CAN SOCIAL INNOVATION IN SCHOOLS MITIGATE EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY?

LESSONS FROM INNOVATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND NEUJOBS

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In this Working paper we analyse what sort of innovative solutions have been put into practice in schools to respond proactively to the situation of exclusion and inequality in education. Secondly, we analyse whether there is scope for these innovative solutions as a complementary solution to more traditional and larger-scale policy reforms. The paper is structured in two parts: in the first part we describe innovative practices that have been used to respond to specific social challenges that schools face within their working context - such as social exclusion, marginalisation, difficulties in learning behaviour. In the second part we present findings from NEUJOBS on why traditional pro-equity measures - in particular late tracking and ability grouping - are not sufficient to decrease educational inequality and how social innovation practices could fill this gap. Section three concludes
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1. Introduction

Equality of opportunity in education has gained relevance as an issue in recent decades due to broad societal changes that have impacted on the educational landscape, such as migration, globalisation and transnational mobility (Luciak and Mikael 2010).

To equalise opportunity in education, two main types of policy reforms are generally believed to be successful: the promotion of early childhood education and a late separation of children into different ability tracks across or within schools1 (Beblavy and Thum 2012, OECD 2010, Hanushek and Woessmann 2006, Schutz et al 2005, Brunello and Checchi 2006). Proponents of early tracking, which generally happens when students are younger than 15-years-old, argue that tracking can increase the efficiency of schooling by focusing on the needs of distinct groups of students (Woessmann 2004). Opponents' main concerns relate to perpetuating and aggravating existing inequality (Ibid). Later tracking is therefore supposed to weaken the relationship between social background and educational attainment and increase equality of opportunity in education (Beblavy and Vasekova 2012). The research of the NEUJOBS project2 contributes to this debate by looking at the linkages between pro-equality education policy reforms and equality in education: the research findings challenge a one-policy-fits-all approach at European level and suggest a different way of looking at the effectiveness of a pro-equality measure. In fact, country contexts and the typology of pupils play a relevant role in the effective implementation of a reform. Research on educational innovation showed that many top-down reforms have never properly filtered down to the individual level. Without a genuine change at the micro level, efforts at the meso and macro level of education will not be reaching actual learners (OECD - ILE 2011).

These considerations lead us to believe that other measures are needed – complementary to large-scale policy reforms – that contribute to reducing inequality in education. We now turn

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1 At some stage of their career between primary and secondary school, pupils are put in different tracks, which usually differ in the curriculum offered as well as in the average cognitive talents of enrolled students (Brunello and Checchi 2006). This is what is generally called tracking. While in the North American context tracking is mainly understood as ability grouping or streaming - which means grouping children together according to their talents in the classroom, in the European context tracking takes the form of well-defined separate segments in the education process, typically specialising in general and vocational education.

2 See (www.neujobs.eu).
to measures in the field of education that can be termed ‘social innovations’. Social innovations (SI) are activities that are not yet mainstreamed and are motivated by the goal of meeting social needs (Mulgan 2007). These innovations are usually introduced by creative individuals or small teams, but their positive effects in a given context rarely attain wider implementation. Innovative learning environments have been found to have the potential to foster a number of pedagogical advantages and can be an excellent way of engaging learners (OECD - ILE 2011).

In this working paper we firstly analyse what sort of innovative solutions have been put into practice in schools to respond proactively to the situation of exclusion and inequality in education. Secondly, we analyse whether there is scope for these innovative solutions as a complementary solution to more traditional and larger-scale policy reforms. Given the wide variety of social innovations in the field of education and the complexity of the education system, we decided to focus our analysis on i) programmes implemented in schools with pupils aged between 6 and 18 years and ii) how some schools are changing in response to social challenges and which innovative solutions have been put into practice by local actors in response to stratifying processes. The organisation and design of a school represent a core feature of the education system and should be seen as vehicles for education reform. Their evolution can trigger a shift in how the learning process is perceived by society.

This Working paper shows that several innovative approaches already exist and represent an opportunity to reduce inequality when the country-context undermines an education reform. The initiatives analysed show positive results and remain a good opportunity to reduce disadvantages and increase the social competence of children, but the success of SI depends on the quality of management, cooperation among all different actors and on government financial support. We further show that traditional pro-educational equality policy reforms have several shortcomings that could be overcome by social innovations, such as:

1. The impact of community schools
2. Teachers act as facilitators and are often accompanied by educationalists and they work together in a close team. This new configuration in the learning environment can offset the elitist approach of certain power groups.
3. In socially innovative measures, the above-average commitment of teachers is coupled with additional organisational innovations. These measures allow a differentiation of effects of a traditional policy reform to be overcome.

