

## **HOW TO TRANSFORM A HIERARCHICAL EDUCATION SYSTEM INTO A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM WITH AUTONOMOUS SCHOOLS**

Author : Nelly GUET ( Alerteducation).  
Independent consultant

Leader of 6 different schools for 22 years, 4 in France, one in Berlin and one in Switzerland.  
Address : Grand Rue  
84750 Saint Martin de Castillon  
Tel : 0033 6 10 05 36 36

[nellyguet@yahoo.com](mailto:nellyguet@yahoo.com)  
[ng@alerteducation.eu](mailto:ng@alerteducation.eu)

### **ABSTRACT**

It is not possible for school principals to change the whole system from being centralized. However, it is possible for them to bring into their own school some autonomy and to run the school in a democratic way with all the stakeholders involved in creating a culture of distributed leadership.

This presentation focuses on European best practices enabling principals to transform their individual schools and consequently obsolete state organizations. It is the result of my work as a practitioner involved in professional associations of school principals since 1998 (ESHA-AEDE-ICP). I presented this topic first in Beijing in October 2013, then in Veszprem ( Hungary) in June 2014 and in Shanghai in September 2014.

If we want to engage ourselves for more democracy and more equity at school, if we want to prepare our youth for lifelong learning, if we want to avoid violence, youth unemployment, lack of interest in school, anxiety about the future, lack of confidence, among youngsters, then :

we have to adopt different measures to change the school culture and the school governance at individual school level :

- Self evaluation of schools
- Distributed school leadership and autonomy
- Changes in teacher recruitment
- Competence-based training and assessment of teachers and school heads
- Cross collaborative activities between business and education world

**KEYWORDS** : self-evaluation, distributed leadership, competence-based evaluation, business world

## **HOW TO TRANSFORM A HIERARCHICAL EDUCATION SYSTEM INTO A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM WITH AUTONOMOUS SCHOOLS**

*I was a leader of 6 different schools for 22 years, 4 in France, one in Berlin and one in Switzerland : 2 kindergarten, 2 primary schools, 3 lower and 3 upper secondary schools and a vocational school among them.*

*I have also been involved in the Executive Board of European associations of school heads and teachers for 15 years, such as ESHA, and AEDE-France as well as a Council Member of the ICP, the International Confederation of Principals since 2004. I'm also working in cooperation with the European Parents Association (EPA) since 2000.*

It is not possible for school principals to change the whole system from being centralized. However, it is possible for them to bring into their own school some autonomy and to run the school in a democratic way with all the stakeholders involved in creating a culture of distributed leadership.

**This presentation focuses on European best practices** enabling principals to transform their individual schools and consequently obsolete state organizations. It is the result of my work as a practitioner involved in professional associations of school principals since 1998.

If we want :

- to engage ourselves for more democracy and more equity at school,
- to prepare our youth for lifelong learning,
- to avoid violence, youth unemployment, lack of interest in school, anxiety about the future, lack of confidence, among youngsters,

we have to adopt different measures including :

- **Self evaluation of schools**
- **Distributed school leadership and autonomy**
- **Changes in teacher recruitment**
- **Competence-based training and assessment of teachers and school heads**
- **Cross collaborative activities between business and education world**

1. Self-evaluation of schools :

**Involvement of students, teachers, parents and school leaders in a collegial work.**

One of the successful practices in Finland is based on this method, while most other countries still have inspection bodies.

At the end of the Nineties, a European project was launched in several European countries by the European Commission. This pilot project was called “evaluating quality in school education”.

One of the tools was a practical guide to self-evaluation. I had the opportunity to use the “**self-evaluation profile**” [1] (John Mac Beath, Denis Meuret, Michael Schratz, Lars Jakobsen) and to put the proposed self-evaluation questionnaire into practice in my school three times.

The “**self-evaluation profile**”: Please, evaluate the school in relation to each area on the following scale.

	AERA	As we are now*	Recent evolution
<b>Out-comes</b>	Academic achievement	++ + - --	
	Personal and social development	++ + - --	
	Pupils destinations	++ + - --	
<b>Classroom</b>	Time as a resource for learning	++ + - --	
	Quality of learning and teaching	++ + - --	
<b>Level</b>	Support for learning difficulties	++ + - --	
	School as a learning place	++ + - --	
<b>School Level</b>	School as a social place	++ + - --	
	School as a professional place	++ + - --	
	School and home	++ + - --	↑ → ↓
<b>Environment</b>	School and community	++ + - --	

	School and work	++ + - --	
Other area			

**Legend :** ++: major strengths in this area, +: strengths outweighs weaknesses,

- : weaknesses outweigh strengths, - -: major weaknesses in this area.

