Using our 'EFFeCT Criteria' for the analysis of evidence to support and challenge practice and outcomes

Title of the project selected.

Limerick DEIS Primary Schools Literacy Initiative

Brief Overview

Limerick DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Primary Schools Literacy Initiative focuses on continued professional development of teachers to support best practice in oral language and literacy instruction and the application of advanced approaches in this area at whole school level. This is a city-wide initiative involving all DEIS Primary Schools (15) in the city. The initiative emerged from a partnership approach involving the Department of Education and Skills (Limerick Office), Mary Immaculate College, and Limerick Education Centre.

The initiative builds on an established and evolving programme in DEIS schools in some of the most economically and socially deprived areas of Limerick City. It followed on from DES policy, supported by the local DES offices in the city, to retain teaching resources in primary schools in the most disadvantaged areas of the city.

The Initiative fits with the national strategy to improve literacy (and numeracy) standards amongst children and young people in schools. Approaches which promote improved instruction in oral language development, supported under the DEIS Literacy Initiative, feed into reforms in the national curriculum in this area and the role of the National Council on Curriculum Development (NCCA). Leadership development in schools, improved assessment and monitoring of progress with language and literacy are also important priorities at national level in education policy. Application on a whole school basis (across the school) is promoted under the

initiative.

Social Context for this project

This project, which brought into partnership a number of government agencies, one higher education institute, and 15 urban, designated disadvantaged schools, was developed within a specific culture and context in Limerick.

In October 2006, former Dublin City Manager John Fitzgerald was tasked by Government with leading efforts to address issues of social exclusion, crime and disorder within specific areas in Limerick city. This intervention arose in response to an incident in September 2006 in which two children were seriously injured in a petrol bomb attack. This incident was a 'tipping point' and brought national attention to the problems that had arisen in Limerick, giving impetus to a government response. In a review of the social problems within Limerick at that time it was identified that 8,000 of the approximately 18,900 houses within Limerick city boundary in 2006 were constructed as social housing (Fitzgerald 2007, p.4). The Government intervention project, titled the Limerick Regeneration Masterplans (2008) identified three pillars – economic, social and physical regeneration. While physical regernation plans (i.e. the demolition of old housing estates and the construction of new homes) was relatively easy and highly visible, longer term issues relating to socio-economic the and educational disadvantage experienced in such communities, was a longer term and more challenging project.