The remainder of the paper is structured in two parts: in the first part we describe innovative practices that have been used to respond to specific social challenges that schools face within their working context - such as social exclusion, marginalisation, difficulties in learning behaviour. In the second part we present findings from NEUJOBS on why traditional pro-equality measures – in particular late tracking and ability grouping – are not sufficient to decrease educational inequality and how social innovation practices could fill this gap. Section three concludes.

2. Innovative Practices in Schools

In this section, we aim to examine whether and what type of specific social innovation practices emerged in response to a situation of exclusion and inequality in education. We do not provide an exhaustive summary of all existing social innovation practices, but focus on cases that have a pro-equality vocation and that have been developed within schools with pupils aged 6 to 18. We further focus on how some schools are changing in response to social
challenges and which innovative solutions have been put in place by local actors in response to stratifying processes.

We first analyse community schools – which represent an example of highly flexible type of school based on the collaboration between different actors of the community – and secondly we discuss innovations found in the OECD/ CERI ILE project, which aims at identifying and collecting examples of an Innovative Learning Environment. The first section sheds light on the key features of the innovations existing in the community schools and it focuses on the UK, the Netherlands and Germany. The second part extends the analysis to a wider range of schools that apply a non-conventional approach to learners, teachers, curricula and school organisation.

Community schools

Community schools are an important incubator of school innovation. Drawing on the experience in the US, a community school is a partnership between a school and external partners – such as primary care services, voluntary and community organisations and local authorities – created to offer a wide range of opportunities for the development of pupils before, during and after school (Vleva 2012). Community schools are open to children from pre-school to secondary school. The cornerstone is a better individual support that responds to the different strengths, interests and requirements of each child.

Reasons to set up a community school can result from issues related to the existence of underprivileged groups to the development of talents and the provision of day care. Although methods and services differ greatly, we can identify some common principles:

- A community school is open to pupils, families and the wider community during and beyond the school day
- It provides services and activities for vulnerable groups
- A community school is aimed at developing children’s and parents’ social (non-cognitive) and cognitive skills

Community schools also exist in several European countries. In this paragraph we focus on three main cases: ‘extended’ schools in the UK, ‘broad’ schools in the Netherlands and ‘all-day’ schools in Germany (Heers et al. 2012).

In the UK, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has actively promoted ‘extended schools’ since 2002. The Full Service Extended Schools initiative (FSES) was launched in 2003 with the aim of providing a comprehensive range of services, including access to health services, adult learning and community activities as well as study support and childcare. Most FSES are located in disadvantaged areas – a total of 138 schools. No single model can be identified in the extended school approach because of the diversity of issues the schools are facing and the way the responses and initiatives have been developed. Some common features can be identified however:

“a focus on overcoming pupils’ barriers to learning, a recognition that these were related to what were seen as family and community problems, the development of additional provisions to overcome these barriers, the deployment of additional staff and the formation of partnerships to deliver this provision, the manipulation of multiple funding streams to support this provision, and a tendency for schools to go their own way in pursuing their aim (Cummings et al. 2007)”.

The ‘learning future programme’ has been developed in UK along the same lines. This programme has worked with secondary schools across the country to develop innovative
approaches to teaching and learning that fosters student engagement.\(^3\) The project started by inviting UK schools to propose interventions aiming at fostering student engagement. Forty schools were selected.

The programme was created out of growing concern about high rates of dropout, poor levels of achievement and disengagement among students (Innovation Unit 2012). It is based on four main approaches:

- Using project-based learning that crosses subject boundaries, with students of all abilities;
- Supporting students beyond the four walls of the classroom;
- Taking into account ‘extended learning relationships’ including families and friends;
- Teachers, students, parents and local employers are all active in the education process (idem).

In the Netherlands, the need to coordinate services for children, young people and their families was felt back in the 1970s and paved the way for community schools. Neighbourhood networks among various care institutions showed positive results in preventing problems in children and young people. Today 1500 out of 6500 schools are part of the extended school programme (Vleva 2012). Community schools in the Netherlands are governed by local rather than national policy and the activities and buildings are managed and funded by the municipality. Although the central government has no specific policy on community schools, in 2010 it budgeted for 26 million euro to be spent on additional combined functions for these types of structures (Netherlands Youth Institute).

In Rotterdam, for example, several schools have opened up to the community that try to be a hub for both education and equal opportunities. Here, 160 primary schools and 45 secondary school sites and their ‘partners’ work on a continuous educational roster, including pre- and after-school activities. Additionally, the municipality has formulated a shortlist of criteria to evaluate the ambitions and funding for the community school concept (Ibid.).

