



# RECENT RESEARCH DEVELOPMENTS AND RELEVANT TOPICS IN CURRENT DISCUSSIONS ON SOCIAL ASPECTS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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## INTRODUCTION

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This brief report provides a summary of new topics covering a number of social aspects of education and training that currently play an important role in academic discussions and research projects, new developments and findings, as well as research that promises relevant novel or renewed foci on certain parts of the field. Considering the nature and breadth of this question, this summary is not an analytical study. Rather, it attempts to put a finger on the 'pulse' of current research developments by providing a brief description of selected topics and issues, with references for further reading. The document is primarily intended for the internal use of DG EAC staff. It will be shared with the NESET II members.

The process of selecting the topics was based on a survey among NESET II members. More than 30 survey responses (topic recommendations with brief justification) were collected, reflecting the broad range of expertise of the NESET II network. The recommendations covered a wide variety of topics and issues, as well as references to recent important publications, and a few suggestions for topics of growing importance. The relevance of the suggested topics was further examined to fit with DG EAC's preferences for: 1) new evidence, evolving perspective and recent data, 2) studies with cross-national focus, with country specific examples, 3) European data or findings in other, non-European countries that are relevant to Europe, and 4) topics prominent in research studies (e.g. special issues in reviewed journals). This process included review of selected research journals and desk review. Selected topics have been consulted with the NESET II coordination team and the PPMI staff. Topics examined by other NESET II activities (such as Integration of Migrant Children, Tolerance and Diversity, Multilingualism) are not included in this summary report.

The following summaries present 11 topics that are at the forefront of current academic research discussions and research projects. They are debated and examined in special issues of various research journals, and at various scientific events and key global meetings. Certain topics (such as Early School Leaving, Citizenship Education) are already among priorities on European and national policy agendas. On these topics and issues, recent research provides new data, more nuanced evidence, new perspective, and/or critical examination of education policies and practice. The relevance of some other topics (such as Learning for Well-being, Inequality of Access to Higher Education) is not yet fully recognised in policy discussions.

The topic summaries highlight recent research developments and briefly outline relevant recent research findings, and recommendations for further examination. The list of references for each topic provides suggestions for further reading.

The selected topics reflect the expertise of the NESET II members. Should the Commission staff be interested in learning more about some of the topics, the NESET II researchers could prepare in-depth analytical reports.

## TOPIC SUMMARIES

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### 1. Rethinking education goals

Rethinking and developing a new vision for education has been high on the agenda for quite some time. The selected research and foresight works briefly outline some of the current critical re-examinations of fundamental education and learning paradigms.

The *European Journal of Education* (Volume 50, special issues 1 and 2) includes reflections of various researchers examining the tension between the instrumentalist and humanist aims of education. Elfert (2015) suggests that the dominant instrumental approaches have curtailed discussions on how education fits within the context of debates about society. Elfert argues that we are offered ‘technocratic solutions to complex social problems’ (p. 96). Desjardins (2015) explains that this is (partly) because the perceived impact of education on competitiveness and other economic outcomes has shaped the debate on what educational systems are supposed to achieve. The almost exclusive focus on skills, the enhanced valuation of competition, innovation, growth and other ideals have reinforced market-based governance (Kordik, 2015). At the same time, researchers, policy-makers and practitioners have recently been rethinking the interrelation between education and the increasingly complex, changing and uncertain world and calling for ‘outside the box’ vision (Tawil, 2015). Cheng (2015) posits that broader social changes and deep discussions on the aims of education will be needed if we are to move toward more holistic approaches.

*Rethinking Education* (UNESCO, 2015) pays tribute to ‘spiritual dimensions’ and advocates for humanistic as opposed to dominant economic approaches to education. UNESCO argues for and reaffirms a humanistic approach to education as ‘the fundamental purpose of education in the twenty-first century.’ *Rethinking Education’s* key idea is the common good, a term that aims to go beyond the dichotomy of the public and the private. Knowledge and education are tied to each other as global common goods, inspired by the values of solidarity and social justice.

*Trends Shaping Education 2016* (OECD, 2016) spotlights global societal, demographic, economic and technological trends such as non-traditional families, increasing migration, climate change, national trends on government spending on health and pensions, the key role of cities in our societies as well as technological trends. Examining these societal changes, the report poses questions on the possible implications for the fundamental principles on which education and learning are based.

Contributors to the *European Journal of Education* special issues on learning (Volume 50 (1, 2, 3 and 4)) reflect on the role and effectiveness of education in responding to or propagating major recent societal, cultural and political developments. Of particular interest are the successes and failures of education in transforming existing and perceived injustices, and how education and education research should/could proceed to promote further economic and social progress. Halbert and Kaser (2015), and Sliwka and Yee (2015) describe reform processes in Canada and Germany that have engaged the full spectrum of stakeholders and helped to re-focus views on the main aims of schooling and learning. Broad professional and public consultations revealed a readiness for a more holistic approach and helped to create a consensus on the need to support intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies.