In the absence of base-line data, a study of the nature of childhood and the lives of children within the most disadvantaged areas of Limerick city, was commissioned. This report, *How are our Kids?,* documented the levels of deprivation experienced by Limerick city families. Based on the Index of Relative Affluence / Deprivation 2006, over 50 per cent of the city's Electoral Districts (EDs) are classified as 'disadvantaged' to 'extremely disadvantaged' with over 18 per cent in the worst category of 'extremely disadvantaged'compared with only one per cent in the latter category at national level. Just over 30 per cent of EDs in Limerick are in the middle or average range of "marginally above" or "marginally below" average, compared with almost 75 per cent of EDs at national level. At the other end of the spectrum, 19 per cent of EDs are classified as "affluent" or "very affluent" which is above the national level of 13 per cent in these categories. This distribution is indicative of greater inequality in the spatial distribution of affluence / poverty in Limerick City compared with the wider national context (*How are our Kids*, p.38).
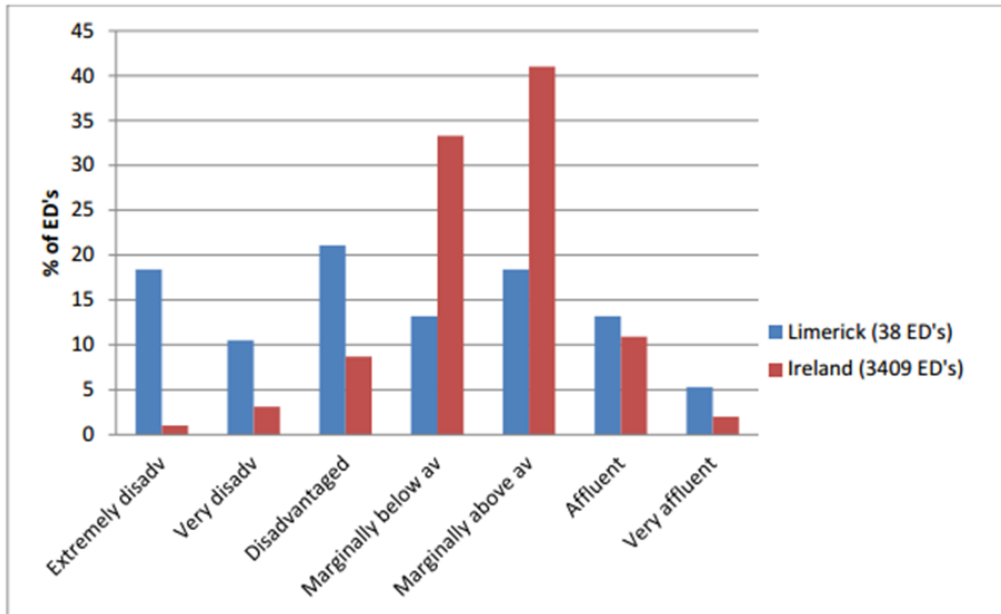
Figure 1: Relative Deprivation index. Classification of Electoral Districts in Limerick and Ireland (Reprinted from *How Are Our Kids?* p.38)

This survey found that in terms of child health, 30% of children within the 'regeneration areas' were diagnosed with physical health problems and 14% had mental health problems (*How are our Kids*, 2012, p.222). In terms of learning difficulties, behavioural problems and mental health problems, children in regeneration areas are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD. Based on screening for child difficulties, higher than average proportions of children reviewed are assessed as being in the abnormal ranges on individual problem scales (emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity / inattention problems and peer problems) and on the total difficulties scale. These problems are severe in the regeneration areas, and the proportion of children in the abnormal ranges on problem scales for all of the areas in the study are well above the averages based on norms in a reference population of American children (4-17 years) (*How are our Kids*, 2012, p.223).

One further indicator of the levels of difficulties experienced by communities within Limerick is reflected in the recent *National Registry of Deliberate Self-Harm in Ireland* (2014). This identifies Limerick as having the highest rates of self-harm in the country: the male rate varied from 93 per 100,000 for Roscommon to 406 per 100,000 for Limerick City. The lowest female rate was recorded for counties Sligo and Offaly (130 per 100,000) with the highest rates recorded for Limerick City residents at 570 per 100,000 (2014, p.6).

Family feuds, firearm offences and intimidation are also a feature of the ecology of communities within the regeneration areas, and the growing criminality of Limerick city has been documented elsewhere.

Within this social context, schools are providing a central role in creating safe and stable environments for children and young people.

The Project Partners:

Department of Education and Skills (DES)
As part of the response of the Government to Limerick regeneration, specific resources were made available to Limerick. The DES Limerick Office was retained by government due to the profile of social and educational disadvantage in Limerick City and the regeneration programme, while other local DES offices in various parts of the state were closed in recent years. In particular four ex-quota teachers were provided to support literacy development within the DEIS primary level schools in the city.
A senior DES inspector and Assistant Principal Officer for Social Inclusion from the Limerick Office of the DES were members of the Steering Committee of this Literacy Initiative.

