PLAY EQUAL
EQUAL

PLAY EQUAL – LEVELING THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Policy recommendations for equal opportunities in education

Corresponding to

IO6: Aligning social inclusion within school and governmental policy

2022

PREAMBLE

In this policy document we present policy recommendations based on the (practical) experiences from our Erasmus+ project Play Equal in the period 2019-2022.

Based on project results, research and experience, we arrive at 10 recommendations. They can be divided into two categories: Strategy and Process. The recommendations are addressed to all
policy makers on national, regional and local level, in governments, municipalities and an school boards that want to take the challenge to change inequality for young people.

Results of Play Equal can be found on www.playequal.eu

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1. INTRODUCTION; THE GOAL OF PLAY EQUAL

OVERALL GOAL

The Erasmus Project Play Equal originated from a growing concern about equality in education. Despite decades of policy at both local and national level to create equal opportunities for children, inequality rises within the educational system.

This is unacceptable because young people are the change makers of the future generation. Every child must have the opportunity and tools to reach his or her full potential, regardless of background, the level of education of the parents or their financial resources. If people have equal opportunity to gain education and skills, this goes a long way to promoting equal opportunities in the labour market. Education therefore is the most important tool for promoting equal opportunities and social inclusion.

The target group of the project are students in the age 12-19 with disadvantaged backgrounds and fewer opportunities compared to their peers because of for example economic obstacles or cultural differences. Play Equal focuses on providing tools based on research and pilots.

PARTNERS

To realize these specific and practical goals, we formed a coalition of seven governmental organizations and schools from Austria, Germany and the Netherlands. Schools involved offer secondary education and vocational training.

Partners from local and regional governments are: Municipality of 's-Hertogenbosch (Netherlands), Steirische Volkswirtschaflichte Gesellschaft (Educational institution, Austria) and Kreis Soest (regional government, Germany). Schools are Polytechnische Schule Leibnitz (Vocational training, Autria), Borde-Berufskolleg des Kreises Soest (vocational training, Germany), roc Koning Willem I College (vocational training, Netherlands) and Bossche Vakschool (secondary school, Netherlands). The partners represent all different stakeholders.

PROCESS

When we create and facilitate equal opportunities and social inclusion, we resolve disadvantages and
give students a better and equal starting-point. We level the field of education and as a result students can take ownership of a successful ongoing learning pathway and this will enable a successful transition from school to the world of work (training / employment /tertiary education). It will help them stay in school and tackle Early School Leave. Talent development helps the student learn new competences, gain self-confidence and a feeling of belonging at school and in their community.

RESULTS

The project encompasses six results (intellectual outputs = IO), aiming at various approaches of enhancing equality and inclusion.

In IO 1	we started by collecting our **best practices** on social inclusion. All schools have methods that have proven to be successful in their own environment. Practices are described in a uniformist way to make them accessible for use by other school;.
In IO 2	we deduced key-success factors from these best practices; resulting in a **mapping tool and a goal setting tool** to guide the process to improve social inclusion in the organization;.
IO 3	presents a **guideline** for co-creating **educational partnership** between school and parents;
IO 4	resulted in a **blueprint for combining formal and non-formal methodologies** for learning in on ongoing pathway;
IO 5	taught us how to organize a **hackaton**; a creative way to bring new solutions to the table;
IO6	concerns a **policy paper** with recommendations on basis of project results.

POLICY PAPER

With Play Equal (P19) we created an opportunity to work on equal opportunities for young people in an educational context in a profound way; based on theoretical facts and insights from desk research we developed tools and guides for practical use. These results and experiences are transferred to a paper in which we to focus on the development of policy-reform for schools and local government to align with and facilitate the development of social inclusion and creating equal opportunities for young, disadvantaged students within the community. The initiator of Play Equal, the municipality of 's-Hertogenbosch, wants to transfer the proceeds of the buzz that is created with PE-19 to change the inequality in education and possibilities. Through creating an equal playing field for all young people talent development and ownership for disadvantaged students are encouraged.

