

Queen's University Innovation Zones: Translating Local Community Educational Innovation to International Contexts

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Abstract

This paper examines the work of Queen's University Belfast Innovation Zones in translating locally developed community-based educational innovations into international contexts. The Innovation Zones operate at the intersection of civic engagement, educational research, and social innovation, supporting co-designed programmes that address educational inequality and community development. The study focuses on two translation case studies. The first, Crescendo, originated in West Belfast as a music and social learning programme supporting pupils in primary schools. Through a structured partnership model, Crescendo was adapted and piloted in Yantai, China, demonstrating how core principles can be maintained while responding to different cultural and educational systems. The second case study, Conversations, a community-led model for understanding children and young people's aspirations, developed in the Shankill area of North Belfast, was translated to Cape Town, South Africa, where it was adapted to local social dynamics. Methods included structured translation pilots, collaborative co-design processes, and mixed-method evaluation examining feasibility, fidelity, and contextual adaptation. Findings indicate both common enabling conditions, such as strong local partnerships and shared values, and context-specific differences affecting implementation. The paper concludes that community-rooted educational and social innovation practices, when supported by research evidence and implementation science, have significant potential for international application while preserving local integrity.