Mary Immaculate College
Since 1998 the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project, located at Mary Immaculate College, has been involved in the promotion of equity of educational outcomes through a strategic and inter-related web of activities.
Specifically, throughout the Regeneration process TED has been working to promote educational attainment and access in the following ways:

- The management and facilitation of DEIS school networks. Network activities include facilitation, administrative support, delivery of workshops, CPD activities for school staff, advocacy, training and research.
- TED has been an actively working with the DES and DEIS schools in the roll out of the initiative 'Maximising the use of school premises and facilities', an initiative informed by the Fitzgerald report and funded (1.7 million euro) by Dormant Accounts.
- TED was a research partner in the *How Are Our Kids? Experiences and Needs of Children and Families in Limerick City with a Particular Emphasis on Limerick's Regeneration Areas* (2012). TED is a member of the Limerick city Children's Services Committee.

The Dean of Education, Associate Vice President Academic Affairs, and two lecturers in Literacy Education are members of the Steering Committee of this project. MIC has committed significant professional support to this project and has provided extensive academic leadership for it.

Limerick Education Centre:

Limerick Education Centre (LEC) is one of a national network of 21 full-time Education Centres. The centre has been operating since the 1970s and has grown in strength and function since those earlier days. The mission of LEC is:

- To provide a meeting place for the dissemination of knowledge and information to all teachers, especially by the organisation of courses, seminars, conferences, lectures, debates, symposia and all other means subject to the approval of the committee.

- To encourage fruitful links with and between the different levels of education.

- To act as a resource centre which would enable teachers to prepare and construct equipment and materials for use in their own schools and in addition to facilitate the display of teachers' and pupils' work and materials for use in their own school and to provide for a display of textbooks, materials and

equipment.

- Co-operate and engage with other Education Centres, full and part-time, so as to ensure that an effective network of centres is established.
- Plan for the development of expertise in key areas and to share such expertise throughout the Education Centre Network and the education system in general.

LEC has professional the staff, experience and an infrastructure in professional development support to teachers and the work programme delivered under the DEIS literacy initiative is within "the core business" of LEC. The Director of LEC chairs the Steering Committee of this project; all meetings associated with the project and the hosting of literacy tutor workshops etc is facilitated by LEC. The budget and documentation relating to this project are managed by the Centre.

The Schools
At the outset of this project there were 15 DEIS schools in Limerick and their teaching staff; 14 of this number volunteered to join the Literacy Project.
Based on 2011/2012 the population of school principals and teachers was estimated at approximately 210. In the academic year 2013/2014, pupil enrolment in the 15 DEIS Primary Schools was 2,235. While having a socially disadvantaged profile overall, the schools have a diverse population, with many children from foreign national backgrounds especially in city centre DEIS schools, and a school population with mixed abilities.

Origins of Limerick DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Primary Schools Literacy Initiative

In 2011 funding from the Programme Innovation and Development Fund (PIDF) which is the central resource for Supporting Social Inclusion and Regeneration in Limerick (SSIRL), was announced to support projects within Limerick regeneration areas.

A significant part of the work of the Limerick DES office involved working with schools to analyse data on pupil attainment in literacy and numeracy in DEIS primary schools in Limerick City. This identified the following issues: low patterns of literacy attainment by pupils in DEIS schools; significant differences in outcomes by gender; drop-off in literacy attainment at middle/senior class levels; difficulties in transition from junior to senior school for many pupils, particularly in maintaining literacy skills and outcomes; gaps in comprehension skills among pupils; the need to research variations in instruction with a view to achieving an integrated and common approach and the need to ensure consistency in the implementation of DEIS Initiatives within and across schools (PIDF Report 2015, pp 100, 101). Grounded in an evidence-base of need within DEIS schools in the city, the consortium submitted a tender for funding; following a competitive process, the DEIS Literacy Project was selected as a multi-agency partnerships to build their capacity to strengthen, adapt and reform mainstream practice within and across DEIS schools.

This request for funding coincided with the publication of the national policy, *Literacy and numeracy for learning and for life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011-2020* (DES, 2011), and the growing emphasis on school self-evaluation (DES 2003, 2012); consequently, the application prioritized the provision of CPD to teachers in DEIS schools in the development of a balanced literacy curriculum.

