AN EXAMINATION OF THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED PROGRAMME: ORIGIN, POLICY AND PRACTICE – A CONTEXTUAL, RELATIONAL, DISCURSIVE AND SPATIAL ANALYSIS EMPLOYING A CRITICAL THEORY APPROACH.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland
CAO	Central Application Office
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit
CORI	Conference of Religious in Ireland
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ESF	European Social Fund
ESRI	Economic Social Research Institute
IIE	Investment in Education
JMB	Joint Managerial Body
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCE	Leaving Certificate Established
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SEC	State Examinations Committee
TUI	Teachers Union of Ireland
TY	Transition Year
VPT	Vocational Preparation and Training

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‘Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire’.

W. B Yeats

Chapter One:

Introduction

1.1 Context and Rationale

The purpose of this study is to examine the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA) as it is lived out and experienced today and to investigate whether or not these experiences continue to marry with the original aims of the programme. The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme is a distinct, self-contained two-year Leaving Certificate programme. It is modular based and 'emphasises forms of achievement and excellence which the established Leaving Certificate has not recognised in the past. It offers a specific opportunity to prepare for and progress to further education and training'. (PDST, Leaving Certificate Applied, Teacher Handbook, 2019, p.7). The central research question asks how the policy of the LCA programme is being lived out in practice today and whether this lived experience continues to marry with the original aims and rationale upon which the programme was conceived and developed. This study will examine the LCA programme from the perspective of those who live the programme, namely students and teachers, as well as from the perspective of policy makers and school leaders. The study will place these voices at the heart of the analysis.

This study was prompted by my own work as a teacher over the last fourteen years, as well as my work as an LCA Associate with the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). Over the course of this time, I have become increasingly aware of a sense of disconnect between policy and lived practice. The LCA policy and programme plan was written almost thirty years ago and has only been updated in piecemeal fashion ever since. Much has changed in Ireland over the last thirty years; economically, socially, and culturally. However, although the LCA programme aims to prepare students for the world of work, this world of work, the labour market, is an unrecognisable place compared to what it was when LCA was first introduced. This neglect of LCA policy also raises deeper questions, questions relating to what is valued and recognised in our education system.

The current Senior Cycle Review process is ongoing and there have also been major developments in the world of Further Education. As such, this study aims to include the voices of LCA students and other stakeholders such as teachers and school leaders in these developments. The examination of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme also offers a lens through which deeper issues of inclusion

are brought into focus and explored, issues such as parity of esteem, value, and recognition of difference. The LCA is a pre-vocational programme, thus, it is a distinct, 'ring-fenced' programme, which offers an alternative to the Leaving Certificate Established. As such, it is viewed differently, both in policy and practice. However, how this difference is recognised raises issues of value and recognition, whereby the roots of the way in which this difference is recognised in terms of vocational and prevocational education is embedded within historical curricular and policy developments and discourses. As such, an attempt to understand the Leaving Certificate Applied programme, and how it is conceptualised and lived out, must begin with its historical and cultural context. Therefore, the first part of this study is an exploration of these developments and discourses.

Much of the literature on LCA focuses on policy, as well as issues of parity of esteem. Whilst this study also draws on material relating to the historical development of vocational education, including Coolahan (1981), Hannan and Boyle (1987), Gleeson (2009), and Trant (2007), as well as others, it also provides an analysis of various reports and papers, as well as previous studies on the LCA programme, namely Gleeson (2000; 2002), Gleeson and Granville (1996), Gleeson and O' Driscoll (2003), Gleeson and O' Flaherty (2013), alongside work completed by the ESRI Banks et al. (2010), and Mc Coy et al. (2014). Much of this previous research has focused on policy, as well as pathways into LCA, and the outcomes for LCA students. Although the ESRI reports also examines students' experiences of LCA, it does not examine this by considering the contextualised nature of schools, the embodied experience of curriculum, or through the emotional aspects of inclusion.

This study builds on work previously completed on the LCA programme but also offers a different lens, in that it utilises a discursive, relational, and spatial lens through which to examine the LCA programme and wider issues of inclusion. This, means being highly sensitive to the microphysics of power within everyday school life. The ways in which LCA students are deployed in spaces within schools and within the education system, both physically and discursively, and the relational nature of their experiences, affects them emotionally and, as such, affects their subjective construction of selves. This focus on the spatial and emotional aspects of students' lived experiences of LCA programme is unique and opens up wider questions about how schools and the Department of Education at large conceptualise and recognise difference. Finally, this allows us to understand how value and recognition are experienced and felt by LCA students in the space of the school.

1.2 Guiding Concepts and Theoretical Commitments

This research is situated within the wider field of the sociology of education and employs a critical emancipatory perspective, as informed by a Foucauldian critical approach to analysis. It was informed

by a number of theoretical commitments shaped by a critical theory perspective and which underpin the conceptual and contextual framework of this study. This approach changes the focus from the perceived deficits of students in order to focus on the practices and discourses within schools and the ways in which these affect students' experiences and their ability to voice these experiences. The voices of students are foregrounded in this study and as such there is a refocusing of analysis from student deficits to student voice.

In its commitment to an emancipatory approach that centred on student voice, recognition, and lived experiences, I was keen to locate thinkers who could enable an exploration of power, dialogue and affect, hence the choice of Michel Foucault, Paulo Freire and Anna Hickey Moody as key theoretical interlocutors. Foucault's theories of discourse, power/knowledge, the micro-physics of power, and heterotopias help us in understanding the lived everyday experiences of students. However, while Foucault offers us much, he does not deal specifically with the critical nature of pedagogy nor the affective or emotional aspects of lived experiences so his work is brought into conversation with Freire's work on critical pedagogy and Anna Hickey-Moody's work on affective pedagogy. Foucault's concept of the insurrection of subjugated knowledges helps to foreground the voices of students as the starting point in a politics of possibility, with the works of Freire and Hickey-Moody further developing this in possibility to pedagogy in practice, in particular the critical and affective possibilities of pedagogy.

The combination of this theoretical framework and the methodological commitments to voice, lived experience, and recognition, as I will outline below, allowed for a nuanced examination of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. This brings wider issues of inclusive education to the fore such as the emotional aspects of inclusion, the spaces students occupy, the embodied experience of policies, and the highly contextualised nature of schools, as well as the complexity of policy enactment.

1.3 Research Aims and Contributions

At the heart of this study was a commitment to student voice and the central commitment demonstrated in the design of this study was to open up a space for LCA students to voice their lived experiences of the programme. To realise this aim involves looking beyond and challenging what appears to be neutral or 'taken for granted' practices within schools. It involves making visible the invisible microphysics of power at play within the various relations and networks of power in schools. It also highlights, not only sites of power within schools, but also sites of resistance. That is why, in this study, schools are seen not only as sites of struggle, but also sites of possibility which can create spaces where voices that had previously been disqualified or marginalised can now be heard, voices

deemed 'beneath the required level of scientificity' (Foucault, 1980, p.82) in order to be considered capable givers of knowledge. Instead, an alternative narrative or alternative discourse is offered, whereby these voices are placed at the heart of analysis. As such, the following aims emerged:

a) To develop a deep understanding of how the LCA programme is lived out in practice by listening to the voice of those who embody and live the programme every day, namely students and teachers.
b) To bridge the gap between policy and practice by listening to the voice of policy makers and then bringing these voices into conversation with students, teachers and school leaders.
c) To examine the complexity of policy enactment and the often unintended consequences of this enactment when it comes to be lived out in the contextualised setting of schools.
d) To explore the concept that policies are embodied, and this embodiment is lived out through relational encounters in contextualised settings and to recognise that these encounters are emotional and as such effect an examination of spaces with schools as emotional landscapes.
e) To explore, through the lens of the LCA programme, issues of inclusion such as value, recognition of difference, and the emotional aspects of these.

These aims emerged from the identification of a gap in the literature relating to the LCA programme. As outlined above, there have not been any studies conducted on the LCA programme that examine the spaces these students occupy within schools and the ways in which their deployment in the space of the school affects students emotionally and shapes their subjective creation of self. This study's emphasis on space and emotion and the conceptualisation of schools as emotional landscapes is unique and, as such, contributes something new to the field, not just in terms of LCA, but also in a wider discussion of inclusive practices within Irish education. This approach aimed to bridge the gap between policy and practice, not simply by determining whether the policy objectives have been met in terms of participation and equality of opportunity, but rather by repositioning and reconceptualising policy as something that is embodied and, indeed, something that is experienced in an emotional way in discursive, relational, and spatial encounters.

The refinement of the aims and research question occurred in a reiterative cycle of analysing the literature, conducting fieldwork and subsequent analysis and reflection. The study took place in phases. The original research question related to issues of policy and curriculum. Through an iterative process, this changed to focus on the lived embodied experience of policy focusing on issues of value and recognition of difference. The impact of spatial discourses upon students' lived experiences of the LCA programme had not been examined before and the ways in which students' deployment in space

affects how included or excluded students feel has not been addressed sufficiently in literature relating to inclusion in Irish Education in relation to students following a special programme such as LCA.

1.4 Research Methodology

A choice was made to mobilise a mixed-methods approach, utilising an arts-based methodology. The adoption of such an approach aimed to open up a space for listening to the voices of participants, in particular the students, as well as highlighting the complexity of policy enactment and the contextualised nature of schools. It allows for exploration of spatial and relational discourses when examining the LCA programme. The theoretical and methodological framework of this study are closely interwoven and are informed by the work of Foucault, Freire, and Hickey-Moody. This critical emancipatory framework outlined earlier enabled an exploration of schools as sites of contestation, resistance, and possibility, where identity is not something that is static but in a constant process of deconstruction and reconstruction. The work of Freire and Hickey-Moody opened up ways in which these voices can be expressed through both critical and affective pedagogies. This was so important for this study, as, not only did it allow for the exploration of voice, it also allowed for these voices to be expressed in different ways. This methodology was a means of highlighting and effecting the recognition of difference.

This mixed method design involved both desk-based research and field research. The field research employed a case-study approach and involved four participating schools in the North-West region. The field research in schools took place over a ten-month period; investigating students, teachers, coordinators, and principals' perceptions and lived experiences of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme as part of a collective case study, the case study being the LCA curriculum itself. I choose to conduct the research over the course of a full school year, as I wanted to immerse myself in each of the four schools as fully as I could, in order to get a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of LCA students and teachers.

1.5 Overview and Structure of Dissertation

The study begins by examining the historical and curricular context of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. It then moves to looking at the voice of policy makers, followed by an examination of the lived experience of the LCA programme within the contextualised settings of the four case study schools. The study ends with Thinking Possibilities.

Chapter Two: The aim of this chapter is to situate the Leaving Certificate Applied programme within the historical discourses and curricular and policy developments from which it emerged. The chapter begins by analysing the phases of development of vocational education in Ireland, then examines historical curricular developments and discourses leading to the development and introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. By doing so, it traces the development of vocational education in Ireland and demonstrates the emergence of a divide between liberal and vocational education. This divide relates, not only to the structure and funding of secondary and vocational schools, but also to how liberal and vocational education are profiled in the public mind. It highlights issues relating to equality of educational opportunity, recognition, and parity of esteem.

Chapter Three: This chapter theorises and contextualises the rationale underpinning the curriculum design and introduction of the Leaving Certificate programme. By understanding the genesis of the LCA programme, it becomes possible to ascertain whether it continues to fulfil the aims and rationale upon which it is was based. This involves analysing the values upon which the aims and objectives of the programme were originally established. This chapter is structured in three parts. Firstly, it notes that offering a philosophical rationale for curriculum was not historically deemed a priority previously in Irish policymaking. It then briefly describes both the implicit and explicit philosophies of curriculum that shaped the LCA programme, according to some of those involved in its design. Finally, it proceeds to examine the philosophy and rationale *de facto* underpinning the programme and presents the curriculum. Part of the purpose of this chapter is to bridge the gap between policy and practice as a way of holding the voices of policy makers, school leaders, teachers, and students in dialogue throughout. This sets the context for subsequent chapters.

