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INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERS – THEIR ROLE IN RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ALL LEARNERS

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MODELS OF INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ALL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Purpose - This article presents a model based on a review of international and European policy and current Agency work on school leadership for inclusive education. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education is an independent organization that acts as a platform for collaboration for the ministries of education in 31 member countries. Member countries' agree that the ultimate goal for inclusive education systems is to provide all learners with opportunities for meaningful high-quality education in their neighborhood school alongside their peers.

Approach - Key issues addressing competences for inclusive school leadership, support and professional development opportunities for inclusive school leaders, and policy frameworks that support inclusive leadership across the whole education system are explored. The Ecosystem of Inclusive Education Systems model sets out the micro level (involves classroom practice directly affecting learner's development and outcomes), meso-level (school structures and processes), exo-level (supportive structures within the community) and macro-level (wider systems and policy environment).

Implications - This manuscript creates a fundamental challenge for policy-makers and practitioners who need to find ways of breaking connections between disadvantage, educational failure and restricted life chances, to achieve equity and excellence for all learners. Inclusive school leaders play a key role in effecting change in order to raise the achievement of all learners in their schools.

Originality/value - The model aims to support analysis of the policy context and interactions between the structures and processes at different levels to ensure effective support for inclusive school leadership and development of appropriate competences.

MODELS OF INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ALL LEARNERS

Introduction

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) was established by the Danish Government in 1996 as the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. Today it provides a platform for cross-national collaboration for the ministries of education in 31 European countries[1]. It is co-funded by the member ministries of education and by the European Institutions. The Agency is an independent, self-governing, non-profit organization that works to promote the common values of the European Union (EU): respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities (Council of the European Union, 2018). The Agency was established by the Ministries of Education in its member countries to act as a platform for collaboration in the field of special needs and inclusive education to improve educational policy and practice for learners with special needs. This aim takes into account issues such as equal opportunities, accessibility, inclusive education and the promotion of quality of education, whilst recognizing the differences in countries' policies, practice and contexts (European Agency, 2018a).

The EU is a supra-national body with governance powers that have been transferred to it from its member states. Currently, with 28 member states, the EU reflects what has

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[1] 31 countries, 35 jurisdictions: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French communities), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales)

been described as 'intense localism against a background of cooperative internationalism' (de Bilj, 2005, p. 222). This combination of localism and internationalism creates an interesting dynamic and sets the context for pan European collaboration. For example, education remains an area of national and sub-national jurisdiction and governance (the principle of subsidiarity). However, shared commitment to the common values of the EU support cross-national movements to harmonize and work collectively on shared education goals and objectives. Thus, while education remains under the jurisdiction of member states, it is also considered a 'specific commitment' within the EU and many education programs are supported under various policy initiatives of EU's 'education area'. Cooperation on a shared education agenda across the EU is understood as being in line with the goals of social cohesion, justice and equity in education.

Although the Agency is firmly established and strongly associated with the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities, all member countries have the shared vision to improve educational policy and practice that support inclusive education systems so that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community (European Agency, 2015). The countries are at different stages of working towards this vision and employ different ways to get there, depending on their past and current contexts and histories.

While the Agency projects are firmly rooted in the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as a policy framework which calls for inclusive education for persons with disabilities, its work is also influenced by and aims to inform the international drive to extend the remit of inclusive education to all learners. Here, the concept of inclusion as promoted in the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for

education (SDG 4): 'to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' links the remit of the Agency to a European enduring understanding of inclusion as a strategy for achieving social cohesion (Council of the European Union, 2018; Bánfalvy, 2007), and as part of the response to the equity issues that are raised in relation to the harmonization and integration processes of the EU.

