Centre for Educational Research and Innovation

Strategic Education Governance Learning Seminars

Design

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This document reflects current development of the Strategic Education Governance (SEG) Learning Seminars. It replaces earlier versions.

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Overview

The Strategic Education Governance (SEG) Learning Seminars are small-scale gatherings of countries specifically designed as an engaging learning environment. The seminars are part of and build upon the OECD work on complexity in education governance. SEG Learning Seminars apply OECD’s insights on strategic education governance to specific policy challenges. Countries/systems draw lessons for governance practice by contrasting and comparing their governance approaches and the challenges they face.

Learning Seminars bring together a small number of countries/systems where participants learn about effective or innovative governance policy practice in other countries and context-specific obstacles and enablers, and identify governance options and possible trajectories (next practice) for future action. These seminars generate new knowledge of the actual “how to” of policy implementation and make tacit knowledge explicit, by investigating design and implications of implementation strategies.

They are designed to create an engaging learning environment inspired by both case methodology and policy design. The seminars are deliberately interactive, with participants actively engaging in discussion and explicit reflection. They comprise a small group of actors, involving key stakeholders from the host system.

Figure 1. The cornerstones of the SEG Learning Seminars

- **Real-life policy experiences**
  - Engaging learning environment inspired both case methodology and policy design approaches
  - Revisiting real-life policy experiences with the help of stakeholders involved
  - Seminars capitalise on the complexity perspective on governance and other SEG work
  - Duration of 1.5 – 2 days

- **Interactive peer learning**
  - Highly interactive approaches, with participants actively engaging in discussions and reflection
  - Each seminar has an explicit phase translating peer-system experiences to host-country context
  - Participants from ministry/agency and stakeholders

- **Generating knowledge**
  - Learning Seminars generate new knowledge of the “how to” of policy implementation and make tacit knowledge explicit
  - The OECD prepares a short report on the main findings and observations

- **Close collaboration with countries/systems**
  - The theme is decided collaboratively by the host country and the OECD
  - The host-country and the OECD decide on peer systems with which to learn in the Seminar
  - The OECD prepares a background paper as a basis for each seminar in close collaboration with the host country
1. Rationale

The six domains accountability, capacity, knowledge governance, stakeholder involvement, strategic thinking, and whole-of-system perspective provide the conceptual basis for the OECD work on Strategic Education Governance (Annex A). However, translating them into national, regional and local contexts and for particular policies is not always obvious and calls for differentiation and contextualisation.

The SEG Learning Seminars support countries to learn from each other on how to realise those elements in the everyday governance of specific policies, such as reducing school dropout or improving the achievement of disadvantaged children. The SEG Learning Seminars create a space where country representatives can learn from exchanging and studying real life cases.

2. Aims

The aims of the SEG Learning Seminars are to make the insights on strategic education governance actionable and to inspire systems to draw lessons for governance practice by contrasting and comparing their approaches and the challenges they face. This will provide critical feedback on their own systems, strengthen their self-reflection on the role of government in complex systems, and expand their repertoire to act effectively in various forms of governance.

Both for participating countries and for countries in general, the seminars will produce ‘new’ knowledge about implementation and realisation issues, or make tacit knowledge explicit, by deepening insight to the design and implications of implementation strategies.

In particular, the seminars aim to:

- gain a deeper understanding of the issues at stake and the range of governance options available across countries;
- learn about effective and/or innovative governance policy practice in other countries and context-specific obstacles and enablers, and develop consequently ‘decisional capital’ of participants;
- identify governance options and possible trajectories (next practice) for future action; and
- generate knowledge of the actual ‘how-to’ of implementation and realisation of policies.

3. Design

To create an engaging learning environment, methods focus on enactment and translation. A first phase focuses on the direct reconstruction of policy experiences, ideally with the help of stakeholders involved in the policy process. A second phase is dedicated to explicitly translating peer country experiences to the host-country context. In casework sessions, participants illustrate experiences and apply governance concepts. The approach is highly interactive, with participants actively engaging in discussion and explicit reflection. A learning seminar takes 1.5 – 2 days.
4. Participants

Ideally, a group of around four countries participates in a given seminar. Each country can delegate two or three participants. The number of participating countries as well as the size of delegations may be increased based on discussions with the host country. Participants may come from different layers of the education system; it is up to the country to decide upon the delegation.

