

"Mission In Possible"

Report on the Mapping Practice Project



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Foreword

I am pleased to present this report on the Mapping Practice Project which is one of three pieces of research commissioned by the NEWB to inform the design and development of integrated practice across the three strands of NEWB's service: the Home School Community Liaison Scheme, (HSCL), the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Education Welfare Service (EWS). The purpose of the Mapping Practice Project was to capture in a systematic way the experience of NEWB and school personnel in their day to day work with children and young people who may be struggling with school attendance, engagement with learning, or staying at school. The stories collected will guide continuous professional development with the overarching aim of developing a single strategic approach to maximising student attendance, participation and retention.

NEWB invited people to share a story that related to helping a young person who was experiencing difficulties in education and that illustrated what it takes to achieves good outcomes for the child involved.

The 332 stories or experiences submitted give us a unique insight into the work practices of HSCL, SCP and EWS personnel. They remind us, in a most vivid manner that some young people can be burdened with complex family and school related problems that impact negatively on their education. Story after story demonstrate so clearly the need for schools to be able to support young people who struggle in education, by offering interventions that are attuned to the young person's needs, as in the case of the young boy who told the SCP Coordinator that '*he would come to school everyday if he could play soccer*'.

Many people working in education have a general understanding of the work of the NEWB strands. However, the stories that form the centrepiece of this research project show the breath, depth and complexity of the practice in HSCL, SCP and in the EWS. The world of the child who struggles in school because of family dysfunction, bereavement or addiction, which is sometimes compounded by academic or social difficulties, is starkly illuminated throughout the narratives, alongside many positive stories of the resilience of children and the success of interventions.

The title of a story submitted by SCP highlights the critical elements of practice that are needed to secure improved outcomes for children who struggle in school:

Perseverance, reflection, staff cooperation and the students own input make way for a positive intervention and a real difference in a student's life.

The narrative powerfully elucidates the successful outcomes that are possible even in the most challenging circumstances when there is respectful relationship building, effective collaboration between all of the stakeholders and key players, when the child's voice is heard and where there is an unshakeable commitment by all, to achieving improvements in the young person's life.

The need for persistence and skilled intervention is echoed in this narrative from a HSCL Coordinator:

This child's needs are even greater today as a result of the trauma suffered due to the bereavement. However, the family have become very accustomed to contact with the school and while it was once difficult to make contact, it is now most welcome by the parents. As it stands, the child has tremendous difficulties which impact hugely on her

ability to learn at present. However there is a huge sense of teamwork between the school and the home which will stand to benefit the child hugely educationally and personally.

The recurring theme of persistence and not giving up on the family or child despite the complexity of the presenting problems resonates with the experiences of the EWO in this story:

Over the 2 years this family have made significant improvements in their own family life, when I met them the level of dysfunction was significant and the school attendance was non-existent. The family have significant issues that will continue to challenge them as a family unit but I feel that sticking with them and not giving up on them has made all the difference.

The Mapping Practice report affirms the core work of NEWB services and the scope for building on existing good practice. Areas that are in need of greater attention are also signalled in the research, such as: the need for the development of appropriate advocacy roles, the empowerment of the child and the family in the decision making process and the need for NEWB to continue to ensure that there is solid evidence for its work with young people and families. The insights from the Mapping Practice project into the issues affecting some young people in our schools contained in this report adds an impetus to the national roll out of NEWB's plans for integrated approach to school attendance, participation and retention.

NEWB wishes to thank Anne McMurray of Anne McMurray Development Ltd who provided technical support to the project, and the team which had overall responsibility for planning and managing the work (Bridget McGreal (EWS), Denis McCarthy (retired, formerly HSCL), Carol Lannin, (HSCL) Marian Brattman, (Research Manager), Anne Colgan (Consultant) and Mary Kenny (SCP). The Board would also like to thank the school principals, Education Welfare Officers, HSCL co-ordinators and SCP personnel who provided expert insights and advice for the design phase of the project and the interpretation of results. NEWB especially wishes to thank all those who took the time to submit their stories and experiences. The rich narratives based on deep knowledge of children's lives collected as part of this project will be an invaluable source of guidance for NEWB personnel and other colleagues.

Mapping Practice Working Group

Executive Summary

The purpose of the Mapping Practice Project was to capture in a systematic way the experience of NEWB and school personnel in their day to day work with children and young people who may be struggling with school attendance, engagement with learning, or staying at school.

- i. The NEWB has a unique remit which requires it to work across boundaries. At government level it sits within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and continues to work directly and closely with the Department of Education and Skills to ensure that children maximise their participation in the educational system.

The Mapping Practice project is one of three pieces work commissioned by NEWB to integrate practice across the three service strands¹. The project will inform the design and development of integrated practice across the three strands of NEWB's service: the Home School Community Liaison Scheme, (HSCL), the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Education Welfare Service (EWS). The results of the Mapping Practice project will also guide continuous professional development with the overarching aim of developing a single strategic approach to maximising student attendance, participation and retention.

- ii. The issues around school attendance, participation and retention are complex. The methodology used is innovative, enabling the gathering of a large volume of narrative data which could then be analysed quantitatively to reveal the patterns in practice across Ireland.
- iii. The overall approach was based on the SenseMaker™ methods and software tools developed by Cognitive Edge.
- iv. The SenseMaker™ data collection survey tool was designed by NEWB practitioners, managers and evidence from international research.
- v. 332 respondents participated in the Mapping Practice Survey during March 2012. These included 24 from the Educational Welfare Service, 101 from the Home School Community Liaison Service, 182 from the School Completion Programme and 25 school teachers/principals (from primary and post-primary levels).
- vi. There were 279 practice experiences set in DEIS schools, 42 were set in non-DEIS schools; 137 experiences were about children at primary schools and 152 about young people at post-primary schools.
- vii. A "Word Cloud" depicting the most frequent themes mentioned in the experiences highlighted the centrality of 'school' in the practice experience of NEWB personnel and schools.

¹ For the purpose of this document, any reference to NEWB personnel refers to the three strands: Educational Welfare Service, Home School Community Liaison Scheme and School Completion Programme.

- viii. The complex needs of children, young people and families emerged consistently across the three NEWB service strands particularly in relation to:
- schools – improving children’s engagement and participation with learning and school life;
 - poor literacy levels in children and families;
 - The need to enhance children’s self esteem and confidence;
 - handling loss, disruption or turbulence in the family;
 - The need for structure, consistency and fairness;
 - The need to provide emotional and practical support to enable children and young people to engage in education.
- ix. There is evidence of good practice and integrated working across all three NEWB strands and schools. These should be used for staff supervision, professional development and service development.
- x. Commitment to children and young people by NEWB personnel is evidenced. In many cases there is no other agency involved. There is evidence that NEWB is carrying work beyond its core role and in certain cases, other agencies have not been available or accessed for the child or family.
- xi. There is frequent evidence of NEWB personnel involved in complex family situations. This highlights the need to support lone workers.
- xii. Some of the stories show evidence of good outcomes for Traveller children when a high level of support is available.
- xiii. Issues to do with bereavement and loss, family breakdown, imprisonment, health (mental and physical) and addictions frequently show up in the families of children and young people who have difficulty with school attendance, retention and participation needs.
- xiv. The NEWB plays an important role in assisting the family to partner with the school in the education and development of their child or young person.
- xv. There is a need for schools and the NEWB to understand the reasons why children and young people present with behavioural issues in the school setting. Schools and the NEWB service strands should work in partnership to understand the context within which the behaviour issues are exhibited in order to support the child and family. More attention should be given to early indications of disengagement and support across transition milestones.
- xvi. NEWB needs to review how its staff resources are maximised by working collaboratively with schools, families and other agencies using evidence informed approaches.
- xvii. Key skill areas for NEWB personnel include: literacy and numeracy support, advocacy, understanding children and adolescents’ stages of development, family work, loss and grief, mediation, negotiation, cross cultural collaboration, conflict mediation, creative problem solving, case management, influencing and networking.

1. Introduction

This is the report of the Mapping Practice Project which was commissioned by the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) in 2011. The Mapping Project was commissioned by Ms Clare Ryan, Chief Executive and led internally by Ms Mary Kenny, Regional Manager SCP, supported by Ms Bridget McGreal, Regional Manager EWS, Mr Denis McCarthy, Regional Co-ordinator HSCL (who retired at the end of 2011) and replaced by Ms. Carol Lannin, Regional Co-ordinator HSCL, Ms Marian Brattman, Research and Development Manager and Ms Anne Colgan, Consultant.

Anne McMurray Development Ltd provided technical support to the Project Team in the use of the narrative methodology and application of the SenseMaker™ software.

The Project Team would like to thank NEWB personnel and school personnel who took part in the design and analysis workshops in November 2011 and March 2012.

There are in excess of 700 personnel working in the services under the NEWB remit: the Educational Welfare Service, the Home School Community Liaison Service and the School Completion Programme. Almost 50% of NEWB personnel have contributed their experience of practice to the survey, as well as a contribution of experiences from school personnel. This provides NEWB with a rich knowledge repository of real practical experience across Ireland.

This report will set out:

- The strategic and policy context for the project.
- The integrated approach being developed by NEWB.
- The approach underlying the project methodology which was used.
- The results of the mapping practice survey.
- A selection of stories provided by NEWB personnel and school staff.
- Emerging themes and Recommendations.

The purpose of the Mapping Practice SenseMaker™ project was to elicit qualitative information from NEWB service strands and school personnel to describe examples of current practice, to relate this to evidence and research and to use the data to inform practice guidelines and continuing professional development.

A further aim was to engage staff positively in the process, to build ownership of good practice, and understand the impact that the services make to children and young people across Ireland.

2. Strategic and Policy Context

This section will set out the context of the NEWB and the service it offers.

2.1 The Role and Mandate of the NEWB

In Ireland, the complex issue of attendance has been the subject of policy attention in recent decades but was not addressed systematically until the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. This Act provided for the establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) in 2002.

The NEWB is mandated to supervise and implement the provisions of the Act to effectively ensure that 'each child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education' (Section 10). The legislation establishes a framework for promoting regular school attendance, participation and retention as well as tackling the manifold problems of absenteeism and early school leaving.

The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 addresses the educational welfare needs of children and young people in a number of ways:

- It outlines the entitlement of every child to receive an education.
- It establishes a legal obligation for children to attend school regularly.
- It clarifies the roles and responsibilities of parents and schools in relation to attendance, and sets down the arrangements for monitoring and reporting attendance, sharing of information about children's education and enforcing the law.
- It established the National Educational Welfare Board with powers and functions to put in place the attendance and participation measures envisaged by the Act. These powers include taking legal action against parents or guardians who are failing in their duty to educate their children or to send their children to school.
- It provides the legal basis for collaboration among key statutory agencies whose work can help to ensure that every child receives an education.
- It sets out the rights and obligations on parents who opt to educate their children outside of recognised schools.

2.2 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)

The investment in school attendance and participation is part of wider educational and social policy aimed at ensuring that every child achieves their full potential. The Department of Education and Skills DEIS programme is a key policy context for the work of the NEWB.

Launched in 2006 by the Department of Education and Skills, DEIS is the most recent national programme aimed at addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. A very significant element of DEIS is known as the School Support Programme (SSP) which is in place in approximately 340 urban primary schools, 340 rural primary schools, and 200 post-primary schools with the highest levels of disadvantage.

As part of the SSP, interventions such as the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme are available to DEIS urban primary schools and to DEIS post-primary schools. The SCP is available in some non- DEIS schools.

In line with Department of Education and Skills policy, the Educational Welfare Service gives priority to children attending DEIS schools.

2.3 NEWB Services

NEWB delivers on its statutory remit through three main services: Educational Welfare Service; the Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme. Each service is described in the sections below.

2.3.1 The Educational Welfare Service (EWS)

The Educational Welfare Service operates through three regional teams, each of which is headed by a Regional Manager who leads a number of Senior Educational Welfare Officers, who in turn manage a team of Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs).

The NEWB's network of EWOs is the key means by which the Board delivers on its statutory remit to ensure that each child benefits from an education. This support is outlined in the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. EWOs assist schools, students and parents in complying with their legal obligations under the Act. Key aspects of the role include:

- Monitoring school attendance and taking a range of measures where children do not attend school and where parents breach their legal obligations in relation to school attendance.
- Working with other statutory and voluntary services to support children's attendance and participation in schools.
- Encouraging and advising schools in developing school attendance strategies, codes of behaviour and other policies to create environments that encourage children to attend school regularly.

2.3.2 Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)

The Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) is a central component of DEIS: the action plan for educational inclusion which aims to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people, from pre-school to completion of upper second-level education (3 to 18 years), from disadvantaged communities, are prioritised and effectively addressed.

The clear vision of the scheme is the promotion and development of partnership between parents, teachers and community in order to enhance pupils' learning opportunities and assist their retention and participation in the educational system.

The HSCL Scheme works for the most part at the universal and preventative level. It aims to enable parents to become active participants in their children's learning and to stimulate learning in the home. It acknowledges parents as the primary educator and as partners in the whole learning process.

2.3.3 School Completion Programme (SCP)

The School Completion Programme (SCP) provides a range of in-school, after-school, holiday provision and out-of-school supports to children to improve attendance, participation and to reduce the risk of leaving school early. This strand is provided under the Delivering Educational Opportunity in Schools Programme, therefore principally in DEIS areas, although there are SCP programmes provided in some non-DEIS schools.