Chapter Four: This chapter listens to and draws on the voices of policy makers involved in the conception, development, and implementation of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. These conversations provide invaluable insights into the workings of the original LCA steering committee, as well as the original aims, rationale, and ethos upon which the programme was based. Through these conversations, we are given an insight into the vision of the programme and the hopes these policy makers held for its future. This provides a context for subsequent thematic chapters which examine the ways in which these aims and rationale have been lived out and felt in schools, by both students and teachers. The final chapter, Thinking Possibilities, brings policy voices into dialogue with the voices of both students and teachers.

Chapter Five: This chapter outlines and explains the research design of this study, as well as highlighting the rationale underpinning the various methodological decisions taken.

Chapter Six: This chapter outlines the principal concepts underpinning this study's theoretical framework, focusing in particular on the work of Michel Foucault, Paulo Freire (critical pedagogy) and Anna Hickey-Moody (affective pedagogy). The philosophical positions articulated here inform the empirical aspects of the study, in highlighting the importance of voice, recognition, and lived experience in inclusive education.

Chapter Seven: This chapter highlights and explores the contextual nature of schools and consequentially the contextualized nature of policy enactment. Contexts are multidimensional, and space and place are just one just dimension of context. Spaces are never neutral and the ways in which students are deployed in spaces, both in policy and in the school, is indicative of questions of value and recognition, issues central to inclusion. The chapter begins by looking at spatial practices of separation and then examines how the deployment of student relates to concepts of visibility and voice. It draws on Foucault's concept of normalising judgements and dividing practices and analyses practices of inclusion and exclusion within spaces and introduces Foucault's concept of heterotopias as a way of evaluating the LCA programme.

Chapter Eight: This chapter shows how the ability to 'voice' one's experience or make oneself heard is always situated, socially contextualised and determined. This view of voice connects with the positions that see knowledge, inequality, and power as mediated and felt through everyday experiences and practice. A Foucauldian framework allows us to interrogate dominant voices and hegemonic discourses by listening to those voices that have been marginalised, silenced or 'othered', as well as questioning why some voices and forms of knowledge are dominant while others are subjugated. Voice is also a 'lens' through which we can examine whether schools enable the inclusion of difference of students who may be 'othered' in post primary education. Voice, as conceptualised in this study, renders actors within schools either visible and heard or invisible and silenced. The chapter begins with a discussion of voice and the politics of hearing. Voice is then related to space (as discussed in the previous chapter). Discourse and power are then examined, in the context of the LCA programme, with particular attention to subjugated knowledges. Issues of normalisation and exclusion, as well as recognition and resistance, are then addressed.

Chapter Nine: This chapter examines the affective enablers and inhibitors of effecting a critical and creative pedagogical approach in the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. It begins by revisiting concepts of Freire that are particularly pertinent to my study such as: problem posing education, the dialogic nature of teaching and learning, the co-construction of knowledge and the student/teacher relationship. The chapter then discusses the aesthetics of pedagogy and affective pedagogy

understood as an emotional endeavour. Finally, the chapter will outline the inhibitors to a critical pedagogical approach in the LCA programme.

Chapter Ten: The final chapter aims to weave the findings of the previous chapters together. It begins by discussing the complexities and unintended consequences of policy enactment. It then puts Foucault's concept of 'care of the self' in conversation with critical and affective pedagogies in examining the processes of becoming. This turns again to the embodied nature of policy enactment, and raises issues of epistemic injustice and issues of recognition. The chapter aims to hold the voices of students, teachers, school leaders, and policy makers in tension whilst inviting spaces for imagination. Finally, the chapter summarises what this study of the LCA programme has taught us about inclusion and how this contributes to the field.

Chapter Two:

The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme: The History and Policy Context to the Introduction of a New Curriculum

2.1 Rationale

The aim of this chapter is to situate the Leaving Certificate Applied programme within the historical discourses and curricular and policy developments from which it emerged. By doing so, I trace the development of vocational education in Ireland and examine the emergence of a divide between liberal and vocational education. This divide relates, not only to the structure and funding of secondary and vocational schools, but also to how liberal and vocational education are profiled in the public mind. It thus will highlight issues relating to equality of educational opportunity, recognition, and parity of esteem.

This chapter will begin by analysing the phases of development of vocational education in Ireland. The chapter will then focus on historical curricular developments and discourses leading to the development and introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme.

The negative perception of vocational education has been well documented (Lynch and Lodge, 2002; O'Sullivan, 2005). I trace the development of this negative perception and highlight how it still impacts the lived experiences of Leaving Certificate Applied students today. The Leaving Certificate Applied programme is a product of what has gone before it. Past perceptions of vocational education and historical discourses relating to issues of power and recognition have left a legacy that is still very much evident in the public perception of vocational education (see McCormack, O'Flaherty, Liddy, 2020), and, I argue, Leaving Certificate Applied students today. I am influenced here by Foucault's genealogical method. Although, I do not claim that what follows is a Foucauldian genealogy, it is certainly in that vein as I attempt to elucidate how historical educational discourses relating to inclusion and recognition influenced and continue to influence the implementation and experience of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme today. In order to fully understand the issues foregrounded in this thesis, such as voice, space, and relationships, we must first tell the story of how LCA came to be, the power struggles and discourses that led to its inception, as well as its current state of being. In keeping with Cornbleth, who stated that 'curriculum as practice cannot be understood

adequately or changed substantially without attention to its setting or context. Curriculum is contextually shaped' (Cornbleth, 1990, p.6), this chapter places the LCA programme in context.

The historical context of the Irish education system has been shaped in a significant way by Ireland's colonial past. This point has been argued by authors such as Lee (1989), Garvin (2004), and Gleeson (2009). Indeed, the OECD report in 1991 notes that:

> [..] the structure, organisation and very terminology of their education system can only be apprehended in the light of the long drawn out tensions and compromises that characterised relations between a ruling Protestant class and a large Catholic majority (OECD, 1991, p.12)

This suggests that the roots of the Irish liberal education system should be understood in the context of the eighteenth and nineteenth century colonialism, where importance was placed on 'the education of the predominantly Protestant aristocratic or stable bourgeois class and a growing Catholic bourgeois elite using the Protestant English Grammar School and its equivalent in the Catholic European tradition as role models' (Hannan and Shortall, 1991, p.16). The above quote also elucidates the notion that the developments of educational provision in Ireland was, from the beginning, a site of contestation, a site of power struggles and resistances, initially between a Protestant ruling class and a large Catholic majority and, latterly, between the Irish Free State and the Catholic Church. As will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, the Catholic Church had control of the primary and voluntary secondary schools, whereas the State had control over the vocational schools. This point will prove important when we come to look at how these two school types were perceived by the general public and how this, in turn, impacted on formal and informal recognition afforded to vocational education in Ireland.

2.2 Phases of Development

The relationship between vocational and general education in Ireland may be studied by examining five phases:

- The period prior to Independence in 1921,
- 1921 to the Vocational Act in 1930,
- The 1930s to 1963 when a bipartite system of education existed in Ireland,
- 1963-1977 when the Government made attempts to replace this bipartite system of academic and vocational schools with a comprehensive system, and
- 1977 to date when funding became available from the European Social Fund (ESF) to develop initial vocational education and training.

To review fully all five periods in detail is beyond the scope of this chapter, however. Therefore, the focus of this chapter is on the development of vocational education in Ireland and the discourses surrounding this development. I will examine briefly the first three phases of development and will focus in more detail on the last two phases.

2.3 The period prior to Independence in 1921

The centralist system had developed in the nineteenth century under British rule in a form of coalition between the Catholic Church and the State administration. Prior to independence in 1922, the system of education was used as part of a general assimilation and socialisation policy of post-Act of Union (1801) politics. Control over the education system was used as a means of eroding the Gaelic language and Irish culture and enforcing the norms and practices of imperial power. During the course of the nineteenth century, the British government relinquished more power and influence to the Catholic Church in areas such as education and health. This relinquishment of power was not altruistic however, but rather motivated by reasons of political benefit. This transformation in educational ideology, that is, moving away from being a vehicle which attempted to enforce imperial norms and practices and moving towards a theocentric paradigm, was a result of a prolonged campaign involving numerous victories on educational issues wielded by the Church against various governments (O' Buachalla, 1985).

After the dawn of Independence (1922), the Church's control and influence intensified. This power was ensured by the vesting of local level management control in parish priests at primary level and a strong teaching force of brothers, priests, and nuns at post primary level. The Church controlled the provision of key services, with the values and ethos of the Catholic Church placed as the centre of the nascent political system. Under the Free State government, Irish societal norms and values were firmly rooted in Catholicism and nationalism. These two ideologies were mutually reinforcing and became inseparable: to be Irish was to be Catholic. Inspired by this cultural ideology, educational policy in Ireland became focused on prioritising native traditions and the Irish language. The Irish social agenda at this time was not seeking to look forward or outward but was instead insular, nostalgically looking backwards in an attempt to 're-invent' Irish national identity. This would later change in the 1960's with the *Investment in Education Report.* Educational policy in Ireland became stagnant and remained that way for decades. The Irish State, in the main, accepted the position of the Church and the control it exerted on the educational system in Ireland; in part due to factors such as economic stringency, the close relationship of the government and the Church, and the State's philosophy of least interference. Educational reform in the early Free State era was focused more on curriculum, rather than structural change. These issues of curriculum were mainly left to the State. As Walsh states: 'Once

the religious had control of 'the religious dimension' they didn't overly involve themselves' (Walsh, 1997, p.58). The Catholic Church was content to allow the State to administer the system, as long as the Roman Catholic interpretation of the Classical-Humanist tradition prevailed in schools. This Classical-Humanist tradition focused on preparing students for university. Mulcahy states that:

> one of the guiding objectives of the second-level curriculum was the preparation of pupils for university education. It was as if the curriculum was shaped by the university ideal of academic education. Thus, no important place was given to studies or subjects which did not exist in the university
>
> (Mulcahy, 1981, p.86).

However, as Mulcahy notes, only a minority of students continued to university. In comparison, technical education received a 'lack of concern' from the Church and, according to Coolahan, this was reflected in the lack of clarity as to what technical education was. Coolahan suggests that this attitude towards technical education was in part based on the fact that the tradition of liberal education 'undervalued the worth of manual occupations' (Coolahan, 1981, p.83). Technical education was perceived by those in power as being second-rate. The year 1899 saw the establishment of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction under the *Agriculture and Technical Instruction Act* (1899). This department set up and administered technical schools where young people were prepared for work in agriculture and trades. There was a clear segregation between these technical schools and the voluntary secondary schools run by the Catholic Church. The technical schools did not enjoy parity of esteem with their secondary school counterparts and, as stated above, were viewed as 'second-rate'. Thus, the dominant hegemony espoused by the Catholic Church did not recognise the learning taking place in these schools as being of equal value with the learning taking place in the schools run by the Church itself.

2.4 1921 to the Vocational Education Act (1930)

The new State was established in 1921. Resulting from a review of existing educational provision by the Dáil Commission on Secondary Education, a new programme for secondary school came into operation in August 1924 (Coolahan, 1989). It was stipulated that in order for a school to be termed secondary, it must provide Irish or English, another language, History, Geography, Maths and Science, Latin or Greek, or Commerce (ibid, p.12). By 1924, 65 technical schools, established under the *Technical Instruction Act* (1899) catered for 22,800 students, the vast majority of whom were part-time day or evening attenders. During this period, pressure was also mounting for a revision of the national school programme to include manual and practical instruction. This was in part due to the growing industrialisation in England and other European countries which introduced an economic

discourse into educational developments. However, another argument was simultaneously being put forth in favour of practical education in the United States and Western Europe. This argument was not based on economic and industrial grounds but rather on physiological and psychological concerns. It was argued that manual instruction should have an important place in the curriculum as a corrective to academic studies. Comenius, Locke, and Rousseau had previously put forth this argument, as well as Froebel and Herbart, who had also discussed the connection between practical work and other lessons in school (ibid). Now, the conception of the type of new education needed was gradually beginning to change.

