

Inclusion and education in European countries: methodological considerations

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Abstract

In the beginning there was the ΛΟΓΟΣ (word) ‘patchwork’ for the dataset on inclusion and education in European countries and its comparative analysis. It regards the project that we usually refer to as INTMEAS. The INTMEAS project proposal promised a comparative patchwork analysis of the many different inclusion mechanisms and measures as practiced and reported in ten European countries and as referred to by consulted experts or in further documentation and literature. The term was a metaphor referring to collage-like works of art that apparently attract the attention of their publics and transfer meanings and interpretations far beyond the single pieces that are collated together. The trouble is that we do not accept the attractiveness, meaning and interpretation of these works of art as sound methodology in the social sciences. Therefore, the researchers were challenged to find, develop and explain the methods and the methodology that helped them to infer meaning and interpretation to the many different inclusion mechanisms and measures as practiced and reported.

In this article, the methodological frame, that helped to disentangle the patchwork and to justify comparative conclusions on inclusion mechanisms, measures and practices, will be explained and discussed.

Keywords

Comparative educational research / Comparative assessment / Educational indicators / Case studies / Pupils at (high) risks / Inclusion / Exclusion / Educational policies / Europe / France / Germany / Hungary / Italy. The Netherlands / Poland. / Slovenia / Spain / Sweden / UK

1 The challenges of a European research assignment

Together with a consortium of ten national research teams and three external expert advisers, the author has taken up the challenge of a European research assignment on inclusion and education. The take-up followed upon a call for proposals launched by the Commission’s DG Education and Culture in early 2007

and a contract concluded with the Commission in December of that year. The contract regarded a comparative research project in ten European countries on six topical issues¹ concerning the inclusion of pupils at (high) risk in mainstream primary and secondary education. The six topical issues regard the avoidance of the exclusion of pupils at (high) risk from their schools and classes and the measures and practices keep them aboard in school and class, apparently. These six topical issues are:

1. Policies, measures and practices to reduce early school leaving,
2. Priority policies, measures and practices targeted at disadvantaged pupils or groups of disadvantaged pupils,
3. Inclusive education policies, measures and practices for special needs pupils,
4. Safe education policies, measures and practices
5. Teacher support policies, measures and practices.

The ten countries to be compared represented the existing European diversity in terms of country size, region and national educational system rather well. The consortium could rely upon a national team leader with an excellent record in the relevant scientific disciplines of education research, research on ethnic relations, sociology of education, etc., and in comparative research. The countries and their reports were:

1. France (Zay, 2008 May; 2009 August; Lemoine, Guigue & Tillard, 2009 August; Reuter, 2009 August; Padoani David, 2009 August).
2. Germany (Gogolin & Mellenthin, 2008 May; Gogolin & Jochum, 2009 August).
3. Hungary (Tamás and others, 2008 May; Tamás, 2009 August).
4. Italy (Gobbo, Galloni & Ricucci, 2008 May; Gobbo, Ricucci and Galloni, 2009 August).
5. The Netherlands (Muskens & Peters, 2008 May; 2009 August).
6. Poland (Federowicz, 2008 June; Federowicz & Sitek, 2009 August).
7. Slovenia (Necak Lük & Novak Lukanovic, 2008 June; 2009 August).
8. Spain (Enguita, 2008 June; 2009 August).
9. Sweden (Dingu Kyrklund, 2008 June; 2009 August).
10. UK (Condie, Grieve, Mitchell, Moscardini & Bourne, 2008 May; Condie, Moscardini, Grieve & Mitchell, 2009 August).

The consortium could further rely upon Jaap Dronkers, Ramón Flecha and Jill Bourne as external advisers and upon a wider informal European network of researchers in the fields of education, culture and media.²

It was an honour for the author of this paper that he could be the leader of the research consortium. On the basis of the reports mentioned above and further

¹ Originally, the project regarded eleven terms of reference that were reduced to six topical issues after the first research phase, as a major conclusion of the first interim report to the Commission. In this way, the complexity of the project was almost halved, without loss of focus and depth (Muskens & Partners, 2008 June).

² Dragana Avramov, who belonged to this network, was in early 2008 an adviser of the Council of Ministers of Education on inclusion, access and inequities in education (Avramov, 2008 February 14). She and other members participated in an expert survey on inclusion and education in other European countries than 'the ten' (Muskens, 2009 August D).

comparative materials and documentation as available he has carried out the comparative analyses on inclusion and education. He has published the comparative conclusion in the final report to the Commission in August 2009 (Muskens, 2009 August A), together with two further final reports, i.e. a report with his discussion and recommendations on the inclusion issues (ibid., 2009 August B) and a summary report in English, French and German (ibid., 2009 August C). The discussion and recommendations report is going beyond comparative research methodology. Therefore, they are not referred to in this paper. The summary report regards a short abstract of both the research conclusions and the most important recommendations.