Inclusive education is viewed as playing a key role in creating socially inclusive societies, addressing discrimination and racism, and reducing school failure and learner drop-out (European Agency, 2015). The move to more inclusive policy and practice creates a fundamental challenge for policy-makers and practitioners who need to find ways of breaking connections between disadvantage, educational failure and restricted life chances. Because school leadership practices are both directly and indirectly connected with positive outcomes for learners (Mac Ruairc, 2013), they are considered crucial in any change process that aims to raise the achievement of all learners in inclusive schools (Donnelly *et al.*, 2016). The development of an inclusive school culture and pedagogy for all learners promotes in particular the academic and social achievement of learners with disabilities (European Agency 2018b). However, there has been little focus on inclusive school leadership despite increasing focus on practice in European-level policy documents (e.g. Council of the European Union, 2018).

This paper reports on a current Agency project, Supporting Inclusive School Leadership (SISL), a cross-national project that considers how best to ensure that school leaders meet the needs of *all* learners in their school communities (European Agency, 2018c). The SISL project is organized over two phases. In the first phase the project examined current theories of school leadership together with the core functions of school

leaders in participating countries in order to develop a model specifically focused on inclusive school leadership. A focus of this first phase was to reflect on the policy context and roles/responsibilities of school leaders enabling them to fulfil the complex responsibilities associated with inclusive school development at different system levels, using the ecosystem model of inclusive education. The second phase of the SISL project is in its early stages and will build on information from the first phase. The focus in this second phase is to develop a policy guidance framework and an open-source self-review tool for mapping country policies for inclusive school leadership. Agency projects such as SISL focus on research findings and policy developments that support countries to chart their own course towards a common goal. This process of cross-national working permits member countries with their distinctive national, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversities to work together on common goals.

The concept of school leadership

Leadership has been interpreted in different ways, but it can be defined as a process of providing direction and applying influence (Lumby and Coleman, 2016). Leadership involves managing people's emotions, thoughts and actions decisively in order to influence others towards a preferred direction (Diamond and Spillane, 2016). In this description, leadership resides in the relationship between leaders and those with whom they work. The relationship is built on the motivation and commitment of both parties, moving people to action by influencing and challenging their thinking and having them reflect on the values and understandings that constitute the base of their practice (Krüger and Scheerens, 2012).

In this paper, the term school leader is used to refer to all those in key leadership roles in schools and learning communities. Such leaders may also be referred to as

headteachers, school directors or principals, as well as leadership taking place in teams. Their roles focus on enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, pupils and parents toward achieving common educational aims. It is important to acknowledge that leading a school involves a balance of leadership focused on values, vision and the future, and management activities that are concerned with making things work (West-Burnham and Harris, 2015).

The landscape of educational leadership in Europe has changed drastically over past decades as schools and school systems have developed. This is due to growing diversity of student populations due to migration, and other factors that contribute to the complexity of the school leader's role such as increasing school autonomy and demands for increasing accountability (Bauer and Silver, 2018; European Commission, 2017). In addition, school leaders increasingly share leadership tasks and work with a range of partners in the school and local community and beyond (European Agency, 2018c). Consequently, school leaders have the potential to play a key role as change managers in wider system reform.

Leading a school therefore is a demanding mixture of tasks that require, among other competencies, a vision, a capacity for strategic thinking and efficient resource management, and the ability to improve learning environments and learning cultures (European Commission, 2017). Initial training, professional development and providing on-going support for leaders are key for the development of effective inclusive schools. In particular, leaders must be capable of promoting and sustaining a stable environment in order to recruit and retain the best teachers for marginalized children and young people (Khalifa et al., 2016). Leaders need to be knowledgeable and well prepared to support teaching that meets the needs of each learner, to tackle inequalities and withstand the

resistance they are likely to encounter to change in their school community (Billingsley *et al.*, 2018; Lumby and Coleman, 2016).

Core leadership functions

The SISL project literature review (European Agency 2018c) identified three main organizational functions associated with the effective operation of inclusive schools (Billingsley *et al.*, 2014; 2018; McLeskey and Waldron, 2015; Skoglund and Stäcker, 2016). These functions fall into three broad categories: setting direction, human development and organizational development. Although they are interrelated, the aim of each of the three core functions is distinctive.

