

The Potential, Limitations and Evaluation of Education Networks in a Monocentric System

Potencial, Limitaciones y Evaluación de las Redes Escolares en un Sistema Monocéntrico

Joe O'Hara, Martin Brown, Gerry McNamara and Paddy Shevlin

EQI, the Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection, DCU Institute of Education, Ireland

Abstract

In almost all education systems, there has been an increasingly incentivised drive to establish and promote local education networks. In the case of Ireland, funded education networks referred to as 'education clusters' have been set up to allow schools to collaborate to increase innovation capacity as well as enhance the return on educational investment through economies of scale. While commendable in theory, there is nevertheless, limited evidence relating to the priorities of these networks as perceived by those who are at the core of them, namely teachers. There is also limited research relating to who should be involved in setting evaluation methodologies and standards for the network. As such, using Ireland as a case example, our study was guided by three interconnected questions; what should the priorities of education networks be, what are the benefits and challenges for such priorities and who should be involved in the development of evaluation methodologies and standards?

Findings, many of which we suggest have considerable relevance to most education systems, reveal that, while in theory, although the appeal of education networks in the form of enhanced professional capital is evident, there are still many issues that need to be resolved to enable such networks to deliver on their theoretical possibilities. These include the limitations of reciprocity among network members and the need for facilitated supports to moderate the competitive nature of schools in a network, allowing for competitive collaboration to occur. Importantly,

Correspondencia: Joe O'Hara, joe.ohara@dcu.ie, EQI, the Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection, DCU Institute of Education, Dublin, 9, Ireland.