## 2. Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Based on comprehensive literature review, the *Futures of Learning* series (UNESCO Working papers, 2015) explores overall vision for twenty-first century pedagogy and learning environments that may contribute to the development and mastery of twenty-first century competences and skills, and advance the quality of learning. The authors underline that the quest for a new knowledge paradigm cannot be separated from the goal of inclusion and more equitable distribution of knowledge in societies. Accessibility remains a significant obstacle to inclusion. Equity demands more focused attention to groups of low achievers, who are often neglected in traditional education systems. The series asserts that new thinking needs to include making learning responsive to individual differences, and empowering and enabling each and every student to engage in learning.

The *European Journal of Education* devoted all 4 special issues of Volume 50 (2015) to exploring the overall aims of learning, new ways of thinking about learning and personal development, learning and societal transformation, and finally, learning in communities for work. It also examines how new media will affect new learning paradigms, and how digital technologies may potentially change the way we learn, as well as how we co-create knowledge. In special issue *Learning to be – Idealism or Core business?* (Volume 50, Issue 2, 2015), the authors explored what we know about how people learn during the different phases of life: from early childhood to the third age — a life-cycle approach. The issue also addressed values-formation processes (Desjardins, 2015), socio-emotional skills for well-being and social progress (Miyamoto et al., 2015), shifts in school education towards integrated settings that aim to support cognitive, metacognitive and social-emotional development for a stronger sense of personal identity, social responsibility and a broader world view.

*A Rich Seam* (Fullan and Langworthy, 2014) adds to the discussion on the new vision and model for education from a ‘bottom up approach’. The authors examine how developments to transform education systems are now being driven and sustained primarily by teachers and students. The report reflects on experiences of schools across the globe involved in the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning partnership. The ‘new pedagogies’ can be defined as a new model of learning partnerships between and among students and teachers, aiming towards deep learning goals and enabled by pervasive digital access. The report includes examples and insights into what the core elements of the new education model (new pedagogies, new leadership and new system economics) are and how they can be effectively implemented across whole systems.

## 3. Learning and well-being

Over the past decade, well-being has been on the agenda for a number of international institutions and organisations (UN, WHO, UNESCO, Council of Europe, OECD) and researchers for some time. Recent years have shown increasing awareness of the need to consider a more holistic approach to the factors that drive well-being and social progress in societies, and to the important role of learning for well-being. Holistic education for all was the central focus on the recent Global Forum in Paris, June 2015<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This global forum *Integrating Health & Social Programs Within Education Systems: A Global Dialogue/European Discussion* brought together over 30 global organisations and UN agencies, along with a number of key European leaders, in education, health, development and other sectors. More information about the

Recent review of relevant research found a significant but weak classroom-level effect on student well-being (Muis et al., 2014). Higher levels of well-being were related to teaching staff cooperation in relation to teaching methods and pupil counselling and the existence of an orderly learning environment, while a strong focus on discipline and subject-matter acquisition had a positive effect on the well-being of high achievement-motivated pupils, and a negative effect on the well-being of low achievement-motivated pupils. There is a growing body of research into examining various aspects of children's learning and well-being. The Cambridge Journal of Education's special issue 'Art, creativity and well-being' (*Cambridge Journal of Education*, Volume 45, Issue 3, 2015) examined the perspective that well-being and creativity can be nurtured in children through their inner diversity – i.e. understanding and addressing the diverse ways in which children learn, communicate, and develop (Gordon and O'Toole, 2015). A study of the impact of various creative initiatives (Creative Partnership Programmes) on the well-being of children in English schools showed positive effects on well-being and student competences and autonomy. The authors recommended that education systems take the well-being of children as their central purpose (McLellan and Steward; Galton and Page, 2015).

The recent WISE report *Learning and Well-being: An Agenda for Change* (Awartani and Looney, 2015) provides an overall framework, which brings together the various dimensions of well-being and examines the dynamic nature of learning, and the synergy between the two as a fundamental condition for supporting children's unfolding capacities to live fulfilling and meaningful lives. The report examines how to define, measure and foster learning for well-being in schools and through policies<sup>2</sup>.

Defining and measuring well-being start to have major implications for learning systems and the ways we measure and assess learner achievement (e.g. the non-cognitive dimensions, value formation). A work on developing a framework measuring well-being for early years has started within the recent EU-funded collaborative inter-disciplinary CARE research project on early childhood education and care (ECEC). The initial framework for evaluating and monitoring ECEC quality and well-being was published in September 2015 (CARE, 2015).

#### 4. Non-cognitive outcomes of education, social and emotional skills

The study of non-cognitive outcomes of education is another area of growing research interest, particularly on social and emotional skills, such as self-concept, motivation, and engagement (Muijs et al., 2014). An extensive developmental research (Durlak et al., in press; Dymnicki et al., 2013; Farrington et al., 2012) on social and emotional skills, indicates that effective mastery of social-emotional competences is associated with greater well-being and better school performance, whereas the failure to achieve competence in these areas can lead to a variety of personal, social, and academic difficulties (Durlak et al., 2011). Research documented positive effects of social and emotional skills for specific, particularly marginalised, groups of children. A meta-analytical review of 75 recently published studies on the effects of universal, school-based social, emotional, and/or behavioural (SEB) programmes documented overall beneficial effects on social skills, anti-social behaviour, substance abuse, positive self-image, academic achievement,

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programme and presentations can be found at the forum's website: <http://www.schools-for-all.org/page/Forum+Agenda>.