As of July 2012, there were 124 SCP Projects working in cluster arrangements comprising 470 primary schools and 224 post primary schools.

SCP educational supports typically include: Transfer programmes; breakfast supports; lunchtime supports; after school including homework support; learning support; personal development programmes; therapeutic supports; holiday revision; summer camps including summer literacy camps; attendance tracking and rewards; staff development; sports, cultural, drama, dance; and music programmes.

2.4 Cross Government Co-operation

In June 2011, the functions of the National Educational Welfare Board were transferred from the Department of Education and Skills to the newly established Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The new Department is mandated to lead the development of harmonised policy and quality integrated service delivery for children and young people. It will effectively drive co-ordinated actions across a range of sectors, including health, education, youth justice, sport, arts and culture. Strategically, this Department is positioned to facilitate people to work side by side, thereby providing a coherent Government approach to the development of policy and delivery of services for children.

Given the unique education remit of the NEWB, the Board continues to work directly and closely with the Department of Education and Skills in order to support and consolidate the work of schools, in ensuring that children maximise their participation in the educational system.

3. Integrated Services

This section will set out how the Mapping Practice Project contributes to the development of an integrated approach to service delivery across the three strands of the NEWB and schools.

3.1 Three Strands

In May 2009 Minister Sean Haughey, T.D. announced his decision to extend the remit of the National Educational Welfare Board to include responsibility for the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme.

“The NEWB will put in place a process and structures for the development of the single strategic approach, for the governance, management and operation of the integrated service, including the use of the allocated human and financial resources to provide an integrated service to children, families and schools, aimed at eliminating poor attendance and early school leaving and maximising school retention and participation.”

From this date the NEWB comprised of three strands, each with their distinct set of skills and methods. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was agreed. NEWB's responsibilities within the MoU were to:

- **Develop:** a single, strategic approach to school attendance, participation and retention.
- **Take a broad range of actions:** in support of the entitlement of every child to a minimum education.
- **Put in place:** process and structures for the governance, management and operation of the integrated service.
- **Undertake responsibility:** for the management, development and direction of the three services.
- **Take responsibility for:** achieving best educational outcomes for children
- **Draw on:** the skills, expertise and knowledge of personnel from the three services now being brought together under the NEWB.

The final stages of a detailed integration of services implementation plan are in train. This includes practice guidelines for all staff on a model of integrated practice as well as the design of Continuous Professional Development to support integrated practice.

3.2 Integrating Practice

Integrating practice across the three strands is central to developing a cohesive approach. The NEWB wishes to ensure that staffs are using evidence informed practice approaches and methods, and that the three strands complement and enhance each other to achieve the maximum impact. To facilitate this process the NEWB commissioned three pieces of work:

- a) Consultation with staff and schools on the vision and challenges of an integrated service.
- b) A research report looking at international evidence about what works in regard to attendance, participation and retention of children and young people in education.
- c) The Mapping Practice project, which is a deeper consultation to extract evidence from staff's experience about what works.

The outcomes of all three pieces of work will inform thinking about an integrated model of practice for staff and schools into the future.

4. Approach

This section will describe the rationale for the innovative approach taken by the NEWB in the Mapping Practice Project to gather qualitative information from staff.

4.1 Terms of Reference

The purpose of the Mapping Practice SenseMaker™ project was to elicit qualitative information from NEWB service strands and school personnel to describe examples of current practice, to relate this to evidence and research and to use the data to inform practice guidelines and continuing professional development.

A further aim was to engage staff positively in the process, to acknowledge and document good practice, and understand the impact that the services make on children and young people across Ireland.

The project has been established to capture good practice across the existing three services and schools. This supports culture change and service delivery integration in three ways:

- a) **A bridge from the past to the future** – demonstrating that the integrated service model is building on what is best in the existing three service strands.
- b) **Shares staff knowledge and experience** – across the service strand boundaries, demonstrates what the different service strands offer, builds mutual respect and understanding and promotes integrated approaches.
- c) **Empowers staff and key stakeholders to define the service model** – by identifying “what works”. This contributes to the design of the integrated approach. It gives staff the responsibility for determining future practice development and harnesses front line intelligence and experience for design of the integrated service.

4.2 “We are natural storytellers ...”

The Mapping Practice project asked staff and educators to describe and interpret the meaning of their day to day practice experiences.

In this way, over 330 “narratives” about good practice across the NEWB three strands and schools were captured, stored, analysed and shared. This “experience bank” can inform future practice and service development.

The Mapping Practice Project facilitated a natural process of knowledge transfer. This already happens within existing work groups. Staff and educators already pass on their knowledge informally on a daily basis by sharing their “stories” and experiences.

These are their personal experiences of what works and what doesn’t work in relation to achieving good outcomes for children and young people in regard to school attendance, retention and participation in education.

This is the process through which knowledge is passed between human beings. It shapes the professional “mental models” which underpin staff’s decision making and interactions with others.

The outcomes from the Mapping Practice project can be used to support practice, inform policy, shape strategy and the targeting of resources and methods to generate the most positive outcomes for children and young people.

4.3 Complex Space

The issues around school attendance, participation and retention which the NEWB integrated service will address, are located in what can be termed as “complex space”².

Complex space is characterised by the following features:

- a) The problems and issues in regard to the attendance and retention of children and young people in education are **multi-faceted**. Causal factors are multiple. More than one agency is likely to be involved with the child and their family. Each has its own independent mandate, policies, resources and methods this can make joined up working and collaboration difficult.
- b) Often **cause and effect** is only knowable in hindsight. It is only looking back after the event that the emergent patterns and signals around a child or young person’s situation can be “joined up” and made sense of to illuminate what was happening. This means analysis and decision making needs to incorporate different perspectives and sources of information.
- c) The **context is key** to determining outcomes. What will work in Dublin may not work in Donegal, Doolin or Dungarvan. Local conditions vary, which means solutions and responses must be “knowledge based” rather than simply “rules based”³

This is why the NEWB needs to develop and empower staff with knowledge and skills to support good practice. Staff may be working in isolation and therefore will need to exercise professional judgement with confidence.

In complex space, the ability of practitioners to “probe and surface” what is going on from a range of perspectives, is critical to determining which interventions are most likely to have a beneficial impact.

For this reason, qualitative narratives about experience provide a context to show how to apply knowledge and skills. This is arguably more useful to practitioners than checklists or procedures which are “context neutral”.

The analysis of a number of narratives may reveal the patterns and trends which can inform practice and policy development across the three services.

4.4 International Research

Current work in the NEWB was used to inform the design of the qualitative data collection survey tool. This included evidence from international research⁴. This highlights a number of factors which are important for effective interventions with children and young people in regard to their attendance, participation and retention in education. These are:

- An ethos of high expectations in the school.
- Early warning systems / early identification of child’s needs.

² Dave Snowden: <http://cognitive-edge.com/library/more/video/introduction-to-the-cynefin-framework/>

³ Morrison, Tony *The Strategic Leadership of Complex Practice: Opportunities and Challenges*, Child Abuse Review Vol. 19: 312–329 (2010) Published online in Wiley Online Library

⁴ Publication pending

- Focus on prevention and whole school strategies.
- Listening to the pupil's voice.
- Strong pupil-teacher relationships.
- Supporting parents to secure best outcomes for their children.
- Teamwork and multi-agency work.
- Working with child to plan interventions that fit the child's need/concerns.

These factors were combined with themes from the NEWB practitioners to design the triangles and questions in the survey tool.

5 Project Methodology

The overall approach was based on methods and software tools developed by Cognitive Edge⁵. These have been used since 2004 across a broad range of projects. The method collects individual narratives about practice.

These are captured, stored and analysed using SenseMaker™⁶. This is a software package designed to manage large volumes of qualitative information. The method offers the benefits of being able to access the detail of individual qualitative experience as well as showing patterns through the meta-analysis of a large quantity of qualitative information.

The steps involved in this process were:

- a) Introduction to the SenseMaker™ package.
- b) Project initiation, scoping and detailed planning.
- c) Signifier design and stakeholder consultation.
- d) Finalising signifier design and data capture methods.
- e) Communication, engagement and data capture.
- f) Interpretation and making recommendations.

5.1. Introduction to SenseMaker™ package

SenseMaker™ is a qualitative research technique. It uses narratives (stories about experience) as the starting point for the capture of diverse perspectives. These provide a multi-faceted exploration about the topic of interest.

As SenseMaker™ is an innovative research technique, a key element of the project methodology was to initiate the Senior Management Team in the SenseMaker™ technology and the narrative approach utilised. The Senior Management Team and the Mapping Practice Project team had two sessions on the SenseMaker™ qualitative research technique.

People narrate their experience (story) then make sense of (signify) their own stories against predefined signifiers using a question (signification) framework. These are in the form of triangle questions.

This is a different approach from an external person or consultant determining the importance of the narrative experience. The signification framework enables a consistent analysis of the data that is generated.

Filter questions are asked to enable exploration and analysis from relevant demographic perspectives e.g. role, age, service type, location.

SenseMaker™ uses software which enables the collection, storage and analysis of a large volume of qualitative narratives (stories). The software presents the qualitative

⁵ <http://www.cognitive-edge.com/>

⁶ <http://www.SenseMaker™-suite.com/>

data for analysis in quantitative format, identifying patterns and trends for analysis, interpretation and use for action. The information entered into the SenseMaker™ software is then analysed to present visual and quantifiable patterns. These patterns are then made sense of (interpreted) through dialogue amongst those involved around questions such as:

- What does the analysis mean for us?
- How does it inform us to act?

SenseMaker™ supports the collection of a continuous flow of narratives that allows emerging and shifting changes, impacts and needs to be identified over time. It enables a quick analysis of qualitative material to provide quantitative 'hard' data.

The approach puts people's experiences (not attitudes or opinions) at the heart of the work and engages with them in considering how to interpret the results.

The SenseMaker™ Software was installed on to the laptops of the project team to enable them to further interrogate the narratives which were collected.

5.2 Project Initiation, Scoping and Detailed Planning

The initial set up and planning meeting with the NEWB project team was held in September 2011. The introduced the team to the SenseMaker™ approach, explored the links with other NEWB projects, scoped out project and the detailed plan.

5.3 Signifier Design and Stakeholder Consultation

A stakeholder workshop was held in November 2011 to plan the design of the SenseMaker™ survey tool. Over 30 participants attended representing a range of staff and managers from the different NEWB services as well as school principals' and educators. This group designed the Survey tool (see Appendix A) which consisted of:

- The **prompt question** to elicit the narrative about practice experience from the individual respondents (see 6.3).
- The questions and labels to "**signify**" the narrative/experience. These are triangles which were derived from practitioners and stakeholders as well as "expert" sources i.e. existing research and evidence about good practice (see 6.3).
- The **filters** to "interrogate" the database i.e. demographic information as well as questions to do with service type, frequency of this type of experience and roles.
- Agreeing the data capture methods that would be most effective either online self inputting or completion of paper based version (which were later inputted by Anne McMurray Development Ltd.).

5.4 Finalising Signifier Design and Data Capture

Following this workshop, the draft signifier design, prompts, filters and data capture methods were finalised and tested during December 2011 – January 2012. Cognitive Edge technical support set up the web-based survey screens and provided PDF versions for paper-based collection.

On a longer term basis, the NEWB may continue to carry out a data capture exercise every 6 to 12 months. In this way the Mapping Practice narrative capture can continue to track how practice is evolving as evidence and knowledge is disseminated and

applied. This could provide an ongoing mechanism for monitoring and evaluating knowledge transfer as well as creating a real-time “experience bank” of practice.

5.5 Communication, Engagement and Data Capture

The data capture phase commenced in March 2012 and lasted for three weeks. Information about the project had been sent to all NEWB personnel by the CEO, Ms Clare Ryan.

5.6 Results Interpretation

The Results Interpretation Workshop was held on the 26th March 2012. The original group of participants who had designed the survey were reconvened. The results of the survey were presented. The group were asked to interpret the results data and identify the main themes. Through a process of dialogue, discussion and debate, the group of participants analysed the patterns signified by survey respondents in each triangle and drew out emerging themes arising out of the interpretation. Individual narratives were reviewed to support the analysis and workshop participants’ reflected on their own practice experiences to ensure the interpretation, emerging themes and emerging practice development resonated with current practice (and perceived gaps) within the service strands.

The project team met in April 2012 to review and refine the findings. The project team interrogated the narratives, the interpretation of data in each triangle, the emerging themes drawn from each triangle and the implications these had for organisational and practice development.

Through the results interpretation process, a clear picture emerged of the key practice issues NEWB needs to further explore in its ongoing strategic development. Chapter 6 provides a summary of the findings based on:

1. An illustration of the patterns discovered in each triangle
2. An interpretation of the patterns discovered in each triangle
3. A summary of the emerging themes discussed at the Results Interpretation Workshop and project team meetings
4. The specific areas of practice that NEWB needs to further explore

Section 7 documents specific narratives provided by NEWB personnel and schools for the purpose of the Mapping Practice project. These stories highlight practice experiences of NEWB personnel and schools and provide a rich, qualitative context for the triangle interpretation, emerging themes and practice development issues.

5.7 Recommendations

The impact of the main findings on NEWB’s ongoing strategic development was discussed at a meeting in June 2012. The conclusions from this discussion form the recommendations which are set out in Section 7.

