

iQerel – Evaluating what really matters in school

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Background

- An increased interest in and demand for school evaluation (OECD, 2013).
- School evaluation raises issues of accountability, performance assessment, regulation and inspection.
- School evaluation is linked to ideologies of neo-liberalism, managerialism and economic competitiveness (McNamara & O'Hara, 2008, Møller, 2009).
- A twin purpose? Giving the authorities and the general public comparable information about curricular processes and educational results, and providing a base for local decision-making and a platform for teacher professional development and school improvement (Skedsmo, 2011).

Evaluation data and facts are specific results that allow for particular pictures of the world to be produced, “creating a politically relevant abbreviation of reality” (Dahler-Larsen, 2015, p. 327)

Are we “measuring what we value or (...) measuring what we can easily measure and thus ending up valuing what we can measure.” (Biesta, 2009, p. 2)

Aims of this session:

- to discuss rationale behind the development of the Erasmus+ funded project **iQerel**
- to exhibit key elements of the **iQerel** website (**Online resource?**)
- to discuss feedback on the website from master students on leadership programmes
- to discuss potentials and ways forward

iQEREL

International Quality Evaluation Resource for Education Leaders

Five European universities working together on an
Erasmus+ funded project



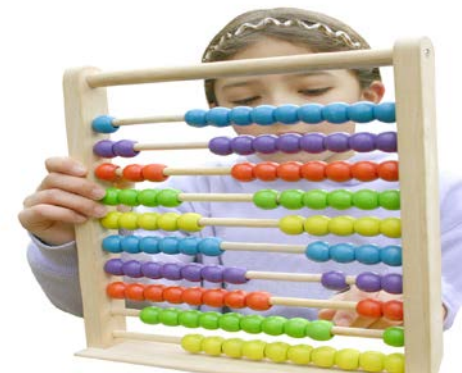
A collaboration worth continuing...

The participating **universities** have a history of successful collaboration including the six successive **Erasmus Intensive Programmes** for school leaders.

- In all five countries, school improvement is a priority, and there are expectations that improvement build on evidence about “what is known”.
- The five countries share a context of **balancing** the importance of school autonomy and accountability.
- Each **project** partner has extensive experience of working with school leaders and schools around an improvement agenda.
- Our previous collaboration assures that we have wide opportunities to disseminate the resource and learning to school leaders on our HE programmes. We also have consultative roles and relationships with schools, school alliances and local authorities and contribute to national initiatives for high quality school development.
- As organisations we have experience of using student voice to evaluate and develop current programmes and this experience **has supported the development of resources** that **may be** accessible and relevant to users.

The rationale

- Governing bodies, local education authorities and headteachers and teachers have access to more data about their institutions than ever before. However, there is also the danger that what matters in schools becomes that which can be counted; that is, in the knowledge economy performance indicators can become detached from the overall purpose of education (Ozga et al., 2011).
- Thus, there is a need to critically examine the models on which the measurement of schools' performance is based; to clarify further trends and directions in international and national governing policies; and to engage practitioners to develop capacity for management of data and translating and amending it in processes of knowledge construction at local levels (Grek & Ozga, 2010).



School leaders in the crossfire – managerial demands and professional responsibility

Evaluation is not “good” or “bad”. However, all forms of evaluation can be questioned.

Being **responsible** means taking on the task of questioning evaluation regimes and evaluation purposes – it is about “attending to multiple qualities in education and other practices; paving the way for evaluations with less anxiety and fear; and sometimes creating spaces for that which cannot be evaluated. (...) It also means making sure that the evaluative practices are not carved in institutional stone and not infused with more power than necessary. It also means asking simple political questions to evaluation:

Why this focus? Who benefits? How well does an evaluation help solve democratic problems as they manifest themselves concretely in a particular situation?” (Dahler-Larsen, 2015, p. 332)

iQerel has given us an opportunity to develop:

- A **values-based** approach to quality assurance and school improvement
- A step enroute to developing a consensus on ‘world class school leadership’ – a dynamic approach that recognises and challenges current practice and priorities and culture in the participating countries
- A virtual learning environment to support the learning and school improvement agenda for school leaders in five European countries and eventually beyond.
- A resource for school leaders and HEIs in their Masters and other types of programmes that also includes and signposts resources to support identified areas for development/improvement
- A **stepping stone to establishing a** network for European school leaders



- In the project, we critically examine how school performance is measured. We suggest that data can sometimes conjure an inauthentic picture of our practice and perpetuating this inauthenticity challenges our professionalism and makes it difficult to engage critically with the manifold discourse and steer a discursive path (Barnett, 2001, p. 201).
- Such alienation from an authentic engagement with evaluation of practice may have serious consequences for teacher professionalism; uncontentious technologies of hierarchical observation, judgement normalised to an inspector's eye view can become the everyday conditions which mould teachers' and school leaders' professional identities (Hall & Noyes, 2009:855).



- Current evaluation, particularly external evaluation, can create a situation where teachers are ‘methodologically adrift’ (Hall & Noyes, 2009) unsure of where and how they should be measuring quality and often ceding, with relief, responsibility for this to external evaluation agencies, or else uncritically using measures from external evaluation systems to support their own practice. These quality assurance activities can create new representations of the truth about schools.