<sup>2</sup> Similar forward-looking draft report was prepared for the Learning for Well-Being Consortium of Foundations in 2012. See reference Kickbush, 2012.

mental health, and pro-social behaviour (Sklad, 2012).

Non-cognitive outcomes are also beginning to be acknowledged in policy discussions about education in Europe (Garcia, 2014) and the USA (Price, 2015). Garcia (2014) contends that non-cognitive skills should be an explicit pillar of education policy, curriculum, teacher preparation and support, other aspects of schools' functioning, and evaluation systems. Accountability practices and policies must be broadened in a way that incentivises the contribution of schools and teachers to the development of non-cognitive skills. Garcia (2014) further argues that many of the existing disciplinary measures used to combat student misbehaviour are at odds with the goal of nurturing non-cognitive skills. Disciplinary measures need to be refocused away from sanctioning wrongdoing and toward supporting and promoting better non-cognitive behaviour, and toward preventing misbehaviour. These policies could include restorative practices such as peer mediation, group responsibility, and counselling, among others.

OECD analytical work in recent years in this field was synthesised in *Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills* (OECD, 2015). The report examines the role of socio-emotional skills on a variety of measures of individual well-being and social progress, which covers aspects of our lives that are as diverse as education, labour market outcomes, health, family life, civic engagement and life satisfaction. The report identifies promising strategies to foster socio-emotional skills and, importantly, shows that these skills can be measured meaningfully within cultural and linguistic boundaries. Non-cognitive learning is an area of OECD's continuous engagement. The OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) is working on a longitudinal study designed to identify children's social and emotional skills development in major cities around the world to be conducted within the framework of the OECD project on Education and Social Progress. This study will follow the lives of a large number of children from Grade 1 until early adulthood by collecting information on skills, learning contexts and outcomes<sup>3</sup>.

## 5. Changing role of teachers, changes in teacher education and professional development

The teaching profession, teacher education and professional development are now among the top priorities in European and national education policy agendas. This increased interest is reflected in a number of publications on teachers, teaching practice, and teacher education. The two newest reports, by the Eurydice network<sup>4</sup> and the European Commission's Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning (JRC-CRELL)<sup>5</sup>, look at evidence from large-scale international surveys<sup>6</sup> and the latest EU data to give

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<sup>3</sup> Further information on the new longitudinal study is on the CERI website: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/internationallongitudinalstudyofskillsdevelopmentincities.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> EACEA, The Teaching Profession in Europe: Practices, Perceptions, and Policies. Eurydice, 2015  
[http://bookshop.europa.eu/is-bin/INTERSHOP.enfinity/WFS/EU-Bookshop-Site/en\\_GB/-/EUR/ViewPublication-Start?PublicationKey=EC0115389](http://bookshop.europa.eu/is-bin/INTERSHOP.enfinity/WFS/EU-Bookshop-Site/en_GB/-/EUR/ViewPublication-Start?PublicationKey=EC0115389).

<sup>5</sup> Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning (JRC-CRELL), Teaching Practices in Primary and Secondary Schools in Europe: Insights from Large-Scale Assessments in Education. European Commission, 2015  
<https://crell.jrc.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/JRC95601.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> The JRC\_CRELL report used combined data from the 2011 Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the 2011 Programme for International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). For secondary education, it uses data from the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and from the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Study (TALIS).



an overview of teachers' working conditions, professional development and classroom practice across Europe.

A large multidisciplinary body of research has established that student-teacher relationships are strongly associated with important academic and social development outcomes. One of the most important and consistent findings in resilience research is the power of schools, especially of teachers, to turn a child's life from risk to resilience (Nicoll, 2014). Teacher beliefs and attitudes are important factors for student learning, particularly disadvantaged students (e.g. Blanchard and Muller, 2015). Research points to the lower expectations and deficit perspectives of teachers for students from working class and minority ethnic backgrounds, as well as a tendency to teach the 'basics' with less innovative and cognitively challenging approaches. Increasingly, research in this area draws attention to differences across and indeed within schools in working with different types of students, with differing levels of effectiveness, hence outcomes among different groups of children (Kyriakides and Creemers, 2011).

There is also a wide-ranging research within sociological, as well as school effectiveness literature, which additionally highlights the significance of student gender, social class, and ethnicity on teaching and learning in schools (e.g. Fives and Buehl, 2011; Devine, 2011; Smyth and Calvert, 2011). The Devine et al. (2013) study documents the importance of passion, reflection, planning, love for children, and the social and moral dimension to Irish teachers' constructs of good teaching. Contradictions are evident, however, between teacher beliefs and observation of their practice, mediated by the socio-cultural context of the school (gender, social class and migrant children), and teacher expectations for different types of students and leadership practices within the school. The authors conclude that debates over 'quality' teaching need to take account of these broader contextual and socio-cultural factors, which influence how teachers construct and do teaching.