5.8 Ongoing Development of the Knowledge Database

The next phase for the Mapping Practice project is to plan how the NEWB can continue to develop and optimise the practice database. This involves reviewing the learning and benefits from the SenseMaker™ process and consider future applications. This could involve developing an experience survey for children, young people and families to provide feedback on the service they have received

It is recommended that an Optimisation Strategy is developed. This will place awareness and demonstration of good practice development at the forefront of the NEWB during 2012-2014 as a strategic priority.

This would send a signal across the organisation about the importance of developing and maintaining high standards of effective practice as the platform for achieving the better outcomes for children and young people.

6. Findings and Interpretation

This section sets out the results of the SenseMaker™ survey. It will provide interpretation of the results, highlight themes arising out of discussion with practitioners and managers and develop issues which are relevant for practice. A copy of the survey is available as Appendix A.

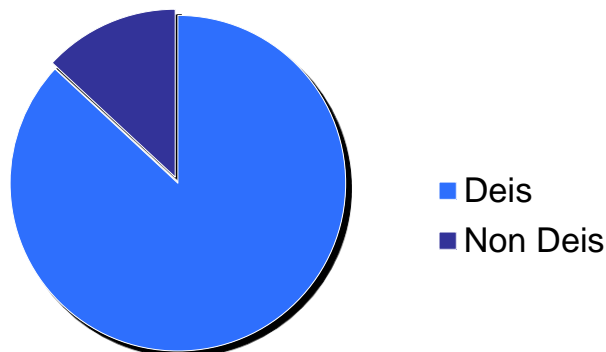
6.1 Respondents' Profile

This is a summary of the respondents' profile:

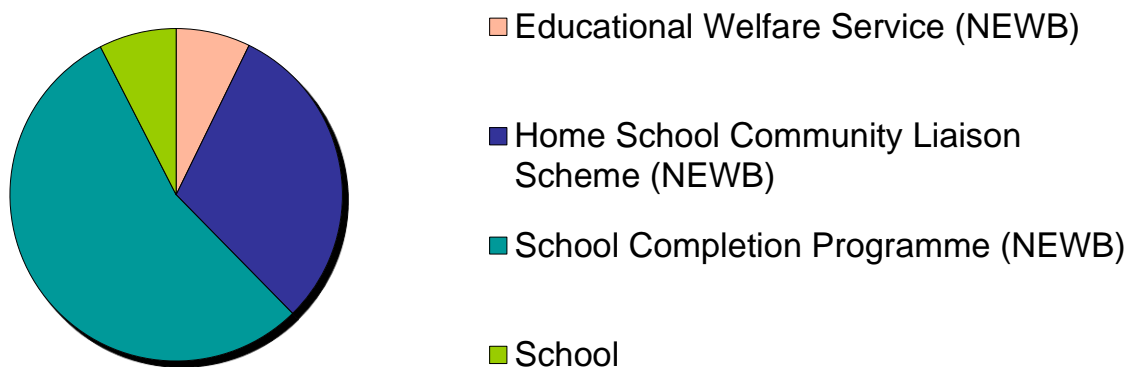
- 332 people participated in the survey
- 24 from the EWS
- 101 from the HSCL
- 182 from the SCP
- 25 teachers/principals primary teachers
- 68 males
- 264 females
- 172 in a city location
- 118 in a provincial town
- 42 in rural settings
- 279 DEIS schools
- 42 non DEIS schools
- 137 primary schools
- 152 post primary schools

The pie charts below show the profile visually.

School Type:



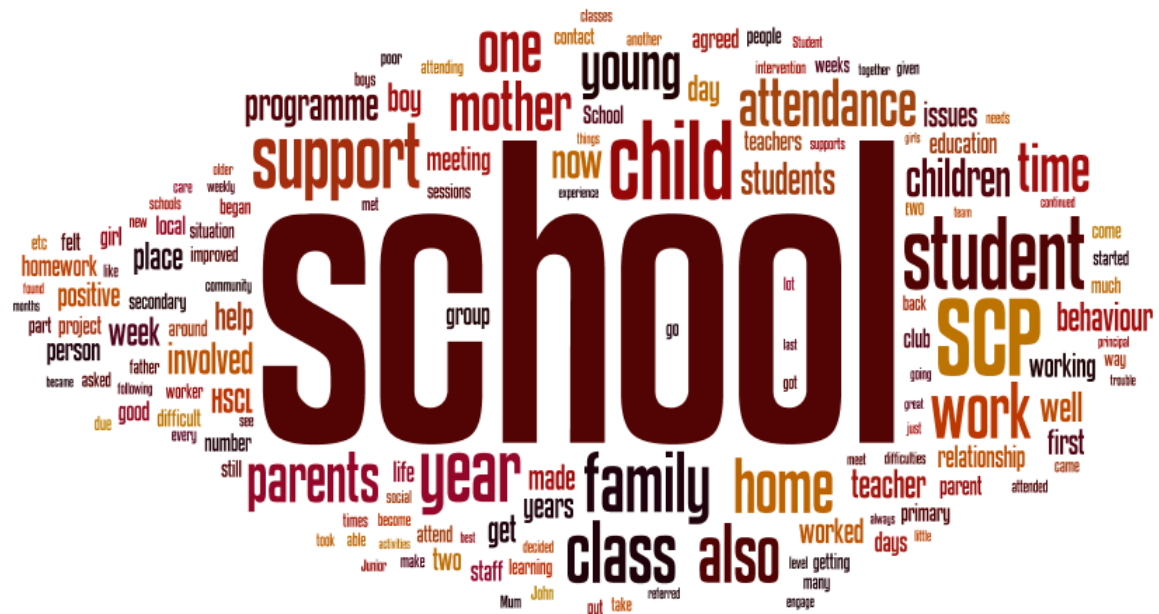
Your Role



6.2 Wordle

SenseMaker™ generates a Wordle “word cloud” from the key words and phrases submitted in the narratives. The resulting word cloud gives a one-glance indication of the issues in the ‘narrative’ of the aggregated experiences.

The size of each word indicates the frequency with which it occurred across all the narratives.



The NEWB Wordle shows the centrality of 'school' in the practice experience of NEWB personnel. The School Completion Programme had most staff participate in the survey. This may have had some impact on the frequency with which 'school' is mentioned.

Nevertheless it shows that all aspects of the NEWB's relationship with schools are important if practice is to be effective. It suggests that the primary focus of NEWB personnel is to work with schools to facilitate the child/young person's attendance, participation and retention.

The words 'student', 'child', 'support' and 'attendance' stand out as important themes along with 'family', 'home', 'mother' and 'parents'. The word 'father' (located in the middle to the left of 'school') is much smaller in comparison to other relevant words.

Developing skills in working to integrate the relationships between the three ‘identities’ of

- a) school,
- b) child/young person, and
- c) family

is core to achieving better outcomes. This is the practice goal of the NEWB and school personnel.

6.3 Responses

Respondents wrote about an experience in response to the prompt question:

“Imagine you are trying to help someone understand what it takes to support children who have difficulty with education. What recent experience would you share to illustrate what it takes to achieve good outcomes for those children and young people?”

Your story may describe what you or others did that made a positive difference to a child or young person; or it may be about a time when things did not work out as you had hoped despite your best efforts. It may even be about a missed opportunity to make a positive impact.”

Respondents then ‘signified’ their experience using questions which were in the form of a triangle. Each triangle consists of a question with three possible response choices, one at each corner. They marked the area of the triangle that best interpreted the experience which they had described in their narrative.

The ten triangle questions in the survey were:

1. In your story to what extent was the voice of the child listened to?
2. In your story to what extent was the voice of the parent listened to?
3. In your story what most describes the working relationships between all the adults involved, including the child’s parents/carers/guardians?
4. Where was support most needed?
5. What aspect of planning and coordination was most challenging in this experience?
6. What best describes the attitude of professional staff in this experience?
7. What was the main lever in bringing about change in the situation?
8. In this experience what caused the most tension?
9. Which intervention most helped in this experience?
10. In this experience what would have made it better?

The results are presented in the form of ‘heat map’ triangles. The heat map triangles are a graphical representation of the data. Each dot in a triangle represents an individual story. Its position within the triangle is where the writer of that story chose to “signify” i.e. interpret their particular experience.

Each triangle shows all the dots’ positions thus creating a “heat map”. This is the pattern of how the respondents’ signified their personal experience in relation to each question. This provides a “meta” picture of how all the respondents interpreted their experiences.

The responses to each of the triangle questions are provided in this section. The interpretation of the pattern and implications for NEWB practice was elicited through a workshop with practitioners and by the project team.

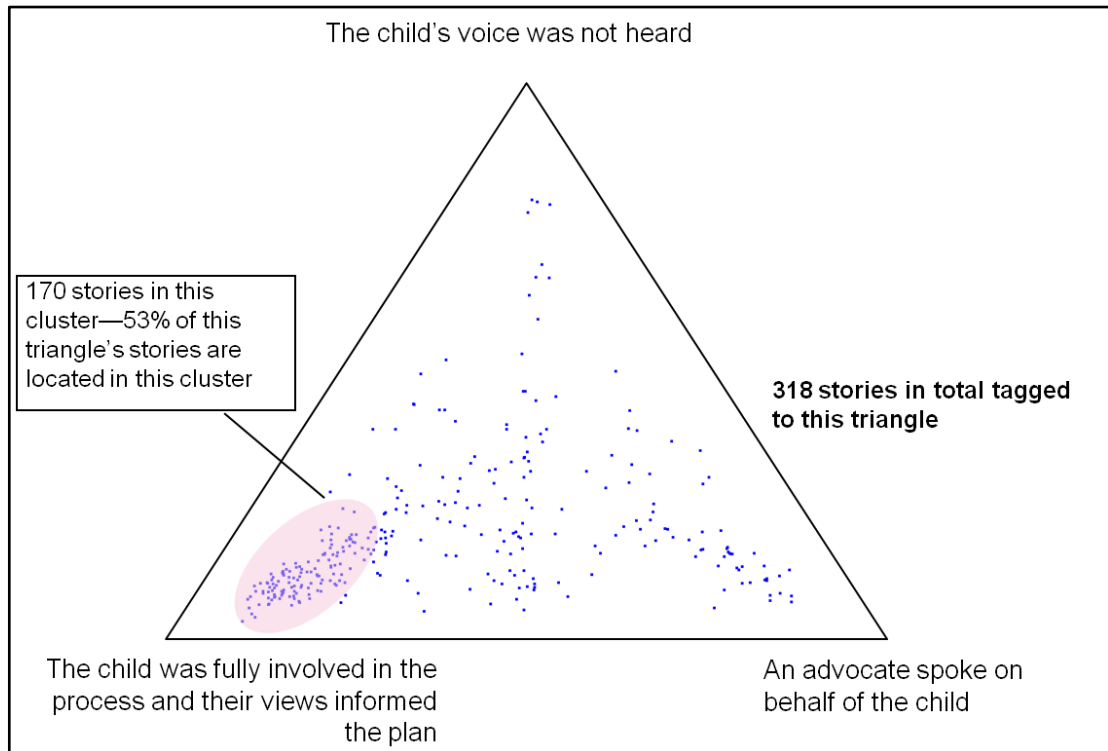
As noted in Section 5.6, this chapter provides a summary of the findings based on:

1. An illustration of the patterns discovered in each triangle
2. An interpretation of the patterns discovered in each triangle
3. A summary of the emerging themes discussed at the Results Interpretation Workshop and project team meetings

4. The specific areas of practice that NEWB needs to further explore

Section 7 documents specific narratives provided by NEWB personnel and schools for the purpose of the Mapping Practice project. These stories highlight practice experiences of NEWB personnel and schools and provide a rich, qualitative context for the triangle interpretation, emerging themes and practice development issues.

6.3.1 In your story, to what extent was the voice of the child listened to?



Observation:

Distribution is scattered with a strong cluster towards the bottom left corner

Interpretation:

- The practice is strongly geared towards listening to the child and finding a solution
- NEWB personnel are taking up an advocacy role with and on behalf of the child.

