

Key note: Improving school leadership through inclusive participation: the challenge of the diversity of school culture

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School is a highly complex and fragile system. It could be either a meeting point or a battlefield of diverse professional, political and moral ideas and values causing its pupils to grow or to stagnate and drop back. Although a major part of the pressures caused by diverse interests comes, in principle, from without, the solutions to it are primarily to be found from within. School leadership is critical in this process as it, in practice, determines whether, in what way and which of the stakeholder would be given opportunity(ies) to act and co-act or counteract to ensure that school fulfills its crucial role. There are many ways in which this challenge may be met but in a democratic society it is important to ground the process on the principles of participation, inclusion, dialogue and exchange through which all relevant voices are heard, respected and taken into account. The stakeholders' interests may be more or less conflicting initially but, providing that they are clearly bounded by the idea of responsibility for reaching consensual decisions on best actions which contribute to the growth and wellbeing of all students as well as to the improvement of school as a whole, inclusive participation may become a potent tool for multifaceted change which lead to quality. It may have a positive impact on the stakeholders by, for example, improving their understanding and skills of democratic decision-making, their responsibility for the processes of teaching and learning, their sense of ownership in school quality management and their trust in school as an institution in which all students are given equal chances to succeed. As such, inclusive participation enables the new values, standards and practices to be established in school while turning it into a democratic community of teaching and learning. By referring to the common European policies relating to education and by drawing from the recent empirical studies we intend to explain in the presentation why inclusive participation in decision-making is crucial for the improvement of contemporary school, how it contributes to traditional school leadership practice and why it is important to take school culture into consideration when inclusive participation is accepted as a means of school quality improvement.



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