Setting direction

Leadership is important for giving direction, with a focus on the values and discourse that support inclusive practice. This discourse is grounded in reflection between stakeholders about what constitutes such practice (Ekins, 2013). Exploring and sharing meanings about inclusion, aiming to promote the best interests of learners both academically and socially, through fairness, justice and equity are essential features of this reflection on practice (Stone-Johnson, 2014).

Enacting a vision of inclusive schools requires leaders to build a common philosophy or inclusive culture across the school. Key aspects of that inclusive culture involve embracing:

- a common definition of inclusion;

- an authentic sense of belonging;

- a commitment that "all" means each and every student; and

- a presumption of competence for ALL students (Theoharis and Causton, 2014).

An important factor in achieving the strategic vision is defining the standards for implementation of policy and practice, in particular attending to the development of professional competences of teachers and staff in working with diverse groups of learners.

Human development

The European Agency (2015) notes that leadership is one of the main drivers of the quality of teaching, and teacher quality is the most important school-level influence on learner achievement. According to Dorczak (2013), school leaders' main role is 'to release and develop the talents of all teachers or other members of staff as well [as] recognizing and activating the potential of all students' (p. 55). Thus is school leaders play a key role in raising learner achievement (European Agency, 2017).

At the center of this strategic role is monitoring and evaluating teaching, in order to collect information to ensure that professional development supports and motivates each teacher to work for all learners (Black and Simon, 2014). In this way, leaders build capacity by developing teachers' knowledge and skills, and promoting a school-wide professional community that facilitates reflective dialogue and collaboration about inclusive instructional practices (Humada-Ludeke, 2013). The European Agency (2015) further recognizes the need for leaders to develop leadership skills in others, for example, in teachers and middle managers, in order to share or 'distribute' leadership tasks and create an inclusive and collaborative school culture. By distributing and sharing leadership more widely, the opportunities for increasing learning capacity and building social capital with schools and across the system more widely are maximized (Harris and Jones, 2013).

Organizational development

School leaders play a critical role in implementing inclusive policy and practice and, in particular, in creating a school culture that embraces diversity (Cherkowski and Ragoonaden, 2016; Mac Ruairc, 2013). This means that they affect elements of organizational development and need systematically to address the following areas: curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, school organization (e.g. use of spaces, learner grouping, etc.) and developing partnerships with parents and the local/wider community (Fultz, 2017). They also create an organizational climate that is conducive to change (Ehrhart *et al.*, 2015).

School leaders are responsible for maintaining a school culture that is collegial, interactive and focused on supporting teachers and learners throughout the educational process. Setting the tone for an inclusive culture requires school leaders to nurture teacher morale and professional collegiality.

Using human and financial resources in a strategic way and aligning them with pedagogical purposes can influence the way school activities improve teaching and learning. Thus, school leaders need to be involved in decisions regarding teacher recruitment. Being able to select the teaching staff is central to establishing a school culture and capacity that has beneficial effects on learners' achievement (Stoll and Temperley, 2010).

Elements of an inclusive school pedagogy and practice, as highlighted in the literature (Deppeler *et al.*, 2015) are based on:

- Engaging students in intellectual challenges;

- Structuring supportive learning environments;

- Recognizing difference and being connected with student's interests and understandings;

- Integrating assessment with teaching and learning;

- Enabling student's voice and active participation;

- Recognizing and reflexively monitoring teaching and learning; and

- Positively influencing the inclusion of students in classrooms (p. 5).

Increasingly, there is a trend towards decentralized decision-making that impacts on the level of autonomy of school leaders. Harris (2016) notes that the pressure to deliver change and improvement has shifted much more towards principals with far greater responsibility placed upon them to deliver school and system improvement.

School leaders need autonomy to set direction, and influence human and organizational development. However, they also need access to support to meet the increasing demands and levels of accountability. Leading inclusive schools requires knowledge of leadership theories and their relevance in supporting quality learning for all and addressing the core functions. These theories are explored in the following section.

