

EFFeCT Conference in MIC, St Patrick's Campus Thurles

Tuesday 7th February.

This workshop, part of the Irish contribution to the evaluation of the draft methodological framework (DMF), took place with an invited group of teachers/educators from the region around Limerick.

The purpose was to ascertain how appropriate or adaptable the DMF would be for practicing teachers, institutions, policy makers and others engaged in education in the Irish context.

23 participants covering all stages of education from pre-school, first level, second level, HEI and policy makers were introduced to the DMF and asked to discuss and report on their opinions of its contents to date. Working singly and in groups of 4 or 5 they completed the proforma versions of the existing grids and comment sheets provided to high-light missing or negative aspects, a set of data giving an overview of the usefulness of the DMF in an Irish context was obtained and analysed. Games designed to introduce and/or stimulate awareness of some of the attributes of collaborative learning reflected in the grid were also used and assessed.

While several pertinent criticisms of aspects of the DMF were made, the correlation between the needs of practicing educators involved in a journey towards collaborative learning and the contents of the DMF were positive. Participants, on reflection and with some caveats, concluded that there was a satisfactory 'fit' in an Irish context.

Materials used in the workshop and a preliminary analysis of their opinions can be found on Trello.

Conclusions from the Irish Context:

- Overall the Irish Educators taking part in the workshop thought that the DMF provided a promising blueprint for encouraging and supporting teachers on their path towards collaborative learning
- The majority of the statements in each horizontal section of the DMF were felt to either 'fit' or be adaptable to the Irish education context
- The principal complaint was the over academic language used.
- 'Teacher register' language would have more appeal to those with anxieties about taking part in practices that were not familiar to them or called for change in attitudes and beliefs
- Some categories/outcomes were felt to be more or less relevant to stages of school education e.g. 'sharing' was easier and more likely in a primary context whilst 'designated time for discussion' within the working day seemed less problematic in a second level situation.
- The majority of the participants were experienced practitioners in their own field and in some cases in several aspects within the educational field. Doubts were expressed about whether beginners or those with less exposure to working in partnerships would be overwhelmed by the complexity of the framework. Pace was raised as a possible point to re-consider.

Taking these points into consideration

Language in the DMF

- This needs either to be formulated in ‘teacher register’ or to have a comprehensive glossary of a common understanding of terms used with concrete examples of illustrative examples.
- the language & concepts need to be presented in a less academic fashion/teacher-friendly vocabulary
- ‘performance’ – language of the technician – prefer ‘teaching & learning’:
- n.b. data/evidence – informal evaluation – caution required – see Biesta ‘what works won’t work’
- define ‘average’

Pace

- One size does not fit all. ‘Contextual’ aspects perhaps underestimated
- The varied levels of teachers knowledge, comfort with the concepts and subsequent knock on experiences, both attitudinal and practical of working towards collaborative learning need to be catered for. This also applies to managers and policy makers.
- A nuanced programme, with supporting material at each ‘level’ would be useful.
- challenge to get collaborative culture less in newly established school when people are more open to new ideas – subsequent incomers then subscribe to the culture without any great need for CPD.
- introduce collaboration to schools by having a formal pilot & training programme

Support

- verbatim/real life examples echoing managers and teachers needs and concerns would strengthen the frameworks usefulness and impact.
- The notion of a comprehensive portfolio of resources including theoretical papers is a sound one.
- some preparatory ‘training’ sessions introducing the concepts of ‘sharing/partnership’ in a communal context are advisable

Missing (reference to etc.)/ Needs strengthening

- The role of parents/home hasn’t featured in the framework but is vital in achieving increased outcomes
- An emphasis on the importance of principal when collaborating with other schools/geographic area – needs confidence and openness of leadership – is this reflected in MF?
- Include theoretical knowledge re reflection Schön/Brookfield etc.;
- Given growing awareness of need for feedback on Assessment to students - Oral/written. Must model Formative Assessment:
- In HEI should reflect how training is needed for tutors in how to implement policy & support student in the Cultural context of the school:
- Student teachers: (co-operating teacher in school practice/mentors) evidence shows that Ms/CpT not familiar with shared practice policy/practice so becomes a barrier for T.Ed. Student

