



- Title:** From Evidence to Excellence: Enhancing Professional Learning Networks through Evidence-Informed Practice
- Event:** Evidence-based approach in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. From data to knowledge, from knowledge to practice
- By:** Martin Brown, School of Policy and Practice, EQI (The Centre for Evaluation Quality and Inspection), DCU Institute of Education, Ireland
- Time:** 10:30 - 12:00
- Date:** 05/11/2024
- Location** Warszawa Centrum, Złota 48/54 St.



#Erasmus+
#European Solidarity Corps

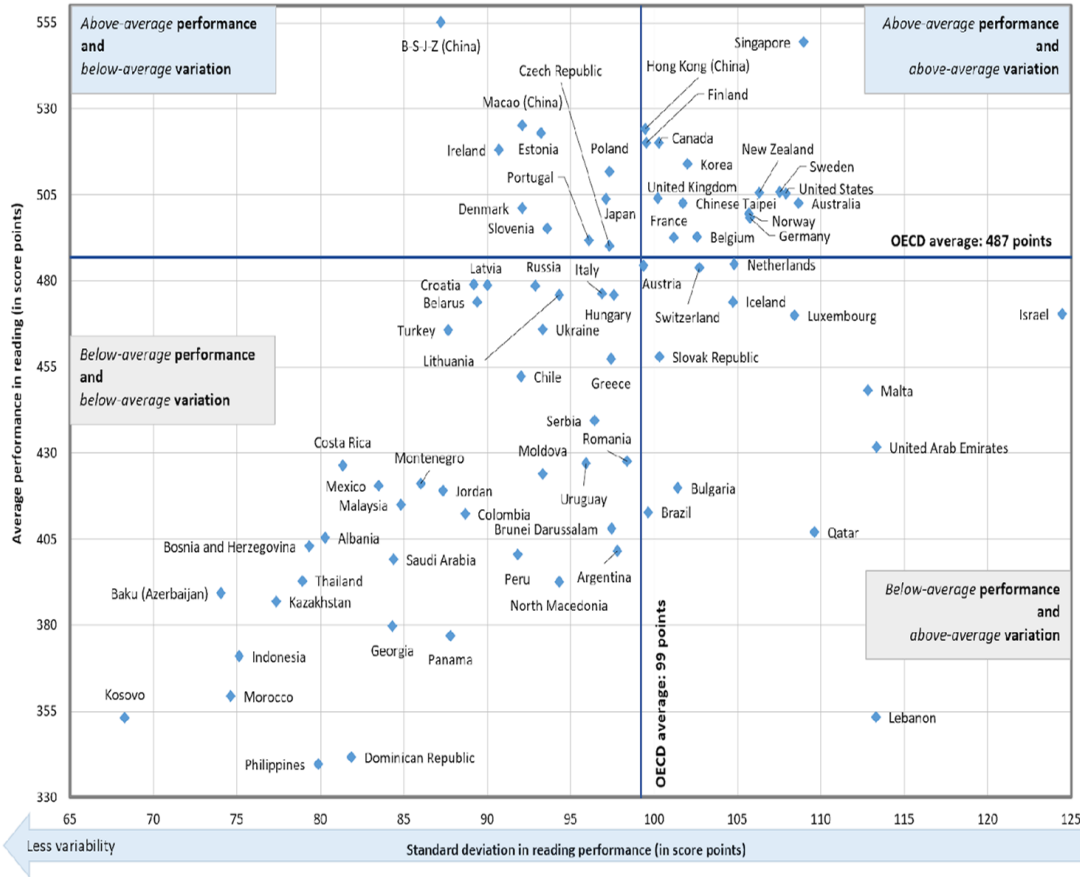
Presentation Outline

- Introduction and Background
- Findings and Evidence of Impact
 - One Solution in Theory
 - One Solution in Practice
- Conclusion and Moving Forward



