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DISSEMINATION OF BEST PRACTICE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH

KEY FINDINGS

Literature review and key stakeholder interviews

- Based on a review of literature and key stakeholder interviews, three main types of dissemination were identified, reflecting an increasing scale in terms of engagement i.e. transmission for the purpose of raising awareness (low engagement), transfer of knowledge for increasing understanding (medium engagement), and transformation for the purpose of generating action and embedding new practice (high engagement).

Survey of schools

- The survey of schools found that although 'transmission of information' was a commonly used method by schools to disseminate learning, only a small minority rated transmission approaches as the most effective method.

- Results indicate that respondents preferred a more engaged form of dissemination in the form of ‘transfer of knowledge’ (e.g. cascade methods such as peer coaching) which respondents regard as the most effective dissemination approach.
- Just over one-third of schools rated ‘transformative’ methods (e.g. action research) as the most effective dissemination approach. However, as transformative approaches were used by less than half of respondents, it was difficult for those respondents with no experience to conclude whether this is the most effective method.
- The main motivations for engaging in dissemination activities were as follows:
 - To improve the educational attainment of pupils,
 - To enhance professional development of teaching staff/build their capacity,
 - To promote school improvement.
- High workload and subsequent lack of time and lack of funding (e.g. for substitute cover) were reported as the current barriers inhibiting effective dissemination of best practice in Northern Ireland (NI).
- A number of factors leading to effective dissemination were identified including:
 - School leadership / management support,
 - School ethos / culture regarding shared learning,
 - Teacher attitude.

Establishing a Dissemination Framework

- The research created a proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI. This advocates the need for dissemination to be pre-planned, focused, coordinated and developed in a strategic manner to ensure that effective solutions are identified, disseminated and taken up more widely.

- The proposed Dissemination Framework was well received, highlighting that the framework provides a helpful 'logic' when considering the various dissemination methods available to schools.

Implementing the Framework

- The implementation drivers, i.e. organisation, leadership and competency, underpin the success of the proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI and represent systems that must be in place to effect and embed change.

Key recommendations of the Report

- DE should lead and support the Dissemination Framework, using the Learning Leaders strategy as the policy vehicle in which to enable the Framework.
- DE should coordinate with other relevant bodies (e.g. EA, ETI, CCEA, CCMS, CnaG, NICIE, and GTCNI) to help identify best practice in teaching and learning already existing in the education system and to promote the use of the Dissemination Framework to encourage knowledge transfer and collaboration between schools.
- Three implementation drivers must be in place to successfully embed the proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI. These include: organisation, leadership and competency.

INTRODUCTION

1. In response to a 2013 Public Accounts Committee report into the lack of consistency regarding the dissemination of best practice by and with schools, the Department of Education (DE) commissioned NCB to conduct research into the dissemination of best practice in teaching and learning in Northern Ireland.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

2. The aim of the research assignment was to provide DE with a comprehensive list of methods that are effective in sharing best practice by and with schools.
3. The objectives of the research were to:
 - identify and assess the effectiveness of current methods of disseminating best practice by and with schools; and
 - identify alternative methods of disseminating best practice in other education systems and assess their applicability for use in Northern Ireland.

MAIN FINDINGS

Dissemination methods in theory and practice

4. Based on a review of literature and key stakeholder interviews, a tiered system was adopted to describe the levels of dissemination (as per the table below), reflecting an increasing scale in terms of engagement i.e. transmission for the purpose of raising awareness (low engagement), transfer of knowledge for increasing understanding (medium engagement), and transformation for the purpose of generating action and embedding new practice (high engagement).