Leadership to support inclusive practice

The SISL project identified three main theories of school leadership linked to successful inclusive practices: transformational leadership, distributed leadership and instructional leadership. These theories share a common focus on developing a shared vision, shared ownership and decision-making (Kershner and McQuillan, 2016; Urick, 2016).

Transformational leadership emanates from the management literature (Burns, 1978), while instructional and distributed leadership originate in research on education administration.

Some information about each of these types of leadership is provided below. After considering each one in isolation, it is important to look at how the three interact and can be used together.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is associated with inspiring others, building a shared vision, providing support and developing a collaborative culture (Yu *et al*., 2002). It focuses on the establishment of structures and cultures which enhance the quality of teaching and learning, setting direction, developing people and (re)designing the organization (Day *et al*., 2016). Transformational school leadership is traditionally associated with the ability to facilitate change and innovation through impacting people and cultures within schools (Navickaitė, 2013). This theory can support the core functions of setting direction and organizational development discussed above.

School leaders aiming to reform organizational structures to develop a more inclusive school may take up transformational leadership to establish and communicate a vision, create opportunities for professional development, to build capacity and encourage professional learning and innovation (Urick, 2016). According to transformational leadership theory, given adequate support, school leaders can influence school staff to become highly engaged and motivated by setting inspirational goals that are associated with values in which the staff believes, or are persuaded to believe (Leithwood and Sun, 2012). This means

that leaders need to identify which values are critical to the performance of their staff and

focus on leadership practices most likely to have a positive influence on those values.

Research on successful school leaders has found that the ability to improve or

transform schools in the long term is connected to the leaders' understanding and analysis

of the school's needs and the way they apply clearly articulated, shared educational values

(Day *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, strengthening school leadership, particularly for responding

to diversity and developing inclusive attitudes, has been identified as an effective strategy

to prevent school failure (European Agency, 2019).

Distributed leadership

Distributed leadership is primarily concerned with the practice of leadership, rather than

specific leadership roles or responsibilities. Theories of distributed leadership in research

literature place emphasis on collaborative efforts based on a network of relationships

between people. Jones and Harris (2014) note a direct connection between social capital

and distributed leadership as both are based on the core principles of collaborative practice

and social connections. Distributed leadership that shares responsibility across leadership

teams can therefore be connected to the core function of human development (Hansen,

2013; Hargreaves and Fink, 2003; Spillane *et al.*, 2001).

The literature has suggested that shared or distributed leadership that focuses on

the development of others, extending beyond the delegation of tasks in school

management, would be more efficient in moving schools towards inclusive education

(Ainscow and Sandill, 2010; Busher *et al.*, 2007). Effective leaders draw on the collective

talent and ability within the school and connect people in a meaningful and productive way

(Jones and Harris, 2014).

This approach goes beyond traditional leadership that focuses on top-down hierarchical styles. Distributed leadership firstly involves the devolution of responsibilities to middle management teams that are able to support and manage the transfer of knowledge and skills. Secondly, it enables all staff and school stakeholders to take responsibility by promoting flexibility and sharing practice (European Agency, 2016). In particular, distributed leadership extends to teacher-leaders (Liasidou and Svensson, 2013) and to any other staff member, learner or parent who takes on a leading role within the school. Such actors are important because they become 'enforcers' or 'drivers' of the change process and multiply the headteacher's actions.

Thus, distributed leadership focuses on the interactions between those in formal and informal leadership roles more than the actions they perform. The main concern is how leadership influences organizational and instructional improvement (Harris, 2013) which in turn serves to raise the achievement of all learners. According to OECD (2016), distributed leadership leads to a greater sense of purpose in schools, as it promotes teamwork, multi-disciplinary and professional collaboration among teaching and non-teaching staff, and other stakeholders, professionals and services.

