

# Pathways to Innovation and Development in Education

*A Collection Of Invited Essays*



Rose Dolan (Ed.)

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# Introduction

*Rose Dolan*

The Department of Education in NUI Maynooth is pleased to publish the first of a series of publications that commemorates the work of our colleagues and our graduates. The series was conceived as a way to mark the contributions of two members of the department on the occasion of their retirement. This publication marks the work of Dr. Gerry Jeffers. Colleagues and graduates were invited to contribute a short essay on a topic that related to the overall theme of the publication, a theme chosen to reflect the multifaceted work that Gerry has engaged with over the course of his career in education, not just in our department but in the education system as a whole. This collection allows others to dip into this world and to experience it through the writings of practitioners in the field of education.

For our student teachers, the essays will serve as valuable introductions to some key ideas about teaching and learning but also ones that challenge their assumptions about schooling. For the more experienced teachers on our Postgraduate Diplomas, Masters and PhD programmes, the essays might inform and enthuse, nudge readers towards innovation and experimentation and emphasise that the *status quo* is not inevitable.

[Professor Jim Gleeson](#) opens the publication with a paper entitled *What sort of teacher do I want to be - critical and creatively constructive or compliant, conformist and conservative?* This is the beginning of a series of questions that challenge us to engage critically with the concept of a theory-practice divide, on being constructively critical, on professionalism and on recognising that schools need to change. In doing so, we engage with other issues such as neo-liberal ideological influences, anti-intellectual bias, the neglect of education research and the historical influence of the church.

This is followed by [Dr. Pádraig Hogan](#)'s contribution on *School Patronage, Educational Experience and Religious Teachings* which highlights the difference between the role of patron bodies and public education authorities and reflects on the roles of each in a pluralist democracy.

[Professor Gary Granville](#) invites us to consider *The Impossibility of Curriculum Change in the Mind of Someone Educated: Shark, Sabre-Tooth and Junior Certificate*. He describes the City of Dublin Humanities Project from the 1970s and demonstrates how the proposed Junior Cycle reforms bear a striking similarity to those contained in the project from 40 years ago.

Through the medium of a play set in Unreal Academy "*Making fools of ourselves*", [Angela Rickard](#) challenges us to confront assumptions about learning. The idea that learning takes

place only in ‘hallowed sites’ and in ‘calm tranquility’ is turned upside down by the introduction of a carnival into the Academy.

Drawing on research carried out in two community schools, [Dr. Grace O’Grady](#) considers the notion of identity as visible or invisible, depending on where we are positioned in relation to the dominant culture. *Constructing identities with young people: making visible cultural norms* challenges us as educators to be aware of these cultural norms and to offer our students opportunities to cross cultural borders.

In *Curriculum, Culture and Society*, [Dr. Dermot Quish](#) details the five traditions of curriculum and links them to curriculum in the Irish context. He posits that, in the interaction between curriculum and society, the purpose of schooling can be clearly understood.

[Dr. Ellis Humphreys](#) invites student teachers and newly qualified teachers to consider their leadership role from the beginning of their career in *Distributed Leadership and the Newly Appointed Teacher*. She offers features of leadership for consideration and a series of questions to prompt the development of thinking about the teacher’s leadership role.

In *Bravery and Leadership*, [David Harris](#) contemplates the role of bravery in leading change in schools. Drawing on his experiences as a Head Teacher in England, he details seven aspects of bravery, including the recognition of the link between staff morale and the leader, and the importance of placing the child at the centre of all efforts to make things educationally better.

[Lynda O’Toole](#), writing about *Sustaining Innovation in the Classroom*, considers how innovation plays a role at each stage of the continuum of teacher education. She outlines the potential of activities, such as the Learning School Project in Cork, and policies, such as School Self-Evaluation and Whole School Evaluation, to develop and sustain innovation in classrooms in Ireland.

*The New Junior Cycle: Learning from Innovations in Transition* outlines the main tenets of the Junior Cycle framework and draws parallels with the Transition Year Programme. [Denise Kelly](#) challenges the profession to participate in curricular reform. She poses questions for the practitioner to consider and highlights the opportunities for students to participate in decision-making.

In *Home School Community Liaison as Part of a School’s Pastoral Programme*, [Noel Kelly](#) describes the role of the Home School Community Liaison and the rationale for the role in a DEIS school. He shows how it assists the transition from primary to secondary school and its significance in linking teachers with parents/guardians as they support the child at this period of change.

[Carmel Boyle](#) draws on her research findings on the impact of engagement in community service Transition Year students in *Schools and Community Service*. Personal growth and

development, learning through experience and the enhancement of communication skills are some of the benefits that students experienced as a result of their participation in this aspect of the programme.

*Collaborative Practice at the Heart of Student Welfare* is the title of [Margaret Keating's](#) contribution. In it, she describes the need for whole school approaches and collegial practices in order to deepen the care shown to students. She also highlights how a strong link between leadership and collaboration is highly significant to the role of the guidance counsellor.

[Emer O'Keefe](#) describes the process of *Setting up a School Guidance Service* in a school in Ireland. She draws us into her expectations in advance of taking the post and the realities of the experience while in the role. What she has learned through the experience is reflected in her advice to others who follow a similar path.

Research conducted on the use of circle time in primary schools provides the basis for [Dr. Bernie Collins'](#) essay on *Circle Time as a Learning Space: Challenges and Opportunities*. She shows that, while circle time presents opportunities for involvement, it is also a place where power can be exercised through silence and non-involvement. She highlights much that is positive and cautions us to be aware of areas for concern.

[Maeve Daly's](#) *Experiential Learning as a vehicle for thinking critically on the assessment process; reflections of an educational psychologist in training* shows how conducting a process of cognitive assessment on a student created cognitive conflict within herself. She highlights the tension between duty of care and ethical consideration in relation to our work with others.

In *Literacy and Creativity: a Personal Essay*, [Dr. Kevin Mc Dermott](#) offers a personal reflection on multiple understandings of the word literacy. He highlights the tension between the lived meaning of literate/illiterate and the conception of literacy in international studies such as PISA. He offers the notion of communicative competence as a more holistic approach to English as a subject.

Four years post-qualification, [Hayley McCann](#) describes the key questions that one should ask oneself before embarking on a programme of Initial Teacher Education. Her personal reflections in *The Challenges of Teaching- Tales from the Frontline* highlight both the challenges and rewards of the role.

[Lisa Connolly's](#) *The Singularity* that tells the story of a mid-career change into the world of teaching. Rather than a single way of being, it shows the complexity of the role and the paradoxes encountered over the past eight years.

The penultimate chapter from [Audrey Halpin](#) focuses on inclusion. At the outset of this chapter, Audrey prompts us to think about our own beliefs about inclusion. The essay highlights tensions between personal beliefs and practices within the education system, and systemic resilient beliefs about separate education, special pedagogies and the incompatibility of special educational needs with the pursuit of academic excellence.

In the final chapter, [Dr. Celine Healy](#) considers the use of drama as a pedagogical strategy in Development Education. She shows the power of drama as a means of learning that does not require an external audience and that assists in the acquisition of insight and perception. As the familiar becomes strange through its reconstruction, it allows the development of multifaceted perspectives.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the meticulous work of Keith Young in preparing the text for publication. His capabilities in copy editing and e publication were of tremendous assistance in the completion of this manuscript.

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*July 2014*

## *Chapter 1*

# What sort of teacher do I want to be - critical and creatively constructive or compliant, conformist and conservative?

*Jim Gleeson*

This is the most important choice facing all beginning teachers. And while most would like to fit the former rather than the latter category, it is important that they are aware of the challenges and pitfalls along the way.

Those who progress directly to the profession from school/college are influenced by their apprenticeships of observation over some seventeen years in the primary, post-primary and higher education systems. This means that all aspiring teachers bring their own 'lay theories' to the initial teacher education (ITE) programme. School placement may well serve to confirm such theories notwithstanding the best efforts of their teacher educators. For example, Gleeson et al (forthcoming) found that student teachers were considerably more conservative in their views regarding the NCCA's proposed junior cycle changes on their return from teaching practice than before school placement. Unfortunately, the modern phenomenon of on-going part-time teaching contracts is likely to expedite the onset of cynicism and reduce levels of professional motivation.

Huberman's (1989) work on teachers' life cycles found that a teacher's early years in the profession are characterised by idealistic enthusiasm. While this stage typically lasts seven years such youthful enthusiasm is inevitably tempered by the prevailing culture of Irish education which includes factors such as: an anti-intellectual bias and the associated neglect of philosophy of education; the prevailing neo-liberal ideological influences with their overarching utilitarian technicism; the historical influence exerted by the churches; economic considerations and the neglect of education research until relatively recently (Gleeson, 2010).

For example, curriculum is a contextualised social process and Irish curriculum has been developed in the environment of a populist approach to governance that eschews social class differences and promotes an instrumental, piecemeal approach to planning. A key part of the professional context, the Department of Education and Skills (what do you think of the name?) has been characterised by centralisation, fragmentation, a culture of secrecy and an ad hoc approach to education planning. While the adoption of a partnership approach to the

governance of education has the potential to bring about a more democratic approach to policy-making, the predominant voices belong to those who have come to know the education formula by rote (Lynch, 1989) and do not seem to change as being in their interests. Meanwhile, the focus on ‘value for money’ and performance indicators is reflected in the move towards performativity and contractual accountability (Gleeson and Ó Donnabháin, 2009).

While Irish post-primary teachers enthusiastically embrace altruistic service, they do not identify closely with emerging professional values such as participative pedagogies, reflective practice, collegiality, self-regulation, and the moral and social dimensions of teaching (Gleeson, 2012). Some of this reluctance may be due to their agnosticism and scepticism in relation to key aspects of the professional knowledge base, including Education Studies, research and reflective practice. Irish education has regrettably been subject to little critical questioning and the prevailing perception is that everything is being done correctly with due regard to an accepted value system.

Some antidotes to these challenges are now suggested.

## BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Unfortunately, it would appear that practising teachers and teacher educators inhabit parallel universes in relation to education theory and research and the current perceptions of educational research pose major questions for both communities. Most teacher educators have not sufficiently recognised the need to engage meaningfully with practitioners, who, in turn, are embroiled in the ‘classroom’ press of preparing students for the state exams. The resolution of this dilemma requires visionary leadership.

Against a background where the professional status of teachers is ‘rigorously protected and the power of teachers’ professional associations/teacher unions is strong’, Christie and Menter (2009, p.342) noted that ‘the concepts of research and enquiry have entered the discourse of teacher professionalism in Scotland’. This is reflected in the expectation of the Scottish Standard for Chartered Teacher (SCT) that the teaching of successful candidates should be informed by reading and research e.g.

1. engaging in professional enquiry and action research, and applying findings;
2. reflecting critically on research evidence and modifying practice as appropriate;
3. testing whether a particular theoretical perspective actually applies in practice;
4. interpreting changes to education policy and practice;
5. contributing and responding to such changes (Scottish Executive, 2002).

In the Irish context this focus on reflective practice is deeply embedded in the various publications of the Teaching Council of Ireland (2011a; 2011b).

The conjunction of theory and practice is never easy and requires movement from teacher educators as well as teachers. As noted by Cheng et al. (2010), the quality of teacher education programmes can only be improved if teacher educators help student teachers identify the gap between teachers' practice and theory, and continually facilitate them in connecting their learnt theory and practice.

## CONCENTRATE ON PROFESSIONALISM

Various models of teacher professionalism have emerged since the Classical model with its emphasis on subject knowledge, altruistic service and professional regulation (only recently achieved in Ireland). More recently developed models (e.g. Hargreaves and Goodson 1996) recognise the importance of knowledge-in and knowledge-of practice, both of which are recognised as essential aspects of the teacher's professional knowledge base in the Teaching Council's (2011a) policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education and in its Guidelines (2011b) for initial teacher education programme providers.

It is particularly important to distinguish between the sociological project of professionalisation and the pedagogical project of professionalism. While these two projects are, of course, intrinsically related, the focus of the former is on pay, conditions and status while the focus of the latter is on the quality of teacher-student relationships, and on teaching and learning. The TALIS (Gilleece et al, 2009) report contains important challenges for teacher professionalism in Ireland. While teachers across participating countries favoured student-oriented (e.g. student co-determination of lesson content, individually adapted lessons) over enhanced activities (e.g. projects, students creating products), TALIS found that 'both of these practices are used relatively infrequently [in Ireland where] teachers show the strongest preference for structuring practices (e.g. stating learning goals, homework review, checking student understanding) across all TALIS countries' (ibid, 78).

Gilleece et al. (2009, 83) found a predictably positive relationship between the direct transmission beliefs of Irish teachers and structuring practices and between student-oriented practices and participation in professional development/mentoring activities. Instructional practice was not affected by student ability and the relationship between class-size and classroom practice was not along expected lines, with teachers of larger classes being 'significantly less likely to report using structuring practices or student-oriented practices' (ibid, 84). They also found that teachers who participate most in professional development workshops and courses are 'less likely to endorse direct transmission views' (ibid, 77).

## BE CONSTRUCTIVELY CRITICAL

If you choose to work out of a technical paradigm you will see teaching as just another job and you will tend to conform to the current system. While your students' social class background may be significantly more influential than your own best efforts, that will not bother you very much. If however you adopt the practical paradigm you will want to engage in teacher and school-based action research as you try to mediate the curriculum document in the most accessible way possible in whatever environment you find yourself.

If you choose the emancipatory or critical paradigm you will be concerned with the fundamental question: who is doing what to whom and why are they doing it? You will pay particular attention to the politics of education in relation to a range of issues such as the pitfalls of standardised testing, established so strongly in other countries; the practice of streaming, whose limitations are highlighted so clearly in the Economics and Social Research Institute (ESRI) longitudinal study; the on-going prejudice towards Travellers (Tormey and Gleeson, 2012); the role of education in the perpetuation of privilege (Lynch, 1989, 124; McVerry, 2013). You will continually ask what sort of society we want and what are we doing to promote citizenship and the common good. You will develop a personal, enlightened, philosophy of education and be inspired to make a difference in relation to issues such as sustainability, educational disadvantage, democracy in schools, pupil voice and effective structures and strategies for teacher development and school-based curriculum development.

The exciting challenges posed by the NCCA (2010) in their Junior Cycle consultative document, well grounded in research evidence such as the ESRI longitudinal study and TALIS, will test the resolve of all parties to make the move from life-limiting to life-liberating beliefs (Sergovanni, 1996). Where do you stand on the following educational beliefs?

<b>Life-liberating</b>	<b>Life-limiting</b>
<b>All</b> students capable of high attainment, not just the fastest and most competent	Only the bright few can achieve at a high level
Effective teaching involves ' <i>getting students to do something for themselves</i> '	Effective teaching involves ' <i>doing something to students</i> '
You're not supposed to understand everything first time	Speed is what counts. Faster is smarter
Consistent effort is the main determinant of success	Inborn intelligence is the main determinant of success
Mistakes help one learn	Mistakes are a sign of weakness
Good students work together, solicit help from each other	Competition is necessary to bring out the best in our students

## RECOGNISE THAT SCHOOLS NEED TO CHANGE

As Jeffers has shown so clearly in the case of the Transition Year programme, there can be no meaningful change without changes to school culture. Deep change is a highly personal experience that demands courage and perseverance. In Fullan's (1993) terms, it is a journey, not a blueprint. As Machiavelli (1513) put in *The Prince*, 'there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to conduct than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who profit by the new order'. Having knowledge of the complexity of the change process will help you persist when the going gets tough. If it's not hurting, the likelihood is that there is no real change happening!

School culture can grow change or kill it. The OECD (2001) *Schooling for the Future* report makes it abundantly clear that the robust bureaucratic schools that we are all familiar with cannot serve the needs of the twenty-first century. It needs to be replaced by the notion of the school as a highly focused learning organisation, characterised by high levels of public trust and funding, a strong emphasis on both quality and equality, collegiality, innovative forms of assessment and skills recognition and a strong emphasis on research and development with teaching and learning as the primary focus. Such an evolution will face strong resistance from the status quo including teacher unions, media and politicians. Where will you stand?

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## *Chapter 2*

# School Patronage, Educational Experience and Religious Teachings

*Pádraig Hogan*

*\*This is an expanded version of an article that appeared in The Irish Times on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2013*

There's an important distinction to be made between how religious teachings are introduced in a church, mosque or synagogue, and how such teachings are to be introduced in schools. Where this difference is overlooked there is a danger that the need to distinguish between educational experience and faith formation will be similarly disregarded. Both generally involve systematic learning. And religious teachings can feature in both. But properly understood, educational experience is mainly exploratory in character while faith formation is, from the start, evangelising in purpose and in practice.

The distinction here is not simply one of 'learning about' religion on the one hand and being nurtured in the teachings of a particular faith on the other. Genuine educational experience is always more than 'learning about'. As well as a deepening of conceptual understanding or an advance in knowledge it involves some appreciation of the significance of what is learned for one's sense of personal identity: for one's efforts to find an enduring sense of orientation and belonging in a world shared with others.

Where Christianity is concerned a keen awareness of the distinction I'm highlighting can be discerned in the teaching activities of Jesus Christ, as documented in the synoptic Gospels. But the distinction seems subsequently to have become eclipsed in the history of institutionalised Christianity, from Imperial Rome to the Reformation and thereafter. The distinction is all but obliterated by the concept of 'school patronage' - a historical remnant which still burdens educational policy and practice in twenty-first century Ireland.

Jesus Christ used strikingly different approaches when dealing with 'disciples' on the one hand and 'multitudes' on the other. Here's how Matthew tells it: "All these things Jesus spoke in parables to the multitudes; *and without parables he did not speak to them*" (Matthew 13:34, emphasis added). Mark's account is similarly unequivocal: "And with many such parables he spoke to them (the multitudes) the word, according as they were able to hear. *And without parable he did not speak unto them*; but apart, he explained all things to his disciples" (Mark 4:33-34, emphasis added).

‘Multitudes’ were heterogeneous groupings - what today we might describe as groups containing a wide plurality of values and beliefs. The term ‘disciples’, then and now, refers to already well-disposed and eager believers. Viewed from a religion perspective, most Irish schools today, including faith schools, are populated more by multitudes than by disciples. That is probably as true of the teachers as of the students.

Speaking to multitudes only in parables seems to have been a decisive, even a categorical strategy on Christ’s part. As a teaching approach, parables draw imaginatively on life’s troubles and triumphs. They seek to illustrate important points in a memorable way; yet a way which makes no presumptions on the loyalties or convictions of the hearers.

Jesus Christ set up no schools. The teaching episodes described in the gospels are all informal, whether they are with disciples or with multitudes. Of course Christ’s purposes were evangelising ones. But where multitudes were concerned his practices were invitational and exploratory. The contrast between the examples of teaching to be found in the New Testament and the continuing prominence of ‘patronage’ in Ireland’s educational history could hardly be more pronounced. The concept of school patronage, and its preoccupation with control, is not only an alien one from an educational standpoint. Properly speaking, it is also a foreigner to Christian missionary endeavour.

Patron bodies are so familiar a feature of Irish education that it’s hard to imagine what life for our schools would be like without them. What would happen if the churches, the Education and Training Boards, Educate Together, An Foras Pátrúnachta were no longer to feature in Irish schooling? Who would do the work these bodies are doing now? A short answer to a searching question is that the work would have to be re-conceived and carried out by public education authorities. This would also mean amending the Education Act (1998), which still retains the concept of ‘patron’ and makes no mention of public education authorities.

There are critical differences between a patron body and a public education authority. In Ireland, patron bodies took shape even before the establishment of the National School system in 1831. This system, established by the UK administration through the unspectacular device of the Stanley Letter (1831), sought “to unite in one system children of different creeds”. It also laid down that “The most scrupulous care should be taken not to interfere with the peculiar tenets of any description of Christian pupils”. The National School system was a historic policy endeavour which succeeded on many fronts, but which failed spectacularly in its declared ecumenical purpose.

Public education authorities in more than a few countries have periodically embraced strident political doctrines, sometimes acting as if they were secular variants of aggressive patron bodies. But their proper role in a democracy is to ensure that education is recognised, provided for, and protected, as a distinct practice in its own right. An impressive example of how public education authorities can build strong traditions of reciprocal trust with

communities in a pluralist democracy is provided by Finland over the last three to four decades (Sahlberg, 2011).

Of course Ireland is not Finland. Traditions of civic engagement - as distinct from community endeavour - are weaker in Ireland than in many other European countries. But the Republic's schools by and large, including faith schools, are non-sectarian. This is chiefly due to the commitment of teachers to practices that are defensible on educational grounds, whatever the nature of the patron body. It is also due to a widespread pragmatism – mainly caring, sometimes more calculating - among school managements.

But problems now begin to loom larger. School managements and teachers have to make increasingly demanding accommodations, and increasingly untenable ones. Misgivings about the denominational nature of so much of Irish schooling are on the rise among parents. The government's response, rather than encouraging a greater plurality within all schools, seems to be the promotion of a greater plurality of schools, while leaving the notion of school patronage itself intact. This holds in place an architecture with key features that are inhospitable to the requirements of educational practice as a public good in a pluralist democracy. It sustains a system of power and influence which took on its key features during the 19th century sectarian struggles for control of education in Ireland, not only between church and state, but also between the main religious denominations. It is in one way scarcely credible, but in another unsurprising, that the government policy-makers view the only practicable path at present as that of promoting a greater plurality of schools. But this doesn't mean that the idea of plurality in the full sense - plurality within schools - should be abandoned, or even put in cold storage, where Irish educational policy is concerned. Its day might arrive unannounced. John Kenneth Galbraith (1958), who coined the phrase 'the conventional wisdom', has insightfully remarked that the march of human events characteristically confounds the conventional wisdom of the present, even making 'non-starters' suddenly timely. Let me conclude with a recent telling example.

Former German Chancellor Willy Brandt, when asked about the prospects of a reunited Germany, replied that he could envisage it only as the final step in a united Europe. Germany has been one country now for almost a quarter century. The EU, meanwhile, remains divided on many fronts. Percipient policy-making appreciates that the crooked paths of history are replete with surprises.

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## *Chapter 3*

# The Impossibility of Curriculum Change in the Mind of Someone Educated: Shark, Sabre-Tooth and Junior Certificate

*Gary Granville*



Nothing is more alive than a swimming shark: beauty, power, deadly authority. Damien Hirst, one of the most controversial artists of recent decades, famously presented a shark preserved in formaldehyde in a tank, as an art work he called *'The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living'* (1991). The work itself was a thing of beauty and it played with irony and contradiction. It was essentially about zero and infinity, the absolute irreconcilability of core concepts and essences.

While the relationship between the established curriculum and proposed reforms may not be quite as stark as that between zero and infinity, the evidence is irrefutable that policy-makers, practitioners and reformers constantly underestimate the challenge of curriculum change. Ironically, it may be that the more successful an education reform is, the more it tends to calcify the system, to make further reform even more difficult. Recent surveys indicate that over 90% of young people stay in school to complete their Leaving Certificate programme. This system of universal education has the effect of providing an almost uniform understanding of what education and schooling should consist of. Thus, probably the most significant educational reform of the twentieth century – the free education scheme that since the 1970s has changed the educational profile of the nation – may have had the unintended consequence of enshrining in public consciousness a certain conception of what 'education' must comprise, how it is 'delivered' and what processes and rituals it must observe.

A famous essay in America (Benjamin, 1939) recounted the fable of the ‘sabre-tooth curriculum’ an imaginative programme devised by an imaginary Palaeolithic tribe to better prepare its children for the world around them, including how to defend themselves from the dreaded sabre-tooth tiger. As generations pass, the world changes, and the sabre-tooth tiger that once stalked their lives has now become extinct. Yet proposals for reform of the ‘sabre-tooth curriculum’ were vigorously resisted. The rulers of the tribe held that “... the essence of true education is timelessness. It is something that endures through changing conditions like a solid rock standing squarely and firmly in the middle of a raging torrent. You must know that there are some eternal verities, and the sabre-tooth curriculum is one of them!”

Like all good fables, there is a deceptive complexity at the heart of the tale. For while there is of course a need for constant and sometimes radical curriculum reform, there are also certain values and qualities that are indeed timeless. The challenge is to recognise those moments when radical changes rather than piecemeal adjustments are necessary.

