

Piloting the draft Methodological Framework in the EFFECT project  
- a brief final report - Czech partner, NIDV,  
September 2017

### Aim

The central aim of the piloting process is to test the 'fitness for purpose' of the draft methodological framework, that is, to analyse and assess whether we have established clearly and sufficiently, in the draft MF, the key components for how to (and when writing of the concepts and process why) establish the right factors and conditions in order - the right step-by-step approach - to achieve successful collaborative personal professional learning for teachers/educators both individually and collectively

### Methodology

Participatory and inclusive approach. Open invitation led to a just acceptable number of participants the potential for which further expansion being somewhat restricted by local (Czech) political conditions relating to education personnel. There has been a significant long-enduring and 'exhausting' activity around a career system for teachers. This has had an adverse impact here. Members of the Czech EFFECT project management team and the related course delivery team were active in the now again-deferred change in the conditions for the teaching service nationally.

Nonetheless, the findings emerging from the piloting of the draft methodological Framework for collaborative learning of teachers present a happier picture.

A small team was established to manage a programme on "Fundamentals of and for Mentoring" in relation to the newly-qualified teacher. The team consisted of the head of International relations in NIDV, the Czech partner in the EFFECT project, two experienced lecturers to lead and facilitate sessions (both members of European coaching and mentoring organisations: one a teacher and mentor; the other, a headteacher and mentor), a senior researcher and author with International experience in education and in the teaching of mentoring, an assistant researcher (and fluent English speaker) who had just qualified from the faculty of education at Charles University, Prague and administrative support.

An open letter explaining the project and the offer of a course, a free course, was sent to the head teachers of all Czech state schools from nursery to grammar school, and a meeting was held at the national headquarters of NIDV. At this meeting, the project was explained and the programme on offer for mentors and mentees (newly-qualified teachers in this case) outlined. The programme had been determined by negotiation between the Czech partner project manager and the two experienced facilitators. (The details are posted on Trello.)

This particular programme of mentoring was new to the Czech approach which had, only in the last few years, taken up teaching mentoring for teachers. Previous programmes had not included mentees nor is there any national, regional or local required programme of induction or mentoring for new teachers or for newly-qualified teachers. Schools are autonomous entities and it is a matter of chance whether or not there is an induction/mentoring programme for any teacher, new or experienced.

A web-based share-point was also established under the auspices of the National Institute for Professional Development (NIDV) as a means of communication between participants and the lecturers to share thoughts, ideas and discussion. E

Using the criteria which formed the basis for the draft methodological framework and which had been formulated into a pro-forma by the EFFECT team, the two researchers made written observations of the programme sessions. These are necessarily interpretative but much discussion between the researchers led to agreed ways of seeing and understanding. Some of the concepts

included in the draft MF required careful interpretation to 'visualise' in the Czech context. Other data were derived from analysing time allocated to the activities and how this was used to enhance collaborative learning between teachers. (The actual work materials in Czech will be on Trello - translation will take a little longer.)

Two questionnaires around the theme of learning and collaborative learning opportunities were designed and distributed to course participants via Google and e-mail; one at the beginning of the process and one at the end. (The questionnaires will be on Trello and results of the later one are currently being analysed and when complete all results will be posted on Trello.)

At the conclusion of the sessions and as a substitute for a planned meeting, a short set of questions (to be appended to this report) was also sent to the headteachers of the participating schools.

The final session of the 'course' (attended by the EFFECT project's bilateral partner from the UK) included presentations (all videoed and in Czech only but shortly to be on Trello) by the participants about their three key points of learning: from their peers (other mentors or mentees), from their mentor or mentee; from the lecturers. Each presenter was given immediate oral feedback by two peers and written feedback from other peers. (See appended for these pro-formae, which required attention be paid to the presenter at the time of presentation in order to give affirming feedback.) Affirming feedback was essential at the conclusion of a programme to leave the course supporting professional growth and development; teachers have been taught to be and are also wise enough to be self-reflective and it is common experience of the Czech researchers that teachers are more self-critical than some observers

Further data regarding collaborative learning and the draft methodological framework during the piloting stage came from the discussions between the two researchers and from the project team during interim planning face-to-face and Skype meetings. (All relevant minutes will soon be on Trello.)

## Findings

Overall, the draft methodological framework and the tool developed for its evaluation were found to be valuable but not yet comprehensive and contextually on occasions some terms did not easily translate. The different histories and consequent cultures of teacher education and the professional development of teachers do set some constraints on the transfer of ideas even in the 21st century.

The value and actualisation of key concepts of "trust" and "sharing" were most significant for participants. In this formulation, the teachers involved saw the "moral purpose" but would not have used that term. Lesson learned: keep the language comprehensible to the audience and its experience but always seek to ensure that horizons are widened and that new language learned is understandable and understood.

The time allocated and dedicated to the purpose was valued. This precious and finite resource requires purposeful planning and built-in flexibility but not lassitude. Additionally, the value of informal (non-directed) time like coffee breaks and other social space cannot be underestimated as opportunities for collaboration and learning exchange.

In professional development sessions, the time given for active learning opportunities should generally exceed the time given to the 'learned'. Time for discussion and development of new skills is essential as was the opportunity to have learned about, talked about and then having had the opportunity to practise new skills was greatly appreciated. Contact with others in the 'same' situation led to greater understanding and empathy.

The actual physical space (and environment) available for collaborative learning opportunities can determine not only what is possible (even for the most creative facilitators and learners). This aspect needs to be integrated into the revised methodological framework.

New ideas and consequently new practice by individuals and within schools and regions have emerged from the piloting of the draft MF and, in that simple sense, the value of collaboration for learning even within the draft methodological framework has been shown to be successful.

The potential for learning exchange through online fora was available but participants exploited this medium less than anticipated, choosing to rely more on e-mail and Skype - again, this may be contextual issue relating to digital accessibility and competency. Nonetheless, the level of intellectual engagement shown by the exchanges suggests that its value is there for some (but not yet all are happy to subscribe to this medium professionally).

A further key finding from the piloting was the value of sharing learning not only between individuals within schools but also across a whole school and between teachers in different schools and in different contexts. Such learning added not only to the professional learning but to professional understanding.

A set of mentor competences was derived from the activities by the course facilitators and this may also be seen to be a product of collaborative learning which, in this case, involved the course facilitators and their learning. In addition, through collaboration with an international expert and author on the mentoring process with teachers, the facilitators gained new knowledge and insights which they shared with course participants. This example reinforces the vital element of the openness of individuals to new ideas and the trust and confidence in the relationships of the 'sharers of knowledge'.

The participatory methodology means that learning emerging from collaborative opportunities leads to new insights for facilitators and project managers (and for their employing institutions). This impact should be recognised and included in the reformulation of the methodological framework since they, too, tend to be members of the teaching profession.

## Conclusion

As a result of the piloting (and the forthcoming adaptability workshops), we need to continue to refine the draft MF.

It is necessary to ensure that the concepts and principles implicit in the methodological framework are readily comprehensible. It seems that it will be necessary to describe it in terms that are accessible to the different audiences and perhaps write sections (or chapters) which relate to the specific audiences: policy-makers, teacher educators and headteachers and teachers.

A chapter on the theoretical background and underpinning cognate fields of both collaborative learning and a methodological framework might appeal to teacher educators and researchers.

A chapter on the benefits of the methodological framework for collaborative learning for teachers with policy-makers and schools in mind would also be valuable.

A chapter dedicated to applying the revised methodological framework for collaborative learning of teachers