

LITERATURE REVIEW – CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The main research question of this review is...

How effective are CDETБ’s quality systems at supporting its mission (in line with statutory obligations)?
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This part of the literature review will look at the conceptual framework, particularly at its theoretical stance and data collection methods.

THEORY AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Rationale and background

This inaugural review is informed by statutory requirements and organisational strategies, namely CDETБ’s Statement of Strategy 2021-2025, the Code of Conduct for Staff Members of City of Dublin Education and Training Board 2019 and Dignity at Work. It will be part of an ongoing longitudinal multi annual study.

The recent mission statement of the CDETБ is “Our mission is to provide professional high quality education and training services for people in Dublin city that contributes both to the personal development of the individual as well as to the overall social, economic and cultural development of the city – helping you Learn, helping you Grow, helping you Develop” (CDETБ, Statement of Strategy, 2021:30).

To help with individuals’ learning, growth and development it is of benefit to the learner and members of the organisation to have empathy for the learners along their learning journey, as the staff and organisation is also on a learning journey of their own (Donohoo, 2017).

Underpinning this mission statement and pillars of the Statement of Strategy include the concept of a Growth mindset. This mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities and abilities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment (Dweck, 2006).

The importance of the learning relationships or learning alliances (Rogers, 2012; Bordin, 1979) and how we establish and maintain them is central to the achievement of the aim of the mission statement and also the goals of the Statement of Strategy. But there is very little reference to this relationship in these documents.

Theoretical stance and role of researchers

The purpose of this quality review is exploratory in its general outlook, but also has an emancipatory angle in its specific research question as we seek to “create opportunities and the will to engage in social action” (Marshall and Rossman, 2006:34).

The ontological (what do we believe about the nature of reality) and epistemological (how do we know what we know) assumptions will determine the research paradigm. Here, we are interested in what “the human world consists of” and “how knowledge of the human world is produced” (Hjelm, 2014:4). We are putting the experiences and voices of students and staff centre stage whilst acknowledging that knowledge is being constructed through collaboration within a group who share artefacts and meanings. Therefore, the theoretical stance of this research is grounded in social constructivism. We are aware that there are other philosophical stances, such as cognitivism, behaviourism, and interpretivism. Social constructivism, however, aligns with the research lenses we have chosen (see below), as it understands that “... culture and social communities shape the manner in which individuals perceive, interpret and attach meanings to their experience; society forms how and what people think” (Jordan, Carlile and Stack, 2008:59).

We are proposing that this review will be carried out in the spirit of participatory action research. Greenwood (2004) lists its key elements. They “include the belief that the purpose of research is to promote democratic social change by enhancing the capacity of people to chart the course of their own future, that insider-outsider collaboration is both possible and desirable, that local knowledge is essential to the success of any social change project, and that nothing of importance happens if power imbalances are not ameliorated to some degree” (p. 799). Additionally, this approach aims to equip participants with the knowledge of how to do further change projects themselves. Furthermore, participatory action

research is reflexive in nature: “their (individual and social) practices (the work), their knowledge of their practices (the workers), the social structures that shape and constrain their practices (the workplace) [and] the social media in which their practices are expressed (the discourses in which their work is represented and misrepresented)” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005:567-568).

We are aware that the relationship between the researchers and the system under investigation is one of intended study-in-action. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) emphasised the embeddedness of researchers who are actively involved in collective reflection and reporting on any learning happening in such a system.

Research lenses

This study applies different lenses, which will influence our choice of data collection methods. Voice, agency and trust are key to this research project. CDETБ is not only a place of learning, but also a workplace, so the voices of learners and staff will be of prime concern. We therefore apply three research lenses: the ‘Lundy’ model on student voice; ‘Great Places to Work’ to capture staff opinion; and ‘The Wheel of Change’ as the overarching framework of ongoing reflection and action.

The student voice

The CDETБ provides Further Education in a student-centred environment. The concept of being student-centred is referenced as far back as the work of John Dewey (Dewey, 1916) and informed the client-centred approach of Carl Rogers, who expanded the approach into a general theory of education (Rogers, 1983). A student-centred approach is also associated with ‘andragogy’ the adult learning theory of Malcolm Knowles (Knowles, 1984).

Having a student-centred approach involves a shift in the power from the teacher to the student where knowledge is constructed by students and that the lecturer or teacher is a facilitator of student learning.

According to Rogers, individuals have an innate tendency towards actualization of their potentialities, and when individuals are provided with a facilitative social environment they will actualize towards becoming fully functioning people” (Joseph and Linley, 2006:130). The concept of socially constructed knowledge is congruent with the epistemological approach of this review.

