

#9 IMPROVING EQUITY IN SCHOOLS BY TEAMING UP WITH THE EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT

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This card provides suggestions for the practical question:

- What is the role of the educational consultant for improving equity in school?

Shifting roles

In Dutch primary schools the school leader collaborates with the educational consultant. The educational consultant is a teacher who supports the professional growth of their peers and coordinates the support system for students. In other European schools this can be the responsibility of team leaders or assistant managers.

The role of the educational consultant has increasingly shifted in the last decade from a primary to a secondary supervisor role. This means the educational consultant does not assist the individual students, but helps the teachers in their actions and professional development. This secondary role can only be successful if the school leader in turn supports the professional development of the educational consultant in this direction. The educational consultant will fulfill an educational coaching role and will focus on the team's learning. The school leader will have to position the educational consultant well within the school. The team will accept the leadership role of the educational consultant if they are part of a team with a strong collective ambition and shared responsibility for the learning of all students. The school leader and the educational consultant need to team up in order to build a culture of research, collaboration and learning, ensuring the continued development of all students and improving the quality of education. This demands a lot from teachers and it requires high-quality support from the educational consultant. As a school

leader you can support the educational consultant by regularly having reflective conversations and by asking and giving feedback and feed forward and offering other forms of professional development, for example participating in networks.

Build a support system

There is a distinction between equity and equality. Equality means that all students should have access to the same educational resources and opportunities. Equity means that some students need more of the school's resources and opportunities than others in order to achieve the same levels of success.

Equitable schools provide a support system for all students. The educational consultant plays a pivotal role in developing and maintaining this support system. Schools do not always have the capacity to serve all students in their schools – sometimes students with (complex) special educational needs are better off in schools which are specialized in responding to their needs. The educational consultant collaborates with teachers in order to decide if a student is better off in a more suitable setting. To prevent making ad hoc decisions, the team, led by the educational consultant, makes explicit what kind of support they can offer to special needs students and what kind of special needs support the school can not provide. They describe what kind of specialism they have inside and outside the school and what kind of help they provide for students and their parents to find support in another setting. The support system consists of professionals. Besides teachers who can support the academic learning and well-being of all students, there may be a remedial teacher or a child support worker. The educational

consultant can be seen as the gatekeeper who can advise and support teachers who believe students need special support.

The educational consultant can also provide assistance for teachers on collaborating with parents, for example in having conversations about how outplacement helps their child's development (see Headstart #6 Collaborating with parents). This could also mean preparing the conversation with the teacher or conducting the conversation together and reflecting on it, so the teacher learns how to conduct a good conversation.

Beyond special needs

Developing an equitable school is not easy and is very demanding for professionals. Equity is only possible by providing the support to special needs students – a complex job that requires not only special pedagogical and didactic knowledge and skills, but also a growth mindset. Equity goes beyond special needs. It is about considering the needs of all students. The work of professionals in equitable schools is based on the belief that every student can learn, and that it is the schools' obligation to provide socially just, fair and inclusive education regardless of race, economic conditions, sexual orientation, cultural and ethnic background or religious affiliation. Equitable schools make students feel they belong and are appreciated for who they are.

Stimulate conducting formative assessments

Teachers enhance their impact on students' learning by using various forms of formative assessments. They can contribute to all students' learning by analysing student learning processes and reflecting on their own contributions using different forms of data – for example observations, talking with students, asking students for feedback and test results. If students fail on a test, teachers do not judge this as a problem of the student, but consider it feedback and feedforward for themselves. School leaders can stimulate teachers to

view student failure as an incentive for greater teacher effort. Equitable teachers are willing to examine their biases, for example concerning the low socio-economic status children. This is not easy to accomplish, so they need to be supported by the educational consultant.

Develop professional capital

The educational consultant can support teachers in analyzing student results individually and collectively. If teachers can interpret student results as feedback for their teaching, they can reflect on what they can do to help the students succeed. This requires pedagogical content knowledge, a deep understanding of the content of learning and teaching skills. This pedagogical content knowledge is rooted in practical wisdom and research evidence on teaching and learning. The educational consultant can support teachers to act in evidence-informed way by providing the practical wisdom and external knowledge and offering advice on how to act, or by showing how to act – for instance in co-teaching. She can stimulate teachers learning from one another and let them reflect on their own and shared practical wisdom and belief system. A strong learning strategy for this is collaboratively reflecting on video recorded classroom situations or teacher-student interactions in other settings. This stimulates the development of the professional capital which consists of three forms of capital: human capital (the talent of individuals); social capital (the collaborative power of the group); and decisional capital (the wisdom and expertise to make sound judgments about learners that are cultivated over many years).

The educational consultant provides teachers with professional learning opportunities to develop their instructional practices, knowledge and beliefs and collective self-efficacy (see HEADstart #2 Stimulating teacher learning). This requires a learning environment for teachers which provides psychological safety (see HEADstart #7 Stimulating collective self-efficacy). This learning environment is developed by everyone, but in an equitable school the school leader and the educational consultant are pivotal culture builders.

