

Developing a Shared Understanding of Wellbeing: An Exploratory Study in Irish Primary Schools Incorporating the Voices of Teachers

Authors : Fionnuala Tynan, Margaret Nohilly

Abstract : Wellbeing is not only a national priority in Ireland but in the international context. A review of the literature highlights the consistent efforts of researchers to define the concept of wellbeing. This study sought to explore the understating of Wellbeing in Irish primary schools. National Wellbeing Guidelines in the Irish context frame the concept of wellbeing through a mental health paradigm, which is but one aspect of wellbeing. This exploratory research sought the views of Irish primary-school teachers on their understanding of the concept of wellbeing and the practical application of strategies to promote wellbeing both in the classroom and across the school. Teacher participants from four counties in the West of Ireland were invited to participate in focus group discussion and workshops through the Education Centre Network. The purpose of this process was twofold; firstly to explore teachers' understanding of wellbeing in the primary school context and, secondly, for teachers to be co-creators in the development of practical strategies for classroom and whole school implementation. The voice of the teacher participants was central to the research design. The findings of this study indicate that the definition of wellbeing in the Irish context is too abstract a definition for teachers and the focus on mental health dominates the discourse in relation to wellbeing. Few teachers felt that they were addressing wellbeing adequately in their classrooms and across the school. The findings from the focus groups highlighted that while teachers are incorporating a range of wellbeing strategies including mindfulness and positive psychology, there is a clear disconnect between the national definition and the implementation of national curricula which causes them concern. The teacher participants requested further practical strategies to promote wellbeing at whole school and classroom level within the framework of the Irish Primary School Curriculum and enable them to become professionally confident in developing a culture of wellbeing. In conclusion, considering wellbeing is a national priority in Ireland, this research promoted the timely discussion the wellbeing guidelines and the development of a conceptual framework to define wellbeing in concrete terms for practitioners. The centrality of teacher voices ensured the strategies proposed by this research is both practical and effective. The findings of this research have prompted the development of a national resource which will support the implementation of wellbeing in the primary school at both national and international level.

Keywords : primary education, shared understanding, teacher voice, wellbeing

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