- Such representations, or ‘fabrications’ as Ball (2001) calls them, are not ‘outside the truth’ – but are created to enable the school to be accountable and to be effective in inspections (Ball, 2003) but the result of the focus on what can be measured (usually attainment) is the danger that what matters in schools becomes that which can be counted; i.e. performance indicators can become detached from the overall purpose of education (Ozga et al., 2011).



However, in many cases, as e.g. in England, the exercise in self-evaluation serves as a preparation for external evaluation (and has the same accountability prerogatives), and there is neither the time nor compulsion to extend the self-evaluation remit beyond the expectations of an external accountability agenda, into ‘what really matters’. As suggested by McNamara and O’Hara (2008:178), ‘a great deal of work needs to be done’.

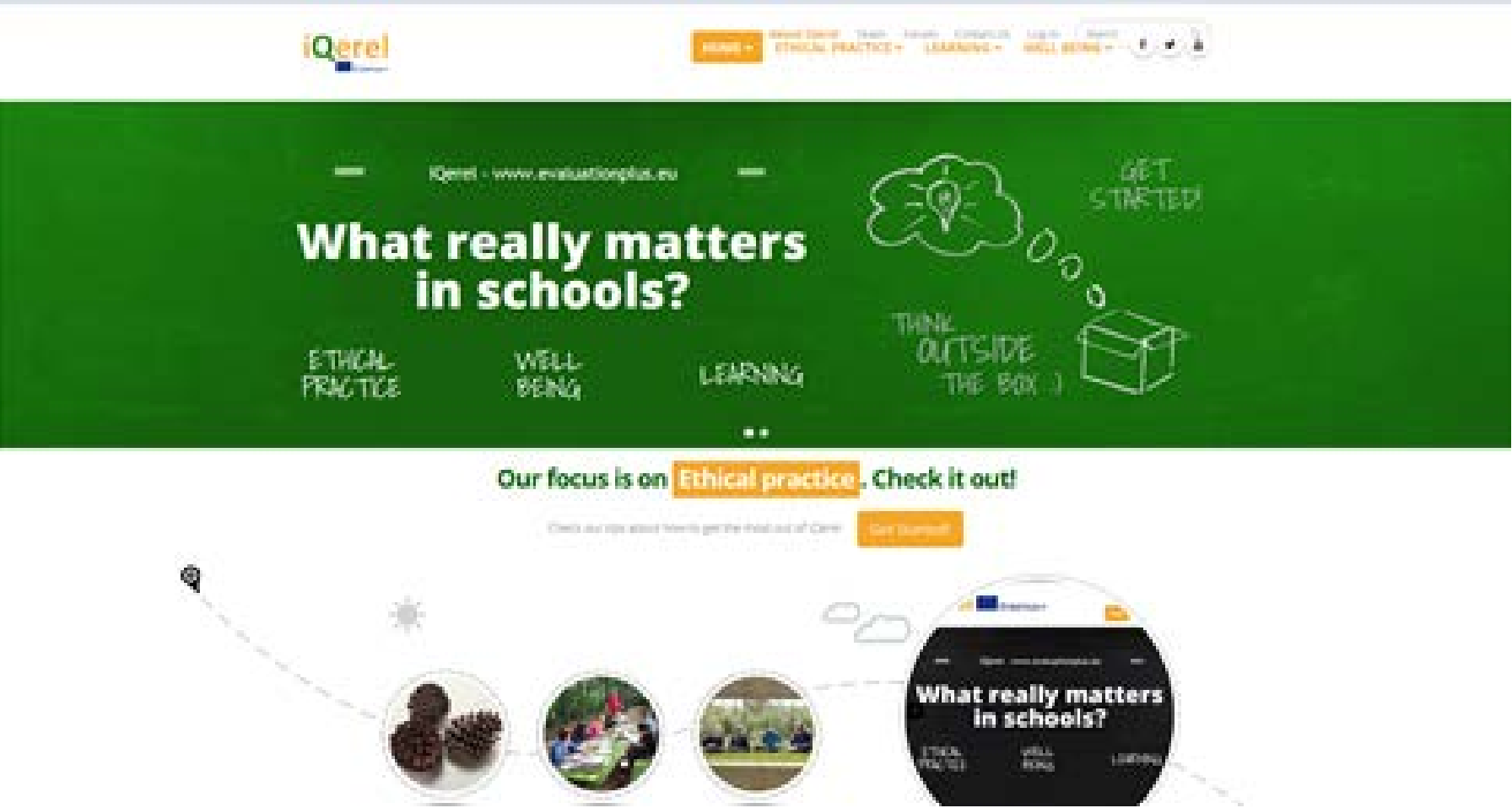


For example,

- Seeing what we want to see; biased and subjective
- Evaluating peripheral and safe areas; narrow perspectives on quality
- Lack of standards
- Lack of credibility
- Lack of evaluation skills locally
- Lack of time; waste of time

“When it comes to the actual effects of school self-evaluation on the quality of the education provided in a school and learning outcomes, our understanding is just as limited as for understanding the effects of school inspections” (Van der Bij et al., 2016, p. 45)

The website



The process of website development

- Student feedback to support development a key aspect of previous collaborations
- Developing the website, including identifying key themes, with the help of Masters students and school leaders.
- Trialling the website with Masters students.
- Key findings from the feedback and plans for the future of **iQerel**