

Autonomy and Stakeholder Engagement in Open Schooling

Key messages

- ⇒ **Successful open schooling initiatives in STE(A)M education require a certain level of autonomy in formal education**
- ⇒ **Various stakeholders with different roles and responsibilities are to be engaged in designing, implementing and evaluating open schooling initiatives**

Open schooling has proven to be more successful when combined with stakeholder engagement in decision making. To create the link to local communities, their representatives need to be part of the planning and delivery processes. Teachers, parents and the students themselves are the first groups to engage, but other local stakeholders that can become part of the open schooling environment are also key. As open schooling reflects local needs, the school needs to have autonomy in designing their own network.

Open schooling is per definition a local collaboration between the school and other stakeholders. To establish such relationships, the school needs to have a certain level of autonomy to decide on such partnerships, allocate necessary resources and arrange their activities accordingly. Open schooling initiatives are great testbeds for curricular experimentation, and thus a respective possibility for autonomous decision making is also desirable. Autonomy is to be accompanied by clear accountability settings by stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder engagement in open schooling requires an identification of stakeholder groups and a deep previous analysis of diverse expectations and needs. Engagement into developing, planning, implementing and evaluating creates a sense of ownership in any stakeholder group, and thus enhances the outcomes by sharing a close vision and common or parallel goals. Multiple viewpoints often result in thinking-outside-of-the-box solutions. What

potential role different stakeholders play in collaborative, open STE(A)M provisions?

First of all, school students will always be the end-user stakeholders. All schooling initiatives, and for that matter, all open schooling ones are supposed to be respondent to their needs. A "nothing about them without them" approach is to be implemented and there is a need to introduce age-appropriate methodologies for that.

Professional educators play a central role in providing quality instruction. Their engagement is crucial and needs to be supported by Continuous Professional Development as well as incentive evaluation and endorsement methods to ensure they excel in their job, bring in and embrace innovative practices.

Parents have proven to be crucial stakeholders being legally responsible for the education of their children, but also as the most impacting educators, having the largest influence on the learning outcomes and also learning mindsets of children with their previous and real-life experiences making them crucial for innovation.

School leaders at different levels of education are key for the success of any open schooling and/or STEM(A)M initiative being responsible for offering educational services and establishing competent and suitable learning environments.

Non-formal education providers are often provide methodologies and practices that engage more stakeholders in learning, have useful experience in working with diverse groups, in more flexible forms and settings, and also often more technologically savvy. They bring in more potential for innovation.

Local businesses play a dual role as providers of inspiration and resources. Having corporate responsibility for their local communities and being engaged in educating their future workforce and customers give them a high stake in education, while they often also possess suitable know-how.

Policy makers on national, regional and local levels are also crucial, creating the legislative and financial



framework for open education. The local level is often easier to engage in activities that target the local community they are responsible for.

Researchers, scientists and academia members can also be leading stakeholders in a number of areas of STE(A)M education, such as teacher training or policy advocacy. There is a global effort to bring research closer to the public, to promote citizen science and overall, active citizenship by this engagement.

Inspiration #1 – White Paper on Schools

The White Paper Higher Standards, Better Schools for All (2005) in the United Kingdom, proposed that schools and services must be 'opened up to new and different providers and ways of delivering services'. The aim was to enable successful schools to establish and manage entirely new schools and federations'. Schools themselves were encouraged to form 'foundation partnerships and federations that will work together to raise standards but also take on new responsibilities'. The business and private sector, in addition to the churches would not only extend their increasing control and provision of state schooling, but also play an emergent role in a new system of local governance, offering 'some local brokerage to make it work' as well as coordination to ensure joined-up provision. 'This cannot just be a partnership of state providers – the voluntary and community sector, business and private enterprises need to be a part of this partnership to provide joined up services.' ([More information](#))

Nevertheless, there are also a number of challenges that can arise from multi-stakeholder partnerships. The most common challenges arising from stakeholder governance are related to traditional power structures and the understanding of accountability. By stimulating broader decision making and promoting inclusive and participatory initiatives, some may argue that they can suffer from a potential weakening of traditional key stakeholders. Therefore, such structures need to be designed with care, and taking real accountability into consideration.

Sources: OECD, Scientix

Inspiration #2 – the Netherlands

Compared to education systems in other member countries of the OECD, schools in the Netherlands operate in a highly autonomous policy context, based on constitutional provisions since 1917. Within a framework of learning objectives, standardized examinations, and block grants set by the national government, the administration of Dutch schools is highly decentralized, schools have been free to choose and follow their own pedagogical visions. In lower secondary schools, 86% of "key decisions" on matters regarding the organization of instruction, personnel management and resource management are made at the school level, as compared to the OECD average of 41%. Schools are free to decide what to teach and how to teach it, as long as they meet established quality standards and learning objectives. School autonomy is balanced by a set of standards, attainment targets, and a national examination system developed by the government. The Inspectorate of Education, under the responsibility of the Minister of Education, monitors both quality of education and compliance with statutory and financial rules and regulations. ([More information](#))

ABOUT PHERECLOS

PHERECLOS is aiming to establish "Local Education Clusters" (LECs) of different design as examples of open schooling. All LECs will bring together schools and other relevant actors in the education ecosystem in a particular pilot region, supported by a peer mentoring programme. The LECs will be incubators for enabling a dialogue between various parties and help to set up joint activities in formal and non-formal education. The LECs will also help to develop collaborative learning environments as experimental testbeds for schools, and in parallel, they aim to impact on the quality of science engagement opportunities available in these areas.

More information: www.phereclos.eu



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 824630.