More than ten years ago, the local authority of Groningen opened the ‘Window school’, which is a partnership of two schools, childcare, playgroups, day-care centres, after-school programme, youth work, social work, health, and many other institutions. The school is located in a disadvantaged area. The initial phase was reported as being disappointing and communication between different actors was not easy (Doornenbal and van den Berg, 2010). Training and specific orientation was needed to improve the level of cooperation between parents, teachers and professionals (Ibid.).

In Amsterdam the first community school was established in 2001. Since then, the city council has invested considerably in combined functions within the municipality to promote their development (Netherlands Youth Institute).

In Germany, ‘the all-day school programme’ is one of the largest federal and state initiatives in the area of education. All-day schools are now firmly established in the German educational system. The federal government has supported the Länder in the development and expansion of over 8,200 all-day schools through the investment programme “The Future of Education and Care” (IZBB) from 2003 to 2009 (with a funding volume of 4 billion euros). During the school year 2011/2012 nationwide 54.3% of all primary and secondary public schools provide all-day programmes.\(^4\) According to a survey started in 2005, it was possible


\(^4\) [http://www.projekt-steg.de/](http://www.projekt-steg.de/)
to show that the general decline in motivation and output of pupils from class 5 to class 7 decreased when children took part in full-time education (Dittmann 2010).

**Examples from the OECD/CERI ILE project**

In contrast to community schools, we investigated schools that apply an innovative approach in terms of content, learning methodology and organisation. To this aim we consulted the OECD/ CERI ILE project, which identifies concrete cases of innovative learning environments (ILEs) to provide examples and enrich mainstream education in systems around the world. The inventory is fed on a voluntary base by participating systems and organisations, which have to fill in a specific template form explaining the rationale and methodology of the school (OECD - ILE 2011). To our knowledge this inventory represents the only existing cross-national pool collecting innovative practices in school.

As mentioned above, we selected European cases that have been developed within schools and have a pro-equity vocation. Most of the cases studied were triggered by an initial dissatisfaction with the existing organisation, the non-attainment of learning aims and dissatisfied students.

The innovative approaches to the organisation of learning mostly concern: time, interactions with students and assessment (OECD - ILE 2011).

Many cases in the ILE project use time much more flexibly than conventional schools. For example in the Hauptschule St. Marein bei Graz, the lessons are shorter than the Austrian standard, so that some extra time each day can be devoted to student coaching and individual student work based on a weekly work schedule that replaces standard homework activities.

Learning in heterogeneous groups is common. Diversification is achieved by different abilities, multilingual and cultural backgrounds but also by mixing learners from different age groups. For example, in the Hauptschule St. Marein bei Graz pupils are grouped with children with special needs. In Ceip Andalucía in Seville, project work in a single class or in a grade or group of different grades aims to overcome curriculum fragmentation.

Mixed classes are often combined with regular team meetings or one-on-one teacher-student time.

In the Kirchberg Primary School, in Austria, performance is measured with portfolios, which require an ongoing dialogue between teachers and students and involve interviews at the end of each semester.

Instead of comparing students with each other, pupils are compared against their own individual learning goals. In the Dalton up-to-date school in Austria, the objectives of teaching are that students become active and self-directed in learning, take responsibility for their progress, and improve their social skills and time management.

Interaction is enhanced also outside the school environment, in the Zakladni skola a materska skola angel, in Czech Republic, for example, activities with parents are highly encouraged. The primary school Vigra in Norway has introduced “Parent School” meetings that foster families to take an active role in the learning activity of their children. The Ceip Andalucía, instead, opened the “Mothers school” where dressmaking workshops are combined with literary discussion.

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5 For full explanation of the schools analysed, see the table in the annex.

Continuing professional development is a key aspect of teaching in an innovative learning environment (OECD - ILE 2011). To this aim mentoring schemes and team collaboration are often taking place. In the Dalton up-to-date school in Austria, teachers meet regularly in teams to discuss practices and also meet regularly with other school representatives to evaluate practices overall at the school (Ibid).

Despite the diversity of practices, we observe that most of the schools of the ILE project present some common features:

- They are mostly organised without ability group streaming and setting. They have a holistic approach and are therefore thought to include all pupils at the school (Hauptschule St. Marein bei Graz). Since streaming is generally absent, alternative approaches are offered such as ‘within-class differentiation’ (Hauptschule St. Marein bei Graz and Vigra School - Norway) where tasks are adapted to the pupil’s level of skills. According to managers, this method offers both a stimulus to average and below-average students which try to catch up with the top achievers and ensure at the same time enough challenge for the more gifted students. However, this approach demands a high level of commitment from the teaching staff.

