The Retain tool box
Or how to establish inclusive and innovative school and working environments

Introduction

The world of work, the organization of democratic societies and even the construction of personal identities, require skills; academic as well as social skills, such as imagination, creativity, collaboration and innovation. The European society requests all these skills to be taught in school, but how will it be possible to teach the children with this in view, if we do not have teachers who are committed to these values, and schools that understand how to create a common vision among staff to work towards these values?

In reality, although there is not a uniform picture across Europe, the school environments show several limitations in this regard. In some countries, having attractive working opportunities outside the teacher profession for trained professionals, the loss of talent in schools has been rather frequent. Trained professionals might leave the teaching profession as they do not feel sufficiently attracted by the conditions within teaching. In other countries, with less dynamic labor markets or where teaching is still a relatively well-paid professional occupation, there are hardly any drop out of the teaching profession; but although the level of leaving the teacher profession in such contexts is low, it might still be a challenge, because teachers stay in the teaching profession but feel demotivated. So the challenge is the same, namely how to develop and support an inclusive and innovative school environment that can facilitate the professional development, high motivation and retention of new teachers.

The RETAIN project is developed to deal with these challenges. The initial hypothesis in the project considers that certain organizational models and educational options facilitate the retention and development of teachers. At an organizational level the “school that learns” (open to the environment, based on strategic management and collaborative projects) is a favorable organizational context for developing the values and capabilities that are needed not only for development and retention of teachers, but also for pursuing the overall goals of increased learning and the education of committed citizens for the future.

The basic assumption of the RETAIN project is, that a good working environment can contribute to the development and retention of teachers within the profession, and further, that such a working environment is characterized by being inclusive and supportive towards innovation.
This assumption has been supported by the work done in the first part of the RETAIN project, where a mapping exercise was carried through, consisting of a literature study and a survey among 24 schools in the participating countries based on a questionnaire about the identity as a teacher, retention, motivation and reasons for leaving the teacher profession.

**Themes addressed in the Tool box**

The mapping exercise of the RETAIN-project aimed at outlining issues and challenges that can facilitate or inhibit the professional development and retention of new teachers in the teacher profession. The issues and challenges that were identified in the mapping exerciser have been grouped in five overall themes, that call for special attention, when it comes to establishing an inclusive and innovative working and learning environment, which can positively contribute to the development and retention of new teachers within the teaching profession. The five themes are:

- Differentiation and inclusion
- Co-construction, co-design and collaboration
- Collaboration with the external world
- Stress management and co-planning
- Professional identity

For short descriptions of these five themes see Appendix 1

In developing the RETAIN tool box the partnership reused and adopted a series development tools, that can be used in relation to the five above mentioned themes that have been identified. For each theme we have identified at least one tool, which is particular relevant for the issues and challenges, summed up within each theme.

But although the individual tools are presented in relation to a particular theme, most of the tools can easily be adopted to and used in relation to the other issues and challenges as well. This flexible use of the individual tools is due to the fact that the tools included in the tool box share some common managerial approaches:
They are **bottom-up** rather than top-down development tools, requiring both a **high degree of managerial engagement and a high degree of participation**.

- They are designed for **open-ended processes** rather than close-ended processes, and

- They are all aiming at introducing changes through encouraging **reflection and critical dialogue**.

These three features will be shortly described in the following.

**Common managerial considerations and approaches**

1. **Bottom-up processes with a high degree of managerial engagement and a high degree of participation**: Strategic development processes can be organized either as bottom-up processes, or as top-down processes or as something in-between. The second kind of processes is characterized by a closed, non-debatable vision and a detailed, ready-made strategic plan, ready for being implemented according to a definite script. The level of involvement and participation of those involved is low, and the degree of processual management is high. In bottom-up processes the level of involvement and participation of stakeholders is high and seen as a vital aspect of the strategic processes themselves. Such processes can be difficult to manage, time-consuming, and be seen as risky as they – from a management point of view – often imply a feeling of loss of control; but a certain kind and degree of loss of control, delegation and risk taking is, actually, what is valued in bottom-up processes, and what creates the engagement and commitment among the stakeholders.