This Intellectual Output will create a policy document based on key principles that are transferable transnationally. The policy paper will be based on lessons learned. We used our working process and the tools that were developed as a starting point for learning; both retrospective and future-oriented.

In the process of working on Play Equal we studied the work of others, exchanged our own beliefs and practices and developed new tools which we used in our schools. In the discussion within the educational context and especially when using the new tools, we learned a lot. We like to share our experiences by sharing the results; the intellectual outputs of the project. But we also like to reflect on working with these results, cumulating in recommendations for co-working partners but also for schools and governmental institutions separately.

To understand the context in which policy is made, we did a desk research on legislation: the legal framework that forms the basis of policy on equal opportunities and inclusion. Since our partnership has the broad experience of secondary schools, vocational colleges, municipalities and regional authorities in three European countries, we started with an extensive desk research on the international legal framework on Mondial and European level. Then we discuss regulations on national level, concerning both government organizations and educational institutions.

2. LESSONS LEARNED

In this chapter we will first briefly describe what results we have reached when working on the five Intellectual Outputs and the desk research on the legal framework.

Then we will discuss what implications these results can have on policy guidelines; both for governmental organizations and for educational organization.

With Play Equal we worked on six aspects of social inclusion or inequality in education resulting in intellectual outputs. The policy paper is based on the results and experiences of working on these outputs. A brief description of the outputs will explain the lessons learned and, where applicable, the connection with their significance concerning policy.

Intellectual output 1: Best practices of equal opportunity programmes in schools

The product of this output is a collection of examples, methodologies, learning opportunities etc. and their feasibility in school and in (outside) networks around young people.

This collection forms on the one hand the basis for the mapping tool which is the result of intellectual output 2 but is also a useful read for all involved in teaching and working with youngsters.

In total we described 14 best practices. The trainings and workshops you will find in this collection vary from short interventions in-between classes till structured trainings for several days in a row. The content has been didactically processed and every example is presented in the same format for easy accessibility and usability.

Lessons learnt from the desk research are
- Looking for good practices in the regions has fostered collaborations in school and outside school;
- The desk research has improved the common theoretical and practical background of the projects' topic.

Intellectual output 2: Mapping tool for enhancing equal opportunities

The work in intellectual output 2 builds on the outcomes of intellectual output 1 and forms applicable tools for recording the status of schools with regard to the essential criteria for equal opportunities and social inclusion in school and education, for the goal setting for improvement and optimization as well as for the evaluation of the effects of measures taken in the context of school development.

The main result is a Mapping Tool based on feedback from participating schools in Germany, The Netherlands and Austria. They have identified several best practices and 15 key success factors that

are the most essential to contribute for improving equal opportunities and social inclusion in schools.

In a common action research, the essential dimensions and fields for equal opportunities in education in schools were specified and evaluated for the formulation of descriptors to describe the success factors for conclusions.

The result is a three-stage Mapping Tool that contains 15 key success factors, 34 indicators and assigned descriptors to offer the opportunity for a quick and efficient self-assessment, further development and evaluation at the own school on the subject of "Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion".

The three stages are

-   First self-assessment, assessment of the status and scope of the possibilities for action
-   Concrete objectives derived from this in selected fields of action and definition of measures
-   Evaluation and evaluation of the results of measures taken

The mapping tool is to be used as a basis for the joint development discourse at the school site, with the involvement of all significant participants and those affected.

Furthermore, the mapping tool and the findings from its application provide basics and hints for further work in intellectual output 3 – Partnership with parents and intellectual output 4 – Blueprint combining formal and non-formal learning.

From the application of this mapping tool at the integrated schools, the following conclusions can be derived:

- The factors, indicators and descriptors cover all relevant areas that are important for successful equal opportunities and social inclusion in schools;
- At no single school are all these areas sufficiently fulfilled, the status varies from school to School;
- Dealing with and discussing all factors, indicators and descriptors proves to be much more comprehensive than originally assumed;
- The more thoughtfully and consciously the involvement of stakeholders and those affected in the mapping process takes place, the more constructive and effective measures and developments are derived from it;
- At each school, there are options for action and improvement in its own sphere of activity;
- At no single school all the challenges arising from the self-assessment can be solved without cooperation or external support;
- It is not expedient to tackle all the issues at the same time – it is necessary to select, prioritize and design step-by-step, affordable improvement plans.