The tender submission and **planning phase** was completed in later 2011, and the **Implementation phase** spanned 2012 – 2014. Funding for the project was supplemented by additional resources from the DES, and this supported the **Embedding and sustainability** phase (2014 – 2016).

The aims of the Limerick DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Primary Schools Literacy Initiative are to:

- Deepen teacher understanding in relation to the components of effective, balanced literacy instruction which includes the promotion of children's language development
- Up-skill teachers in oral language and literacy instruction and in assessment and monitoring of literacy and other relevant outcomes.
- Share, extend and support existing good practice among participating schools
- Enhance whole-school approaches to literacy and oral language instruction
- Support principals and teachers in the management and delivery of change and in leading literacy in their schools

Activities within the Implementation Phase

The most intensive phase of the project was during the period 2012 - 2014 and the activities focused on developing professional capacity in literacy and oral language instruction. Following a detailed audit by each school of the knowledge, skills and resources available to and within that school, a programme of continuing professional development (CPD) was provided for literacy teams from each school on the assessment of pupils' reading and oral language skills, as well as pedagogical skills in promoting balanced literacy instruction and oral language. As schools joined this project on a voluntary basis, and equal resources (staffing and funding) were available to schools in Limerick city, irrespective of whether or not they participated, it was essential to ensure that the principals of the schools were fully engaged with and committed to the project.

While funding was used to provide the CPD required by staffs, funding was also utilised to pay substitution costs for teachers to enable staff to attend / participate in the CPD programme. As it would not have been possible to engage participation of the teachers in the absence of substitution funding, this removed a barrier to participation.

The project was an all-embracing strategy. It included an intensive CPD programme for teachers in DEIS schools specifically focused on instruction (pedagogy, resources) in oral language and literacy. It developed a broad-based CPD programme using different instruments. These include: lectures, training, mentoring, open days at schools, live observation of a teacher delivering a lesson in the classroom preceded by a session involving visiting teachers and the mentor /PDST staff / project coordinator, and a review with feedback after the lesson. It also included buy-in and application of a new assessment tool, training in undertaking the assessment and analysis. A very important part of the strategy was to embed the knowledge and practices developed under this programme at whole school level. Practices from the initiative (e.g., planning oral language and literacy instruction by class year, term, weekly sessions,

assessment and tracking outcomes) are linked to whole school planning and school self-evaluation, as well as the specific policy (literacy).

For the schools involved some of these activities were novel. For example Open Days and it was evident from participation / observation of CPD sessions and "Live Observation" (by the evaluator) that teachers from across the schools in the city did not know each other. "Live Observation" by teachers of another teacher teaching a class and a discussion / review after the lesson was new. This had not been part of the culture of the participating schools. Within these schools teaching was considered a "lone" activity and it was highly unusual to invite another teacher, particularly from a neighbouring school, into the classroom to observe and review the practice. In addition, "Open Days" at school, where the school hosted visits and discussion with teachers from other schools, was another example of opening up the schools, developing collegiality, as well as new opportunities to exchange experience.

The initial allocation of four ex-quota literacy teachers within the participating schools was increased to eight, and each teacher worked across two schools. Nominated by their schools, their role was to support implementation of literacy and oral language instruction in the schools, wider capacity building and application of best practice in the schools (in other classes), supporting the setting up of literacy stations, bringing in new resources, including texts as well as pedagogy resources, supporting the assessment and analysis of pupil tests, and supporting teachers in planning oral language and literacy instruction.

Each literacy teacher was located in a base school but 'twinned' with a partner school. The time of the literacy teacher was shared equally between the base and the partner school. The twinning or clustering of two schools was planned carefully (involving LEC and DES) to ensure a good match. The matching took into consideration that specific schools may be in strong competition with each other and a match of geographically adjacent schools may not necessarily work well; a very advanced school in terms of its teaching and learning practices /services and a school with less experience here was not necessarily considered the best match either. This was to ensure that while schools / teachers can learn from each other, there isn't "one way to do this" and teachers needed to work with practices that work best in the context of their school and classroom.