In this paper, the author intends to explain the comparative challenges of the research project and the methodological grounding and justification of the research conclusions. As said in the abstract above: what methods and the methodology helped the researcher to infer meaning and interpretation to the patchwork of the many different inclusion mechanisms and measures as practiced and reported. In the patchwork, the rather raw materials and pieces consisted of rather wide spectre of interesting national reports and further materials. The reports and further materials were based upon on a rather open and vague concept of inclusion as well as policies, strategies and measures that enhanced or appeared to enhance the inclusion of pupils at (high) risk of exclusion from education, such as early school leavers, disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special needs, bullied and/or harassed pupils, etc. Apparently, inclusion policies, strategies and measures represented major national and regional differences with regard to system, policies, terminology, etc. The wide spectre, the open and vague concepts as well as national and regional differences were rather threatening pitfalls for a successful comparative assessment of inclusion and education in European countries.

The methodology that was applied for the comparative analysis of all 'this' should lead to justified and grounded comparative conclusions on common inclusion issues in the diversified European educational scene. The methodology that was applied has lead to such conclusions. The paper will follow the methodological considerations and steps in paragraph 2. In paragraph 3 the most important comparative conclusions will be justified.

2 Methodological considerations and steps

2.1 Methodological considerations

In general, comparative research methodology is ranging from hard to soft. At the hard side there are:

1. The controlled comparative experiments on innovations and new measures, as applied e.g. in medical and pharmaceutical research on new drugs,
2. The comparative statistics of measurable indicators, as produced by e.g. EUROSTAT, OECD, UNESCO, FRA and EUMC, Eurydice, The World Health Organisation, etc. in the field of European education. In addition, the national reports referred to topical national indicators and statistics. Dronkers and

others have made elaborated analyses on such indicators, as to explain structural inequities in school achievement (Dronkers, 2008; Dronkers & Robert, 2008; Heus, Dronkers, & Levels, 2009 January; Haahr, 2005).

At the soft side, there are the qualitative procedures for content and discourse analysis, case studies, observation reports, etc.

The two models of hard comparative analysis as well as qualitative comparative analysis have been applied for INTMEAS, as far as feasible. The coming three paragraphs will discuss the application of controlled experiments (hard model 1, par. 3.1) that failed and had to fail, comparative indicators (hard model 2, par. 3.2) and qualitative comparative analysis, particularly the analysis of texts through methods of qualitative content analysis (soft models, par. 3.3).

2.2 Comparative experiments

The state of the art in comparative educational research has not yet shown convincing controlled comparative experiments with specific measures to enhance the inclusion of pupils and target groups of pupils at (high) risk in mainstream education. Attempts have been set out, e.g. on package of measures that was proposed by Dan Olweus on the reduction of bullying in schools and classes in the eighties (Olweus, s.a.), on the achievements of special needs pupils in mainstream education (Mooij & Smeets, 2006; Persson, 2006; Porter, 2004; Vaughan, 2008 April), on good practice in Roma education (Open Society Institute, 2007), on home language teaching (Extra & Verhoeven, 1998; Ager, Muskens, & Wright, 1993; Skutnab Kangas, 1981; Grima, 2007; Idiazabal, Amorrortu, Barreña, Ortega, & Uranga). There is, however, good reason to assume that controlled comparative experiments in education are hardly feasible in educational settings.

The general design of a controlled experiment should be based upon rigid and fixed procedures concerning a clear innovation or intervention, to be applied among a representative sample of cases and targeted clients, while in the control groups nothing should be done with regard to the tested innovation or intervention. To a certain extent, one may succeed to apply such procedures under laboratory conditions, varying the procedures, case conditions and targeted clients according to a pre-designed plan. In educational reality, however, procedures cannot be sufficiently rigid and fixed, as the applying actors (e.g. professional teachers) will adapt the procedures to needs and points of attention as occurring, both in the experimental groups and in the control groups. Further: case conditions are that diverse at the national or regional level that controlled experiments appear to be hardly feasible at that level, let alone at the international or European level. And then: the real client groups do not represent a sample of Pavlov-dogs waiting for food for treatment. They living young people, who act and react according to their needs and opportunities in the course of time. It is to be taken into consideration that real-time experiments in education almost always will take time, e.g. that of a special course, and that therefore the most relevant actors of teachers and pupils will change the 'experimental conditions' in the course of time, in relation to their needs, points

of attentions, other business and opportunities. Later in this paper, the author will present a revealing example in this respect.

2.3 Comparative indicators

Relevant indicators on inclusion and education are available from the sources mentioned above. For the comparative report, the author has assembled a rather extended overview of the national indicators, ranging from national budgets and arrangements for primary and secondary education up to national estimates of the involvement of pupils in bullying, violence, harassment and other unsafe school conditions. They regarded:

1. Public expenditures for primary and secondary education (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2008; OECD, 2008; National reports),
2. Child well-being (Bradshaw & Richardson, 2009; National reports),
3. Compulsory education (EURYDICE, 2005; national reports),
4. Participation in pre-school education (Penn, 2009 June; EURYDICE, 2005; National reports),
5. Age, enrolment, achievements and teacher-pupils relations in primary education (EURYDICE, 2005; Mullis & others, PIRLS 2006 International Report IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study in Primary Schools in 40 Countries, 2007; Mullis & others, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), 2008; National reports),
6. Age, enrolment, achievements and teacher-pupils relations in lower secondary education (EURYDICE, 2005; OECD, 2007; National reports),
7. Age, enrolment, achievements and teacher-pupils relations in upper secondary education (EURYDICE, 2005; National reports),
8. Early school leavers (EUROSTAT; EUROSTAT, 2006; EUROSTAT; National reports),
9. Disadvantaged target groups (Luciak & Binder, , 2005 January; Luciak, 2004; EURYDICE, 2009; EURYDICE, 2005; FRA European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2007; National reports),
10. Special needs pupils (EURYDICE, 2005; National reports),
11. Outplacement (EURYDICE, 2005; OECD, 2008; UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2008; National reports),
12. Bullying and harassment (Due, et al., 2009; National reports).

The indicators revealed predominantly the relevant national differences that were attached to the final comparative report. Seven indicators have been selected to measure the national differences between the ten countries with regard to inclusion and education. These indicators and the following conclusion on national differences will be discussed in paragraph 3. There, we will also discuss the indicators that justified the comparative conclusion on failing policies and measures to halve early school leaving in the EU in ten years and those that justified the conclusion on the feasible inclusion of special needs pupils in mainstream education.

Hard comparative methodology had further only restricted value for the comparative assessment of inclusion policies, measures and practices. It gave no applicable methods for the analysis of the many national evaluations and case studies of certain strategies, measures, interventions or practices that were

available. These evaluations and case studies were related to a wide variety of inclusion issues and domains. Therefore, the analysis had to rely upon the soft comparative methodology of grounded theory and interpretation in general and qualitative analysis in particular. The challenge was to making sense of it.

2.4 Qualitative research procedures

The comparative analysis of policies, measures and practices relied predominantly on qualitative research procedures. The policies, measures and practices were reported in the national reports, in protocols of expert consultation and the report of the expert survey, in the reports of the so-called Peer Learning Activities in the frame of the Commission's Open Method of Co-ordination³ and other sources as available. Policies, measures and practices were reported in a national frame of educational policies, schools and teaching practices. As far as possible, the reports referred to the policies, measures and practices in a terminological frame that should be more or less understandable beyond the local and the national level, making use of e.g. the terminology of UNESCO, OECD and Eurydice. Unavoidably, the rapporteurs had to find more or less appropriate terms and translations for the often rather unique national particularities and terminology.

In two steps, the author has focussed the analysis of policies, measures and practices as reported on common issues in all materials. At the same time, he has taken national and local differences more or less for granted, following the logic that common issues are the most interesting side of any inclusive policy, measure or practice for any-one else, e.g. in a European setting. Common issues related to promising policies, effective measures and good practices are likely to reinforce their wider application and their adjustment to policies, measures and practices that are to be taken into consideration at other places and countries.

The first step towards common issues regarded the reformulation of the eleven original terms of reference as listed in the Commission's call for proposals. The eleven could be reduced to five, without major loss of detail and precision. In this way possible overlap of relevant issues and terms was diminished, while the total complexity of the full research matrix was approximately halved. In raw lines it resulted in a matrix of ten countries and five issues or frames, i.e. a matrix of 50 fields. The original one consisted of ten countries and eleven issues, i.e. 110 fields. The five core issues for the comparative analysis were:

1. Policies, measures and practices to reduce early school leaving,
2. Priority policies, measures and practices targeted at disadvantaged pupils or groups of disadvantaged pupils,

³ The Commission has applied the so-called Open Method of Co-ordination with regard to European educational policies, for which it has only restricted authority. The Commission intended to support the competent national authorities by special seminars and site visits of volunteering national representatives and experts that were called Peer Learning Activities. Five relevant reports concerning integrated Roma education, immigrants, early school leavers and diversity training were published on the special website www.kslll.net (GHK).

3. Inclusive education policies, measures and practices for special needs pupils,
4. Safe education policies, measures and practices
5. Teacher support policies, measures and practices.

For the finding and interpretation of common issues the author has first followed the research procedures for qualitative document analysis as developed by Fred Wester (Wester, 2006; Kwalitan 5.0). He has developed a first classification of possible measures and measures as mentioned in the national interim-reports, under the five core issues or frames.

The classifications ranged from some ten to twenty policies, measures and practices per core issue or frame each. The list was adapted in the first months of analysis (June-August 2008) regularly. Since the end of August 2008 the author has applied the a 'final' list of general measures The emerging and final lists were circulated among the members of the Reference Groups, for comment and improvement, and to clarify possible misunderstandings and interpretations. Dialogue and emerging consensus has helped to find the common issues in a reliable and valid way. The list is presented in the scheme below.