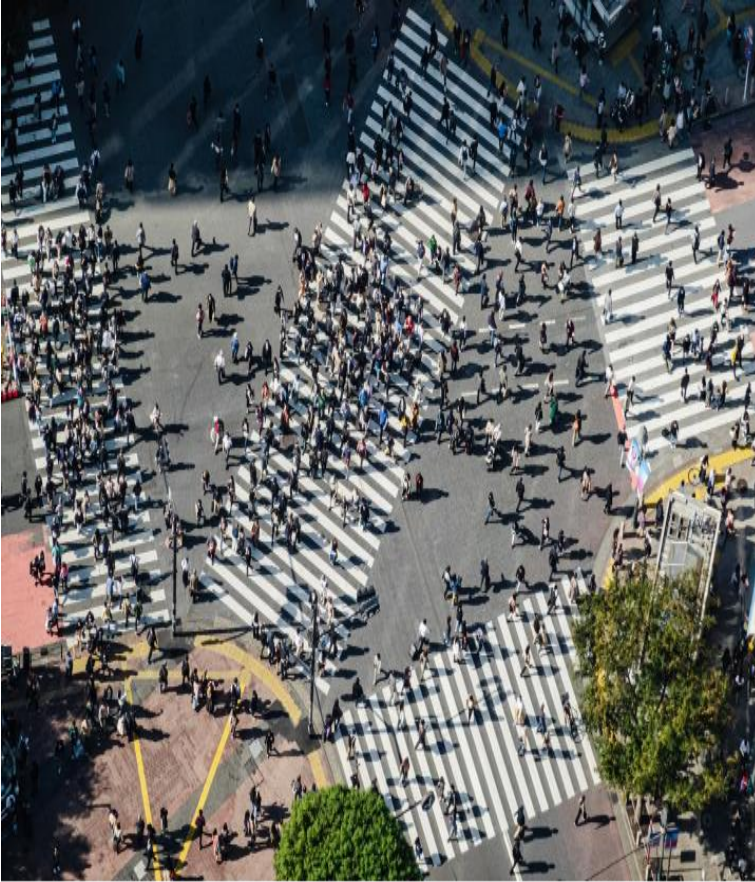


From Good to Great
(Barber and Moursehead, 2010)



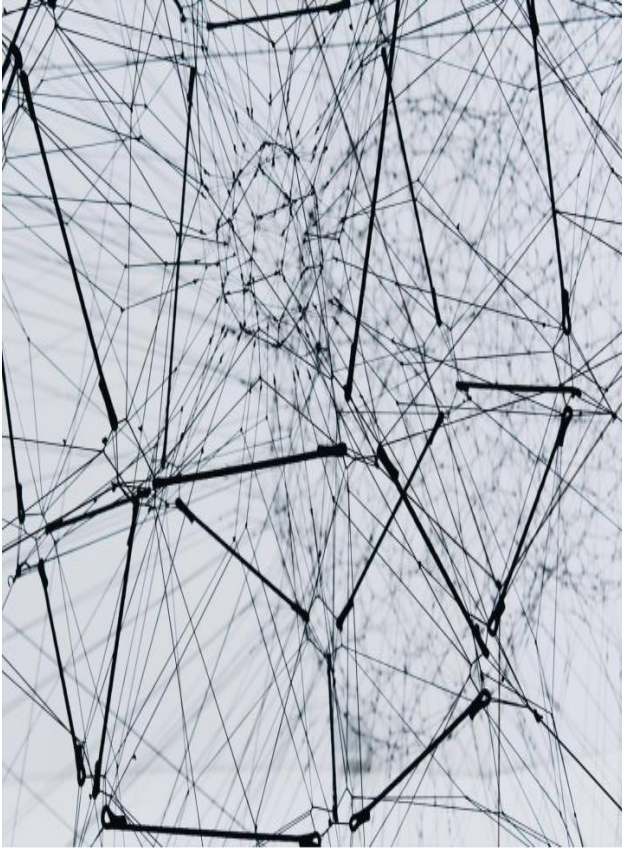
From Good to Great
(Barber and Moursehead, 2010)

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table I.B1.4.



The New Orthodoxy for Improvement

In the public and non-profit sectors, collaboration is no longer simply an option; it has become **the new orthodoxy** (Feyes and Devos, 2014, p.1)



Benefits

Professed benefits of being part of an educational network:

1. Enhanced Policy Translation via Dialogic Co-Creation;
2. Efficient use of resources;
3. Increased innovation capacity;
4. System-wide improvement;
5. Enhanced Social cohesion

The Reality



Despite **VAST AMOUNTS OF FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES** spent on the establishment and maintenance of **PUBLIC AND CIVIC ENGAGED NETWORKS**, there are **LIMITED STUDIES** on the **FAILURE RATE OF NETWORKS**, either in **EDUCATION** or in **ANY OTHER SECTOR**.