The arrows indicate the trends since the previous evaluation two years before in the given area: upwards arrow means improvement, etc.

(More information on the self-evaluation profile [here](#)).

Each time the questionnaire was used, about 50 representatives/delegates of students, parents, and teachers and 5 members of the leadership team had to answer questions concerning all the aspects of school life. Then we evaluated the weaknesses and strengths together and used the information to prepare the school development plan for the following 3 years.

We had to consider not only input but also output, to measure results, which is much more relevant. There is often a gap between what is decided on at the top and what comes out in the classroom! These results were taken into account by the staff of our school and then some teachers decided to do peer-supervision. So it is a good way to create a new culture at school and to promote teamwork.

**Result 1 : If we want to give students and parents new roles and responsibilities, the first step is to involve them in the internal evaluation of the school.**

## **2. Distributed school leadership and autonomy are required to enable individualized learning**

To change learning methods at my school and to remind my teachers of this fact, I posted this statement on the door of the teacher's room in our school [2](Joyce, B.R. & Showers, B):

- 5% of learners will transfer a new skill into their practice as a result of theory.
- 10% will transfer a new skill into their practice as a result of theory and demonstration.
- 20% will transfer a new skill into their practice as a result of theory, demonstration and practice.
- 25% will transfer a new skill into their practice as a result of theory, demonstration, practice and feedback.

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- 90% will transfer a new skill into their practice as a result of theory, demonstration, practice, feedback and coaching.

Competence-based learning, integrating initiative and responsibility for the learner and for all the partners working inside and outside the school means that we no longer have a “command and control policy” from the centre, no longer a vertical hierarchy.

Instead of huge institutions, we need to implement a “school-based innovation” [3] (David H Hargreaves – Sept, 2007), allowing personalized learning with:

- not an “age” but a “stage” approach
- “bottom up” instead of “top-down”
- "empowerment ", allowing teachers and school heads to have expanded responsibilities.
- 3 long terms replaced by 5 or 6 terms
- flexible time management in the school : variable blocks of time are a flexible resource for teachers
- a new design for buildings and learning spaces,
- flexible student groups

Some experiments – like Slash 21 in the Netherlands – have shown that 13 years old students are able to choose what they want to learn, able to decide when and how, able to know why, connecting learning with their own future.

**Result 2 : If we wish to stop thousands of students dropping out each year, we have to get rid of our rigid organization based on classes, where teaching is the same for all.**

### **3. Teacher recruitment**

Access to studies leading to become a teacher should not only be based on purely intellectual criteria, but including personal and social skills.

The influence of "Informal Education", for example: long-term and frequent involvement in youth work involves high "soft skills" development such as: communication, teamwork, decision-making, organizational skills and self-confidence, intercultural and leadership skills. Training abroad includes acquiring higher language skills but also intercultural and leadership skills. We have to take these skills acquired informally or non-formally into account, because 4 of the 8 ‘European key competences’ are transversal and teachers must have these key competences in order to be able to collaborate with others and to work with and within society.

A school needs teachers with professional skills and personal commitment. They also have to be facilitators, team members, researchers, lifelong learners, reflective practitioners. Teacher training must prepare for life and work in a "learning community". Future teachers have to get an approach to teaching that goes beyond traditional subject boundaries. They also have to be trained as “leaders” in management and finance because they will have to organize external partnerships.

**Result 3 : Teachers will have to recognize that “co-construction” is at the basis of knowledge and to be aware of the necessity to integrate the influence of non-formal and informal education.**

#### **4. Competence-based training and assessment of teachers and school heads**

A “European” initial and in-service training will connect the future teachers and school leaders with external partners of the school.

Collaborative practices enable teachers and students in some European countries to develop transversal skills mentioned among the “8 European key competences”, including science education, entrepreneurship education, financial education.

“Science education” is a good example. We all have to promote science education and to motivate children and school students for science and technology because this means more jobs and less unemployment for the younger generations. I was involved in different European projects such as “Hands on, Brains on” covering 8 European countries led by Hannu Salmi, a researcher from Finland. The project was based on partnerships for schools particularly those with science centres.

Formal, non-formal and informal education have to converge in order to shape a new educational model within a long-term project. If we consider that a majority of European students spend just 200 days at school in a year and about 165 days outside of school, we are easily convinced that not only teaching is important, but just as important is the informal learning through activities carried out by parents, cities, associations, science centres, Universities and other partners.