There is a growing body of research examining the implications and impact of the paradigm shift in the focus from teaching to learning on the teaching profession, teacher education and professional development. Muijs et al. (2014) synthesised best evidence from research on effective teaching and teacher development, and linked it with new theories of learning. Their 'state-of-the-art' research review concluded with the argument that understandings about the processes and conditions that promote student learning are typically not used to construct appropriate learning environments for their teachers. Timperley (2011) argued that traditional professional development (aimed at improvements in teaching practice) often does not make a difference to student outcomes. Only when teacher professional development becomes continuous professional learning, can new learning on the part of teachers make a substantial difference in student outcomes.

However, researchers also caution that significant changes in teaching practice require intensive and challenging professional learning experiences that not only extend teachers' repertoire of strategies and approaches, but also engage them in activities. Dialogue with teachers is essential to allow them to examine their existing beliefs in order to identify the difference between the beliefs they hold and the beliefs underpinning the new ideas. This a challenging task and Timperley (2011) identified a number of shifts in thinking that are required for the professional learning to be effective: focus on students (student learning and well-being); shift from forms of delivery (teaching practice) to knowledge and skills (student learning); professional learning as collaborative inquiry; and professional learning at all levels. The Pearson report (Cordingley and Bell, 2012) further explored the main characteristics of high quality and effective professional learning. Models of teacher professional learning (professional development), from which student learning will most likely benefit should be collaborative, supported by specialist expertise, focused on

aspirations for students, sustained over time and connect evidence from practice with theories of learning.

The changing role of teachers, changes in teacher education and professional development are the main focus of two recent special issues of the *European Journal of Education* (Volume 49, 2014, Issues 2 and 3). The articles reflect on the growing policy and research focus on teacher-related policies (Steger, 2014) and teacher competences in European policy discourse and practice (Caena, 2014).

The Thematic Section on teacher education policies and developments in Europe in *Education Inquiry* (Volume 6, Number 3, 2015), put together articles, in which authors rethink the logic of teacher education developments within the national as well as European context (particularly England, France, Greece, Scotland and Sweden) over the past decade or two. The special issue focused on the current issues and dilemmas, with a special emphasis on inclusive education (Pantic and Florian), cooperation between universities and schools (Fancourt, Edwards and Menter), early childhood education and the challenge of 'acquiring scientific acceptance' and legitimacy to this field. Almost all the articles address the dichotomy of 'academic' and 'professional' within the contemporary 'universitised' teacher education.

However, developments and changes in teacher education policies are not without contradictions. Recent research has revealed a number of dilemmas to which they have led. As Biesta (2015) warns, the space for teacher judgement is being threatened by recent developments in educational policy and practice because the focus is shifting too narrowly towards accountability and the role of evidence.

## 6. Assessment and curriculum – Learning for tests or learning for 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies?

Concern with the quality of education has spurred significant growth in the number and scope of large-scale learning assessments over the past two decades. The evidence documents that large-scale assessments can serve as valuable tools for national accountability of public and private investment in education, particularly by monitoring the learning outcomes of those most disadvantaged by educational systems. But such assessments are also a cause for concern. They risk undermining the quality, relevance and diversity of educational experiences by encouraging teaching to the test and thus a convergence in curriculum development. Illeris (2015) voiced concern that the focus on high stake assessment have a 'sweeping tendency' to reduce learning to what is measured. Bourke (2015) examines how school assessment systems do not reflect students' socially and culturally valued learning, and as a consequence this reduces conversations around learning to that of outcomes. The study shows that teachers need to support learners to self-assess in increasingly sophisticated ways. This means teachers need to think about students' learning across contexts. Overall, both teachers and students need to be liberated from thinking only about institutional assessment demands.

The recent IBE report (Muskin, 2015) also highlights that these assessments do not reach all students, focus on few subjects (Reading, Mathematics, Science) and neglect the broader range of personal competences, such as the acquisition of new knowledge using a variety of methods, and the practical application of the basic knowledge and techniques students learn in school. Focus on student learning assessment is a potential 'obstacle' to the full and successful implementation of a curriculum. And there is a severe risk that education systems will rely excessively on tests to drive its reforms. Muskin (2015) also explores the implications of assessment on curricula and posits that if a system truly expects its whole curriculum to be taught, then the whole curriculum is what must be tested, and this should occur in ways



that matter. The report suggests that for assessment to be of high quality and relevant, and for it to inform real improvements to the overall education system and its outcomes, it must be in full and functional harmony with a system's curriculum, teacher training and support, textbooks, planning, budgeting and all other departments. Education systems might also find much more benefit in placing greater emphasis on classroom-level assessment. Classroom-based teacher assessments can be more precise, more nuanced, more thorough and multi-dimensional and more reliable than standardised tests. Teachers can link their assessment directly to where a class is at in the curriculum at a particular point in time and employ a diverse set of assessment methods to measure the diverse ways by which students can demonstrate their learning.

Research confirmed that teachers' conceptions of assessment are powerful in shaping the quality of their instructional practice (Brown, 2004). The special issue of *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice* (Volume 21, Issue 4, 2014) focused on teachers' views on assessment practice in different countries. A large survey study from New Zealand (Bourke and Mentis, 2014) showed the significance of teachers' beliefs on pedagogical and assessment practices. Teachers committed to inclusive education within regular classrooms develop and use a great variety of assessment strategies simply because having students with high needs creates opportunities for teachers to find creative ways to ascertain what and how a child learns. However, Hopfenbeck et al. (2013) highlighted that many teachers are reluctant to use peer and self-assessment because they do not fit the dominant model of teaching and learning, especially the expectations about the roles of the teacher and student. To address these challenges, Miyamoto (2015) recommends developing measurement technologies and classroom assessment that can capture meaningful learning.