The international experience of curriculum reform has been one of Sisyphean struggle against the inertia of conservative systems. Another metaphor has been used to describe this relationship between policy rhetoric and classroom reality: “hurricane winds sweep across the sea tossing up twenty foot waves; a fathom below the surface turbulent waters swirl while on the ocean floor there is unruffled calm” (Cuban, 1984, p. 2). And perhaps most depressingly, Sarason succinctly summarised the international experience in the title of his 1990 book – *‘The predictable failure of educational reform’*.

The past four decades of curriculum debate in Ireland have seen many initiatives, reforms and policy announcements. Yet, despite claims to the contrary, the educational experiences of the great majority of students who have come through our second level system in those decades have remained remarkable unchanged. This paper makes the modest suggestion however, that the present junior cycle reform programme is a long overdue initiative to challenge the calcified practices and conceptions of teaching and learning that are enshrined in very crude and outdated understandings of core curriculum, of subject disciplines and of assessment practices. In essence, all these issues were raised in the 1970s, in the immediate aftermath of the introduction of ‘free education’. A conservative educational establishment at that time succeeded in ‘preventing the future’ (to use a phrase coined by Tom Garvin (2005) to describe the disposition of the Irish establishment, including the education system, through much of the twentieth century). A further irony is that while the forces that initially resisted such new ideas were lodged in the state Department of Education, in the contemporary context, those forces are most strongly expressed in the teacher unions.

This paper presents two propositions. First, by capturing some current contributions to public discourse on junior cycle reform, largely as reported in the *Irish Times*, it suggests that proper

educational debate is hampered by the fact that everyone is an expert on education. As a result of universal education, each of us has unique insight into education, and we tend to generalise from our own experience. Secondly, a brief summary of the experience of an innovative curriculum project in the 1970s displays an uncanny resemblance to the debates currently associated with the junior cycle reform programme, and possibly a salutary model to inform our current situation.

## CURRICULUM WARS

Four items in the *Irish Times* in October and November 2013 highlight some of the challenges and contradictions of education discourse in Ireland. Mary O'Rourke (29 Oct) makes a strong and persuasive case for history as a core subject in our second-level schools: she says that 'the most important habit a young person can have is a sense of curiosity' and that history fosters this. Two days later (31 Oct), David Puttnam is reported as calling for "a radical shake-up of the education sector that would encompass more ICT learning and '21st Century' lecture halls". Orlaith McBride (5 Nov) makes a modest claim for arts education: "if our children are taught creatively, they will think creatively". And finally (26 Nov) Brian Mooney calls for "high-skills vocational training" for the 20 per cent of students he suggests are not served by an academic curriculum.

These different statements essentially capture the possibilities for, and the stumbling blocks to real change in education.

O'Rourke is a former Minister for Education (and recognised as one of the best), Puttnam, the noted film-maker is current 'Digital Champion' for Ireland, McBride is current Director of the Arts Council. There is remarkable consistency between the views they express, but some significant dissonance also. Mooney, an education commentator and school guidance counsellor, strikes quite a different note, one that perhaps accurately reflects a strong though largely silent body of opinion.

Despite the complementarity of their views, our current model of curriculum pits O'Rourke, Puttnam and McBride in a zero-sum game, competing with each other. In an age of universal education, where we have all experienced more or less the same 'diet' of schooling, most people believe that there is only one frame within which we can think of schooling. That is the frame of 'subjects', the itemisation of learning into discrete 'boxes' of subject disciplines. Mooney's position is essentially a defence of the current academic subject regime.

The concept of a 'core' curriculum is invariably discussed in terms of what are the most important subjects. So we have turf wars between advocates of one subject above another. Any specification of core subjects means that the amount of time and space for new elements is very limited. The longer the list of 'core subjects', the less time there is for new elements.

Brian Mooney seeks to avoid the issue by re-introducing a dressed-up version of the old divide between vocational and secondary schooling.

So, while everyone seems to be in favour of educational reform, the manifestations of real change continue to be restricted to the peripheries, the limited amount of discretionary time that remains for a school beyond the so-called core curriculum. Arts education, physical education and the growing list of ‘adjectival education’ – environmental education, development education, consumer education, relationships education and so on – must take place in the margins.

What *is* a core curriculum? Must it culminate in a national examination and certificate award? Does it have to be defined as a set of ‘subjects’? Must a subject consist of five or six lessons per week, over a two, three or even six year period? And if so, is science education more important than physical education? Is religious education less important than Irish? If we were to distil into one subject what most parents would wish for their children on reaching school leaving age, it is likely that Home Economics would be the one that most closely aligns with those wishes. Yet it is unlikely to be nominated as the ‘most important’ subject. An OECD survey more than ten years ago noted that the *qualities* that most parents want schools to promote in young people are a positive sense of self-worth and a capacity to engage with the responsibilities of life, employment and relationships. Yet when asked to rank *subjects* in order of importance, arts education and physical education, subjects that foster precisely those qualities in learners, were placed at the bottom of the list. It is an impossible conundrum, bounded as much by tradition and custom as by rational educational planning.

The role of history has been the issue that has generated most discussion lately. History (conjoined with geography) has traditionally been a requirement in secondary schools. This has not applied to Vocational Schools nor to Community and Comprehensive schools, as Brian Mooney rightly points out. So we cannot accurately talk of the ‘retention’ of history for all junior cycle subjects, without addressing the differentiated provision across school sectors.

President Michael D. Higgins is on record (19 June 2012) as an advocate of the importance of history for an informed citizenship: “Without good history teaching, there is no shared idea of a public past... history (is) essential to understanding who we are today and who we might be, in co-operation with others, in the future”.

The key phrase here, I suggest is the first one: “good history teaching...”. For ‘good history teaching’ can take many forms. It is not confined to the teaching of a ‘full’ subject history over the three years of junior cycle. Good history teaching is as much concerned with the context within which history is encountered as it is about the qualities of the teacher in the classroom or the syllabus for examination. Thus an inter-disciplinary programme can provide an appropriate base for students to develop those enquiry skills, the capacity to evaluate evidence and the capacity for empathy which are the hallmarks of good history teaching. An

appropriate arts project, in drama or visual arts for example, can foster real historical understanding in a way that rote history learning patently does not.

Mary O'Rourke rightly makes reference to the development of qualities of 'curiosity' in young people and she extols the capacity of history to foster those qualities in young people. Puttnam's vision of an education system that incorporates not just the technologies but the creativity of digital media, is based on that same 'curiosity'. McBride's call for 'creativity' is making the same point. So if there is an essential agreement on the qualities and attributes we wish to see in our young people, we should avoid getting into a trench-war between subject constituencies. History education is too important to be left to historians. I say this not as a glib sound-bite, still less as a dismissal of the committed and professional engagement of historians and lovers of history: rather in the same way as I tell my own colleagues in NCAD, that art and design education is too important to be left to artists and designers. We need a fuller interpretation of education within which all subject disciplines can find a place.

People learn in many different ways, and at different ages and paces. The international research has been telling us this for many years now. The changes proposed by the NCCA for restructuring the junior cycle are a positive reflection of the need to develop a new vision for junior cycle education that bridges the integrated curriculum of the primary school with the more defined subject boundaries of second-level schooling. By framing the purposes and outcomes of education at this level, not in a simple list of subjects but as an overarching set of learning statements, schools and teachers will be able to devise the most appropriate response to the learning needs of their pupils. Thus, the aim is that all young people at the end of junior cycle should "value their local, national and international heritage, should understand the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change; and should understand the origins and impacts of social, economic, and environmental aspects of the world around her/him". These and other learning outcomes apply to all students, not just those who study the full subject 'history'. And most crucially, access to these outcomes should be the right of all learners, not differentiated between those of academic or vocational streams.

How such outcomes are achieved will be the professional task of the educators in the school, not the prerogative of centralised prescription. This is the single most positive and progressive element of the new plans. Teachers, school principals and school communities generally will have the authority to devise programmes best suited to the diverse learning needs of their pupils. Undoubtedly, it can be anticipated that history will continue to be studied by the great majority of school students as a distinct subject in its own right. But there will be other opportunities for learners to experience new forms of learning as well. The recent draft specifications issued by the NCCA for eight new short courses gives an indication of an exciting new curriculum offer for young people: from artistic performance to programming and coding, from Chinese language and culture to digital media literacy to caring for animals – the junior cycle is shaping up to be really exciting!

The record of ‘compulsory’ subjects in our school system is not a glorious one. Irish remains the only compulsory subject for the Leaving Certificate: the success of that project in compulsory education is not immediately obvious. Religious education was historically noted not just as compulsory, but as the most important subject in the primary school curriculum, so important that the state ceded the syllabus specification for this subject to the relevant Church authorities. The legitimate concerns for the teaching of history – and indeed for arts education – must not be reduced to sterile arguments about compulsory subjects, or restricted understandings of ‘core’ curriculum.

But as David Puttnam noted “we are and always have been, change resistant”. In doing so, he perhaps unconsciously echoes the words of that historical figure, Machiavelli:

... there is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than a new system. For the initiator has the enmity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old institution and merely lukewarm defenders in those who gain by the new ones.

To be fair, there is no selfish interest present in the current debate. Quite the contrary, the views expressed on all sides are disinterested, motivated by the best of intentions by people of the highest integrity. But we need a more nuanced and sensitive debate as to what constitutes a ‘core curriculum’, what professional judgements can best be devolved to school management and to teachers rather than being prescribed by the central authorities. Teachers in their schools are best placed to identify what learning experiences are most appropriate for different learners.

There is a further irony associated with another significant reform in the Irish examination system. The introduction in the 1990s of access by candidates to corrected scripts in state examinations was an imaginative and progressive development. It provided transparency to the process and constituted an act of confidence in the system. The associated dissemination of detailed marking schemes however had another unintended consequence: a further tightening of the focus of teaching to the examination.

By the removal of the stranglehold of national examinations, prescribed curricula and inflexible subject blocks, teachers could be free to respond to the diverse needs of the learners in their classrooms. This scenario, as envisaged in the new junior cycle programme, is an opportunity for teachers to reassert their professionalism, rather than be tied to the reductive exigencies of the exam system.

Opposing the reform programme, an *Irish Times* columnist Breda O’Brien (1 Dec 2013) made a plea for more time before implementation. Sadly, ‘more time’ has been the mantra of resistance to curriculum reform for many decades, including the many attempts of the NCCA to introduce rolling reform of the Junior Certificate since its introduction in 1989. In that context, it might be instructive to look back at an initiative in the 1970s, at a time when the

stakes for a junior cycle examination and certificate were significantly higher than they are today, in terms of school leaving, employability and certification.

## THE HUMANITIES PROJECT

The City of Dublin *Humanities* project, to give it its full title, was an initiative that was developed through the Curriculum Development Unit, established in 1972 by the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee, located in the School of Education in Trinity College and supported by the Department of Education. The complicated tripartite management structure was highlighted by the equally convoluted acronyms it generated: the CDVEC CDU located in TCD was a precursor of the epidemic of acronyms that spread exponentially through Irish education in the subsequent four decades. The image of bureaucratic complexity conjured up by this convoluted structure hides a much more vibrant and organic reality. The Curriculum Development Unit became known simply as the CDU to a coterie of innovative and committed teachers largely based in Dublin city vocational schools. It has survived countless shifts in policy and remains a centre for innovation and divergent thinking in an increasingly conformist education system.

The *Humanities* project was a teacher-led educational project that was a direct response to the perceived needs of Dublin school children. The early 1970s saw the first generation of school children progressing from primary to post-primary education on the free education scheme introduced in 1967. Dublin vocational schools - like post-primary schools everywhere in Ireland – saw huge increases in their enrolments. The ‘free education’ scheme, coupled with the raising of the school-leaving age to 15 years, also facilitated the abolition of the old Primary Certificate examination, hitherto the terminal leaving certificate for most Irish children. With the demise of that old programme, a new child-centred curriculum was introduced into Irish primary schools. This ‘new curriculum’ – so-called for the next forty years – featured an integrated methodology, spanning a wide range of learning experiences, unlike the old Primary Cert that focused almost entirely on Irish, English and Arithmetic. The child-centred curriculum provided teachers with the freedom to shape their classroom practice according to the needs of their pupils, drawing upon and reflecting the local environment, culture and traditions. While national guidelines were provided, teachers and schools were encouraged to adapt their teaching to the possibilities and potentials of their own classes and the local environment.

In that context, the post-primary schools were faced with a challenge: how best to accommodate not just the increased numbers of incoming pupils but the broader range of cultural experience which would henceforth be present in their classrooms. Second-level schooling had been the preserve of the middle classes, those who could afford to send their children to secondary school and who had the ‘cultural capital’ to encourage them to do so. Secondary schools, providing liberal, academic programmes of study to Intermediate and

Leaving Certificate examinations, were fee-paying institutions. Local authorities providing a certain amount of scholarships to some students to augment costs, but access remained restricted. Vocational schools, as the term indicated, were focussed on trades and crafts, offering the 'Day Vocational certificate' programme – more commonly known as the 'Group Certificate', referring to the group of subjects selected by pupils. These subject groupings typically comprised technical groups such as woodwork, metalwork and mechanical drawing, or domestic groups such as laundry, cookery and needlework (with the associated gender divides implied). The dual system was of course highly class-biased, with the middle class catered for largely through the secondary schools and the rural and urban working class attending the vocational or technical schools, commonly known as 'techs'. Under the new free-education system, however, the aspiration was that both school types would offer the same broad and common curriculum. Indeed, this concept of a comprehensive curriculum across all sectors found formal expression in the establishment of some new comprehensive schools. The City of Dublin VEC saw its pupil numbers expand dramatically. Vocational schools, located largely in the working class housing estates around the city, were now for the first time providing courses to Intermediate and Leaving Certificate levels as well as to 'Group' certificate.

Anticipating the challenges signalled by these changes, the CDVEC sponsored some imaginative responses. The principal of Ballyfermot Vocational School, Anton Trant, had been appointed to lead a school with a specific brief to be innovative. That school pioneered various community-linked projects, outdoor education schemes and school-parent initiatives. It also led the way in developing new curriculum structures and approaches to meet the needs of the new cohorts of pupils.

In 1972, Trant was seconded from his role as principal to establish the Curriculum Development Unit, based in the TCD School of Education and with the support of the Department of Education. One of the designated projects to be developed under the auspices of the CDU was the City of Dublin Humanities Curriculum, and a young teacher and academic Tony Crooks was appointed as co-ordinator. The *Humanities* project was established as an integrated, inter-disciplinary programme, bringing together the 'humanities' disciplines traditionally taught as the subjects, English, History, Geography and Civics. Parallel to this project, a similar science initiative took place – the integrated science innovation project (ISCI) adopted a similar cross-disciplinary approach to the teaching of the science subjects, while a third project addressed the development of outdoor education, utilising structured adventure programmes in orienteering, mountaineering, water sports and similar educational activities.

The *Humanities* project was based on the principles of teacher-led, school-based curriculum development. Central to this approach was the facilitation of teachers coming together to discuss their classes and to identify common approaches to the needs of their pupils. The City of Dublin VEC facilitated teachers from various vocational schools across the city to meet

regularly in their individual schools and in the CDU, to discuss and plan how best they could draw up a programme of studies for young people making the transition from primary school. What emerged was an inter-disciplinary humanities programme structured around a field of studies over three years. Designed specifically with Dublin pupils in mind, the programme was structured around three stages. The *Humanities* programme was conceived as a study of society, in terms that were accessible to young people aged about 12 to 15 years. The learning was organised around studies of the familiar and of contrasting societies: familiar in the sense of the one's own immediate family, community and city, contrasting by way of contrast in time (largely but by no mean exclusively historical) or location (largely but not exclusively geographical). Finally, the course looked to the future, preparing young people for life after school in the world of work and adult life.

First stage (Year 1) was an examination of the local community, expanding to a broader study, over time and place of the city of Dublin to which the learners 'belonged'. The second stage (Year 2) was a study of contrasting societies, in rural Ireland and abroad: course materials were developed for study of Aran island culture, of Russian and Dutch culture. (A highly innovative and well regarded education programme from the USA, designed by Jerome Bruner and entitled *Man: A Course of Study*, exploring the culture of the Netsilik Eskimos of North America, was also incorporated by some participating schools as a study of a contrasting society). The third stage (Year 3) was focussed on contemporary issues that would have direct bearing on students' lives. A unit on 'resources and population' addressed issues that would in later years become known as the 'green agenda' of sustainable development. Another unit looked at the development of urban Ireland, the environmental setting where most of the students could expect to spend most of their lives. A final section looked at the worlds of work and adult life, into which they would be entering in the immediate or short-term future. An innovative collaboration with RTE resulted in a series of broadcast programmes, with video-tapes and learning materials produced for participating schools.

These units of study, progressing in spiral form from the personal and immediate to the more generalised and dispersed and ultimately into the unknown future were addressed in an interdisciplinary fashion, through the core disciplines of English, history geography and civics. Other subject inputs were also valued, notably those of Irish and of art. Crucially, recognition of the Department of Education was secured for the study of *Humanities* as an equivalent experience to the national Intermediate and Group Certificate examinations for participating students. After much negotiation, sanction was received from the Department of Education for the Humanities curriculum to be recognised for assessment within the Intermediate and Group certificate examinations, as equivalent to English, History and Geography (the civics syllabus at that time was not an examinable subject).

Even at the remove of more than forty years, the *Humanities* curriculum seems enlightened, not least in relation to its assessment: students were assessed through a combination of continuous teacher assessment (30%), project assignments (30%) and terminal examinations

(40%). Within the continuous assessment component, such attributes as oral competence, working with others and initiative were accommodated.

The *Humanities* curriculum aimed to foster the learners' ability to think for themselves. The learning material was thus designed to be distinctly different from the traditional school textbook: the narrative was relatively simple but not simplistic, and certainly not patronising in presentation. The approach relied as far as possible on the presentation of authentic material and of documentary evidence, so as to allow – indeed, to challenge – the learners to make sense of what they were encountering, to make their own interpretation of what they found and to draw upon their own insights to formulate views and opinions. The role of the teacher, in this context, was to facilitate and to support, not to impose and direct. Thus, the teaching and learning materials utilised various media, for instance the stock of documentary evidence, photographs and visual images that brought the experiences and events of Dublin 1913 to vivid life.

The process of curriculum development and change that was initiated in the 1970s, notably through the Curriculum Development Unit in Dublin and the Curriculum Development Centre in Shannon, began to open up debate and developments in schooling. While the innovative curriculum projects were initially developed at the margins of the national education system, a body of pressure began to build up that ultimately led to national policy changes. In 1984, the government established the Interim Curriculum and Examinations Board, with a brief to review the entire curriculum of primary and post-primary schools. The pilot projects, including the *Humanities* project, shaped much of thinking behind the new policy initiative (Granville 1995, Gleeson 2008). When the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) replaced the interim board in 1987, the first task it took on was the introduction of the new Junior Certificate programme. A new history syllabus was among the first of the new courses introduced for the Junior Certificate in 1989. The new history syllabus introduced a qualitatively different understanding of history, with a conscious treatment of social history, of women in history, of local history and of the work of the historian. In teaching the new syllabus, teachers were encouraged to choose from a variety of approaches.

In the context of the current debate on the role of history, it is instructive to re-examine the *Humanities* experience. Previously, social history generally and labour history in particular was essentially invisible in schools. History as a school subject was presented largely as a political narrative. The teaching of history through inter-disciplinary, project-led, student-centred programmes opened up territory and experiences that traditional history schooling had failed to do. Indeed, in subsequent years, the model of the *Humanities* treatment of history ironically featured in both the structure and the accompanying guidelines for Junior Certificate and subsequently of Leaving Certificate history (NCCA, 2004, p.59). How well honoured those principles have been in the national examination systems is a very moot point.

It is ironic that current debates on curriculum policy are engaged with almost the same issues that the Humanities curriculum was set up to address in the 1970s. *Humanities* was discontinued in 1989 (a much modified version *Environmental and Social Studies* was introduced as an alternative to traditional history and geography but it remains a sadly neglected option). Yet current debates in education could benefit from a re-engagement with the Humanities model in relation to two critically important issues – the definition of a core curriculum and the best ways to assess the learning experience of young people.

## CONCLUSION

Elmore (1996, p. 499) points out that education policy is additive by nature, layered in its evolution and filtered over time and contexts. Despite this, he identifies three common ‘conceits’ of policy makers: (a) that the newest set of reform policies automatically takes precedence over all previous policies under which the system has operated; (b) that reform policies emanate from a single level of the education system and embody a single message about what schools should do differently; and (c) that reform policies should operate in more or less the same way in whatever settings they are implemented.

There is more than a little irony in pointing out that while much of current educational policy in Ireland reflects these generic observations, the junior cycle reforms actually do not. In this case, the set of reforms is not really additive – instead, it reverts to a position that was essentially held nearly half-a century ago. Those ideas embodied a movement to the periphery away from the centre and they were premised precisely on the notion that each school in each region or cluster of schools would have freedom to interpret and implement within a loosely-coupled system.

But in a society and a profession that seems hard-wired to restricted conceptions of curriculum, of subjects and of assessment, it seems that there is an impossibility of change almost as deep-rooted as that of Hirst’s suspended shark.

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## *Chapter 4*

# “Making fools of ourselves”

A play set in Unreal Academy

*Angela Rickard*

### DRAMATIS PERSONNAE:

THE CHANCELLOR OF UNREAL ACADEMY

TOM FOOL (A JESTER)

STU DENT

ANNE OTHER

MISS ROOLE (AN EDUCATOR)

ALSO NON-SPEAKING PARTS FOR: TIGER, MONKEY AND BEAR.

### ACT I SCENE I

*Set in a great hall of Unreal Academy in historical time past. The set is dark, grey, monochrome. Tom Fool, a jester, is speaking with the Chancellor of Unreal Academy.*

#### CHANCELLOR

Prithee Fool, what's this I hear of this charivari festival of thine? This Carnival nonsense? A Festival of Misrule in the hallowed halls of Unreal Academy? Can it be true? Art thou serious?

#### TOM

Ah my lord, it is a riddle! Tom Fool must not be serious, if he is to be Tom Fool! Yet, I jest not. For whither to convince thee to let this Carnival be, I must say I AM serious, most seriously, serious for thee and all the Unreal academics to be as not serious as me! I prithee

try it my Lord. What dost thou say being both serious and not serious ... simultaneously?

CHANCELLOR

Ah thou art Fool with thy riddles and upheavals! It cannot be! This is the Academy, a hallowed site of learning, and place for rational intelligence. We seek the calm tranquility of the scriptorium. We have no place for ribaldry and riot and we must not be distracted and disordered in our scholarly pursuits. In any case we do not care for such diversity! Why a Carnival would turn all this on its head!

(stops: looks both perplexed and curious at once)

No, no, no. It cannot be. Such frivolity may do for the common man, the guilds and artistes... and for women perhaps! But truth, reality, the scholarly, rational mind: these are our concerns.

TOM

Ah, my lord, thy wisdom and scholarship are indeed great, but alas wouldst thou split thy crown as did my lord, Lear? I entreat thee do not sever the link to the hands and to the heart. For it is only a partial wisdom. Trust in my Tom Foolery... Besides thy grey matter wilt grow if thou wouldst let in some colour.

CHANCELLOR

My wisdom and brain-power would grow, is't so? Hmmm... Yet I am NOT convinced, but we shall see. Let it proceed, we shall let thy Carnival be.

TOM

Ah my lord, let it be and we shall indeed begin to see.

## ACT I SCENE II

*Set in an equally dark and monochrome lecture hall in a modern-day university. The atmosphere is hushed, solemn and very dull. Two students are talking...*

STU DENT

Another feckin' lecture! I am not joking you, but I have a pain in my backside from sitting here this long!

ANNE OTHER

Oh I know what you mean. It is ridiculous! We've been in the same spot all morning. I can't take much more of this!

STU

And d'you know they go on about feckin' group work and cooperative learning... it might be alright if they did any of it themselves! Ha!

ANNE

And you know what...? I could do with a bit of bloody cooperation from the crowd in my school!

STU

God, yeah. Me too. And don't get me started about technology either! I'd be afraid to let my lot even near a computer. Sure they'd wreck it the minute you had your back turned! I'm serious: it's like a feckin' zoo there sometimes! I should have signed up for lion taming classes not teacher training!

ANNE

Yeah I know, pure crowd control. How are you supposed to control them when they don't even care? You know, now that you mention it, there's times I'm like "I just want to run away to the circus!"

STU

I know! The school I'm in is so bad it is like the friggin' circus! Especially with the second years ... Oh. MY. GOD.