General guidelines for policy managers derived from our results are:

- The crucial work to improve equal opportunities and social inclusion must be done at the school itself;
- Responsibility for this lies in principle by the school management, the involvement of all necessary responsibilities and engagement in the staff of the school is a prerequisite for success;
- The work at the school can only be successful to the extent that the legal, organizational, and financial framework conditions make it possible, these must be observed in any case and used in the best possible way;
- In addition, the political levels in the municipality, in the region, in provinces and in the state

are called upon to support and accompany schools in development processes on the one hand, and to check the framework conditions on the other hand to see to what extent they enable goal-oriented development processes;

- The circumstances vary in the partner countries and other EU countries, so they must be interpreted and used depending on the national framework conditions.

Since regulation differs per country, specific guidelines for partner countries are:

For Austria

- In the sense of the national legal system, it must be checked which support, accompaniment, possibly also change at which level is useful and possible;
- In addition to the responsibility of the school management at the single school location (or school cluster), the respective educational region is of particular importance;
- School development in the educational region is responsibly initiated and accompanied by the regional school quality management, which must be included in the process;
- At the same time, the regional school quality management has the task of supporting the school location (or school cluster) in its work in the best possible way;
- Further concerns must also be addressed in an appropriate manner to the management of the education region, to the Directorate of Education, as well as to possible cooperation partners outside the school.

For Germany

- Equal opportunities have to be actively put through;
- According to recent academic research, in Germany is a successful education still dependent on factors as origin or prosperity (Bildungsbericht 2022);
- The Play Equal findings are for schools to self-assess their current situation and how to improve education for all students;
- The overall outcome of PE should also have an impact on the school authorities and should have an effect on curricula.

For the Netherlands

- Dutch schools have great freedom to arrange their own school development. The school management can include this in the school plans.
- It belongs also on the agendas of the Participation Council and the student council because it concerns the lesson content, the organization and the school culture.

Intellectual output 3: Guideline for partnership between parents and school

The product of this intellectual output represents a guideline for building educative partnerships between schools and parents, with a list of do's and don'ts.

The influence of parents goes beyond the learning achievements. It also affects social behavior, perseverance and problem situations in the classroom. Parental involvement contributes to a positive attitude towards other people and learning. Activating parents will result in a better education opportunities for students.

Parental involvement is the involvement of parents in the education and education of their child, both at home and at school. This also includes the parent participation. That is, the active participation of parents in school activities. But how do we go from (minimal) involvement from

parents to educative partnership between school and parents. The influence of parents goes beyond upbringing. It also affects social behavior, perseverance and problem situations in the classroom. Parental involvement contributes to a positive attitude towards other people and learning. Parental involvement is the involvement of parents in the education of their child, both at home and at school.

To get a good idea of what work with parents looks like in the participating regions, IO3 started out with a thorough desk research. Here, the reader presents the national or regional legislations in the partner countries, how the work with parents is regulated. If you are asking, if parents' involvement in school life is legally binding, yes, it is, in the Netherlands, in Austria and in Germany.

But where do we go from here? That is, where the collected examples from school and outside school to work with parents can give an answer. The examples are, again, didactically processed in a comparable format for a better read.

Guidelines for schools

- The work with parents is regulated in every partner country, act on it;
- Give parents an active role to improve school life for their child and others;
- If the school is collaborating with external institutions, parents should be involved, too;
- Active parents often improve also their relationship with school as an institution;

Intellectual output 4: Blueprint for combining formal and non-formal learning in an ongoing pathway

The result in Intellectual output 4 is a Blueprint that supports schools and teachers in using non-formal and informal ways of learning in addition to formal teaching to promote equal opportunities and social inclusion, resulting in an ongoing learning pathway.

