

Focus Group Moderator's Guide
Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in SEE
Parents' and pupils' participation
January 2008

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

Purpose: The moderator greets the participants and explains the objectives of FGD. Setting the rules. Participants meet each other. Everyone says something, contributing to social facilitation.

- Moderator's introduction and ground rules.

Hello, my name is _____, and I am the moderator for this discussion. My job is to move the conversation along and make sure that we cover several different subjects and to ensure that everyone here gets to participate. The purpose of this session is to find out what school principals across the country think about a number of important issues. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. The purpose is to find out what your personal opinions are, and everyone's opinion is equally important to us.

I am glad that you are taking time out of your day to talk with me today about a range of important school-related issues – some of the topics that you encounter during your daily work as a school principal. We will be covering several topics, and I encourage you to speak freely.

Respect for opinions. In fact, you may find that you disagree with an opinion voiced here by another person. That is OK, and I hope you will say so when that happens in a respectful and polite way. You also may change your mind in the middle of our discussion, perhaps as a result of something that someone else says, and again I hope you will say so, if and when that happens.

Important rule: one person speaking at one time. Because we want to respect everyone and make sure that everyone is heard, we have one basic rule in this session – we will allow only one person to speak at a time. We want to have an organized session, and in order to do this, I ask that you respect the person who is speaking, and wait for him/her to finish his/her thoughts.

Confidential/anonymous research. This discussion is completely anonymous and confidential. There will be no record of what you say with your name on it. We are not going to quote anyone specifically using her/his name. We are using alias names, and no one will ever connect your real name to your statements. You were all randomly selected to participate in this session, and we appreciate that you have taken time out of your lives to come today. I have this small tape recorder, like a journalist, so that I can be sure that I capture your words accurately, but no one will know which person says any specific statement. We

are using a tape recorder because your opinions are very important to us, and we need to know what you said. This way, I do not have to take notes while we talk and I can concentrate on you and on our discussion.

Transparency. Also, I have a couple of colleagues, in another room, who are watching us with this video camera. This is part of the academic method for this kind of session. The purpose of this is simply so that they can make sure that I do not forget to ask you some questions; if I do, they may send a message in here to remind me of something, or to suggest that I explore something more fully that I may skip over too quickly. Please just ignore the tape recorder (and the video camera).

- **Sponsorship.** The Education Support Program (ESP) is an organization that works in different transitional countries to improve the education process and works to facilitate change in education and national policy development. This discussion will be used to help bridge the gap between existing policies and their implementation. Our intention is to understand the concerns of school principals in our country so that their opinions can be taken into account when planning new programs, policies and activities.
- You are here to represent other people who are not in the room - share your views
- Speak up, your opinion is important to us
- Also here are observers who are going to help us prepare the analysis
- Everyone comfortable – we understand this is unusual, but think you will find it interesting
- **Participant introductions.** Let's go around the room - tell us something about yourself - first name only, what school do you work in, for how many years. Just say one thing about yourself, like where you were born, or how many children you have. Just so we know enough about each other to have a good conversation.

➤ *[MODERATOR SHOULD BEGIN, WITH A VERY BRIEF REFERENCE TO OWN PROFESSION AND FAMILY]*

An important note for the moderators: what follows is a list of questions on some important topics that will be covered in the ensuing quantitative survey. The list is divided in 5 different sections. Each section contains more questions than you could probably ask during the 1.5 – 2 hours (the reasonable maximum length of FGD). However, keep in mind that we do not expect each participant to provide an answer to each question. The purpose of the guide is to instigate the discussion; it is helping the moderator to keep participants to stay within the topic. As long as participants are discussing the topic they are providing us with useful information. On the other hand, always keep the list of questions in front of you. It may become very handy when discussion loses momentum. One or two questions from the list may rekindle it anew. Please note that it is very important to stay within the time limits anticipated for each section.

II. General Mood (10 - 15 minutes)

Purpose: Expression of personal views that will help funnel to subsequent topics. Please note that the participants are still unaware of the main topic of FGD (parents'/pupils' participation). Give them a chance to spontaneously mention parents'/pupils' participation.

1. How do you feel about the way things are going in the schools these days? What are your reasons for feeling this way? Who or what is responsible for that?
2. What has changed for the better for your school in the last few years? Who or what is responsible for that?
3. What has changed for the worse for your school in the last few years? Who or what is responsible for that?
4. What are the main problems your school is facing today?
5. What is currently the most pressing problem for the school?
6. What has been done about it?
7. Who is going to solve this problem?
8. Will other parties be involved, as well?

