



Report on EI School Leadership seminar

“Quality leadership for quality education”

Helsinki, Finland, 6 – 8 May 2009

Introduction

Education International held a school leadership seminar in Helsinki, Finland, from 6 – 8 May 2009. The seminar, whose theme was, “Quality leadership for quality education”, was hosted by Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö (OAJ), the Finnish teachers’ union and attended by 69 participants, mainly from Europe, Africa, North America and Asia.

Brief highlights

The seminar started with opening remarks from Monique Fouilhoux, the EI Deputy General Secretary. Monique highlighted the importance of school leadership and informed the participants that EI’s mandate to work on this issue was derived from the 2004 and 2007 Congress Resolutions. This was the third school leadership seminar, following the 2005 seminar held in Paris, France and the 2007 seminar held in Birmingham, England.

Anne Kolehmainen, the Deputy President of OAJ, welcomed everyone to the seminar, to Helsinki and to Finland. Anne stressed the importance of teacher and head teacher expertise in achieving quality education and the importance of involving teacher and head teacher organisations in all decision making concerning education

The seminar was officially opened by Henna Virkkunen, the Finnish Minister of Education. The Minister informed the participants that in Finland, education is free up to high school –this includes free learning resources, free meals and free transportation. Teachers are highly educated (the minimum entry level qualification is the masters degree) and autonomous. A combination of these factors might explain why Finland has performed well in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Jukka Alava, Director, Institute of Educational Leadership, Jyväskylä University, Finland, delivered a key note address highlighting the role of school leadership in achieving quality education. Jukka stressed the importance of pedagogic leadership and collaboration. He argued that a school should have, not just a single leader, but a community of leaders comprising teachers, support staff, students parents and others.

Dennis Sinyolo, EI Coordinator, Education and Employment, highlighted some of the current issues, trends, developments and challenges in education management and school leadership, including high

accountability demands, performance management/appraisal and merit pay, competition, international assessments, HIV/AIDS, dwindling resources and school safety concerns.

Reports from France, USA, Taiwan, Ireland and South Africa highlighted the current key leadership issues in these countries. Some of these include the continuous evolution of school leadership in France, the move to establish national standards and differentiated pay in the US, the election of school leaders in Taiwan, the impact of the financial crisis and gender composition of school principals at secondary school level in Ireland and the prioritisation of education reform by the new ANC Government in South Africa.

There were two panel discussions. The first panel discussion focused on strategies for improving school leadership policy and practice. Lynn Marlaz, NEA Senior Policy Analyst, USA, talked about the role of teacher unions in improving school leadership, John Bangs, NUT, Assistant Secretary, UK, talked about improving school leadership policy and practice through research and Ari Pokka, President, Finnish principals Association, Finland, talked about participative leadership.

The second panel discussion focused on strategies for dealing with school leadership challenges. Jukka Kuitinen, Principal/ Vice-President, Finnish Principals Association, Finland, talked about the assessment system in Finland, Sara Israeli, ITU Board Member and Head of Elementary School Principals, Israel, talked about making school leadership an attractive profession, while Anders Balle, President of School Leaders' Union/DLF, Denmark, discussed school autonomy.

There were three parallel working groups. The first group, which focused on developing a school leadership profile, stressed that school leaders should be trained teachers, have experience as teachers and be as competent as teachers. In addition, they should have relevant experience, managerial skills and training. The second group focused on building a safe school environment. This group emphasised the need to ensure safety for students, teachers and other education employees in terms of natural disasters and violence. The third group discussed the role of teacher unions in developing democratic and quality leadership in schools. This group called upon EI and the unions to engage in more advocacy activities in order to influence education policy and to organise training and leadership programmes for their members.

Guntars Catlaks, EI Coordinator, Research, talked about the impact of the international comparative surveys on educational leadership. He particularly discussed the (possible) positive and negative impacts of PISA and the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) on education and school leadership.

Mats Ekholm, Professor, University of Karlstad, Sweden, focused on training and continuous professional development for school leaders. Mats emphasised the need for a school to be a continuous learning organization. He stressed that school improvement and development require proper planning, resources and take time to achieve.

Monique Fouilhoux, the EI Deputy General Secretary, talked about the impact of the financial and economic crisis on education. Some of these include cuts in education budgets, reduced official development assistance to poor countries and lending conditionalities imposed by international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank.

The participants also visited local primary and secondary schools and most of them found the experience informative and enriching.

Main conclusions and recommendations

1. The significant role of school leadership in achieving quality education continues to receive more and more attention in many countries and in various international organisations.

R1. Education International and teachers' unions should take advantage of the current momentum to move the school leadership agenda forward through continued advocacy activities, involvement in policy development, organising training programmes on school leadership, collaboration with international, regional and local organisations etc.

2. New issues and challenges that have a significant impact on educational leadership and education in general continue to emerge in many parts of the world. Some of these include performance management/ appraisal and merit pay, international comparative surveys and assessments and competition.

R2. EI and teachers' unions should continue to monitor these developments and to engage with public authorities and international organisations in order to influence school leadership policy and practice.

3. The 2007 EI Congress Resolution calls for the employment of principals on the basis of a benchmark of skills (school leadership profile).

R3. The seminar recommends that school leaders should be trained teachers, should have experience as teachers and be competent as teachers. They should be availed the opportunity to train as leaders, including pre-service and continuous professional development. In addition, they should have managerial and coaching skills, including the ability to create a vision for the school, practise democratic and shared leadership etc.

4. Violence against teachers, students and other education employees seems to be on the rise in some parts of the world.

R4. Teachers' unions should work or continue to work with school leaders to ensure safety for teachers, other education employees and students. This should include the development of safety measures for dealing with natural disasters and violence.

5. Teachers' unions have a significant role to play in the development of democratic and quality leadership in schools.

R.5 Teachers' unions should engage or continue to engage public authorities, organise training programmes and undertake other appropriate measures to improve the democratisation and quality of school leadership.

6. The current financial and economic crisis has had a negative impact on educational leadership and education in some countries. In the US and other countries, the education sector has benefited from economic stimulus packages.

R6. EI and its member organisations should continue to engage international financial institutions and public authorities to resist cuts in education spending and to ensure that the education sector benefits from any economic stimulus packages that may be instituted.