The Minister for Education, John O' Sullivan, set up an Advisory Commission in 1926 called *The Ingram Commission*. The remit of this commission was to enquire into the technical education system, with a view to examining the needs of trade and industry. This commission received formal submissions from The City of Dublin Technical Education Committee and the Rathmines Technical Instruction Committee, who both put forward strong arguments in relation to the value of Vocational Education. The recommendations of the Commission were largely incorporated into the *Vocational Education Act*, 1930 and the *Apprenticeship Act*, 1931. These two pieces of legislation were to prove to be far reaching, enabling and generating the developments which took place in vocational education in Ireland. The main aim of this legislation was that vocational education would provide education that would offer general and practical training in preparation for the workplace (O'Connor, 1986a). The passing of the *Vocational Education Act* resulted in the setting up of 38 vocational education committees (VECs) nationwide. These committees were charged with delivering education that was defined as follows:

> Education to continue and supplement that provided in Elementary schools, and includes general and practical training in preparation for employment in trades, manufacture, agriculture, commerce, and other industrial pursuits (Andrews, 1973, p. 37).

Vocational education was to be administered by secular authorities. The Catholic Church gave tacit acceptance to the scheme based on reassurances from the Minister of Education that vocational schools 'would not be allowed to develop so as to impinge upon the field covered by the denominationally run school' (Whyte, 1971, pp.37-38). The Church did not wish to concede power or relinquish control. The minister is referring here to the decree of the Maynooth Synod in 1927 which stated:

> Since it seems to us that knowledge of technical skills and of agriculture is useful and necessary for our people we consider it permissible for Catholic young people to attend schools with non-Catholics where this knowledge, but not general instruction or education is given.
>
> (O'Buachalla, 1988, p.224).

Here, a distinction appears to be made between skills, that is between what is deemed 'useful' and what is deemed 'knowledge'. The teaching of skills was within the remit of the vocational schools, whereas the imparting of knowledge was within the remit of Church-controlled secondary schools. The Minister went on to ensure the Church that those attending Vocational schools would have their 'future set before them at all times'; that is, work in the trades or agriculture. Those attending technical school were systematically excluded from powerful discourses, as they were denied access to such 'knowledge' and, as such, limits were placed on their social mobility. A clear divide was created between voluntary secondary schools and vocational schools, as it meant that 'vocational schools would not be allowed to teach those subjects nor prepare for those examinations which gave access to university and white collar employment' (O' Buachalla, 1988, p.382). This effectively meant that students attending vocational school were excluded from taking the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations. This would remain the case until the mid-sixties when the restriction was removed. These restrictions were placed on vocational schools, despite pressure from the Gaelic League and 'some of those interested in the spread of the Irish Language' (ibid).

However, the Minister argued that there were some positives to these measures. He stated that 'for the great bulk of our young people the education at present provided for instance in secondary schools, is neither available nor suitable' (ibid, p.401). Many students have other interests and talents and do not necessarily wish to go to university. Vocational schools would provide these students with a viable alternative to secondary schooling. The courses on offer in vocational schools would be suited to their needs. A memorandum issued by the Department of Education in 1931 suggested that local VECs develop a system suitable to the specific needs of respective areas (*Memorandum for the Information of Committees*, 1931). For these committees to administer their duties successfully, it was essential that they develop strong links with employers and adapt the courses on offer to suit the employment opportunities in the locality. In other words, the committees needed to design courses that would respond to the needs of the local community. This allowed for a level of autonomy and freedom when deciding course content. As such, it was not a uniform approach to developing curricular content but rather was an approach that allowed for ownership of the curriculum by the individual vocational committees.

2.5 1930's to 1963

This was to change in 1942 when the Department of Education issued *Memorandum V40*, which set out the rationale underpinning continuation education with more precise guidelines for Vocational Education Committees. It specifically included religious studies as part of the courses offered and placed a greater importance on the Irish language. This marked the completion of the experimental stage of the continuation education schemes started under the *Vocational Education Act* of 1930 (Coolahan, 1981, p.98). As Hyland pointed out, having committed the schools to faith and fatherland, the memorandum went on to clarify that the main purpose of the continuation courses was to:

> [..] prepare boys and girls, who have to start early in life, for the occupations which are open to them. These occupations, in general require some sort of manual skill and continuation courses have therefore a corresponding practical bias.
>
> (Hyland and Milne, 1992, p.226).

It went on to state:

> [..] the nature of the continuation courses in any centre must be closely related to economic conditions in the neighbourhood (ibid, p.227).

Vocational schools did not offer general education and, as such, students did not receive a general qualification that would help them to compete in the job market. This was a major concern, as it placed students attending vocational schools at a great disadvantage when it came to competing for jobs. This was a concern expressed by officers of the Vocational Committees. Subjects offered in secondary schools were in Bourdieu's terms, 'differentiated species of cultural capital' (1977). The subjects offered in vocational schools were not, in these terms, convertible currency at all. In an effort to rectify this, the Department of Education introduced The Day Vocational Group Certificate for students in vocational schools. Its introduction afforded students attending vocational schools a recognisable qualification. However, the introduction of the Group Certificate also gave the Department more control over the curriculum. Here, we see a contest over pedagogic authority. Up to this point, the VECs had control and relative creative freedom when it came to curricular content of subjects offered in vocational schools. With the introduction of the Group Certificate, curricular control returned to the State. This limited the autonomy of teachers and began the process of an academicization of vocational education. There was a struggle between the creative autonomy of teachers to exercise pedagogical control and the Department of Education's desire to exercise control through processes

of standardisation and 'normalisation'. This is something I will return to later in the thesis when I come to examine critical and creative pedagogy and the LCA programme.

By the 1950's, the Group Certificate had achieved credibility as a passport to employment or apprenticeships. Even though the number of vocational schools had increased to more than two hundred and fifty, vocational education still had a low status in the Irish psyche. In 1958, the then Minister for Education Jack Lynch, stated that 'the general public, and in particular that section who would profit most, had not yet fully grasped the extent of the services available and the advantages to be gained…' (O'Connor, 1986a, p.27). When Minister Lynch said, 'that section who would profit most', one may assume he is speaking of working-class families, those whose children wish to work in the trades or agriculture. Perhaps it is this very social division, highlighted here by Lynch himself, which contributed to the perceived low status of vocational education. From its inception, it was perceived in deficit terms, suitable for those unsuitable for secondary schools. There was a social divide between those who went to secondary school and those who went to the vocational schools. The vast majority of those attending vocational schools came from working class backgrounds. This legacy continues, as we will learn.

Secondary schools were valued by the Catholic Church, still an extremely powerful and influential force in Irish society. Many of those attending secondary schools, especially the boys, could speak Latin. This established an immediate division in the congregation between those who could understand the words, and could share in the power of the priest, and those who could not. Therefore, not only a social but a cultural divide existed between those in receipt of secondary education and those in receipt of vocational education. When later we examine the LCA programme, although this is a pre-vocational programme incorporating elements of general education, it can be argued that this social divide remains. For example, Lynch and Lodge argue that vocational programmes and ETB schools continue 'to live with the legacy of their working-class identity' (2002, p.48). Clancy goes further by contending that the role of the Irish Education system in social selection has remained largely unchanged – 'the educational system under colonial rule, the system after independence, and the present system fulfilled and continue to fill essentially the same function' (Clancy, 1995, p.482).

Keen competition has long been a feature of academic education in Ireland. Drudy and Lynch (1993) claim that educational qualifications in post-colonial Ireland were an important determinant of status and power. The old adage - we measure what we value, and we value what we measure - seems to be applicable here. Academic opportunities for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds who could not afford the fees for secondary schools were confined to those able to obtain scholarships. However,

it must be noted that, due to efforts from the various religious orders who provided academic education at a very low cost, there was a higher level of participation by fifteen-year-olds in Ireland than in the United Kingdom in the 1950s (Coolahan, 1981).

2.6 A Period of Change 1963 - 1977

Much of the impetus for a re-imagining of educational policy in the 1960's was the economic crisis of the late 1950's. T. K. Whitaker stated that 'the mood of despondency was palpable'. High inflation, decline in industry, and a decline in agriculture, as well as mass emigration left people anxiously wondering if the Free State would survive. Sean Lemass took over as Taoiseach in 1959. Having previously, as Minister for Industry and Commerce, been reluctant to engage with the possibility of foreign investment, he, now as Taoiseach, opened the country up to foreign investment and free trade policies. There was much criticism in the late 1950's regarding the current system of education in Ireland. Society was increasingly beginning to perceive an important link between education and the economy. Here, we witness values in transit, a paradigm shift from a theocentric system of education to an education system becoming increasingly based on the principles of a human capitalist theory. Education was increasingly being viewed by government as something they could invest in so as to reap capital gains. In Foucauldian terms, this involved a movement from an *episteme,* based on Church control, to a new episteme, one based on an economic discourse of competition.

Nonetheless, when asked to consider the need for or possibility of free education, the *Council of Education's Report* (1962) appears to suggest that they were a body satisfied with the current system and unwilling to make amendments. When discussing the notion of free secondary education, the council concluded that this was 'untenable, utopian, socially and pedagogically undesirable and economically impossible' (McCormack and Archer, 1998, p.17). This was indicative of the 'political paralysis that appeared to permeate the entire Department of Education' (Tuairim, undated, p. 5). The Government and the Catholic Church seemed content to maintain and protect the status quo. This was all to change. The 1960's became a period of unprecedented change in Irish Educational history, with the arrival of the Investment in Education report and Donogh O Malley as Minister for Education in 1966.

The Council of Education saw the current system of post-primary education as being:

> of the grammar school type, synonymous with general and humanistic education and appropriate for the inculcation of religious beliefs and values which was the dominant purpose of the schools.
>
> (Coolahan, 1981, p.81).

The Council were happy with the current state of affairs and felt there was no need for change. However, agencies such as the OECD and the EU, O'Sullivan's 1992 'cultural strangers', were to prove particularly influential in bringing about change in the educational arena. These new voices were not as easily silenced or marginalised and placed increasing pressure on the Department of Education to recognise and embrace a human capitalist discourse. As stated by Benson, 'much of the pressure for change has emanated from outside the system and may in fact be resented by it' (Benson, 1985, p.14). This change was initiated by the decision of O'Connor, the then Assistant Secretary to the Department, to attend the OECD Washington Conference on Human Capital. According to O'Connor, his attendance at this conference sparked a,

> conviction of the importance of education in economic growth to the extent that education was canvassed as the most important factor in economic recovery.
>
> (O' Connor, 1986, p.62).

In 1961, Schultz published his seminal work, *Investment in Human Beings*, which coincided with O'Connor's attendance at the OECD conference in Washington. The OECD wished to carry out a critical study of the entire educational system of a small country and it would provide funding, support, and expert advice. The Irish Government applied to be part of this study and was successful; hence a survey team was established. The findings of the survey team were published in 1966 under the title, *Investment in Education.* Coolahan describes the *Investment in Education* report as 'one of the foundational documents of modern Irish Education' (Coolahan, 1981, p.165).

The report raised two primary concerns. Firstly, the report highlighted marked inequalities based on social class and geography, as well as emphasising the high dropout rate after primary school. Secondly, the report raised concerns pertaining to the needs of the economy, particularly, that the level of trained manpower, given the level of economic growth, would not be sufficient to meet the needs of the economy in 1970 without reform of the education system. A dichotomy of discourses is clearly visible within this report. The concerns raised pivot on inequalities in society and the needs of the economy. The former concern relates to a discourse of social justice while the latter relates to a discourse of human capital theory. *The Tuairim-London pamphlet on Irish Education* (1962), as well as the Labour Party policy document on education (1963), also elucidated issues of social inequalities and injustices within the Irish education system. The above pamphlet stated that education 'has remained static for so long in Ireland because it suits powerful sections of society, the middle classes, the churches and the politicians to keep it so' (*Education towards a United Europe, Tuairim Pamphlet*, 1962). Due to the benefits of education, a small minority remained in control of the powerful

discourses controlling Irish society; health, politics, education, media etc. The uneducated majority were denied access to these discourses and, as such, lacked social power.

O'Buachalla contested that the *Investment in Education* report clearly highlighted 'the connection between education and socio-economic development' (O'Buachalla, 1988, p.315). Gleeson states that 'where the churches and graduates from the humanities had once been the dominant forces in education policy, now it was the economists who held sway' (Gleeson, 2009, p.40). He goes on to say that Irish 'involvement with the OECD facilitated the introduction of the human capital paradigm where education was seen as investment in people for economic gain' (Ibid). One of the most palpable outcomes of the *Investment in Education* report was the raising of school leaving age to fifteen and the introduction of 'free' second level education. This resulted in an increase in post-primary enrolment of almost 90% between 1966 and 1976. Participation rates for sixteen-year-olds jumped from 37% in 1963 to 80% in 1984. Vocational schools were now allowed to offer a full range of secondary school subjects and to enter their students in relevant State exams.