A basic idea behind the tools in the RETAN tool-box is that viable strategic (development) tools require both a high degree of stakeholder participation and a high degree of processual management. A high degree of stakeholder participation means that the relevant stakeholders are included in the planning, development, and implementation processes, or, at least, that the different stakeholder’s perspectives are taken into account and used. A high degree of processual management, basically, means that the tools are manageable in the sense that they provides a processual frame work that can be used directly or easily adapted and developed to specific contexts (See figure I).
### Figure 1: Different strategic approaches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High degree of stakeholder participation</th>
<th>A low degree of processual management</th>
<th>A high degree of processual management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High commitment and chaotic strategic processes</td>
<td>No commitment and no processes</td>
<td>High commitment, open-ended, bottom-up strategic processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low degree of stakeholder participation</td>
<td>Low commitment, closed-ended, top-down strategic processes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. **Open-ended processes**: Involving stakeholders might be risky in the sense, that different stakeholders might have different, and even conflicting, values, ideas, wishes and interests. Involving stakeholders in strategic processes might be like opening Pandora’s box. Everything is coming out. It might be overwhelming, even chaotic. The challenge in doing open-ended (bottom-up) strategic processes is to strike the balance between chaos and total control, to find a balance between involving stakeholders, and at the same time orchestrating the process in such a way that the values and interests expressed by the stakeholders get visible and structured to some degree ending up as the shared values of the organization. In order to strike balance, not only a high degree of stakeholder participation and processual orchestration is needed, it is also necessary to consider how to organize both the participation and the orchestration. Management needs to be visual in a “non controlling way”, putting forward clear supporting structures for dialogue and exchange of opinion, ensuring that chaos does not become the dominant factor.

3. **Reflection and critical dialogue**: The third common feature of the tools included in the RETAIN tool box is the idea of introducing changes through reflection and critical dialogue. In order to organize successful dialogue processes it is important to be conscious of the values or the attitudes that characterize dialogue-processes and the contexts that are favorable for establishing such attitudes.

In the discussions, that took place among the partners in the development phase of the tool box, five values or attitudes emerged as central in our efforts to formulate, what characterize reflective and critical dialogical processes in general. The five values are equality, risk-taking, reversing, modelling and transparency.
In a dialogue there are no privileged positions. All participants are in principle equals. This idea is, for example, fundamental in peer-group-mentoring, which is clearly shown in a dialogue-based mentoring program that has been developed by Finnish organization Osaava Verme and the University of Jyväskylä.\(^1\)

Peer group mentoring represents a shift from classical forms of mentoring, where an experienced mentor guides an unexperienced mentee, to a form of mentoring where the ‘gap’ between the mentor and mentee is closed or minimalized by looking at the mentor and the mentee as equal. Semantically this can be done by dropping the words “mentor” and “mentee” all together, and using the term “peers” for the participants in a mentoring scheme regardless of their roles. The classical forms of mentoring are based on the assumption, that learning is fundamentally a question of transferring knowledge from the experienced to the unexperienced rather than the outcome of situated processes of knowledge construction. The suggestion, that knowledge (perhaps not all kinds of knowledge, but at least certain kinds of socio-ethical knowledge) should be seen as contextually constructed rather than as something fixed and given, transferable and applicable regardless of context, calls for a dialogue-based, open-ended, bottom-up approach to organizing mentoring processes. As shown below (in figure II) both mentor and mentee can be construed as either knowing or not knowing. Doing so, we will end up with four types of mentoring, which can be called “classical mentoring”, “peer-group mentoring” (or similar), “non-mentoring” and “the odd-meeting”. Though the two last forms hardly deserve to be called mentoring at all, the typology can help understand what is special to the newer forms of mentoring (like the peer-group-mentoring). Here mentoring is seen as collaborative processes between equally knowing individuals. The point is not, that mentor and mentee know the same, but that both parties are knowledgeable, and that what ‘I’ know, might also be relevant for ‘you’, and vice-versa, and that together – talking and working together – both parties might come up with suggestions, ideas, solutions (and so on) that are even better that what they could come up with individually.\(^2\) In peer-group mentoring the value of equality (peer-ness) is supported by a set of rules, defining the conditions of the equal participation. Decisions about topics to be discussed should be reached by consent, and the issues addressed in the group are confidential.\(^3\) Such rules define a context of trust and equality, and such contexts are crucial for successful dialogue processes.

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\(^1\) http://ktl.jyu.fi/ktl/osaavaverme/mainenglish

\(^2\) Holst-Hansen: “The Paedeia Café and the urge ‘to aarrhhg’ – An evaluation”.