- They promote the enhancement of alternative skills such as social and ecological responsibility, team work, creativity, responsibility and autonomous learning (self-directed learning) (see, for example: GTVS Europaschule, Vienna). Instead of the traditional setting where “teachers convey declarative and procedural knowledge and students must find a way to comprehend, store and activate that knowledge” (Boekaerts and Niemivirta 2000), learning is rather self-organised (see Lernwerkstatt im Wasserschloss Pottenbrunn school).

- School buildings reflect a pleasant work climate and teachers have often additional qualifications in reform pedagogy (Montessori, Freinet) and alternative learning theory approaches (See: GTVS Europaschule, Vienna). Motor and cognitive exercises are also used to enable students with special needs to integrate better into the school environment (Lieska School - Finland).

- Where schools are located in areas with a high share of immigrants, they often provide language classes for parents and aim to involve them more in the school life (see CEIP Andalucia or the ‘cultural café’ of the GTVS Europaschule).

**What can we conclude?**

We showed that social innovation at school occurs at different levels: in the profile of learners, in teachers, in the infrastructure and in the content.

Schools under the pressure of societal changes modify their approach to education and pedagogy. The cases described address the reduction of social inequalities in alternative ways by

- reducing traditional concept of streaming
- focusing more closely on the students’ needs and backgrounds
- maintaining an integrated approach between the school and student environment
- reinforcing interaction with the community.

With regard to community schools, they have the advantage of a more holistic approach to learning and focus on the students and their environment. However, some authors argued that there is still a lack of empirical evidence and just descriptive proof of the effectiveness of these school activities (Heers et al. 2012).
If we look at the FSES impact in UK, the evaluations (Cummings et al. 2006, 2005, 2007) reported positive effects on pupils’ attainment, personal and social health, family stability, community well-being and school performance. While the benefits of FSES have been strongest for people facing difficulties, larger scale effects are not yet clear (Cummings et al. 2007). According to an Ofsted report published in 2008, the majority of schools surveyed offered a range of out-of-school activities that motivated children and young people to develop new skills and interests. Services that had been used by the most vulnerable parents were reported to have transformed the lives of some parents and had positive effects on their children. However, these initiatives did not do enough to reach out to particularly vulnerable individuals or families, or those living beyond the immediate neighbourhood. Even if the general picture that emerged from the evaluations looks positive, the FSES initiatives also posed significant challenges for schools, such as more complex management and difficulties in the integration with the community. The provision of core services is heavily dependent on effective partnerships with other agencies, workforce training and remodelling. Teachers have to think differently about the nature of the school and managers have to be able to drive the change (Ibid.) and provide special training for staff. Additional concern is also related to the challenge of integration in a context where students often travel some distance to their schools.8

These initiatives have shown some positive results and they remain a good opportunity to reduce disadvantages and increase social competence of children, but their success depends on the quality of the management, cooperation among all different actors and on government financial support.

3. Why pro-equality education policy reforms are not the only solution: the need for innovative practices in schools

After the previous overview on innovative existing practices in schools, we now summarise why pro-equality measures – in particular late tracking and early childhood education – are not necessarily the only solution to the problem of educational inequality. These findings are based on the NEUJOBS project.9 The objective of the related research in the NEUJOBS project was to find the linkages between social policy models, structural features of the education system and educational equality – measured by the socio-economic gradient of education outcomes.10 The main findings of this research is that

- Pro-equality education policy reforms are embedded in a social policy model and countries should therefore not be seen in isolation (see “Education policy and welfare regimes in OECD countries. Social Stratification and equal opportunity in Education” by Beblavy, Thum and Veselkova 2013).
- There are different interest groups involved in the implementation of pro-equality education policy reforms (political economy of educational reforms), which might hamper the smooth implementation of a pro-equality reform (see “From selectivity to

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7 The survey was conducted between September 2006 and April 2007. Inspectors visited 30 children’s centres and 32 schools in 54 local authorities that had established, or were developing, extended services.
8 http://www.infed.org/schooling/extended_schooling.htm
9 Specifically the findings are based on results of Work Package 4 (“New skills, more skills and the evolving education structure”), Task 5 (see www.neujobs.eu).
10 The socio-economic gradient is a measure of how strongly educational outcomes react to (are a function of?) social background (Beblavy and Vasekova 2012).
universalism: The political economy of pro-equality educational reform” by Beblavy and Veselkova 2012).