This blueprint is based on a survey in all partner countries, among the affected students themselves. It was determined where students acquire competences and in what way; formally, non-formally or informally. Basic competences – language, mathematics, handling of digital tools / special interests / personal competences – have been researched.

From the results, guidelines for action – a blueprint – were derived, which support teachers in including those fields of learning in the development processes of young people that are not directly related to school – living environment, leisure time, personal interests, peer groups, social media etc.

Awareness of the importance and dimension of non-formal and informal learning varies across partner countries, individual types of schools and school locations. It can consistently be stated that the possibilities offered by the combination of formal learning with other approaches from the life and experience worlds of pupils represent enormous development potential.

From this, information is derived both for schools, school management and teachers – these are summarized in the Blueprint – as well as for political leaders at various levels, which must be implemented depending on national and regional circumstances.

Guidelines for policy managers

- Create fundamental awareness of the importance of formal, non-formal and informal Learning;
- Collect, use and implement scientific evidence and practical experience on learning strategies of young people;
- Encourage schools and teachers to deal with the learning of young people outside school and combine it with formal teaching in the best possible way;
- Reduce or eliminate bureaucratic hurdles for the use of extracurricular learning;
- Actively support cooperation between schools and extracurricular actors;
- Provide resources for collaboration and overarching forms of learning;
- Use forms of performance evaluation for young people that not only take into account and assess formal aspects, but also include developments that encompass the entire personality of students in the assessments;
- Make this part of a broad and multi-year program in which multiple stakeholders take their responsibility.

Intellectual output 5: Hackaton to involve young people in societal challenges

The definition of a hackathon is: 'an event in which teams of participants work non-stop to come up with solutions for presented cases within a short time.' A hackaton may last a part of the day or several days.

Our hackathon is based on the idea that we want young people to think about solutions for complex issues. In Play Equal we practice organizing a hackathon in order to create a blueprint that can serve as an example for organizations that want to actively and creatively involve young people on the issue of equal opportunities.

Schools have some challenges. In the first place, there is an assignment to involve young people in societal challenges. This is partly the case in the established school programs, but partly this is related to everyday reality. Young people learn to form an opinion and to participate in society in general. Another educational task is learning skills that make it possible to participate actively. Furthermore, every school is aware that they do not only work for young people but that they also have work with young people. Especially when a theme such as social inclusion is not only seen as something that can be improved with appropriate regulations, but also requires a favoring school climate (dealing with each other in the school), the input of students is indispensable. They are not only an important actor but also often experience experts.

In a hackathon result goals come together in a creative, innovative and hackathon work form. The results of a hackathon are at the individual level of the participants but also at the school level because the generated ideas and plans can be parts of the whole school organization.

Guidelines for schools
- Look for ways to actively involve students; as a source of information and experts by experience;
- Put the school climate theme on the agenda, next to regulations;

- Make room in the curricula for different learning strategies and methodologies. This releases a lot of positive energy, also for teachers. Have an eye for an innovative learning environment.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on project results, research and experience, we arrive at 10 recommendations. They can be divided into two categories: Strategy and Process. The recommendations are addressed to all **policy makers on** national, regional and local level, in governments, municipalities and an school boards that want to take the challenge to change inequality for young people.

Strategy

1. Ensure a comprehensive approach

Policy makers must work towards equality integrally and systematically together with all partners. Inequality arises from many circumstances. A successful approach needs the efforts from various fields of policy.

We have constantly noticed that the theme of Equal Opportunities hardly needs any explanation. Every professional we spoke to knows many examples from their own work situation of situations in which there is inequality. While countering equality and promoting inclusion are high on the agenda everywhere, it is not always easy to implement.

A second experience is that equal opportunities is a widespread topic. In our project, the focus was on the school and on students who have a greater chance of inequality because of their social background. This does not alter the fact that there are many matters that did not have our immediate focus, but are of great importance. Think of students who we do not immediately see as underprivileged, but who, due to circumstances we are not aware of, also have a threatening risk of inequality. Also consider factors that are not directly noticeable at school level, but take place in the home situation, in the neighborhood or in a social area and have a direct relationship with inequality of opportunity: socio-economic situation of parents, poverty, health, racism, housing, unsafe home situation and opportunities for sports.