The Duggan Committee was established in 1962 'to consider the present position of post-primary education, particularly in its social aspects, and to make recommendations' (Duggan, 1962, p.1). Their findings and recommendations were in sharp contrast to the Council of Education report published earlier the same year. The Duggan committee stated that:

> We feel that the time is not only approaching but has in fact arrived when we can no longer allow traditional patterns to unduly influence educational planning and provision in a world where a social, political, economic, scientific and technological revolution has taken place and is still proceeding.
>
> (Duggan, 1962, p.3).

The report addressed the low status of both vocational education and manual labour. It highlighted the need to 'implant firmly in the minds of our people the idea that there is within the milieu of manual work a dignity and a culture peculiar to itself and a direct access to mental satisfaction' (Duggan, 1962, p.4). This quote from the Duggan report draws attention to issues of recognition, non-recognition, and mis-recognition. The report addresses the need for new thinking that would 'implant firmly' in the Irish psyche the conviction that there is an innate dignity in vocational education and in manual labour and consequentially such work and education should be recognised and valued within society. The lack of recognition afforded to vocational education, and in terms of the LCA programme, prevocational education, is a legacy that is still felt today. This will be discussed in greater detail in the thematic chapters later in the thesis.

The Duggan report argued that there should be a period of compulsory post primary education and that this should be provided free of charge. The report posited that free compulsory post primary education should be introduced in Ireland for several reasons. First, post-primary education is recognised internationally as a means of social promotion. Second, it will allow for the development of native talent, which can only benefit the state. Third, it will lead to an increased standard of living. Fourth, it will benefit industrial development, as it will provide the economy with an increased number of people with qualifications. Lastly, the report made clear their belief that it is imperative the education system responds to and reflects the needs of the economy. The Duggan Committee rejected the idea of comprehensive schools, as they believed Ireland's low population density would inhibit the success of such schools and instead put forth the notion of a comprehensive system, where 'the distinction at present between vocational schools and secondary school would disappear, and that a common form of post-primary course extending over a three year period should be available both in existing vocational and existing secondary schools' (Duggan, 1962 p.11). Here, there is a focus on not just equality of opportunity but on equal recognition. By having a comprehensive system, it was hoped that the 'distinction' both in terms of physical separation and in terms of issues of recognition would 'disappear'. On the 20th of May 1963, Patrick J. Hillery, the then Minister for Education, gave a speech announcing, not the introduction of a comprehensive system, but rather the introduction of comprehensive schools. He espoused the principle of equality of opportunity. In his speech, he states that

> The new type of school I have in mind is a comprehensive Post-Primary day school. It would provide for children of the age about 12-13 to 15-16 a three-year course during which observation and tests would show with fair probability in which direction, academic or technical, each pupil's bent would eventually be. At the end of these three years in the Comprehensive section, the pupil would take the Intermediate Certificate Examination, which in any case, it may be necessary to amend in several ways. If he passed that examination, if he so wished, proceed to the Secondary or Technical course in accordance with his previous showing at the Comprehensive school and at Intermediate Certification Examinations
>
> (Barber, 1989, p.49).

By September 1966, three comprehensive schools had opened in Shannon, Carraroe, and Cootehill. The curriculum in these schools combined academic and vocational subjects. This was not what was envisaged or hoped for by the Duggan committee, but was none the less a big first step in addressing what was effectively a two-tier system in Irish education, namely the binary of academic and vocational education. The introduction of comprehensive schools was followed by the introduction of community schools in the 1970's. Community schools attempted to initiate more community

involvement in schooling. However, progress was extremely slow. Over an eighteen-year period, only nine community schools had been established. All of this resulted in three main types of schools in Ireland: privately owned secondary schools, local authority vocational schools, and state-owned community/comprehensive schools. By the early 1980's, the vocational schools and community colleges continued to have a poor public image and appeared to cater for a disproportionate number of disadvantaged students. This was in spite of the fact that students could study the same subjects and take the same exams as their peers in secondary schools. As such, a historical discursive legacy, which positioned vocational education as second choice or suitable for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, continued to linger in the public psyche, and allowing students in vocational schools to sit the same exams as their secondary school peers did not succeed in fully shaking it. Lynch (1989) identified a 'technical bias' in the subjects offered in these schools, and Mc Cormack, O Flaherty and Liddy (2020) see this bias as still persisting today. O'Sullivan states that ETB schools and, in effect, vocational education is still seen as 'less prestigious', in comparison to the 'high status and religious controlled secondary school' (2005, p.134). The LCA, as we will see, as a vocational programme, continues to be subject to this 'low status' perception (Banks, Byrne, Mc Coy, Smyth, 2014).

Throughout the 1970's, the Department of Education had concentrated much of its resources on providing free second level education for an ever-increasing number of students to the neglect of vocational education. However, Ireland's membership of the then EEC in 1973 would eventually reverse this trend as money became available in the late 1970's for vocational education and training. This funding from Europe had a huge impact on curricular development in Ireland. The funding allowed for the establishment of curricular development projects, as well as enabling schools to provide initial vocational training programmes. The Shannon Curriculum Development Centre and the Curriculum Development Unit of City of Dublin's VEC were both established in 1972. These were centres of curriculum innovation and led to the development of the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme, as well as the Senior Certificate programme; both forerunners of LCA. As such, most of new and experimental thinking was taking place in the vocational sector. It also helped to shake Irish educational policy from its insular state, providing contact with other systems and allowing for different perspectives and new voices. As a result, Irish educational thinking began to be influenced by new thinking. For example, Gleeson informs us that the Curriculum Development Units were influenced by curriculum development that was 'thriving internationally, when Illich and Freire were challenging school institutions' (Gleeson, 2009, p. 109).

The Minister for Education was now part of a group of European Ministers of Education working together under the aegis of the Council of Europe. This group recognised the importance of education

as a key factor in economic growth. Educational discourse had moved from an insular, nostalgic discourse to a discourse of togetherness and forward thinking. This powerful group in control of educational discourse, not only recognised human capital theory, but also wished to base educational policies on this theory. As education was crucial for economic development, this type of educational discourse was influential in curricular development that took place in the 1970's and 1980's. These curricular developments, in particular the Senior Certificate and the Vocational Preparation and Training programme were precursors of the current Leaving Certificate Applied programme.

2.7 1977 to 2021: Curricular developments leading to the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme

Both the Shannon Curriculum Development Centre and the Curriculum Development Unit in Ballyfermot were established in 1972. As previously mentioned, Shannon was one of the first comprehensive schools to open in Ireland. It was envisaged, driven by Séan O Connor's thinking (then Assistant Secretary of Education in Marlborough Street), that these new comprehensive schools would become centres of curriculum development. This was predicated on Dr Hillery's policy that 'curriculum reform was one of the major reasons for the establishment of the comprehensive schools' (Barber, 1989, pp.50-51), and it was hoped that developments due to this curricular reform would result in the bringing together of secondary and vocational schools.

Many pre-vocational and pre-employment courses began to emerge in the 1970's and 1980's. These pre-vocational and pre-employment courses were the forerunners of the LCA programme. Many of their features are still contained in the LCA programme today. Pring defines pre-vocational courses as incorporating '[..] vocational relevance without providing vocational training' (Pring, 1995, p.59). He goes on to explain that there:

> [..] needed to be a continuation of general education, but in a different form. The students were not ready for vocational training, but general education had to be vocationally relevant – not vocational but prevocational
>
> (ibid, p.60)

This provides a useful description of LCA as a pre-vocational course. He goes on to list five main features of pre-vocational education:

- An emphasis on learning by process or learning by doing. In other words, experiential learning which incorporates reflection on one's own learning, as well as the learning of the

group/society. In pre-vocational education strong links with the community is of vital importance,

- Profiling of students' abilities and capabilities and building on a sense of achievement,
- Vocational educational as a means by which general qualities might be acquired,
- Emphasis on opportunities to formulate generic and transferable skills, and
- The option to develop local, individualised curriculum.

(Pring, 1995, p.60)

These new programmes attempted to lessen the gap between liberal and vocational education. This ideal is summarised by Trant, who asserts:

> For educationalists the most important thing about the new vocational movement should be an awareness of the liberal values that are inherent within it. Vocational education – if it is to be called education at all – should be an attempt to provide general education through a practical mode and should therefore be as liberalising and humanising as the traditional academic approach.

(Trant, 1999, p.17)

One of the first pre-vocational programmes in Ireland was the Pre-Employment Programme. This programme was widely adopted by second level schools. The 1970's was a time of high youth unemployment, not just in Ireland, but also across the EEC generally. As a result, the then EEC adopted a resolution in 1976 to improve the preparation of young people for work. The Department of Education received money from the European Social Fund to develop pre-employment courses and subsequently circulated details of pre-employment courses to vocational, comprehensive and community schools in 1977. The programme was aimed at students who had left compulsory education but who were yet to gain employment. It was structured on three main tenets: general education, technical modules and work experience. The Pre-Employment Course was of much significance in the development of pre-vocational education in Ireland in that it included many of the features later adopted by other vocational programmes including LCA. For example, it was:

- Aimed at students who would otherwise have left school,
- Modular structure,
- Work experience,
- Emphasis on personal development, and
- Learning by doing/emphasis on practical content.

The programme was subsumed into the Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT) programme in 1984. This programme was aimed at students who did not wish to take the Leaving Certificate and as such would otherwise have left school without any qualifications. It intended to enhance the employment opportunities of these students when entering the labour market. The VPT programme also placed greater emphasis on the vocational education of girls, who seemed to be trapped in a narrow range of occupations. An emphasis was placed on the importance of numeracy and literacy as being greatly valued by employers. Literacy and numeracy are also highlighted as key skills in the LCA programme statement. The VPT programme statement described its main aim as '[..] that of bridging the gap between the values and experiences normally part of traditional education and those current in the adult world of work' (DES, Ireland, 1984, p.6).

Gleeson summarises the primary aims of the VPT programme as follows:

- Providing a more balanced education in response to the strong criticism of academic bias in educational provision for the 16-19-year age group, e.g. the Culliton report from the Industrial Review Group (Government of Ireland, 1992); Report of OECD Examiners (OECD, 1991),
- Improving retention rates in education in order to tackle unemployment and disadvantage,
- Addressing the needs of the significant number of students for whom the current structure of the Leaving Certificate was unsuitable, and
- Introducing curriculum change and focusing more on vocational education.

(Gleeson, 2009, pp. 215-216).

These aims revolve around a discourse of social inclusion and economic development.

The curriculum of the VPT programme was divided into Vocational Studies, General Studies and Work Experience and Preparation for the World of Work. The VPT was conceived as a one-year programme that could lead to a second year with much more focused vocational skills and work experience. Schools were encouraged to adapt the broad guidelines in a flexible manner that would allow for an individualisation of the curriculum and a response to local economic and social needs. For many reasons, this proved difficult for most schools. Leonard, when evaluating the programme, concluded that there were large discrepancies between what was planned centrally and what was happening at local level. He also concluded that, in large part, the success of the programme was determinant on the quality of leadership provided by individual school managements (Leonard, 1990). The VPT programme is also significant because the Department of Education invited voluntary secondary

schools to participate in the programme. This was the first time voluntary secondary schools were afforded the opportunity to offer a pre-vocational course. This gave teachers valuable experience in teaching courses other than the Intermediate Certificate and the Leaving Certificate and in developing curricular content. In its first year of operation, 375 schools offered the programme, almost 50% of all post-primary schools. The programme was clearly responding to a felt need across the country. However, a major difficulty for the VPT was the lack of a credible system of national certification. This led to issues of parity of esteem and value (Gleeson, O Flaherty, 2014).