III. Reforms of education (10 – 15 minutes)

Purpose: Narrowing down on participants' opinions about redefining the role of the school in transitional societies. Again, give them a chance to spontaneously mention parents'/pupils' participation.

1. How about reforms of education in our country?
2. What is their main idea, purpose?
3. Who is the most interested party in the reforms? Why?
4. Who is reforms' most ardent advocate? Why?
5. Who is its most vocal opponent? Why?
6. Who should benefit most from the reforms? Who else?
7. What is your role in implementing reforms?

8. Who is helping you and who is making it harder for you? Why?
9. What is the future of education reforms in our country?
10. What are the main obstacles, problems for the reforms?
11. How do you feel about the reforms? What are their key advantages/disadvantages for your school?

IV. Participation, general (30 minutes)

Purpose: The main body of the interview. The first question is mandatory. Principals' role and understanding of participation: how do they feel about it? Are school principals the part of the problem or the part of the solution? Please, insist to obtain examples of participatory behaviors, they are the best evidence about presence, spread, appreciation and approval/disapproval of participation.

1. Who besides you is involved in making relevant decisions for the school?
2. Under what conditions and in what phases do you normally seek to share decision making with others?
3. What is teachers' role in the decision making groups? What is their current role in making relevant decisions for the school?
4. How is community involved in decision making?
5. How about parents, pupils? What is their current role in making relevant decisions for the school?
6. Can you give me some examples of parents/pupils participation?
7. Was it successful? Why was it successful or why it was not successful?
8. Could you please think of some other examples?
9. Do parents/pupils like to participate in making relevant decisions?
10. What was parents/pupils chief motivation for participation or no participation?
11. What did you learn from this experience?
12. How would you do it the next time?
13. Could you think of some other potential areas of parents/pupils participation?
14. Were there any formal programs/initiatives/activities/policies aimed at enhancing parents/pupils participation in your school?
15. In your opinion, how could parents/pupils do better to help the school?
16. What is your role in parents'/pupils' participation? How do you facilitate the decision making process?
17. Does parents'/pupils' participation energize the school?
18. What are the chief advantages and disadvantages of parents/pupils participation?
19. How do you feel about parents'/students' participation in general?

V. Parents' participation (45 minutes)

Purpose: The main body of the interview, continued. Concentrate on principals' view of parents' readiness and motivation to participate. What are the rational and emotional benefits/obstacles to parents' participation? Again, insist to obtain examples of parents' participatory behaviors. Special emphasis on minorities/disabled participation.

1. What is the history of parent participation in your school?
2. Were some of the projects/initiatives/decisions/policies initiated by the parents? Please give examples.
3. Who, if anybody, provided guidance for their activities?
4. Did parents participate in projects/initiatives/decisions/policies that were initiated by somebody else (pupils, teachers, community, yourself)?
5. If so, did parents understand the intentions of the project?
6. Did they know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why?
7. What are the projects that will be most conducive for parents' participation?
8. What are the projects most conducive for demonstrating parents' competence and strengthening their self esteem?
9. Who are the parents that will be most interested in participation? Why?
10. Who are the parents that will be least interested in participation? Why?
11. Is parents' participation hindered by their lower SES, inadequate education, or some minority issues?
12. What are the main obstacles for parents' participation?
13. What are main benefits of parents' participation? Please give examples of direct benefits for the pupils and for the school.
14. Were there any formal initiatives from the ministry and/or the like to boost parents' participation?
15. Are parents of disabled children more or less likely to participate? Why? Please give some examples.
16. How about minorities? Why? Please give some examples.
17. What are the key obstacles to more participation of parents of disabled/minority children? Why? Please give examples.
18. Do you need some extra resources in order to boost parents' participation?
19. Is parents' participation limited to election of representatives who sit on school councils, serving only in advisory or consulting capacity?
20. Is parents' participation in any way threatening the existing system? Are you concerned that it may get out of control?
21. How do you feel about parents' participation?

22. Is there anything else that you would like to add/emphasize? Have we skipped something important? How would you explain to somebody who was not present, what have we talked about during the last 2 hours?

Thank you very much for your contribution!

