Managing for @ School of Success

E-book 3 – Curriculum Executive Summary

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A – Context and Objectives

Managing for @ School of Success is a project included in Key Action 2 – Cooperation for innovation and sharing of good practices of the Erasmus+ programme - reference number 2015- 1-PT01-KA201-013059 and financed by Erasmus+ of the EU programme.

It is included in the sub-group of strategic partnerships that promote improved school education and is a group of seven partners from six European countries: Portugal, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and the United Kingdom.

This e-book is the result of the work done during the third year of the Managing for @ School of Success (M@SS) project (in the fifth and sixth Training Events) and concentrates on the subject of Curriculum Management.

The relevance of the subject is strengthened by the current debate, in educational policy, about flexible organisation of the curriculum, as well as policies to promote school success, which themselves are included in processes of greater curricular autonomy and decision-making.

In fact, closely related with these, movements of decentralization in educational policies occurring between 2000 and 2007 have been recently renewed in a number of European countries. Following the arguments presented by Kärkkäinen (2012)[1] concerning the need for more decentralized curricular decisions, several countries are implementing curriculum changes that give more responsibility and freedom to schools. This is the case of Portugal, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Italy. This raises new questions and new challenges and a more bottom up approach to curriculum development.

Headteachers are key players in such decentralization policies, giving more visibility to their role as curriculum decision-makers. Nevertheless, being a decision-maker within the curriculum development process was not a clear feature for several participants in M@SS. Therefore, training events related to this topic also aimed to improve headteachers' awareness of their curriculum-making role.

At the same time and supporting this, there is a clear, dynamic vision of the curriculum that needed to be the focus of analysis and discussions.

Accompanying all this process, there is the understanding that the curriculum is dynamic and contemplates various levels of analysis.

Indeed, this gives the school an opportunity to learn and promote the success and quality of learning, providing headteachers, as decision-makers in curriculum management, with

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[1] Kärkkäinen, K. (2012), "Bringing About Curriculum Innovations: Implicit Approaches in the OECD Area", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 82, OECD.

elements of decision-making support and providing school users with results that allow them a clearer reading of organizational and pedagogical quality, particularly concerning curriculum management, orienting choices and interventions that promote educational practices suited to society's challenges.

The aims of this e-book are those of the Training Events on curricular management:

- To clarify the concepts of Curriculum, from a perspective of developing analytical competences;
- To improve knowledge and understanding of the curriculum;
- To share experiences and best practices;
- To promote the knowledge constructed and shared by the partner countries;
- To encourage actions and processes to improve the school's quality, operation and results;

B – Revisiting the Main Topics

This e-book is divided in three parts corresponding approximately to the tasks carried out by the participants during the training events. The first part, entitled "Overview on National Curricula" is an observation by each partner country of the map of curricular organisation, to find the typology of curricular organisation for each "Key Stage".

The aim of this section is to present an overview of the National Curricula structure in countries participating in M@SS.

Very often, during the debates, formal talks and informal conversations, participants needed to clarify some features of other partners' educational systems. The national curriculum is one of these.

This section contains the main axes that frame national curricula, namely the functional approaches adopted to organize curricula, if they are mostly subject-based, mostly skills or competence-based or if they follow thematic approaches. Other quantitative information collected concerns the age of pupils crossed with main divisions in the education system, the number of pupils per class, the number of subjects studied, the number of teachers working with each class, the number of hours and classes pupils attend each week and how many of these are occupied by experimental work and citizenship. Other qualitative information collected concerns the main difficulties experienced by pupils during transition to the next key levels and a narrative explaining the way one particular transversal skill (among those that are compulsory within curricula) is planned and delivered.

The second part, entitled "Mind the Gap/Overcome the Gap" reflects the awareness of imbalance between the Planned Curriculum, the Implemented Curriculum and the Experienced Curriculum, in order to identify practices to reduce that imbalance and find effective ways to improve pupils' school success.

Mind the gap / overcome the gap was a task proposed to each participant, presented in the Italian training event. The task comes from the general idea that curriculum development is a three level process (planned; implemented and experienced) and it is put in place by different actors. Therefore, it is important to consider the existing gaps between representations and actions coming from such diversity. Its objectives were:

- To identify the representations of different curricular agents acting on those three levels.
- To be aware of existing gaps among those agents.
- To identify effective practices that could overcome such gaps. Identify practices or guidelines that reduce those gaps.
- To increase pupils' achievement.

The third part of the e-book, "Curriculum Innovation" reviews a number of key ideas, indicators and evidence inherent to the process of innovating in curricular management. Closely related with previous tasks, this section presents and discusses paths for innovating curricula. Three main tasks were developed by participants.