This requires a comprehensive approach. The government must work towards equality integrally, systematically and for several years, together with all partners. Only then will the efforts from the schools or other organizations make sense. Likewise, schools need to work with a comprehensive approach.

The necessary integral and systematic policy can be promoted by joining ongoing projects carried out globally, European, national, regionally or locally. In this context, consider the efforts for equal treatment from policies for inclusion, health, income, housing, social development, poverty, diversity, refugees and vulnerable people in general. In various forums there are efforts that arise from the SDGs, human rights or children's rights. Collaboration can ensure more attention for the theme and for bundling people and resources, creating a better and more sustainable impact.

2. Take a long-term approach

Fighting inequality requires a perennial approach with a permanent focus on equal opportunities and social inclusion.

One reason for choosing the theme of equal opportunities is that more and more attention is being drawn to it locally, nationally and internationally. At the start of the project it became clear that we could expect great improvements through collaboration and linking to existing projects.
During the COVID crisis it became clear that the problem of equal opportunities has worsened. Precisely at this time, the young people who are already in a disadvantaged situation found it even more difficult to fully participate. Fortunately, this was widely recognized.

However, both municipalities and schools were confronted with a multitude of new or intensified problems among young people during and after the crisis. Think of learning disabilities, social isolation, difficult or dangerous home situation, developmental delays, access to online learning facilities, physical and mental health, lack of exercise, financial problems, etc.

Especially when working with the mapping tool (intellectual output 2) we saw that there are different aspects of inequality in an organization that require an approach. Unequal opportunities are often the result of situations that have existed for a long time. Many organizations and professionals need time to become aware of aspects that influence equal opportunities and to make good interventions. Achieving sustainable impact requires not only careful planning but also a long breath.

3. Innovation must be anchored

Innovative projects must be carried out in a planned manner as part of the normal work with sufficient capacity and funding

We noticed that the subject of equal opportunities and the chosen project approach received a lot of support from our partners. There was hardly any explanation needed for the chosen theme and approach. Equal opportunities have already been addressed in various ways in the municipal organization of 's-Hertogenbosch. For this reason, it has been decided to strengthen innovation together with local and international partners.

However, we have also noticed that efforts always take more time than anticipated. Added to this were the consequences of Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns. Due to the impossibility of making time for this in the schools, an extension of the project has been requested and granted. This made the lead time of Play Equal almost 3 years.

In retrospect, we can conclude that such a great effort in a difficult time only leads to a good result if a number of preconditions are met. For example, internal and external partners must be fully committed and aware of the activities to be performed and the corresponding capacity. But above all, the subject must be or become embedded in existing developments. In this way, working on

innovation is not something you do extra or on top of the regular activities, but it is a choice that the organization makes to strengthen its own policy. In other words: making work with work.

Innovation and especially working on a broad theme like social inclusion finds its basis in legislation from different levels. In the desk research on laws and regulations, we have found that there are many regulations that can help to implement a change. It is important to know where responsibilities lie and where there is room for policy. There is a challenge to use legislation and the resulting programs to achieve one's own goals. In addition, there are opportunities to deploy extra resources, to build a network and to share knowledge.

When you work together on a project whose results and experiences are in line with regular policy, the project is not put on the back burner when necessary choices have to be made in the allocation of capacity. Innovation and international cooperation are therefore not a free choice, but are part of the regular activities.

Furthermore, innovative projects must also be carried out in a planned manner. This includes prioritizing and making capacity available.

4. Combine formal, non-formal and informal learning

Create legal, structural and strategic conditions to combine formal learning with non-formal and informal learning in the educational process of young people

Awareness of the importance and dimension of non-formal and informal learning varies between partner countries, individual types of schools and school locations. It can be consistently stated that the possibilities offered by combining formal learning with other approaches from the life and experience worlds of pupils represent enormous development potential.

As part of the Play Equal project, the self-assessments of schools, school development processes based on them and the surveys of students have provided clear indications of this.