\(^3\) Heikkinen 2012: 16.
Mentor knows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentee knows</th>
<th>Mentor does not know</th>
<th>Mentor knows</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-mentoring</strong></td>
<td>Knowledge is seen as individually constructed, based on ‘my’ experiences.</td>
<td><strong>PGM (peer-group-mentoring)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘You have to do your own experiences. I (the mentor) can’t tell you, what to do, neither how to do it. Go-bye!’ – ’Sink or swim!’</td>
<td>‘We all do and must do our own experiences; but ‘talking’ about it, can qualify the conclusions, the knowledge, we are constructing.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The ‘odd’ meeting</strong> (between equally unknowing, unprofessional professionals)</td>
<td><strong>Traditional or classical mentoring</strong></td>
<td>Knowledge seen as transferable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Listen to me!’ I can tell you, what to do, how to do it, and why to do it!’</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The second attitude that is crucial for a successful dialogue concerns the willingness of risk-taking. Risk is often seen as something to be ‘managed’, as in the widely used term ‘risk management’. In this line of thought risk is associated with loss, and seen as something to be minimized, controlled even eliminated. Innovation is unlikely to happen through this approach. In another line of thought risk is associated with reward. Risks are seen as something that can be positively and actively explored and used as part of innovation. This approach to risk taking insists on exploring which risks should be taken and which should be avoided or minimalized, rather than only seeing risks as something to be minimized and eliminated.

The first ‘risk management’ approach can be illustrated by a Head of Department, when he/she says: “I feel less confident about (taking risks) now because I need to get results, league tables and the fear that if you try something risky and it doesn’t achieve a great deal. I can't afford to do that.” The other approach can be illustrated by another Head of Department, who, being asked about risk taking, said: “… if I don’t take on new ideas, how can I expect others in my department to do it?” The second approach to risk taking no only insists on exploring which risks should be taken and which should be avoided, it also insists on exploring which contexts are favorable for innovative risk taking. [Exeter] has identified three contexts that seem especially supportive for the willingness to take in new ideas, to try new ways of doing things, in short, contexts that are facilitating the willingness of risk-taking, 1) ‘small groups’, 2) ‘groups where everything is going wrong’ and 3) ‘able groups’. From at social psychological perspective this is hardly surprising, as

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5 Ibid.
evidence shows, that the level of trust and the sense of security are higher in small groups than in larger groups, and that a high degree of failure tend to make people more willing to take risks or try something new [reference]. These findings point to the importance of establishing – or orchestrating – contextual settings that can facilitate the kind of willingness of risk-taking that is crucial for successful dialogue processes.

The third attitude, which is crucial for a successful dialogue concerns the **willingness and ability of reversing**, which basically means the will and ability to see things from another perspective. This idea is fundament in the Danish Inclusion Compass, which is actually designed as a tool explicitly aiming at taking different stakeholders’ perspectives into consideration. That perceptions, understandings and proposed solutions are contextually constructed, is a well-established point, at least, within social-constructivist sociologies. The Inclusion Compass is based on this way of understanding knowledge and on the idea that bringing different perspectives together might contribute to more inclusive solutions than solutions that are based on only a limited range of stakeholder perspectives. The Inclusion Compass suggests that systematically organizing dialogical processes in a way, that includes different and relevant perspectives, is likely to foster exactly the kind of willingness of reversing that is crucial for a successful dialogue.

A fourth attitude, that is somehow similar to the idea of reversing, is the **willingness and ability to do modelling**, that is letting go of ones preconceived ideas and ways of thinking, and imagining, what could be – Instead of just sticking to the old ideas and ways of doing things. Modelling in this sense has similarities with counterfactual thinking. This idea is basic to the tools described in the RETAIN-tool-box by the Belgian partner, who for example suggests using the SWOT-matrix (**strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats**) as a way of systematically discussing the pros and cons of different ways of doing things. Used in this way the SWOT-model becomes a tool that – by a structured comparison of different proposals – might positively contribute to the willingness and ability to realize that the alternative suggestions of others might in fact have “strengths” and that they might in fact have a point.