Dissemination Method	Brief Description	Dissemination Activities
Transmission of Information: Awareness	Involves telling teachers about an initiative/best practice through policy documents or professional development resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports /Publications • Training (one-way) • Conferences /Events (one-way)
Transfer of Knowledge: Engagement	Involves the transfer of knowledge using cascade approaches i.e. key individuals being 'trained' in the matters to be disseminated. Those trained then train others where good practice cascades down from the top. As the word spreads, the practice is adopted by each level in the cascade until it ripples across the final level, the whole community of teachers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching/ mentoring • Training (interactive) • Conferences /Events (interactive) • Networking (active participants)
Transformation of practice: Action	Involves engagement of teachers in the process of transforming their assessment practices, often through action research. It emphasises that for real change, the individuals involved need to take more control of what they are being asked to do. They need to make sense of it through reflection and sharing with others until new ideas and processes become internalised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action research (process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action) • Transformative model – combination of methods used in a strategic manner

5. Transmission efforts are widely used and messages can be circulated quickly and inexpensively. However, engagement is low and limited to the passive form of information gathering - where individuals are 'uncritical consumers of information'.
6. Transfer methods are more engaging than transmission and involve cascading learning via peer-to-peer mentoring and coaching. However,

effects can be negatively impacted due to the dilution of learning from person to person.

7. At the other end of the spectrum are transformative methods, which involve active participants engaged in information generation and critical thinking and reflective practice to transform practices, often through action research.

Dissemination methods used by schools in Northern Ireland

8. Although 'transmission of information' was a commonly used method by schools to disseminate learning (e.g. reading reports, publications, listening to and receiving information from seminars etc.), only a small minority rated transmission approaches as the most effective method.
9. Results indicate that respondents preferred a more engaged form of dissemination in the form of 'transfer of knowledge' (e.g. cascade methods such as peer coaching) which respondents regarded as the most effective dissemination approach.
10. Just over one-third rated 'transformative' methods (e.g. action research) as the most effective dissemination approach. However, as transformative approaches were used by fewer than half of respondents, it was difficult for those respondents with no experience to conclude whether this is the most effective method.
11. The main motivations for engaging in dissemination activities were as follows:
 - To improve the educational attainment of pupils
 - To enhance professional development of teaching staff/build their capacity
 - To promote school improvement
12. Half of all survey respondents reported that there is a person responsible for disseminating best practice in teaching and learning, with the majority indicating that that person is the Principal, Vice-Principal or a Middle Manager.

13. High workload and subsequent lack of time and lack of funding (e.g. for substitute cover) were reported as the current barriers inhibiting effective dissemination of best practice in Northern Ireland.
14. A number of factors leading to effective dissemination were identified including:
 - School leadership / management support
 - School ethos / culture regarding shared learning
 - Teacher attitude

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implications for Education Structures in Northern Ireland