European projects – like **eTwinning**, **ELOS** (Europe as a Learning Environment) and **ELICIT** (European Literacy and Citizenship Education), are aiming at developing key competences for the future European citizen. **Erasmus+** will also enable European teachers and other staff to enhance project-based and problem-based learning whilst also addressing trans-disciplinary questions.

The Elos Network uses the “**Common European Framework of Reference for Languages**» from the Council of Europe (2000) and the “**Common Framework for Europe Competence**” “providing indicators for students aged 12-19. It is based on the” European key competences” and intends to build a concrete bridge between the core competences and practice in schools.

The ELICIT Framework aims at providing the conceptual framework which teacher trainers and lecturers could refer to when designing a course curriculum for initial or in-service teacher training, by developing competences in 7 areas: curriculum design, European culture, intercultural education, motivation and personal development, use of ICT, school ethos and evaluation.

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These forms of "European" teacher training and, developing school leadership, the European project **ESLN** - European School Leadership Network – which I was part of the steering group (in 2004-05-06) and now the **EPNoSL** - European Policy Network on School Leadership (final conference held in May 2015) - should allow our schools to implement “life long learning” and a “competence-based education”.

**Result 4 : A “European” initial and in-service training will connect the future teachers and school leaders with European institutions, research institutes, universities, science centres, companies and associations involved in science, arts, finance education.**

**5. Cross collaborative activities between business and education world**

It is essential to develop cross-collaborative activities between the business and the education worlds : companies should be allowed to provide training content; they also need to be more involved in the assessment of skills when training periods are set up. Self-commitment, personal development, innovation driven by ICT - companies and schools have a lot in common and much to share. To let students develop awareness, autonomy, the ability to make choices and take responsibility, discover their own motivations and potential, we have to involve companies in the daily life of the schools, to influence the design of student learning methods and/or of school buildings, adapted to the 21st century, enabling teachers to work with assistants, external partners thus practicing teamwork.

We should consider the company as "a developer of talent", take the European recommendations and some successful and inspiring practices in Europe into account, mostly introduced by a **public-private partnership -- Foundation** - initiating change at school:

- **“MODUS 21 (MODUS F)”** school experimentation led both by the Bavarian Ministry, companies and organizations in partnership and shared responsibility : <http://bildungspakt-bayern.de/>
- **Jetnet** <http://www.jet-net.nl/english> Jet-Net, Youth and Technology Network Netherlands, is a joint initiative of leading Dutch technology companies and secondary schools. Together they provide students with practical content for the science curriculum, with a great variety of activities and also allow students to gain a better understanding of their future career prospects in industry and technology.
- In Germany, the publishing company **Universum** offers teachers of economics and also teachers of other disciplines content in finance and social sciences from both companies and government within the framework of the **Jugend und Bildung** Foundation training : On the website “Lehrer on line” teachers find online courses, projects, educational materials for teaching economics and finance, but also on all social issues : <http://www.jugend-und-bildung.de> <http://www.lehrer-online.de/>
- **The "Entrepreneurial Skills Pass”** proposed by **the Austrian Chamber of Commerce of Vienna - WKÖ in Austria**

<http://www.unternehmerfuehrerschein.at/Content.Node/index.en.html> recognized by the European Commission as a key device for developing all "entrepreneurial" skills but also "intrapreneurship", that is to say not only essential to the creative future business but also one that will work in a company where you will also need the same skills: organization, animation, decision making, teamwork, self-confidence, etc.

- Developing financial literacy through private-public partnerships, training teachers and students : **CYFI Child and Youth Finance International** is an NGO, working worldwide <http://childfinanceinternational.org> to make it possible that every child can have access to financial inclusion. By the collaborative work with a lot of partners (private and public), they could elaborate a Learning Framework and Curriculum Certification for financial education.

**Result 5 : Companies should be allowed to provide training content and to be more involved in the assessment of skills when training periods are set up.**

## **DISCUSSION on the 5 results**

## **CONCLUSION**

**This presentation shows how school leaders can change the school's autonomy at their level. The other decisions depend on the will of the ministers, who should "shift to Europe" and no longer recommend practices belonging to the past.**

## **REFERENCES :**

- [1] Self-evaluation in European Schools: A Story of Change** by John Mac Beath, Denis Meuret, Michael Schratz, Lars Jakobsen – Sept. 2000
- [2] Joyce, B.R. & Showers, B.** 1983 in ESLN (European School Leadership Network)
- [3] System Redesign – 1** –The road to transformation in education - David H Hargreaves – Sept, 2007, Ed. Peter Chambers, for [SSAT](#)