A fifth attitude, that is crucial for a successful dialogue concerns **transparency**, which in this context concerns the transparency of the issues *that* are being addressed, *why* they are being addressed, *how* they are being addressed, and by *whom*. A successful dialogue requires that those involved have a common understanding of, *what* they are talking about and *why*, *whom* they are talking with, and *how* they are
talking. The value of transparency can be illustrated by the “Soft Guidelines” developed by the Danish National Research Centre for the Working Environment. The Guidelines is a series of recommendations on, how to organize interventions aiming at improving the psychosocial working environment. Distinguishing between “basic conditions”, that are part of the job and cannot be changed (for example fixed time schedules for teachers and drivers), and conditions, that can be changed, the recommendation is, ‘do not try to change what cannot be changed and do not accept what should be changed’. In other words, make it transparent, what is being addressed (that, which can and should be changed), and why something is not being addressed (the basic conditions, which can’t be changed). The idea of transparency is also found in the recommendation, that ‘it is a bad idea to try to change everything at once’ and that priority should be given to a few of the most important factors that should be changed, in other words, make it transparent, what is going to be addressed. The guidelines also suggest transparency regarding how psychosocial problems are solved. Concerning this question the recommendation is, ‘there are no standard solutions to the problems. Solutions should be developed locally by the people at the worksite’. The reason that is given for this, is the fact that “solutions have to take into account the local resources, conditions, and barriers [and that] even two ‘identical’ worksites may have different potentials and barriers.” The guidelines also recommend transparency in regard to responsibility, stating that working with improving the working environment is a joint effort, ‘management as well as supervisors and workers should participate and be committed in the entire process.’ As a reason for this recommendation, it is stated, “a ‘participative approach’ without the commitment of the management will often run into major problems with regard to resources and implementation. A ‘management approach’ without the participation of the employees will often run into problems with lack of support and passive resistance.” Organizing dialogical processes in general, and working environment improvement processes in particular, in a way, that makes them transparent as to what, why, how and who is involved, might help bringing about exactly the kind of transparency, that is necessary for a successful dialogue, or a successful process of improving the work environment.

These five values – equality, risk-taking, reversing, modelling and transparency – can be seen both as preconditions for successful dialogical processes, and as the outcome of organizing such processes of critical dialogue.

7 Ibid.
The tools

The tools included in the tool box all share the management approaches, values and attitudes outlined above, but in other aspects they are different. They differ in regard to specificity (they are more or less specific to a particular issue). They also differ in regard to complexity (the number of dimensions, they are operating with). And, finally, they differ regarding to the range of involvement (the range of participants). The Inclusion Compass is an example of a tool, which is both rather complex as is operates with several dimensions (values, pathways, evaluations), involves a wide range of participants or stakeholders, and can be used to address a wide range of issues and challenges. The Exeter Model is another example of a more complex tool that can be used addressing a wide range of issues and challenge.

These differences (regarding specificity, complexity, and range of involvement) have to be taken into consideration when school management plan their interventions. The degree of complexity, flexibility, has to be assessed against organizational and managerial competences and financial resources being available in the organization.

In order to give an initial idea of what it takes in relation to competences and resource demanding to use the different tools in the tool box, the tools have been rated, based on their usability according to their overall complexity (specificity, complexity, and range of involvement) in relation to the five theme, which have been identified.

The (suggested) usability of each tool in relation to the five themes is rated as ‘very useful’ (XXX), ‘useful but requires adaption’ (XX), and as ‘useful, but not alone and only after adaptation’ (X). (See figure III).

**Figure III: The usability of the tools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools:</th>
<th>Differentiation and inclusion</th>
<th>Co-construction, co-design and collaboration</th>
<th>Collaboration with the external world</th>
<th>Stress management and co-planning</th>
<th>Professional identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>Xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exeter model</td>
<td>Xx</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>Xx</td>
<td>Xx</td>
<td>Xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion Compass</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>Xx</td>
<td><strong>XX</strong></td>
<td><strong>XX</strong></td>
<td>Xx</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to use the tool box

In order to succeed in making a school environment more inclusive and innovative, it is important that school management takes a strategic view on the process. Taking a strategic view could be seen as asking (at least) three kinds of interrelated questions:  

- What are our strategic goals regarding inclusion and innovation as a way of retaining new teachers within the teacher profession?
- What are we going to do (strategic initiatives) in order to increase the inclusiveness and the level of innovation of our organization?
- What are the present organizational capacities and capabilities, and what is in need of being developed?

These three strategic questions might be described as the overall context for using the RETAIN tool box. They can be helpful in clarifying the actual context, and identifying the needs for starting a development process, aiming at developing an inclusive and innovative school environment favorable for retaining new teachers.