Sharing experiences and resources within and across participating schools became part of the fabric of this project. The emphasis on providing new opportunities for teachers to work together was an important strength. Such opportunities arose from the methods put in place to deliver the CPD programme: lectures provided opportunities for exposures to new expertise and to engage in discussion; working in groups across schools to plan literacy and oral language instruction with support of a mentor and the literacy tutor provided opportunities for more practical exchanges of experience; visiting other schools to observe and discuss practice, to attend open days, seeing literacy stations, reviewing new resources provided further opportunities for exposure to different practices, discussion with colleagues and practice-based learning.

CPD

Reflective Practice – network teachers' meetings; onsite observations; open days' discussion following CPD; readings from CPD

Balanced Literacy Framework

Supporting acquisition of new knowledge in;

Data Analysis

Oral Language

Reading

Writing

Small group literacy instruction

Speech and language development

Mary Immaculate College – Áine Cregan, Martin Gleeson, Maria Ryan

PDST – Siobhán O'Donoghue

External advisors – Anne McGough, Stephen Graham, Ashling Enright

KEY Principles underpinning this project

1. Teachers are key agents of change at classroom and whole-school level. The extent to which effective literacy practices in primary schools can be established, let alone sustained, is almost wholly dependent on the degree to which teachers take ownership of those practices, individually and collectively – developing, in so doing, an effective literacy 'community of practice' in those schools (Taylor, 2005).
2. All schools have equal access to the resources available. While all but one school participated in the project, this school was provided with access to the additional teacher's time and to each activity/opportunity for networking, CPD etc. within the project.
3. Collaboration, shared inquiry and learning from and with peers have been identified as central to professional development (Lieberman 1995, 2001).
4. Learning out of school through networks, teacher professional communities, school-university partnerships all provide multiple perspectives and new questions that broaden and deepen understanding. (Lieberman 1995, 2001)

Key supports 2012

School visits by literacy leaders in 2012 and open days facilitated sharing of practice, discussion and reflection

Literacy leaders played a key role in data generation – focus groups, interviews and in disseminating the Balanced Literacy Framework

Initial baseline assessment data generated

This initial phase involved raising awareness in each school about the need for effective literacy practices and what these might comprise

Collecting, analysing and interpreting assessment data about pupils' abilities in order to highlight areas where pupils required support

Key supports in 2013
In 2013 there was a significant expansion of human resources available to the DEIS schools and 8 network teachers sanctioned by the Department of Education and Skills
The network teachers' group established and meetings co-ordinated by the project co-ordinator.
Each school shared a network teacher with an outline plan of work – change agenda for each school
Financial grants to schools for literacy related materials
Provision of literacy materials (teacher resources) to schools
Provision of a wide programme of CPD in literacy and oral language continued
Website contained presentations, resources and associated readings
Open days where teachers observed other colleagues teach and engage in discussion and reflection continued as an important strand of the approach to professional development. These were focused on oral language, literacy in the early years, writing, small group literacy instruction and data analysis.
School-based support visits by literacy advisors from PDST in small group literacy instruction provided safe environments for experimentation
School-based support facilitated in data analysis and further large group CPD in Woodcock Johnson Training
Visit to school in relation to Kids' Talk – oral language progamme with parents
Substitute cover for teachers attending CPD events

Embedding and Sustaining Phase 2014-2016
Department of Education and Skills continues to allocate 8 ex-quota teachers to Limerick school for the school year 2014-2015 and 2015-2016
The network teachers work on a shared basis between two schools or in the case of amalgamated schools, a dedicated teacher is assigned to that school
The network teachers meet on a monthly basis.
With the agreement of St. Mary's National School, the network teacher in that school, for 50% of the post, will undertake the role of 'network link teacher'
The network link teacher facilitates the meetings of the network and links individual schools' needs for additional support back to the LEC
Effective professional development needs to be sustained, ongoing, in-depth, requiring active engagement by the professional – job-embedded learning or learning in school through peer coaching, mentoring, action research, planning teams offer strong opportunities to implement and practise.