There is an increased call for more room for human judgement and for a better balance between what we need to measure and what is measurable. An essay by Hill and Barber (2014) reflects on the need to transform assessment as part of the ongoing process of learning and teaching. For an assessment renaissance to be meaningful, it needs a total cultural shift within society to accept the different 'what' and 'how' of assessment. The outcomes of assessment renaissance may not always be test scores to contend with. It may just be a series of qualitative descriptions of the extent to which a student may have demonstrated various attributes that cannot be quantified. The authors pose the question of whether societies can accept such assessment outcomes.

## 7. Education governance shaping educational trajectories of young Europeans

The increasingly varied and complex forms, outputs and outcomes of governance result from and impact on the activities of many different people, working at many different levels, carrying out a multiplicity of activities and tasks related to governance. Recently, governance of education has generated a broad spectrum of questioning, including how education policy is formulated and what the roles of key actors in education policy-making are, leads to debates about whether stakeholder governance is research – or interest-based. The Special Issue on 'The Governing of Education in Europe' of the *European Educational Research Journal* (December 2013; 12, 4) focused on examining processes and policies of decentralisation, deregulation and new modalities of privatisation and marketisation in education systems in various countries (Simons et al., 2013). Research studies from a number of European countries examined the role of commercial actors, new local and global markets (Grimaldi, 2013) and public-private partnerships in the governing of education (Papanastasiou, 2013). Comparative analysis of 20 countries examined how school

choice conditions (i.e. institutional features of education systems) can succeed in balancing educational efficiency and equity (Lauri and Pöder, 2013).

The most recent findings on education governance in Europe come from the EU-funded research project 'GOETE (Governance in Educational Trajectories in Europe)' <sup>7</sup>. The research examined interactions between structural and institutional contexts of educational trajectories, the individual meaning attached to education and the strategies adopted by young people to cope with its demands, and found that decision-making processes of individual students are firmly placed within the social contexts of their families, local schools, national education systems and welfare states, as well as transnational policy contexts (Walther et al., 2016). GOETE research points to the crucial need to find *structural* solutions for *structural* problems instead of attempting to shift them to the individual level.

The project examined young people's educational trajectories in Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and the UK. Applying a life-course perspective it asked how young people's access to different stages of education is regulated, how coping with forms and demands of education and life-long learning is facilitated, and if and how education is relevant for the future lives of young people. The research findings (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2015) contributed to a more differentiated view of issues of access to education in educational trajectories, and particularly of crucial issues related to *access and inequality*. Access reflects socioeconomic factors such as class, gender and ethnicity as well as the social context of schools and depends on the stratification inherent to the institutional structure of education and training. Differences occur especially between high-level standardised and comprehensive systems (Finland, Slovenia) and high-level standardised differentiated systems (France, Germany, the Netherlands). Referring to individuals' subjective interpretation and realisation of access, research findings revealed that access needs to be expanded by *accessibility*.

The research showed that dominant policy discourses have the effect of concentrating governing activities predominantly around issues of access to the labour market. GOETE examined the new roles for networks of actors, and found that cooperation with actors outside the educational sphere vary substantially across countries. In most countries cooperation is rather weak, and there are few synergies activated with external actors (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2013).

## 8. Early school leaving – critical examination of policies and strategies

Early school leaving (ESL) is one of the key policy priorities across Europe. A special issue of the *European Journal of Education* (Volume 48, 2013) critically discusses the underpinning assumptions and rationale for this policy focus. In the articles, authors challenge the association that is made between early school leaving, economic growth and employment. The issue editors (Ross and Leathwood) problematise the utilitarian conceptualisation of the education and linear models of educational pathways that are embedded in the prevailing policies. Instead, the authors suggest that ESL is important, not because it is inhibiting growth or that it is responsible for high levels of youth unemployment, but because it helps to sustain and reproduce inequalities. They argue that criteria for assessing ESL strategies should be more closely aligned to the extent to which they meet social equity and social inclusion goals. Downes (2013) points to a missing vision of systemic accountability of schools to students' needs and argues that key problems of

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<sup>7</sup> More results can be found at the GOETE project website - <http://www.goete.eu>.

ESL can be interpreted as system level blockages in communication, including blockage in communication of children's voices. The author highlighted several issues to be reformed, including authoritarian teaching, alternatives to suspension, splits in communication, emotional supports, teacher conflict resolution skills and substantive structures and processes for active student voices in school.