Another important precursor of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme was the Senior Certificate. The Senior Certificate evolved from the Spiral I and Spiral II projects developed by the Curriculum Development Centre in Shannon. The Minister for Education, Gemma Hussey launched the project in 1983. The brief was clear:

> The main thrust of the project will be in the development of alternative senior cycle programmes leading to national certification flexible enough to make possible the assessment of the variety of learning experiences considered important for the period of transition from school to adult life.
>
> (Curriculum Development Centre, 1990, p.1)

The course title The Senior Certificate was chosen in order to distinguish the programme from the established Leaving Certificate. The programme ran for 11 years and mainly served the Southern part of the country. The Senior Certificate aimed to:

- Promote in students a wide range of personal qualities such as self-belief, self-confidence, self-confidence, the ability to take responsibility and make decisions as well as being able to work with others,
- Promote gender equality,
- Enable students to develop personal values,
- Provision of activity-based learning experiences including learning about such roles such as worker, supervisor, citizen, volunteer, etc.,
- Enable students how to locate and use information,
- Promote the use of teaching/learning strategies that are appropriate for students who may experience learning difficulties,
- Preparing students for the demands of adult and working life as well as becoming an active citizen, and

- Promoting links with the community through the use of a rich out-of-school learning environment and of volunteer adults in the community as resources for learning.

(Shannon Curriculum Development Centre, 1989, p.7)

Key features common to both the Senior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied include:

- Emphasis on Work Experience,
- Emphasis on out of school learning and establishing strong links with the local community,
- Emphasis on Social Inclusion,
- Emphasis on learning by doing and working with others,
- Inclusion of computer applications/information and communications technology as a mandatory course,
- Senor cycle two-year programme.

Intensive in-career development courses were provided for both principals and teachers during the lifetime of the Senior Certificate programme. This in-career development included learning new active teaching methods which provided teachers with confidence in using teaching methodologies other than the traditional didactic skills. Through the implementation of the Senior Certificate programme, new methods of assessment were tested and teachers gained valuable experience in developing and tailoring the curriculum to meet the need of the students and the local community. Senior Certificate offered seven discrete programmes. National assessment and certification was provided for each of these programmes:

- Work and Communication Skills,
- Computer Applications,
- Food and Agriculture,
- Gaeilge Chumarsaideach,
- General Technology,
- Mathematics, and
- Social and Cultural Studies.

It was envisaged that schools would put their own arrangements in place for Religious Education and Physical Education. Students could achieve a Pass with Distinction, a Pass with a Merit, and Pass. Schools provided each student with a Personal Record of Experience and Achievement and were granted autonomy in the implementation of the programme. They could choose to implement it as an

alternative to the Leaving Certificate, as part of Vocational Preparation and Training, or as individual Senior Certificate programme within the context of Transition Year or the Leaving Certificate Established. The programme outline highlighted the importance placed on the integrated nature of the programme stating that:

> It is important that these programmes, which differ significantly from traditional school subjects, be provided in an integrated manner for the students. It is for this reason that possible links with other programmes are suggested in conjunction with the outlines of each particular programme.
>
> (Shannon Curriculum Development Centre 1989, p.6)

This represents a significant difference in how knowledge is located within the curriculum. In the classical humanist tradition, teachers are experts in their subject area and the curriculum is conceived, developed, and organised within subject areas and specific learning objectives within these areas. The curriculum of the Leaving Certificate is based on subjects and developed by subject experts. However, in vocational or pre-vocational education knowledge is not restricted to subjects but rather enjoys a much broader basis. It is interdisciplinary and demands a collaborative approach between teachers and also between teachers and students. This approach is reminiscent of Freire's critical pedagogy approach (1970), where learning is student centred and teachers and students enjoy a horizontal relationship built on trust and the co-construction of knowledge. However, one of the major difficulties faced then and now by vocational education in Ireland is that it exists within a classical humanist system. This classical humanist system places importance on subjects that lead to and are studied at university. Linguistic and mathematical proficiency is valued and rewarded. Skills and talents pertaining to vocational education such a creativity and the practical application of knowledge are not afforded equal recognition and as such issues of low status and parity of esteem persist.

In 1987, 1240 students completed the Senior Certificate. However, these numbers steadily decreased over the eleven-year period, and in its last year only 38 schools were offering the programme. The Shannon Curriculum Development Centre carried out an internal review of the Senior Certificate programme in 1987, and while coordinators were pleased with the development of students and were happy with more positive attitudes of young people towards school, they expressed concerns regarding the status of the programme, the availability of resources and the viability of a second year and the possibility of students transferring from the Leaving Certificate (Gleeson, 1990).

Ó Donnabháin, who was the director of Shannon Curriculum Development centre, saw Irish Education as being dominated by a culture of textbooks and exams. Trant, who was director of the Curriculum

Development Unit in Ballyfermot, remarked that 'subjects and the public exams decide the whole bloody curriculum and politics of the curriculum and everything else' (Gleeson, 1998). He continued that all 'the while the people whom the system is supposed to serve are becoming increasingly alienated from it' (Trant, 1998, p.31). At a conference to mark the end of the second phase of the EC Pilot Projects in Ireland, Ó Donnabháin, presenting a paper entitled Alternative Curricula, argued that

> While the experience of the three Irish projects confirms the need for schools to change from subject-centred teaching to person-centred learning in their approach to young people who wish to go directly from school to the labour market, it also shows that such a change cannot be brought about abruptly and must be managed sensitively and sensibly with due recognition of the rate of change that particular sectors of the educational system can bear at any one time [..] There is clear evidence from the pilot projects that the majority of teachers will find the changes extremely difficult. A role change of the scale required demands continuous support and enlightened leadership for teachers as they develop a whole range of new skills
>
> (Ó Donnabháin, 1986, pp.3-4).

Ó Donnabháin goes on to make clear the importance of leadership, particularly the leadership of principals, when introducing curricular change. He states that:

> There is a great need for principals in Irish schools to clarify for themselves their own particular role in the management of change in their schools. There are no easy answers to be imported from abroad. As professionals they must work it out for themselves as a matter of priority (Ó Donnabháin, 1986, p.5).

This need for leadership remains as important today.

2.8 Development of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme

An OECD report entitled *Review of National Policies for Education in the case of Ireland* was published in 1991. The review was extremely critical of the Irish Education system; particularly at second level. The examiners stated that:

> The weight of the classical humanist tradition is enormous, not least because of its underpinning of high-status occupations and a way of life which is widely admired even though unattainable by the majority.
>
> (OECD, 1991 p.69)

The report contended that the classical humanist system was benefiting the minority, not the majority. As such the OECD report encouraged the use of a variety of new forms of assessment 'as a way of meeting the needs of the whole student population instead of the minority' (OECD, 1991). It was

therefore made clear by this report that the Leaving Certificate in its current form was not adequately catering for the needs of all students. The Green Paper published by the Government commented that in 1991, 15% of candidates failed to achieve 5 grade Ds in the Leaving Certificate. This also echoed concerns expressed earlier by the NCCA when, in their document entitled *Senior Cycle, Issues and Structures,* they highlighted a 'mismatch that often occurs between a candidate's abilities, interests and aptitudes on the one hand and the syllabus and examination on the other' (NCCA, 1990). As a result, the subsequent *Green Paper on Education* (1992), while not offering a specific outline, did propose a curriculum framework for senior cycle. It stated that senior cycle should cater for the diversity of students' needs. The paper recommended that an investigation take place into the relationship between ordinary level Leaving Certificate and the Senior Certificate/VPT programmes. The paper also recommended an exploration of the idea of mixing courses from different programmes.

The main aims of the Green paper were to:

- Establish greater equity in education; particularly for those students who were socially, economically, physically or academically disadvantaged,
- Equip students for life, work, enterprise and European citizenship,
- Make the best of education resources by introducing best management practice and strengthening policy making,
- Create a system of effective quality assurance,
- Train teachers to be able to cope with constantly changing environments,
- Ensure greater openness and accountability throughout the system, and
- Encourage greater parental involvement.

(Ireland, 1992b, p.5)

There are several discourses evident in these aims: a discourse of equality of opportunity, a human capital discourse where students will be equipped for work and enterprise, a reversal of a previously insular discourse in that now students are being educated for European citizenship, hence the stipulation that courses in receipt of funding by Europe, such as the LCA, must contain a European language. We also see a discourse emphasising performativity and 'quality assurance'. As such, the power of the Church in Education had begun to dissipate, replaced now, in part, by Europe.

The paper pointed out the importance of including any future curricular developments under the umbrella of the Leaving Certificate:

> […] in view of the strong traditional attachment of parents and students to the Leaving Certificate, there is merit also in providing for all options and all ability levels within the Leaving Certificate, rather than through the alternatives of Leaving Certificate and Senior Certificate
>
> (ibid, pp. 99-100).

The decision was taken to name the Senior Certificate as such, in an effort to emphasise its fundamental difference from the Leaving Certificate. This decision has now been rethought and reversed and instead the Leaving Certificate Applied programme was named such in an effort to connect it linguistically with the Leaving Certificate Established. In so doing, it was hoped that the LCA programme would be viewed by the Irish public as a different but equal Leaving Certificate programme. This was in keeping with the views expressed in the earlier OECD report:

> The weight of the classical humanist tradition is enormous, not least because of its underpinning of high-status occupations and a way of life which is widely admired even though unattainable by the majority. This dominance is likely to prevail unless the authorities are able to develop either a much more powerful parallel system of technical/vocational schools or a restructured general secondary education curriculum.
>
> (OECD, 1991 p.69)

The NCCA's response to the Green Paper was published in March 1993. The policy document *Curriculum and Assessment Policy, Towards the New Century* identified four premises essential to senior cycle reform:

- The senior cycle should be viewed as a single entity and should be capable of catering for the needs of 90% of students,
- Quality educational experience must be provided for all students of all abilities,
- One national programme should be offered at senior cycle for national certification, and
- New forms of student assessment must be developed for the successful running of new senior cycle programmes.

The document advised that the Senior Certificate and the VPT programme be subsumed into a new single senior cycle course and the suggested title for this course was the Leaving Certificate Applied. The NCCA went on to release a consultative paper entitled Assessment and Certification in the Senior Cycle: Issues and Directions. In this paper, the NCCA highlighted the significant challenges that the new forms of assessment of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme would bring and advised significant investment in the in-career training and professional development of teachers. In October

1993, the NCCA published *The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme – Rationale, Philosophy and Operational Plan.* This document, while lacking specific detail regarding the course structure or content, stated that the new programme would be introduced into schools in September 1995. As a result of this process, a steering committee was set up with the mandate to:

> [..] advise on the development of all aspects of the Leaving Certificate Applied including linkages with the supports in local communities for their effective delivery. In carrying out this task, the experience of the Senior Certificate, VPT courses and other such initiatives should be drawn on.
>
> (NCCA, 1993, pp. 23-24).

The NCCA, in the development of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme, wished to draw on the experience of the Senior Certificate and VPT courses. LCVP was being developed at the same time as the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. The Department of Education had an inspector take responsibility for LCVP and meetings of the LCVP committee were held in Department offices in Marino, therefore as Gleeson stated the LCVP was 'still very much a creature of the Department' (Interview with author, May 2019). On the other hand, the NCCA, who were still only an advisory body at the time, were given responsibility for the development of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. The Leaving Certificate Applied committee only began to engage with the Department of Education when it came to assessment as that was done by the Examinations Branch. This may suggest that from the very outset, the LCA programme, as a pre-vocational programme was not seen as having the same level of importance of the LVCP, which unlike the LCA, was part of the CAO points system. This is indicative of the broader issue that has been discussed throughout this chapter i.e. the negative perception of vocational education in Ireland.

In March of 1995, Gleeson and Granville presented a paper at a conference organised by the Educational Studies Association of Ireland in University College Cork. In their paper, they explored the symbiotic relationship between curriculum development, education planning and national and social economic policy as manifested in the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. They went on to highlight the ways in which the Leaving Certificate Applied programme embodies Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.