Scheme 1. Coding schemes for 'inclusion and education'

<p>Core issue 1 Measures to reduce early school leaving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved registration • Improved education, quality • Individual tracks, special classes • Rebound classes • Outplacement and replacement • Welfare, youth care, judiciary • Labour market instruments • Involvement of parents • Expertise measures • Networking and co-operation • Other measures <p>Core issue 2. Priority measures for fair and best chances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home language and culture measures • Priority measures for pupils at risk • Additional and individual teaching • Pre-school education • Language education • Insertion classes • Extended school days • Further special classes and schools • Expertise measures • Networking and co-operation • Other measures <p>Core issue 3. Priority measures for non-discrimination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home language and culture measures • Legislation, mainstreaming against discrimination • Neighbourhood and community development • Access rules • Parents' participation • Extended school days • Expertise measures • Networking and co-operation • Intercultural education
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- **Other measures**
- Core issue 4. Inclusive education measures in the ten countries**
- **Expertise and teacher qualification**
- **Appropriate teaching practice**
- **Additional funding**
- **Co-ordination and networking**
- **Specialised staff and services**
- **Other measures**
- Core issue 5. Safe education measures**
- **Prevention**
- **Safe building, gate control**
- **Police control**
- **School rules and discipline**
- **Dismissal, rebound measures**
- **External services and co-operation**
- **Monitoring**
- Core issue 6. Protection measures against bullying and harassment**
- **The 'Olweus package'**
- **Peer mentoring, mediation, counselling**
- **Consultation of parents**
- **Teacher role and teacher training**
- **School care and counselling**
- **Improved school climate**
- **Extended school days**
- Core issue 7. Teacher support measures**
- **Competences and qualification**
- **Workload management**
- **Additional teaching staff**
- **Additional support staff**
- **Rewards**
- **Specialised and external services**
- **Image management**
- **Cont(r)acts with pupils and parents**
- **Other measures**

The author has collected all references to the policies, measures and practices from all materials as relevant: national interim-reports, national reports, the report of the expert consultations, the reports of the Peer Learning Activities, and further materials as available. References in the texts were coded, often using several codes for the same piece of text, where these appeared to refer to more than one common issue. As far as national reports or reports of consulted experts were concerned, they were asked to correct and to improve the codes as applied, and to clarify possible misunderstandings and interpretations. Dialogue and emerging consensus has helped to find the common issues in a reliable and valid way.

Within the constraints of the reliability and validity of this qualitative content analysis and those of expert dialogue and emerging consensus, the author was able to draw comparative conclusions with regard to inclusive policies, measures and practices in different European countries. These will be discussed further on below.

In addition, interesting cases related to the inclusive measures were listed. The interesting cases were highlighted in the research materials on a non-frequency

basis. The method of non-frequent qualitative content analysis is already in use since WWII, when American researchers applied it for the analysis and interpretation of German radio broadcasting (Kracauer, 1959). The national teams were invited to reveal 'interesting' policies, measures and practices, being cases that proved to be feasible, effective and applicable at a wider scale, or that were at least promising in these respects. Their response and further cases as available were assessed in these terms: are they feasible, effective and applicable at a wider scale, or do they appear to be promising in that respect? In case of doubt, the national teams were approached for further clarifications. Among the 'interesting cases' one may find 'eye-openers' for schools, teachers and other relevant actors, and maybe even the decisive 'best policies, measures and practices'. Whether decisive 'best policies, measures and practices' were revealed, should be doubted in relation to the wide educational diversity in the European countries concerned. Yet, implicitly or explicitly some 'measure makers' and rapporteurs of policies, measures and practices appeared to believe that their ideas or their policies, measure and practices as intended would solve all or most inclusion issues in education decisively, at least at the national, regional or local level.

Decisive 'best policies, measures and practices' were not elucidated, but the national teams, the consulted experts, the Peer Learning Activities in the frame of the Open Method of Co-ordination and further documentation as available have revealed a corpus of some 100 interesting cases. These have been listed together with the reported common issues in the comparative research report (Muskens, 2009 August A). Each is expected to open eyes for further inclusive action and measures. The author will discuss this point further on below.

3 The comparative conclusions: where they justified?

At a closed expert workshop in Brussels, 26 June 2009, the author has presented five comparative conclusions (Muskens, 2009, June 26),⁴ namely:

1. Differences concerning the inclusiveness of the national and/or regional educational systems in the ten countries range from 2 to 6 on a seven-points rank order scale.
2. With exceptions, the European countries have not taken the necessary measures to halve early school leaving in the ten-years period between 2000 and 2010.
3. 'Inclusive education' is feasible for all or almost all pupils with a handicap, disabilities or special needs.
4. The most promising common issue among the many measures and practices that should enhance inclusion in mainstream education appears to be personal attention and commitment for pupils at (high) risk, with a clear focus on their potentials and learning needs. It regards the attention and commitment on behalf of school leaders, teachers and further staff such as (peer) tutors, i.e. those who are keeping the pupils at (high) risk aboard.

⁴ These as well as some other comparative conclusion were also presented and discussed in Muskens, 2009 Aug. A.

5. As far as further common issues were touched upon, these could not justify a general conclusion. They revealed a wide set of more or less promising measures and practices, but feasibility, effectiveness and/or wider application appeared to depend on the local aims, means, scene and/or circumstances.