Instructional leadership

Instructional leadership is associated with 'setting and communicating clear instructional goals and expectations' and 'promoting and participating in teacher learning and development' (Brown and Chai, 2012, p. 753). Instructional leadership emphasizes the importance of establishing clear educational goals, planning the curriculum and evaluating teachers and teaching and can as such be connected to the core functions of human and organizational development. The prime focus is on the leaders' responsibility for promoting

better measurable outcomes for learners, highlighting the importance of enhancing the

quality of classroom teaching and learning (Day *et al.*, 2016).

Instructional leadership furthermore emphasizes the creation of a supportive,

encouraging work environment that can support the development of teaching practices

best suited to improve academic performance (Hansen and Lárusdóttir, 2015). This type of

leadership has also been termed 'learning-centered leadership, leadership for learning or

curriculum leadership', as one key dimension focuses on developing and co-ordinating an

effective school curriculum (Gumus *et al.*, 2018).

Research suggests that the best way to raise learner achievement is to improve the

instructional practices of teachers. A further, powerful factor is the leadership practice of

the headteacher or principal in facilitating human development, that is both learner and

teacher learning (OECD, 2014). Central to that goal is attending to the pedagogical

repertoire, decision-making skills, sense of self and professional efficacy of both teachers

and leaders (Donnelly *et al.*, 2016). Thus, while teachers are pedagogical experts, school

leaders co-ordinate the efforts of teachers and teacher-leaders to support each other and

the central mission of the school (Urick, 2016).

Analysis of OECD 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) of 23

countries found that, while varying degrees of instructional leadership exist in different

national settings, school leaders who adopted a stronger instructional leadership focus were

associated with:

- more collaboration between teachers;

- more positive teacher-learner interactions;

- greater recognition of teacher innovation (Sammons *et al.*, 2014).

A further analysis of TALIS 2013 showed that, in schools where instructional leadership is favored, teachers in primary and secondary education were also more engaged in reflective dialogue (OECD, 2016).

According to instructional leadership theory, the responsibility for promoting better measurable outcomes for learners by enhancing the quality of classroom teaching and learning is the leaders' prime focus (Gawlik, 2017). However, the challenge is to identify *how* leaders can facilitate teacher learning and what it is that teachers need to be able to do to implement the kind of instruction that will support learners in achieving educational goals (Neumerski, 2013).

A model of inclusive school leadership

The SISL project has developed a model of inclusive school leadership (see Figure 1) that integrates the models of leadership discussed above with the three core functions of school leadership: setting direction and building a vision, human development and organizational development and the foci from the three theories of leadership (transformational, distributed and instructional).

<Insert Figure 1 here.>

Figure 1 shows how the leadership models can influence and support the core functions of inclusive school leaders. When these three theories of leadership co-exist in an integrated practice, there is a substantial impact on learner achievement, the pedagogical quality in schools and on the development of professional learning communities in schools (OECD, 2016).

Based on the model and the vision of inclusive education systems (European Agency,

2015), the SISL project has defined inclusive school leaders as follows:

Inclusive school leaders (or leadership teams) have the vision that "all learners of any

age should be provided with meaningful high-quality educational opportunities in

their local community, alongside their friends and peers" (European Agency, 2015).

Such leaders combine elements of instructional, transformative and distributed leadership

models. They take responsibility for and value all learners. They work to ensure their full

participation and engagement by setting a clear direction, developing staff and other

stakeholders and using all available evidence, experience and expertise to collaboratively

create and sustain the learning community and support everyone to achieve the best

possible outcomes.

The model of inclusive school leadership aims to close the gap in international and

European policy, by specifically addressing leadership for inclusive school policy and

practice. It brings together both the underpinning vision and the core functions of school

leadership. However, a supportive policy framework is needed to enable school leaders to

balance these tasks and influence the success of both teachers and learners in education

and this will be considered in the following section.