> The Leaving Certificate Applied, with the emphasis on breadth and balance, and on the application of knowledge and skills to the solution of practical problems, attempts to reward a very broad range of intelligences, abilities, competencies, achievements and practical skills.
>
> (Gleeson and Granville, 1995, pp. 126-127)

This is also in keeping with theories of critical and creative pedagogies that will be explored in a subsequent chapter. They described the Minister of Education's decision to provide a radically different course at senior cycle as a major and decisive step and a significant statement regarding the role of education in combatting unemployment and inequality and poverty. Concerns had been expressed by various social partners regarding the danger of the Leaving Certificate Applied as being perceived as inferior to the Leaving Certificate Established. At the National Education Convention in October 1994, some concerns were raised:

> Would the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme be perceived as having low status in schools? What prospects awaited students on completion of the programme? What effect the Applied Certificate will have on the ordinary level Leaving Certificate? How can it be offered as an option in anything but very large schools?
>
> (Coolahan, 1994, p.76)

These questions are still pertinent today. Gleeson and Granville welcomed the statement by the National Economic and Social Council that the success of such alternative programmes would be greatly enhanced by the provision of structured routes for participants to further education and training and to the labour force. Gleeson and Granville argued that it would be indefensible to offer young people an alternative route, no matter how desirable from an educational point of view, unless that route carried with it national certification that had currency in the labour market. This is still a crucial point. Huge effort was made in the early days of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme to work with employers and to gain recognition for the qualification afforded to students on completion of the LCA, however, concerns expressed at the National Convention in October 1994 are concerns that are even more acutely expressed today. Enhanced pathways afforded to LCA students in the beginning by the ESB, the Gardaí, and Fáilte Ireland have all but disappeared. Coupled with that apprenticeships have become much more sought after, LCA students now find themselves competing with their LCE counterparts for such places.

2.9 Introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied

In September 1995, the Leaving Certificate Applied programme was introduced in 53 schools across the country. The Leaving Certificate Applied programme was intended to meet the needs of a substantial number of students. According to the NCCA:

> Research indicates that many of those (23%) who take all their Leaving Certificate courses at ordinary level may not be following a programme responsive to their aptitudes, abilities and needs.

(NCCA, 1993c, p.3)

This statement suggests that the Leaving Certificate Applied programme may be seen not just as an option for students who are more vocational in nature and wish to pursue vocational routes, but rather that it may be suited to students who are not performing at a high academic level. There is a link made between vocational and 'non-academic'. Circular M47/93, DES, 1993) released by the Department of Education prior to the introduction of LCA contends that the programme is aimed at those students who do not wish to progress directly to third level (p.2). Stack highlights the target population of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme and the curricular difficulties and challenges that this entails.

> It is primarily the 14% who get fewer than 5 Ds in the Leaving Certificate, together with those who might otherwise leave after the completion of the junior cycle, or the 34% of Leaving Certificate candidates who do not aspire to matriculate [..] If the LCA is expected to accommodate both groups, then we must ask whether it is realistic to expect that one curriculum will be capable of satisfying the educational needs of two quite different constituencies.

(Stack, 1996, p.70)

Various research has highlighted the importance of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. Bray (1996) emphasised the importance of the programme in the context of lifelong learning. He perceived the programme as being capable of motivating and encouraging students who had thus far been passive and unenthusiastic in a predominantly classical humanist system that did not acknowledge, recognise, or place value on their talents or abilities.

Boldt's research in 1998 led him to conclude:

> The data indicates that the Leaving Certificate Applied has provided a 'real' and substantial alternative senior cycle programme which encourages students and enhances their school experiences, encourages and enriches educators and impresses and satisfies the expectations of parents and employers.

(Boldt, 1998, p.42)

Boldt's research highlighted the positive relationships experienced between student and teacher in the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. Riele (2006) argued that the most important school-based risk factor is the profoundly negative relationship some students can experience with their teachers. The reverse is also true, positive relationships between students and teachers play a key role in engaging 'at risk' students. This will be discussed in a subsequent chapter entitled *Thinking*

Relationally. The National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme in 2000 reported 'retention of many of these students in school until the completion of Senior Cycle education was an indicator of the success of the programme' (DES, 2000, p.73). However, one may be tempted to ask how indicative is this really of success? Is the success of the programme based solely on retention rates or is it based on how the programme has prepared students for life after school and helped them to achieve equality of opportunity? I contend, as will be argued later in the thesis, that the success or otherwise of the LCA programme cannot be measured in such narrow terms as 'retention' of students in school. This notion of success appears to limit inclusion to discourses of access and participation. I argue that while extremely important, inclusion is about much more than access and participation, and success is dependent on much more than just retention. In order to examine the LCA programme, its success or otherwise and the ways in which the programme supports inclusion we must examine issues of recognition through a discursive, spatial and relational lens.

An additional question one may ask at this juncture is whether all who complete the LCA programme exiting the system with a high-quality education and related qualifications that increase their chances of full participation in society and the economy? Are these qualifications recognised and valued by employers and Further Education? These are questions I attend to later in the thesis.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the historical discourses and curricular developments that led to and influenced the conception and design of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. The chapter has also attempted to historicise the academic and vocational divide in Ireland. This divide and the subsequent 'low status' of vocational education has a direct impact on how LCA, as a pre-vocational programme, is lived, experienced, and felt today. This chapter has examined the paradigmatic shift from theocratic control of the education system to the influence of a human capitalist discourse. A social reproduction discourse was also explored, that is, predominantly working-class students make up of vocational schools and predominantly middle-class students make up of secondary schools. Lynch and Lodge highlighted how post-primary schooling in Ireland is fragmented by social class. Hannan describes the majority of students attending vocational schools, and one may add to this, following vocational programmes such as LCA, as coming from 'working class or small farm origins with a high proportion of educationally disadvantaged students' (Hannan, 1987, p.66)

Ireland's participation in the OECD conference and subsequent project, as well as the *Investment in Education* report was examined in an effort to highlight the emerging dominance of a human capital discourse in Irish education. The impact of the OECD and Europe, O Sullivan's 'cultural strangers', was

enormous. The European Social fund led to the development of school to work programmes such as the Senior Certificate and the VPT programme, these were eventually to be amalgamated into the LCA programme. These 'cultural strangers' were also very influential in pushing equality of opportunity up the Irish policy agenda. The European Social fund reflected the EU's policies of social inclusion and gender equality (Hantrais 1995). This meant an increased amount of funding going to 'curative' initiatives such LCA. The National Economic and Social Forum, 1997, stated that 'early school leaving, and youth unemployment are among the most serious social and economic problems which the state must address' (p. 3ff). Programmes such as LCA and LCVP can be seen as attempts by the state to address these issues. It is clear therefore that two main discourses envelop the LCA programme; that of social reproduction and human capital.

There is keen competition amongst students for points and the resultant places afforded to them in university. Increasingly, the tangible criteria for judging schools are the points received by their students and the subsequent number who go on to attend university. Each year, both parents' associations and school authorities lament the enormous pressure placed on young people in the lead up to the Leaving Certificate examination, with each blaming the other for the exertion of such pressure. As Drudy and Lynch (1993) point out, Irish people value education particularly as a means of social mobility. The school attended and programme followed is a status of power. Perhaps, this can go some way towards explaining the low uptake of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme. However, although there is a felt need for the Leaving Certificate Applied programme within the Irish Education system, negative perceptions of the programme is one of the major stumbling blocks that inhibit the success of the programme. This is due, to some extent, to the innate amount of importance placed on academic liberal education and the lack of importance placed upon vocational education in the Irish system. As noted earlier, by bringing the voice of LCA students to the fore, this will enable their voices to be positioned as expert in the evaluation of the LCA programme and in assessing whether or not the programme continues to fulfil its original aims and rationale, that of providing students with a viable alternative to the Leaving Certificate Established. This aimed to be an alternative that is different but equal to the Leaving Certificate Established, one recognising talents and abilities that had not previously been recognised by the system and, in so doing, preparing them for the world of work or further education.

Chapter Three:

Bringing a Curriculum into the World: The Vision and Realisation of the LCA

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter will theorise and contextualise the rationale underpinning the design and introduction of the Leaving Certificate programme. This will help to set the context for the later chapters which examine the extent to which the LCA programme facilitates inclusion or perpetuates exclusion of students following the programme. Understanding the principles, philosophy, and values underpinning the genesis of the LCA programme enables us to ascertain whether it continues to fulfil the aims and rationale upon which it is was based and appraise whether it continues to uphold the values upon which the aims and objectives of the programme were originally established. This chapter is divided into three parts. Firstly, it notes how historically in Irish policy offering a philosophical rationale for curriculum was not deemed a priority and the implications of this for the LCA. It then briefly describes the implicit and explicit philosophies of curriculum that shaped the LCA programme, according to some of those involved in its design. Finally, it proceeds to examine the philosophy and rationale *de facto* underpinning the programme and its curriculum. Part of the purpose of this chapter is to begin to bridge the gap between policy and practice in order to later hold the voices of policy makers, school leaders, teachers, and students in dialogue.

3.2 Gaps and Silences in Educational Policy

In the previous chapter, I outlined the historical discourses and curricular developments that lead to the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. It was argued in that chapter that curricular debate in Irish Education after independence and right up to the introduction of LCA centred on issues such as control and power, rather than on philosophical issues. This meant that a new curriculum such as the LCA was introduced without any real philosophical discussion or debate as to why it was important and what it was trying to achieve, other than just increase school retention rates. The question that would then arise with introduction of the LCA was whether the values espoused by the LCA curriculum could ever marry with the values of the system it found itself in, a predominantly classical humanist system governed by mechanisms ensuring performativity and standardisation and related issues of control and accountability. As we will see, the philosophies underpinning curriculum tended not to be made explicit. Mulcahy, as Minister for Education in 1957, had stated that he did not

feel he had 'a duty to philosophise on educational matters'. Similarly, Ministers Colley and Hillery, in the 1960's stated that they did not see the introduction of comprehensive schooling as a philosophical or ideological matter. Indeed, Colley stated:

> It is not anything ideological or political. Positively it is a system of post-primary education combining academic and technical subjects in a wide curriculum, offering to each pupil an education structured to his needs and interests and providing specialist guidance and advice on the pupil's abilities and aptitudes (cited in O Sullivan, 1989, p.243)

Mulcahy, in a paper written in the late 1980's, argued that:

> [..] as of yet there has not emerged an official view of the curriculum which is sufficiently well developed, coherent and imaginative to provide a basis for policy-making which could deal in a satisfactory manner with all of the issues with which second-level education is faced
>
> (Mulcahy, 1989, p.95ff).

Likewise, Duffy working on the Interim Curriculum and Examination Board (CEB) in the late 1980's highlighted the lack of a philosophical underpinning for the Junior Certificate and argued that the proposal for the Senior Cycle reform, a reform that included the introduction of the LCA programme, and which was about to take place in the early 1990's, also did not have a philosophical basis:

> All subject committees are to work in isolation from each other, there are no general guidelines, and there is to be no overall debate eventuating in a philosophy which will inform the senior cycle review. Everything seems to be done at breakneck speed'
>
> (Duffy, 1989, p.3).

Hannan and Shortall shared a similar opinion:

> State policy-making shows a general disregard for clarity of goals. The general aims of secondary education seem to be so taken for granted, or its values so deeply institutionalised, as not to require articulation or justification
>
> (Hannan and Shortall, 1991, p.16).

When discussing the *Green Paper* at the Conference of Religious in Ireland (CORI), Mc Cormack, who was the Education Officer at the time, contended:

> What is totally missing from the [Education] Green Paper is any explication of the vision of society and model of development on which it is based…. In particular the language of the introduction seems excessively consumerist with concepts like competition given a very strong emphasis
>
> (McCormack, 1992, p.27).

The then Minister for Education, Niamh Bhreathnach, entered the discussion regarding the *Green Paper* and the lack of an underlying philosophy of education. She identified the need to develop a philosophy of education as the 'major project of the state' and stated her concerns that the Irish education system seemed to be operating on an implicit philosophy that is rarely subject to question. She stated her intention to move to a coherent philosophical framework based on the principles of equity, broadness, and partnership (Bhreathnach, 1994, pp. 5-10). However, debate at the subsequent National Education Convention was devoid of philosophical arguments and instead focused on familiar issues of control and power. With the prevailing educational debate revolving around matters of power and control, there was extraordinarily little room for meaningful debate about curriculum. The debates arising from the introduction of community schools further highlight this point:

> There was no attempt to define curriculum….nor was there any evidence that it formed a major part of the discussions leading to the various agreements……the study of curriculum per se has not been a high priority in the day-to-day operation of post-primary schools in Ireland…..schools have remained unchanged and teachers have taught what they have always taught, unless told by the Department of Education to teach something else
>
> (O'Flaherty, 1992, pp.114-115).