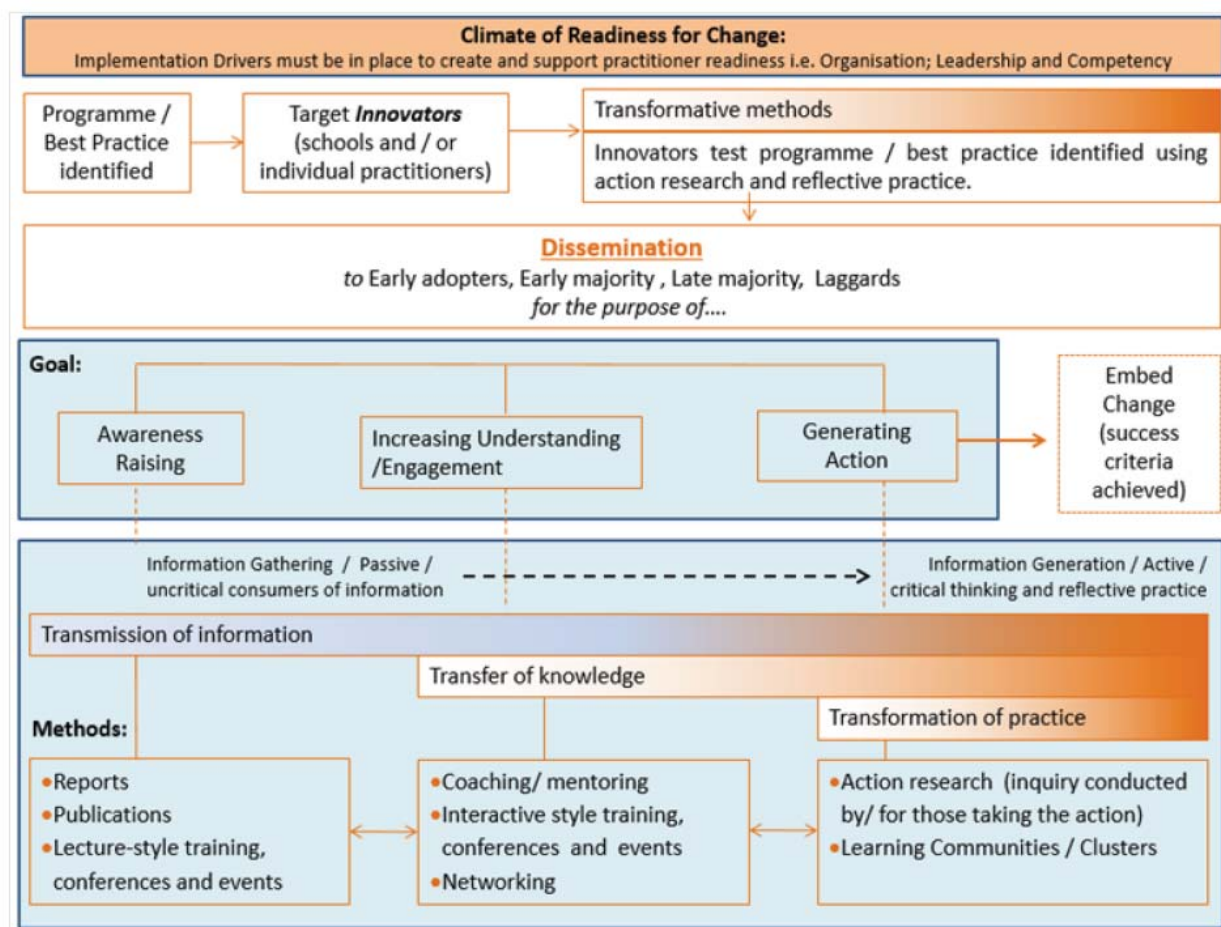
15. Whilst the research found a wide range of methods are being used by schools in Northern Ireland, it also clearly points to the need for more strategic coordination if these methods are to succeed in improving practice. This critical coordinated approach would be achieved through the development of a framework to relate dissemination goals with dissemination methods.
16. The research presents how such a framework could be established and implemented and the associated implications for the education sector in Northern Ireland, and is structured in the following three parts:
 - **Part 1: Establishing a Dissemination Framework for Education in NI:** This section draws on the learning from other frameworks identified through the literature and makes recommendations for how a suitable framework should be developed in Northern Ireland.
 - **Part 2: Testing the Dissemination Framework:** This section draws on the findings from testing the Dissemination Framework for education in NI with a small number of schools.
 - **Part 3: Implementing the Framework:** This section describes the key implementation drivers to be considered when using the proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI.

Part 1: Establishing a Dissemination Framework – A Proposed Model

17. Based on learning from other frameworks and evidence from our online survey of schools and key stakeholder interviews, it is recommended that DE proceeds with establishing a Dissemination Framework for education in NI such as that proposed and outlined below.
18. This proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI advocates the need for dissemination to be pre-planned, focused, coordinated and developed in a strategic manner to ensure that effective solutions are identified, disseminated and taken up more widely. The Framework firstly promotes the need to create a climate of readiness for change and considers levels of diffusion of an innovation (innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards). The Framework purposely aligns dissemination goals to methods, which when used together enhance the extent to which transformation occurs.
19. The proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI aims to fit within existing structures i.e. promotes the process of self-evaluation and a culture of reflective practice and continuous improvement, as well as closely aligning with the new Learning Leaders strategy (2016)¹ which seeks to promote the dissemination of good practice and develop 'next practice'.
20. It is important to note that this proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI is not designed to be overly prescriptive, but aims to provide guidance for the education sector so they have autonomy to select various methods available to access and disseminate best practice.

