

## Conceptualising disadvantaged schools and improving their quality across Europe

There is a wide variety in how disadvantaged schools are conceptualised and defined both in theory and in practice within different education systems (McCoy, Quail & Smyth, 2014). Disadvantaged schools or schools situated in disadvantaged areas face more and different challenges compared to other schools in the same education system. Therefore, classifying certain schools within an education system as disadvantaged, creates the opportunity to introduce remedial educational policies specifically aimed at improving the quality of disadvantaged schools. These educational policies should bridge the gap between disadvantaged schools and other schools within the same education system. At the same time, naming a school as disadvantaged may discriminate the students going there and contribute to further deprivation. Therefore, the terminology used to conceptualise disadvantaged schools needs to be assessed critically.

Although disadvantaged schools may manifest themselves differently across Europe, there are many similarities in the challenges faced by disadvantaged schools and education systems trying to improve the quality at these schools. The goals of the proposed symposium, therefore, are: Firstly, to establish how disadvantaged schools are conceptualised in different European countries. Secondly, to discuss interventions aimed at improving the quality of disadvantaged schools. Thirdly, to consider the possibility of transfer of these interventions to other European education systems.

After the three papers below, a discussant will address pertinent issues and open the floor for questions.

### **Recognising 'educational isolation' as a place-based disadvantage for schools.**

Pupils in low density populated areas with high levels of disadvantage have lower attainment than similarly disadvantaged pupils in high density population areas in England. A school's 'place' can therefore disadvantage pupils. The researchers have conceptualised 'Educational Isolation' to demonstrate a *'school experiencing limited access to resources for school improvement, resulting from challenges of school location'* (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2019:5).

Using qualitative research findings and publicly available school data collected between 2010 – 2018 in England, the researchers identified the challenges of geographical remoteness, socioeconomic deprivation and cultural isolation for schools in low density population areas e.g. rural, coastal, ex-industrial, and the limiting effect this had on these schools accessing resources for educational effectiveness. The aim of this paper is therefore to offer a new perspective on place-based disadvantage through an 'educational isolation' lens. The findings from England will be explained and applied to educationally isolated schools internationally, demonstrating the challenges of place in securing equitable educational opportunities and outcomes.

### **Introducing an adaptive mentor training aimed at disadvantaged schools across Europe**

Different indicators are being used to define disadvantaged schools in the following seven education systems participating in the "Novice Educator, Support and Training" (NEST) project: Austria, Bulgaria, Catalonia, Flanders, Madrid, Romania and Wallonia. However, in all these education systems disadvantaged schools struggle to retain teachers. Supporting novice teachers at disadvantaged schools could be especially effective in reducing teacher attrition, because novice teachers are more often placed at disadvantaged schools (Allen, Burgess, Mayo, 2018; Long et

al.,2012). Therefore, an adaptive mentor training has been developed and implemented as part of the NEST policy experiment.

The NEST mentor training is adaptive in three ways: with regards to the mentor selection (1), the mentoring approach (2) and the mentoring content (3). This paper will compare the effects of the NEST adaptive mentor training, using data from surveys before and after the training, on the mentoring competencies of mentors at disadvantaged schools in the seven education systems across Europe.

### **School improvement and leadership for a resource-oriented school culture. Research-practice-partnership in the project "Schule macht stark (SchuMaS)"**

SchuMaS is a joint project that provides research-based and practice-oriented support for 200 schools serving disadvantaged communities in all 16 German states. One of the main focuses of the SchuMaS topic cluster *School Development and Leadership* is on developing and testing, in partnership with the schools involved, approaches that promote an empowering, resource-oriented school culture with a growth-mindset.

A resource-oriented view of the school and its students, reflected in high as well as realistic performance expectations, appreciative interactions, and positive norms, among others, represents a key characteristic of *improving schools* serving disadvantaged communities (Muijs et al., 2004; Reynolds et al., 2014). Such a view can be assumed to have a positive impact on school culture, students' self-concept, and students' learning (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1986; Hoy, Tarter & Hoy, 2006).

In the partnership, the development of a resource-oriented culture in the participating schools is supported with a web-based professional learning platform and a design-based school improvement workshop. These tools will be presented in detail at the conference.

### **References**

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