On at more operational level using the tool box – or the different tools – involves making decision regarding the following aspects of a development process:

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8 Based on: Klausen, Kurt Klaudi (2014), Strategisk ledelse i det offentlige. Fremskrive, forudse, forstille, Copenhagen, Gyldendal Public, s. 18ff.
- **Indications**: What are issues and challenges we want to address?
- **Aims**: What are the aims of the process, we are initiating? What are we going to achieve?
- **Interventions**: What are the proposed actions? What are we going to do?
- **TOOLS**: What are the more specific tools that we are going to use?
- **Context**: What are contextual constraints and possibilities for doing the proposed actions?
- **Evaluation**: How are we going to assess the outcome of the proposed initiatives?

These questions are interrelated, and although they are here listed in a definite sequence, the main point is not the sequence itself, but rather their interrelatedness. Working with the tool box – and the tools included – implies asking these questions.
Overall aim of toolbox

Aims of themes

Tools

Graphic overview of the toolbox

Inclusion and differentiation:
- inclusive management
- awareness raising practices
- inclusive teaching skills

Internal relations: co-construction, co-design
- professional learning community

External relations: Collaboration with the external world
- inclusive management
- innovation management

Stress management and co-planning
- healthy work environment and psychosocial well-being

Professional identity
- development of professional identity

Inclusion and differentiation:
- inclusive management
- awareness raising practices
- inclusive teaching skills

Internal relations: co-construction, co-design
- professional learning community

External relations: Collaboration with the external world
- inclusive management
- innovation management

Stress management and co-planning
- healthy work environment and psychosocial well-being

Professional identity
- development of professional identity

Inclusion Compass

Inclusive teaching

The Exeter model

Inclusion compass

Interventions (primary and secondary)

Personal resources: emotional intelligence

Personal resources: Self-belief

Situating oneself on a continuum

The good teacher game

My strengths and weaknesses

Source: Sandrine Biemar

Cards by Motus or jeux cadre de Tiagi

SWAT
Appendix 1: The five themes (issues and challenges):

- **Differentiation and inclusion**
  Novice teachers in all five countries talk about inclusion as fundamental for a good teaching environment. The issue of inclusion is closely intertwined with the issue of differentiation. Although the word differentiation is not used very often in the five national summaries, there are many references and statements indicating that differentiation is indeed a major challenge. One of the more specific issues mentioned in relation to inclusion and differentiation is the difficulties of class management and discipline. If there is no inclusive environment, problems with many different pupils arise, and it will be difficult to teach, and differentiation will challenge even more. Therefore it will be even more difficult to perform as novice teachers and feeling successful in the job as a teacher. Teachers stated that the shift from more teacher-led methods of teaching to a more student-centred approach, focusing on discovery, constructivist or problem solving and cooperative learning, makes an inclusive learning environment a must.

- **Co-construction, co-design and collaboration**
  The main issue within this theme is good social and working relationships – with students, colleagues and management. The working relationship (collaboration) is crucial for a positive experience of being a teacher. Conflicts with colleagues, other partners and with the school management and a lack of communication can in some cases have a very negative influence on ... . Many teachers say, they do not get enough recognition by the management teams, and this discourages them to continue in their profession or to continue with the same energy. The importance of having feedback from colleges and the management (classroom visits) and regular meetings with colleagues teaching the same subject is essential.

- **Collaboration with the external world**
A major challenge that many teachers are confronted with in schools is related to parental pressure. Teachers are overwhelmed and feel under pressure by overly demanding parents having unrealistic expectations of their children. Another issue is being obliged to play other roles than being a teacher, such as parent, psychologist, social worker in facing the children and their parents. More and more families hand over more responsibilities to the schools. Children are not educated at home to acquire the basic social skills.

- **Stress management and co-planning**

  One of the main difficulties within this theme is stress and how to cope with it. The increased number of responsibilities which teachers are experiencing, are often felt as stressing. Today there is an increasing list of new demands, new technologies, tests, curriculum goals and bureaucracy. Workload is mentioned as one of the reasons for developing stress and for teachers dropping out of the profession. Conflicts with other colleagues or with the management team, a growing sense of competition and an experienced lack of respect from the pupils can also increase the level of stress.

- **Professional identity**

  Finding the professional identity of being a teacher is a challenge that is described in many ways, for example as finding one’s own way of being a teacher and being able to deviate from plans and coping with the unexpected and as being involved and jet keeping a professional distance. Some novice teachers talked about a feeling of lack or loss of confidence due to an overwhelming demand of performing and an ever changing school environment. Confidence is not just an issue with novice teachers but increasingly also for more experienced teachers, both may lose confidence in their professional identity in an increasingly result oriented and change dominated school environment.