This provides guidance both for schools, school management and teachers – these are summarized in the Blueprint in Intellectual output 4– and for political decision-makers at various levels, which must be implemented depending on national and regional circumstances.

For political decision-makers, this results in concrete recommendations to create fundamental awareness of the importance of formal, non-formal and informal learning as well as to collect, use and use scientific evidence and practical experience on the topic of "how young people learn".

Furthermore, schools and teachers should be encouraged to deal with the learning of young people outside school and to combine this with formal teaching in the best possible way. Bureaucratic hurdles to the use for extracurricular learning must be reduced or eliminated. Cooperation between schools and extracurricular actors should be actively supported and resources for cooperation and cross-cutting forms of learning should be made available.

Furthermore, forms of performance evaluation for young people are to be developed and used, which not only take into account and assess formal aspects, but also include developments that include the entire personality of pupils in the assessments.

5. Involve stakeholders as a community

Involve all relevant teaching and supporting staff as well as persons outside of school in teaching, learning and personal developing processes. Include parents and realize a connection between school, home and neighborhood

Promoting equal opportunities is a very broad subject that requires a long breath and willpower. A subject that is too comprehensive for a school, a municipality or a region alone. Even when you take the educational institution as a location and place of action, it is necessary to work together with stakeholders. This requires a strong connection with government institutions but also with researchers, social organizations and other schools. Only a chain cooperation between network partners can result in significant and long-term improvements. At the local or regional level, a community should emerge where stakeholders meet, help and carry out activities together. This is a fruitful approach whenever societal changes and challenges are involved.

Young people have many more interests, probably skills, than are evident in normal school lessons. Young people also learn in other places of learning, outside school, in leisure time, in family, with friends, in internships, in non-formal and informal ways. Competences and skills that young people acquire and use outside school can make a decisive contribution to self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-confidence.

School teaching and learning should therefore include and support extracurricular competence gains in a targeted and beneficial way. To this end, contact and cooperation and between school and extracurricular learning venues and forms of learning must be developed and used in the best possible way. The more diverse and diverse a student population of a school is, the more essential and effective these approaches are to strive for and achieve equal opportunities and social inclusion.

A community-based programme offers many opportunities. The work on collecting best practices and working with mapping tools for self-assessment, goal setting and evaluation proved to be valuable within the network. Not a single school is able to change matters of inequality on its own. Young people develop themselves not only in lessons or in a school context. In intellectual output 4 we developed a blueprint to connect the world of school with the outside world. In 2020, a broad approach to equal opportunities was started in 's-Hertogenbosch, in a community-based programme. This ensures a permanent focus on equal opportunities, incidentally in conjunction with the themes mentioned in more detail.

Every school has a relationship with parents, they also are part of the community. In every country participation of parents is subject of legislation but there is also a lot of space for connecting in other ways. In intellectual output 3 we developed a guide for educational partnership with parents, including guidelines for focus groups to have the right conversation.

6. Make use of data and scientific insights

Use of knowledge from international and national sources helps to choose efficient and effective methods

In the desk research it became clear that a lot of data are available that can help us to focus efforts so that good results are achieved. At the international level, reports from the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) are important as well as the reports on children's rights and education. They are often used in the development of national programmes. There are also a lot of data available at national level. An important source of information are the Education reports that not only address learning performance but also report promoting and hindering factors. In Austria, the Chance Index is particularly important, in the Netherlands data acquisition is promoted through the Equal Opportunities Alliance.

In addition to numerical information, much is also known about the backgrounds of social inclusion and proven effectiveness of programs that focus on this. Especially in relation to education, a lot of information is available. For that reason, we have started a number of intellectual outputs with a desk research. They formed the basis for our developed tools. On a modest scale, we conducted our own research with students; this was the case with intellectual output 4 where we used questionnaires to understand the ways young people learn, inside and outside of school.

7. Put responsibility at the level of the school

The chosen approach must fit an organization and therefore be tailor-made.

Within a legal framework, the school is and remains the owner of a number of things. Social inclusion is an important societal challenge and a school has its own responsibility to implement a policy. The chosen approach must fit an organization and therefore be tailor-made.