Despite the assertion in the *Education White Paper* (1995) that matters relating to the curriculum include, 'not only the subject taught, but also why and how they are taught and with the outcomes of this activity for the learner' (p.17), in the context outlined above curricular reforms have focused on the content of the curriculum, with little emphasis placed on pedagogical matters. The curriculum appeared to be viewed, for the most part, as a document, with the teachers' role being one of implementation. The gap between policy and practice is evident here. However, one may argue that the design of the LCA curriculum was in fact more in keeping with the view of curriculum espoused in the *White Paper*. I will argue why and how this came to be the case later in the chapter. Set against this backdrop then, it is a little easier for one to understand why the philosophical underpinnings of the LCA programme are not made explicit but are rather implicitly implied. This leads to difficulties at micro and meso levels, as the purpose of the programme can be interpreted differently in different

school contexts. As such, while the programme values inclusion, how this is defined by the Department of Education in relation to LCA is never made clear.

3.3 The Wider Values and Priorities Shaping the Design of the LCA

The world of education and curricular reform is not simply a world of facts but is a world of values. Educational discourses and curricular reforms are value laden and involve normative actions; decisions are made as to what is important and what can be excluded. Some knowledges and voices become dominant while others become subjugated (Foucault, 2004a). Here, one is reminded of Freire's contention (1970) that education is never neutral: it either promotes domestication or facilitates freedom. In order to facilitate freedom, for Freire, pedagogy must be critical, it must listen to quieted voices, and see again or recognise those who have been marginalised. For Freire, this is one of the primary responsibilities of a teacher. However, the promotion of human capital theory privileges the voice of industry and the economy, and the control it exerts over the goals of education. This produces a discourse of competition and performativity, where uniformity and sameness are promoted. This negates the recognition of difference and makes it much more difficult for education to facilitate freedom.

Although the philosophical underpinnings of the LCA curriculum are not explicit, as we will see, the values laden discourse underlying the programme were made explicit, namely those of the marketplace and equality of opportunity, as well as retention. In the introduction to the programme statement, the goal of the Leaving Certificate Applied is to prepare 'participants for transition from the world of the school/centre to that of adult and working life' (DES/NCCA, 2000a, p.4). It goes on to state the 'participants should also develop communication and decision-making skills so as to achieve a more independent and enterprising approach to learning and to life' (Ibid). The programme statement explains 'in the interests of equity it is important that the various needs of participants at the post-compulsory stage of education is provided for' (Ibid). Here, we can see that equity is viewed in terms of equality of opportunity. The programme statement highlights the fact that the suitability of the Leaving Certificate Established, to adequately meet the needs of all students, had been subject to question for some time. The LCA programme was part of 'the expanded senior cycle designed to cater for the diversity of participants' needs and aimed to celebrate different talents. It recognises that, even though talents may be different, they are no less worthy; 'it is essential that the talents of all Leaving Certificate participants are recognised and that they are afforded an opportunity to develop in terms of responsibility, self-esteem and self-knowledge' (Ibid). The programme also seeks to recognise difference in the way students learn; 'there is a need to recognise that individuals differ considerably in the ways they process, assimilate and recall information' (Ibid). As already discussed

in the previous chapter, these two values came to the fore for various historical reasons i.e. the impact on educational discourse of O Sullivan's 'cultural strangers' and the influx of students with varying talents into the post primary education system due to the introduction of free post primary education and a concerted effort to raise retention rates.

A human capital discourse has been hugely influential in the legitimatisation of education policy in Ireland since the 1960's (see Hannon, 1987). Gleeson in his book, *Curriculum and Context,* identifies the *Investment in Education (IIE)* report as the main legacy left by the 'cultural strangers' (a term used by O'Sullivan in 1992 to describe the influence of the OECD and the EU on curricular developments in Ireland). Ó Buachalla (1998) argues that the *IIE* legitimated the connection between education and socio-economic discourse. O'Sullivan notes that education and social discourse have become increasingly 'coterminous with the theme of education and the economy' (O'Sullivan, 1992, p.464). Following Ireland's participation in the OECD's Washington conference and the subsequent *IIE* report and supported by World Bank funding, Irish education came to be seen increasingly in terms of human capital production. O'Sullivan goes on to argue that the *IIE* 'set out to remove school from the sacristy and place it in line with the need for greater technological change in Irish society' (O'Sullivan, 2005, p.129). He contends that the State used the *IIE* and the influence of the OECD to disseminate,

> the principle that the requirements of the economy and, more particularly, those of large employers or potential employers are paramount [while] cleverly concealing an indigenous project as an international modernising imperative, and legitimating it by reference to the 'expert' and the 'neutral' OECD involvement
>
> (Ibid, p.260).

For all this emphasis on the importance of education for economic competitiveness, Thornhill remarks that 'economists have been much less successful in identifying precisely the relationship between economic growth and social development with the level and composition of investment in education (Thornhill, 1998, p.46ff) (for further discussion on this, see Lynch and Lodge, 2002).

Leading up to the introduction and nationwide implementation of the LCA programme, there was a proliferation of policy statements relating to education and training. The *Green Paper*, written and prepared during a period of economic depression, was strongly influenced by economic concerns. The first sentence of the paper states there is a need, particularly in an enterprising culture, to 'equip students with the ability to think and to solve problems – rather than just with an accumulation of knowledge' (p.3). There was a strong emphasis on vocational education, which stated that 'the

achievement of economic growth and industrial development is dependent…. On the availability of qualified personnel with the necessary technical and vocational skills and competencies' (Ibid, p. 109). This sentiment was also echoed in the *White Paper, Science, Technology and Innovation,* published by the Department of Enterprise and Employment in 1996, which made explicit the importance of education and training for economic growth and development. It put forth the conception of the education system as:

> The foundation stone on which to achieve the State's long-term ambition – the construction of a strong National System of Innovation [in a scenario where] the present balance in Irish education transmits itself to the business sector and the wider society, making it difficult for entrepreneurs, employers, managers, employees and society to adapt to new business practices and technologies and hindering the economy's capacity to innovate (Government of Ireland, 1996b, p. 120).

The *Education White Paper, Charting Our Education Future* (1995a), articulates the idea that 'education makes a fundamentally important contribution to the quality and well-being of our society' (Department of Education, 1995, p.5). The paper maintains that:

> The development of the education and skills of people is as important a source of wealth as the accumulation of more traditional forms of capital. National and international bodies have identified the central role of education and training as one of the critical sources of economic and social wellbeing in modern society. This is the logical outcome of the increasing centrality of knowledge and skills in shaping economic organisation and national competitiveness. Interlinked with these trends is the emerging economic necessity for life-long learning, given the speed with which knowledge and skills become outdated. For these reasons, expenditure on education and training is an investment in economic growth and improved social cohesion [...] Thus investment in education is a crucial concern of the State to enhance Ireland's capacity to compete effectively in a rapidly changing international environment (Ibid, pp.7-8).

This funding and investment in education, particularly vocational education and training, was provided in large part by the European Social Fund (ESF). O'Connor argued that vocational education in Ireland would be 'a pale shadow of what it actually is' (1998, p.66) without the financial support of the European Social Fund. The money provided by the ESF (some 930 million between 1992 and 1999) was used to introduce vocationally orientated curricular initiatives such as LCA and LCVP. In 1998, the then Minister for Education, Micheál Martin, stated in a radio interview that he hoped 30% of the all senior cycle students would opt for these vocational programmes by the year 2000. Gleeson notes that LCA and LCVP owe their existence to the ESF and the curricular development activities supported by the EU during the eighties (Gleeson, 2003). The LCA programme is based on two EU funded IVET programmes: the Senior Certificate and the Vocational Preparation and Training programmes. The

primary aspiration of the LCA programme was to prepare students for the world of work. Hence the marketplace value is core and human capital discourse dominates. Let us examine this further, in particular in reflecting on the different ways in which equality can be understood.

3.4 Equality, Equity, and Education

Ó Buachalla in his book, *Education Policy in Twentieth-Century Ireland,* highlights the importance of the *Investment in Education* report in identifying:

> [..] the social and geographical inequalities of opportunity…. it illustrated convincingly the nature and extent of inequality, it drew attention to the low rate of participation in post-compulsory education by children from lower social groups and to the high rates of early school leaving from vocational schools and the small proportion of students from these schools entering higher education (1988, p.72).

This report and its emphasis on inequalities within the Irish Education system led to the raising of the school leaving age to fifteen and the introduction of 'free' second level education. However, the economic difficulties faced by the country in the 1970's and 1980's resulted in emphasis being placed on human capital, rather than on equality of opportunity. As Coolahan explains:

> Support for egalitarianism as a social ideal has been weakening while the virtues of privatisation and meritocracy are promoted. In Ireland there has been little overt ideological debate on such issues but both the provision and shape of education are, nevertheless, being influence by an attitudinal change in which instrumentalist and utilitarian thinking have become quite pervasive (Coolahan, 1990, p.7).

O' Sullivan argues that the use of slogans is a prominent feature of Irish Educational discourse and one such slogan is 'equality of opportunity'. He argues that equality of opportunity became a,

> Slogan [that] was not used in a theoretical fashion, as a feature of a social project or vision. Rather it was grounded in appeals of a high moral loading which were considered to be self-evident [and] functioned to mobilise support and accommodate and integrate potentially diverse viewpoints (O'Sullivan, 2006, p.249).

Molloy in a paper written in 2002 entitled, *The Leaving Cert and Good Outcomes: Hard Work, Good Luck or What?,* highlights the gulf in results attained in the Leaving Certificate by those students from a higher professional background and those from an unskilled background;

> …..you might assume that the expected outcome of their years at school, and study for examinations, would be more or less the same, allowing for the obvious range of difference in intelligence, ability, aptitude, application and so on, that would be present in any group of young people. Not so. 52.9 per cent of students from a higher professional background gained 5 or more honours at leaving certificate level compared with 4.1 per cent of those from an unskilled background. Are we then to assume that the large numbers of people from one kind of background are considerably less able, at some fundamental level, than those from another? (Molloy, 2002).

The LCA programme was designed with 'the interests of equity' in mind. Many other researchers have examined LCA in terms of equality and particularly equality of opportunity (see O' Donnabháin, Trant,

Gleeson et al). The equality debate prior to the introduction of LCA focused on equality of access and participation. This placed emphasis on inclusion as access and participation which had very real consequences when the programme came to be lived out in practice. It implied that, once students are in school and participating in education, then they are included. Many commentaries such as those above view equality and inclusion relating to LCA in terms of policy and progression. While these are important, they neglect how polices are lived out and embodied in practice and experience. This, in turn, negates the very real emotional aspects of inclusion as something that is experienced, lived, and felt.

As already described, the *Investment in Education Report* highlighted social and geographical inequalities of opportunity. Archer shows how the debate on the Green Paper and the subsequent National Education Convention proposed tackling the problem of educational disadvantage by 'prioritising resource allocation to tackling the problem' (Archer, 2003, p.41). He cautions that there is a 'tendency among policy makers and others involved in education to have unrealistic expectations for what can be achieved by particular initiatives' this is due, he argues to policy and practice in this area being 'based on relatively poor understanding of the nature of disadvantage' (Ibid, p.44). It may be argued here that the vast majority of educationalists and policy makers do not come from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds and, as such, do not possess a real understanding of the complex nature of what it means to be 'disadvantaged'. Gleeson, Holden, and O'Driscoll in their 2002 study found that LCA students are predominantly from lower socio-economic backgrounds, with 75% of their fathers completing formal education at or before the Leaving Certificate. Although, the redistributive nature of equality and inclusion is very important when examining the LCA programme, it is beyond the scope and focus of this study (however, for further discussion see Tuohy and Doyle, 1996; Gleeson and O'Flaherty, 2013; McCoy et al., 2014).