The Reality

There is nothing inherently **POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE** about a network: it can be **FLEXIBLE** and **ORGANIC**, **RIGID** and **BUREAUCRATIC**; it can be liberating and empowering, or **STIFLING** and **INHIBITING**; it can be **DEMOCRATIC**, but it may also be **DOMINATED BY PARTICULAR INTERESTS** (de Lima 2010, p.17)

The Reality

The Case of Newark Public Schools



- 200 Million Dollar investment to **reform Newark Public Schools** via Zuckerberg foundation over five years.
- Newark's high-school graduation rate hovered at around **60%, 19 points** below the national average.
- Of those who graduated, **90% needed to take extra classes** before entering the local community college.
- **Fewer than 40%** of students were reading at grade level (Garfield, 2018)

The Reality

The Case of Newark Public Schools



'Goal was not to repair education in Newark but to develop a model for saving it in all of urban America' (Dale Russakoff)

The Reality

The Case of Newark Public Schools



Much of the \$200 million went toward:

- **buying out contracts of underperforming teachers**, which also served as a **cost-saving move**, The New Yorker reported in 2014.
- **Sixty million dollars was funnelled into charters** — schools that are **privately run but publicly funded**
- **Millions more went to \$1,000-a-day consultants** (Garfield, 2018)



The Reality

The Case of Newark Public Schools

- Results of the \$200 million experiment were **disappointing**
- **The initiative ceased to exist after five years** (Garfield, 2018)

The Reality

The aftermath of the Newark Public Schools Initiative And The Importance of Civic and Public Engagement



The money "**didn't go to the city, and it didn't go to the school system either.** It went to a foundation that made decisions about what the money should be spent on" (Ras Baraka)

(Garfield, 2018)

The Reality

The aftermath of the Newark Public Schools Initiative And The Importance of Civic and Public Engagement



"You **can't just cobble up a bunch of money and drop it in the middle of the street** and say, 'This is going to fix everything.'

YOU HAVE TO ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITIES THAT ALREADY EXIST" (Ras Baraka)

(Garfield, 2018)

The Reality

The aftermath of the Newark Public Schools Initiative And The Importance of Civic and Public Engagement



"There needed to be **A DISCUSSION WITH A SERIES OF ORGANIZATIONS IN THE CITY ...**

TO TALK ABOUT THE CONCRETE ISSUES and

NARROW THEM DOWN TO SPECIFIC THINGS THEY COULD'VE IMPACTED OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME,"

(Ras Baraka)

(Garfield, 2018)

The Reality



THE EDUCATIONAL WORLD is swept by **PERIODIC TRENDS**, confidently and **OPTIMISTICALLY** moving on from **WHAT DID NOT WORK**, but often returning to **IDEAS THAT WERE PREVIOUSLY DISCARDED**. Short memories and a belief in **THE POWER OF NOVELTY** seem to be the driving forces.

Such an unscientific approach **CREATES FASHION VICTIMS, NOT IMPROVING SCHOOLS [AND EDUCATION SYSTEMS]** (Coe, 2009, p.363)

One Solution (In Theory) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

- **Core Theory of Polycentric evaluation:** When schools reach a certain evaluation threshold, they can only further improvement not merely through a combination of **school self-evaluation** and **pressure from external inspection** but rather, through **collaboration between clusters of schools, communities and the inspectorate.**
- **Northern Ireland:** many schools are in the process of asking the question, **'How do we as practitioner researchers improve the quality of education not only in our schools but also in our communities?'**



One Solution (In Theory) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

- In comparison to **single unit planning and evaluation [Inspection, School Self Evaluation]**, there is **very little, if any research relating to the impact or for that matter, potential impact of or evaluation on networks of schools.**
- Research on the effects of school evaluation (In have primarily focussed on evaluation of individual schools. **(McNamara and O'Hara, 2012, 2013, Brown, et al, 2014, Brown, 2013; Dederling and Muller, 2013; Ehren et al, 2013)**)



One Solution (In Theory) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

In reality

Reluctance among many who study networks to discuss formal mechanisms of control.