Inclusive school leadership within the inclusive education ecosystem

Schools do not sit in isolation from the communities and the wider state, national, global

and historical contexts within which they operate. These external factors, along with

internal school and classroom factors, will determine the success (or not) of inclusive

education (Anderson *et al.*, 2014).

The Agency's Ecosystem of Inclusive Education Systems model (European Agency, 2017a) has been developed to set out the main structures and processes that influence every learners' participation and that must be considered to maximize opportunities for learning and achievement. The ecosystem was originally developed as part of the Agency project on Inclusive Early Childhood Education (European Agency, 2017b) to provide a holistic model of the complex networks in the environment that affect every learner.

The Ecosystem contains four levels: macro, exo, meso and micro levels, which co-exist, interact and influence each other. These levels influence and govern the work of school leaders to different degrees. Across the levels, the school leaders play different roles to fulfil the core functions of setting direction, human and organizational development. The importance of the main theories of leadership in supporting school leaders to fulfil the various roles also become evident. The Ecosystem here is employed to explain the policy context and how that affects the roles, or core functions, responsibilities and influence of inclusive school leaders within the different system levels.

The **macro-level** system represents the wider social, cultural and legislative context that encompasses all the other systems. This embeds the principles of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child and on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which should in turn be visible in each country's policies for equity and non-discrimination in education. The policies provide a clear vision of how to implement inclusive education and how the implementation is a shared responsibility of all educators, leaders and policy-makers (European Agency, 2015). These national-level policies affect the work of the inclusive school leader directly, as they both create the environment within which the leader works and influence the professional development and training of leaders.

This level contains key national/regional policy areas, such as curriculum and assessment, monitoring, quality assurance and accountability, governance and funding and collaboration with other institutions and the local community. Autonomy in these areas can facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of an inclusive school leader as they strive to implement national policy at local/school level, setting a course and a strategic vision for inclusive practice. School leaders who feel a sense of ownership of reform are more likely to engage their staff and learners in implementing and sustaining change.

The **exo-level** system represents the community context. Here, inclusive school leaders play a key role in building relationships with others beyond the school – for example families, employers, support agencies, other schools, colleges, universities in the community. Leaders influence and structure collaboration with these different stakeholders for the benefit of learners, their families and staff within the school, fulfilling the core functions of both human and organizational development. Working jointly (e.g. with the health and social sectors) can improve the efficient use of resources and bring about a more coherent approach, reducing unnecessary duplication of provision or procedures in the longer term (Byrne *et al*., 2015). Here, leaders need access to human and financial resources within and beyond the school.

The **meso level** represents the school and the interactions which influence its structures, processes and practices. This level focuses on the traditions, culture and ethos, values and ideology, patterns of authority and collaboration within the school. It includes organizing time to build professional learning communities and to engage with parents and the local community – a process which 'sits' in both exo- and meso-levels.

Inclusive practice is about the ways decisions about support and resources are made and how specialist knowledge is employed (Florian, 2010) and therefore, requires flexibility in for example, school organization, resource allocation and the provision of support for all learners and teachers. School leaders need autonomy to provide direction and to influence the successful transformation of the structures and processes through distributed and instructional leadership, working within a social justice framework to sustain a welcoming, supportive school culture with trusting relationships (White and Jones, 2011). Instructional leadership is also important to address both equity and excellence in achieving positive outcomes for all – in the spirit of the 'ethic of everybody' (Hart *et al.*, 2004).

At the school level, leaders are accountable for school outcomes often set out within the national framework, but at the same time they are accountable to learners and their families. To respond to this responsibility, leaders must recognize the importance of contextual analysis and the need to use qualitative and quantitative data, including information and feedback from all key stakeholders for on-going improvement.

The **micro level** involves classroom practice that directly affects the learner's development and outcomes. Here, the school leader demonstrates a positive attitude and a commitment towards raising the achievement of all learners. Leaders should use available autonomy to adapt the curriculum and assessment frameworks to ensure that they are fit for purpose and appropriate for local needs.