Themes:

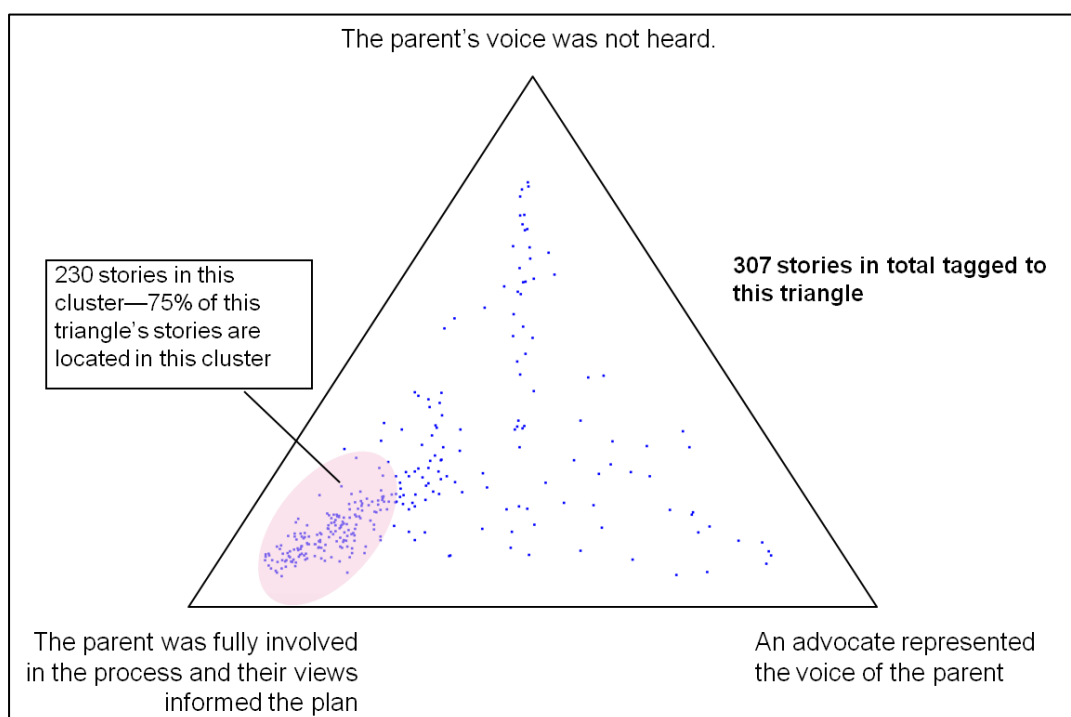
- Advocacy (depends on the strand involved) strengthened through CPD
- Listening to the voice of the child
- Professional boundaries
- Meaningful engagement in school life

Practice Development:

- Clarity around the extent of the advocacy roles for all three strands in NEWB

- Guidance for service strands around advocacy and the professional boundaries for the advocacy roles undertaken
- Empowering the child and family to participate in the decision making processes related to education (Engagement in the life of the school)
- Disseminating good practice to school communities

6.3.2 In your story, to what extent was the voice of the parent listened to?



Observation:

Distribution is scattered with a strong cluster towards the bottom left corner.

Interpretation:

- Parental involvement is strongly evidenced in practice
- NEWB personnel are taking up an advocacy role with and on behalf of the parent

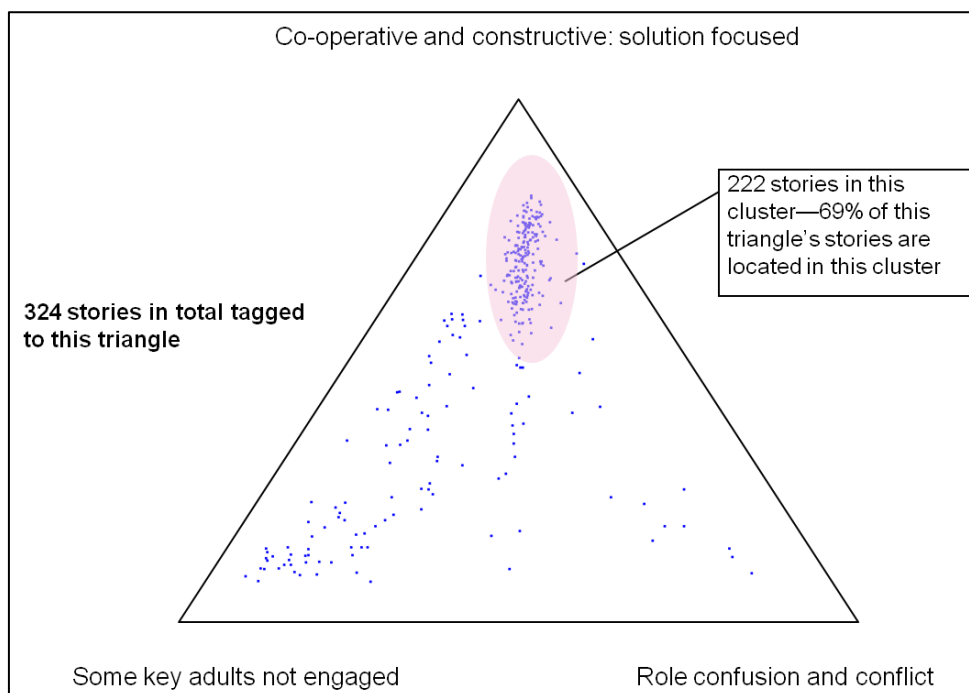
Themes:

- Partnership with parents
- Family related issues which impact on children's engagement in school such as bereavement, family breakdown, mental health, imprisonment, absent parents, literacy and numeracy difficulties
- Advocacy
- Awareness by school of family circumstances which impact on child's education

Practice development:

- NEWB should continue to develop models of excellent practice of meaningful engagement with parents
- Awareness raising of and referral to services available to children and families
- Clarity around the extent of the advocacy roles for all three strands in NEWB
- Guidance for service strands around advocacy and the professional boundaries for the advocacy roles undertaken

6.3.3. In your story, what most describes the working relationships between ALL the adults involved – including the child's parents/ carers / guardians?



Observation:

Distribution is scattered with a strong cluster towards the top corner.

Interpretation:

- Clear evidence that relationships between adults are co-operative, constructive and solution-focused
- A smaller number reported role confusion and conflict
- There is a cluster of stories where the key adults are not engaged

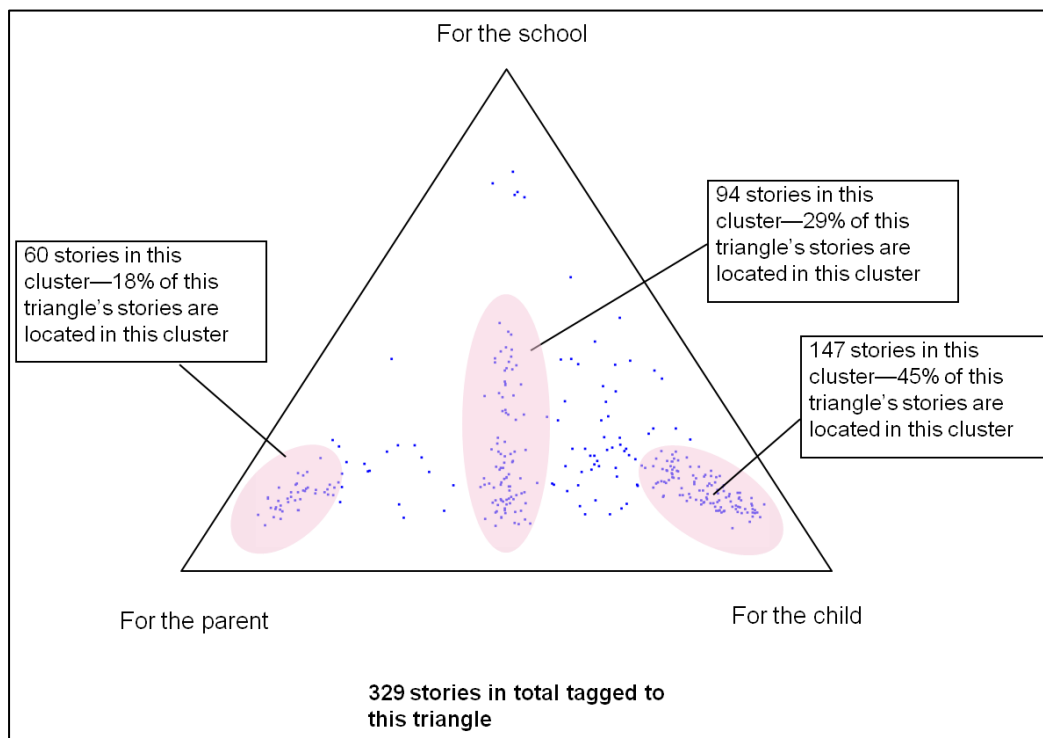
Themes:

- Partnership
- Leadership
- Commitment to better outcomes for children
- Impact of non-engagement
- Lack of support services in non-DEIS schools and the implication for the lone worker

Practice development:

- Disseminating the good practice already established in collaborative working
- CPD for NEWB personnel in working with complex situations and in facilitating collaborative working with the family where many agencies are involved
- Ensure there is on-going support for lone workers
- Disseminate the learning from DEIS schools (in relation to better outcomes for children in relation to attendance, participation and retention) to all schools (to facilitate knowledge transfer)

6.3.4. Where was support most needed?



Observation:

Distribution is scattered with clusters towards the bottom corners, and one down the centre.

Interpretation:

- In 92% of experiences most support was needed for the child and/or parent
- This triangle would appear to indicate that support was needed more for the child/parent rather than the school

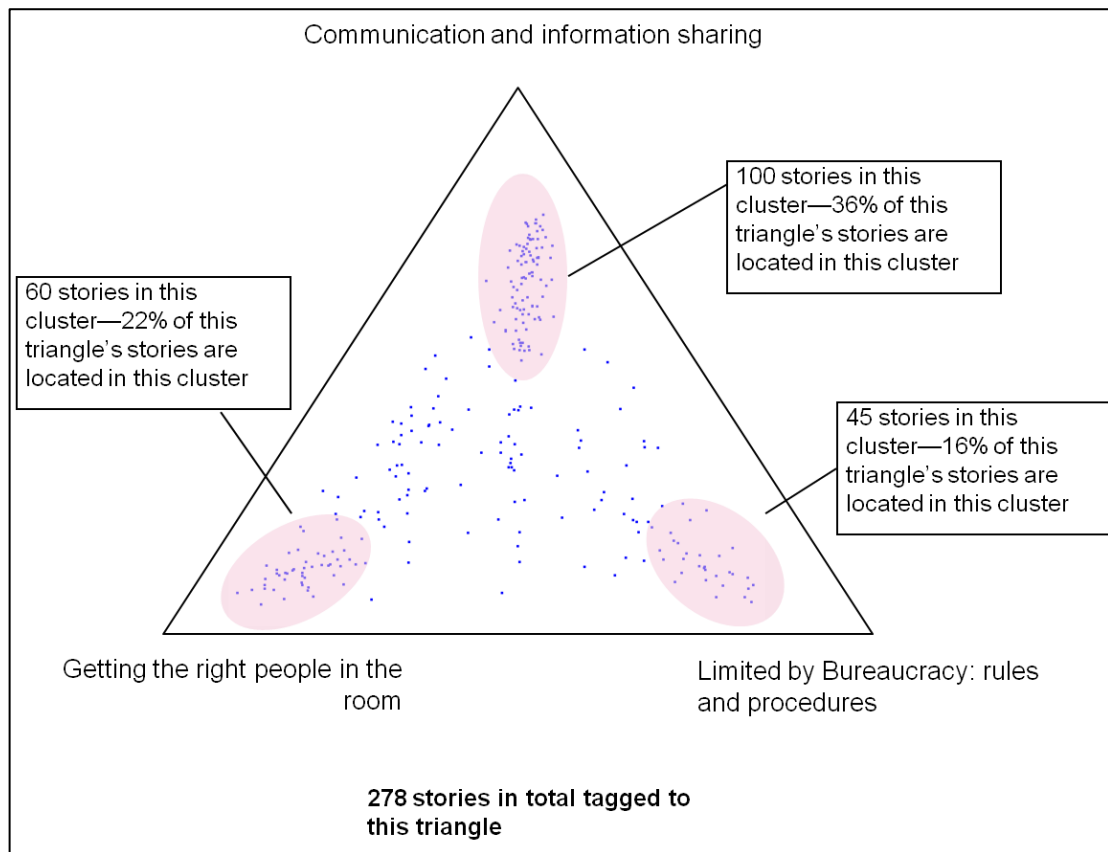
Themes:

- Family based supports that are underpinned by education principles
- Addressing educational needs through family based support and that are child and family centered
- Need for tailored responses to meet needs of individual children
- A whole school approach to address the needs of the child

Practice development:

- Building on and dissemination of current good practice in working in partnership with children and families
- NEWB needs to continue to ensure that there is an evidence base for its work and access research on what supports work for families and children
- Continue to support families to access appropriate services
- Continue to promote a structured whole school response to the needs of the child and family in order to support the educational needs of the child

6.3.5 What aspect of planning and co-ordination was the most challenging in this experience?



Observation:

Distribution is scattered with clusters towards all three corners

Interpretation:

- The most challenging aspect of planning and co-ordination was communication and information sharing
- Challenges were signified across all aspects of the triangle

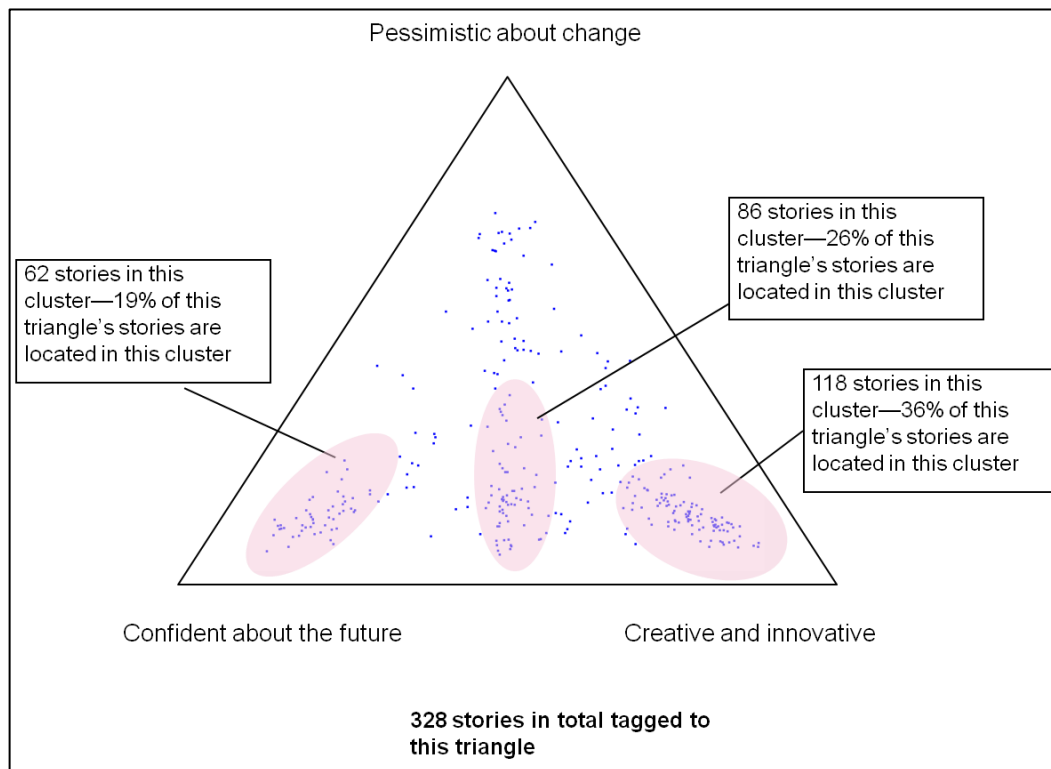
Themes:

- Communication is essential to effective planning and co-ordination
- Engagement – the necessity to have the key stakeholders on board
- Effective interagency working
- Complex nature of family issues

Practice development:

- Need for training in effective interagency working
- Develop protocols for information sharing (both at national and local levels)
- Develop appropriate structures to facilitate effective planning and co-ordination

6.3.6. What best describes the attitude of professional staff in this experience?



Observation:

Distribution is scattered with strong clusters towards and in between the bottom two corners, and towards the bottom right corner and another towards the bottom left corner.