ANNE OTHER

Hang on here she comes. ... Better take out the notebooks!

### ACT I SCENE III

*In the same lecture theatre. A single podium centre-stage. Miss Roole steps up to the podium to address the students.*

MISS ROOLE

You know that they say you dream in black and white. And yet I have always thought that such an odd idea. I've been working in this Academy for

years and the longer I am here the more I think that the daily reality here is so black and white. You know the idea we try to have: the teacher teaches, the learners learn, we all know where we stand... And yet you say it does not match the reality in school. Yes, but how can we re-imagine it?

(pauses to reflect)

The more I think about it, the more dream-like I actually think it needs to be. But in every colour of the imagination: not at all in black and white. I think we need to turn things upside down, to look at the whole thing differently. Let me show you what I mean.

#### ACT I SCENE IV

*Miss Roole and the students walk through an opening in the wall behind the podium into a new (imaginative) space. They wander around for a while. They meet up again in front of a small group of animals: Tiger, Monkey and Bear. The animals are playing with magic lanterns.*

STU

Wow! Amazing! That is so cool!

ANNE

Fabulous!

STU

They are so young, aren't they?

ANNE

Yeah, they're brilliant though. And so articulate! I mean for animals they're pretty good!

STU

Wait a second... what's the tiger doing with that magic lantern? ... She's like pointing it over the Pharaoh's tomb and ... hang on a minute... it's coming to life!

STU & ANNE

(speaking together, excited) Oh my god! Woooow!

ACT I SCENE V

*A few weeks after the Carnival. Students are catching up on each other's news.*

ANNE

Back to reality eh? How's school? And those unruly second years?

STU

Yeah... the second years! No, well they're great really! Something has changed I have to say. It's different now. You know I realized they were struggling and didn't enjoy studying because they found my way of presenting the information and the topic "boring". At the Carnival I saw a presentation on using a visualizer to create 60 second stories. The basic idea was that students would draw pictures to present the story and then video themselves flicking through their images, while narrating it. I loved this idea and I decided to use it in my history class. I made a silly 'Day in the life' of my own life to show them how it works. We were doing the 1798 Rebellion and I got them to create short clips in groups representing the key events. They really enjoyed the exercise and learned a lot more than they would have if I'd stuck to the traditional, boring way.

ANNE

Wow! That sounds great! You must show me what they did. So I take it you are not still thinking of running away to the circus?

STU

(Laughing) No, no I'm not! I've a different idea about the circus now actually: a little more 'Clown' and a lot less 'Ringmaster' I think works a lot better.

ANNE

(Also laughing) Yeah, I think you are right: it really can help to make a bit of a fool of ourselves from time to time! It's more real that way.

THE END

Teaching Educational Technology in the university I have always been uncomfortable with the incongruity of giving lectures about constructivist, student-centred learning using an approach that was anything but constructivist and student-centred! To mitigate against this, at least to some extent, I organise a one-day event aimed at student teachers that is now called *METS Carnival of Creative Learning*. It began life in 2011 as the *Maynooth Educational Technology Showcase (METS)*. Besides the contradiction in the format a one-hour lecture once a week is also very limited in terms of time to cover the dynamic and ever-changing area of 'Ed Tech'.

Carnival is an ancient and deeply pagan Spring-time "Festival of Misrule" where ordinary time and regular routines are suspended for a day: in fact everything is turned on its head and "either/or" dualities dissolve in favour of "both/and" possibilities. In the Education Department in NUI Maynooth this involves, among other things, the idea of school children becoming teachers for a day and sharing with students and teachers in the university their creative and colourful ideas about learning with technology. We are all *both* teachers *and* learners.

I wrote this piece of Tom Foolery to trouble ideas of what is real and not real. Having written it, I do not of course propose to read it as well by providing a detailed explanation of what I was trying to achieve. It will be for the reader to determine if it resonates for you and your own practice. What I will say, however, is that by writing it and by thinking about Carnival I have learned to embrace more creative ways to teach and to learn.

*Making Fools of Ourselves* has all the hallmarks of fiction, but believe it or not, the second level students who took part in this Carnival of Creative Learning in March 2013 showed up dressed as circus animals - a tiger, a monkey and a bear - to lead a workshop on using iPads in the classroom. Also the account of the impact of the day, described in the exchange between Stu Dent and Ann Other on the last page of the script, is copied directly from an essay by one of my students that year who came to think differently about his second years following the METS Carnival.

"Fooling around" with the idea of Carnival has enabled me to enter new creative spaces in my teaching: I hope reading it has made you smile and has prompted new ideas for you too.

## *Chapter 5*

# Constructing identities with young people: making visible cultural norms.

*Grace O’Grady*

The breaking of the norms of knowing by ‘seeing through’ is fundamentally related to breaking the oppressive aspects of human existence...When ideas are not seen through; the reality they spawn is experienced as natural and inevitable. It is the process of seeing through that liberates us to create with ideas, rather than merely be a victim of them. (Watkins, 2005a, p.13)

This paper presents a short introduction to a study I carried out over a three-year period in two Irish secondary schools into identity construction and young people (O’ Grady, 2012). I draw on textual material from that work (vignettes of conversation and creative artefacts) and some of my reading and reflections, to underscore the theme of ethnicity and the need to make it visible in the construction of a white identity.

A central aim of the inquiry was to explore with young people (17/18-year-olds) how they constructed their identities through talk and image. In particular, it attempted to assist them in unpicking the social discourses they drew on consciously/unconsciously to construct their individual and collective identities; to make visible cultural norms in an effort to de-essentialize identities, and to hold open a space to find movement out of fixed, limiting identity constructions. These aims are congruent with the emancipatory intent of Narrative Arts-Based Inquiry (Finley, 2005) and what McLaren (2003) and Denzin (2005) respectively call ‘Revolutionary Pedagogy’ and ‘Critical Performative’ praxis. Denzin writes that we are at a point in time when performative ethnography must be enacted as critical social practice to “confront race relations and inequalities in the globalised, capitalist, democratic system” (ibid, pg.688).

As part of the research design of this inquiry, I facilitated two Identity Programmes with a group of ten Fifth Year students and eleven Transition Year students (February-May 2008/ February-May 2009). Each programme involved twelve two-hour creative workshops over a semester in two Irish Community Schools. In each case the self-selected students (5 male/5 female in first programme and 5 male/6 female in second programme) were facilitated in an exploration of their identity narratives using arts-based educational activities such as drawing, collage-making and journaling. The young people selected their own media to work with as they creatively constructed and critically analysed portraits of themselves in their world.

## ETHNICITY

Ethnicity became central to this study for two reasons: Firstly, the visibility and invisibility of ethnic difference was evident across both programmes. The story of a girl, whose parents were Ugandan, was creatively constructed in the first research programme but only presented, with her permission, for the first time in the second programme to assist in making visible the white hegemonic identity of the group. Secondly, the ‘effects of the western way of construing the world and making meaning were very much in evidence in the talk and images of the young people and became the discursive threads that the participants and I attempted to unpick.

Both strands of this theme were underscored from the very beginning in the selection process of group participants. Having presented the programme to four Transition Year classes, a total of forty students returned for the second meeting and were invited to devise a fair way to select the final ten/eleven. It was suggested unanimously that there would be a gender divide. I then asked what other considerations might be important.

### *2nd Meeting in first school February 2008*

...A Swedish student, Maggie, who told the group that her parents were Ugandan, suggested an ethnic mix. “Identity is about ethnicity and difference”, she asserted. The others agreed and so I asked if there were any other international students in the group who would like to be included. When a girl called Susan, was named by some of her classmates, she laughed defensively and declared, “I’m not ‘ethnic’, I’m English”. From her perspective, she was just like the rest of the class. In contrast to Maggie’s, the group’s ethnicity was invisible. In resisting the category of ‘ethnic’, the English girl was claiming a position at the centre as white, and in so doing, was constructing Maggie as ‘other’ than her. Identities situated in a position of hegemony are unmarked and naturalised and constitute themselves by constructing the margins. Kiesling (2006) writes:

It is by identifying and creating...subordinate categories that the dominant categories become invisible and normative; they are erased in a sense, and the speakers can thus naturalise their power. This is one of the mechanisms of hegemony (p.285).

## A RATIONALE FOR A MULTI-ETHNIC GROUP

Following the incident with Maggie, I began reading some of the post-colonial work of Watkins (2002b), (2002c), (2005a), Fromm (1976) and the feminist writings of Irigaray (2002) and Butler (2004). This reading brought me back to an incident in my youth that reinforced my decision to work with a multi-ethnic group of students.

In my fourth year in primary school (1969-1970), there was an effort at integration of the children from the local orphanage with the children in the mainstream national school. It was a progressive strategy on the part of the Mercy nuns who ran both the orphanage and the local school. On Wednesday evenings we watched films in the convent refectory. I recall a moment of exchange that took place between a fellow student from the orphanage and myself while watching a 'Cowboys and Indians' movie, *The Battle of the Little Big Horn*. As General Custer and his army of handsome Americans began to flee the scene because of a reprisal from the Comanche/Sioux Indian population, my friend began shouting with glee. I was startled. Perceiving the Indian as the 'bad guy'/'other'/'enemy'/'stranger' and Custer as 'hero'/'good guy'/'same as self'/'friend', I felt a momentary anger towards her. How could she support the enemy?

From a postcolonial perspective, Watkins (2002b, p.3) reminds us that the colonial self, profiting from the oppression of others, has created a view of others that justifies oppression. The other is inferior, impulsive, underdeveloped, superstitious and needs monitoring. Colonial superiority, disciplined work, logical thought, resourcefulness "elevate the colonial self and justify control of the cake" (ibid, pp.3-6). The presence of my friend from the orphanage, her position in the discourse that was being played out on the screen, viscerally challenged my colonised position and its limited understanding. As an 'orphan', someone who is positioned outside the norm, up-rooted from family, she was able to see the injustice of the reprisal. Being a 'mainstream' kid, I was part of the unquestioning cultural majority.

While we can never completely look in on the culture we are a part of from an outside position, being in dialogue with the viewpoints of another culture is an important way to begin to see more deeply into our own and our discursive construction of self/identity.

Kimmel (1990, cited in Davies, 1993) recounts a similar moment when he listens in on a conversation between a black woman and a white woman:

'When you wake up in the morning and look in the mirror, what do you see?' she [the black woman] asked.

'I see a woman', replied the white woman...

'That's precisely the problem', replied the black woman. 'I see a black woman. For me race is visible every minute of the day, because it is how I am not privileged in this culture. Race is invisible to you which is why our alliance will always feel false and strained to me.' (p.94)

He concluded: "Marginality is visible and painfully visceral. Privilege is invisible and painlessly pleasant" (ibid). From a feminist poststructuralist perspective, Irigaray (2002) questions a single way of being and knowing, the phallogocentric basis of western philosophy – "a Platonic monologic that reduces the other to a pale copy or deficient version of the same" (p.98). She calls for the recognition of two instead of one, the acknowledgement of otherness as a basis for recasting relationships.

## OTHERNESS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF

Fromm (1976) argues that the rise of capitalism and industrialism in the west strengthened the colonising 'ego', silencing the voices of those it marginalised thereby constructing 'otherness' as an abject category; that which one has no wish to be (Kristeva, 1986). The young African Swedish girl, Maggie, having initially proposed publicly that there would be an ethnic mix in the group, did not continue to risk further marginalisation: The most visible ethnic identity signature, skin colour, was not evident in her portraits and the story of her Ugandan background was never articulated in her conversation in the group. The only acknowledgement of her African ancestry was privately written into her journal. According to Butler (2004, pp1-5) when a person finds that they are outside of a dominant social norm, at a given point in time, this can be experienced as abjection. In order to avoid this abjection, the desire for recognition is a powerful one and causes people to subject themselves to existing normative frameworks, even where this subjection is hurtful and harmful. If in seeking a reflection of ourselves in another, we find nothing, we are rendered 'other' to ourselves.

The desire to belong and to subject oneself to normative frameworks is underscored in responses to Maggie's narrative below. The rhizomatic narrative strand that tells of the longing to belong and the fear of being rendered 'other' wove its way into much of the talk and images of the young people in this study. According to Watkins, movements of mind that support a colonising 'ego' involve "comparisons between self and other, meticulous monitoring of issues of sufficiency, inferiority/superiority, a heightened judgmental capacity, scrupulous maintenance of power, control, autonomy" (Watkins, 2002b, p.3). This was very evident in the jockeying for power in the research groups. The boys in the study policed each other's talk and actions by sexualising and oppressing anything to do with 'girl'. Their conversations showed that this was a taking up of hegemonic forms of power in the face of other forms of powerlessness – the powerlessness, in these particular groups, of being 'gay', effeminate, physically soft, black. The girls' silence discursively positioned them as powerless initially (the traditional feminine position), in a conversation dominated by sport, football and sexist, misogynist and homophobic language. A central aim of the research programme was to de-essentialize 'otherness' and locate it in its cultural/discursive context.

## MAKING VISIBLE HEGEMONIC IDENTITIES

One of the varied pedagogical strategies I used to make visible the dominant discourses in which the young people were discursively positioning themselves, was to circulate extracts of both Maggie's journal entries and the borderland identity narrative of another male student from the first programme, and invite response from the participants in the second programme. Exposing the young people to the experience of a heterosexual male student

who was positioned as 'gay' and a black female student who positioned herself as 'white' was an attempt to render visible the hegemonic centre and its invisible power and also support and validate other students' struggle to perform multiple subjectivities in the group. For the purpose of this paper, I include Maggie's identity narrative: The hegemony of the white centre is made visible as it appears to highlight the effects on her of subjection to the norm. Students' responses to this narrative created a type of 'between-the-two' activity, in which energy, which was "captured" and "striated" might escape; momentarily moving outside "normative strata" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.15). The narrative extract was introduced into the programme in the fourth workshop after the participants had completed and shared their self-portraits and had already begun to make visible some of the cultural, family and school stories in their creative images (see appendix for method of facilitating the audiencing of images). Below is a narrative performance of Maggie's creative story constructed in her self portraits and journal entries, and the response of the students from the second programme to her narrative.

#### MAKING VISIBLE THE 'WHITE CENTRE' IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES

*Maggie's Self Portrait and extract from Journal (1st Programme/February 4th 2008)*



*Maggie's 1st Self Portrait*

## Journal Entry:

...I was born in Sweden and came to Ireland when I was 9. I drew the Swedish and Irish flag with the music icon over the Swedish flag because I loved music from the beginning. I put the three RIP icons in because they were really sad times in my life when my granddad (Dad's father) and my two aunts (mum's two sisters) died within one year – I was 10. Granddad was a big person in my life, he got me into music, he'd play me songs on the piano and loved percussion. He used to play on an old drum made from goatskin. I tried to draw it but it looked more like an airplane so I put a wing on it because I love travel as well. I coloured them [the headstones] in brown because they were all from Uganda...

## *Maggie's 2nd Portrait and extract from Journal Entry (First Programme/February 11th)*



*Maggie's 2nd Self Portrait*

## Journal Entry:

In this portrait I feel sad and lost. I'm on a deserted island and I don't know how to get off it. Maybe the mood I'm in today! I am on my own, but normally I'm with lots of friends. Not sure! I want to get home to my house up in the right corner where there is a lot of love in my family, hence the red heart [Maggie excluded this image in her photograph of self-portrait above]. Sometimes maybe when I'm with my friends I feel like this, alone. I am different.

## Responses to Maggie's Creative Narrative and snippets of analysis:

Ron: The Swedish flag and Irish flag are big and there is only a tiny thing showing Africa in her first portrait, like you could miss it. She just writes 'African trip'.

Finn: She's from Sweden but her relations are from Uganda. Is she erm black?

Grace: Both her parents are also from Uganda.

Finn: Um... You'd never know that a black girl drew this portrait.

Ron: Yeah she draws herself like any other Irish girl but she must be aware of being black.

Anne: She probably just wants to belong to the group...not to be different.

Eoghan: But she's black so she is different.

Finn: Technically it's brown, she coloured the tombstones brown...

In the above, the boys are eager to find a way of categorising Maggie and are perplexed by the fact that she omitted to indicate her ethnicity in the drawing. They try to find a way to capture, striate, essentialise, territorialise, pin down her subjectivity. Anne tries to read Maggie's motivation and in so doing constructs herself as a person with emotional insight and perhaps as someone who has knowledge of a similar marginalised discursive positioning.

Sandy: Because her people are from Uganda and she says that is why she coloured them in brown.

Sandy reads this as Maggie's way of indicating her ethnicity

Anne: Like when you're from here, Irish, you just take for granted that you are white, you don't notice. But like when I was in the States erm... Pennsylvania and I was waiting at a train station for my aunt to collect me. I was the only white person and it felt very weird like it was probably the first time I was aware of my colour.

Anne names the white centre as something that is taken for granted in Ireland, a centre that is discursively constructed and shifts according to geographical location. The hegemonic 'ethnic' centre becomes obvious when one is positioned outside it, as white. Mandy's white Irish identity is no longer a position of privilege in this situation, a position that was invisible to her prior to this.

Grace: Wow that must have been an extraordinary moment...

Sandy: When you're different you are always aware of it. Like Maggie wants to be white but she can't... The tombstones take up most of the room in the picture.

Sandy speaks with authority as though speaking her own story. Maggie's desire to be white is constructed as a lack, acknowledging the gap between lack and desire as understood in psychodynamic thinking.

Grace: When you say that I think it's nearly like she buried a critical part of her own story, her link to her ancestral past.

Sandy: I think that's what people do when they want to be the same...like burying a part of themselves.

Sandy underscores the effects of subjection to the norm. Davies (1993) sees this as an ongoing tension between a person's access to specificity and the right to be different, and one's access to group membership which assumes and achieves sameness].

Anne: Yeah...and the African drum turned into an airplane when she was drawing it, kind of the same thing.

Anne interprets this activity as a taking flight from her African heritage, which Sandy reads as unconscious.

Sandy: So all of it could be unconscious, she doesn't know she's doing it.

Ron: You know when people adopt those African and Chinese babies, must be kinda tough on the kids when they grow up in a white country. Like when...

Sandy: Maggie...

Ron: ...says that she feels kind of alone, even when she's with her friends.

Finn: Yeah, she drew herself white on the deserted island. Tough one.

### AND SO ...

The above responses make visible the dialogic movement towards deconstructing the white centre. White as a hegemonic identity is unmarked and naturalised and constitutes itself by constructing a margin. Making visible its discursive thread softens the boundary between black/white and loosens the binary thinking and talking that supports it. It seems to me that patterns of power and powerlessness inherent in dualisms such as male/female, adult/young person, teacher/pupil, heterosexual/homosexual, white person/black person, need to be addressed as old cultural patterns, if we hope to move beyond oppressive forms of human relations. According to Davies et al (2006) all of these - gender, sexuality, ethnicity and age status, are implicit in acts of learning to talk, read, becoming a competent person. Because of their embeddedness in approved dominant discourses their creation and maintenance are invisible and intractable (ibid). As teachers, school counsellors and educators we need to facilitate young people in making visible cultural norms in the construction of their 'personal' identities, and to actively encourage movement out of fixed, limiting identity stories. Aronowitz and Giroux's idea of 'border pedagogy' in *Postmodern Education...* (1991) fits with what I'm saying:

Border pedagogy offers the opportunity for students to engage the multiple references that constitute different cultural code, experiences, and languages. This means educating students to read these codes, including the ones they use to construct their own narratives... (p.118-119)

This is revolutionary in that it is counter cultural. A critical performative pedagogy that works towards unveiling oppression and transforming praxis has the potential to implement new visions of dignity, care democracy and other postcolonial ways of being in the world (Finley, 2005, p.689).

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## APPENDIX

I began by asking about the physical image; colour, form etc. and later, at times, loosely stitching in questions like the following:

- What do you see? What story is the image telling?
- Where did you hear that story? (raising awareness of cultural/institutional discourses).
- What is it like to be in that image – body, feelings, thoughts? (awareness of effects of discourse).
- How does that story serve you? (encouraging reflexivity/distance).
- How does that image/story limit you? Does it exclude others? (making visible the discursive construction of power).
- What image/s, if any, have been blocked out or erased? (making visible abject categories).
- Why did you choose that image and not another? (raising awareness of audience/context and the fluidity of narrative identity).
- What changes, if any, would you like to make to the image/s? (underscoring non-fixity of identity).

## *Chapter 6*

# Curriculum, Culture and Society

*Dermot Quish*

The interaction between curriculum and society can be clearly seen when one examines the purpose of schooling in ancient, medieval and modern times. In ancient Greece, Spartan young men studied the arts of war and high priority was put on physical fitness because Sparta was a militaristic society.

Democratic Athens in contrast provided a holistic education with a strong emphasis on civic virtue and participation in keeping with the values of an urban civilisation that reached its height in the age of Pericles.

In the Theocentric medieval period, philosophy and theology were central to the curriculum at all levels in an education system run by the Catholic church and where the most likely work taken up by an educated person was in some branch of the clergy.

The renaissance with its more anthropocentric perspective supported a broader approach to the curriculum, in the spirit of ancient Athens and in keeping with the growing humanism of society at the time.

The Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century essentially saw education as providing cognitive development along rational lines. The values of the Enlightenment are still central to education today.

Mass education developed in response to the needs of the industrial revolution for a disciplined, literate and numerate workforce to operate its systems of production, distribution and exchange.

One of the more negative influences of modern capitalist society on education is on the disposition of students to learning in the curriculum. Student motivation is put under pressure to operate from the extrinsic rather than the intrinsic end of the motivation continuum. Extrinsic student motivation is powerfully reinforced and rewarded or penalised in high stakes public examinations and its driving force the points system. High points are the gold standard for the cultural capital of ambitious parents and their children in materialistic twenty-first century Ireland.

## FIVE TRADITIONS OF CURRICULUM

Mark Goby (1989) devised a useful classification of curriculum into five traditions or dispositions.

1. The National Tradition
2. Technological or Utilitarian tradition
3. The Liberal Humanist Tradition
4. The Progressive Tradition
5. The Cultural Analysis Tradition

Each tradition or disposition of curriculum can be reinterpreted and discussed in the context of different societies and at different phases and stages of social development. Of the five traditions, the national tradition highlights most closely the relationship between curriculum and society at least in so far as the state can be regarded as the custodian of society's meta-narrative.

### THE NATIONAL TRADITION OF CURRICULUM

The national tradition of curriculum is usually the major concern of the government and its education agencies. In the early history of education under British rule, the state was concerned with replacing the use of the Irish language with English and with replacing the practice of Catholicism with Protestantism. The Imperial state was interested in dominating its troublesome and turbulent colony. The education system was seen as an instrument of culturally assimilating the population into the British idea of civic society. Irish cultural distinctiveness was seen as a major roadblock in the way of Britain's imperial mission in Ireland. The state's interest in curriculum was to use it as an instrument of cultural colonisation.

O'Donoghue (1999) has written an illuminating account (1999) of how a symbiotic relationship was formed between the meta-narratives of the Catholic Church and the new Irish Free State in the early years of independence. The state believed that the major function of the curriculum was to promote its nationalist ideology and the Catholic Church saw education as the means to produce conservative and obedient Catholics. The church was allowed to control most of the schools and the church in return facilitated the implementation of the state's ideology in particular in regards to the revival of the Irish language.

The publication of the OECD seminal report *Investment in Education* (1965) ushered in the idea that the development of the education system and its central component, the curriculum, was essential if economic development was to take place in Ireland. The concept of the

knowledge economy is still a driving force in Irish education. Gleeson (2009) in discussing the education policies of the influential Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) says:

The neoliberal nature of IBEC discourses is clearly reflected in their education policy statements e.g. the emphasis on improving retention rates to Leaving Certificate, the anxiety regarding the uptake of Science and Technology subjects as well as Higher Mathematics and the importance accorded to work-base education and Modern Languages in the context of the knowledge economy.

In post Celtic Tiger Ireland investment in developing the curriculum has been largely put on the back burner as the political establishment of society embraces policies of austerity, an interesting case of the negative influence of society on curriculum.

## TECHNOLOGICAL OR UTILITARIAN TRADITION OF CURRICULUM

In the nineteenth century John Mills in the 'can do' culture of the industrial revolution and building on the work of Bentham formulated the political philosophy of Utilitarianism. It argued that an action was right, if and only it conforms to the principle of utility. This perspective underpins the idea of a useful and technological curriculum that prepares young people for the world of work. The technological tradition of curriculum has assumed centre stage with the centrality of computers to all of lives directly and indirectly.