- The effect of pro-equality education policy reforms on equality might differ for different pupils (effect on performance distribution) (see “Do the effects of pro-equality education policies differ across the performance distribution” by Thum, Beblavy and Potjagailo 2012)

In the remainder of this section we summarise these findings and examine why they might imply that reforming features of the education system may need to be complemented by social innovation measures as described in section 2.

A. Education policy and welfare regimes in OECD countries: social stratification and equal opportunity in education

Promoting early childhood education and late streaming are policy reforms commonly designed to reduce the effect of socio-economic status. The paper challenges a one-policy-fits-all approach and shows in what way the introduction of policy reforms designed to promote equal opportunity in education could be unsuccessful in some countries:

- First of all, the research shows that a culture of egalitarianism/stratification is rooted in very long-term factors. These longstanding factors are not necessarily easily overcome by a reform concentrating only on the education system.

- The interplay between a culture of stratification in welfare and education systems differs between countries: in some countries, there seems to be a trade-off where initial emphasis on equality of opportunity is coupled with acceptance of stratification in pensions, whereas in others there is a stratification culture that becomes apparent both in education and in pension systems. This means that in countries with a trade-off implementing non-stratifying education policies might result in more stratification in the welfare system.

- Thirdly, the presence of a stratification culture in countries does not neatly overlap with the state vs. family/market boundary, but cuts across it.

These findings challenge the frequent though lazy assumption that acceptance of more inequality/stratification is associated with less state intervention. The paper shows that the extent of state intervention and the direction of the state intervention (pro-egalitarian or not) are two separate dimensions, which together produce differentiated results. This fact should be taken into account when implementing a policy reform to increase educational equality in a specific country. Therefore – and this is the main policy implication of the paper – the implementation of education reforms designed to increase equal opportunities in education should be approached with caution in the sense that the whole system of the particular country should be taken into account to ensure a successful policy reform.

When stratifying aspects of the country context undermine an education reform, innovative within-school practices might provide an alternative for achieving equality. The impact of community schools can in fact have an important influence on society itself. If we look at the “all-day school programme” in Germany, they affected the conservative German welfare state model (see Esping-Andersen classification) and not only shaped education policy but also created a shift in family policy. The previous part-time school model supported the welfare state focus on the preservation of the status quo while the full-time one improved work-life balance and high quality courses became accessible to children from a low socio-economic background (Dittmann 2010).
B. From selectivity to universalism: the political economy of pro-equality educational reform

In this paper the authors examine the political economy of the reforms aimed at later tracking. The starting point of the research is the growing body of literature based on comprehensive datasets, such as OECD’s PISA or IEA’s TIMSS and PIRLS (see Hanushek and Woessmann 2006, Meier et al. 2007, OECD 2004, 2007, 2010, Woessmann 2009) which suggests that the sooner the students are tracked, the greater the dependence of the student performance on family background.

In light of this evidence, the authors explored a set of interrelated questions: i) why different countries adopt or not pro-equality educational policies, ii) what is the political and social balance of forces? and iii) under what conditions are these reforms politically sustainable? In other words, we examine how the policy process (agenda-setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, implementation) contribute to the reproduction of educational inequalities.

There is a rather stable balance of political and social forces: whereas the left-leaning parties and education experts tend to be in favour of later tracking, right-leaning parties, parents from a high socio-economic background and teachers in elite, academic tracks tend to oppose it; reframing the issue of later tracking as threatening the quality of schooling, homogenising and harming the development of gifted children. The stability of the balance of forces to a large extent limits political choices when it comes to the successful adoption and implementation of pro-equality education reform. How is it possible to overcome the resistance of those who benefit from the reproduction of inequality?

According to the main research findings, framing the issue of later tracking in the initial, agenda-setting phase and dissemination of the research results (see publication of first PISA results in 2000) are both important factors that may shift attitudes of public officials.

The introduction of stratifying elements under the pressure of interest groups can be also challenged and reshaped by the different setting of community schools, where collaboration between different social actors is a fundamental pattern of work. In several cases of social innovation in education, the characteristics of the learning environment have also changed in relation to the teacher’s role. As in the case of the ‘Pedagogical Platform’ in Aarhus, Denmark, we identify a cooperative approach between the teacher and the student with individual meetings between each learner and teacher every two months to review the progress of the work plan. Teachers act as facilitators and are often accompanied by educationalists and they work together in a close team. This new configuration of the learning environment can offset the elitist approach of certain power groups.

