children in their care. Distributed forms of leadership in which the voices of all the main stakeholders - students, teachers and parents - are heard and valued are far more likely to create a climate of trust within which schools can develop democratically.

Education reform is a complex and slow process. This Symposium highlighted the critical elements of that process in the journey towards a more equitable society.

EUROPEAN FORUM FOR FREEDOM IN EDUCATION

The European Forum for Freedom in Education (effe) was set up 25 years ago shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It began as a bilateral collaboration between Germany and Hungary and has grown to have members in 25 countries across Europe. The organisation was established to support the freeing of education systems in Eastern European countries and to encourage the exchange of ideas and cross national dialogue.

Effe is founded on three basic principles:

1. The right to education

Education is a human right and should be available to all. The responsibility to guarantee this right is a task for European society as a whole.

2. Educational autonomy

Schools and teachers should have the freedom to respond to the needs of the children and young people in their care without political interference. The free development of personality requires educational spaces that give autonomy to students and teachers. In accordance with a modern civil society freedom also entails responsibility on the part of all participants (students, teachers, parents).

3. Diversity of provision

Diversity in education is a recognised principle of the European Union which allows for the existence and support for different pedagogical approaches. Schools require freedom in terms of staffing, organisation and finances to set their educational objectives and in the realisation of those objectives.

Effe is committed to safeguarding the rights and dignity of every child and will seek to defend these in cases whether they are undermined or threatened.

Over the past 25 years effe has organised events in many European cities including Amsterdam, Berlin, Bern, Brussels, Budapest, Helsinki, Prague, St Petersburg and Vienna. The last time an event took place in the UK was in 1995 when a conference on the theme of ***New Educational Environments: rights, responsibilities and initiatives*** was organised at the University of Oxford.

Effe has a presence in Brussels and aims to contribute to policy discussions, particularly on themes which are identified as priorities by the European Parliament. In 2008 a conference was organised by effe in Brussels on the topic of early school leaving and school dropout – a key concern of the Parliament. A specially convened session attended by the European Commissioner for Education was held within the European Parliament to present the outcomes of the conference.

Effe has had a number of distinguished patrons over the years including Vaclav Havel (Czech Republic) and Arpad Goncz (former President of Hungary).

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