A strategy that is grounded in social constructivism and encourages student participation in the curriculum is computer supported collaborative learning. This strategy could give students opportunities to practice 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in communication, knowledge sharing, critical thinking and use of relevant technologies found in the workplace and in their social life outside school. There is a mismatch between the technological world in which students operate in with ease and joy, and the relatively low level of technologically aided and potentially transformed learning experiences in the classroom.

Ultimately, my analysis suggests that there is a widening gap between children's worlds outside school and the emphases of many education systems. While the social and cultural experiences of children have been dramatically transformed over the past fifty years, schools have significantly failed to keep pace with change. This is not to posit an absolute opposition between 'school culture' and 'children's culture'. The school is inevitably a site for negotiation (and often for struggle) between competing conceptions of knowledge and cultural value. Nevertheless, there is now an extraordinary contrast between the high levels of activity and enthusiasm that characterise children's consumer cultures and the passivity that increasingly suffuses their schooling. (Buckingham 2000 pp.32-33).

If the student is to be affectively stimulated and to engage with learning that uses the technological tools they enjoy and are familiar with, the internet must play a more central role in the classroom.

The internet has shifted much learning out of the formal curriculum of school to the informal learning environment outside school. The student needs to be up skilled in retrieving and validating information from cybernetic material that can be over whelming in volume and occasionally dangerous and manipulator in content. The question is do the teachers have the technological skills to meaningfully connect and with the students level of expertise?

The internet is essentially a positive cultural force that enables humanity to enrich itself. It allows free access enabling greater equality of education. It has dramatically contributed to human liberation as recently evidenced by the Arab Spring. It makes censorship policies very difficult to implement. It facilitates the formation of specialised learning communities around the world and it can be argued is forging a new international consciousness. However serious ethical issue have to be dealt with. There is a threat to human privacy. The use of technology by corporations and governments to collect information on individuals and societies is of major concern to democratically minded people and explains why whistleblower Edward Snowden is viewed as a hero rather than a traitor by so many people.

## THE LIBERAL HUMANIST TRADITION OF CURRICULUM

The liberal humanist tradition with its ideal of the holistic development of the individual through culturalisation should always be a central aim in the education of youth. The problem arises in the degree of emphasis given to content rather than process in this tradition. The term curriculum arises from the name of the racing chariot tracks of ancient Greece. In Latin, *curriculum* was a racing chariot; *currere* was to run. The concern here is with the emphasis on covering the course like a charioteer rather than teaching through the course like a teacher.

The shift in the proposed Junior Certificate reforms of posing learning question rather than specifying course content is a welcome although the concerns relating to History and Geography in particular have to be addressed. It is important to bear in mind that the curriculum is more than a list of subjects. It is intended to contribute to areas of experience that people have in their daily lives (Malone 2011).

Effective as opposed to notional reform of the our high stakes examination system is imperative if teaching and learning in the liberal humanist curriculum is to change it obsession with the accumulation and packaging of information for reproduction in examinations.

## THE PROGRESSIVE TRADITION OF CURRICULUM

The progressive tradition ushered in by Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* gave the concept of the child-centred curriculum and the importance of the affective domain in education. Rousseau's emphasis was a reaction to the oppressive social norms of the Ancient Regime in pre-revolutionary France.

In Ireland, secondary education's preoccupation with measuring learning outcomes can ignore the subjective and emotional world in which the learner's institutional identity is shaped. The students' voice must be listened to and the importance of the affective domain recognised. The understanding we currently have from educational psychology should inform how learning takes for each individual student in the classroom. Strategies must be developed to enhance the students' self efficacy or belief in their skill base and capacity for self regulated learning. (Quish 2012)

## THE CULTURAL ANALYSIS TRADITION

If the curriculum is to be about life, then it should be in touch with life. In Paulo Freire's (1970) hands literacy is a weapon for social change. The curriculum is the means by which people can perceive, interpret, criticise and finally transform the world about them. The cultural analysis approach to curriculum believes that students and parents should be consulted as to what should constitute the curriculum. It argues for a curriculum that makes its cultural selection from contemporary society. The Transition Year provides a most appropriate framework for the operation of the cultural analysis tradition of curriculum. This can only succeed as long as the Transition Year is not highjacked by schools that are intent on using fourth year to increase the schools ranking in the cultural capital league tables of the points system.

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## *Chapter 7*

# Distributed Leadership and the Newly Appointed Teacher

*Eilis Humphreys*

Good leadership is hard to define but you know it when you see it! In point of fact, a leader is like a football referee the better the person is doing the job, the more you wonder why he or she needs to be on the field at all.

The illusive search for the secret of successful leadership goes on. In recent years there has been a distinctive shift from management to leadership and the discourse has predominantly been on the wider aspects of leadership, including the personal qualities, dispositions and actions of effective leaders. Allied to this is the idea that leadership is not held by one person alone but is exercised in many ways throughout an organisation. There are many terms for this, e.g. shared leadership, delegation, dispersed and distributed leadership. It is perhaps unfortunate that no single interpretation of these terms is shared by academic analysts.

Leadership is exercised by teachers in their own classroom, in subject departments and in the school as a whole. This article examines distributed leadership and invites student-teachers and newly qualified teachers to reflect on how they might develop their own leadership capacity so that they have a positive influence on the culture of their school and in particular on student learning. It is intended to challenge how new teachers view their approach - how they see themselves and their roles within the school.

Teachers do not just teach a subject; they educate young people with particular skills and talents. The worth and individual qualities of each student as a human person must be recognised and therefore the development of students' values and beliefs is central to the work of the teacher. In this context, teachers must realise that they are not working alone or in isolation. The student encounters many teachers every day and their education is a totality of what happens in school (not to mention experiences outside school), and they are keen observers! All teachers are role models for their students and this extends to observations on how teachers work co-operatively and collegially with each other.

Looking at our work as teachers through the lens of distributed leadership allows us to explore how we work together to the benefit of our students.

## STARTING IN A NEW SCHOOL

Imagine you are a teacher starting work in a new school. You may be freshly qualified or you may have had experience elsewhere. Either way, this is an unfamiliar environment. You will have met the principal and probably other staff members in your subject area but you won't yet know how the place runs. Your first focus of concentration must be on your own classroom, i.e. developing the best possible teaching strategies that will allow students to learn effectively. But if that is all that each teacher does, the students are being short-changed.

As a new teacher, look outside your classroom and see how the school is run as a complete entity.

James Spillane has studied leadership in schools extensively. He argues that leadership happens in a variety of ways throughout the school and is centred in the interactions between people. In what he calls, the “leader plus” aspect, he recognises that leadership roles are played by different people at different times, whether in formal or informal positions (Spillane and Diamond 2007).

He highlights not only the interaction between people, but also the interdependence between the people and their context. He notes that this varies hugely between schools. Spillane's research revealed that while in one school, formally-designated leaders were responsible for none of the advice-giving interactions, they were responsible for 82% of these interactions at another. The influence of one teacher over another can have a significant impact on teachers' work and is, of course, central to the concept of distributed leadership (Spillane 2008).

So, where do you fit in? Which of your fellow teachers play a leadership role and in what settings? How effective are the formal positions? Where can you make your contribution?

James Duignan's (Duignan 2006) concept of distributed leadership differs from Spillane's in that he places a heavy emphasis on community and relationships. Indeed, he argues that because leadership is an influencing process, it does not lend itself to distribution, especially within a hierarchical framework. However, what he does encourage and promote is the development of leaders within each organisation, and the development of an “allowed-to-be-a-leader” culture. The quality of relationships greatly influences everything else in the organisation.

You may, as you look around your school organisation, recognise that certain individuals are empowered through the recognition of their worth as people. The concept of a school community should ensure that a sense of unity and shared vision prevails.

Another distinctive characteristic of distributed leadership is that it varies according to expertise (Woods et al 2004). Researchers (Elmore 2000; Ritchie and Woods 2007) agree that various tasks require different skills and that all the expertise does not reside in one person. Schools nowadays are complex organisations and therefore it is too much to expect that they can be led by one individual.

As a newcomer, finding your feet, you should not forget that this discussion of leadership must focus on the improvement of student learning. Richard Elmore agrees with Spillane and Duignan that the skills and knowledge that matter are those connected to, or that lead directly to, the improvement of student performance. Elmore recognises that in any organisation, people will have skills and competencies related to their predispositions, interests, aptitudes, prior knowledge and specialised roles, and acknowledges that some people will perform certain tasks better than others. He argues therefore that distributed leadership consists of many routes of influence, following the contours of expertise in an organisation, made coherent through a common culture (Elmore 2000).

Recognising expertise at various sites within the school allows for a more fluid approach to leadership than assigning formal roles and positions. Depending on the task in hand, any individual teacher can suggest new ideas, introduce new initiatives and influence the practice of colleagues. In terms of classroom practice, experienced teachers have a responsibility to lead the learning process. After all, they know their students and their subject-matter well; that is their expertise.

## DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

Work with the Principals, Deputy Principals and teachers in three second-level schools in Ireland (Humphreys 2010) confirms that people play leadership roles throughout the school whether in formal positions or not. In order to capitalise on this however, four features of distributed leadership were identified.

These features may be useful for you, as a new teacher, as you develop your professional skills and dispositions.

1. **Roles.** A leadership role can be formal, e.g. post of responsibility or head of subject department; or informal, e.g. producing the school musical or organising the sports day. The newly qualified teacher will be involved in subject departments and can choose to engage in voluntary activities.
2. **Personal / Individual Traits.** Individual traits influence the practices and interactions of teachers in the school, whether formally or otherwise. This has a follow-on impact on the culture of the school. Taking initiatives and being willing to accept responsibility were two specific dispositions named by research participants.

3. **Belonging to the Organisation.** Throughout the research, a sense of belonging to the organisation featured strongly. This included being part of an organic structure; having a voice; being involved in decision-making. If there are neither common goals nor a spirit of trust, then leadership is unlikely to be shared or distributed.
4. **Supporting the Individual.** The concept of support from principals, deputy principals and colleagues in exercising leadership responsibilities featured strongly in this research. It emerged as significant in the teachers' questionnaire as a factor that helps them to do their job well. It also arose through the focus group discussions, where it was evident that distributed leadership doesn't 'just happen'. People need to be 'nurtured' if leadership capacity is to be developed. This is achieved by such things as recognising skills; developing potential; providing opportunities; leading by example.

The fourth feature is an essential platform if leadership is to be truly nurtured and exercised. Little has been mentioned in this article so far about the role of the Principal and it may be thought that distributed leadership diminishes that role. In fact, direction from the top remains essential if leadership is to flourish within the organisation. An autocratic principal will be far less successful than one who nurtures and guides – and will also be as visible as a poor referee.

## LINKING DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP WITH TEACHING AND LEARNING

While the research carried out in three schools did not establish causal links between distributed leadership and student learning outcomes, the teachers who participated in the research were confident that student learning improves when teachers work together and when there is a culture of recognising teacher leadership. As stated above, Elmore claims that leadership should focus on instruction and that the teacher's expertise is in the classroom (Elmore 2000). New teachers have been trained in the latest pedagogical approaches and have a lot to offer in a school. Having the confidence to share their knowledge with other teachers while at the same time observing and listening to other perspectives, is a vital part of developing professional expertise. Applying the most effective pedagogical approaches in the classroom is the best way of enhancing student learning.

Various levels of shared learning can be observed in the Irish setting, e.g. sharing ideas and agreeing basic issues such as common textbooks and tests; discussing methodologies and class resources; trying out ideas based on dialogue with colleagues; visiting colleagues' classrooms and observing them in action. Reflection after class and discussion with colleagues also play a significant role in that it can change the teacher's approach and create a culture of seeking continuous improvement. While these are evident in some schools, they may be absent in others and changing that culture can be daunting.

My research found that teachers perceive collaborative work practices as being beneficial for themselves and for their students, but the opportunities to augment the range of knowledge and skills are not always utilised. Subject departments can provide opportunities for teachers to learn from each other, but this opportunity to engage in dialogue about pedagogical issues is not always taken. My research suggests that teachers influence each other mainly through informal channels.

It was observed that teachers who did not have permanent positions were reluctant to seek help, especially from the Principal as they feared this would jeopardise their prospects of permanency in the school. With regard to discussing problems with other teachers, they clearly stated that a relationship of trust is more important than the teacher's position held; they will seek help from someone they trust.

While recognising the potential benefits of classroom observation, there were mixed views on this. There was evidence of some peer observation being practised to positive effect but there was resistance to the idea of extending this practice to all teachers. However, there was agreement that more formal structures would be helpful in enabling teachers to share their experience and their ideas. The participants recognised the expertise of colleagues. When seeking advice, it is from a colleague with relevant expertise, regardless of leadership position.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to provoke thoughts on the nature of school leadership and in particular to challenge newly qualified teachers to see themselves as leaders, firstly in their own classrooms but also within the wider school context. The type of leadership they exercise will have an impact on the students in their care and on the general atmosphere in the school.

Distributed leadership can be viewed as a frame of mind. If you see yourself as a leader, you are more likely to take initiatives. You are likely to be a dynamic member of staff who can make a very positive contribution to the life of the school and therefore to the life of your students. Your leadership can be exercised in your own classroom, in your subject department and in the school as a whole.

Ask not if the school has a good leader; seek, rather, for the leader within yourself.

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## *Chapter 8*

# Bravery and Leadership

*David Harris*

Linking the words bravery and leadership may bring to your mind images of armour plated warriors heading their troops in battles long past. The bravery I refer to is rather more subtle, it is the focus on doing ‘What you feel is right’ over ‘What you are told to do’. I have been in school leadership for over 20 years now, and in that time have witnessed many new fads and trends, and an increasingly imaginative set of ways to torture, punish and hold us to account. However, the job I came into the profession to do remains unchanged, I want to help as many pupils as possible improve their life chances as possible. Sadly you sometimes need to be brave just to hold onto this ideal. I am currently Principal of Nottingham University Samworth Academy (NUSA), having been part of the team which set it up. Prior to this I was the founding Principal of Serlby Park, one of England’s first ‘all-through’ (3-18) schools. Both these roles have required overseeing considerable amounts of change, and caused me to contemplate the role of bravery in doing so.

*Bravery is giving permission to people to live a new story*

Of course you need to plan to make a school capable of more than it is currently. Raising attainment (i.e. scores) may well be the lever that is used by politicians to pull the appropriate financial levers, but it clearly must not be the single focus of the school principal who is seeking meaningful enduring transformation. Helping the school grow as a whole and across all aspects of school life is key, not just chasing the greatest number of those dreaded and dreadful targets that authorities set.

If you are brought in to turn around a school that, according to a whole host of measures, is a failing one, it is obvious to assume that everything and everyone there is failing and that the first thing you should do is clear the decks. Nowhere is this pressure greater than when you consider what you should do about the existing teaching team. It would not seem to be an unfair assumption to put the school’s failings down to them – along with the management team you are inheriting – and have the word ‘cull’ at the top of your school improvement to-do list.

I inherited around 60% of the staff of the previous school, rather than focus on what they *hadn’t been able to do* I made the conscious decision to concentrate on what they *would be able to*

*do* in the new school with new leadership, new opportunities and a whole new ethos across the organisation as a whole. I retained my staff and leadership team despite the protestations from some of my lords and masters who were in favour of the short-term, headline-grabbing cull approach. I am delighted to have vindicated my long-held belief that everybody wants to do a good job, and more often than not simply needs the right sort of support from the top in order to achieve this.

*Bravery is reminding every adult that every child should be at the centre of the change*

Changes that do not have a positive effect – directly or indirectly – on student outcomes are simply window-dressing. Great, positive change could be happening within a school, but it is vital that this change touches the student body in a way in which they can engage. It is essential pupils realise that the changes taking place in the school, *their school*, are for them; that they are at the centre of all the efforts being undertaken to make things better. One way to achieve this is to focus all efforts around the core theme of *learning* – everything is being done to make the learning better, more effective, more enjoyable and more engaging. One of the common features of failing schools is the way in which the children do not feel valued. Around this central theme of ‘the joy of learning’ there must be a genuine push to ensure children feel valued and secure, that the staff – *all staff* – genuinely care for them and want them to be happy and work well (in that order).

To move from a situation where children are the problem (‘Kids from round here’) to an acceptance that the professional responsibility of every single teacher is to genuinely care for all children to bring the best out of them, now that’s a transformation.

*Bravery is giving the pupils real power to change their schooling*

Almost every summary of effective schools contains frequent mentions of the elevated place the learner must have in that institution.

At NUSA we have grown our involvement of pupils from the early seeds when we used them to help design the new school uniform and even choose the supplier, through their involvement in hundreds of staff selection interviews (myself included), to the formation of a peer counselling team who work directly with the adult teams to solve issues including bullying and misbehaviour. Pupils’ role in leadership is one of the most exciting areas of pupil engagement; done sensitively it can be key to transforming engrained pupil attitude.

*Bravery is releasing the trapped energy of your school*

Staff want to feel they are being led, but it is a mistake for a head to assume this gives them the permission to adopt a ‘tour guide’ approach, leading from the front, umbrella in hand, occasionally slowing down to explain the view to the followers. I believe that leadership is

more about helping others to see the possibility of their journey and to identify where we are all travelling, rather than fostering the passivity caused by the tour guide. The energy released by encouraging staff and children to be amongst a school's 'trailblazers' as opposed to mere travellers is immense. And as such, the journey is far more likely to succeed.

*Bravery is accepting responsibility for having a happy staff*

Next time you are in a meeting with a group of heads, ask for a show of hands relating to whether they want all their staff to be happy *and* effective. This is clearly a no-brainer.

Another query to put to your fellow heads is this one: "Hands up who is prepared to take direct responsibility for personally ensuring that all their staff are both effective and happy." This might elicit more of a mixed response, if your peers are being honest.

The key to school-wide happiness seems to be to bring everyone's journey in line with the one you are setting out for the school, and then ensure they are all happy travellers. After all, their satisfaction levels will clearly affect the speed of change possible.

The school leader has put in place procedures and activities that will bring people together in a positive and uplifting way. What's more, as many teachers originally entered the profession filled with a desire to be part of some form of educational transformation, Barth (1990) suggests that the crisis in education is less about *commitment* to education than *recommitment* to it. To what extent are you using the lever of a whole new school journey to help recommit staff to the very thing they came into the job for in the first place? Measuring the happiness levels in your staff will give you clear indication as to how well you are doing that as a leader.

*Bravery is facing up to the fact that poor staff behaviour may simply be a reflection of poor leadership*

I have overheard some crass comments in the principals' 'locker room' about poor staff attitudes, rarely giving thought to the fact that poor staff attitude might be the result of poor leadership. When any criticism of staff behaviour is mentioned amongst our leadership team I always ask them the following question: "What mistake have we made to cause this behaviour?" Not only does this ensure we are always reflecting on our own actions, it also serves to remind everyone that good leadership, like good teaching, is all about relationships.

The nature of the relationships formed within any organisation will clearly have an impact on the final outcomes. It is debatable whether strong relationships come from effective leadership or effective leadership results from strong relationships, but the importance of the relationship itself is beyond debate.

*Bravery is focusing on good teaching and helping teachers aspire to it*

There is a growing bank of evidence that emphasises the direct link between the quality of teaching and the outcome of pupils. The movement away from more traditional, didactic forms of teaching has thrown up the need for improved discussion about what makes a good twenty-first century teacher and how schools best go about implementing the most effective techniques.

The good school leader will do whatever it takes to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning are the number one focus of all the professionals within the school. You may not be able to influence every lesson taking place on a daily basis, but you certainly can make a significant impact on the conditions within which those lessons take place.

That said, this comes with a note of warning to schools that only focus change on the performance and skill of their teachers. Whilst this may be the most important part of the process, if considered in isolation there is a real danger that staff will feel victimised and ‘done too’ rather than active agents of change.

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## *Chapter 9*

# Sustaining Innovation in the Classroom

*Lynda O'Toole*

Few will question innovation in the classroom. Few will question its importance. At least some, may wonder how best to sustain quality innovation in our classrooms. This essay aims to share some personal reflections with regard to factors that can contribute to the sustaining of innovation in the classroom. The reflections will focus primarily on the fundamental role of teacher education and will consider briefly the developmental role of evaluation.

The argument that teachers matter has become axiomatic - “The quality of teachers and of their teaching are the most important factors in student outcomes that are open to policy influence” (OECD, 2005, p. 12). A high quality teaching profession is seen as one which should engage teachers “as active agents in educational reform and innovation” (OECD, 2013, p.10). However, teacher innovation should not be understood solely in the context of reform-related prescribed innovation rather pedagogical innovation should be seen as a natural part of the practice of a skilled teacher committed to student learning.

Teachers may be the innovators, and are the key mediators of innovations in the classroom but it is on them too that the on-going realisation of innovation depends. Teacher belief, or what Fullan (1991, p.92) might call the ‘development of meaning’, and teacher competence are two essential ingredients for the successful implementation of any innovation, as they are equally essential to the sustainability of pedagogical innovation. Further, one could suggest that innovation and the sustaining of innovation in our classrooms require not just teacher desire and teacher capacity but crucially also the creation of relevant opportunities, support and recognition.

Teacher education and the teacher education continuum are fundamental in this regard. The establishment of the Teaching Council of Ireland in 2006 recognised and validated the importance of the teacher professional in this country. Commitment to change and innovation and to enquiry and reflection are seen as key dimensions of teacher professionalism (Mc Guinness, 2006). The Teaching Council’s Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education (2011) and its Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (2007;2012) provide a policy framework which should support teacher innovation and the sustaining of

innovation in our classrooms. The former gives, as its three underpinning principles, the concepts of innovation, integration and improvement.

Kellaghan (2006) recognised the importance of initial teacher education in starting teachers on a course of development that would lead to ‘self-generative change’. He referred to the knowledge and skills that would be required. For this writer, the formation of the teacher professional, and the fostering in that professional of a disposition and attitude likely to dispose that teacher to a career-long openness to innovation and development is of vital importance also. Skill and knowledge alone will not be sufficient to allow the teacher professional self-sustain, promote and realise career-long innovation in the classroom.

Induction and the first experiences of the newly qualified teacher are often seminal; they can leave a mark for good or ill. A number of powerful influences come into play here, not least the lived and experienced culture of the school. A good instructional leader, a ‘master’ mentor and colleagues, in particular perhaps subject department colleagues, also play a pivotal role. The greater the sense experienced of a learning community interested in, and seeking to promote innovation, the greater the extent to which a well-formed, well-disposed, knowledgeable and skilled inductee will grow in self-sustaining professionalism.

Teacher continuing professional development (CPD) offers a prime opportunity to support and sustain teacher innovation and this, at both the level of policy and practice. The Teaching Council’s Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education recognises this stating that effective CPD should “encourage teachers to evaluate their pedagogical beliefs and practices, to critically reflect on their professional practice and working environments and to engage in professional collaboration”. Equally it “should facilitate teachers’ critical engagement with curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to maximise students’ learning” (2011, p.20).

Teacher CPD in practice can help to sustain innovation in our classrooms through its promotion of teacher innovation. The focus and content of CPD and the approaches taken to delivery can support pedagogical innovation. Effective CPD can be the catalyst for innovation where it seeks, or requires teachers, to examine their practice, engage in experimental implementation and review and share the experience.

This is the case when curriculum development is seen as a collaborative activity which integrates meaningful professional development so as to build on teacher experience. In this context, the teacher is seen as a key change agent and recognised in his or her capacity to innovate in the classroom. Such an approach is advocated by The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

To be effective, and to help sustain teacher innovation, teacher CPD should also serve to recognise and validate teacher innovation. This can be facilitated by the use of a teacher

professional portfolio and appropriate accreditation of CPD as is also referenced in the Teaching Council's policy document (2011, p. 20).

The nature of the structures established to enable the provision of CPD can play a vital role in the promotion and sustaining of teacher innovation. One thinks here of the powerful nature and potential of teacher professional networks. As Hopkins contends networks constitute natural infra-structures for innovation and they have also "a key role to play in supporting innovation and development" (OECD, 2003, p.158). This is clearly accepted by the NCCA (2012, p. 9) when it sets out as one of its main principles engagement and networks for innovation. The principle recognises: the importance of innovation; the central role of the classroom teacher as the key innovator in practice and the power of professional learning communities and networks.

Two, among other, recent professional development initiatives in Ireland demonstrate the capacity of teacher CPD to support the school as a professional learning community focused on pedagogical innovation. Both initiatives also show how, in that context, networks can support innovation.