The role of the network teachers is to:
- Continue supporting teachers in developing and embedding the school-wide strategies that are beginning to change literacy practices in schools and which have an impact on pupils' learning
- Support schools to continue to implement effective literacy strategies across the school
- Continue to develop literacy knowledge and to assist schools with self-reflection (continued cross school visits, onsite observation
- Assist schools with their whole-school plans for literacy – assist with the collection and examination of literacy data and its use to inform teaching and learning practices

CPD Sessions: Participation by schools, teachers and attendance September 2012 to March 2014 (Table 7.1 taken from the PIDF report, 2015, p.108)

School	No. of Teachers	Total No. of Attendances
Corpus Christi	18	88
Gaelscoil S. Clancy	7	38
Galvone NS	12	65
Our Lady of Lourdes	14	63
Our Lady Queen of Peace	23	91
Presentation Primary	22	109
Scoil Eoin Naofa	24	101
Scoil Iosagain CBS	10	49
Southill Junior School	9	46
St John the Baptist BNS	4	25
St Marys NS	16	88
St Michaels Infant	6	47
St Munchins CBS	9	43
St Munchins GNS	14	73
Total	**188**	**926**

Lessons from the initiative

The importance of a strong principals' network in Limerick and the support it has provided to principals in the context of the key leadership roles they play in their schools and communities, particularly in leading whole-school approaches to literacy.

Teachers are the key resource in DEIS schools. The central role which high quality professional development plays in building teachers' knowledge and skills and self-efficacy is evident from this initiative

The value of strong partnerships between government departments with academic institutions and statutory bodies (Mary Immaculate College and the Limerick Education Centre) in sustaining projects in the longer term to continue improving educational outcomes for children.

The success of the Limerick DEIS schools in building a strong culture of sharing best practice in literacy across schools. The importance of schools opening their doors to their colleagues to initiate professional dialogue about best practice has been very powerful thus facilitating schools to learn from each other and to improve their practice

There is no one solution to solve literacy problems for all children. However, there are a set of factors that, when combined, have a positive influence on children's literacy.

The Limerick DEIS Literacy Initiative illustrates that the following factors contribute to pupils' literacy learning:
- o Whole-school approaches to the implementation of a balanced literacy framework including a strong focus on oral language development
- o Targeted literacy interventions such as differentiated teaching, guided

reading that are developed and reviewed regularly based on the identified needs of the pupils in each specific school
- o Varied assessment methods and a whole-school approach to assessment, data analysis and use to improve teaching and learning

The crucial role of literacy leaders (network teachers, principals and literacy coordinators) in prioritizing literacy and focusing on school improvement

The importance of professional development for teachers which is based on their identified needs given the context in which they are teaching

The value of teachers working collaboratively, of learning from their peers, of reviewing and reflecting on practice

Lastly and most importantly, while the education system alone cannot resolve the very complex issue of disadvantage singlehandedly, there can be very positive outcomes when there is collaboration and partnership from government departments, academic institutions and statutory bodies. Schools play a very important role in influencing interventions that directly impact on pupils and their ability to get maximum benefit from the education system.

Legacy outcomes

Capacity building
Best practice in evidence in balanced literacy instruction in DEIS primary schools in Limerick
Literacy teams in evidence in schools and whole school approaches to literacy instruction in schools
Strengthened culture of sharing best practice in literacy across schools

Sustainability
A self-sustaining approach to literacy development in schools serving communities living in disadvantaged areas
Strong self-sustaining and functioning teacher professional communities supporting literacy development
Improved literacy outcomes for children across DEIS primary schools

Quantifiers/qualifiers of "Good Practice" in Collaborative Learning etc.

Analysis Sheet 1.

