School Leaders and Teachers in Open Schooling

Key messages

- ⇨ **Teachers and school leaders need professional autonomy for successful open schooling programmes**
- ⇨ **Appropriate training and support as well as remuneration are necessary factors for any education innovation to succeed**

Teachers and school leaders are the cornerstones of introducing open schooling activities at any school. They need to have autonomy to make such decisions and they also need professional support – training, coaching, mentoring – to introduce new ways of teaching. Introducing and maintaining open schooling activities require time investment, and this needs to be acknowledged in their workload.

While teachers have been identified as key actors in achieving the EU education targets and goals as well as Sustainable Development Goal 4, experience and statistics show that there are several aspects of teacher career paths that need to be addressed to overcome the main challenges in relation to attracting and retaining teachers for the goals to become reality. This is especially true in the context of open schooling delivery.

One of the most important aspects is training: initial teacher education is as crucial factor in assuring an effective functioning of an education system as Continuous professional development (CPD). Such programmes can be considered compulsory in all EU countries, but their extent varies from country to country. There are also major differences between time and budget provisions for CPD. Training needs are to be considered when developing open schooling programmes as a key element of success. Appraisal systems can also be considered as an incentive for open schooling and play a very important role in reviewing and determining professional development needs. Appraisal systems also have a role in detecting low performance and they lead to supportive/remedial measures.

Motivated teachers are inevitable for good school provisions. Financial benefits such as salary, pension and insurance are often mentioned in research as extrinsic factors motivating in-service teachers. For this reason, it is of utmost importance that teachers' overall workload is considered and remunerated, including extra effort in establishing and maintaining open schooling processes. At the same time, these direct factors are closely interrelated with elements such as 'the perceived benefits or convenience of teaching', 'the nature of teaching work' and 'the status of teaching'. A successful open schooling approach can greatly contribute to these indirect factors. A strong professional community and exciting working environment, along with stimulating and challenging colleagues, has also long been considered important by teachers.

Inspiration #1 – E4F

Within the Education for the Future (E4F) project - a joint international Master's level in-service programme for teachers, school leaders and other educational specialists - has been developed, tested, evaluated, adapted and implemented. The programme created a context for supporting teachers, school leaders and other educational specialists to strengthen their leadership capacities and their expertise with respect to school development and innovation.

The programme was developed within a sustainable partnership between three universities and an educational authority in four different countries (Liechtenstein, Estonia, the Netherlands and Switzerland). The programme is unique because it brings together teachers, school leaders and other educational innovators as partners in innovation, by stimulating international exchange at a Master's level, by stimulating intensive reflection about national systems and school practices, and by combining both individual professional development of the participants and school development within their schools through small-scale innovation projects at local level. (More information)

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School leaders usually have a very important role in designing, organizing and evaluating open schooling programmes as well as in establishing, nurturing and maintaining partnerships, but most school head training schemes do not offer training in the field. What is more, research evidence shows that school heads are second only in school to classroom teachers in their influence upon student outcomes. The provision of appropriate CPD, together with mentoring and coaching schemes, for school leaders is of great importance, especially when it is considered that, conventionally, leadership rarely features in initial teacher education programmes, and the most common pathway to school leader positions originates from teacher positions.

Example #2 – ELITe

The "Learning in Teaching via e-inquiries" approach for STEM teachers' professional learning is based on the principle that the teacher teaches in such a way in which he/she was taught. Inquiry-based learning (IBL) has been identified as a powerful innovative teaching approach, providing opportunities to develop the scientific literacy of all learners. At the same time, teachers meet difficulties when implementing it in the classroom, due to missing experience in it, as, usually, the teachers' professional development courses are conducted in a traditional way via lectures. The main assumption of the ELITe project is that the implementation of the IBL methodology in teachers' competence development courses will provide them with real situation experience and know-how as well as with a reflection from 'students' point of view'. Something more – the IBL has a very poorly explored potential as an effective teacher training method, which can contribute to effective STEM teachers' competence development.

The majority approaches in initial and continuous training programs focus on subject knowledge, pedagogy and classroom-based training, the ELITe approach addresses knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by teachers to address their challenging roles. The implementation is based on proven links between inquiry skills practice and STEM teachers' competence development. Contextual aspects affecting effective provision of CPD in the above-mentioned countries have been taken into consideration, while challenges and needs in terms of renewing the thematic of STEM teacher training have also been addressed. (More information)

Autonomy is a main factor for both teachers and school leaders to be successful and motivated promoters of open schooling. When teachers are able to choose materials, teaching methods and determine classroom organization and discipline, their motivation is reportedly higher, however only if a high degree of continuous support exists. Research has shown that greater autonomy has a positive impact on the system level, students' achievements are higher in systems with overall higher autonomy and where school leaders can be more independent in their responses to local conditions. One of the key elements in this success is the freedom to choose open schooling approaches in addressing student needs by entering into partnerships. It is also clear that as curriculum autonomy increases, teachers' on-the-job stress decreases and as general teacher autonomy increases, their motivation, empowerment and professionalism increase. All these factors result in a better and more inclusive school climate and greater overall wellbeing of school staff and job satisfaction. However, it must be stressed that autonomy and accountability are interconnected, and that teachers and school leaders need to be empowered and supported in order to be effectively autonomous.

Sources: EACEA, EURYDICE, EEPN

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

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