The question to be answered in this paper on research methodology is whether these comparative conclusions were justified, in relation to methodological requirements and the data as available?

3.1 National inclusion differences

It was concluded that the differences concerning the inclusiveness of the national and/or regional educational systems in the ten countries range from 2 to 6 on a seven-points rank order scale. The scale is representing the national score for inclusiveness of education. It is based upon seven international indicators that were selected from among the above-mentioned sources, such as Eurydice, OECD, UNESCO, EUROSTAT and EUMC/FRA, with additional points from the ten national reports.

The indicators were:

1. The structure of its primary and lower secondary education is *comprehensive or single structure* – comprehensive meaning that lower secondary education is undifferentiated, and single structure that there is one undifferentiated school for all (almost all) pupils attending primary and lower secondary education.⁵
2. *Pre-school education* for children at the age of 3 or 4 to 6 is (almost) 100%.
3. *Compulsory education is long*, i.e. starting under the age of 6, with the aim to guarantee early (language) learning among children at (high) risk, and prolonged, part-time or full-time, up to the age of 17 or 18, with the aim of reducing early school leaving in e.g. upper vocational education.⁶
4. *Early school leaving is low*, i.e. under the EU's aim of less than 10% early school leavers.
5. *Disadvantaged priority groups* representing urgent issues in national and regional policies and in school practice – this is actually the case in all ten countries and their regions.⁷
6. *Repeated classes and outplacement* are clearly low.
7. Most handicapped, disabled and special needs children⁸ (i.e. more than 80% of them) find a place in mainstream education and are *not out-placed in special schools and tracks*.⁹

⁵ Upper secondary education is differentiated in all countries.

⁶ The highest 'age' is now introduced in The Netherlands, where unemployed young people under 27 are obliged to accept an apprentice place or to return to school for further qualification.

⁷ Gender is not urgent any longer in the ten countries, as participation and achievement of female pupils has turned into higher participation and achievements than those of male pupils. Only the consulted Bulgarian expert raised the issue as an ongoing priority issue.

⁸ Terminology is a serious issue with regard to the pupils concerned in relation to the physical or mental characteristics of the pupils concerned. The terminology may reinforce their discrimination and exclusion. All countries have found their own way to manage the issue and to adjust their terminology.

The scores per country are presented in scheme 2.

Scheme 2. National inclusion and exclusion characteristics

Indicators	France	Germany	Hungary	Italy	The Netherlands	Poland	Slovenia	Spain	Sweden	UK England	UK Scotland
Structure of education	<i>Comprehensive</i>	Differentiated	<i>Single structure</i>	<i>Comprehensive</i>	Differentiated	<i>Comprehensive</i>	<i>Single structure</i>	<i>Comprehensive</i>	<i>Single structure</i>	<i>Single structure</i>	<i>Single structure</i>
Compulsory education	Standard	Standard	<i>Early & long</i>	Standard	<i>Early & long</i>	<i>Early & long</i>	<i>Early & long</i>	Standard	Standard	<i>Early</i>	<i>Early</i>
Early leaving school	12,7%	12,7%	10,9%	19,3%	12,0%	5,0%	4,3%	31,0%	8,6%	17,0%	13,0%
(Almost) 100% pre-school education 3-6	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No ¹⁰	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Disadvantaged priority groups	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Repeated classes and/or outplacement	Not low	<i>Low</i>	<i>Low</i>	Not low	Not low	<i>Low</i>	<i>Low</i>	Not low	<i>Low</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Low</i>
Disabled pupils	Inclusive and special	Inclusive and special	Inclusive and special	<i>Inclusive</i>	Inclusive and special	Inclusive and special	Inclusive and special	<i>Inclusive</i>	Inclusive and special	Inclusive and special	<i>Inclusive</i>
Inclusion score	3	2	4	4	3	5	5	4	5	5	6

The inclusion scale is correct and justified in relation to the data and their interpretation. The scores are based upon plus or minus on each indicator. The break between inclusive or not on each indicator is a matter of interpretation. For one indicator no break was justified. It regarded the national policy attention for priority measures to support disadvantaged pupils and groups of pupils. All reports and documentation revealed obvious attention in all eleven countries and regions of the scheme above for one or more target groups, such as Roma pupils and families, some indigenous minorities, immigrant minority pupils and families, weak, poor or 'challenging' families and neighbourhoods, etc.

The value of this 'rank order' of the countries on inclusiveness is reasonable at face-value, but it needs further validation and adjustment, apart from the indicator of early school leaving, to a certain extent.¹¹ Therefore, the rank order

⁹ The placement of the pupils concerned in special streams in mainstream education was interpreted as 'inclusive'.

¹⁰ In the school year 2008-2009 70% in the age group, i.e. near to the EU's objective as agreed in the Barcelona Objectives.

¹¹ The Working Committee on Quality Indicators introduced its indicator for early school leaving as an appropriate indicator of educational exclusion (Working Committee on Quality Indicators, 2000 May). It referred to the percentage of young people aged 18-24 that has not achieved more than lower secondary education and not being in education. In 2006, EUROSTAT and the

is representing an educated guess that is based upon the evidence from international statistics and national reports. Taking this point and the remarks below into consideration, the scale and the national differences are justified.