C. Do the effects of pro-equality education policies differ across the performance distribution?

Evaluating the effects of tracking on average student achievement and the distribution of achievement is difficult, in part because of variations from study to study and from country to country in the characteristics of the tracking system (Meier V and G. Schütz 2007). Thum et al. (2012) use the harmonised PISA database to analyse the effects of early or late tracking and early childhood education on educational equality. The authors find that both preschool attendance and ability tracking have significant effects on the PISA performance and on equity but their effects vary across the PISA performance distribution and across countries. In particular the authors found that the correlation of pre-primary education and ability grouping with equality of educational opportunities (measured by the socio-economic gradient) is ambiguous across countries; the effect of either of the two education policy measures (ability grouping or pre-primary education) on equality of educational
opportunities is not the same across the ability distribution – meaning that an equalising or a stratifying effect of a policy can be stronger or weaker for less able or for highly able students.

In Austria, for example, social stratification is reinforced by ability grouping mostly for the more able: for a more able child with a low socio-economic background, ability grouping will reinforce the negative effect of low socio-economic background more than for the less able child. In other words, due to the ability grouping, the talent of more able child from a low socio-economic background will not be used properly (Thum et al. 2012).

If we look at social innovation practices, we observe a shift towards more collaborative and cooperative learning where the streaming process is generally replaced by alternative learning methods.

In cases like the Hauptschule St. Marein bei Graz in Austria (where the streaming process starts at the beginning of secondary school), the school and the teachers’ teams apply within-class differentiation, alternating between basic instruction of the whole class and add-on content for motivated students or extra support for less motivated students.

By applying the within-class differentiation, instead of ability grouping, you have all the children of different abilities together and you might reduce the risk of different effects of streaming across ability groups – in particular, for those countries where the correlation between ability grouping and equity is not similar across quantiles.

While mixed ability class and within-class differentiation allows for more of a social mix, it relies a lot on the expertise of the teacher and the flexibility of the school. In fact, in the Hauptschule St. Marein bei Graz, the above-average commitment of teachers is coupled with additional organisational innovations: teaching without text books and performance assessment, no fixed units after the first three of each day, flexible recreation phases instead of pre-defined break times, flexible content design by the team. Additionally, given the constant changing of the learning situation, within-class differentiation measures have to be continually adapted.

4. Conclusions

In this Policy Brief we studied i) firstly what sort of innovative solutions have been put in place in schools to respond proactively to the situation of exclusion and inequality in education and ii) secondly we analysed whether there is scope for these innovative solutions as a complementary solution to more traditional and larger-scale policy reforms.

For the former research question we analysed a selection of socially innovative (SI) practices in schools, which are put in place to respond proactively to situation of exclusion and inequality in education. We additionally describe how certain schools under the pressure of societal change modify their approach to education and pedagogy and might represent an alternative when stratifying aspects of the country context undermine an education reform. Within the diversified picture of the cases presented, we recognised the following common features:

- SI reduces streaming.
- SI relies on closer focus on the student’s needs and background.
- SI keeps a more integrated approach between school and student’s environment.
- SI reinforces the role and interaction of/ within the community.

For the purpose of the second research question, we examined the outcomes of three NEUJOBS working papers which looked at how the features of the education system are
impacting on educational inequality. The objective of the research was to find the linkages between social policy models, structural features of the education system and the socio-economic gradient of education outcomes, particularly at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale. The research findings challenge a one-policy-fits-all approach and suggest a different way of looking at the effectiveness of a pro-equality measure, which are not necessarily the only solution to the problem of educational inequality. In fact, findings indicate that a pro-equality policy reform in education should be studied, taking into consideration different levels of analysis, such as the country context, the distribution of power of different interest groups and the typology of pupils; meaning that an equalising or a stratifying effect of a policy can be stronger or weaker for less able or for highly able students. Within this context we were also interested in understanding what contribution social innovation and social experimentation can provide to address the shortcoming of education reforms aiming to change features of the education system. Can a bottom-up approach work as an equaliser where the national or pan-European policy fails to succeed for certain groups of students; such as pupils coming from a weaker socio-economic background?

We have identified cases in which SI practices can overcome problems that traditional pro-equality in education policy reforms encounter:

Firstly, research from the NEUJOBS project has identified the necessity of pro-equality measures to be embedded in the social policy model. The impact of community schools takes into account the link to welfare policies. In fact, if we look at the “all-day school programme” in Germany, they affected the conservative German welfare state model (see Esping-Andersen classification) and shaped not only the education policy but also created a shift in family policy. The previous part-time school model supported the welfare state focus on the preservation of the status quo while the full-time one improved work-life balance and high-quality courses become accessible for children with low socio-economic background (Dittmann 2010).

