



Managing for @ School of Success

E-book 1 - School Autonomy Executive Summary

Title: Managing for @ School of Success. E-book 1 - School Autonomy. Executive Summary

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Editor: EduFor

Date: November, 2017

Source of finance: Erasmus+ KA2, Project Nº 2015-1-PT01-KA201-013059

Format: Ebook

ISBN number: 978-989-20-6663-9

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With the support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union

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A – Context and Objectives

This Executive Summary concerns the ebook which resulted from the material produced (in the working version, without any “treatment”) by the participants and invited guests at the first two Training Events of the Managing for @ School of Success (M@SS) project, with reference 2015-1-PT01-KA201-013059 and financed by the Key 2 of the Erasmus+ of the EU programme.

In European educational systems, in the areas of interest in this project, there are five clusters, namely: centralized systems with limited school autonomy, including countries such as Portugal; predominantly centralized systems with local certification, such as Italy; federal systems with importance at the regional level, in countries such as Spain; cooperative systems between state and local government, in countries such as Poland; decentralized systems with great school autonomy, in countries such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom¹ (with England standing out as having major curricular autonomy). This was the criterion for seeking partners from those countries to be part of the project.

M@SS is organized around 4 objectives:

1. Learning about and sharing experiences of school management in different European contexts with different actors and typologies of responsibility distribution;
2. Identifying experiments developed at different levels of school management, associated with the principle of more transparent, effective management promoting the concept of an intelligent school;
3. Promoting innovation in school management through shared, international reflection on innovative experiments and strategies developed at the local level;
4. Producing and spreading knowledge about local, municipal and national policies regarding school management, which are able to change the perceptions of stakeholders in school management.

The project challenges practices related to school management, the training of head teachers and educational decentralization of relevant policies in the area of this international partnership and organized around the three structuring themes that guide

¹ Batista, Susana (2015). "A (Re)distribution of responsibilities among educational actors: a European perspective." Conference at the Seminar "Decentralization Processes in Education." University of Aveiro, Portugal, 18th February.

the project: autonomy, schools' self-assessment and the curriculum. The first ebook was organized on the subject of school autonomy.

B – Revisiting the Main Topics

The concept of autonomy, based on how this is interpreted by the participants in this project, **results and is reflected in the most specific questions regarding performance of daily activity as school managers.** Mentioned as being of particular interest were questions related to the educational supply, principal pedagogical strategies and management of human, financial and material resources.

In the actual carrying out of autonomy, experienced in its ups and downs and difficulties, the Head Teachers present saw themselves as the “corridors of the autonomy” that already exists. However, **excessive regulations from central or regional structures were considered an obstacle to carrying this out,** with all longing for greater decentralization of powers and responsibilities.

Another commonly shared idea was the **association** between the clarity of understanding of **autonomous action and carrying out effective leadership.**

In addition, **the degrees of autonomy in schools seem also to depend on school results.** This means that, at times like the present, stimulated by greater social emphasis on the school indicators and results obtained by pupils in external assessment, **better performing schools seem to be more trustworthy, from the administrative point of view.**

As referred to in the introduction, this project is the living proof that different historical and cultural contexts influence the exercising of autonomy in schools.

In the partner schools with **practices of greater autonomy, there is more systematic (we could say more natural) policy and practice of sharing and cooperation,** both internally (between teachers and the school's own organs) and externally (between the school and stakeholders such as parents, companies and other local bodies). Those collaborative practices are also opportunities for improvement for the whole educational community.

A relevant requirement is that **the head teacher has a strategic vision for the school,** covering the real time of the educational context, which extends over a period of at least twelve years (remember that children entering the 1st year of school this year will only finish in 2030), without jeopardizing the needs of the educational community and an inclusive school.

It also became clear for all the head teachers participating in this project that the need for more autonomy is no personal project, but rather an **intrinsic condition of organisations' development** and of better service to the communities they serve.

C – Main Conclusions

1. This ebook is a living book – this means that **it continues to set questions** and challenges, the same ones that head teachers and **school leaders have to face**. Its living character comes from this feature of a work-in-progress. The novelty of the book's content also lies in the diversity of tasks, texts and authors, always connecting theory and practice, always challenging readers to ask themselves the questions, as if they are part of the team. In addition, this book is a product of a training project that has head teachers both as its recipients and authors. These double perspectives come from the main idea of the project itself, which intends to work with school leaders on subjects that really matter to them.
2. The second major idea of the book is that it **is both a result and a training process** that brings together head teachers from different European countries. Although they come from different educational traditions they share the same concerns about how to contribute to school development, sustainability and quality, and students' achievement.
3. The third idea of the book is the **plasticity of the school leadership** concept. The three dimensions of school leadership that emerge from this e-book are:
 - 3.1. **School autonomy** – the generic theme of the e-book, **is not separable from the leadership concept**. Until now, it was possible to validate the general impression regarding the importance of leadership as a key factor of schools' autonomy and quality. The perspectives included in the book show the diversity of the team, its management experiences, shaped by the diversity of institutions and countries represented. It is possible to argue that the team sums up the main trends of European school management.
 - 3.2. **Leadership** of a team (usually heterogeneous, such as that of a School) to develop an educational project that fulfills the threefold goal of adapting to national goals, the needs of the students and the characteristics of the people and the resources available, **is not a simple task**. Three axes balance the essence of educational management.

3.2.1. The first is **transversality**. Transversality means the possibility of educational action to translate (and deal with) and tackle the complexity that characterizes the so-called knowledge society. Accordingly, educational leadership generates different forms, levels and areas of knowledge, making it particularly relevant regarding the differentiating effects of its action on the communities served.

3.2.2. A second axis of meaning lies in the **style of leadership** and management. This dimension includes more or less shared forms of leadership and management, and more ecological or more technical forms of leadership. An important aspect of this axis is the visibility of the intermediate leaders.

3.2.3. Furthermore, in the uncertain times we live in, schools face new and **wide-ranging challenges**. As they must ensure a public social service, they have to deal with higher expectations and to act more comprehensively and ethically than ever before. It is up to school leaders to interpret these new challenges and reconfigure in each case the learning that must be improved, in clear articulation with their stakeholders.

3.3. **Leadership is currently related to the concept of a learning school and it is open to innovation.** The concept of learning schools is applicable to those that promote an expansive learning environment, improve students' achievement, improve professional awareness, promote innovative teaching and learning practices that can foster pupil and teacher engagement and deal with the community. To fulfill all these tasks through open leadership is the challenge.

D – Main Recommendations

The three dimensions of school leadership emerging from this e-book open up the tasks that the project still has to face: how to promote intelligent and sophisticated self-assessment processes that can monitor the essence of schoolwork - organizing meaningful curricula for 21st century pupils

Therefore we recommend:

1. Strengthening national and international networks joining head teachers.

2. Emphasizing “to see in place” how others approach and solve similar problems regarding schools’ direction and management.
3. Emphasizing the autonomy and responsibility of school-based decisions and their consequences.

These are the paths to follow.