In their comparative analysis De Witte et al. (2013) showed that macroeconomic and social context variables (such as GDP/capita, growth, poverty, and youth unemployment), as well as system characteristics of the education system (such as legal school leaving age, grade retention, early tracking, and size of vocational education) and the labour market and social protection systems (minimum wages, unemployment insurance) have effects on ESL and need to be considered. Cederberg et al. (2013) examined a complex representation of ESL and its consequences for young people's subsequent access to the labour market in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. The study showed that measures taken by governments and school authorities in the respective countries have resulted in improvements for students in their transition from school to work. However, Cederberg also highlights that an educational system per se can create problems for both individuals and groups. Vallejo and Dooly (2013) examined the relationship between the high rates of early school leaving (ESL), high youth unemployment, and labour market expectations in the context of Spain. The article ends with a discussion of policies and practices that may reduce ESL rates and help shift discussion from the 'lost generation' perspective to a generation of young people with potential.

Education policies and political instruments dealing with early school leaving are currently examined by the project 'Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU' (RESL.eu, financed by EU, 2013-2018)<sup>8</sup>, involving 9 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom). One of the first results of the resl.eu study is a review of successful prevention and intervention programmes that point to the importance of positive school climate, as well as a protected environment (from safe routes to school to the avoidance of physical violence and bullying), professionalisation of teachers and head teachers and, above all, of the establishment of 'professional communities' – cross-institutional, interdisciplinary teams with strong social skills that work on pedagogical challenges over the longer term. Prevention and intervention measures that link school activities (new types of teaching and tutoring), out-of-school activities and partnerships (work experience, leisure activities, mentoring, etc.) with changes to the system (new curricula, cooperation between schools, etc.) produce the best results (Nouwen, 2015).

## 9. Citizenship education and inclusive schooling

Promoting inclusion, tolerance and active citizenship are not new goals for European educational systems. Yet, in the context of current societal challenges these aims have once again become essential, as highlighted by the 'Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education' (Paris, March 2015)<sup>9</sup>, and the recent European Education, Training

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<sup>8</sup> For more information about the project visit the project website: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/resl-eu/>.

<sup>9</sup> Informal meeting of European Union Education ministers 'Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education'. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf).

and Youth Forum (October 2015)<sup>10</sup>. The research community has also reflected on the increased importance of active citizenship in the changing world and the current context of value crises, social exclusion, and rise of new extremist ideologies. A special issue of the *European Journal of Education* (Volume 50, Issue 4, 2015) addressed selected changes for policy and research in building competences of citizenship from different perspectives. The best way to develop these competences and skills is through real life within the school, involving students in decision-making processes and recognising the diversity of their talents and potentials (Michel, 2015).

Some researchers propose that a more critical vision of citizenship learning is necessary (Simo et al., 2015). The EU research project 'Democracy, Participation and Inclusive Education in Schools' examined participation of secondary school students in democratic activities and assessed how young people experience citizenship learning at school from an inclusive perspective. The project's theoretical starting point was citizenship as practice that is differentiated from citizenship as a result of the academic trajectory. Participation is considered to be essential for a democratic-learning experience that is not only a school responsibility but also the relationship with the community. The research findings further expanded understanding of citizenship-as-practice, which not only encompasses problems and issues of culture and identity but also draws these different dynamic aspects together in a continuously shifting and changing world of difference. The authors argue that such a view of citizenship provides a more robust entry point for understanding and supporting young people's citizenship learning from an inclusive perspective (Simo et al., 2015). Earlier, Lindstrom (2010) suggested that the notion of citizenship must be seen in a broader perspective with aspects of both globalisation and local phenomena seen from a citizen's daily life experiences as well as of gender, race, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, religion and class. Citizenship learning must also reflect cultural, demographic, political and socioeconomic contexts of everyday life. Certain dimensions of citizenship such as young citizens' adoption of values of individualisation and globalisation tend to be invisible.

In recent years, research started to examine the process of education policy and curriculum reform related to citizenship education in European countries. Engel (2014) explored citizenship education reform in the context of Spain and how it addressed issues of national and global citizenship, as well as cultural diversity and immigration. Franken (2014) studied how citizenship education is positioned in school curricula and class organisation in Belgium (Flanders) and found that it is often taught by religious teachers. Based on the situation analysis, Franken proposed a new, obligatory, non-confessional subject encompassing religious diversity, ethics, philosophy and citizenship education. The SIRIUS study 'Citizenship education and ethnic and cultural diversity' (Issa et al., 2013) explored a range of approaches to citizenship education across the 12 SIRIUS network member countries from the perspective of the education of children from a migrant background. Findings provided more details on varied and country-specific approaches to citizenship education and cultural diversity. The report called for significant expansion of policy initiatives at local, national and community levels to support transformative citizenship education permeating into schools. The report suggested that it is important to look beyond maintaining students cultural identities and to explore the dynamic process of how marginalised groups are conceptualised by more privileged groups. If schools are to educate critically thinking active citizens, lived experiences and multiple identities need to be incorporated as important ingredients for citizenship education. The authors concluded that one of the areas for further development relates to reviewing the existing provision

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<sup>10</sup> The European Education, Training and Youth Forum 2015, Available on the Official website of European Commission Education and Training. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/forum/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/forum/index_en.htm).

on cultural diversity, and examining the notion on citizenship education, which incorporates students' linguistic and cultural experiences into the teaching as a learning process.