Since some years, the highest and increasing national priority is regarding the educational achievements, their national and local indicators, e.g. in terms of passed exams, and their international indicators of PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS. Debate on achievement and inclusion is going on. The more extreme positions are that highest achievement is a pre-condition for the effective inclusion of pupils at (high) risk, one the one side. The other position holds that high achievement pressure on pupils at (high) risk would double or triple their risks. It would 'trash' them towards outplacement arrangements and make them early school leavers. Hard versus soft, one might say. The final conclusion is still open, and therefore no conclusion is to be drawn now on achievement, achievement indicators and the inclusiveness of mainstream education. Therefore, achievement is not (yet) taken up as an indicator for the scale.

A similar discussion is going on with regard to repeated classes,¹² outplacement and special schools. Argument in favour of a repeated class, outplacement or special schools for the pupils concerned is that they will receive special attention as needed. At the same time, it would not lay a dysfunctional burden on 'mainstream' pupils, parents, staff, teachers and schools. The parents of repeating children, out-placed children or children attending a special school may be satisfied with 'special' education of their 'special' children.

Against these exclusion arguments and mechanisms, the argument in favour of the inclusion of pupils at (high) risk is that it avoids the possible negative stigmatisation, hospitalisation and 'trashing' of these pupils. It may encourage the 'mainstream' school community to focus on the many things all children and young people have in common, to focus on the potentials of children and pupils at (high) risk, and to accept the unavoidable differences between people in society.

3.2 Insufficient reduction early school leaving

This paragraph will discuss the comparative conclusion that stated: with exceptions, the European countries have not taken the necessary and appropriate measures to halve early school leaving in the ten-years period between 2000 and 2010.

We have drawn the comparative conclusion that, with a few exceptions, neither the ten countries nor the other EU Member States have reduced the number of early school leavers sufficiently since 2000. The conclusion is justified because it

Working Committee have introduced the percentage of young people aged 20-24 that finished upper secondary education as a 'contra-indicator' for early school leaving (EUROSTAT, 2006 October).

¹² A repeated class regards the exclusion of the pupils concerned from their classmates and year group.

is based upon the accepted European indicator for being an early school leaver. The indicator was jointly accepted by the competent European expert committee in 1999 (Working Committee on Quality Indicators, 2000 May) and has been applied by EUROSTAT since then (EUROSTAT 2009).

Referring to that indicator, the Presidency of the European Union and the EU Member States agreed to halve the percentage of early school leavers in ten years. For the present 27 Member States the percentage was 17,6% in 2000. In 2007, the European average was 15,2%, ranging from 4.3% in Slovenia up to 37.7% in Malta (data 2007, EUROSTAT 2009). Halving would mean 8,8% in 2010.

In the Lisbon Strategy Document (Presidency of the European Council, 2000 March), the European Council has stated that too many young people, who enter the labour market, have not passed the level that is required in this respect. The level should be at least that of a qualified worker with the proved capacities of ISCED-level 3C. The numbers, identified as early school leavers by the European Commission and EUROSTAT, were to be halved in the decade between 2000 and 2010. As stated in Presidency conclusion 26: "The European Council accordingly calls upon the Member States, in line with their constitutional rules, the Council and the Commission to take the necessary steps within their areas of competence to meet the following targets:

- ✚ (...)
- ✚ the number of 18 to 24 years olds with only lower-secondary level education who are not in further education and training should be halved by 2010;
- ✚ Etc."¹³

In that sense, the reduction of early school leaving is declared to be a top-priority in Europe.

The major argument to justify the rather hard conclusion with regard to insufficient national policies and measures was the pace of reduction between 2000 and 2007. On average, it was 15,2%, representing a reduction of 2,4% since 2000. That does not promise to be down to 8,8% in 2010, and neither to 10%, being the target that was mentioned in recent EU-documents (Commission of the European Communities, 2008). Additional arguments are:

1. The national differences are very skewed, with percentage beyond 20% in four Mediterranean Member States, without a clear explanation for the high level of early school leaving or exceptional national efforts and priorities to reduce the level at high pace. Four new Member States from Central and Eastern Europe reported a percentage under 7% and, in case, a reduction pace since 2000 beyond 40%.
2. The national reports, consulted experts, reports of Peer Learning Activities and further documentation revealed some promising national attention for the issue,

¹³ In recent documents the Commission is referring to a reduction of early school leaving to 10% in 2010, in relation to the low reduction pace between 2000 and 2007 (European Commission, 2008). It is 2,4% above the original target. For matters of convenience we will keep to the original target of 'halving' in the text. One should read: reduction to 10%.

particularly since more recent years. Particularly promising appeared to be measures that were taken in The Netherlands since 2005 as 'the attack on early school leaving'. The authorities expect to have reduced early school leaving sufficiently shortly after 2010, i.e. in 2012. The Dutch authorities referred, however, as other 'promising' countries did, to other statistical indicators than the EU-indicator (Case 12. Regional benchmarking and targeting – towards an effective reduction, The Netherlands; Case 13. Promising measures to reduce early school leaving in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2009 August A, in: Muskens, 2009 August A).