Pedagogy grounded in social constructivism has the student voice at its heart. Laux (2018) conducted a literature review on research projects examining the student voice in the science classroom. Her findings showed that social constructivism was one of the two main philosophical perspectives discernible (the other was critical theory).

Adams (2006:247) summarised this link as follows:

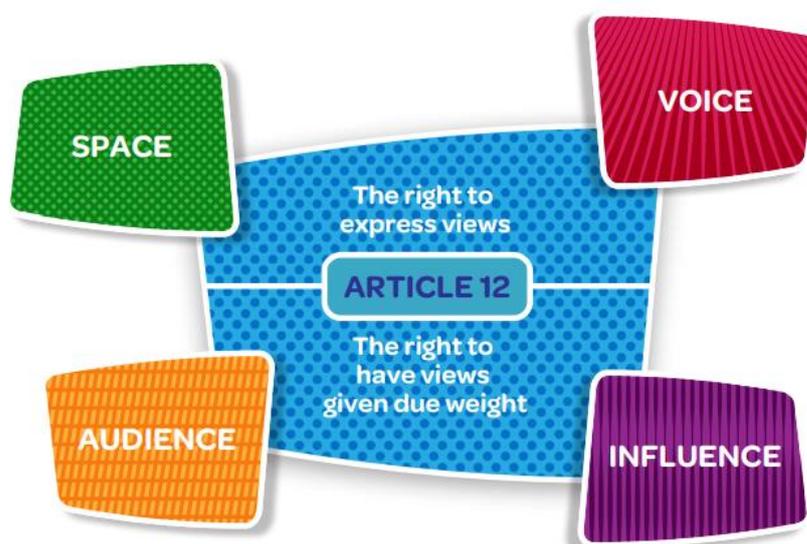
1. Focus on learning not performance.
2. View learners as active co-constructors of meaning and knowledge.
3. Establish a teacher–pupil relationship built upon the idea of guidance not instruction.
4. Seek to engage learners in tasks seen as ends in themselves and consequently as having implicit worth.
5. Promote assessment as an active process of uncovering and acknowledging shared understanding.

There is an increasing interest across the Irish education sector to include the opinions of learners in processes and in shaping policies.

In a recent study for the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Flynn (2017) aligned her study on post-primary student voices with “...a transformative paradigm and as such, the research is positioned in an emancipatory framework of inclusion, voice and empowerment (p.12).”

The National FET Learner Forum (NFLF) was established in 2016 to bring the voice of further education students into Irish policy making. The main research questions at their learner events were “What is working well in FET?” and “What is not working well in FET and how can it be improved?” (Dowdall, Sheerin and O’Reilly, 2019:155). The present review continues this tradition.

Lundy proposed complimenting ‘pupil voice’, which is central to Article 12 of the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child, with ‘space’, ‘audience’, and ‘influence’. Her work influenced the National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015).



This model provides a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC which is intended to focus educational decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision. The four elements have a rational chronological order:

- **SPACE:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view
- **VOICE:** Children must be facilitated to express their view
- **AUDIENCE:** The view must be listened to.
- **INFLUENCE:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.

(Source: Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015:21)

We are following the Lundy model to capture the student voice.



(Source: Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015:22)

It has been successfully used in Child Welfare practice (Kennan, Brady and Forkan, 2019).

Staff voice

The 'Great places to work' (GPTW) model allows us to draw out perceptions of staff. It focuses on the social dimension of organisations with its central tenets of credibility, respect, fairness, pride, camaraderie, trust, pride, and friendship.



(Source: Burchell and Robin, 2011:4)

Connor (2011) elaborated on how trust motivates employees: "they want to feel that they can use their own judgment and be allowed to get on with work within their level of competence" (p. 33). This touches on the question of agency. Conway et al (2016), in their study on a large public sector organisation in Ireland, found that employee experiences of voice led to positive experiences of engagement and reduced their negative perceptions of emotional exhaustion associated with performance management processes. In their work on understanding and managing organisational culture in the public service O'Donnell and Boyle (2008) suggest there are six key issues that leaders and managers need to address which help with changing and fostering the culture of an organisation.

1. Creating a climate for change,
2. Leaders as champions,
3. Employee engagement and empowerment;
4. Team orientation;
5. Tracking cultural change
6. Training, rewards and recognition

Many studies have confirmed that organisations that are recognised as a GPTW have higher levels of productivity, growth potential and higher profits (e.g. Chamberlain, 2015; Butler et al, 2016). What is more, GPTW assessments are employee driven (van Marrewijk, 2004), therefore giving workers an opportunity to give their opinion.