A study from the UK (Hampden et al., 2015) analysed data from the national survey of school coordinators and leaders on citizenship and community cohesion and found convincing evidence that schools are successfully implementing strategies to equip students with a conceptual understanding of their roles as citizens, but it also identified a need to develop students' practical skills and self-efficacy to interact with their immediate and wider communities. In order to support students to participate most effectively in their communities, schools need to provide tailored support to those groups of students who may otherwise be least likely to participate in community activities.

Finally, with regards to inclusive schooling and citizenship, two recent studies provided more nuanced evidence on factors promoting inclusive schooling, examining attitudes and behaviours of native and migrant students. Janmaat's (2014) study examined the attitudes of 14-year-old native students in 14 Western countries towards immigrants. He found that a country's experience and history (or lack of it) of receiving immigrants, as well as ethnic composition in classes are important factors that affect the inclusive attitudes of native students. The study showed positive effects of ethnic mixing in classrooms particularly in countries where second-generation outnumber first-generation migrant children (the 'old' immigration states). Findings suggested that for positive effects of ethnic mixing in classes to emerge immigrant communities have to become more settled and integrated. Rutkowski et al. (2014) used the 'International Civic and Citizenship Study' (ICCS) data and examined some of the differences in attitudes towards host/receiving country related to social class among immigrant students, thus opening up important avenues for discussion and future research. The study suggested several factors that foster an inclusive society, including school and local-level practices such as improving immigrant student participation in schools, positive relations between immigrant students and teachers, and increased civic participation within the school and community.

## 10. Children and young people's voice and active citizenship

Although linked to the previous topic, we consider children's voices a separate topic for two reasons. Children's views on issues that affect their lives (particularly in educational practice) continue to be irregularly sought and are rarely acted upon (Sargeant et al., 2015). On the other hand, in recent years, there is an increase in research that aims to provide children's and young people's perspectives on citizenship, participation and educational development, including the work of the European Commission (Day et al., 2015). The research findings call for incorporation of children's insights about their worlds into a new, voice-inclusive practice.

A special issue of the *European Educational research Journal* (Volume 14, Issue 2) discussed the subject of children and young people as members of a community. The main focus is on how children and young people perceive themselves as members of one (or several) community(ies). The issue invoked a broad understanding of participation and citizenship in terms of children's everyday experiences, informed by their roles as members of one (or several) family(ies), as students, and as inhabitants of a certain space. Sargeant et al. (2015) examined a commentary of more than 1 000 children across five countries – Australia, England, Italy, New Zealand and Sweden, and thus provided a unique view of childhood and the interactions with family, community, educational experiences and well-being. Lucio (2015) mobilised the productions of children between the ages of 5 and 17 in an attempt to capture their perceptions (their discourse) about urban life and education, as well as their appropriations (their projects), either past,



present or future. Lucio and l'Anson (2015) suggested that the 'common', rather than smothering diversity, emerges with the purpose of configuring fuller and more complex ways of experiencing citizenship and citizens' rights.

The EU-funded action research project 'Creative Connections' (2012-2015)<sup>11</sup> in six countries (the Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and the UK) explored children's views and artistic expressions of their day-to-day lives as citizens within Europe. The project findings show that children across Europe, with the exception of those living in the UK, are voicing concerns that they are 'living on the edge' due to the economic downturn and their precarious living conditions. All of the children (except the UK children) taking part in the project showed a strong commitment to being European and exhibited very little own country-specific allegiance.

The book *Agency and Participation in Childhood and Youth* (Hart et al., 2014) sought to bring the youth agency and participation in education to the fore both in theoretical and practical terms from the capability approach (CA) perspective; this emphasises that children are not only granted rights, but are also social actors. Education, whether in school or not, is seen as a process central to developing citizens prepared for participation in democratic deliberation. The CA approach applied in an educational context (with children as co-researchers) allows children to be actively involved in the educational process and to develop critical thinking skills through research design and execution. Case studies from various national contexts (European and international) provide examples of how the capability approach can be used to evaluate the welfare of teenagers, as an alternative measure of childhood poverty, or to work with children with special needs. It is also used to teach life skills to low-income students, and is an alternative measure to evaluate the success of programmes. Maunder et al. (2013) used focus groups and semi-structured interviews, conducted by student researchers, to provide in-depth accounts of their transition to higher education experiences.

Downes (2014) highlighted the importance of adding both parents' and students' voices to system reform processes, and this also implies a common contribution to active citizenship. The Policy Recommendations Report for the EU Urbact, 'PREVENT' project (Downes, 2014), suggested that municipalities are in an ideal position as a mediating space for dialogue between schools, parents and students. Such a dialogue, targeting schools especially in areas of high poverty, non-attendance and early school leaving, would include student surveys of their needs and school experiences, including open-ended questions and also focus groups of students and parents. The report further recommended that municipalities develop a 'Quality Mark for Democratic School Systems for Parents' and Students' Voices' for participating schools, as an incentive to participate in this process.

## 11. Social inequality in access to higher education

Inequalities of access to higher education have become an issue of increased attention at a number of recent academic events, including the 'Higher Education Symposium at the European Forum Alpbach' (August, 2015) and the international conference 'Inequalities of access to higher education. The role of policies, institutions and markets' organised by Sciences Po/CNRS (Paris, October 2015).

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<sup>11</sup> Creative Connections website <http://creativeconnexions.eu/cg/>.