Interpretation:

- 81% of respondents are confident, creative and innovative about the future in relation to the outcomes for the child as recounted in the stories
- Some professionals signified pessimism about change. However this pessimism is indicated at the less extreme end of the apex.

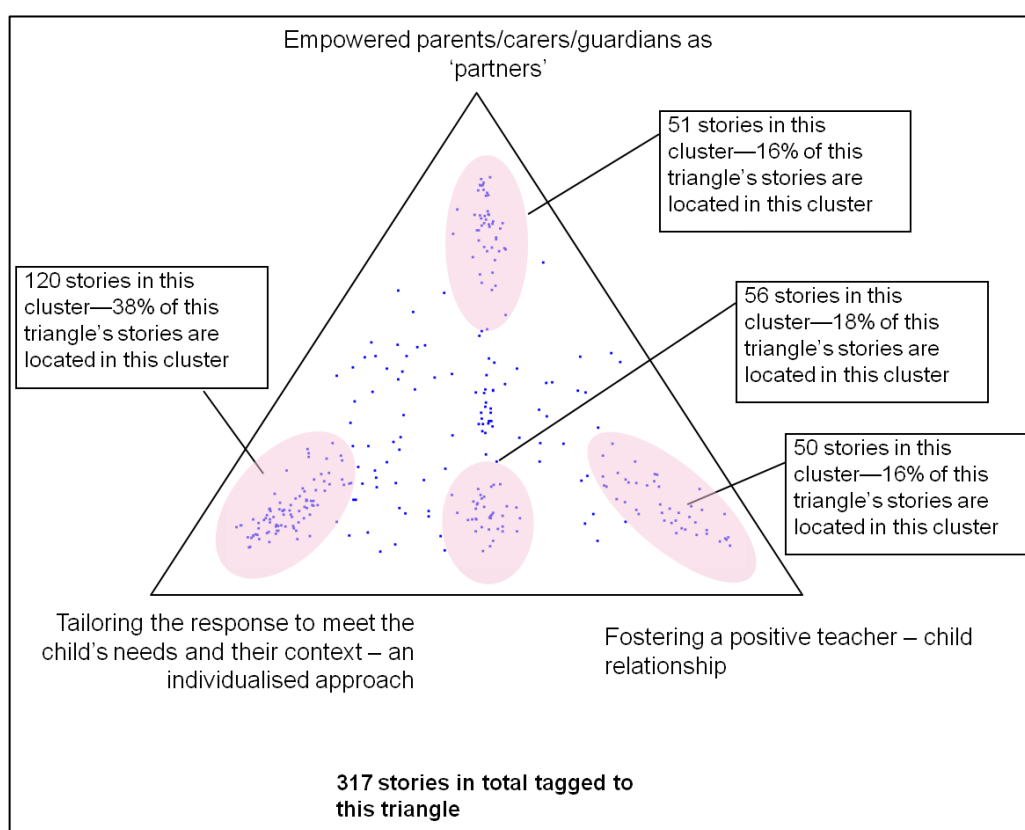
Themes:

- Optimism
- Creative and innovative practice
- Pessimism linked to complex cases and lone working

Practice development:

- NEWB to analyse the 'creative and innovative' stories to extract best practice and inform staff development processes across all services areas
- Personnel who are carrying complex cases need support and supervision to reduce risk and isolation. Also in a number of stories NEWB personnel's professional boundaries were stretched beyond the professional contract.
- Share the positive stories with school staff to heighten awareness of student's needs and use this to examine practice approaches.
- Create an inventory of 'what works' with schools and disseminate as a resource to NEWB personnel and schools.

6.3.7. What was the main lever in bringing about change in the situation?



Observation:

Distribution is scattered with clusters towards all three apices, and one in between the bottom two.

Interpretation:

- A combination of approaches which meets the needs of the child through an individualized approach while ensuring that a positive teacher-child relationship is fostered.
- Empowering parents as partners was also noted as a significant factor in bringing about change.

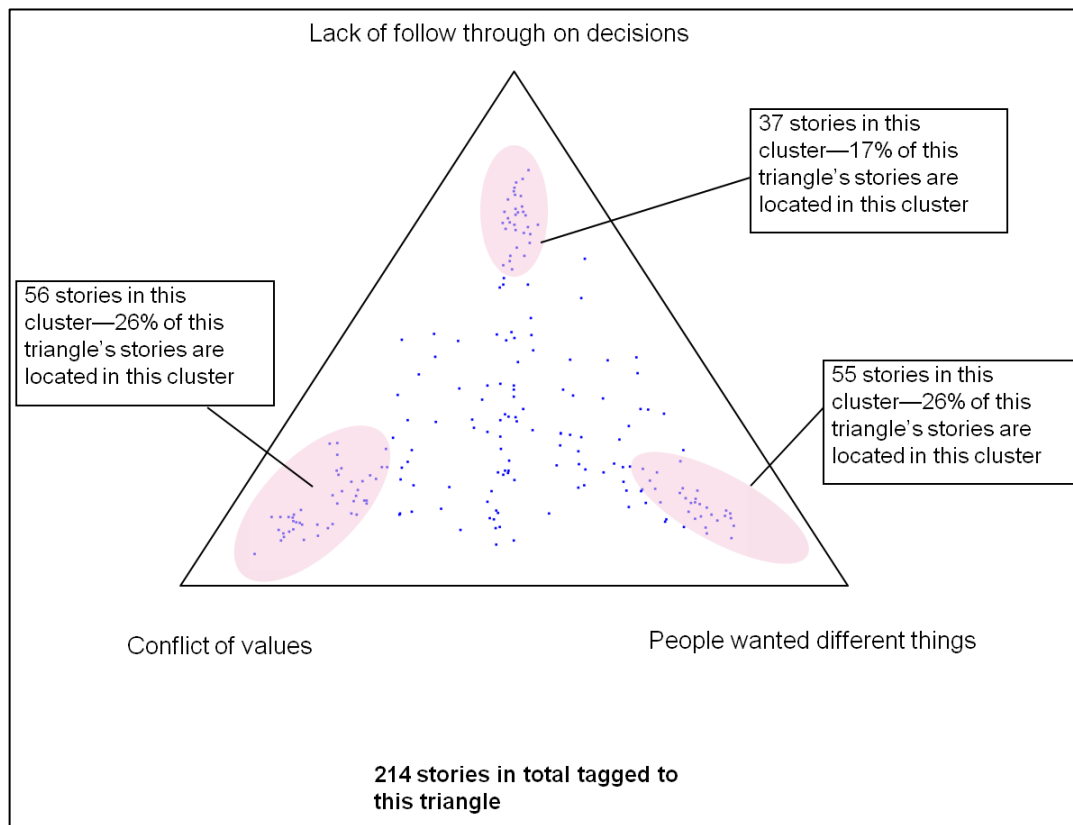
Themes:

- Child-centered responses
- Positive school climate
- Partnership with parents / guardians / carers
- Combination of approaches

Practice development:

- Develop effective partnership working models with schools, home and relevant agencies
- CPD on evidence informed approaches in working with individual children and also in combined approaches of working together with parents, schools and children
- The development of a clearly defined early identification system for children's educational needs

6.3.8. In this experience, what caused most tension?



Observation:

Distribution is scattered with clusters towards each corner.

Interpretation:

- An equal number of respondents identified conflict of values and people wanting different things as causing most tension
- A smaller number of respondent identified lack of follow through as the source of most tension

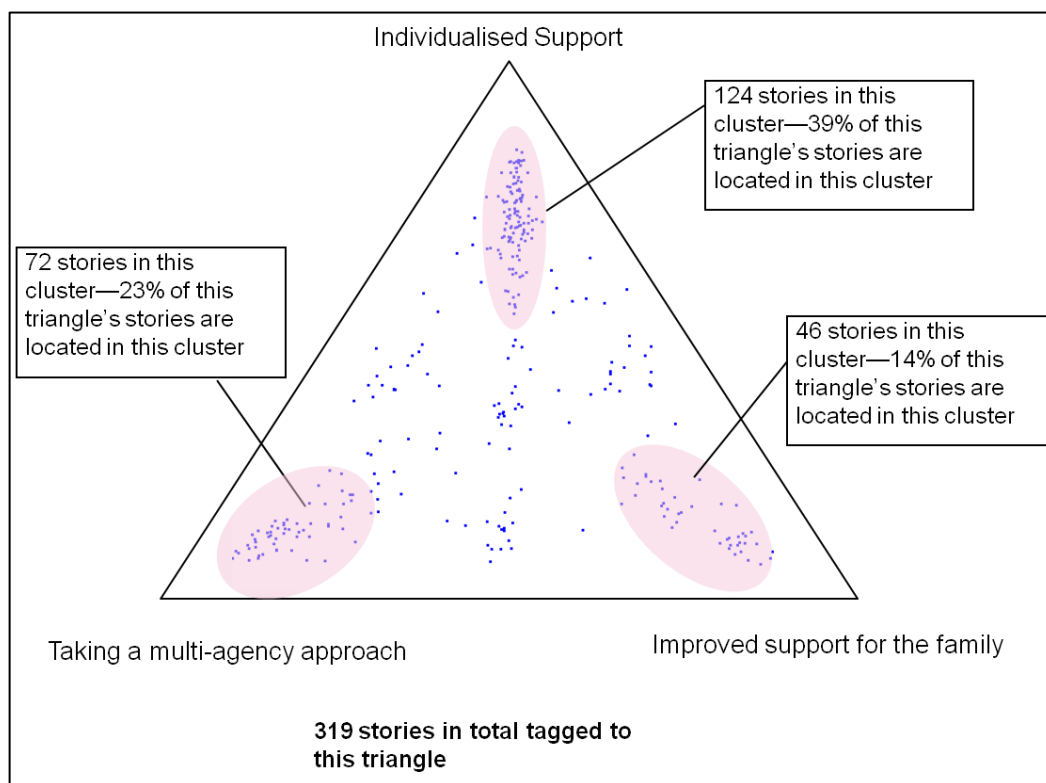
Themes:

- Accountability
- Diversity in relation to values, identities, needs and culture

Practice development:

- An accountability framework to be developed and shared with professionals. This can be difficult to create in a 'collaborative working' situation where responsibility is shared and roles may not be clear. This points to the need to clarify the lead agency responsibility.
- The potential conflict areas show the importance of skills development in areas such as diversity, conflict mediation, negotiation, collaboration, cross cultural facilitation and values clarification

6.3.9. Which intervention most helped in this experience?



Observation:

Distribution is scattered with clusters towards all three corners, with the strongest towards the top.