The Learning School Project was initiated by Education Centres in Cork, Kerry, Limerick and West Cork and funded by the Department of Education and Skills. As well as aiming to develop an increased awareness of what constitutes a learning school, it aimed to support school based-activities promoting the on-going development of the learning school and to enhance the capacity of individual teachers to contribute to that development. Such a project resonates with the work of Hargreaves, referenced in (OECD, 2003, p.71), who states that

encouraging schools to become learning organisations requires ensuring among teachers: the motivation to create new professional knowledge; the opportunity to engage actively in innovation; the skills of testing the validity of innovations and the mechanisms for transferring the validated innovations rapidly within the school and in other schools.

The Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) led initiative in instructional intelligence focuses on the classroom and instructional innovation as a means of extending a teacher's instructional practice. The initiative is founded on the work of Bennett for whom (Bennett and Marzano, 2008, pp.68-69) the "tension between the drive to get better and the lack of a better way creates a fertile ground for conflict ---". The resolving of the pedagogical 'conflict' requires innovation in that the teacher must "integrate different instructional methods to more effectively meet the diverse needs of the students".

Evaluation can also play a part in sustaining innovation in our classrooms. In Ireland, evaluation has both an accountability and a developmental function. The latter aim clearly underpins the work of the inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills when it seeks to: affirm and acknowledge good practice; promote continuing improvement in the

quality of education offered by schools and promote self-evaluation and continuous development by schools and staffs (DES, 2002, p.1).

Both external and school self-evaluation encompass the potential to support innovation in the classroom. The external evaluation process offers, firstly, a particular opportunity to identify and recognise innovation in the classroom. The feedback process affords the external evaluator an opportunity to validate and encourage pedagogical innovation as part of professional dialogue. Innovation can be formally and publicly acknowledged in subsequent reporting. As part of a professional learning community themselves, external evaluators can do much to help sustain innovation in classrooms through the dissemination and promotion of the good practices identified.

If it is to be effective, school self-evaluation must, by its very nature, impact on the learning experiences of, and learning outcomes for, students. The reflective, systematic, collaborative, evidence-based and improvement-focused nature of school self-evaluation is ideally constituted to support teacher engagement and pedagogical innovation. Pedagogical innovation and what Bransford *et. al.* (2005) call the ‘adaptive expertise’ of the teacher become integral to an action-focussed improvement plan for teaching and learning.

In this essay, I have drawn on two areas of professional interest and experience to consider the question of the sustaining of innovation in our classrooms. Hopefully, the reflections shared and the contributory factors identified have in some small way demonstrated how innovation can be sustained in our classrooms.

*Please note that the views expressed in this article are the personal views of the author.*

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## *Chapter 10*

# The New Junior Cycle: Learning from Innovations in Transition

*Denise Kelly*

In a schooling system that is highly centralised and dominated by the effects of a high-stakes public examination (the Leaving Certificate), *A Framework For Junior Cycle*, launched by Minister Ruairí Quinn TD in October 2012, represents a significant and exciting departure from the existing Junior Certificate. The opportunities it offers are documented in the *Framework* document (DES 2012).

Schools are encouraged to offer a new ‘core’ of 24 statements of learning. This will effectively mean a refocusing on what students need to learn at this stage of their education rather than on what subjects need to be taught. Short courses will form a new curricular component aimed at broadening students’ field of study while at the same time 8 key skills will be embedded in the short course and revised subject specifications. All of this is aimed at making education at this stage more engaging and relevant for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Teachers are asked to use assessment in a much more explicit way to support learning and inform their teaching. There is a place for summative assessment but it ‘should be seen and not heard’ mostly until third year when it plays a part in attracting qualifications. Teachers are asked to take a more significant role in assessing their students for certification with the removal, to a large extent, of external high-stakes assessment - unnecessary in Ireland where the vast majority continue to senior cycle.

The essential guideline for me as an educator is contained in the foreword: “...to place the needs of our students at the core of what we do and to improve the quality of their learning experiences and outcomes” (DES 2012).

There is a certain irony in the parallels between the thinking informing the new Junior Cycle and that which led to the introduction of programmes like the JCSP, the LCVP LCA and TY; for many of the principles that informed those programmes are reappearing in the new JC. We must ask ourselves why this is so and whether or not it is the policy decision that makes an impact on students’ learning experiences. For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on some parallels between features of the new Junior Cycle and the Transition Year (TY) programme, first introduced in 1974. This, in an attempt to identify lessons for the

introduction of the new Junior Cycle which also aims to be more than what Looney describes as “something for teachers, students and schools to overcome, to manage, to conquer” (Looney 2001).

In addition to a particular focus on personal and social development, individual schools were and are given extensive freedom by the *TY Guidelines* (DE 1993) to design their own curriculum. This was Ireland’s first attempt at top-down/bottom-up reform (Fullan1994). The new JC is similarly taking this capacity-building approach. My experience as a teacher and leader working in three different education systems has shown me that some teachers (like some in all professions) have a love-hate relationship with being asked to participate in curricular reform. They want to have a voice but they can be less enthusiastic when they realise their contribution extends beyond bestowing a blessing (or not) on what is developed for them to engage their students with. It demands of them that they become more deeply involved in designing as well as implementing the sort of learning experiences that will engage their students. Many TY teachers have managed to do this very well and that must surely offer reassurance to teachers who will engage with the new Junior Cycle. Some of the greatest advocates of the new Junior Cycle so far are those very teachers who have found teaching TY classes a great professional liberation!

Any professionals looking for guidance as to what they need to do to meet the *Framework* challenges need only return to the moral purpose of why they became teachers to find a starting point in what may, initially, seem a daunting task: What is it that students in our school need in terms of learning experiences as they progress from Primary and in preparation for Senior Cycle and beyond? How can I contribute to providing those learning experiences in my classroom? What do I need to do as a professional to improve my capacity to provide the most engaging, relevant and effective education that I can? How can I use assessment as a tool to help students learn and to better inform my teaching? We need no instruction from policy to find answers to these questions; they are embedded in the very core of our beings as educators.

When TY was introduced it brought a fresh emphasis on self-directed learning and intrinsic motivation combined with the use of more active teaching and learning methodologies by teachers (DE 1993). The effects of these features have been largely liberating. Students and teachers report enjoying an improved student-teacher relationship and greater engagement in learning because it is seen as being more relevant to everyday life (Jeffers, 2011). My own experience as a Senior Manager in an International school in Spain taught me that other jurisdictions do have lessons to teach us too. I remember observing a teacher of GCE Media Studies (British curriculum) facilitate students in working with others<sup>1</sup> on project-type assignments. The work had rigour and structure but promoted creativity, independent learning and students could see clear links with everyday experiences. This teacher had

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<sup>1</sup> Working with Others is one of the new key skills to be developed in the new Junior Cycle

excellent relationships with her students, with the latter reporting that learning was dynamic and topical. The teacher was present to guide and assist, making skill development explicit in the plenary of the lesson, with the students driving themselves in their own learning towards shared learning outcomes. I could see that the teacher's popularity was in part due to her own communication skills but in large part it was because the students saw the subject as relevant and her as someone who made learning interesting.

Likewise in the new Junior Cycle teachers are asked to develop more explicitly the key skills that are recognised internationally as being important in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Rather than teach these as separate components in Junior Cycle programmes, teachers are challenged to embed them in their daily lessons. The fact that these key skills (NCCA 2012) have been developed with identifiable elements and learning outcomes should add rigour and structure to the existing teaching of key skills which can be somewhat ad hoc currently in TY.

I once had the privilege of observing a teacher of French in the classroom as part of ongoing evaluation of teaching and learning. She was covering the reading, writing, aural and oral elements of French using an article from a Parisian magazine on the spending habits of French women aged 25 – 32. By assigning groups of students differentiated tasks and by asking them to interrogate graphs within the article, the teacher expertly wove the teaching of content with the key skills of working with others, literacy and numeracy, not to mention those essential language skills. Seeing such skilled teaching in action confirmed for me the importance of a teacher knowing her students, creative preparation that links content knowledge with skill development and, critically, relationships of mutual respect.

From my experience of working with the NCCA's junior cycle network schools, the option for schools to develop their own short courses in Junior Cycle has been the most warmly welcomed feature of the Framework to date. Again the opportunity exists for a school community to determine which student needs can be met using these curricular components. Teachers are eager to be let loose to develop areas of interest to them which they see as being attractive and relevant to young people and which will allow a certain rejuvenation of their own teaching – something that TY teachers also experience. What's more, in TY they report that rejuvenation extending to other areas of their teaching and with other age groups (Jeffers, 2011).

The guidelines for TY (DES 1993) sought to bring about greater collegiality in schools, including collaboration with parents and community interests. With the arrival of School Self-Evaluation, some schools are taking the opportunity to look at teaching and learning in Transition Year; at how it provides for progression from Junior Cycle and how it prepares for senior cycle. They are also exploring learning gaps that need to be filled. One obvious audience to consult with are the students themselves. To date - in common with our Northern Irish colleagues, we have not been grasping such opportunities as well as we could in relation to policy and qualifications reform (Elwood 2012). Elwood calls students the 'Key Actors'. Yet

as her paper points out, we rarely engage with them in deep and meaningful way about the more significant aspects of their education. In their book *How to Improve Your School*, Ruddock and Flutter (2004) also construct a powerful case for consulting students. It should be noted that the NCCA did include this audience during the consultation phase of the new Junior Cycle and they were extremely enthusiastic and insightful in their responses. (NCCA 2011)

In Junior Cycle there is a real and genuine opportunity to consult with students about which short courses might be offered, the learning that most engages them and how teachers' feedback could better provide them with more meaningful assistance on what to do to improve. It remains to be seen how well schools take up such opportunities.

Similar to the new Junior Cycle, TY was, and still is, strikingly different from other school programmes. Overall, the aims were ambitious and the challenge to schools to implement it in a manner that was true to the spirit of its aim should not be underestimated. When offered the opportunity to introduce the Transition Year Programme in 1974 only 3 schools out of almost 800 did so! Irish educationalists and Irish society generally were even more wedded to the notion of the reliability and fairness of the LC than in 2012 and the country 'was not for turning' – not easily anyway. Many saw anything which was not directly and obviously a preparation for the Leaving Certificate as a mere distraction. Times change however and people's attitudes along with them. Today TY is offered in 75% of schools and taken by over 50% of the cohort (Jeffers,2010).

Mixed attitudes to TY prevail, however, and there are many factors influencing the myriad of opinions. As for any curricular programme it is the individual school and the individual teachers in it - rather than policy decisions - that make the difference between what are seen as meaningful TY experiences or not.

The new Junior Cycle has the look and feel of previous programmes because they share features that work. The success of the new Junior Cycle will depend no less on the interpretation of its spirit by the school and by individual teachers. As John Hattie (2003) says,

'Interventions at the structural, home, policy, or school level is like searching for your wallet which you lost in the bushes, under the lamppost because that is where there is light. The answer lies elsewhere – it lies in the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act –the person who puts into place the end effects of so many policies, who interprets these policies, and who is alone with students during their 15,000 hours of schooling'.

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## *Chapter 11*

# Home School Community Liaison as Part of a School's Pastoral Programme

*Noel Kelly*

Many publications on the subject of pastoral care have set out to establish a working definition prior to dealing with the topic at hand, for example Collins and McNiff (1999; Henderson and Calvert (1998). I believe the following, although bulky, is a comprehensive definition and formula to best describe the function and effect of pastoral care.

Pastoral care is concerned with promoting pupils' personal and social development and fostering positive attitudes: through the quality of teaching and learning; through the nature of relationships amongst pupils, teachers and adults other than teachers; through arrangements for monitoring pupils' overall progress, academic, personal and social; through specific pastoral structures and support systems; and through extra-curricular activities and the school ethos. Pastoral care, accordingly, should help a school to achieve success. In such a context it offers support for the learning, behaviour and welfare of all pupils, and addresses the particular difficulties some individual pupils may be experiencing. (Collins, McNiff, 1999)

This definition includes relationships, progress monitoring, structures, systems, out of class activities and school ethos as instruments for schools to achieve success. However, before we move on we must be cognisant of the fundamental right of the family as outlined by the Constitution of Ireland:

The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family.  
Article 42.1(Ireland, 1937)

However, due to parental socio-economic status, inadequate educational retention and attainment, poor ideation of self-worth which compounds the parents' lack of ability to participate in their children's education, a school's pastoral programme needs to go beyond the boundaries of the school and to become actively engaged with the community in which it sits. Through the appointment of Home School Community Liaison coordinators (HSCL) in DEIS schools this active engagement with families, and parents in particular, is catalysed through a kaleidoscopic menu of interventions. Such interventions range from the fundamental home visits to an eclectic mix of literacy and numeracy programmes spearheaded by 399 coordinators across 532 primary and second level schools across Ireland. To avoid this short piece becoming a mere catalogue of the Home School Community Liaison Coordinator as part of a school's pastoral programme, I will delve into aspects such as

home visits and transfer programmes, while exploring mechanisms to engage parents as active participants in their child's education.

## BEGINNINGS

Since the establishment of the HSCL programme in 1991, schools with coordinators have been placed in a unique position which enables them to liaise with families at a whole new level. Schools and care teams were afforded and still have a vehicle to deliver their pastoral support programme directly into targeted family homes. Through home visitation the coordinator and parent/legal guardian can develop and foster relationships that may not otherwise come to fruition on the school premises due to a vast number of parental factors particularly a fear of school or their own educational ability among others.

Rather than promote indiscriminate parental involvement, the HSCL scheme is 'a targeted and focused resource aimed at the most marginalised within the designated schools' (Conaty 2002)

Home visitation may take place for a variety of reasons, for example: delivery of school-based materials and information on upcoming parent courses/classes; the family may be targeted due to poor retention and/or attainment history of past siblings; information may have been ascertained by the school which draws a closer lens towards the family in question. For home visitation to be effective, the coordinator must have a skills set which encourages the parent/guardian to engage with him or her. These include an ability to listen to the full story in a way that is non-judgemental and compassionate. Overall, the individual must be trustworthy and a competent communicator.

In relation to home visits, coordinators must earn the trust of families and not assume that it is simply afforded just because you have called, usually unannounced, from the school. However, once a trusting relationship is forged the work of the coordinator can truly begin: to engage the student and the family further in the process of education. On a personal level, I have found the process of home visitation to be informative for not only the family but for myself. On the whole, families have welcomed me into their homes and have engaged me in conversations about themselves, their children, the school and their experience of education and their thoughts on their children's education. Some issues have emerged which I never pondered previously. On the flip side, I have helped to alleviate some of the fears which some parents have about the school and about their own academic abilities. I have also managed to put many families in touch with pertinent community organisations to assist them deal with relevant difficulties/traumas they may be experiencing. Once a home visitation is complete, if needs be, significant information, with the consent of the parent or guardian, may be passed onto the relevant members of the school management and or care team to ensure effective and transparent supports are in put place for the student in question and perhaps for the family.

It is paramount that children and their parents/guardians experience a smooth and natural transfer and progression through the various academic milestones to ensure that high retention and attainment is achieved. This is a very significant issue for children attending DEIS schools and is facilitated by Home School Community Liaison Coordinators at primary and post-primary level through transfer programmes. Each school will have a slightly different programme, however, the end goal is to ensure 100% transfer, where achievable, from Junior National School to Senior National School and from there onto Post-Primary. It is worth noting that some transfer programmes also incorporate visits to third-level colleges. These visits are attended by parents and the students in order to broaden not only the student's academic expectations and aspirations but also those of the parents. Transfer programmes are also mechanisms that schools and pastoral teams can use to allay some of the following fears:

“As a parent I need to be informed of the whole process myself . . . explain the process to me please...”

“It's frightening for us as parents to see our child not coping”

“I need a place to express my fears for my child where he/she can't hear me”

“When making school choices and getting all the literature it needs to be explained to us e.g. we do not know what CSPE is etc”  
(DES, 2011, p.14)

The transfer programme, a year-long process, formulated in conjunction with the management and care team in the author's second-level school operates as follows. An open evening is held for all parents/guardians and students in early September at which teachers are available to chat with parents in relation to their subject. Parents are escorted around the school by teachers, students from Transition Year and parents from the Parents Council. The next phase in the process involves the parent attending a 20 minute one-to-one meeting with the HSCL coordinator. At this meeting the parents provide the school with a detailed history of their child's academic performance, highlighting areas for the school to focus on and sheds light on issues, family or academic related, they may have or had concerns about. The coordinator documents relevant information and, where appropriate, assures the parents of supports and resources which may be available to the child and themselves. Further meetings and/or house calls are offered to those most anxious or identified as marginalised. During the transfer process the coordinator facilitates the collection of documentation, from the primary schools, relating to students who may have been identified as having special needs. This process is to facilitate an appropriate transfer for those students and lessens their parents' concerns and workload. Transfer information sessions are organised for parents through the HSCL coordinator while collaborating with the Guidance and Counselling department. This meeting provides parents with an opportunity to hear about subject choices and programmes their children will engage in over the first year in the school. Literacy and numeracy courses for parents, within the school and local community, are also highlighted and an opportunity is afforded to all parents to make suggestions on how they can link in with the school. Once a child has enrolled and completed the transfer process, the HSCL coordinator with the care

team will monitor and support all students and their families with particular emphasis on the most marginalised.

In conclusion, the Home School Community Liaison scheme plays a pivotal role in the pastoral programme of a DEIS school. If the HSCL scheme is coordinated and used to its full potential parents/guardians become truly empowered, actively engaged, informed and confident enough to participate and support their children to excel in life's educational journey. Although home visitation and transfer were discussed, these are only two aspects of a widely diverse position held by the coordinator which is designed to maximise parental participation in their children's education. Finally, in an era of a poor economic climate and a demand for increased transparency and accountability, I urge those with the responsibilities for socio-economic portfolios to think before they make any more cuts in the education budget and in particular to the HSCL scheme or other critically important supports such as guidance and counselling and the various specific supports for Traveller children and their families.

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## *Chapter 12*

# Schools and Community Service

*Carmel Boyle*

Transition Year (TY) is an optional one year programme which is taken by 15-16 year old students and is set between Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle. TY was introduced to the Irish Education System as an optional programme in 1974, and by the mid-nineties it was mainstreamed. Schools were given scope and flexibility to create and develop their own programmes but the philosophy which underpinned it was:

The content of Transition Year curricula will include elements of the following: social education; moral education; education for living (including home crafts and education for parenthood, employment and leisure); philosophy and applied logic; music and the arts; Irish Studies; civilisation courses for students of continental European languages; visual education, media education and communication skills, etc. (DOE, 1976, p.131a)

The Minister for Education, Mr Richard Burke, TD in launching this initiative, acknowledged that the education system of the time was becoming particularly academic and that students had little time to look at their own development or the development of society around them. His rationale for this project was:

Because of the growing pressures on students for high grades and competitive success, educational systems are becoming, increasingly, academic tread-mills.....  
The suggestion was made that perhaps somewhere in the middle of the course we might stop the treadmill and release the students from the educational pressures for one year so that they could devote their time to personal development and community service. (Burke, as cited in Jeffers, 2007, p.1).

As part of the TY mission its curriculum was “to promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of pupils and to prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society” (DOE, 1994, p3). Thus within this context the aims of TY do not stand alone, they are interlinked and may be presented as follows:

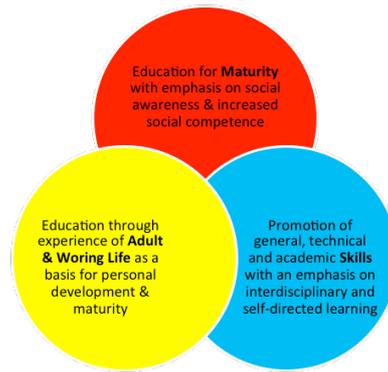


Figure 1: Aims of Transition Year (TYCSS, 2002).

Community Service<sup>1</sup> as a module in TY plays a large role in fulfilling the overall aim of the programme. From its introduction, Richard Burke recognised the role of community work within the overall framework of TY, “he acknowledged that the education system of the time was becoming particularly academic and that the students had little time to look at their own development or the development of the society around them” (Boyle, 2009, p.14). He went on to suggest that time should be taken to “release the students from educational pressures for one year so that they could devote time to personal development and community service” (Jeffers, 2007, p.1).

## RATIONALE

This paper focuses on the benefits to Transition Year students who engage with Community Service. It is based on the data from a study of an investigation into the practices of the Community Care module in TY in six different schools. (Boyle, 2009). The six different schools cover a range of different context as is evident in table 1:

	School enrollment	TY students in 08/09	3rd year students in 07/08	TY established in school	TY optional / compulsory	TY subscription	Profile of Community care co-ordinator
<b>Barrow</b>	862	96	99	1989	Optional	€400	Female TY co-ordinator Age: 40-49
<b>Shannon</b>	867	162	162	1987	Compulsory	Fee charging School	Male TY co-ordinator Age: 50-59
<b>Foyle</b>	230	42	42	1992	Compulsory	Fee charging School	Male TY co-ordinator Age: 50-59
<b>Corrib</b>	722	120	120	1976	Compulsory	€240	Male TY co-ordinator Age: 40-49

<sup>1</sup> Mark Community Service is also referred to as Community Care in some schools.

	School enrollment	TY students in 08/09	3rd year students in 07/08	TY established in school	TY optional / compulsory	TY subscription	Profile of Community care co-ordinator
<b>Lee</b>	760	68	150	1994	Optional	€340	Female TY assistant Age: 40-49
<b>Liffey</b>	562	90	107	1986	Compulsory	No fee	Female Chaplain Age: 50-59

*Table 1: Variable Features of the Selected Schools (ibid, 2009, p.58)*

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SIX SCHOOLS

### *Barrow*

The Barrow is a Voluntary Catholic Secondary School for girls located in an urban area. It was founded in 1936. Community Service has operated in TY for nine years. The TY co-ordinator is also the community service co-ordinator.

### *Shannon*

The Shannon is a fee charging boys secondary school located in an inner city area. It is a Catholic school. Community Service has operated as a module for the past ten years. The Mission and philosophy in Shannon promotes social justice and service to others.

### *Foyle*

The Foyle is a fee charging Catholic Girls School established in 1953. Community Service has been included in the TY programme from the start.

### *Corrib*

The Corrib is a girl's voluntary secondary school in a middle-class suburb of a large city. It was established in 1953. It has a Catholic ethos and this has a strong impact of the curriculum the Corrib offers. Community Service has been part of the TY programme in the Corrib for the past twenty years.

### *Lee*

The Lee is a Voluntary Catholic Secondary School for boys located in an urban area. The Lee has just introduced Community Service for the current TY students. They have been

planning to initiate this for some time and this year the boys went on their first community care placement.

### *Liffey*

The Liffey was established in 1982 under the auspices of the Vocational Education Committee. “It is a co-educational, non- selective multi-denominational” school located in the suburbs of a large city. Community Service has been operating in the Liffey for the past seven years.

## COMMUNITY SERVICE AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE TY AIMS.

The TY aims refer to education for maturity.. “Promotion of general, technical and academic skills” and “Education through experience” (DOE, 1994, p.4). Community Service can actively fulfil some of these aims. All the schools researched, cited “social awareness and concern for vulnerable members of society was one of the benefits of community service” (Boyle, 2009, p.111). Students not only become socially aware they actively engage in voluntary work in the community.

Maturity and personal growth and development are important elements in TY. Many schools referred to this vis-a vis community service as did the students, for example, Mary and John in the Liffey:

My community care placement made me more mature. I wouldn't have been comfortable around people with disability, I now appreciate things that I always took for granted like speaking. It shows you that there are people worse off than you, so don't take life for granted. (John, Liffey)

It made me grow in confidence and maturity. It made me independent and thought me to make the most out of every situation. (Mary, Liffey)

Through community service students become more aware of the value of care workers in society. By direct participation in society students can become more equipped to develop into active young citizens of the future (Jeffers, 2008).

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

TY guidelines strongly promote a wide variety of teaching and learning strategies. This is embraced by both students and teachers (Jeffers, 2007, Smyth, Byrne and Hannan, 2004). Community Service affords students the opportunity to learn in an interesting and exciting way. Learning experiences outside the normal classroom “appear to succeed in capturing the attention and imagination of young people” (Jeffers, 2007, p.292). Community Service is learning beyond the classroom. Community Service provides learning which can

“bridge between the official knowledge of the school and their own informal, personal or life world knowledge” (Dunne, 1995, p81). What students learn during their community service placement remains with them long after their formal schooling.