Project experiences with the mapping tool from intellectual output 2 clearly indicate that the differences between schools are large. Schools must be given the space but above all feel the space to implement their own improvement plans. Activities are both at the level of the organization and the curricula as well as the school climate. This requires commitment from the school management and from the staff members.

8. Involve young people

Their points of view are meaningful for professionals. We should find ways to make more and better use of the contribution of young people.

A school is an excellent environment to develop young people's talents and guide them towards their place in society. However, change processes that directly affect pupils and students are not always prepared and implemented together with young people. Legally, the participation of pupils is regulated, we have investigated this in the various project countries. But large differences are also possible within this.

On a number of occasions, we have actively involved young people in our project. By means of questionnaires for intellectual output 4, young people were questioned, the results were used in the blueprint. Intellectual output 5, the hackathon, is based on the idea that we need the input of young people to find a good answer to the problem of inequality within the school. To address such a complex issue, the suggestions of young people are valuable. They are sometimes experts by

experience, but they also look at the situation in a different way. Especially when they are challenged to think freely and creatively, this can lead to valuable ideas. A second goal is that it is good to actively involve young people in social issues.

Process

9. Invest in peer-to-peer learning

Collaboration works best when people know each other and easily pick up the phone to find a quick answer or a sparring partner

In contacts between peers, for example teachers themselves, experiences are shared as practically as possible, also with room for less successful activities. In the Harvest session, we introduced school employees to working with the mapping tool. People who have worked with the tool themselves briefly explained how the tool came about and what the underlying ideas are. However, the emphasis was on telling how it has been applied to a school or other organization. Teachers who had used the new tool at their school were therefore convincing in their presentations and also honest about points for improvement or matters that have come out less well.

The project got off to an energetic start with an inspiring Kick Off meeting in which project team members got to know each other and rolled out plans. For all kinds of (external) reasons, there have been many personnel changes, especially at the municipality of 's-Hertogenbosch. This has caused some delay. It is important to take time for a good induction program and new acquaintances with partners. After all, collaboration works best when people know each other and easily pick up the phone to quickly find an answer.

Although it is good to base a new approach on data and scientific insights, it is particularly valuable to have a discussion among ourselves. During the execution of the various intellectual outputs, it turned out that in the regular work setting many things are taken for granted. The guided discussions led to new insights, for example about the best practices; what is common in your own organization is very innovative for another organization. It has also happened that in a discussion it turned out that a proposed best practice is less effective than thought.

At various times we have noticed that the dialogue and the meetings have yielded great results. A clear example of this is working with the mapping tool developed at IO2. An (online or paper) questionnaire has been developed with which organizations can indicate the status of equal opportunities within their own organization on the basis of a number of indicators. This leads to a number of choices at the organizational level from which activities arise. The mapping tool can then be used again to determine whether changes have occurred over time. Much has been invested in the development of this mapping tool and the associated goal setting tool.

It soon became apparent that this form of self-assessment led to very good results. It was considered less relevant how the scores on the various indicators turned out. The discussions that were part of filling in the scores turned out to be the most important result. We challenged organizations to use the mapping tool in a multidisciplinary team. The mix of employees with different tasks and functions turned out to be very interesting conversations. This often led to lively discussions, but in all cases to new perspectives and a sharper look at both the positive points in the organization and the points for improvement.

10. Invest in bordering conditions

Solutions to the problem of inequality require a working climate with openness, security, trust and equality and attractive forms of communication, preferably live.

This became especially evident in the Harvest session in 's-Hertogenbosch. We have opted for an attractively designed report. This invites reading and dissemination among colleagues. Long and boring reports are likely to go unread. The Play Equal logo and website were also created in this way; After an inventory among future users, we opted for a simple design for the website that quickly provides the requested information. We also think it is important to show names and photos of everyone who has worked on the project; in this way we show that the work is done by real people who are proud to be project employees.