The responsibility of the inclusive school leader is to support the development of inclusive pedagogy that attends to individual differences between pupils but avoids the marginalization that can occur when pedagogical responses are designed only with individual needs in mind (Florian and Beaton, 2017). The provision of additional support for

learners who experience barriers to learning should focus on creating quality learning

opportunities, rather than on provision and placement (Ekins, 2013).

Inclusive pedagogy should be learner-centered, involving learners in a personalized

process, not expecting them to learn the same content, at the same speed, or employ the

same approach (Wolfe, Steinberg and Hoffman, 2013). To build teachers' confidence in their

pedagogical skills and the belief that they can teach all learners, school leaders should

employ instructional leadership (Óskarsdóttir, 2017). Finally, learners should be given a

voice in matters that concern them in their education and school leaders can create a

platform or a space for democratic discussions with learners, both individually and in groups

(Bragg, 2007; Portela, 2013).

Table 1 outlines the key roles and responsibilities of school leaders at each system

level. It can be seen that at every level, school leaders draw on all three types of leadership

to fulfil the core functions and in particular these roles and responsibilities that support

inclusive practice.

<Insert Table 1 here.>

The development of inclusive school leadership within the Ecosystem needs a

supportive policy context at national and local levels. The next section provides some

discussion on the ideas presented above and the policy implications.

Discussion: Key levers for supporting inclusive school leadership

To date, European policy has lacked an explicit focus on inclusive school leadership. The SISL

project was undertaken to examine this policy gap and consider how all school leaders can

be enabled to attend to equity and raise the achievement of *all* learners in their community.

The SISL project was established to develop and promote inclusive school-level leadership through national- and local-level policy frameworks and support mechanisms. To this end, it adapted an ecosystem model to reflect the ways that school leaders operate at the interface between educational policies and their implementation. This provides school leaders with the potential to extend their sphere of influence as they play a key role in managing change and supporting wider system transformation. The ecosystem model provides a framework for the consideration of the roles and responsibilities of inclusive school leaders – and also related areas of accountability – within and across system levels. Importantly, it is intended to support reflection on developing equitable practice so that all are included and no one is excluded from learning in school.

In addition to the leadership model described above, the SISL project has identified three key levers necessary for leaders to fulfil their core functions and manage change towards more inclusive practice. These are: access, autonomy and accountability (European Agency, 2018c). While these levers are seen to facilitate inclusive school leadership practices, they must be underpinned by relevant national policies that support the vision that 'all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers' (European Agency, 2015). To achieve this vision, education policy will need to facilitate the development of more flexible learning locations and innovative ways to organize learners and personalize learning through inclusive pedagogy, relevant curricula and fit for purpose assessment. These developments require a focus on the education and on-going development of leaders and teachers to ensure that they acquire the competences needed to empower them to meet the needs and raise the achievement of all learners. Therefore, in supporting school

leaders, education policy should take into account the levers they require to fulfil their

roles. Thus, policy should facilitate:

Access to:

- appropriate pay and status in the community, on-going support commensurate with

  levels of autonomy;

- real engagement with a full range of stakeholders at all system levels including

  communication with policy makers to extend their sphere of influence;

- professional development and on-going support – formal as well as informal (e.g.

  through collaboration with colleagues/other stakeholders at all system levels);

- resources to develop the capacity of the workforce for diversity and implement

  national policy initiatives.

Autonomy to make evidence-informed decisions on the strategic direction, development

and organization of the school including, for example:

- using available flexibility within national policy context to adapt the curriculum,

  assessment and accreditation frameworks to ensure that they establish high

  expectations and meet local community and learner needs;

- the appointment of teachers and staff able to take responsibility for and raise the

  achievement of all learners through innovative learner-centered pedagogy;

- the development/empowerment of teachers and staff through shared leadership

  tasks and collaborative professional development;

- proactive work with other agencies and the local community:

- to provide support for all learners without recourse to labelling or bureaucratic processes;

- to provide expertise to support school development and extend learning opportunities and support for staff and learners;

- secure knowledge of research evidence to further develop the learning community.