As per the statement of strategy pillar to “Invest in staff development in order to build professional capacity and foster a positive organisational culture in CDET B”. This can be done by raising the collective efficacy of the organisation by focusing on the enabling factors of collective efficacy (Identified as having a high effect size for learner attainment (Hattie) and also an important principle of recovery from the Pandemic (Hobfoll et al, 2007). These enabling factors include Supportive leadership; Goal consensus; Embedded Reflection; Empowered teachers; and Cohesive teacher knowledge (Donohoo, 2017). When staff put trust in the leadership and learners put trust into staff this requires that staff and learners can, (1) be vulnerable to others—vulnerable to betrayal in particular; (2) rely on others to be competent to do what we wish to trust them to do; and (3) rely on them to be willing to do it (McLeod, 2020).

We mapped the QQI review evidence map as well as CDET B’s Statement of Strategy 2021-2025 and Code of Conduct for Staff Members of City of Dublin Education and Training Board 2019 to the GPTW survey questions. This allowed us to isolate the core principles and philosophies underpinning CDET B’s vision and align them with an established survey model. This was followed up with focus groups of staff members to let them elaborate on their views and experiences.

Wheel of Change

The overarching research lens is that of the ‘Wheel of Change’, developed by Robert Gass. In this model, the emphasis is on an approach to change for a whole system (Gass, 2013:1):

1. Heart-Mind - our inner life: our beliefs, emotions, motivation, etc.
2. Behavior Change - our behavior, our habits, the choices we make to act and not to act
3. Structural Change - our environment: everything external that makes up our ‘life’

Gass (2015:2-4) created a template for organisations to follow:

Hearts & Minds

What is currently in place or will be needed to ensure that:

Purpose/Vision

- People can connect the change to their deeper purpose for doing this work.
- People share a clear and compelling vivid picture of what success would look like.
- People are committed and aligned with the change process.

Beliefs

- People believe that they have some power to influence the change process.
- Potentially limiting beliefs and assumptions are named and addressed.
- Conditions are created for creative thinking, breakthroughs and new paradigms to empower the change.

Emotions

- Feelings such as cynicism, resistance to change, anxiety, and anger that might potentially impede or derail the change are skillfully surfaced and addressed.
- Positive emotions are inspired to help fuel the change process.
- There is ongoing support and development of individual and collective emotional intelligence.

Belonging

- There is a collective sense of ownership over the change process throughout all levels of the organization, beginning with top leadership.
- The trust and partnerships necessary for change are cultivated within and across organizational silos.
- Safe spaces are created to name and successfully address significant barriers to trust and peoples' sense of belonging – including issues around social identity, inclusion, power and privilege.

Behavior

What is currently in place or will be needed to ensure that:

Norms

- Clear norms/team agreements are established that are tied to the success of the change.
- There is shared commitment and ownership of the norms (especially among top leaders)
- Everyone at all levels of the organizations understands how they need to act (and not act) to help implement the change.

Communication

- Top leaders model authenticity and transparency, especially regarding the change process.
- There is an excellent communication plan for the change process that keeps people well-informed and well-engaged.
- There is a flow of honest, timely feedback throughout the organization to ensure the learning critical to the success of the change.

Habits

- There is conscious, sustained practice of new habits (consistent with the new norms).
- There is adequate time for the reflection and evaluation needed for learning.
- There is an environment of acceptance for “mistakes” that is integral to learning.

Skills

- There is a thorough assessment of what skills will be needed to develop or acquire in order to implement the change.
- There is sufficient training in the critical skills needed for successful implementation of the change, both technical skills as well as personal and interpersonal mastery.
- Adequate support is available for those playing key roles in the change process (mentoring, professional coaching, peer coaching, etc.)

Structures

What is currently in place or will be needed to ensure that:

Strategies

- There is a well thought-out plan for the successful launch and implementation of the change process
- Plans include performance metrics to support successful implementation of the change plan
- Implications of the proposed changes for existing organizational strategies have been thoroughly explored and addressed

Organizational Structures

- Structures that best support implementation of the changes are in place or created as part of the change process
- Existing organizational structures are assessed for their alignment with the proposed changes
- Potential implications of the changes for existing organizational structures have been thoroughly explored and addressed

Processes

- Processes that best support implementation of the changes are in place or created as part of the change process
- Existing organizational processes are assessed for their alignment with the proposed changes
- Potential implications of the changes for existing organizational processes have been thoroughly explored and addressed

Technology

- Existing technology has been assessed to ensure maximum support of the proposed changes.
- New forms of technology have been explored to empower the change and offer possibilities of breakthroughs.
- The potential role of technology in the transformation is fully integrated into the change process.

This ties in with the overall aims of this organisational progress review, where reflection is core.

Research approach: Case study

As this is a review of one organisation, City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb), we take CDETb as the site for a case study. We propose that this constitutes a single case, embedded type of case study in line with Gray (2018), since there are several different units of analysis, namely the different service spheres.

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