Transitions in education, including challenges in transition to HE were also the main theme of the 'European Conference on Education Research (ECER) 2015' in Budapest. These events intended to create a new dialogue between social science researchers working on aspects of social inequalities and access to HE, and to foster the development of a comparative perspective on the issue, particularly across European countries.

An increased body of evidence describes dynamics in inequalities in the access to higher education (HE) on the basis of social class, ethnicity, gender and age from historical, comparative and country specific perspectives. The most recent studies focus on social inequalities. A recent study from Italy (Pigini and Staffolani, 2016) showed that lower costs and geographical accessibility of HE institutions increase the enrolment of economically disadvantaged students and students with weaker educational backgrounds. However, as Thomsen (2015) documented, even when countries with a massive expansion of the HE system (Denmark between 1984 and 2010) increased enrolments of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, it mostly improved their access to less-prestigious programmes. Ilieva-Trichkova and Boyadjieva (2014) compared access to HE in Bulgaria with Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, using European Social Survey data (2006-2010), complemented by EUROSTUDENT III data (2007). The analysis showed that despite the expansion of HE before and especially after 1989, Bulgaria is among the countries where inequality in access to HE caused by socioeconomic disadvantages is most salient. A comparative study by Jerrim and Vignoles (2015) examined how four English-speaking countries (Australia, Canada, England and the USA) fare in getting young people from disadvantaged homes to study for a bachelor's degree. Findings suggested that socioeconomic differences in university access are more pronounced in England and Canada than Australia and the USA and that cross national variation in the socioeconomic gap remains even after differences in academic achievement are taken into account. Recent studies also offer examples of good practice on how to increase the level of community access to educational, economic, and even political resources, e.g. by democratising processes of knowledge production in the context of university–community partnerships (Strier and Shechter, 2016).

In his recent book *Access to Education in Europe. A Framework and Agenda for System Change* Downes (2014) identified current gaps and strengths in policy, practice and structures that impact upon access to education, including higher education, across a range of countries. The book aims to inform a system-level change and development for improvement of access to education for socioeconomically marginalised groups in Europe and beyond. The book provides an innovative post-Bronfenbrennerian theoretical development of systems theory<sup>12</sup> and adopts a systemic focus on access across a range of domains of education, both formal higher education and non-formal education.

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<sup>12</sup> According to Downes, a major limitation to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework of concentric nested systems of interrelation is that it tended to omit a dynamic focus not only on time but on system change. This gap in understanding system change means that Bronfenbrenner's influential accounts offer little understanding of system blockage and displacement. In his book, Downes developed a framework focusing on system blockage and identified key elements of an international framework to develop systems-level change to promote access to education, including higher education, for socio-economically marginalized groups.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

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In this summary, we highlighted some of the key themes that have emerged in academic discussions on education research, development and policy. The topic summaries briefly inform how these issues are shaped by societal developments and public debates. Tensions between various visions and goals of education (briefly introduced in the first topic on rethinking education goals), and new learning paradigms permeate discussions in all social dimensions of education and training. Implications of these tensions and other, often contradicting, societal, economic, forces and technological advancements are increasingly examined and reflected upon in recent research discussion.

Although critical re-examination is a constant feature in research, there's a lot of re-thinking across many fields of educational research over the past few years. The extent to which education systems can take on these new and complex challenges is unclear. As research reminds us, not everybody is convinced that the most important function of education is to promote equity, inclusion or support economic growth. Nor are socio-political goals always coherent.

Policy rhetoric and actions (implementation and practice) are sometimes two different agendas examined and documented by research and there is a great awareness of complex challenges in bringing change down to classroom level (as reflected in several topics, particularly on teaching and new assessment).

Several topics included in the summary (particularly on learning and well-being, social and emotional skills, new approaches to measurement) will require further research to expand evidence and broaden understanding of the significance for education and learning. Recent research review already suggested areas for future examination.

Calls for more complex, holistic, integrated approaches to education development and change at all levels are also increasingly present in current research discussions. The dialogical approach, although a permanent feature in research, policy and practice, has become even more important. There is an increased awareness of the need to be more attentive to bringing those most affected (particularly voices of children and young people) to the dialogue.

A growing body of research contributes to greater understanding of how new learning theories are affecting the teaching profession and practice. Research evidence calls for transformation of professional development into professional learning to be more effective in promoting new, 'deep' learning of all learners, particularly those disadvantaged.

Fostering the transformative and adaptive capacity of our education and learning Importance of active citizenship has recently been more emphasised in policy rhetoric. Research suggests that more fundamental changes in policy and practice to promote transformative citizenship learning are needed.

Several other topics, not included in this summary, also deserve attention and may be worth examining separately – new media and transforming learning paradigms; leadership, transformation of schools into learning organisations and communities; management and capacity to transform learning; complexity and singularity (need to balance calls for holistic, complex approaches with specific, well-designed and implemented individual interventions); equal access and transition to quality education at all levels, and particularly universal access to ECEC; curricular reforms to identify what is important to learn and what

qualities, competences and skills are important for the twenty-first century. Finally, several NESET II researchers underlined the need to support new research on the education of refugee children.

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