A common assumption is that, since networks are collaborative arrangements, governance, which implies hierarchy and control, is inappropriate.. (Provan and Kenis 2008, p.230).



One Solution **(In Theory)** to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

Serendipitous networks

Interactions among group members (that is, 'networks evolve haphazardly from the interactions of individual actors, without guidance from any central network agent (de Lima, 2010, p. 11).

Goal directed networks

All relations between network members are structured in order to achieve network-level goals; an administrative entity plans and coordinates the activities of the network as a whole

Polycentric Evaluation of Networks

You're really asking schools don't forget here to move from a culture of competition to a culture of cooperation. My own view of it is that you don't move from competition to cooperation. **You have to evolve a new construct**

One Solution (In Theory) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

Poly-centric Evaluation is implemented by **internal** and **external** stakeholders and involves some or all of the following activities:

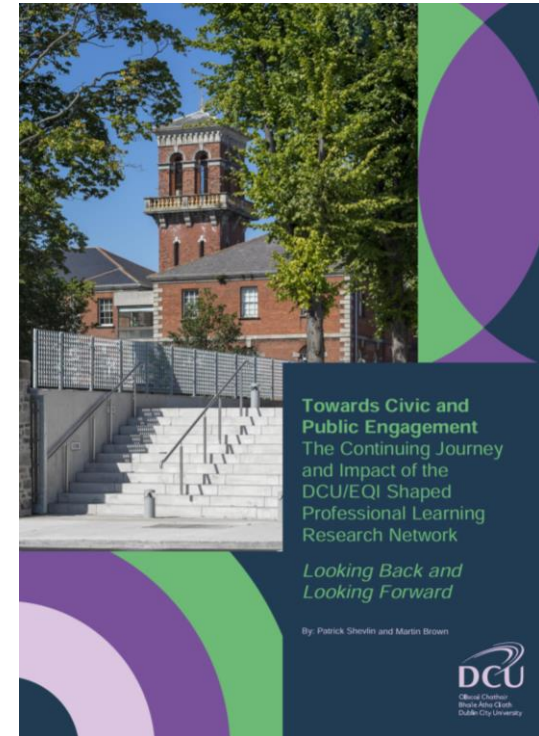
- **Examining the quality of collaboration** between schools and stakeholders in the network;
- Taking into account the perspective on school quality **from the schools** and the **various stakeholders in the network**;
- **Quality assuring the networks collaborative self-evaluation** of recommendations from previous poly-centric inspections;
- **Providing feedback to stakeholders** on elements of best practice in other schools and networks;
- Facilitating collective agreement for a **shared agenda for change within the network.**

One Solution (**In Practice**) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

DCUIOE / EQI NI Shaped Professional Network

Legacy and findings carried into the shaped Cluster from:

1. School Self Evaluation
2. Area Inspections
3. Polycentric Evaluation
4. Intercultural Community Evaluation
5. Dialogic Co-Creation



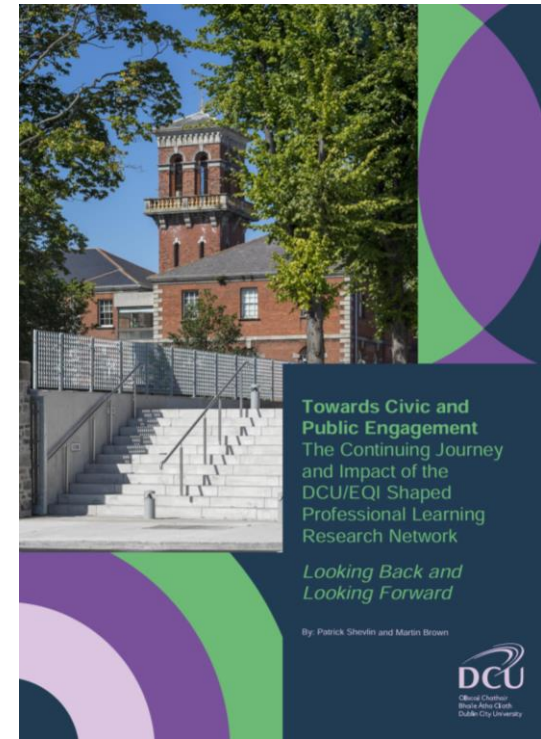
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One Solution (In Theory) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