Level 2 School and local agency network	identifiers within level – Data exemplars	comments	
Participative professionalism participatory democratic co-ownership mobilization of: knowledge, expertise, interpretation of policy	committee make-up: consultation across all members: Engagement of school principals; teachers, literacy tutors, Steering committee, local agencies Knowledge generation, expertise sharing, peer learning; policy informed and evidence-based project	Teacher questionnaire data (n=114) gathered post-CPD assessed the degree to which teachers' data literacy had been enhanced by the sessions. This was achieved through self-report measures of their understanding of the fundamental theory and key concepts underpinning effective approaches to data analysis. Teachers agreed/strongly agreed that they felt more confident in analyzing school-based data, that they could analyse data to help understand and solve problems, monitor the effect of new initiatives, and identify areas for class-based and whole school development.	
deep level collaboration cultural cohesiveness high team identity building on each other reiterating/interpreting developing concept emotional support creativity innovative practices result	Peer observation; open classrooms; literacy tutors twinning with schools; CPD tailored to schools' needs; networking opportunities	"After the Open Day session, we got a slot at the staff meeting … with staff who have tried it (small group literacy instruction), other staff now know where to go … well, one teacher has small group literacy instruction up and running and you (teacher) can go and observe it… that's other colleagues teaching in your own school…" "There's more value in watching a colleague do it (oral language and small group literacy instruction) than us (literacy teaching) coming in and telling them what to do… when they see it and see that you can make it easy to run in the classroom, it's better … also teachers see that there isn't only one template for this…"	

*impact **on all players/contexts***	Whole school initiative – all teachers, classes involved. Networks within and across schools developed. Collegiality and teacher confidence in their pedagogical approaches increased.	"It's great seeing teachers taking things on board, observing colleagues… Now people are coming to me (literacy teacher) saying can you give me a hand with small groups… they want to try it out… I'm not going in asking them to do it… but I'm a back-up in the room. I've found they're not always coming to me anymore …. Other colleagues doing it are more than happy to share … teachers are more open to this … the culture of the school is changing…"
equity advances all fronts operative processes outcomes across all fronts	Emphasis was at all times on the process of teacher development and not on the actual improvement on student attainment scores. The active, hands-on, collaborative approach was designed such that teachers would recognise the benefits of engaging collaboratively with colleagues with regard to their own personal professional development and the continuous improvement of the school practices. Processes are at all times consultative. Ownership resides with schools and embedding is occurring.	'Observations during whole-school focus groups and planning meetings have displayed a shift from a "show-me" mentality to a "let me figure it out" approach'. 'Martina (school literacy teacher) was passionate about developing literacy throughout our school. She helped with planning, organising and assessment throughout the year. She set up the small group literacy instruction groups in 2nd and 3rd. She taught groups of pupils in the SGLI and modelled best practice to the other teachers in the SGLI for 2nd and 3rd. She has improved the literacy instruction in the school enormously'.
deep learning a la Biesta & others functions ' qualification' 'socialisation' 'subjectification'	Culture of sharing expertise and innovative pedagogical approaches within schools, and between schools was significant.	'Network Literacy Teacher (NLT) facilitated focused classroom visits within our two schools. This included standing in for teachers to allow the teacher to visit other classes/schools, arranging visits to the school and to other schools and facilitating discussions

		during these visits… the learning from these visits was amazing' (principal)
facilitating factors personal/structural/group/ organisational/processes/support how, where, why developed	Management of the project by LEC. Expertise and 'buy-in' of the DES. Commitment of the HEI. Steering Committee. Collaborative approach undertaken, based on extended relationships between cooperating agencies and the schools.	Funding of PIDF. Resources from the DES. Commitment of partners to engaging in education for social justice. Presentation to SCoTENS conference (2015) based on the project.
barriers as above and how or if overcome		
contextual considerations historical/institutional/cultural/ political/policy etc.	Regeneration in Limerick.	