Interpretation:

- Individual support was identified by respondents as being the most helpful intervention
- A multi-agency approach was also identified as a helpful intervention
- A smaller number of respondent identified improved support for the family as most helpful in the described experience

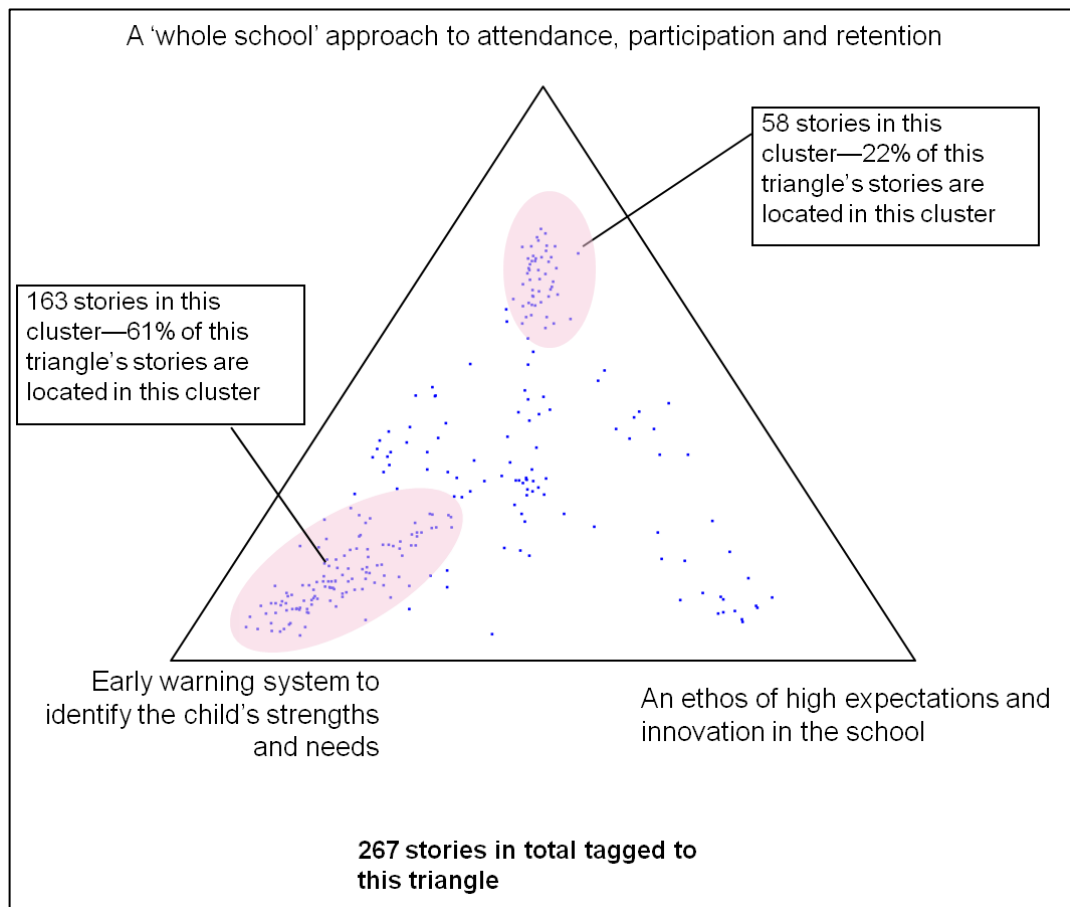
Themes:

- Targeted response
- Innovative approaches to learning
- Support for family
- Effectiveness of multi-agency /disciplinary approaches

Practice development:

- Share current good practice in relation to targeted responses and innovative approaches to learning

6.3.10 In this experience, what would have made it better?



Observation:

Distribution is scattered with clusters towards the top and bottom left corner — the one on the bottom left being especially strong.

Interpretation:

- An early warning system is strongly indicated by respondents as being a development that would have contributed to better outcomes for the child
- A smaller number of respondents indicated that a whole school approach to attendance, participation and retention would have led to better outcomes for the child

Themes:

- Early identification of needs
- Early intervention
- Prevention
- A systemic approach at school level to supporting attendance, participation and retention of students (e.g. Hardiker model)
- Supporting transfer between critical milestones

Practice development:

- Developing links with early childhood care and education (ECCE) and identifying and addressing issues around school readiness, oracy, literacy and numeracy, transfer, social skills etc
- Develop strategies and models around parental involvement in the early years
- The development of a clearly defined early identification system for children's educational needs
- Identify and disseminate current good practice in relation to transfer programmes and processes

7. Mapping Stories

This section documents specific narratives provided by NEWB personnel and schools for the purpose of the Mapping Practice project. These stories highlight practice experiences of NEWB personnel and schools and provide a rich, qualitative context for the triangle interpretation, emerging themes and practice development issues.

Stories were provided by each service strand of the NEWB and by school personnel. This section includes stories from the EWS, SCP and HSCL service strands and school personnel. Critically, the stories provide an insight into the complex nature of practice within the services and schools and underpin the quantitative interpretation provided by the SenseMaker™ software analysis in Section 6.

7.1 Three stories from the Educational Welfare Service

7.1.1 'Sticking with a family'

I have been working with a family (single mother and 2 young people who are both now in secondary school) as a brief intervention for the last 2 years. This family reside in a rural area outside of my main area of work, I cover a large geographical county area and this family are only 1 of 3 families that the local secondary school have referred to the NEWB. In the main there are no attendance issues in the school. This presents a challenge in itself as I am not in the school or locality on a regular basis. Another challenge is that the school has no HSCLO/SCP and it has limited in-house supports with one staff member providing pastoral care support to the entire student body under an allocation of 6 hours per week. From carrying out our assessment with the family the barriers to the chronic school attendance that were identified: poor family relations i.e. high levels of verbal abuse and aggression, poor parenting skills being used by the mum and family dysfunction i.e. no routine/structures/boundaries. In an effort to address these barriers a number of steps have been taken.

1. Communication: through regular communication phone/meetings/ home visits I have developed enough of a relationship with all family members where they all now accept things need to change and are now engaging positively with our service and other services.

2. Referral to other services: We have referred the family to the HSE Social Work Department twice, through the local family resource centre we have organised individual counselling sessions for both the mother and the daughter, we have referred the eldest child to the local 'Teen between project' (project that supports young people of separated parents), we have set up various 'attendance schemes' with the family and with the individual children. We have advised and supported the mother to refer her daughter to CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service) and we have supported her to attend their service.

3. NEWB processes: We have had educational welfare conferences in the school where target and intervention plans were set up. As part of these I have liaised with all parties involved. Recently due to a lapse in attendance before Christmas the SEWO (Senior Educational Welfare Officer) and I signed off on SAN (School Attendance Notice) that can now be issued if things deteriorate again.

Over the 2 years this family have made significant improvements in their own family life, when I met them the level of dysfunction was significant and the school attendance was non-existent. The family have significant issues that will continue to challenge them as a family unit but I feel that sticking with them and not giving up on them has made all the difference. The time frames/processes as set out by the NEWB allow our work to be focused on target plan

and ultimately outcomes for the child(ren). In this family not only have the NEWB impacted positively on the school attendance which will have obvious positive benefits for the two young people but we have impacted positively on a family unit which impacts them in many different ways.

7.1.2 'Listening, understanding and being heard'

Child out of school, assessment of situation could not ascertain any particular reason other than child was in control and would not go to school for the parent. Child was 9 years of age. Mother was not strong enough to force the child to attend. Child was blaming the school/teacher for not wanting to attend.

Meeting called in the school - initially just mother, teacher and principal. Issues discussed and strategies put in place. Child then called into meeting, she explained why she did not wish to attend. Teacher praised her about things she was good at e.g. when she had helped the teacher and others in her class. Child appeared to be happier and agreed to go to school next day.

They were a few days were the parent had to be strong and ensure the child attended but after a two week period the child was back attending school on a full time basis.

7.1.3 'Working together'

A referral was made to me in regard to a child who was absent for a significant amount of time in both this and the last academic year. The school was unable to address the issue as parent would not engage with the school.

I engaged with the parents in my role, which they responded to. I explained the nature and depth of the problem in relation to attendance and the urgent need to address the issue. The child's poor attendance was having a detrimental effect on the child's participation in school, confidence to go to class in a way that he was ready to learn and separate from his parents.

I invited his parents to a formal meeting given the nature of their non-engagement. Support staff from the school was present along with the child.

The meeting happened and the issues were raised and addressed, these were discussed in the context of how the situation was affecting the child in school.

Following this a plan was made taking into account these issues.

The parents were made aware of their statutory responsibility to ensure the child was in school and how this would be monitored.

The child's struggle in school, as a result of his poor attendance, was heard by his parents.

The school heard about the parents struggle in getting the child to school as he was in such a poor pattern.

Opportunities for support in the school and outside agencies were discussed with the parents, allowing the support staff to revert into a support role with the family and to be seen as a source of same.

A plan was devised in light of the above and expectations were created for going forward.

Following the meeting the parents were open to support within the school, which assisted them to carry out their responsibility, opening up the opportunity again for good relationship and communication with the school.

For example, the plan involved parents agreeing a priority to get the child to school every morning, they would be supported in doing this by a designated person meeting the child every morning as he was distressed leaving his parent, the child was brought to place a star on his chart for coming into school and given a few minutes to play a game to help him to settle in the school environment, he was then taken to class when he was ready to learn. Parents were clear about how this would be monitored by all the services and the possible consequences of this plan not working. Rewards were built into the plan both at home and in school for the child, i.e. looking at more external supports or legal action.

7.2 One story from Post-primary teacher

7.2.1 'One Child, One Plan....'

Student is presenting himself with chronic poor attendance. Lack of emphasis on the importance of education at home. When presenting himself at school student has admitted that he doesn't feel a part of school, has no close peer connections and feels that what is going on in class in terms of learning is going over his head. This latter point is affecting him displaying positive behaviour in school.

Student was referred from the SCP Attendance Team to the Care Team. Student support plan was implemented to break barriers affecting school achievement and engagement. Student was assigned adult Mentor (SCP Co-ordinator) and Peer Mentor (senior student). HSCL and SCP worked together to get child into school- pick up (short term), mentor worked on school preparedness, engage with school clubs, constant praise given and positive rewards for improvement.

7.3 Three Stories from Home School Community Liaison Scheme

7.3.1 'Family Learning is the way forward'

In May 2011 I co-ordinated the Mist (Middle Infant Screening Test) Forward Together Programme in our school. In Senior Infants the Mist screening test is administered to identify children who are struggling with literacy. There were nine children identified in need of a guided home help programme. These children all scored in the below average and well below average range and they all came from very disadvantaged backgrounds. We targeted these children and their parents inviting them to take part in the nine week programme which focuses on reading, writing and spelling using a fun approach using games to engage the children and their parents in a rich learning experience. Our families included two Nigerian families; one Latvian and the rest were Irish, all with the common aim of helping their child in readiness for their transfer to First Class. A pack was put together for each child and every Monday morning the parents (two dads and seven mums) made the games and learned what the activities were for that particular week. After a few weeks two families dropped out and the Learning Support teacher worked with these children. The feedback was very positive and the families enjoyed the games and activities. Finally the children were re-tested and three of them scored in the average range, some doubled their letter recognition/listening skills, they all improved significantly. We celebrated their success, presenting the children with certificates, their parents were delighted. I feel early intervention programmes such as this are

invaluable in making a difference for a child, as an experienced teacher who has observed the struggling child lack self esteem and giving up when they fall behind and often leading to discipline problems as well. This was my first time doing the Mist Forward Together Programme, I really enjoyed working with the families and glad that it proved so worthwhile for them, after Easter 2012 we have another programme beginning in our school and it has become part of our school tradition.

7.3.2 'Working Together Can Make a Difference'

Two new students joined our school this year. They came to enrol with a family support worker and it was clear that they were going to need a lot of support in school. When I visited the Mum in the first week, it emerged that they had left a violent situation and had all been scarred by it.

When the students started with us, we noticed a pattern of poor attendance, taking half days etc. Both students were already struggling in school because of broken attendance. The year heads became concerned about this and asked me to speak with the mother. I was also in contact with the family support worker. There was a professionals meeting called - family support worker, doctor, social worker and I. We discussed what we could do for the family - my role being to focus on their education and what we could offer as a school. It was clear that our students were taking on a huge amount of responsibility at home and not getting a chance to do schoolwork or even come to school. Mum was taking them out of school to look after younger children.

When I returned to the school, I spoke to the SCP co-ordinator, who agreed to include the students in all activities she offered - even holiday activities.

I spoke to the year heads involved and we set up a reward system for the students for attendance. This meant that they would get a reward for every full week they attended.

We also gave them two places in the homework club in school so we could support them with their homework and make sure it was done.

When this case arose in a pastoral care meeting, it was agreed that counselling sessions would be offered to the students if the mother agreed.

I spoke to the mother and told her what we were putting in place and asked for her support. She was supportive and it was clear that she wanted the best for her children.

All of these actions have made a notable difference. Their attendance etc. is not perfect but has drastically improved since the beginning of the year. I stay in constant contact with the mother and the other professionals working with her. Because I have built up a good relationship with her, I feel she is honest with me and we can work through any problems. I constantly try to make her see that all of these actions are in the best interest of her children.

There is no doubt that her children are also happier at school and making better progress. This has been commented on by their teachers.

I believe that by continuing to work with this family, we can certainly make a difference to their educational needs.

7.3.3 'Partnership between the home and the school has a hugely positive impact on children's learning'

Child X has had difficulties with learning since starting school due to a variety of factors. Both parents are early school leavers. The child in question has a visual impairment and recently the family has suffered bereavement with the tragic loss of the youngest child in the family. Very early in this child's school life it became clear to the teacher that this child had a visual impairment. HSCL made contact with the family through a number of home visits and phone calls to both raise awareness of this issue and to offer the parents advice around what steps to take in order to find suitable solutions for their child. The parents in question required a lot of support as disorganisation meant that appointments were missed and not followed up. Through home visits information was also given to parents about special support that was put in place for their child in school. Attendance was also an issue for this particular child so HSCL spoke to the parents about the SCP and helped parents to refer their child for this programme. HSCL also accompanied the Visiting Teacher for the Visually Impaired on a home visit which allowed both parties to discuss and plan for the child in question. HSCL worked with the family and the principal to set up Care Team meetings in the school as a forum for devising an educational plan for the child in question. Partnership between the home and the school is vital for the educational success of this child. Care Team afforded all parties the opportunity to engage in a discussion for best practice.