Students’ communication skills are enhanced through community service. They learn to communicate with adults at a different level. In school they are familiar in dealing with adults as teachers; they now learn to communicate with adults as workers. In some of the placements, students learn that there are different ways and levels of communication. They learn to interact and communicate and adapt to the environment they are in.

Very often the students need to come out of themselves to do eighty per cent of the work that is necessary for their communicative partner in order to get twenty percent of the communication back from them. That is a very dramatic learning experience... to come into a room of children that can’t say anything to them, and yet by the end of the week you can see them interacting and communicating very well with them. You can see them watching their facial expressions and watching their gestures and beginning to interpret what they want to do. (St. Vincents) (Boyle, 2009, p.125)

Students themselves also appreciate this as Michelle, from The Liffey, comments:

It was hard at times because some of the children couldn’t talk and when they wanted something they just pointed to it and I didn’t know what they wanted...It got easier as it went along because you could make out what they were saying. (Boyle, 2009, p.125)

Students organisational skills are improved, they must organise their time and their routine for the week of placement. The Caring Agencies insist on this

Other simple learning experiences; on the first day two of them came with no lunch, and yet we only get half an hour for lunch and we are a long way from the shops, simple things like managing your time, when they go out for lunch they must sign in and sign out. Learn to bring lunch tomorrow. (Boyle,2009,p.126)

Students learn to appreciate that when working with vulnerable people, respecting their rights is fundamental. “Thus the importance of being confidential is accentuated” (Boyle, 2009, p. 126).

“Learning outcomes like these are not always evident in the regular curriculum that a school provides. There is extensive evidence of multiple benefits to students, schools, agencies and society in general of including a community care module within a TY programme”. (Boyle, 2009, p.126).

## INDUCTION AND REFLECTION

From the data collected it became clear that the Community Service module operates differently across the different schools. However, one clear factor emerged: “all schools

prepare the students for the placement and subsequently de-brief them after it. This is regarded as part of the learning process” (Boyle, 2009, p.115). The process of learning has been well documented by educationalists such as Dewey, Kolb and Piaget. The manner in which schools induct students before their Community Service placement and subsequently provide opportunities for them to reflect after it is critical to the learning experience. “The real learning will only emerge when the students get the opportunity to reflect on the actual experience. Thus, the intrinsic value of Community Care is accomplished when the students engage in a structured de-briefing programme” (Boyle, 2009, p.119).

Writing about their experience first facilitates a richer reflection as students take time to contemplate what the placement means to them. Subsequently, when reporting to the class they are more focused and engaged. Though the Shannon proposed smaller reflection groups worked well, other schools felt that the students benefitted significantly from listening to other students report on their experiences. This too is learning, because the type of experience in one agency is not necessarily replicated in another. ...the best part of the evaluation was listening to everyone else, I was in a special school which seems so different from being in an elderly day care centre. (Boyle, 2009, p.119).

Written reflection focuses the student on the individual experience, and guided by the teacher, can be a form of self-evaluation. Oral reflection has a dual purpose, it enables the other TY students to become informed about the different types of community work but it also allows the student to report to the class, a practise in itself which boosts self-esteem and self-confidence.

## CONCLUSION

Community Service is a module well worth including in any TY programme. A strategically planned TY programme will enable the student to achieve a holistic education. Including a community service placement that is carefully prepared and monitored will be a valuable asset to such a programme.

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## *Chapter 13*

# Collaborative Practice at the Heart of Student Welfare

*Margaret Keating*

This article endeavours to shed some light on the notions of leadership and collaboration as they apply to the work of school Guidance Counsellors. In attempting to do this it is necessary, in the first place, to consider some of the significant characteristics of modern second-level school environments.

There is a considerable body of data in the relevant literature which asserts that teaching - as a professional practice - has been experienced as a more solitary, isolated pursuit than a collaborative one. Jean Ruddock (1991) claims that around the world teaching has been one of the loneliest professions. In her words, “education is among the last vocations where it is still legitimate to work by yourself in splendid isolation”.

In the 20 or so years since Ruddock carried out her research, there has been a huge impetus for change. There has been a growing realisation that working in schools is a collaborative exercise. This does not take away from the autonomy of the teacher but should, rather, improve both the benefit to the student and enhance the teacher’s professional experience and development.

One powerful metaphor of schools is that of the ‘egg-crate’ (Lortie 1975). This draws attention to teacher autonomy, where individual practitioners facilitate learning. The flip side of autonomy, of course, can be isolation where individual teachers engage in little or no professional conversations with colleagues who are teaching the same children. The contrast, for example, with medical teams in hospitals where collaboration is the norm, can be striking.

Hoping to overcome widespread professional isolation reformers began to advocate for new school structures and teacher practices that recognise the importance of learning within communities (Westheimer 2008). By focusing on the environment in which teachers do their work, these reformers hoped to foster collegiality and increase professional dialogue.

Many of the fresh insights into schools and teaching, in recent decades, have focused on the teacher as team player as well as the autonomous professional. In a study of six kinds of professional cultures in schools Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) found that it is better to be

collaborative than individualistic - as a teacher - and that we need to think harder and deeper about better and worse ways to work collaboratively with one's peers.

When collaborative improvements and decisions are guided by experienced collective judgement and where they are pushed forward by grown-up challenging conversations about effective and ineffective practice you have a professional learning community (PLC).

According to the originator of this term, Hord (1997), a PLC was a place where teachers inquired together into how to improve their practice in areas of importance to them, and then implemented what they learned to make it happen. This school community is likely to be far more effective than that suggested by the 'egg-crate' metaphor mentioned above.

The call for leadership and collaboration in school guidance counselling is something of a 21st century phenomenon although the debate and arguments for this were going on during the last decades of the 20th century. Baker and Gerler (2003) have asserted that leadership and collaboration are requisite functions for school guidance counsellors and school guidance programmes "because of the circumstances that exist in the world, the nation, in communities and schools".

Here in Ireland, the development of a 'whole school approach' as part of a school's response to the guidance and counselling needs of its students has been an active concern of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) since the mid-seventies. However, research and experience would suggest that until the late 1990's this assertion was carried out in an informal and ad hoc way rather than a formal and systematic way. McKenna et al (1997) found that more than a third of school principals described their knowledge of guidance and counselling issues as inadequate. While the principals recognised that a lot of good and valuable work was being done it was neither visible enough nor accountable in a formal way. One reason for this situation could be the likelihood that guidance counsellors (as teachers) were for the most part working in isolation.

Another very likely reason is that of the expectations and orientation of people who went into school counselling. As a general rule aspiring guidance counsellors can be described as having a helping orientation. They tend to see themselves as working more closely with individual students, parents and teachers. According to Baker and Gerler (2003), "seldom do these aspiring counsellors consider that leadership skills are required to build and maintain successful guidance counselling programmes".

So, as well as realising that working in schools is a collaborative exercise guidance counsellors need also to have a sense of the kind of leadership which would serve them best in carrying out their work.

One must not forget that a vital and unique part of the school counsellor's work commits them to working alone with students. This is the counselling aspect. Notwithstanding the demands of child protection issues and the shared responsibility for student welfare that is characteristic of a school community, the effectiveness and value of the counselling work is to a large extent reliant on the confidential nature of this work.

Jeffers (2002) suggested that guidance counsellors often feared a tension between their unique and professional role as guidance counsellors and guidance counselling as part of a more collegial and whole school function. Recent developments in both legislation and policy have put a stronger emphasis on the 'whole school' and curricular dimension of the work. In an article written for NCGE in 1996, Collins argued for a collaborative approach to whole school guidance. In her view the days of the 'solo run' were over and it was incumbent on Guidance Counsellors to co-operate with other professionals in schools (NCGE, 1996).

This view is in keeping with the research already mentioned on 'isolationism' in schools and in teaching in particular. According to Fullan "isolation protects teachers (and guidance counsellors) to exercise their discretionary judgement, but it also cuts them off from the valuable feedback that would help judgements to be wise and effective".

The Department of Education and Skills (DES), the IGC, and the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) have asserted over several decades that the school guidance counsellor's role and functions encompass three main areas:

1. Personal/ Social Guidance Counselling
2. Vocational Guidance
3. Educational Guidance

This assertion emanates from a shared philosophy and belief that the whole person matters and it recognises the enormous amount of developmental change which takes place during adolescence. The main theory which underpins this philosophy is Rogerian and the core elements which Rogers (1961) advocates for education and personal development within which the educator and the counsellor demonstrate empathy and positive regard as each young person/student develops as a social being, with educational and vocational possibilities and choices.

Internationally and at home the 1990's were years in which intense and extensive public debate on education took place. An OECD report in 1991 set the ball rolling, so to speak. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989) put a moral and legal obligation on signatory countries to ensure that children everywhere had access to education. In Ireland these various discussions led to a Green Paper, a White Paper and culminated in the Education Act of 1998. School guidance counselling was a central theme throughout

these policy consultations and article 9 (c) of the 1998 Act enshrines the rights of children and young people to appropriate guidance.

The DES Guidance Inspectorate and NCGE produced various guidelines for interpreting how ‘appropriate guidance’ could be delivered and managed, most notably, *Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of 9(c) of the 1998 Education Act, relating to students’ access to appropriate guidance* (DES 1999)

*A Whole School Guidance and Counselling Service and Curriculum: Roles and Relationships* (IGC 2008) defines the role of the guidance counsellor in a school setting. The key role has two distinct but complementary elements; firstly, the provision of a responsive service, staffed by trained guidance counsellors, to meet the students’ needs, as they emerge, throughout the student’s time in school; and secondly, the development of a curricular programme which is developmental, preventative, appropriate to the needs of the students, and delivered in a proactive manner in a whole school context.

Both of the elements described above require varying levels of co-operation and collaboration. However, delivering a curricular programme in a whole school context requires that several people work together towards common shared goals. With this in mind the most effective form of leadership is proposed as collaborative. Although it is not within the scope of this paper to consider the question of leadership from the designated school leaders’ perspective (principals) it needs to be said that the 1998 Act has put the responsibility for whole school guidance in the remit of the management of the school.

The first step in thinking as a collaborative leader is to view the work through the prism of relationships. Therefore planning, delivering preventative programmes, co-operating with local organisations and agencies, involving parents, surveying students and working with colleagues have as their cornerstone the building of good, professional, working relationships.

Rubin states this very powerfully:

A lot of the work of building collaborative cultures is informal. According to Fullan, ‘it is about developing trust and relationship and it takes time. But, if all this is left to spontaneity and to chance a lot of collaborative effort will dissipate and provide no benefit to anyone’.

As asserted earlier, the young people with whom guidance counsellors work are in the throes of the demands of (arguably) the greatest period of developmental change that will occur during their lives. This period needs to be handled with optimum care and skill. The different initiatives and responses from the bodies and organisations mentioned above attest to a deep understanding of the value of the work that was being done and needed to be done. Young people, and the people who work with them, need nurturing and time. Collaborative ventures take time if they are to take root and flourish. From this perspective it seems very difficult to

comprehend why the role and work of the guidance counsellor was ‘downgraded’ in such a serious way in the Budget of 2012.

Marland, a leading light in the pastoral care movement in education in the UK, came to the following conclusion; “It is really a truism of school planning that what you want to happen must be institutionalised. It is not enough to rely on good will, dedication, hard work and personality”. It is fair to say that since the Education Act (if not before) there appeared to be a growing realisation by principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, inspectors and others of the key role played by guidance counsellors in nurturing and structuring collaborative, pastoral approaches in schools.

Through involvement in and commitment to in-service, supervision, NCGE courses and so on guidance counsellors affirmed the seriousness with which they embraced whole school approaches and the benefits of collaboration. It has become increasingly evident that guidance counsellors have a greater understanding of harnessing the shared wisdom and expertise of all staff members for the benefit of the students in school.

Guidance counselling - as with teaching - is uncertain by its nature (Schon,1983). It is uncertain because it is different every day. Collaborating in a formal, structured way with colleagues minimises the effects of uncertainty and the feedback advice and support ensure both the quality of the service and the health of the professional.

In conclusion, to extend the metaphor implicit in the proverb that “it takes a village to raise a child” one could argue that it takes a whole school to educate an adolescent and to give him/her the opportunities and supports that help her/him grow into a confident, self-actualising adult (Maslow).

During my time as a guidance counsellor I witnessed many examples of this in the course of my work. One such example illuminates the benefits to the student of adopting a whole school approach. In the early 2000’s Chinese students began to attend the school where I worked in significant numbers. In the main these students were intelligent, hard working, positive and ambitious. Of course there were obvious cultural differences in how they approached education and life in general.

However, it was only through regular conversations between tutors, year heads, language support teacher and guidance counsellor that we realised that ‘saving face’ was an even more important from a cultural point of view among the adolescent Chinese in our care than it was among Irish adolescents. This ‘saving face’ frequently meant that they would say that everything was fine and going well until evidence at a later stage would suggest that it wasn’t. This realisation on the part of the staff was instrumental in our managing them in a more beneficial way for all concerned-especially the students.

A structured, collegial approach to students' welfare and development, as distinct from a plethora of well-intentioned individual efforts, not only makes sense within schools but also enriches professionalism and deepens the care of students.

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## *Chapter 14*

# Setting up a School Guidance Service

*Emer O'Keefe*

When I was offered a new role as the full-time guidance counsellor in a school at the other side of the country I was filled with an enticing mixture of excitement, fear and hope. I was excited about the endless possibilities, I was fearful of the level of responsibility that would be involved, and I was hopeful that I could make a difference in students' lives by setting up an effective guidance service that everyone was comfortable with. Now, two years on, these feelings are still ever-present. This confirms to me that setting up a guidance service is not a one-time-only effort but a constant state of change, reflection, and adaptation.

The summer I graduated from Maynooth after an enthralling year of learning I was full of ideas, eager to get started, and anxious all at the same time. I have a strong interest in technology and I believe in the power of utilising it in schools to help students. I developed a guidance website that would act as a portal site for students to access career, educational and personal guidance. I wanted to provide useful templates, upload presentations and give links to important websites. I felt that students could appreciate having their own dedicated school guidance website which enabled them to research, fill out questionnaires, ask for an appointment and get up-to-date career news both in and out of the school environment. So, armed with my shiny new website I embarked on the road to Kerry feeling ready to show the world what I was made of. Yes, innocence is a wonderful thing!

A whole new world opened up to me once I stepped into my new school that a glossy website alone could not help me navigate. The first few weeks I hardly felt my feet touch the ground. I was in a school with well over 700 students and 70 members of staff. I had a crash course in introductions, shown where my office was and then, one by one the students came tentatively at the door, curious to meet the new teacher with the new accent. Yes, it was all very new.

In my first few weeks I made a number of aptly-named rookie errors. For example, I arranged a huge list of careers appointments with students after they jumped me in the corridor or at my office before having met students in their class groups. The result was that when they came most of them had little to no research done and I ended up explaining the same things, and showing the same websites, to each one in turn. I have since learned that assigning foundation work first makes a huge difference to the development of students' self-reflection

and also improves my time management. We are all keenly aware of the severe cuts to Guidance and so it is all the more important that we can manage our time wisely.

This summer I have developed a file for students to use in guidance class that involves a number of steps and worksheets that they must complete, such as interest assessments, brief career investigations, and course investigations worked on in the previous year. Once this background information is gathered I feel that the career appointment should be more productive. This would also provide the new guidance counsellor the chance to go around and meet more classes as a way to introduce yourself and the service you will provide.

In the beginning I felt a little like a lost soul on a deserted island. I had not properly researched the area I was coming into and the support networks that were available to me. Looking back on those initial months I think I felt it was my responsibility to solve all the students' problems that I encountered by myself and I did not realise the wealth of support that was out there. I felt overwhelmed and underprepared. But bit by bit I learned about the different agencies like CAHMS, Kerry Mental Health, and South West Counselling among others that threw a completely different light on my role as the guidance counsellor. I learned quickly that it was my responsibility to seek help, and get direction where necessary and wherever possible. If I can make one contribution in this article it is to suggest to all newly-christened guidance counsellors to research your local area, make a list of all the support agencies and services that are there, introduce yourself over the phone or in person and discover how each of you can assist the other. It could also be an idea for the IGC to compile a list of the various agencies, support services, and local guidance counsellors in each of the branch regions and give their contact numbers and a brief description of how they can help. It's just a thought, but it could be a way for us to make the fountain of knowledge out there more accessible.

One very important key element of setting up the guidance service is planning. In my first year I was asked to submit the Guidance Plan to the school. I felt prepared as we were taught excellently how to create this plan in Maynooth and its important function. However, it was not until the end of my first year that I truly learned the value of creating a timeframe of the activities you wish to carry out during the year, be they assessments, parents' evenings, modular classes, guest speakers etc. I found I was chasing my tail without a definitive timeframe and although the work was done, and I had ticked all my mental boxes, I did not feel like my effort and energy was focused enough in the right places at times.

I have learned from Gerry Jeffers the power of innovation. I think it could simply mean finding new ways of doing things to get better results. So, how can we find out what these new ways should be? Well, we can ask questions to the students themselves. One addition to my website this year will be the introduction of a feedback form asking students to evaluate the guidance service that they are receiving. I have wanted to do this in the previous two years but I was reluctant. Why? Because I was afraid of the negative things they might say, and that I

would not be able to deliver on the desired change. I now see that this may not meet the needs of students or achieve the aim of creating the best service possible. My one small contribution to innovation this summer is looking at a new way of keeping student counselling records. I have created a new database system that can be kept confidential and provide easily accessible information. I found that the paper system was just not working for me and so I will make the change to computerised records.

It has taken two years to even find my feet and to get to the stage where I am able to truly reflect on my work. I have learned in my short experience that setting up the guidance service is not a fine art and there is no one-size-fits-all. I cannot claim to be anything close to an expert as I am only embarking on the start of a long and adventurous road ahead. However, I look forward to each and every step of the journey and the endless learning opportunities I will no doubt encounter. I have learned that it is OK to make mistakes and that we can adjust my plans to fit the changing situations we meet. Most importantly, in the words of the increasingly popular phrase; we must at all times endeavour to *'Keep Calm and Carry On'*.

Looking back on my time so far in setting up the guidance service I think it could be wise to;

- Find out more about the support network around you, your colleagues, your fellow Branch members, the outside agencies and services available,
- Develop an efficient form of record-keeping using a database,
- Make a plan for the year to include an accurate timeframe but don't be afraid to change it where necessary,
- Set up a simple yet effective website that your students can use to get more information and download various useful templates, (weebly.com is a good website development site to start with)
- Develop a system that helps you manage your time better such as getting students to do plenty of guided research in your Guidance class before having a Career appointment,
- Find your own way of evaluating the Guidance service and try to embrace the change it may bring.

I wish you well and best of luck in your endeavours ...

## *Chapter 15*

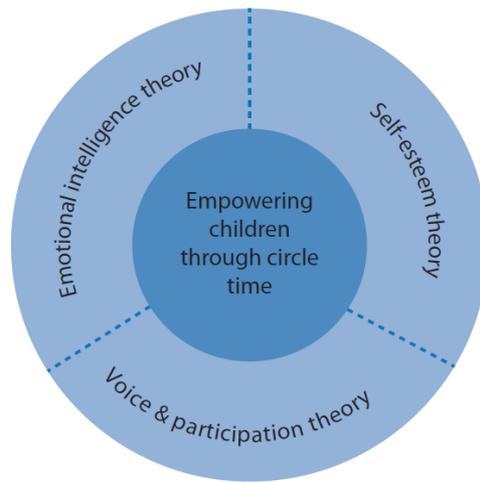
# Circle Time as a Learning Space: Challenges and Opportunities.

*Bernie Collins*

Circle time is a widely-used method at primary school level in Ireland (NCCA, 2008). There is evidence that it is also used in second-level schools, particularly in First Year and Transition Year (Collins and Kavanagh, 2013, in press). It involves children sitting in a circle with their teacher using method-specific strategies (such as a speaking object) to promote self-esteem, positive relationships and discipline (Mosley, 1998). While it is seen as a pupil-centred and innovative practice by many teachers, its detractors are gathering (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009; Hanafin, Shevlin, Flynn and O'Donoghue, 2009). Some aspects of a recent research project into the practice of circle time (Collins, 2011) are presented and problematised here. A full account of the research can be accessed at <http://eprints.nuim.ie/3728/>.

### WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CIRCLE TIME IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS?

What is striking about research on circle time is how little is available in the Irish school context, in spite of its apparent popularity. What little there is focuses exclusively on primary school level. While the research that is available (mainly in the UK) is overwhelmingly positive about its effects on children's self-esteem (Miller and Moran, 2007), social skills (Canney and Byrne, 2006), emotional literacy (Coppock, 2007), and behaviour (Lee and Wright, 2001), there is no real evidence as to what is happening in these circles. I was interested in finding out how empowering circle time was and whether it could potentially benefit children socially and emotionally, or be harnessed as a space for developing citizenship and democratic skills. The main focus was on teachers and their practice. The following diagram illustrates the conceptual framework adopted for the research:



*Diagram 1: Conceptual Framework (Collins, 2011).*

The work of Carl Rogers (1967) was examined as his influence on the development of circle time as a “warm and non-judgemental setting” (Housego and Burns, 1994: 26) is noted in the circle time promotional literature (Mosley, 1996). Other theorists in the field of self-esteem whose work was explored included Maslow (1968) and Glasser (1990; 1998; 2000). The work of Gardner (1985; 1999) and Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2004: 2008) contributed to my understanding of emotional intelligence theory, in particular the idea that emotional intelligence can be developed in a structured and staged way. Lundy (2007) and Simovska’s (2008) work on voice and participation theory also informed the research, with Lundy’s (2007) four factors of space, voice, audience and influence providing a framework for auditing children’s voice and participation in circle time. The methodology adopted was qualitative, involving multiple observations, teacher journals, and pre- and post-fieldwork interviews. The following Table summarises the activity undertaken, and the types of schools and classes involved:

Teachers using circle time (Pseudonyms)	School/ Organisation	Observations (30 – 50 mins each)	Journals	Interviews
Neasa (6th Class)	Rural mixed	3	3	2
Majella (3rd Class)	Urban mixed	3	3	2
Tomás (3rd Class)	Urban boys	3	3	2
Annette (6th Class)	Urban mixed	3	3	2
Sally (Senior Infants)	Urban mixed	3	3	2
<b>Principals</b>		In each school above		5 (one per principal)

<b>Teachers not using circle time (Pseudonyms)</b>			
Michael	Urban mixed	1	
Teresa	Urban boys	1	
Alan	Urban mixed	1	
Former Education Officer	NCCA	1	
<b>Totals</b>	15 observations	15 journals	21 interviews

*Table 1: Summary of Field Work*

## EMPOWERING CIRCLE TIMES?

I want to acknowledge that the observations undertaken saw evidence of exemplary facilitation of circle times, with children appearing to benefit both in terms of skills, confidence, enhanced relationships and fun and enjoyment (Collins, 2011). What is discussed here are some of the troublesome aspects of the findings which risks obscuring what is good about the method. This should be borne in mind by the reader.

Circle Time typically involves games, rounds using a speaking object where children are invited to speak, and open fora where discussion can be facilitated on topical issues or a particular problem (Mosley, 1993; 1996; 1999). The conduct of circle time is informed by rules (sometimes referred to as ground rules). One such ground rule is around the use of a speaking object (typically a soft toy at primary level), where children are invited to contribute orally when they get the object while others listen. In the Mosley Model, there is a ‘pass rule’ (Mosley, 1996: 35) which allows children to exercise choice. Another ground rule mentioned in some of the research and promotional literature is confidentiality - ‘the most important rule’ (Kelly, 1999: 43). While Mosley does not go as far as this, she suggests that confidentiality could be exercised ‘within realistic constraints’ and that children should be encouraged to say as much as they feel is ‘safe’ (Mosley, 1993: 116).

In the first instance, while teachers generally uphold the pass rule, there is evidence that some teachers put pressure on children to speak. As one teacher stated:

Circle time for others maybe it’s ok to pass, and maybe sometimes it is ok to pass if there is something they can’t really think about or whatever, but as a rule I try to omit that rule, that other people may enforce, and I say c’mon, think of something...because it does encourage them to get out of their ‘I can’t think of anything’ ...