It is important to entice people to join a gathering; everyone has busy schedules and many issues deserve priority. We saw this at the Harvest Session where interim results were shared, but also at the closing meeting on May 30, 2022 in 's-Hertogenbosch. Participants are first and foremost guests. We do this by carefully choosing dates and times; not during a test week or on Friday afternoon. Then you would be looking for an attractive location that is easily accessible and has ample parking. The program must be inviting and therefore contain triggers such as experiences of colleagues, well-known speakers. And of course the organization has to be excellent; with good timekeeping and catering. Otherwise no one will join a second time.

In this respect is it also important that the programme has elements of fun and creativity. Online meetings forced us to invest extra in attractive program element like energizers and in using the possibilities of tools like Jamboard and Mentimeter and by having breakout sessions. These are necessary elements in the program to actively involve participants but also innovative means in meetings.

This was also very important for attracting students for the hackaton. Participation should also be fun! Unfortunately we had to organize the hackaton online but in a real live event we would have paid attention to the choice of location and the choice of food, drinks, music and other aspects of a favoring atmosphere. Het element of competition made it extra attractive to attend.

The policy recommendation is therefore that attention should be paid to the value of conversations and communication and the necessary preconditions for open discussions such as time, openness, security and equality.

A good working atmosphere turned out to be necessary in discussions about the own working environment, like with intellectual output 2 (mapping tool), 3 (partnership with parents) and 4 (pathway between formal and non-formal learning). Management and staff discussed various topics concerning social inclusion. This requires a climate in which participants feel secure and on equal level.

We also experienced the value of meeting live. As indicated earlier, we were dealing with the consequences of covid-19. There were lockdowns, school closures and restrictions for office work, meetings and travel. The bottom line was that a large part of our work had to be done from home and that consultations mainly took place online via Teams, mail or telephone. This led to new forms of communications. Attempts have been made to make it attractive with varied and innovative

forms of work that had the advantage of being time efficient. But in general we realized that exchange of practical experiences in real is fundamental for the success of working together.

4. CONCLUSION

Inequality is a very broad field of attention. Even when we restrict ourselves to the ambition of improving equal opportunities for young people in the age of 12-18 and in an educational setting, there are many stakeholders and many possible buttons to turn.

In 2022 we are in the midst of several crisis situations: COVID, war, energy, climate, economic, refugees to mention a few. The world has become smaller and the need for co-operation is stronger than ever. In every crisis there is a group of people that is more affected by the negative effects than others. Generally these are the people that already suffer from a disadvantaged position. In all crisis situations it is evident that they again will suffer more from crisis situations than other groups. Many scientific studies have shown the negative effects of COVID on vulnerable groups. The Lancet published a study about safeguarding vulnerable people [1]. Children up to the age of 18 are one of the most vulnerable groups. A quote from the report: "The impact of these setbacks on these children's future is dire. School closures due to COVID raised concerns about decreases in equal opportunities in schools. A study of the University of Utrecht assessed educational inequality for vulnerable groups [2].

An extra complication is the experience we had that in times of crisis organizations tend to focus on short term activities. In other words, when there are so many topics struggling for attention, capacity and funding, equal opportunities and inclusion are merely a few of the many issues that have to be handled.

But, we would like to end in a rather positive way. Although schools and even municipalities cannot compensate for social equality, they can make an important contribution. The key success factors for a successful policy lie with attention for both strategy and process.
Equality improvement needs decisions on strategy level; since inequality often stems from situations from a distant past from various social and economic causes, there are no successful quick fixes. Successful interventions and good tools deserve to be embedded in the organizations' s strategy. Equality and social inclusion are not a choice but a fundament of policy. To fight inequality all stakeholders should be involved. This demands a policy involving a community in which professionals, parents and young people meet, exchange ideas and feel responsibility.
A successful approach requires preconditions that positively favour the progress; creative thinking, a good working climate and live contacts in a community involving all stakeholders and including all forms of learning and developing.

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[1]   https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(21)00235-8/fulltext
[2]   https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00313831.2021.2006307?needAccess=true

Only with this fundamental and structured approach for policy we can combat and end the highly undesirable situation in which not all our young people are given equal opportunities to develop their talent