One of the participating countries hosts the seminar. This host country provides facilities and offers the main case to be discussed. Jointly decided by the SEG team and the host country, invitations are extended to comparable systems; there will be room to invite an ‘outlier’ to insert radically different perspectives and sharpening the discussion. The main case will be presented by the most involved policy makers and external stakeholders from the host country.

Optionally, one to two experts can be invited to strengthen reflection and translation. The SEG team provides theoretical and empirical insights from ongoing work on strategic governance as well as previous work on governing complex education systems\(^1\). An experienced facilitator guides the seminar.

5. Preparation

Seminars are designed in close collaboration with the host country, taking into account considerations of the participating countries. For each seminar, both a governance topic will be selected (for example participatory governance or accountability) as well as a particular policy initiative (for example introducing a new curriculum or attracting and retaining high quality teachers) as illustration of the governance issue. Cases might either be retrospective or prospective.

For each seminar, the SEG-team and the host country will draft jointly a background paper. Optionally, a short country questionnaire collects learning needs of the participants.

6. Carrying out a seminar

Seminars will take 1.5 – 2 days and revolve around two phases. The seminar starts its first phase with an introduction of the governance topic at hand, followed by the reconstruction (for retrospective cases) or elaboration (for prospective cases) of the main policy case by the host country. The reconstruction (or elaboration, respectively) involves policy makers, stakeholders and potentially experts to get a comprehensive view on the case and to learn about the involvement and interests of various stakeholders. Ideally, the case presentation includes evaluation results or exploratory research, or draws from research on governance in general. A site visit could also be part of the reconstruction (elaboration) phase.

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\(^1\) Work on governing complex education systems (GCES) was carried out between 2011 and 2016. The GCES project aimed to help countries develop and realize policies to meet modern education governance challenges (OECD, 2016\(^2\)). Two volumes synthesize the conceptual and empirical work undertaken (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016\(^3\); Burns and Köster, 2016\(^4\)) and provide the basis for ongoing work on strategic education governance.
The second phase focuses on country experiences, analysing which arrangements and instruments worked and which ones did not work, and under what conditions practices are transferable to other countries. Interactive sessions collect common governance challenges and promising governance practices across the cases. Inspired by the methods of (policy) design thinking, the second phase session aims at generating recommendations and options for governance.

7. Follow-up

The discussions and outcomes of the seminar will be included in a short final report (5-10 pages) prepared by the SEG team in consultation with the host country. Publication of this report is decided upon in consultation with the participating countries.

Key lessons of all corresponding seminars will be included in a publicly available synthesis report at the end of a given biennium.

8. Costs

Costs are to be discussed with respective host countries.

References


Annex A. The SEG project and its Organisational Framework

Governing education systems is complex. Today, governance processes involve a substantial number of stakeholders inside and outside the government administration, interacting with each other in many different ways. They do so across often several levels of governance and with different short- and long-term goals. Relationships among these stakeholders are increasingly dynamic and interconnected. Against this background, a central question for governance is how systems can provide high quality educational opportunities for all in this challenging environment.

Strategic Education Governance (SEG) addresses the need to develop flexible and adaptive governance processes for more effective and lasting reform in today’s complex education systems. It aims to help countries develop smarter governance arrangements, sensitive to context and capable of delivering improvement by building upon robust knowledge systems, stakeholder capacity and involvement, and constructive accountability.

Figure A A.1. SEG Organisational Framework

Complexity theory helps to make sense of the functioning of systems in education governance. The complexity paradigm conceptualises systems as being defined by the relationships between their constituent elements. As such, systems exhibit characteristics that emerge from their components interacting dynamically with each other, in turn leading
to emergent properties of systems that cannot be anticipated by analysing the system’s elements in isolation. Related concepts pertain to self-reinforcing dynamics, tipping points and inertia that needs to be overcome to engender lasting change.

The study of complex systems requires a step back to examine how the various interconnections form a coherent whole, in what way existing processes facilitate or hinder this coherence, and how best to develop new forms of governance that take this complexity into account. This forms the foundations of strategic education governance and informs the analytical approaches applied in SEG work.

The Organisational Framework (Figure A A.1) structures the SEG work into six interdependent domains. The framework brings together the analytical lens of the complexity paradigm – systems are interconnected, exhibiting properties not possible to anticipate from their constituent parts – with practical considerations to maximise the ability to guide improvement efforts.