Although HSCL was not always a welcome visitor to the family and although at the time contact seemed to be futile, when the family suffered their tragic bereavement, the school, HSCL and the principal was their first port of call. The family were immediately met by HSCL followed by the principal. The family were given time and space to share their story and gradually plans were put in place. HSCL and the principal kept up regular contact with the parents during their difficult time and parents regularly met with HSCL and principal to ensure their child's smooth transition back into the classroom situation. This child's needs are even greater today as a result of the trauma suffered due to the bereavement. However, the family have become very accustomed to contact with the school and while it was once difficult to make contact, it is now most welcome by the parents. As it stands, the child has tremendous difficulties which impact hugely on her ability to learn at present. However there is a huge sense of teamwork between the school and the home which will stand to benefit the child hugely educationally and personally.

7.4 One Story from a Primary Principal

7.4.1 'The power of belonging'

John (not his real name) came to the school as a third class child. His family had moved from London. He was a 'statemented' child and came with a ream of paper. John was oppositional, defiant and aggressive and had a history of assaults on teachers and pupils. He had been put on a short day in his last school and was frequently withdrawn to the "Nurture Room".

On enrolment John was frequently hostile and refused to attend a support class for literacy. He was very negative to the notion of reading. Very hostile to teachers and had few friends.

We contacted the Educational Psychologist who gave us a lot of information on ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder) and associated behaviours. Using HSCL and SCP we established a relationship with parents.

Our first lesson with John was to avoid confrontation. He was more practised than us at this and tended to "win" frequently. Use of threat was pointless and counter-productive.

We adopted a two pronged approach. The first involved giving John choices. The second involved building a sense of belonging - building a feeling that he was in the right place.

It was a slow process and involved huge mindset changes among staff; not confronting every challenge; praising proximate compliance etc

But it worked. Worked beyond our greatest expectations. John is now ordinary. He participates in all activities, plays hurling for his town, accepts sanctions and praise, smiles and enjoys school.

He is reborn in the process has taught us so much. The greatest gift that he has gained is a release from opposition; becoming ordinary.

As he transfers to secondary we are faced with a number of dilemmas; should we forward all his historical "paperwork"? Should we generate negative expectations prior to his arrival?

And the great question? How can we support his transition to secondary and his induction into a new scenario?

7.5 Three Stories from the School Completion Programme

7.5.1 'The Soccer Project'

I often recount the story of a Traveller boy who, when walking off the pitch after a soccer project ended said that if he did that everyday; he would be at school everyday! This to me is what education is about: introducing to the timetable some element of satisfaction of pleasure for targeted young people so that they at least turn up; and then you can work with them. The rules of that particular soccer project - which lasted for 4 weeks for 3 class periods per week - were that they had to be in school the day before, they had to stay out of trouble during the week and that I was not going to question any teacher who objected to anyone taking part.

7.5.2 'Perseverance, reflection, staff cooperation and the students own input make way for a positive intervention and a real difference in a student's life'

I worked with a 2nd class male student whose attendance was poor; when he was in he arrived substantially late, without uniform or school bag and wouldn't have homework done. When in school his behaviour was reasonably good, he would sometimes get in trouble for shouting out in class, boisterous play etc. I worked with him as part of a group of students from his class which over time allowed him to make some quality connections with peers which thus led to friendships developing. Due to his low percentage of class attendance previously it appeared hard for him to build relationships with his class peers.

I began work on an achievement chart with him - he chose the theme of 'space'. He worked on a 2D space rocket and poster of outer space environment incorporating different planets and so on. The idea behind his poster / chart was that his space rocket needed to travel throughout space beginning at earth and finally reaching the moon - landing on each planet along the way. In order to get to each planet he would need to achieve his stars on a chart that we put in his classroom. Using this chart we worked on various issues for the student targeting attendance, punctuality, wearing the uniform, having a school bag in, homework

done and his behaviour in school also. I saw him weekly so we began by targeting one thing each week- a smaller task to begin with - something he would not find unachievable or too daunting, depending on the amount of stars he would receive in class for achieving this task he would move his rocket closer to the next planet on his poster. When he reached a planet he would move on to another task, however keeping on the last task too - so his progress from the previous week/task must continue. Slowly but surely progress was being made with this student. There were many weeks when progress soared and he did really well and also weeks where little progress was made, or at times even a slight regression occurred, but perseverance and positive encouragement from all involved spurred him on again to succeed.

He began attending a School Completion homework club two days a week and on those days his homework would be completed.

When we began to tackle punctuality we utilised the Breakfast club in the school run by School Completion also. The student had to make it to breakfast club each morning which thus ensured he would be on his line at 8.50 am - which was the school motto. If he managed to be a full week at breakfast club on Friday mornings he received a hot chocolate from the Home School Liaison Teacher in the school.

On completion of the intervention he had reached the moon on his poster and had settled into school and his class excellently. Not only did the student improve on his class behaviour, his attendance was up; missing very few days throughout the intervention. With his attendance not being a problem at all this year, his punctuality is much more desirable now. Being on time for school most days and when he is late now it is only by a few minutes (max 20) compared to the substantial hour or 2 that he would arrive late previously. He also has his school bag every day and his school jumper on most days. This year unfortunately he has opted out of the homework club but his homework is usually done at home each day, just maybe not to the same standard as when he attended homework club as he has no help there but we continue to tackle this.

The success of this intervention with this child I feel had many reasons:

- the cooperation between all school staff involved with this child i.e. the HSCL taking part in an incentive for punctuality at the end of the week, the breakfast club staff noticing his attendance at breakfast club each morning. The class teacher's willingness to give up time to award his stars each week on his class poster for achieving whatever task was set out.

- the understanding of the class teacher and HSCL in relation to the role SCP play in the school and the student's school life - the school alongside SCP identified this student as having grave concerns in relation to schooling and allowed the correct measures to be put in place for him and to allow SCP work with him to achieve his highest potential.

- the role the student had in his own intervention - that he had choices, he had a voice in what we worked on each week - things he felt were problems for him, things he identified he was getting in trouble for etc.

- My perseverance, the student and the others involved in parts. At times the intervention did seem to slow down in results or for short periods the student would regress on his previous progress, however with reflection each week the intervention would be reshuffled slightly and would pick up pace once again. I feel also that the faith and belief we had in the student and

that that he had in himself spurred on the enthusiasm of all parties involved to continue with this intervention, which has since paid off long term for him.

SCP also took G to the local gym once a week with a small number of students which he stated was the best thing about school. G would often seek the help of the SCP when in difficulty. But G began to report to staff that he hated school and began to become involved in a lot of difficulties in December. SCP would help to intervene and calm him down when possible, often escorting him home when he disagreed with a suspension. He was suspended a number of times and a report made to the board of management due to volatile and aggressive behaviour. G's parents were upset and frustrated at his behaviour and with the school for their constant calls about G. In February G assaulted a teacher and was expelled, he was 15. G was referred to the EWO and his parents applied to a number of schools in other towns but they had no places for him. G was granted home tuition until he was 16.

SCP put an out of school plan in place for G: a project worker met G twice a week to maintain the relationship; the local JLO (Juvenile Liaison Officer) was involved with G. SCP worked on the Copping On programme with him and with the JLO, which included a visit to Wheatfield Prison. SCP also visited G at his home and worked on life skills such as banking/ paying bills/keeping a budget/ cookery/sexual health awareness/drugs awareness. G also went with the SCP staff to the gym twice a week.

G turned 16 and got a place in a training centre in the next town as is attending daily and happily. SCP staff often meets G in the town and he always stops for a chat and to give an update.

7.5.3 'Breaking the Cycle'

In this mapping exercise, I would like to take the opportunity to speak about Robert (not his real name).

Robert completed his Leaving Certificate two years ago. The experience of working with Robert has given his junior national, senior national and community college a much needed boost in what can be at times a challenging environment to work in.

This is a short account of how Robert broke and continues to break the cycle of educational disadvantage.

Robert first came to my attention when he was in 4th class. It was the first year of the School Completion Programme in this area. Robert was identified as scoring highly in standardised tests like the Drumcondra English profiles. Unfortunately Robert was not receiving any significant affirmation at home and his behaviour became more and more challenging. He was continually disruptive and was getting into a lot of fights with his peers (male and female). Through his involvement with a SCP summer camp, good trusting relations were formed with other key secondary school staff members and the Local Co-ordinator.

To say that Robert's passage from 1st to 6th year was 'rocky' would be a gross underestimation! The records will speak for themselves. In total Robert was suspended on eleven occasions over his time in secondary school. Things were not good at home. Robert found out that his father was not his real father. Robert missed out on a local youth service trip to France as his Mam (with whom he has no real connection either) had not bothered to get an Affidavit signed at a local solicitor's office. His birth cert has a different surname to the one

he goes by. Robert also missed a significant amount of time in school due to having to take on childcare responsibilities.

Through good lobbying work on behalf of Robert, SCP was able to influence over half of Robert's teachers in secondary. His Class tutor and history teacher took particular interest in his case even when there was controversy surrounding him.

As Robert has no reliable person at home to help with his organisation, SCP had to take on that role. This included flexibility of response, particularly in his final year. Appointments with Trinity Access Programme, interviews with NUIM Access Programme had to happen. Robert had to be prepared. At the time this included a considerable amount of what I call 'donkey work'. We can all now look back with satisfaction, that all of our actions/interventions were very worthwhile.

Robert who at one time was over a week suspended (as his mother would not come into the school) completed the Trinity Access Programme in Liberties College and is currently a 1st Year student in History at Trinity College Dublin! Relations are still not good with his mother and Robert now lives independently. He is still in regular contact with SCP. He is very keen on completing a H.Dip in secondary school teaching as a postgraduate. I have no doubt that he will do well. The Access Programmes in our universities need to appreciate the difference they can make to young people like Robert also.

This story has lifted the spirits of the school communities in the schools he has attended, the family support service he attended and SCP. It encourages us and challenges us to continue to work collaboratively for the best interests of all of the children/young people we serve.

7.6 One Story from Post Primary School

7.6.1 'Reward for effort'

David started in our school in First Year, with lots of issues and identified needs. His home situation was dysfunctional with a strong presence of alcohol and substance misuse. He found it hard to settle into First Year and displayed lots of anger and tantrums in class and on the playing field. We met as a group under the Care Team organised by SCP and developed a needs response. His mother and David were part of the process. Over the next number of years with lots of support, help, one to one, David made great progress. He was targeted for extra tuition, after school support and was heavily involved in sport. After lots of intervention from the Career Guidance department David was successful in securing a place in NUIG to study Arts. Having spoken to him recently he has plans to go to Wales to do his PGDE and become a secondary school teacher. He recently did his teaching observation in our College and it was lovely to have him back.

8. Emerging Themes

This section captures the salient themes that have emerged out of the Mapping Practice project. The themes reflect the interpretation of results as well as the stories documented by participants. They highlight the critical elements of practice and the level of development required to make things better for children.

- The need for highly developed **advocacy** practices that is appropriate to each of the strands.
- The importance of **listening to the child** when devising plans and interventions. The need for on-going support for children who struggle in school, to experience meaningful engagement in school life.
- Clarity around professional **boundaries and accountability** is necessary to facilitate effective collaborative work among professionals and with children and families. Effective communication strategies are essential for planning and coordination.
- **Partnership with parents** is a critical factor in the support of the child's engagement in school life. The need for intensive and on-going supports for children who are effected by bereavement, family breakdown, mental health, imprisonment, absent parents, and low levels of literacy. The need for schools to be aware of and sensitive to family circumstances that impact on the child.
- There is frequent evidence that NEWB personnel are involved in **complex family situations**. The successful outcomes for the child and the family are usually contingent on persistence with continued and long term supports.
- The experiences submitted in the research indicated that there is highly evolved **collaborative practice** among NEWB personnel when dealing with challenging family situations. This highlights the need to support lone workers in Non-DEIS schools.
- The **complexity of the challenges** that beset families and children was a recurring theme throughout the experiences. NEWB personnel work in a highly skilled way with families in relation to parenting, loss and grief, mediation, negotiation, cross cultural collaboration, conflict mediation, creative problem solving, influencing, networking and inter-agency engagement.
- The NEWB have a role in assisting the family to **partner with the school** in the education and development of their child. The NEWB also has a role to work with schools in creating a positive school climate that fosters inclusivity and respects diversity. NEWB personnel are well positioned to work with schools to implement innovative approaches to learning that better meet the needs of the child who struggles with attendance, participation and retention.
- Consideration needs to be given to **tailored individualised responses** where appropriate, having regard for optimal use of resources.
- The chances of securing better outcomes for children are increased when there is a systematic approach to **early identification of needs** coupled with targeted early intervention that is underpinned by evidenced informed strategies that support attendance, transfer, participation and retention.

9. Recommendations

The Mapping Practice project identifies scope for integrated practice development, for embedding new practice through continuing professional development and for organizational practices to support integrated working.

A compendium of the stories collected in the Mapping Practice project should be produced and made available to all staff. These stories should be used for staff supervision, professional development and service development.

9.1 Practice development

The Mapping Practice findings highlight a range of areas of practice development to support integrated working. These include:

9.1.1. Advocacy: Provide clarity and further guidance for staff around the extent of their advocacy roles and the professional boundaries for their advocacy roles

9.1.2. The voice of the child: Develop best practice models for empowering the child and family to participate in the plans and decisions processes about their education and engagement in the life of the school

9.1.3 Loss and bereavement: Develop clear policy for the strands of NEWB on how to support a young person who has experienced loss through bereavement or family breakup, drawing on existing good practice.