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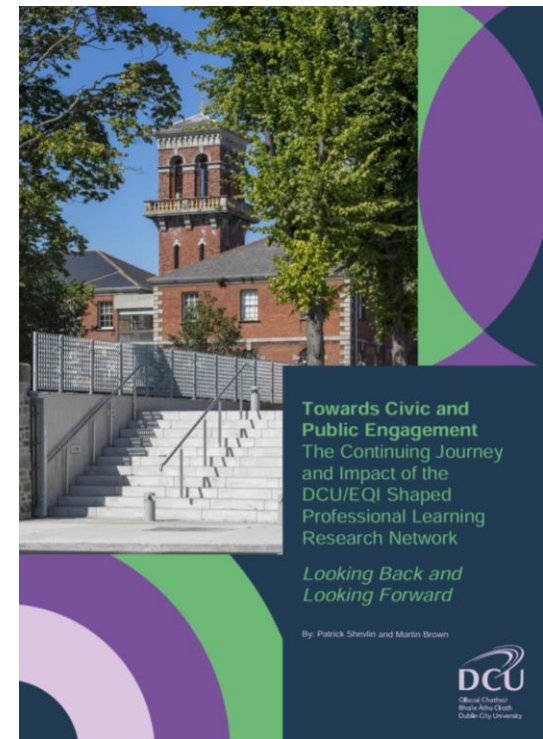
One Solution (In Practice) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

Background information

- One of the highest levels of people claiming unemployment benefit in Northern Ireland (NI)
- The highest proportion of people (76%) living in the most deprived Super Output Areas of NI
- Ranks first on the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure (WBP, 2014, p.6)
- A significant number of the student population entitled to Free school meals. 35% at Post-primary level and 60% at primary level.

One Solution (In Practice) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

- **Permanent network** based in NI, specifically focusing on **action research programmes** – with **case study foci** engaged with various members of the **education community**
- The initial scale comprised **more than 40 schools cross-phase** – controlled and maintained – and including integrated and shared education schools – covering all types of schools
- It has now risen to **~= 150 Schools**

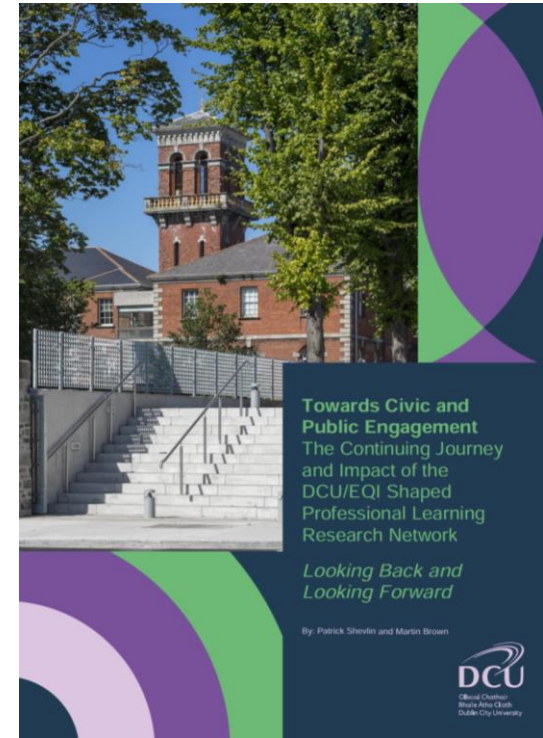


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One Solution (**In Practice**) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

The key focus of the work is **targeted improvement in a variety of forms**; using newly developed and innovative techniques for **data-informed decision-making, evidence informed practice** focused on a range of Evidence Informed Techniques.

- To **improve standards further**
- To **disseminate best practice**
- As part of all this to embed **Policy Entrepreneurship and Distributed Leadership** in actions
- To use **area networking/clustering effectively** to break down some of the barriers that too often exist in Society