3. For an issue of highest European and national concern, the author gave as his assessment that hardly no policies and measures were promising a sufficient reduction of early school leaving in Europe at short notice.

3.3 Inclusive education is feasible

This paragraph will discuss the comparative conclusion that stated: 'inclusive education' is feasible for all or almost all pupils with a handicap, disabilities or special needs.

With regard to the inclusion of pupils with a handicap, restrictions, disabilities, special needs or 'being different'¹⁴ in whatever way, it was concluded that 'inclusive education' is feasible, in principle. Inclusive education for (almost) all is policy and practice in Italy, Spain and Scotland.¹⁵ Educational achievement figures from there and further comparative research (Gobbo, Ricucci, & Galloni, Section IV - The school integration of disabled students in Italy, 2009 August; Enguita, Inclusion and education in European countries. Final report: 11 Spain, 2009 August; Condie, Moscardini, Grieve, & Mitchell, 2009 August; Persson, 2006; Porter, 2004; Vaughan, 2008 April) proved that 'inclusive education' is apparently at least as good or even better in terms of achievement and integration as non-inclusive education, as shown in comparative research.

Therefore, the comparative conclusion is justified.

Further, the comparative conclusion is justified that it needs appropriate facilities, specialised personnel and awareness campaigns to adjust mainstream classes and schools to pupils with a handicap, disabilities or special needs, or to ensure their integration and chances there. It is assumed that facilities, specialised personnel and awareness campaigns would not be more demanding, e.g. in relation to the national educational budget, than a full-fledged structure of special education and treatment.

3.4 Disadvantaged groups, quality and commitment

This paragraph will discuss the comparative conclusion that stated: the most promising common issue among the many measures and practices that should

¹⁴ 'Being different' should never be an argument for special classes or schools, in line with the Human rights etc. The Landmark judgement of etc. underlined the point with regard to special Roma schools and classes.

¹⁵ Percentages of pupils in special education were under 2% in these countries, while countries with a mixed arrangement counted up to 6% in special schools.

enhance inclusion in mainstream education appears to be personal attention and commitment for pupils at (high) risk, with a clear focus on their potentials and learning needs. It regards the attention and commitment on behalf of school leaders, teachers and further staff such as (peer) tutors, i.e. those who are keeping the pupils at (high) risk aboard.

Structural and persistent inequities related to e.g. class, ethnicity, origin and/or neighbourhood made all national and regional authorities to set out priority policies and measures for disadvantaged pupils and groups of pupils. The national reports, expert response, reports of Peer Learning Activities and further documentation revealed the necessity of such policies and measures. Dragana Avramov has summarised the evidence for the European Council of Ministers of Education in February 2008 (Avramov, 2008, February 14). Heckmann and Crul c.s. have reported the European evidence, as did rapporteurs of RAXEN, EUMC, ECMI, FRA and Eurydice and the Open Society Institute (Heckmann, 2008 April; Crul, Pasztor, Lelie, Mijs, & Schnell, 2009 May; EURYDICE, 2009; Luciak, 2004; Luciak & Binder, 2005 January; FRA European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2007; Open Society Institute, 2007; ECMI, 2006).

The question is, however, what policies, measures and practices are most appropriate and promising in terms of individual learning gain and/or balanced intercultural relations in schools and classroom, without the occurring negative side-effects of priority policies and measures, such as the stigmatisation of pupils at (high) risk on the one side and/or the failure of educational allocation mechanisms.

It regards a challenging question, as no clear answers emerged from the reports and documentation as available. The common promising factor that appeared to emerge is that it needs most favourable conditions at the grass-root level of the school and the classroom, in response to the motivation of the pupils concerned and their families. One may summarise these most favourable conditions as follows:

1. Best schools,
2. Qualified school leaders for these schools, who are committed to keeping their pupils at (high) risk aboard, to the learning gain of their disadvantaged pupils, and to balanced intercultural relations in their schools and classrooms,
3. Qualified teachers, who are committed to keeping their pupils at (high) risk aboard, to the learning gain of their disadvantaged pupils, and to balanced intercultural relations in their schools and classrooms,
4. Qualified and committed support staff, consisting of specialised teachers for e.g. second language teaching, or (peer) tutors,

At the grass-root level, these actors must succeed in motivating the pupils at (high) risk and their families.

In this grass-root frame of the school most promising case studies were reported from most countries (Case 23-70, in: Muskens, 2009 August A). At these schools, national and regional policies and measures for teacher training and for additional school budgets were used in that way.

This general conclusion is supported by case study reports on feasible measures and practice and on realised effects with regard to learning gain and/or balanced intercultural relations. All school might follow the examples and develop their own good practices and measures, with the backup of national and regional priority budgets as available, on the one side, and in co-operation with nearby institutions for teacher training, on the other.

In this sense, the general conclusion concerning quality and commitment is justified. It is, however, not a hard conclusion, based upon a controlled comparative experimental design.