This ambivalence, even if done to help children to overcome shyness or reticence about speaking in a public forum, is problematic from a rights perspective. While children have a right to a voice and participation in matters affecting them enshrined in Article 12 of the United Nations Charter of Children's Rights (UN, 1989), they also have a right not to participate:

Most importantly, children and young people must be free to form their own opinions, decide whether or not to express them and decide whether or not to participate in activities or events. (Desk Review, UNICEF, March 2009)

While circle time is seen as an ideal forum for children to exercise voice, there is a danger that this aspect becomes a yardstick by which to measure the success or otherwise of the session, and that "[p]articipation is lauded and non-participation is construed as lack of interest, lack of motivation or laziness" (Hanafin et al., 2009: 3). Mosley suggested that children exercise power by not speaking in the circle:

...there are power-brokers who are deliberately doing it to get attention. So sometimes the silence is far more powerful than the speaking. (Mosley, in interview)

She was in favour of preparation for children to contribute in the circle, with topics for discussion being given in advance, 'non-emotional' and 'prepared rounds' initially, and 'coaching' where necessary (Mosley, in interview). This again underlines a preference for oral contributions in circle time which might encourage teachers to put pressure on children to speak.

In relation to confidentiality, I found that this was a feature in some classrooms, particularly at 6<sup>th</sup> Class level. This is in keeping with research done with student teachers which found that confidentiality featured more at second-level than primary (Collins et al., 2013, in press). One excerpt from a 6<sup>th</sup> Class teacher interview provides insight into the rationale behind this particular ground rule:

Researcher: If they wanted to go home and talk to their parents?

Teacher: Oh, yea the parents of course.

Researcher: But not ...?

Teacher: Basically if you heard, if somebody got upset, you don't go out and say it on the yard, or things like that.

Researcher: But they could go home and share it with the parents.

Teacher: Oh, yea, yea.

While the intention is to shield children from ridicule in this instance, the imposition of a confidentiality rule is problematic on a number of levels. It may encourage children to say more than is prudent in the circle which flies in the face of teachers' stated intentions to make circle time a 'safe space' (Collins, 2011). It also potentially limits children's ability to voice issues and concerns outside the circle, thereby depriving them of influence (Lundy, 2007).

That children have a low level of involvement in school decision-making is supported by DES (2009) and *State of the Nation's Children* (2010). So while teachers in schools may be using circle time as a means of allowing children to develop and exercise voice and participation, confidentiality limits that voice in a way that may not be conducive to the development of citizenship or democratic skills. On a more worrying level, it supports the notion of secrecy, a concept which contradicts what is taught in the Stay Safe (1998) programme, where children are encouraged to 'tell, tell, tell'. While removing the confidentiality rule may expose children to ridicule, it potentially allows their voices to reach new places in the school and wider world context. Teachers have a responsibility to ensure that children are not made more vulnerable in circle time than in other classroom contexts. This may require a re-thinking of rules and role in circle time.

## CONCLUSION

The intention of providing this snapshot of research activity is to generate discussion about what happens in fora such as circle time in schools. What has been established in the Collins (2011) research is that while there is much to be lauded in the practice as seen on the ground, caution is required in relation to how it appears to be evolving. The research also begs several questions: are there other school and classroom practices that appear democratic and empowering (such as school councils, green schools committees) but which in effect corral children's opinions and views even though that may not be the intention? How esteeming is circle time for children who are not orally adept or who prefer other forms of participation? Are there opportunities for circle time to become more outer-focussed and/or more empowering?

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## *Chapter 16*

# Experiential Learning as a vehicle for thinking critically on the assessment process; reflections of an educational psychologist in training.

*Maeve Daly*

The ways in which the experience of conducting a cognitive assessment accelerated my thinking on principles and assumptions of the assessment process will be highlighted. This will be done through examination of the informed consent process, limits of confidentiality and the feedback session of the first-ever assessment I carried out as a trainee educational psychologist in a psychological service. The extent to which the experience of assessing a client pushed me to think critically on this practice will be outlined. A discussion with reference to various psychological and reflective frameworks that guided my practice will permeate the process of resolving cognitive conflicts that arose for me during this particular assessment process.

### THE PROCESS OF INFORMED CONSENT

For my first case on psychological placement, I was charged with the task of carrying out a full cognitive assessment with a twenty year old girl studying at a college of further education. After recently learning how to follow a model for obtaining informed consent, I felt well-equipped for my first session with the client. After working through informed consent, my client signed the consent form and was amenable to the assessment process. As I progressed through her background history, I was lead to an unwanted surprise. In response to a question about her confidence levels, my client revealed that she had cheated to get a place on her current course as her friend with the same colour hair had sat the interview for her. As she expanded on how she had never told anyone else, I found myself thrown into a state of cognitive conflict. On the one side, my client had been referred by the college because she was struggling to keep up with coursework, while on the other side she had not earned her own place on the course in the first instance. Desperately pushing panic aside, I continued with the interview while surreptitiously recalling the parameters of confidentiality we had set out during informed consent (that information provided to me during the assessment was fully confidential except in three circumstances, where she reveals harm to herself, where she is harming others or damaging property). As I left that day, I grappled with whether I had, with

just one question, uncovered a reasonable explanation for why my client was struggling to keep up on her current course or was this merely corroborating evidence that my client is in need of extra support? I arrived home, in a state of utter confusion, battling with the rationale for proceeding with the assessment and with my own limits of confidentiality.

Reaching for the Code of Professional Ethics of The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI, 2008), I identified all relevant clauses relating to limits of confidentiality. I needed to measure my personal constructs (my client had committed a serious offence but it was not grounds for breach of confidentiality) against those of the profession. I trawled the guidelines of my service, which stated “disclosure of information to an appropriate third party should be made where it is deemed necessary: to protect the interests of the student, to protect the interests of society and to safeguard the welfare of another individual or student” (Ethical Practice Guidelines, 2003, clause 4.2). I weighed the situation up against principles of duty of care over the client where “duty of care to the client requires initiating actions designed to protect the health and welfare of the client or others” (Ethical Practice Guidelines, 2003, clause 5.1) and noted the guideline that stated “every effort must be made to ensure that a proposed disclosure is in the best interests of the client”, (Ethical Practice Guidelines, clause 10.2). I considered how she was currently in her second year of study and that this event occurred over eighteen months ago. She had since achieved her own grades last summer and passed her own interview, earning a place in year two on her own merit. Nevertheless, advice from our Professional Ethics lectures was ringing in my ears, “if in doubt, consult your supervisor and refer to your code of ethics” (G. Ni Dhomhnaill, personal communication, February, 2011). With that, I sought the guidance of my supervisor, who also concluded confidentiality need not be breached and theorised that my client’s offence was committed as an act of desperation. When he added that this revelation was testimony to the rapid rapport I had established with the client, my thinking grew. This consultation was crucial in enabling me to move on with the assessment process.

During that first informed consent meeting, my attention was wholly occupied on following each step of the structured format in a logical sequence to ensure I imparted all the relevant information to the client. In this regard, I was merely fulfilling the rights of my client and my duty as a practitioner. Once stimulated by surprise, however, I was caused to reflect on the ethical and legal considerations that underpin the informed consent process, particularly in relation to the principles encompassed by limits to client confidentiality. From the informed consent process, the principles of autonomy and self-determination guide my practice and in this way, the client and the client’s concerns are placed at the centre of a collaborative relationship. Secondary benefits of informed consent also became clear to me in my practice later in the assessment process. The Ethical Practice Guidelines (2003) state that “the challenge of fulfilling the spirit of informed consent...is to strike a balance between giving the client too much information (thereby, perhaps confusing or frightening the client) and too little information (thereby, leaving the client unclear about what is involved)” (p.11). From my

supervisor's comments during consultation, I realised I had gained a privileged understanding of the challenges faced by my client but also thought about the level of skill required for the balancing act of building good rapport with avoiding a compromising position for you or the client. Appropriate supervision as a structure for discussion that allows practitioners to think about anxieties and feelings stirred up by their work struck me as an important strategy for all professional practice. Roberts (as cited in Dennison, McBay & Shaldon, 2006) states that "support teams can help contain the anxieties stirred up by the work, restoring the capacity to face reality, without which effective work is impossible" (p. 88). I internalised the legal aspect of informed consent where "codes of ethics and standards of practice are guidelines that have been developed to ensure that clients' rights are protected and serve to protect the legal liability of healthcare providers" (Wilson, 2006). In line with Piaget's assertion that 'knowledge cannot be transmitted', despite training and preparation with tools (a structured model of informed consent and a knowledge of our professional codes of ethics), real meaning of the process of informed consent and client confidentiality was only constructed through personal experience. Such practical experience where I am given an opportunity to merge theory with my practice, allows "knowledge and experience stand in a relation of mutual adaptation, of mutual questioning and mutual illumination", (Bettencourt, as cited in, Mc Elwee, personal communication, 3rd February, 2011).

## THE FEEDBACK SESSION

After the cognitive assessment, results indicated that my client to be functioning within the Low-Average range of intellectual ability that spans into the Borderline range. It also revealed her to be presenting with an inconsistent psychological profile, as her scores traverse three categories of ability from the Average to the Borderline range, which may leave it difficult for her to perform consistently across the different areas of her college course. After assessing attainments, her overall reading levels came out within the Borderline category while after technical analysis of her scores, enough evidence had emerged to suggest that she is presenting with a Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD) in Reading Comprehension. As this has major implications for her ability to access new material from her course notes and textbooks, it was clear that she would require considerable support to cope with the demands of her course. Throughout the assessment process, my client engaged in general discussion about college life and spoke openly about her difficulties at school over the years and indicated expectations of dyslexia or dyspraxia as an outcome of this assessment. As the process unfolded, I became increasingly apprehensive about how the outcome might affect my client. This concern, coupled with behavioural observations during assessment and details of her case history, prompted me to recommend a referral to the site psychologist for counselling sessions and support. Her total cooperation and sustained motivation showed an admirable determination to get to the bottom of her struggles with academic work. At various intervals, she discussed her future ambition to pursue social studies in National University of Ireland (NUI) in Maynooth and her drive to become a social worker in the future. In addition to this,

reports from college indicate that she is well respected for her high levels of motivation and her excellent attendance. In light of her expectations and hopes, finding an approach to explain the meaning of a Full-Scale IQ of 80, the implications of an SLD in Reading Comprehension and the rationale behind a referral to the site psychologist presented a considerable challenge to me. On the approach to the feedback session, I found myself in a state of perplexity about how to support my client in coming to terms with her own limitations on one side, and empower her and reassure her that her future is bright, on the other. In order to maintain my duty of care and respect for my client and stay true to my role as an agent of empowerment, the onus lay with me to equip myself with the necessary tools to embrace this challenge.

During feedback, my goal was to open my client's mind to what she can do, rather than creating the illusion of helping by offering complex explanations for why she cannot do it (Hughesman, as cited in, Cameron, 2006). To deliver this, I drew on my counselling skills to take a strengths-based approach to my explanation of the meaning behind her Full-Scale IQ and the implications of an SLD in Reading Comprehension. I drew on counselling frameworks characteristics of a helping relationship to foster my professional-client relationship (such as unconditional positive regard, warmth and respect, clear and recognition of potential proposed by Rogers, 1958). Also drawing on Hornby's (2000) partnership model, I drew up a set of student recommendations to engage my client as a direct collaborator in the interventions set out. The process of dual-signing (as we both had to sign off on them) at the session handed autonomy to the client. Research has shown that if people commit to goals and ideas orally or in writing, they are more likely to honour that commitment (Cialdini, 2001). In line with this thinking, the client was supplied with writing frames and graphic organisers for immediate use and the feedback session was followed up with a summary letter on the outcomes of the assessment process posted to the client's home address. Research has shown that when clients experience themselves to be true partners in the therapeutic process, the likelihood of a beneficial outcome increases (Behnke, 2004). In relation to the referral for counselling, *The Ethical Practice Guidelines*, (2003, clause 3.9) of my service state that "guidance, counselling and psychological interventions in general can be effective only if the client is...willing to cooperate with the practitioner in working towards mutually acceptable goals". Lazarus' Multimodal Therapy model (Lazarus, 1997) is adapted for use during the informed consent process and when I asked the client to recall the seven different interrelated areas in which a psychologist can offer support, which we had outlined during informed consent, the secondary benefit of this process became clear to me. During this process we had highlighted areas of need for potential intervention, other than the area identified as the referral issue and this empowered the client to collaborate on my rationale for the referral to the site psychologist. Taking a cognitive approach to framing my referral, that paying attention to physical condition such as getting enough sleep and exercise and psychological well-being aids study skills and memory improvement (Herrmann, Raybeck & Gruneberg, 2002), aimed to foster these "mutually acceptable goals" (p.12).

In preparation for the feedback session, I was caused to reflect on my use of language and communication skills for delivering feedback to the client and on my rationale behind each recommendation made, reflecting at a technical level (Van Manen, as cited in, Mc Elwee, personal communication, November, 2010). This reflection helped unravel the cause of my cognitive conflict about delivering feedback to this student. On one hand, we are operating within the medical model which dictates a process of identifying, assessing, classifying and remedying students into “a realm of separateness, specialness and dualism” (Kinsella and Senior, 2008, p. 657). Such practices are symptomatic of what Foucault (1979) terms dividing practices, resulting from disciplinary power where professionals have embraced the prescriptive model which operates from a within-child pathology of disability. On the other hand, however, the role of the educational psychologist is to advance concepts of empowerment (Cameron, 2006) and “promote learning, attainment and healthy emotional development of children and young people” (DfES, 2005, p1). As the social constructionist approach proposes that reality is only constructed through the language that people use, I realised that awareness of ways discourse and language can construct and determine thought, actions and decisions, will be important for effective practice. In acknowledging that problems can be reframed with a shift in language, a referral for counselling was proposed in terms of ‘the development of relaxation techniques’ as opposed to ‘the management of her anxiety’ for example. This shift of language from a ‘within-child deficit discourse’ may serve to encourage the client to try out the option of counselling. Furthermore, drawing on different psychological perspectives to enhance our practice may help us navigate through our system that is so ‘entrenched’ in the ‘psycho-medical model of disability’ (McDonnell, 2003, p262), enabling us to remain true to fundamental aims of healthy attainment in educational psychology.

## CONCLUSION

Working through a full assessment procedure, from informed consent, to the technical analysis through to the delivery of feedback, enabled me to ‘assimilate new information’ at each stage of the process and ‘accommodate’ a new perspective that questions the principles underpinning each phase for the ‘formation of new schema’ on the assessment cycle. For example, that the informed consent meeting was particularly useful in laying the groundwork for the feedback session was unbeknownst to me at the beginning of this assessment but became clear to me by the end. Through the development of this mental map I gained an understanding of the principles that underpin each stage of the assessment process, allowing me to gain a critical overview of not just the assessment procedure itself, but also of the limitations of the model that operates with in our national education system at the macro-level.

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## *Chapter 17*

# Literacy and Creativity: a Personal Essay

*Kevin Mc Dermott*

*“Why do you have such a negative view of the word ‘literacy’?”*

Recently, a colleague, twenty-five years my junior, asked me this question. There were a number of supplementary questions, including why I rejected the idea of English as a subset of literacy and why I demonstrated such little enthusiasm for the current policy emphasis on literacy. The questions gave me pause for thought. And this essay is my attempt to answer them. It is not a scholarly or a research essay, more a statement of beliefs, with some recounting of the personal experiences which helped form the views and the values which I hold. However, while the essay consists of personal reflection, the relationship between personal experience, belief and commitment, is an area worthy of scholarly attention and research, especially during a period of policy change.

The word ‘literacy’ is freighted with personal, social, economic and political meaning. It is not a word that I consider an essential part of my lexicon as an educator. In fact it is hardly part of my active vocabulary, though it exists in a dormant way in the phrase ‘basic literacy’, which I associate with adult or second-chance education and with notions of illiteracy. As a student teacher in the late 1970s, helping someone to acquire ‘basic literacy’ meant teaching him or her to read simple texts and sign their name. To teach basic literacy was to deconstruct the code of graphemes, phonemes and morphemes and find a simple way of explaining its brilliant complexity to those who were baffled and awed by its mystery.

I was not a good teacher of basic literacy. When I think back on my brief experience as an adult literacy tutor, I remember subjecting a few unfortunate individuals to the torture of decoding official forms and writing little scraps of uninspiring phrases. This experience left me with a fear that I was complicit, through a lack of artfulness and a failure of imagination, in producing compliant citizens rather than self-determining agents. I also feared that I had induced tedium rather than illuminated mysteries. Subsequently, during my higher diploma in education year at UCD, I was introduced to the work of Freire and was inspired by the vision it offered, though I did not believe myself capable of translating the ideas I encountered in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* or *Cultural Action for Freedom* into practical action for adults who wanted to read. (I am not, of course, suggesting that all basic literacy tuition corresponds to my inept efforts. However, the experience was formative for me.)

Equally formative was the societal attitude to illiteracy when I was growing up in a working-class suburb of Dublin in the 1960s. Not being able to read or write was considered a sign of stupidity, and a source of shame. Illiteracy carried the stigma of a social disease or pathology. I wasn't sure who gave authority to these attitudes or how this authority deemed itself competent to judge. I only know that I had a mortal fear of falling under its adjudicative gaze and being found wanting.

And when I began to come to social consciousness, as a young adult, in the mid 1970s, I discovered a prickliness in myself around the idea of illiteracy. My father was not a good reader or writer. Both my older sisters left primary school unable to read. On a census form they might have been returned as 'illiterates'. Then, as now, I thought this an unfair judgement as it ignored the language repertoire of 'illiterate' individuals. In the case of my family members, this included the warmth and humour of my father's speech; my oldest sister's fluency and elegance of phrasing and my second sister's quality of attentive listening. Each of my family members had admirable language and communicative attributes. But of course, from the point-of-view of the individual, literacy is not a personal attribute - I have never heard anyone say, "I am literate" in the way people say "I can read" or "I cannot read". Literacy is a judgement made about individuals by those institutions and agencies who claim the authority and competence to do so. Governments judge their citizens literate; schools judge their students. In the case of PISA, the influential international study, the literacy judgement is divorced from feeling. Data is gathered in an anonymous way and reported in statistical form for ease of cross-national comparisons. PISA is concerned with information, not personal; stories or experiences.

Possibly arising from my familial experience I believe that speech, with all its exciting, creative, expressive and humorous possibilities, should be the starting point for considering the communicative competence of individuals especially, though not exclusively, those who have had little or no success in learning to decipher the written code. In fact, I think that assessment through conversation is the surest way to establish someone's understanding and empathy. (I am using the phrase 'communicative competence' deliberately because it encompasses both the semantic and the interpersonal dimension of using language.) Furthermore, I have believed, ever since I first considered it as a student teacher, that competence in speaking and listening should be assessed, as much as competence in reading and writing, in reckoning an individual's communicative competence.

On the issue of literacy and its relationship to English, I confess that I resent the growing colonisation of 'English' by literacy in the current international educational discourse, a discourse, in my view, impoverished by the influence of an economic-led view of education. From the 1960s, when I entered post-primary school, English meant poetry, short stories, novels and drama. It was an arts subject, a gateway to some of our most important literary forms. I will never forget my excitement in reading Mary Lavin, Frank O' Connor and Seán O'Faolain for the first time. I can still recite with pleasure many of the poems from the

*Exploring English* series, edited by the late Gus Martin. The short stories and personal essays I wrote in secondary school were my first steps in finding my voice as a writer. In other words, English was related to literary forms, aesthetics and personal creativity and imagination. It was an extraordinarily vivid subject and it is this version of the subject that still excites me as a teacher. ‘English’ resonates for me in a way that ‘literacy’ does not. In the discourse of literacy, the skills of summarising and retrieving information are foregrounded as much if not more than the choice of text to be read. As an English teacher, the choice of text, and the aesthetic judgement involved in selecting one text over another, is all-important. I see the role of the English teacher as inducting students into an apprenticeship of reading, developing and refining their intuition and their judgment in relation to the ethics and aesthetics of reading. As a teacher I endeavour to provide a range of literary texts which bridges the gap between the students’ current interests and masterworks such as the nineteenth century novel, Shakespeare’s tragedies or the works of some of our twentieth century poets.

The PISA emphasis on skills (Achiron 2013), works to diminish the importance of the content of texts which, to my mind, amounts to a diminution of the importance of literature, the imagination and notions of the beautiful and the transcendent.

As a teacher I have expended considerable energy on exploring the relationship between the personal language of students and the cultural language of art and the way in which the two can and do cohere. In an essay on Patrick Kavanagh, Seamus Heaney wrote that reading Kavanagh gave you “permission to dwell without cultural anxiety among the usual landmarks of your life”. As a teacher of English I want every student to experience the excitement of turning the landmarks of his or her own life into art, whether in poetry or fiction or drama. Literacy, dominated as it is with measuring proficiency, largely ignores creativity and the prolixity of creative writing. An apprenticeship in writing invites students to re-imagine and re-create the world, at the insistence of that most exciting of all educative questions, ‘what if...?’ In responding to the imperative of ‘what if’, students draw on the personal resources of memory, observation, understanding, empathy, judgement, morality, dreams and desires. In writing drama and fiction, these considerable resources are deployed in exploring the circumstances of characters and shaping these into stories. There can be few educational experiences to compare with that of writing something that feels true and right. PISA, with its international league table of educational performance, ignores writing, because it cannot codify, classify and measure what students achieve in and through the imaginative engagement of writing creatively.

In an age obsessed with measurement, English remains a subject that works on the margins of meaning and what can and cannot be said and long may this continue. It saddens me that we are shaping national policy in response to a measurement-and-outcome conception of education. In nineteenth century Britain when the link between economic prosperity and education became a matter of public policy, Charles Dickens warned of the dangers of allowing utilitarian and pragmatic considerations to dominate educational practice. Thomas

Gradgrind, the utilitarian philosopher and school-owner, is portrayed by Dickens, in his 1854 novel *Hard Times*, as always carrying a rule, a pair of scales and a multiplication table so that, at any given moment, he could “weigh and measure any parcel of human nature and tell you what it comes to” (Dickens 1987, 16). Gradgrind’s elevation of the factual and the measurable occurs at the expense of the hidden, interior life; the life of the imagination and the heart; the life of warm human relationships. Dickens’s novel explores the calamitous effects of the practices of auditing and measurement on the heart of education, the invisible pulse that gives education its energy and spirit; qualities that are impossible to measure but which are, nonetheless, real and important.

In this essay, as elsewhere (McDermott 2012), I relate personal feelings and values to educational policy as a way of striving to maintain personal and professional integrity at a moment of large-scale education reform. I think this version of reflective practice sits comfortably with the model of professional practice evident in the work and writing of my friend and colleague, Dr. Gerry Jeffers.

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## *Chapter 18*

# The Challenges of Teaching-Tales from the Frontline

*Hayley McCann*

Since I received my PGDE in 2010, I have at times found teaching to be tough-emotionally, physically and mentally. However, as a profession it also has many rewards. Over the course of this essay, through the lens of my personal experience, I am going to discuss some of the challenges and rewards I encountered and some of what I have learned.

Firstly, some background. I have been teaching for the last six years, five with ‘qualified’ status. The majority of my time has been spent in a very new secondary school in North County Dublin. This has brought with it additional challenges to that of teaching in an established school, for example, setting up subject departments.

I now realise that among the key questions a person needs to consider before one embarks on a teaching career include: Do I work well on my own and as part of a team? Do I like children? Do I have a love of my proposed subject(s)? If the answer to these questions is ‘no’, then perhaps teaching is not the correct profession for that person. Teaching is not just a job. It is, in my opinion, a vocation. You should feel drawn to it. Teaching can at times be an isolating profession. When you are in your classroom - even though you are with up to thirty students - you are essentially on your own. It can be ‘you against them’. Essentially the ‘buck stops with you’. When training as a student teacher, you have a co-operating teacher(s) to rely on to deal with any major issues you encounter. This changes when you are an NQT; it is up to you to deal with the issues that arise in your class and they can be daunting. At the same time, it is important to be able to ask for help when needed. Take, for example, a particularly challenging student. You feel you have tried everything you possibly can and nothing is working. This is where you need to be able to work with others, to have the courage to ask for help and not see this as a failing on your part. I think this is so important as an NQT and even later as a more experienced teacher. Autonomy should never become isolation. The National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) has an excellent motto, namely, “to ask for help is a sign of strength”, that summarises the above point. For NQTs, this can tie in with fears they may have in relation to hours and job security. In my first year as an NQT I felt overwhelmed. Being in a new school I felt I had no one to turn to for specific subject help, as I was at the time the only qualified teacher in one of my subjects. This is why I feel so strongly about the

need for teachers to be members of their subject associations, to continue their professional development, to attend in-services to talk to colleagues and generally to tap in to teacher collegiality.