1 Department of Education (2016) Lifelong Learning Leaders - A Strategy For Teacher Professional Learning' [Online] Available from <https://www.deni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/strategy-document-english.pdf>

Proposed Framework for Dissemination



21. The key elements of the framework are described below:

a. Identifying Best Practice

Best practice should be identified and endorsed by a credible source and validated before widespread dissemination can be justified. The best practice identified must have relevance to the intended audience, and address a specific school need/priority.

b. Creating a Readiness for change

For an innovation (or best practice) to be adopted, systems need to be ready to change and teachers need to be motivated to act in accordance with the change. To achieve this, it is important to be clear about who will benefit from the best practice / programme (end-users) and who would be likely to take up new approaches (potential adopters). End-users (schools/

practitioners) should be involved and engaged at the outset, and throughout the process. This active engagement will engender a sense of ownership and uptake of the practice to be widely implemented.

The assessment of the climate of readiness for change is an underpinning feature of the framework and is central to the dissemination process. Three 'Implementation Drivers' must be in place to create and support practitioner readiness i.e. organisation, leadership and competency. It is important to note that the state of readiness may change quickly at any given point, therefore continually scanning and reviewing the climate during the dissemination process is vital.

c. Target Innovators

The Framework considers end-users i.e. schools and/or individual practitioners as being either innovators and/or adopters of change. Within a school itself, practitioners can be both innovators and adopters of best practice. This is what makes inter-school sharing possible.

- School and/or practitioner as an 'Innovator' using transformation methods (such as action research and reflective practice) to test new ways of working within the school. If positive results ensue, this practice should then be validated and endorsed by Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), through the inspection process and/or through the Education Authority (EA) School Development Service.
- School and/or practitioner as an 'Adopter' of practice that has been tested by 'Innovators'. This adoption process may involve schools firstly accessing information from EA/DE/ETI via transmission methods and if the best practice addresses a need (via self-evaluation and linked to the School Development Plan) the adopter school should actively engage in transfer and transformative methods.

d. Select Dissemination Methods & Goals

Dissemination is an active process of transferring knowledge and embedding outcomes. In our Framework, dissemination methods are purposefully aligned with intended goals i.e. transmission approaches for the purpose of raising awareness, transfer approaches for increasing knowledge and

promoting greater engagement and transformative approaches to generate an action leading to a change in practice.

e. Embed Change

Dissemination is a continuous process involving adaptations along the way and the need to allow time for evaluation, reflection, and re-planning. This process will allow for the identified best practice to be adapted to suit the needs of schools and tailored in terms of application. The dissemination approach will be successful if schools embed the best practice approach to such an extent that it becomes 'normalised' within the schools and encompassed within their daily teaching practice.

Part 2: Testing the Dissemination Framework

22. The proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI was tested in six schools to include a spread of various school management types, sector and geography. The purpose of the school visits was to test what has been learnt from the research and to assess the implementation readiness of schools in terms of adopting the proposed framework.
23. The proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI was well received, highlighting that the framework provides a helpful 'logic' when considering the various dissemination methods available to schools. Encouragingly, some of the schools commented that this framework reinforces what they are already doing and fits with the school development plan process.
24. The mapping of two existing programmes (Literacy and Numeracy KS2/KS3 CPD Project and Delivering Social Change (DSC) Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme) identified that extensive dissemination activities are already being carried out. However, these activities are not carried out in a coordinated or consistent way across schools, therefore strengthening the case for a framework by which dissemination activities would be planned and coordinated, to generate the greatest impact. Discussions during school visits indicated that schools would welcome an applied version of the framework - to list the various dissemination activities planned for a particular programme at the outset of such a programme. It was agreed that, if issued by DE at the pre-planning stage of a programme, this would generate increased awareness of the various dissemination activities available to schools to engage in the learning and to help embed a new practice.