9.1.4. Early Years: Develop strategies and models around parental involvement in the early years

9.1.5 A whole school approach to attendance, participation and retention: NEWB should continue to promote a structured whole school response to the needs of the child and family in order to support the educational needs of the child

9.1.6 Transfer: NEWB should continue to develop effective models of transition supports by drawing on the practice and evidence from a wide range of successful transfer programmes

9.2 Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

NEWB should develop and implement a comprehensive programme of continuing professional development to support personnel in its services in areas such as:

- a) Use of evidence informed approaches in working with individual children
- b) Good practice in meaningful engagement with families
- c) Good practice in involving children in decisions that affect them
- d) Offering individualized tailored responses to meet complex needs
- e) Working collaboratively towards agreed outcomes
- f) Effective and innovative approaches to learning which will engage the student
- g) Conflict mediation, negotiation, collaboration, managing diversity, cross cultural facilitation and values clarification
- h) Effective interagency working
- i) Working with complex situations and in facilitating collaborative working with the family where many agencies are involved.

9.3 Organisational development

The Mapping Practice findings highlight several areas of wider organizational development to support the work of NEWB and school personnel:

9.3.1 Supporting staff: NEWB should ensure support and supervision for personnel who are carrying complex cases to reduce risk and isolation or who are working on their own in an area

9.3.2 Gather evidence informed practice: NEWB should ensure that there is an evidence base for its work on what supports work for families and children by:

- Continuing to gather examples of effective practice at school and local level
- Invest in ongoing research on attendance, participation and retention
- Create an online library of research and materials for NEWB personnel and schools
- Create a repository of positive stories that can be shared with school staff to heighten awareness of student's needs and use this to examine practice approaches.

9.3.3 Information sharing protocols: Protocols for information sharing should be developed by NEWB at national with appropriate organizations and agencies that support young people and at local levels with appropriate organizations that support young people in education, having regard for confidentiality and for relevant data protection procedures.

9.3.4 Disseminate good practice: Strengthen and develop the role of NEWB in gathering and disseminating good practice to school communities in relation:

- a) Effective interagency working
- b) Engagement strategies
- c) Models of partnership with parents and families
- d) Strategies to improve attendance and retention
- e) The learning from DEIS schools in relation to better outcomes for children in relation to attendance, participation and retention
- f) Successful strategies to assist children and young people to make good transitions at key points in their educational journey.

9.3.5 Develop an Accountability Framework: NEWB should develop an accountability framework providing clarity on roles, communication and areas of responsibility to be shared with other professionals to govern situations where the challenging nature of family situations requires the involvement of a number of agencies.

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Young Person At Risk initiative, www.ypar.ie



Appendix One: NEWB Mapping Practice Survey

NEWB

National Educational Welfare Board Mapping Our Practice Project

March 2012

National Educational and Welfare Board

Mapping Practice Project

Introduction

There are many reasons why some children and young people struggle with school and with learning. The role of the National Educational and Welfare Board (NEWB) is to enable children and young people to achieve the best possible educational outcomes. NEWB can only achieve this by working in partnership with the children and young people, their parents, teachers, and other agencies.

The aim of this project is to find out what practitioners have learned about the critical aspects of practice that lead to successful outcomes for children and young people. We want to gather all these experiences in order to create a rich picture of what makes a difference.

The results of the project will be used to design integrated services, contribute to professional development and inform policy.

Please take part in this survey and share your experience. It will take 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Individual information will be treated in confidence.

The survey will be open from 1st March 2012 to 20th March 2012. All individual contributions will be aggregated into a final report which is to be finalised by the end of May 2012. The report will be available on the NEWB website.

If you have any queries about the project or about completing the survey, please contact Anne McMurray (anne@annemcmurray.com)

How to take part:

1. Describe a real experience that involved you and that had an impact on educational outcomes for a child or young person, and write it down in the next page. Your story may describe what you or others did that made a positive difference to a child or young person; or it may be about a time when things did not work out as you had hoped.
2. Complete the set of questions (in the form of triangles). Answering these questions will tell us what YOU think or feel about your experience.
3. You will also be asked some background questions for comparative purposes.

Confidentiality

Thank you for taking part in this exercise. The information you are sharing in this survey is anonymous and untraceable. When contributing your experiences, please do NOT provide the names of family members, caregivers or professionals.

All information will be handled and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

By completing and returning the survey you are consenting for your anonymous information to be used with that of others in the development of a study report.

Your role:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Welfare Service (NEWB) | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher – Primary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home School Community Liaison Scheme (NEWB) | <input type="checkbox"/> Principal – Primary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School Completion Program (NEWB) | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher – Post Primary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> Principal – Post Primary |
-

Imagine you are trying to help someone understand what it takes to support children who have difficulty with education. What recent experience would you share to illustrate what it takes to achieve good outcomes for those children and young people?

Your story may describe what you or others did made a positive difference a child or young person; or it may be about a time when things did not work out as you had hoped despite your best efforts. It may even be about a missed opportunity to make a positive impact.

Do not worry about grammar or spelling. Write in the box below. The story must be real. You can use phrases/bullet points/sentences. Describe the situation, what happened and the impact on the people involved.

Please give your experience a title (eg 'What can we learn from this experience')

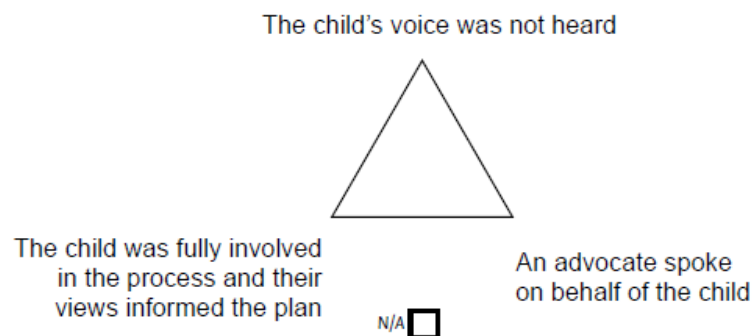
Choose 3 words or phrases that reflect the key themes in this experience:

You are now moving on to the stage where we ask you to reflect on your story by answering the following questions, which are in the form of triangles.

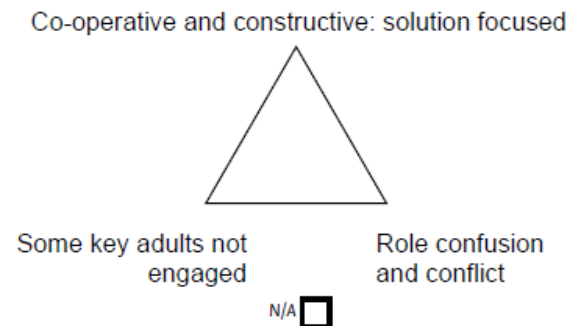
We would like you to use the triangle questions to interpret your experience against a number of critical factors which are necessary for services to be effective.

Please mark the spot on each triangle by drawing a circle, which best reflects the experience in your story. You may put your circle anywhere within the triangle to show whether your answer relates to one specific point or is a mixture of two or three points. If any are not applicable, please indicate N/A.

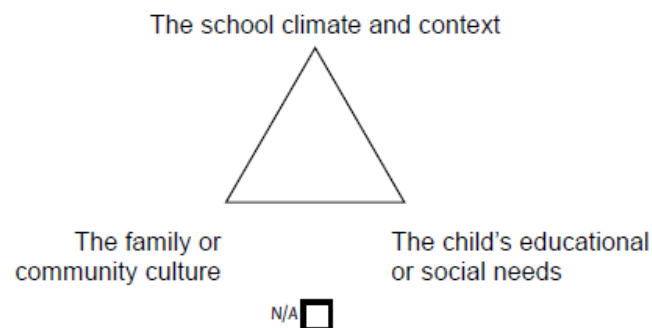
1. In your story, to what extent was the voice of the child listened to?



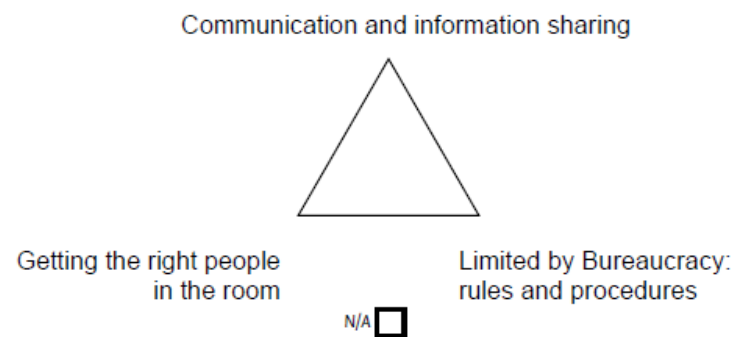
2. In your story, what most describes the working relationships between ALL the adults involved – including the child's parents/carers/guardian?



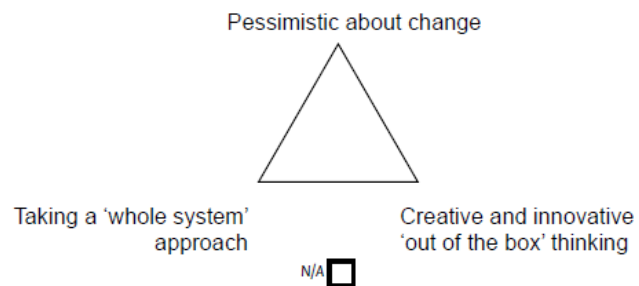
3. What best describes where the core issue was rooted in this experience?



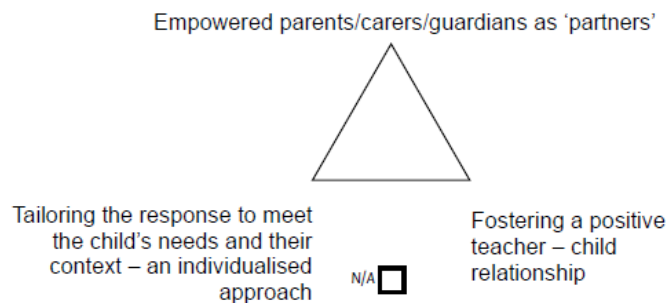
4. What aspect of planning and co-ordination was the most challenging in this experience?



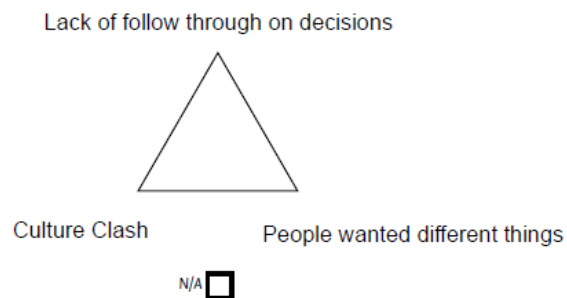
5. What best describes the attitude of professional staff in this experience?



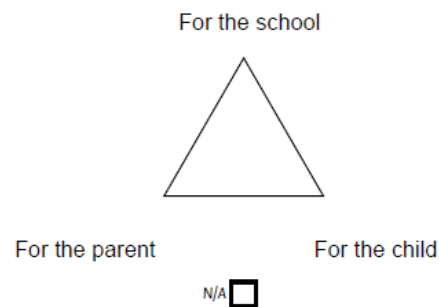
6. What was the main lever in bringing about change in the situation?



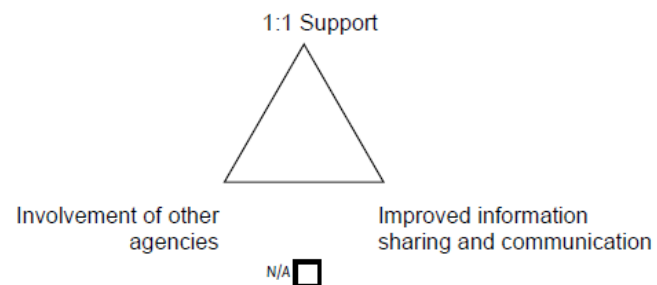
7. In this experience, what caused most tension?



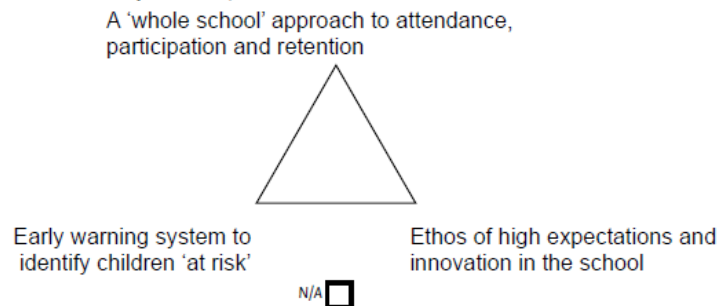
8. Where was support most needed?



9. Which intervention most helped in this experience?



10. In this experience, what would have made it better?



Your age:	Under 20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+

Your gender:	Male	Female

How common is your story?	Exceptionally rare	Not at all common	Somewhat common	Common	Commonplace, it's just the way things are around here

Length of time in your current role?	0 - 5 yrs	6 - 10 yrs	11 - 15 yrs	15 - 20 yrs	16+ yrs

Where best describes your location?	City	Provincial Town	Village	Countryside	County	Other (please specify below)

School Type (please tick all that apply)	Deis	Non Deis	Primary	Secondary	Single Sex