Secondly, NEUJOBS research has identified that the implementation of pro-equality measures is often hampered by conflicting interest groups. Within SI measures, teachers acts as facilitators and are often accompanied by educationalists and they work together in a close team. This new configuration of the learning environment can offset the elitist approach of certain power groups.

Thirdly, NEUJOBS research shows that outcomes of traditional pro-equality measures may differ across the ability distribution. In socially innovative measures, the above-average commitment of teachers is coupled with additional organisational innovations: teaching without text books and performance assessment, no fixed units after the first three of each day, flexible recreation phases instead of pre-defined break times, flexible design of the content by the team. Additionally, given the constant changing of the learning situation, the measures of within-class differentiation have to be continually adapted. These measures allow a differentiation of effects of a traditional policy reform to be overcome.

Our paper shows therefore that SI can provide an alternative to traditional pro-equality reforms and ultimately help to reduce their shortcomings. Policy-makers should not only focus on macro-structural changes, which can have various effects within a specific country context, but also think how to foster social innovation to solve the inequalities within the existing system. However, research remains ambiguous about their long-term effects, also in the face of macro-structural societal challenges. Further research from both scholars and practitioners is needed to explore and investigate their long-term effects and consequences on the school structure and management.
References


Netherlands youth institute, (xxx) “Community Schools in the Netherlands”,


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## Annex

### Social Innovation practices in school: cases selected from the OECD CERI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Promoter/Founder</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Short description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>No additional funding, apart from statutory, is provided.</td>
<td>Hauptschule St. Marein bei Graz</td>
<td>Students (aged 10-14 years) at this lower secondary school are taught in mixed-age integrative classes, including some disabled students. Instead of streaming students in ability groups, teacher teams apply within-class differentiation, alternating between basic instruction of the whole class and add-on content for motivated students or extra support for less motivated students. The organisation of the school day has been changed such that each day starts with three units in native language (German), mathematics, and English, followed by three units for interdisciplinary projects. The lessons are shorter than the Austrian standard, so that each day some extra time can be devoted to student coaching and individual student work based on a weekly work schedule that replaces standard homework activities. Learning activities include remedial teaching, reading and writing training, outdoor teaching, station plan work, and the use of strength portfolios to support personality and aptitude development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>National Government</td>
<td>GTVS Europaschule, Vienna</td>
<td>A school with high levels of poverty and migrant populations. Strong focus on languages, with English as a standard foreign language from year 1 and Italian as a first modern foreign language. Integrative approach to native language teaching in Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and Turkish. There is a heavy reliance on project teaching, closely involving the learners in planning via class and school councils. Alternative approaches such as Freinet, Montessori, and Jena Plan are used but not exclusively. Partner schools in the Netherlands, Italy, Slovakia and France, and is looking to develop another in Turkey. Students from the Vienna College of Teacher Education also mentor one child each in an informal setting to address special social needs. There is a cultural café where migrant parents and teachers can meet once a month outside school to form networks of different cultural groups, and there are also ‘Mum learns German’ courses for migrant mothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>municipality and voluntary contributions</td>
<td>Europaeische Volksschule Dr.</td>
<td>Primary school (students aged 6-10) has a special programme to work with students from multi-ethnic/migration backgrounds, fostering their German</td>
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Leopold Zechner  
(national language) proficiency and using the linguistic diversity of its students in language and culture workshops for all students. Parents and community members are involved in the classes, for example, non-native speaking student mothers participate in German courses, learning with and from their children, and daily English lessons are supported by a native speaker teaming with the form teacher. English is used as instruction language in subjects like sport and art. Also focus on elements of progressive pedagogy, with students working independently, in flexible groups with week plans. The school uses a European studies curriculum that was developed with colleagues from other countries. A school development team of teachers works on new ideas and evaluates current practice.