The first concerned conditions to improve curricular innovations and aimed to improve participants' awareness of what innovation is. Organized in four small groups, participants were invited to discuss curricular innovation conditions considering the constraints posed by the syllabus, organizational issues, the headteacher role, pupils' perspectives, school dynamics or assessment practices.

The second task was built on Van Acker's web model. Each participant was asked to choose two components from the web model where they thought it easier and more effective to make innovations within the curricula and present a proposal or an argument indicating how innovation could occur.

Finally, the third task was practical as it required participants attending the Education Show to choose one product (software, apps, resource, etc.) that could be effective in promoting innovation in each school's learning process.

C – Main Conclusions

This is the product of a training project which has teachers and school leaders as active elements in training and aims to reach other teachers, school managers and other agents with responsibilities in the educational process. This perspective fulfils the objectives of the project itself, which aims to work with school leaders on subjects that contribute to school development, sustainability, quality and pupil achievement.

This publication presents some examples of reflections made in team or individual work, demonstrating the diversity of tasks, as well as the experiences promoted by the different educational systems, with a view to connecting theory and practice, always challenging everyone to reflect permanently. The work included in the e-book represents the diversity of the team, their management experiences, showing the diversity of the institutions and countries involved, with different experiences as curriculum decision-makers.

Curriculum management, the general theme of the e-book, allows identification of what is being done and what needs to be improved. In truth, it provides schools with an opportunity to learn about, discuss and absorb different concepts of the curriculum, especially the levels of work required. It gives educational decision-makers elements of support in their decisions. It supplies school users with elements giving them a clearer reading of teaching establishments' quality and differentiation of pedagogical and curricular organisation, guiding choices and interventions.

Managing the curriculum implies defining priorities and making choices that fall within schools' objectives and give meaning to their projects, with the aim of improving pupils' learning. Setting out from an inclusive look at curriculum management as a structural activity of the School, central to reflection are the challenges headteachers face as curriculum decision-makers, together with the management, assessment, supervision and leadership practices inherent to curriculum management.

The concepts, topics and ideas developed by the partners concerning curriculum management are evident in their work and individual and group presentations. The "Overview on National Curricula" is the observation by each partner country of the map of curricular organisation, to find the typology of curricular organisation, for each "Key Stage". The part entitled "Mind the Gap/Overcome the Gap" reflects the awareness of the imbalance between Planned Curriculum, Implemented Curriculum and Experienced Curriculum, in order to identify practices that reduce that imbalance and find effective ways to improve pupils' school success. Finally, the third part of the e-book, "Curriculum

Innovation" reviews a number of key ideas, indicators and evidence inherent to the process of innovating in curriculum management.

Understanding schools, in how they organise and manage the curriculum, their pedagogical, organisational and assessment practices and their main concerns was a permanent process of analysis and reflection. The intention was to identify the educational policies, perspectives and tendencies in curricular management in each partner country.

The main characteristics of the curricular organisation process in schools in the countries in the project became known; the models, concepts, degrees of autonomy as curriculum decision-makers, the practices used, levels of participation and the implementation process.

There was identification of strategies used in each participant school to improve educational quality, promote improved results and provide a global quality response in the educational work. Training the pupil from an inclusive perspective, the Competences of the 21st Century, necessary for the citizen of 2031, are developed.

Through this comparative exercise, each one can identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding the process of curriculum decision-making.

The peer network created by the M@SS project remains as an intangible legacy of all those who participated in it.

D – Main Recommendations

The broad concept of curriculum adopted in this project emphasises the need for a forward look and discussion on the changing nature of schools and headteachers' role regarding their task as curriculum decision-makers. This implies an emphasis on the following topics and leads to the e-book's main recommendations:

Headteachers should accept their task of curriculum decision-makers, exploring the decentralization paths already identified as effective in promoting better learning.

Curricular practices and approaches should be compared among international participants to learn more about their possibilities and features.

Schools should explore ways to improve internationalization and include them in their curricular provision.

That Erasmus+ agency should undertake a study concerning the impact of schools' internationalization on their task of curriculum decision-making.

Other topics were touched on, glanced at or put on the waiting list for future reflection on the curriculum. Among them are (1) the voice and contribution of pupils, (2) the reformation in the curriculum caused by ICT, (3) differentiated and formative ways of assessment, (4) identification of the most relevant indicators for curricular monitoring or (5) definition of areas where studying the impact of curricular changes can be interesting for educational action.