Liking your subjects and liking children are so important. Children are extremely tuned in. They pick up on everything. They will know quite quickly whether or not you enjoy what you do. If they pick up that you don't, they will make your classroom a difficult place to be. If they sense that you enjoy, even love, what you do, they will respond much better to you and to learning. As W.B. Yeats so eloquently said "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire". Passion is vital! Part of our role as teachers is to instil in our students a desire and passion to learn. If we do not have this passion how can we expect our students to engage seriously? Nobody wants to be around somebody who has no interest in them. Even if you are having a bad day/week/year, you still have a professional obligation to teach to the same high standards and not let it impinge on your performance. I recall one day when I had a particularly difficult morning. It was 'just one of those days'. By the time the afternoon came around I was drained, grumpy and in a bad mood. Naturally the students picked up on this. When one daring student asked me "Miss, did you have a row with himself?", I just had to laugh and my bad mood lifted. This is the beauty of teaching. One minute you feel like exploding, the next you feel like laughing. It can be an emotional roller-coaster. I have been lucky to find the good times have massively outweighed the bad and I think that this is largely down to my love of the job. In the modern era I left college, like many other NQTs, with an awareness that teaching entails a whole lot more than just physically teaching the content of particular subjects. The pastoral role and responsibility to nurture each individual student and support their talents and ambitions is a central part of the job. This should entail the teacher passing on his/her wisdom and experiences through their own teaching philosophy.

It would be wrong of me to talk about challenges facing teachers without addressing a major issue in the profession at the moment, which is the issue of salary cuts. Teachers have been hugely affected by the economic recession that Ireland is currently experiencing. Today teachers are being asked to do more for less pay. NQTs who enter the profession are being paid less than their peers for doing exactly the same job. All teachers now have to work an extra 33 hours a year a result of the Croke Park Agreement. Now with the further amendments to the Croke Park Agreement it seems there is even more financial implications to come. Supervision and substitution will no longer be paid and increments are set to freeze. With the new Junior Certificate being rolled out in 2014 starting with the new English curriculum, will teachers have to do even more? Coupled with that is Droichead, an induction programme being implemented for NQTs. It is a time of uncertainty and no doubt financial hardship for teachers. It can be hard to remain positive in the face of austerity. It is essential, however, that one does; taking stock of what one does have and being thankful for that is important. The lengthening queues of people who seek unemployment benefit or job seekers allowance is perhaps a reminder to be thankful even in the face of difficult financial measures.

Finally, in this short reflection, I would like to discuss physical, emotional and mental well being. During my first year as an NQT I was sick more often than I would have liked. I had numerous throat and chest infections. I wish I knew then how much more effective it is to lower your voice to gain attention instead of raising it! I was often afraid to go the bathroom some days when I had numerous classes in a row. As a result, I didn't drink enough water in class, which increased my throat problems. Now I always drink at least a litre of water a day, sometimes more. A colleague recently informed me that urinary tract infections are highest amongst teachers. This is worrying. It is important for teachers to take care of themselves. I know that in my first few years the long hours and many evenings spent planning until very late at night took their toll. I often found it quite hard to 'switch off' from the job. This in turn led to me being physically ill. Now to combat this I take multivitamins and I try very hard to get all my work done during the week where possible so that I can take a break at weekends. I am also a major advocate of exercising. Not only are there obvious benefits to your health, but exercising also releases endorphins that help to relieve pent up stress.

I have only touched on some of the challenges associated with teaching. There are others, however, I strongly believe that the rewards outweigh these. These include seeing the smile on a student's face when they become more competent in your subject, seeing the results of your students improve, observing their positivity and confidence increase, knowing that they respect and listen to your ideas, and knowing that you are being a positive role model for each child and for your subject. All of these are results of the processes you put in place in your teaching. A teacher has one of the most influential roles in a student's life. The satisfaction and rewards you receive when influencing a child's life far outweighs the challenges. Teach with your heart and your mind and you will receive the rewards and fulfilment in your job.

## *Chapter 19*

# The Singularity

*Lisa Connolly*

Scene: A five star super-deluxe hotel in Guangdong, China, the year 2006. Outside it is as it always is in this region, smoggy. A thirty-seven year old business executive is on the phone to her ten-year old daughter in Ireland. Her expression is fraught and her eyes are beginning to well up, however her tone of voice is calm and reassuring – perhaps too much so.

Child (sobbing): “Mam I can’t do this spelling test... (audibly sniffs and snorts whilst convulsing) ...Mam... come home now... help me....?”

This phone call was the start of a long, difficult and perilous journey backwards in my life, or so it seemed. As a successful business woman in a predominantly male and technical industry, job sharing was neither an option nor even a plausible request, neither was time ‘off-ramp’ to simply be a mother so I took a quantum leap into the unknown. Having made the decision to mother my three children myself, I packed my career and my salary into the boot of my then company car, dropped it off at head office and took the train empty-handed back home to overdraft, stews and huge uncertainty. My new life plan seemed to have few upsides.

Seven years on, now earning what I earned in my mid-twenties and with a still screaming overdraft and cumulative Visa balance, I can’t say there haven’t been casualties, poor bankers. However, in terms of bigger more important life potentialities it has been priceless. My daughter can read and write with confidence and now, thanks to her interest in cross-fit training, she can open every jar of jam and pickled onions that I might ever need. To watch this physical and emotional strength emerge tickles me pink. As genetics would have it my youngest child is also dyslexic so I am in this arena for the long haul, the eldest child prompted the career change the youngest cemented it. So the long suffering banks will have to suffer on for some time, unless of course the Minister sees fit to bring my salary scale into parity with my former hard-earned position; although plausible, this seems unlikely.

To be fair in terms of education I thought I understood the world I had just walked back into. After all I was a relatively positive example of success within the system, five years of full time study in UCD in the late 80’s early 90’s (when, by the way, only gods and geeks scored firsts) and in continuous progressive employment ever since. Apparently this was not so. Ironically as a language graduate it has taken me all my time and energy to decode the language of the

world I now occupy. Terms like ‘persona, lively, systemic, resistant, unsettled, incremental, stasis, prepared, inspected, self-evaluated,’ now cause physical shudders. These seemingly benign everyday words bite and bite hard. Also to be described as ‘idealistic, reformist, independent, creative, eccentric, radical and challenging’ really mean to imply naïve. What was naïve was that this coding should have caught me by surprise. Hadn’t I just left a highly aggressive tank where I swam with sharks daily, practically mindlessly? *Mea culpa!* I dropped my guard and spoke honestly and openly challenged the resistance to change and reform, expecting in return passionately intellectual debate and timely action. I have learned (though still recoil at the notion) that time moves at a different rate in the public sector and change - the very lifeblood of business and progress is not really welcomed. So in the face of such, my real learning has begun from the inside, where it will sting the most. I hungrily completed the M.Ed. in Cooperative Learning. The students seemed to be happy in my English classes but desperately at sea in my French ones. After much navel gazing I realised it was a bigger issue than just content alone. Ironically, despite how aggressively competitive I had to be to succeed in business, competition was beginning to look toxic in this world. These were developing children after all? So the Masters helped re-navigate and re-inform my practice whilst also having the same effect as alarming my bank manager – a ‘win-win’. The only downside was that a thesis, so utterly and fundamentally about autonomy, was not to include independent thinking, this has provoked a state of partial academic and intellectual paralysis where the only soothe I can find is with Heidegger “The most though provoking thing in our thought provoking time is that we are still not thinking”. Some other equally controversial paradoxes that I’ve uncovered perhaps worth sharing are as follows; Socrates may not have invented the Socratic method so when he said ‘I know I know nothing’ he might actually have been telling us the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help him ye gods... Teaching does not always equate to learning and my best classes have also seemed like my most unhinged. More content is not better learning, in fact worksheet porn is a vacuous exercise in self-satisfaction to be avoided for the sake of the students and the trees. Teaching practice is not a *fait accompli* on receipt of any teaching qualification; if you think you have arrived at the terminus then that’s going to be of itself terminal for your students. Wishing for things to be otherwise will not make them so.

Democracy in the classroom is not passive-aggressive autocracy. Silence is compliance not concentration, so don’t kid yourself. In terms of *persona* always be Miss Honey, Miss Trunchbull is for the Miss-Guided. When teaching a second or third language speaking at the students in any language is pointless, try staying quiet long enough for the students to fill the space – it’s called increasing production of the simultaneity principle (Kagan, 1992) look it up. Know every swear word and obscene gesture in as many languages as you have sitting in front of you, forearmed is foresworn. Supplement your practice with bouts of stand-up and improvisations; they’ll save a sinking ship faster than any ‘osophy’ or ‘ology’ and that is from painful experience, it also makes the students want to do more than die. If you are going to change something start with yourself but careful now, don’t think you’re doing something

different when all you're really doing is saying you are; ask the students to monitor you they'll keep you honest. For those of us in the middle years, learn to function on the shortest splash and dash pit-stops in history, with a three-minute turnaround - it's probably better to just not sit down.

And finally....Every good pilgrim needs the help of an experienced guide. I had one of the best, if not the best and although *'c'est pas tout a fait la vie dont j'avais rêvé'*, thanks for not letting me quit when I wanted to, I can fulfil the imperative of my two most precious roles as mother and teacher, and that is always 'to give and not count the cost.'

Itching to try a PhD next, if you'll excuse me now, I have some bankers' hearts to break...

*Note: In quantum mechanics a singularity is when we don't know what to do. In life this, I suggest, is an ideal condition for any hungry learner.*

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## *Chapter 21*

# Key Considerations For A School Wishing To Be Genuinely Inclusive

*Audrey Halpin*

When asked to write on the above topic my first thought was that wishing to be genuinely inclusive is itself the key to effective inclusion. A school with this approach already has more potential for success than is possible to transmit in a piece of writing. Some readers may expect to find here a recipe for doing inclusion but to attempt prescribing for inclusion in education would be reductive and in itself contrary to inclusivity (which requires that all who arrive at a school belong as they are) which is ever-evolving. This piece will illustrate the rationale for and importance of commitment to inclusion, outline some barriers to remaining firm in the resolve to be inclusive and then list a few key ideas for consideration when layering practices into the principle of being inclusive of all students.

Inclusive education is a term that remains somewhat elusive and has several interpretations ranging from emphasis on needs to provision for rights (Thomas and Loxley 2007, 130) yet it is a simple philosophy that acknowledges, accepts and values naturally existing societal diversity in schools (Dewey 1915, p7; Stainback and Stainback 1992; Westwood 2013). While my own interpretation of inclusion has always meant education for everyone (as outlined in the World Declaration on Education for All : Interagency Commission 1990) which automatically includes people who have disabilities it is acknowledged that there persists a belief that disabilities confer educational diversity that is fundamentally different to all other types of diversity. Inclusion is often considered to be bringing people with disabilities or “special educational needs” into education designed for all other people rather than education that is from the outset designed for Everyone. UNESCO went on (UNESCO 1994) to reaffirm the belief that every child is unique. Children whose uniqueness also meets criteria for being classified as having a special educational need require education that is equitable with that provided for all other unique children (Ibid. 11-12). Twenty years later, although education systems have responded to some degree in policies and practices for inclusivity, there remains much equivocation and inconsistency (Florian and Rouse 2014). Full inclusion (where children with disabilities, including those who have severe and/or multiple disabilities should have the automatic right to attend the same local school as children without such disabilities and that even where special education is indicated total segregation should not

occur) as stipulated in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994, 17-20) remains the preserve of schools committed to treating all children equally.

While there is no intention to suggest that the will to include is all that schools need the importance of being positively disposed cannot be underestimated and is the factor wholly within a school's power whereas other elements may rely to some degree on other agencies. Having a positive attitude to inclusion and maintaining a belief in its effectiveness are among the most important components of being inclusive (Stanovich and Jordan 1998; Butler and Shevlin 2001; Savolainen et al. 2012). This is not surprising since teacher beliefs have long been considered to have a profound influence on their practices (Dewey 1916; Illich 1971; Kagan 1992). Positive attitudes influence schools and teachers to make significant efforts to accommodate and modify in order to include (Jordan et al. 1997; Avramidis et al. 2000; Burke and Sutherland 2004). Positive experience of inclusion has been shown to positively influence attitudes and thus contribute to the growth of inclusion (Lambe and Bones 2007; Shevlin et al. 2009). Successful experiences of inclusion contribute to teachers' beliefs about their own efficacy for including students with special educational needs (O'Toole and Burke 2013; Peebles and Mendaglio 2014). Efficacy beliefs and epistemological beliefs about inclusion, if supported and sustained, in turn contribute to resiliently inclusive practices (Gibbs 2007; Jordan et al. 2010).

Policy equivocation, however, has resulted in barriers (such as those described in Travers et al. 2010) to the realisation of inclusive education for all. Even schools that firmly believe in inclusion as right and good for everyone can experience doubt as to whether it is the best option for all pupils when alternatives continue to be presented, highlighted and supported (Warnock, 2005 (in 2010); Nugent, 2007; NCSE 2011). In Ireland, for example, the notion of all schools being open to all pupils was formalised in 1998 (Government of Ireland, 1998, article 9) and the mainstream school was confirmed as the preferred place of education for all students in 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2004, Article 2). Nevertheless inclusion of some students is still considered exceptional and sometimes prohibitively difficult or even unfairly inappropriate. Recent policy advice (NCSE, 2014) indicates that inclusion may now be considered merely an important principle rather than a goal for all as 2004 legislation indicated. There is still a common belief that mainstream schools may not be suitable for some pupils with the consequence that their enrolment is conditional rather than an entitlement and reversible if unsuccessful. Who deserves to be included is therefore a choice and subject to judgement. We hear of annual debates (Irish Examiner 2013) about whether a child will be admitted to a school and what conditions must be fulfilled in order to begin the process of finding out if it will be possible for her/him to belong in the local school/school of choice (Irish Independent 2013). It is unthinkable that pupils without recognised learning/behavioural difficulties would have to prove in advance their worthiness of being at school yet it remains a possibility that some pupils will need to fight for the right to belong. There are also other groups at significant covert risk of failing to meet enrolment requirements in

Ireland (Rottman et al. 1986; Smyth et al. 2009) and the widespread issue of selective enrolment policies is related. The overt refusal to enrol individuals unless certain criteria are met in advance because of specific within-child factors, however, is uniquely discriminatory against young people who are considered to have special educational needs. While the unsubstantiated belief that there is another, better place for some pupils persists, inclusion remains an option rather than an obligation. This option may seem excessively difficult and/or inappropriate at schools that have not already experienced success to bolster their commitment. Since separate education/exclusion is inherently unequal (Brown vs Board of Education 1954 in Martin 1998) this reality that some students may not belong, just as they are, preserves inequity.

Resistant beliefs about the value of and necessity for special education compound the impact of policy prevarications in hindering progress towards inclusive schooling for all children. While it is beyond the scope of this piece to fully trace the special trajectories and the legacy issues it is believed that three of these erroneous beliefs comprise the greatest obstacles to inclusion. The belief that separate education may be better for some pupils is resilient in spite of the evidence that even children with severe disabilities can be effectively included in mainstream schools (Ysseldyke et al. 1982; Stainback and Stainback 1984; Ring and Travers 2005; Bennett 2009; Thomas 2013). The belief that there are special pedagogies available in special settings and that these are appropriate for students with certain needs but unsuitable for all students, as well as unavailable to mainstream teachers who have not received specialised training, endures. Research has: failed to identify the existence of such pedagogies (Norwich and Lewis 2001; Rix et al. 2009); proven that what works for all learners is a judicious selection from the full range of good pedagogy (Norwich and Lewis 2004; Florian and Linklater 2010) and shown that a significant majority of teachers in special settings have not received specialised training (Ware et al. 2009). The belief that providing effectively inclusive education for pupils with special educational needs is incompatible with the pursuit of academic excellence is another belief that prevails although research has found otherwise. It has been established that being educated in classrooms with students who have special educational needs does not have a negative impact on academic achievement of other pupils (Kalambouka et al. 2007) and that pupils with special educational needs achieve more in inclusive settings (Freeman 2000).

Genuine inclusion is the belonging of everyone who chooses to enrol at a school and the belief that each student belongs at the school once enrolled. Everyone being part of the whole is the crux of inclusiveness. The whole of a school at any given time is comprised of everyone who is working in, attending and supporting the work at it. This has implications for material resources, time allocations, myriad collaborations, organisation systems and delivery mechanisms but it is people who are at the core of being inclusive and making inclusion happen. This is not the same as saying that a school can be all things to all people at all times. As a living structure a school is constantly changing. If there is a will to consider everyone at

the outset of each class, week, term and year and then to provide the best possible response to people within time, curricular and funding limitations then we are being inclusive. The following are recommended for consideration as schools endeavour to keep all students wrapped inclusively within their boundaries with the possibility of maximising their potential in all that school offers.

### *Welcome*

Welcoming all students into our schools and classrooms is a powerful way of implementing inclusivity, leading inclusion and setting the context in which accommodations and modifications can effectively take place. Ó Murchú (2013) in reviewing observations from childhood to school inspectorship noted that “true inclusion happens at the door”.

### *Relationships*

Getting to know students is another essential ingredient of inclusivity. The power of relationships with teachers is well documented (Ryzin et al. 2009; Rigsbee 2010) and is particularly important for students with special educational needs. Recent evidence in Ireland (Mc Coy and Banks 2012) has confirmed that school satisfaction for students with special educational needs is strongly linked to their relationships with teachers and peers.

### *Acceptance*

Being inclusive requires acceptance of individual difference as ordinary aspects of human development (Florian 2008) and acceptance of the need to develop learning strategies for all. This acceptance implies that classrooms are very dynamic with many interactions and roles (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education 2010).

### *People First Language*

People First Language (Russell 2008) is a key to keeping education relational and an essential part of moving away from a history of seeing people with disabilities as examples of conditions or labels rather than as people. This is not about political correctness but about accuracy that allows us to relate and educate. It often requires conscious effort where de-personalisation has become the norm (e.g. “the ADHD students” or “the Down Syndrome child” rather than “the child who...”).

### *Pedagogy*

Teachers have the necessary skills and knowledge to support all learners (Florian and Linklater 2010). Inclusive education requires selecting from all we know and thinking about

ways to create learning opportunities (Hart et al. 2004). Recent research in Ireland indicates the particular need for more use of active methodologies (Mc Coy et al. 2012).

### *Expectations*

Holding appropriately high expectations for all pupils is a feature of effectively inclusive schools (Rouse and Florian 1996; Peters 2004) and it has been shown that having different behaviour and/or academic expectations for some does not lower overall expectations at post primary level (Dieker 2001).

### *Diversity*

Inclusive Schools contain the same diversity of people that exists in society. Disability is an aspect of Diversity. Resource or suitability clauses of enrolment or retention in schools, at written policy or more subtle implementation levels prevents representativeness of the naturally existing diversity in communities and therefore is not inclusive.

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## *Chapter 20*

# Development Education through Drama in Education

*Céline Healy*

To meet the opportunities and challenges of the world as it is now, and to be actively involved in shaping the world of the future, learners need to develop the knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills to actively participate in the development of local and global communities (Wade, 2008). Development education is based on reflection, analysis and action at local and global levels (Kenny and O'Malley, 2002). It seeks to enable learners to make connections between their own lives and the wider world so they may be more aware of the parts we all play in causing, sustaining or preventing the inequalities that exist in the world (McMorrow, 2006). Development Education aims to develop “critical thinking skills, analytical skills, empathetic capacity and the ability to be an effective person who can take action to achieve desired development outcome” (Tormey, 2003, 2).

It is difficult to learn to become actively involved in society through transmission approaches to education. Active involvement in society necessitates learners' active involvement in the classroom. However, it is not just a matter of introducing activity into the lesson, the activities need to engage learners in the learning process enabling them to develop a deep understanding of the important ideas to be learned (Nugent, 2006). Active learning is grounded in constructivism based on the premise that knowledge is constructed rather than passively received (Fox, 2001). Learning is achieved through exploration, discovery and reflection. The social elements of learning are emphasised through co-operative action, collaborative problem-solving and sharing (Niemi, 2002). Active learning enables learners to make connections between the classroom and the world outside, between concepts, information and real-life scenarios. Development education and active learning approaches are inseparable. However, implementing active approaches to learning can pose a challenge for teachers and there is a prevailing attachment to more traditional approaches in Irish second level schools (Clarke et al, 2010; Mc Morrow, 2006; Jeffers, 2004).

This practitioner has found Drama in Education (DiE) to be a valuable methodology in development education lessons helping to create motivating, meaningful contexts for learners to examine and discuss their worlds and the worlds of others. DiE uses as its foundation the human ability to imagine and re-create the behaviour of others in different times and in

different places (Neelands, 1992). It combines elements of theatre and pedagogical approaches to enable learners to become actively involved in viewing a situation from a variety of perspectives. The focus is on problem solving and living through a particular moment in time. DiE is a means of using learners' own experience to understand the experience of other people. Learners are enabled to actively identify with imagined roles and situations in order to explore issues, events and relationships. This identification is used to allow them to look at reality through a fictional lens (Wagner, 1999). An experience is explored through the creation and examination of layers of non-linear episodes relevant to an experience or situation. These episodes cumulatively enrich and extend the fictional context and allow a situation to be viewed and analysed from different angles. Through this analysis learners are led to see the meaning of their actions and to develop a better understanding of themselves, human behaviour and the world in which they live.

DiE provides a bridge between the unfamiliar world of concepts and data and the familiar world of human experiences and endeavours. Participants feel that it is happening because the same rules as are used in real life apply. The important difference between life and the make believe life created by the DiE situation is that there is an opportunity for one problem to be faced at a time. Drama in Education helps to peel away all that is extraneous to the experience or situation being explored leaving only the meaningful for examination. Dramatising an event can isolate it, making it simpler and more understandable (O'Neill and Lambert, 1982). In real life a decision taken cannot be revised except in the long term. The DiE context creates a 'no penalty' area where learners can see how decisions taken can influence a situation and learn from this (Heathcote, 1984). In this 'no penalty' area the burden of future responsibility is taken away. Learners are enabled to examine and test out their ideas and attitudes without having to live with the consequences of the decisions they make during the course of the drama. Thus, lived through experience and reflected upon experience can be combined to lead to greater understandings (Bolton, 1986).

DiE is not about acting or re-telling stories. It does not focus on the creation of a spectacle for an external audience. It uses the process of creating drama as a means of learning and therefore does not need an external audience to give it significance (Bolton, 1979). Participants create the drama but are also audience to their own work in process. The participant part of the person and the spectator part have equal status. Built-in distancing devices enable them to be audience to their own work and to reflect on and discuss its meanings and issues raised (Heathcote, 1984). The spectator part allows participants to stand back and analyse what they are experiencing at any given moment. The participant part deals with the event in a practical manner. By becoming a 'self-spectator' the participant is making things happen and is brought to an awareness of how he/she is making them happen. This exposes the learner to why things are happening and the possibility that they could be different. By placing participants in a position of being able to make a difference to the way

things are, they are being offered a possibility to effect change. This helps facilitate a change in insight and perception.

DiE offers a means of exploring and examining experience in ways which are denied to us in real life (Fleming, 1998). There is a process of de-familiarisation as scenes are looked at afresh through the conventions of drama. Complexities are revealed through simplification as aspects of a situation are thrown into relief so that they can be scrutinised and thus enable learners to examine things as they are rather than how they might be. In this way learners are brought to realise that there are many ways of looking at the world. They can examine their's and others' ways of looking at it, and realise there is no norm. DiE works by allowing learners 'to put behaviour under a microscope', reflecting on what they learnt and articulating it for others. These skills are transferable and can help to open learners' minds, broaden their outlook and increase their general knowledge. Learners learn to examine their own and others' culture and come to realise that all culture is relative, there is no norm.

Drama in Education takes learner needs and interests as its starting point and incorporates the active learner-centred approaches that are central to development education. Using a range of teaching and learning strategies in a multi-sensory way, it supports the interaction of multiple intelligences and facilitates different modes of expression. It gives learners a voice and enables them to use it. Creating contexts where learners draw on their empathetic competence along with their analytical and critical reasoning skills, it helps them develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to engage with the world. Drama in Education has a lot to offer development education.

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