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<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>parental contributions</td>
<td>Lernwerkstatt im Wasserschloss Pottenbrunn</td>
<td>A private Montessori school with public-law status for students aged 6 to 16, offering integrative teaching of children with disabilities and children with behavioural problems. Learning is self-organised and the students freely select activities, supported by teachers who have a reform pedagogical education. The learning environment is structured into different areas of experience, between which the students move freely (e.g., kitchen, workshop, handicraft, music, etc.). Activities of the individual students are recorded daily and summarised in an annual development report. Parents pay tuition and contribute 80 hours of voluntary work to the school every year. There are regular exchanges between parents and teachers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>Dalton up-to-date, Vienna</td>
<td>Secondary school (grades 5 – 8) using reform pedagogic principles of the Daltonplan. Students learn in mixed-ability groups that include children with special needs. Teaching objectives are that students are active and self-directed in learning and take responsibility for their progress, and that students improve their social skills and time management. Performance assessments are based on portfolios and interviews in addition to standard tests. Teachers act as coaches in class, and meet regularly in teams to discuss practice. A monthly council with class representatives evaluates the practice at school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Municipality</td>
<td>Kirchberg Primary School</td>
<td>Primary school with a large population of children with special needs, oriented towards principles of Freinet education, which emphasise children’s expression, and responsiveness to students’ questions and needs. The school aims to foster student maturity, independence, and self-reliance, as well as constructive and</td>
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non-violent conflict resolution. Children have an active say in the classroom and in performance assessments; there is a classroom student council and student parliament. Learning activities include individual work, project work, cross-class learning, and joint instruction. Performance is measured with portfolios, which require an ongoing dialogue between teachers and students and involve appraisal interviews at the end of each semester.

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<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>National government and sponsorship</td>
<td>Zakladni skola a materska skola ANGEL School covering pre-primary through lower secondary education, considers itself an open community school. Actively encourages partnership between teachers and students and supports many parent activities; redefining the roles of teacher and learner. While the curriculum features a broad range of general education and competency development, the strong focus on language instruction, including bilingual education and 2nd and 3rd language instruction, is a particularly innovative component. Learning is enquiry-based, and motivation to learn and socio-emotional progress are actively encouraged and monitored. A key feature of the school is the integration (whenever possible) of students with special needs – including those with chronic health problems and/or physical disability, socially disadvantaged students, and exceptionally gifted students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>National Public Funding</td>
<td>Pedagogical Platform, Arhus Underlying objective is to promote four integrated life competences in the learners: knowledge, self-assessment, conduct, and ‘being’. All learners are assigned to two large groups – one for those aged 6-9 years and one for those aged 10-13 years – and smaller groups (the home groups) of about 12 learners each, with teaching and learning alternating between the larger and smaller groups. 14-15 year-olds soon to be included. Each learner has a plan for interpersonal and educational development (the child’s ‘storyline’) with individual meetings between each learner and a teacher every two months to review progress according to the plan. Portfolios are an essential feature – all learners work with three different portfolios: the working portfolio, the selection portfolio (more formal and focused), and the presentational portfolio (2-3 products from each subject). School is designed as a triangle, representing the three age groups, the three specialised subject fields – culture and communication, science, and music and aesthetics. New complex also houses a community centre and parish centre.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Institution/Source</td>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) and the town of Lieksa.</td>
<td>Keskuskoulu School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish National Board of Education</td>
<td>College of the Home Mission Society, Huvilakatu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>State and municipal funds</td>
<td>Vigra School</td>
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meetings to exchange experiences, discuss pedagogical literature, etc. New measurements are evaluated systematically to further improve teaching practice.

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<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>Primary school OS Janka Padeznik</td>
<td>This primary school uses the cultural diversity of its students as a resource (aged 6 to 14) by including traditional and modern cultural values in school work. It has innovative programmes for language, social competence and natural science learning. Students can learn two foreign languages (English and German) starting in the first grade and the school participates in several projects for language learning, including European portfolios. The development of social competences is fostered by fair-play-awards and students tutorship. Activities in early natural science classes include science camps, workshops, and optional subjects with the objective to build on the children's natural curiosity and let them develop a positive attitude towards nature. Activities are designed to engage all senses; often using nature as a classroom and offering much hands-on experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Regional Administration for Education CEIP, Andalucía, A Learning Community, Seville</td>
<td>This is a pre-primary and primary state school with all learners at risk of exclusion and very high numbers from the gypsy community. The teachers fostered the change and considered learning communities to be a key concept in providing quality education and to break the circle of poverty and social exclusion. These are realised through such activities and approaches as: weekly tutorship; students' representative meetings; discussion on the subjects for project work; the monthly family assembly; a close collaboration with the Administration for Education; and the assessment tool elaborated by staff together with a committee from the Learning Communities Programme which comprises indicators of achievements and obstacles while also guiding improvements. A key feature is the interactive groups based on cooperative learning. The learners split up into subgroups of 5 or 6 students each; lesson time is divided in periods of 15-20 minutes, each devoted to a different activity all subject related, with subgroup dynamics coordinated by volunteers from families, the university, and collaborating associations. Project work in a single class or in a grade or group of different grades aims to overcome curriculum fragmentation and is organised around four stages: planning, searching, organising, assessing.</td>
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