3.5 Local circumstances

The paragraph will discuss the last comparative conclusion, that states: as far as further common issues were touched upon, these could not justify a general conclusion. They revealed a wide set of more or less promising measures and practices, but feasibility, effectiveness and/or wider application appeared to depend on the local aims, means, scene and/or circumstances.

The quality and commitment complex that was discussed above does not ensure success for all or most disadvantaged pupils or groups of pupils, or for other pupils at (high) risk, e.g. of bullying and harassment, discrimination and stigmatisation, etc. Success is likely to be dependent on local circumstances, internal opposition, resistance to change, de-motivated pupils and families, and other points. It is certainly sure that top-down policies and measures depend on local circumstances for their (full) implementation and effectiveness.

National policies and measures are regarding e.g. obligatory language classes for immigrant pupils and pupils of immigrant descent, weighted budget allocations for disadvantaged pupils, or extended school time¹⁶, national or regional policies and measures with regard to school rules and discipline, etc. These policies and measures appeared to be implemented in the countries concerned, although often with considerable dispute between the competent authorities and the schools and with considerable local differences. Effects were sometimes measured and positive, but also negative results or negative side effects were reported, e.g. in relation to resistance among teachers and teacher factions, de-motivated pupils and families, administrative burden, lack of time, and other objections, either real or as perceived.

Therefore, a positive or negative general conclusion would be premature, i.e. not justified. The positive examples and case studies are to be added to the emerging corpus of possibly good policies and measures, to be disseminated widely among

¹⁶ The author is inclined to expect considerable positive effects of longer compulsory education in the European countries, as it may assure that all or most pupils will reach the ISCED 3C level that is needed for their labour market qualification, and as it may improve the effects of pre-school (language) learning. These effects should be assessed in line with new policies with regard to extended school time in a number of countries, such as Hungary, The Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and the UK.

schools, teachers, teacher trainers and all further relevant actors, as an expert advise on what could be done. But it should regard a message with a warning that the actors will adjust and should adjust the good case to their own circumstances and opportunities.

The author would like to finish this discussion on 'justified comparative conclusions' with a Dutch example. It showed the occurrence and necessity of the adjustment of good practices to local circumstances and needs in the frame of a controlled experiment with new (good?) measures to reduce bullying among pupils. For the experiment, several schools agreed to carry out a Dutch version of the well-known Olweus-package against bullying (Olweus, s.a.; Dorst, Wiefferink, Düsseldorf, Galindo garre, Crone & Paulussen, 2008 January). It regarded a two-years plan, and the effects were compared with the bullying practices in matched schools that did not apply the package. After two years, the comparative result was 'no difference' between the experimental schools and the control schools (Dorst, Wiefferink, Paulussen & Crone, 2008). In their discussion, the researchers referred to what occurred at the experimental schools and at the control schools. The experimental schools had adjusted the package in the course of two years to their own needs and circumstances. So, they 'deviated' from the original plan in the course of time. The control schools, however, had not reacted passively on their confrontation with bullying in the schools or on the media-hypes around it. They had made their own plans. That might explain why schools as compared realised (nearly) the same effects in the end.

To a certain extend, the example is an illustration of the impossibility of hard experimental research and development (R&D) on inclusive measures in mainstream education.

4 Beyond comparative conclusions

Instead of the usual concluding paragraph this paper will reveal some INTMEAS points beyond the comparative conclusions that were discussed in the preceding paragraph. Such points regard the recommendations that the author has formulated for policymakers and practitioners. These recommendations are tied to the empirical materials and the comparative conclusion, on the one side, and the responsibilities of the different actors for keeping pupils at (high) risk aboard in mainstream education. Special attention regarded the responsibilities the European actors and institutions have or may have, directly or indirectly.

Although 'Europe has no or only rather restricted statutory responsibilities for education and for keeping pupils at (high) risk aboard, the author has recommended the European institutions to reconsider their statutory responsibility with regard to some issues. One of these regards the reduction of early school leaving that was insufficiently reduced by the Member States in the course of the past seven years. It may need concerted European action to enforce appropriate measures, particularly for countries early school leaving percentages of 20 per cent and higher.

The present role of the European Commission with regard to issues of inclusion and education consists of expert meetings and meetings with national representatives and policymakers on topical issues, in the frame of the Open Method of Co-ordination. The author has recommended to improving the Open method of Co-ordination, as to encourage the effective assessment and dissemination of good practices and interesting measures, among others through a network of national expert centre for inclusion and education, in cooperation with a European expert centre. He has recommended to intensifying the Open method of Co-ordination by involving not only national, but also regional representatives and policymakers, particularly for the European countries that have decentralised educational legislation, authority and governance.

The key recommendation is that all European and further actors must reinforce and strengthen the commitment, efforts and focus of schools, teachers and further staff and mentors to keeping the pupils at (high) risk aboard. This recommendation followed from the general conclusion they represent the common promising factor at schools that apparently succeed to keeping the pupils at (high) risk aboard and to further their educational achievements.

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