Part 3: Implementing the Framework

25. Implementation focuses on how to use innovations as intended and achieve the promised results in typical practice settings i.e. to bridge the gap between 'research/innovations' and 'practice'.
26. The implementation drivers, i.e. organisation, leadership and competency, underpin the success of the proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI and represent systems that must be in place to effect and embed change. It is encouraging to note that DE's 'Learning Leaders' strategy reflects elements of these drivers. Given the importance of this strategy each of the implementation drivers have been mapped to the 'policy commitments' in the strategy (refer to shaded boxes). Therefore, **DE's 'Learning Leaders' strategy presents the vital policy vehicle to enable the proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI.**

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

27. DE should lead and support the Dissemination Framework, using the Learning Leaders strategy as the **policy vehicle** in which to enable the Framework.
28. DE should coordinate with other relevant bodies (e.g. EA, ETI, CCEA, CCMS, CnaG, NICIE, and GTCNI) to help identify best practice in teaching and learning already existing in the education system and to promote the use of the Dissemination Framework to encourage knowledge transfer and collaboration between schools.
29. Three implementation drivers **must be in place** to successfully embed the proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI. These include: **organisation, leadership and competency**. Implementation drivers are integrated and compensate for one another i.e. weaknesses in one driver can be overcome by strengths in other components. However, if all three drivers are weak this will adversely affect the success of the dissemination framework. Implementation of the framework will, therefore, require the support and coordinated effort of all relevant bodies to ensure that organisation roles and functions are aligned to the identified best practice, that leaders fully support the process and incorporate the necessary implementation supports, and that staff competencies are developed to aid the uptake and dissemination of best practice.

30. The development of a future School Development Service within the Education Directorate of the EA provides the **operational vehicle** to support the implementation of the proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI. As the new Service evolves, the coordination of dissemination activities and training in dissemination methods (e.g. peer-to-peer mentoring/coaching and team teaching strategies) should be an important role of the service.

CONCLUSIONS

31. The proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI was well received by schools, highlighting that the framework provides a useful structure in the form of the '3T' approach (Transmission, Transfer and Transformation) when considering the various dissemination methods available.
32. The proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI reflects the research evidence which advocates creating a climate of readiness for change and the alignment of dissemination goals to methods which when used together enhance the extent to which transformation of practice occurs.
33. The Learning Leaders strategy provides the **policy vehicle** in which to enable the use of the Framework.
34. The development of a future School Development Service within the Education Directorate of the EA provides the **operational vehicle** to support the implementation of the proposed Dissemination Framework for education in NI.

METHODOLOGY

35. A mixed-method approach was adopted to deliver this research project, to include: a literature review, key stakeholder consultations with representatives from the statutory and voluntary sectors (n=15), an online survey of schools (n=122), school visits (n=6) and a stakeholder workshop. The project was overseen by a Steering Group comprised of representatives from DE Standards and Improvement Team, DE Analytical Services Unit, ETI, CCMS and the Education Authority, who provided strategic direction to the research team and will have a key role to play in critically examining the research findings and implications in terms of potential recommendations.

THE PROJECT

36. The project was undertaken by National Children's Bureau (NCB) and funded by the Department of Education. The total cost of the project was £37,467.30 including VAT.

FULL REPORT

37. The full research report entitled Dissemination of Best Practice Research is available on the Department of Education website at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/>.

PURPOSE OF DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RESEARCH BRIEFINGS

The Department of Education (DE) places a high value on the wide circulation of research results to ensure that research has the maximum impact on policy and practice in education. DE Research Briefings are designed to provide attractive, interesting and easy access to research findings for policy makers, researchers, teachers, lecturers, employers and the public to facilitate informed discussion of education issues. Research cannot make decisions for policy makers and others concerned with improving the quality of education. Nor can it by itself bring about change. But it can create a better basis for decisions, by providing information and explanation about educational practice and by clarifying and challenging ideas and assumptions.

The full range of DE Research Briefings can be accessed at the DE Internet site <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/research-publications-0>

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