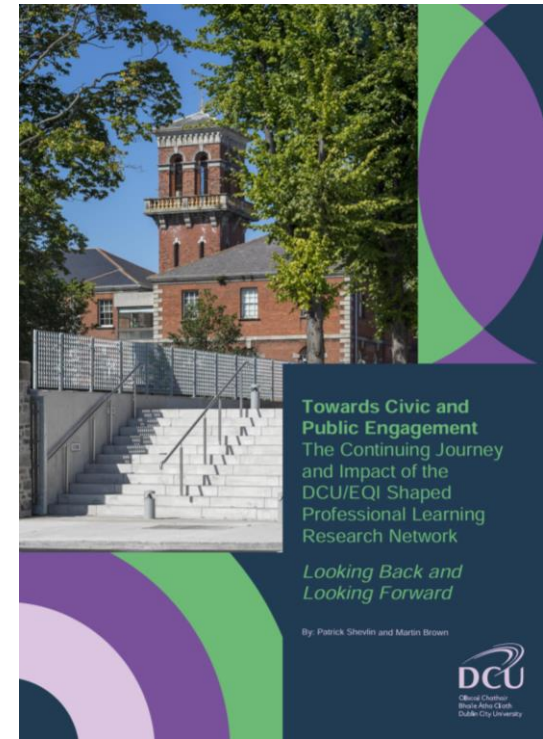


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One Solution (**In Practice**) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

TO DEEPLY EMBED

Effective Data, Research Informed Decision-Making processes Evidence Informed Practices that lead to improvement

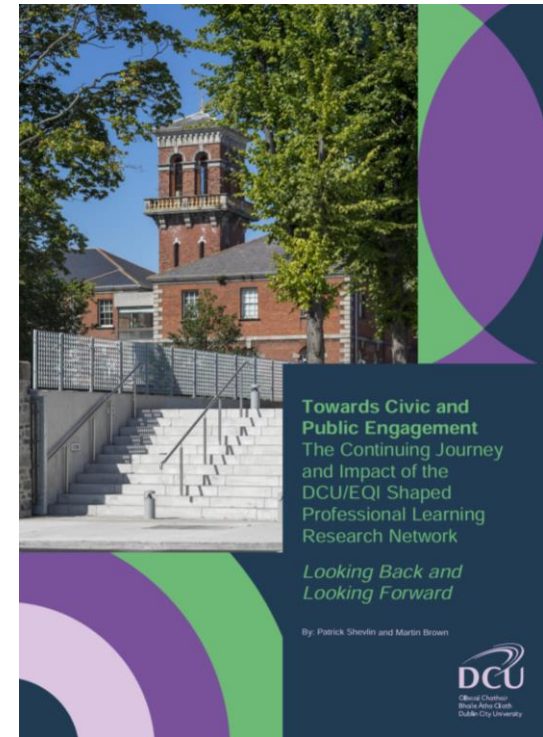


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One Solution (**In Practice**) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

TO ENHANCE, PROMOTE AND IMPROVE THE USE OF FIRST-HAND EVIDENCE

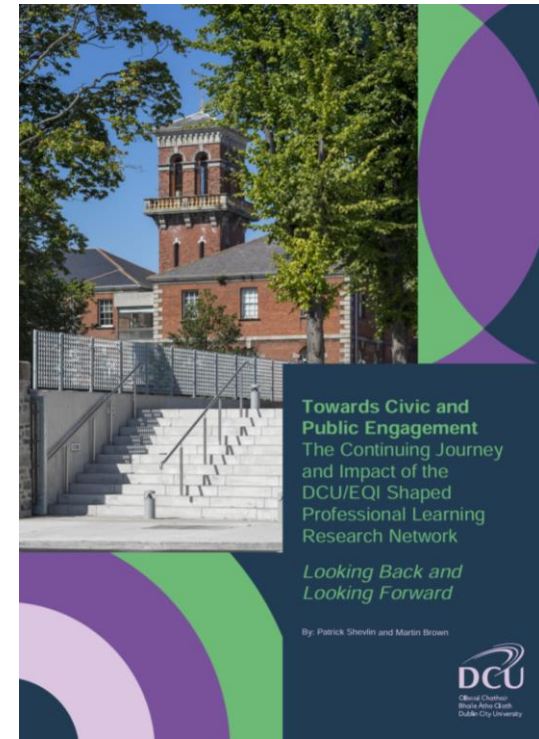
- Schools ethically **create and use their own** data sets
- as opposed to the often at times, **OVER RELIANCE OF SECONDARY DATA SETS**



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One Solution (**In Practice**) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

**For So it is My God, I Measure it, But
What it is I Measure I do not know**
(Saint Augustine Confessions – Book 5)



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What do the Schools and Communities Say about this new mode of Improvement

What are the most profound differences of this way of working with traditional inspections of individual schools?