- about funding and equitable allocation of resources.

and regarding accountability, that they:

- are able to set out the vision, values and outcomes for which they (and other stakeholders) wish to be held to account (e.g. equity, non-discrimination, meeting the requirements of all learners from the local community, personal and social as well as academic outcomes);

- are held accountable (to learners, families, local community) through mechanisms that are aligned with other policy areas, ensuring support for inclusive education policy and practice;

- play a lead role in monitoring, self-review and evaluation, together with key stakeholders, to provide information on learner outcomes and reflect on data to inform on-going improvement.

While the three levers of access, accountability and autonomy are important for inclusive school leaders, they also increase the complexity of their work. Autonomy is dependent on the extent to which the education system is decentralized. School leaders working in systems where there is strong national prescription have a more limited role

(Pont, 2014). It follows that, as the autonomy (and accountability) of school leaders

increases, there must be a concomitant increase in relevant professional development and

on-going support to enable them to meet these increasing complex

obligations/responsibilities. These include skills in financial administration, to enable leaders

to priorities resources to certain areas of development (Pont *et al.*, 2008) and the ability to

monitor progress and use evidence and data to plan and design appropriate improvement

strategies to raise learner achievement.

Conclusion

Inclusive leaders are responsible for leading schools that build on the principles of equity to

raise the achievement of *all* learners and their families in the local community. For inclusion

to be fully embraced by the school, school leaders need to set a strategic vision and attend

to both human and organizational development. The SISL project has described core

functions of inclusive school leaders and their increasingly complex range of responsibilities.

The project is aligned with the view of Brauckmann and his colleagues (2016) that more

light needs to be shed on the on-going debate about the contextualized adaptation

processes of a transnational construct of leadership. The SISL project acknowledges the

need for policy that sets a supportive context and enables leaders to work through the three

levers of access, autonomy and accountability to manage the change process towards more

inclusive schools. It establishes a starting point for member countries to address the issue

raised by Jones and Harris (2014) that the real task for school leaders who pursue

organizational change is to create conditions that reinforce and reward high quality teaching

and learning that positively affect and improve achievement for all learners.

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Table 1 The key roles and responsibilities of school leaders in the Ecosystem

Level	Roles and responsibilities
Macro (National/regional)	• Influence the development of national policy on equity and Inclusive Education through consultation and communication • Translate and implement policies in ways appropriate to their school context and values and manage school level change regarding: curriculum and assessment frameworks; professional development; funding and allocation of resources; quality assurance and accountability
Exo (Community level)	• Build partnerships with support agencies, other schools/institutions at other system levels, businesses in the community • Build school capacity for diversity through research engagement and collaborative professional development activities e.g. with universities • Manage human resources, securing commitment to the shared vision of inclusion • Manage financial resources to meet the needs of the whole school community
Meso (School level)	• Guide and influence school organisation and resources according to principles of equity • Engage the learning community in self-review and reflect on data to inform on-going school improvement • Provide opportunities for professional development • Ensure a continuum of support for all stakeholders • Show commitment to the ethic of everybody • Ensure curriculum and assessment are fit for purpose and meet the needs of all learners • Actively engage all families
Micro (Individual level)	• Influence learner centred practice/listening to learners, personalisation (centre) • Ensure that teachers take responsibility for all learners • Support innovative and flexible evidence-based pedagogy/practice in classrooms • Monitor classroom practice ensuring high quality education for all • Develop a culture of collaboration - positive and trusting relationships • Use data as a basis for teacher reflection and ongoing improvement

(European Agency, in press)

Distributed Leadership

Transformational Leadership

Instructional Leadership

Inclusive Leadership

Setting direction: shared vision with high expectations for all; monitoring
Human development: professional development; reflective practice; inclusive pedagogy
Organisational development: inclusive culture; partnership & collaboration; shared tasks