

## FOREWORD

The ICSEI 2007 conference theme »**Professional challenges for School Effectiveness and Improvement in the Era of Accountability**« attracted over 300 participants, both researchers and practitioners from almost 50 countries, including 80 professionals working in schools, public institutions, ministries and universities in Slovenia. The ICSEI is a professional association of researchers and theorists from more than fifty countries who share the idea that effectiveness and improvement in education are essential for enhancing the future possibilities and access to education for all children.

Annual ICSEI congresses provide special opportunities to exchange experience, learn from colleagues from other countries, critically review presumptions, establish new relations and discuss the current issues of effectiveness and improvement in education.

For conference in Slovenia we invited the participants to reflect on the effects of the approaches to professionalism, autonomy and accountability in various countries on the attempts to improve education and provide better effectiveness for all learners.

External assessment of knowledge, the implementation of quality indicators, and other initiatives emerging in numerous countries in the world have strongly affected the issues of accountability, autonomy and professionalism. The interrelatedness of these three themes provided an excellent starting point for the exchange of experience and evoked a rich international discourse.

The most topical contributions concentrated on the interrelatedness between external quality control and external testing on one hand, and professional accountability and school improvement on the other. The majority of the participants shared a view that at present the schools, teachers and school leaders cannot avoid evaluation and school-level approaches to quality. If they don't do it, external agents will do it for them. Of course no simple cure was found and there has always been more than one answer to complex questions and dilemmas, but the participants reached the conclusion that both external control and professional accountability matter, and that both depend on the school, its environment, context and many other factors.

For one year, during the preparation phase and the congress itself, the National School for Leadership in Education has been in the hub of world action on continuous improvement and effectiveness in education. By e-mail contacts and by face-to-face communication in Portorož, invisible bonds have united all of us and our activities for school improvement all over the world. It is important that among the participants there were top scholars from universities and practitioners from over 50 countries.

We hope that the participants returned home with new ideas and strategies, and with newly established professional bonds.

To add a new perspective on the ICSEI 2007 we decided to publish this e-proceedings – I hope that keynote texts and the papers presented by the participants will be useful reading for participants, ICSEI members and others.

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