- **The biggest difference is the potential for change** and to start to see that the solution for deficiencies in a system are **not going to be solved in one particular way or by one particular institution...** The potential is for more creative ways of tackling the problems that emerge. **(Interview participant)**
- The organisations own the process. **That's the most profound difference.**
(Interview participant)
- In some jurisdictions if there is a bad inspection, the powers that be would be able to put the school on special measures or eventually, suggest that the school is closed down. Now I can't imagine if we had a really bad area inspection which we didn't, that the inspectorate would have put West-Belfast on special measures or, West-Belfast down; so **ownership and an agreed agenda for change is essential.**
(Interview participant)

What do the Schools and Communities Say about this new mode of Improvement

What is the impact of these types of inspections on individual schools, the network and potentially other stakeholders? How do you know? What is the evidence of impact?

- **Increased collaboration**, integrated responses and **collective responsibility**. You see a child being a bit happier going to school and within their community, you see their attendance improving. **You also see the involvement of families.** (Interview participant – Member of Area Learning Community)
- With poly-centric inspection there is **less of a threat of becoming institutionalized**. Hearing things from a different perspective is never really a bad thing and it gets you to **reflect** and **re-articulate** how it is done in your own environment. (Interview participant – Member of Education Library Board)

What do the Schools and Communities Say about this new mode of Improvement

What elements/aspects of polycentric evaluations have an impact?

- A good communication of the findings, **persuasion on the part of the inspectorate that this is a good thing to do.** That is what has an impact and **buy in from the people to improving the findings as well.** (Interview participant)
- What is unique is that because the **Network focuses on teaching and learning** this is what has made the difference in my opinion. (Interview participant)
- I think it does **raise to a certain degree the level of professional language in schools** particularly around **Self Evaluation** and planning and it **encourages schools to reflect.** Now it is pressurized and it is stressful but it forces schools to periodically reflect on what they are doing and where they want to go. (Interview participant)
- The building up of very positive relationships where **traditionally we would have been working out of silos in our own school.** I keep on going back to the point that it is our community, they are our pupils, and **we need to start looking at it from that perspective.** (Interview participant)

Analysis – Unintended consequences

What are potential unintended consequences of polycentric inspections/inspections of networks?

- **We now have schools, heads of departments getting together.** It's hard enough in an individual school to put a group of teachers together where they are now bringing along first hand evidence and showing each school their first hand evidence. That is an unintended positive consequence. **Its' getting organizations to co-operate with each other and that is a major unintended positive consequence. (Interview participant)**
- I see it as the beginning of a process of looking at our pupils as opposed to our individual school and I think that that's a process that's long overdue and it will also **begin the debate around what a school effectively is. (Interview participant)**

One Solution (**In Practice**) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

Findings and Evidence of Impact

- *A Hearts and Minds Approach*



One Solution (**In Practice**) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

Findings and Evidence of Impact

- *A Hearts and Minds Approach*
- *Regular contact and Follow up is key*



One Solution (**In Practice**) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks The case of Polycentric Evaluation

Findings and Evidence of Impact

- *A Hearts and Minds Approach*
- *Regular contact and Follow up is key*
- *Transfer of responsibility for improvement away from the researchers to members of the network/cluster*



One Solution (**In Practice**) to counteracting the failure rates of Networks

The case of Polycentric Evaluation

Findings and Evidence of Impact

- *A Hearts and Minds Approach*
- *Regular contact and Follow up was key*
- *Transfer of responsibility for improvement away from the researchers to members of the network/cluster*
- *Changing attitudes towards Evidence Informed Practice, Data Informed Decision Making, Collaboration, Public and Civic Engagement*



Conclusion and Unanswered Questions

Unanswered Questions specifically relate to **the often-silent voice of those who are on the receiving end of this proposed mode of system wide improvement – Namely Parents, Students and other members of the community.**



Do they feel that this **approach to improvement has had an effect on the quality of educational provision in their schools, their area and in their education system? If so, where is the Evidence Decisions that suggest this.**

To what extent are their opinions and their plans **actually making an impact and are actually being taken seriously within the process of Educational reform?**

Can lessons learned from the DCUIOE/EQI NI Network be used across other areas of the world?

Thank you for Listening