3.5 The LCA Curriculum as Prevocational Education

The LCA curriculum is typical of most prevocational programmes in that it contains general education, vocational education, and preparation for work and vocational guidance. Although the focus on cross-curricular activities is indicative of prevocational education, LCA represented a real innovation in Irish education, as the programme was modular based and introduced cross curricular tasks that are formally assessed at regularly intervals over the two-year programme. Pring highlights two important aspects of prevocational education:

> First, it accepts continuity between what is taught and the experiences that the students bring with them to school. Learning is a matter of building on that experience, reflecting on it and refining it. Second, the

> purpose of education includes vocational training, but is much more than that. It has a moral purpose, enabling students to develop a set of desirable values that will sustain them when life gets tough, encouraging the interests that will enable them to enjoy their leisure time profitably, providing the guidance and counselling which will enable them to find the appropriate route into further education, training and employment (Pring, 1995, p.79)

Pring argues that prevocational education must respect the thoughts and feelings of young people and the various contexts from which they come. He argues that prevocational education involves,

> …..bringing the educational ideal to the vocational interests of young people, educating them through their perceptions of relevance, helping them to make sense of their social and economic context, enabling them to be intelligent and questioning in their preparation for the world of work (Ibid, p.190).

The preamble of the LCA programme is reflective of the sentiments expressed by Pring:

> It is essential that the talents of all pupils are recognised and that they be afforded an opportunity to develop in terms of responsibility, self-esteem and self-knowledge…..The Leaving Certificate Applied focuses on the needs and interests of students, using a variety of teaching methodologies, making optimum use of resources of the local community and paying particular attention to the needs of the local region (DES/NCCA, 1995a, p.2)

Atkins (1989), while highlighting some positives of prevocational education such as allowing a higher proportion of young people to remain in formal education, also put forth arguments against prevocational education. He argued that prevocational education was second class education in terms of the transmission of culture, the structure of the curriculum and the content of the course provided. He charged prevocational education with dispossessing people who were already disadvantaged of economic opportunities and instead creating a docile workforce indoctrinated in capitalist values. In terms of curriculum, Atkins argued that prevocational education was a means of excluding 'undesirables' from mainstream education and that integrated courses were an inferior currency in the world of work and did not marry with the structure of courses at third level. He also argued that participants were selected for prevocational programmes based on academic performance, without any attention given to mitigating factors, and that progression routes for those completing prevocational programmes are limited. Gleeson echoed some of these arguments, stating that 'in the wider society pre-vocational courses have the stigma of being second rate' (Gleeson, 1989, p.75). He went on to argue that, 'if prevocational education is to have any impact it is essential that it should attract a cross-section of all young people, and not become a 'sink' subject for disaffected youth' (Ibid). In addressing progression routes for those completing prevocational programmes, he states that,

> equally it would be important to generate careers for those encouraged to take them up via prevocational education, rather than as at present, leaving this side of the equation to the vagaries of the market mechanism' (Ibid).

A similar viewpoint was expressed by the NESC in the lead up to the introduction to the LCA programme. They stated that the LCA programme must be seen 'to lead to worthwhile employment prospects' (NESC, p.164), otherwise issues of parity of esteem and status will emerge. The White Paper, *Human Resource Development* (1997), also highlighted the need for enhanced 'progression routes for LCA students in order to 'achieve the same acceptance and status as the more traditional and conventional programmes' (p.48). There are many different discourses evident here, a human capital discourse, a social reproduction discourse, and a social justice discourse. In an effort to rid pre-vocational courses of the stigma of 'being second rate', both Gleeson and the NESC argue that there must be viable progression routes offered to and available for LCA students. Surely this is important in order for the Department of Education to realise their ambition that the LCA programme would provide students with equality of opportunity? Otherwise, is it just fulfilling the Department's goal of increasing retention rates but achieving little else?

3.6 The Context for Designing a New Curriculum

It is difficult to define the official view of curriculum in Irish Educational policy documents as many contrasting definitions are given within official policies. In the Department of Education's *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools*, the curriculum is officially defined as 'the list of those subjects in which instruction is given to pupils of the school in courses approved by the Minister' (2004, p.4). The OECD review in 1991 reflects this by stating that 'teachers and the educational community are generally confronted by a bald list of required subjects with their syllabus and examination requirements' (1991, p.67). *The Education Act* in 1998 also defined the curriculum as 'instruction in recognised subjects'. *The Education White Paper* (1980) contained a more open-minded view of curriculum as 'a totality of experiences', however this position was abandoned promptly and the paper stated instead that 'the curriculum will be taken to mean simply the range of subjects, with their individual syllabi, that are approved for study at a particular level' (p.43). This view of curriculum as a list of subjects and their contents is contrasted by the definition offered in *The Education White Paper* (1995):

> The term 'curriculum' encompasses the content, structure and process of teaching and learning, which the school provides in accordance with its educational objectives and values… The curriculum in schools is concerned, not only with the subjects taught, but also with how and why they are taught and with the outcomes of this activity for the learner.

(1995, p.18)

There appears to be confusion by what is meant by curriculum within the DES itself. To view curriculum as merely a list of courses of study approved by the DES is quite different from a holistic view of curriculum as embodying a 'totality of experiences'. This has consequences for teachers, in that if the official view of curriculum is seen as courses of approved and prescribed study, then the teacher is reduced to the role of one who simply implements it. As a teacher, I am aware that in the dynamic world of schools, this is never truly the case. Teachers are active in deciding which parts of the curriculum to emphasise, which resources to use, what pedagogical approaches they will implement etc. However, different policy views impact on the teacher's role as curriculum maker: teachers are not involved in the official design of the curriculum and must, albeit in creative and individual ways, 'cover the curriculum'. Thus, teachers are simultaneously powerful and powerless. Teachers are relatively autonomous in their classrooms, although this autonomy is regulated by access to resources, time, location etc., as will be discussed in detail in a later chapter. However, curriculum content, as well as modes of assessment, are designed and regulated by external, powerful bodies i.e. the Department of Education and the State Exams Commission. As such, the teacher's ability to 'cover' the curriculum is tested when his/her students sit an exam to assess how well they have been taught the curriculum. Modes of quality assurance, standardisation, and performativity mean that teachers are subject to a high degree of external control (Meyer and Rowan, 1988; Giroux and MacLaren, 1996) and public pressure (Harold, 1998; Mahony, 2001; Smyth, 1999).

In the early 1990's, when the LCA programme was conceived and designed, the dominant view of curriculum in relation to the Leaving Certificate Established was certainly one of curriculum as product, where the high stakes final exam governed all thinking. The LCA programme, as will be explained, viewed curriculum as process, where the role of the teacher in curriculum construction is core to the programme's success. However, most teachers did not have any experience in this kind of curricular role and so the LCA teacher existed simultaneously in two different worlds: in the world of the mainstream classroom, where they were expected to deliver a specific syllabus, and the LCA classroom, where they were given a newfound freedom and expected to become creative and innovative designers of curricular content. The LCA curriculum is designed in an alternative way. Teachers are given course descriptors which allow for autonomy and freedom. This autonomy and creative freedom is important for the success of the programme. However, due to teacher union strikes at the time of the introduction of the LCA programme, teachers did not receive in-service in this new curricular thinking and, as such, there was a disconnect between what was desired by policy makers and the experience and expertise of teachers in this regard. The lack of in-service also meant

that the programme was introduced into schools without LCA teachers from different schools, meeting in a collaborative way to discuss not only teaching methodologies relevant to the programme, but also to discuss the vision of the programme and how that vision was radically different. As these conversations did not take place, this silence had a very real impact on the initial implementation of the LCA programme in schools across the country, meaning a disparity continues to exist between what was envisaged for the LCA programme and what the system it is part of allows for in terms of funding, resources, time etc. This is something that will be explored in more detail in a later thematic chapter, entitled Thinking Relationally.

3.7 Curriculum as Process and Curriculum Making

It is clear that the LCA programme was designed with the view of curriculum as process. There is ample reference in the programme plan to the importance of the experiential nature of the learner. The role of the teacher is also of crucial importance. It is designed in such a way as to encourage teachers to be creative, with a lot of freedom afforded to teachers in how they chose to teach each topic. The practical paradigm recognises the importance of context, social processes, and the emancipatory potential of education. This is in keeping with the pedagogical approach espoused by the LCA curriculum, where learning is student centred and based on the lives, worlds, and lived experiences of students. As a result, the student teacher relationship is envisaged not as one of a vertical power structure but rather a horizontal relationship based on trust (Freire, 1980). This is emancipatory, as it opens up a space for student voice and acknowledges students as partners in the co-construction of knowledge. Students are valued in a way that positions them as equal partners in the learning experience, and teachers become students and students become teachers or what Freire terms student/teachers (Freire, 1980). This in turn offers a alternative discourse to dominant values of linguistic and mathematical proficiency, as espoused the assessment system governing the Leaving Certificate Established. The Leaving Certificate Applied in its assessment system recognises a variety of talents and abilities, whereby students complete tasks and key assignments and interviews, as well as work experience.

According to Carr and Kemmis, the practical paradigm acknowledges that education is intrinsically political and affects 'the life chances of those involved [and] the character and expectation of future citizens' (1986, p.34). As such, education is not neutral but is value laden. These values are felt in how students are positioned spatially and discursively within the system and within schools, as this study will explore. How LCA students are positioned within the system is indicative of how they are valued. The idea that concerted effort is needed by policy makers to ensure viable progression routes for LCA students speaks volumes as to how valued they are. The Department espouses equality of opportunity

for LCA students in policy but from the beginning this was not lived out in practice. Gleeson, as we saw in the last chapter, argued that it would be 'indefensible' to offer young people an alternative programme without recognised routes of progression either in terms of further education or training or the world of work.

3.8 The influence of curriculum theory

As Gleeson stated, the LCA programme did not fall from the sky; it was influenced by what went before it in particular the work of the Curriculum Development Units (Gleeson, 2009). Ó Donnabháin, the director of the Shannon Curriculum Development Centre, and Trant the Director of the Curriculum Development Unit, City of Dublin identified the thinking of Jerome Bruner and Lawrence Stenhouse on their work. Trant, principal of Ballyfermot Vocational School, recalls using the MACOS project developed by Bruner, and introduced into Britain by Stenhouse, in the school in Ballyfermot. He also recalls how Stenhouse was interested in the early work of the CDU in the 1970's and came to Dublin to participate in a seminar organised for some of the teachers involved (Trant, 2007). Trant explains that the work of both Shannon and Dublin curriculum centres 'were influenced by the curriculum development movement in America and Britain' and 'especially in the work of two pioneers, Jerome Bruner and Lawrence Stenhouse' (Trant, 2007, p.156).

In his book, *The Process of Education* (1977), Bruner stated, rather controversially at the time, that any child, at any stage of development can be taught any subject, as long as teachers have a firm understanding of the principles that underlie the subject they are teaching. We deepen understanding of these principles by using them effectively and in progressively more complex forms. This is what Bruner refers to as the 'spiral curriculum'. We learn by doing and this doing should become a little more complex each time. For Bruner, it was essential that teachers introduce or induct students into this inquiry process. Students should be encouraged to be autonomous and attempt solving problems on their own. This attitude, Bruner argued, can only be fostered by leading by example. As a result, teachers should also possess a scholar's excitement of discovery. For Bruner, what was important was not the "what" but the "how". Bruner, like Freire, articulates a different role for the teacher and as such a different student-teacher relationship. For Bruner, the teacher must also be engaged with learning through discovery, and both teacher and student must be involved in the learning process and the co-construction of knowledge. This thinking is evident in the design of the LCA programme.

3.9 Dialogue, experiential learning and democratic education

Due to its strong focus on experiential learning, connecting learning to the lives of students, making use of the local community and the importance of student teacher relationships it can be argued that one sees the influence of the thinking of Freire on the design of the LCA programme. Freire's pedagogical approach emphasises an approach to learning that is centred on the lived experiences of students. A positive relationship built on trust between student and teacher is vital. This relationship should be democratic in nature with both teacher and student participating in the co-construction of knowledge. An underlying principle of the LCA programme is 'to develop active citizens who have a sense of belonging to the local, national and European and global community, who have a capacity to gain access to information and structures, and an ability to fully participate in democratic society' (DES/NCCA, p.8). The pedagogical philosophy of the programme also promotes a democratic approach where students are active partners in the learning experiences. The underlying principles of the programme states that the programme must promote 'the use of a broad range of teaching methodologies and participant centred learning' as well as have 'a strong community base so as to complement the school or centre as a learning site' (DES/NCCA, p.8). The participants' 'learning experiences' are at the very heart of the programme and the worlds they occupy (i.e. the communities they live in) should provide the resources for learning in this way student learn to both 'read the word and the world' (Freire, 1970).

Freire's theories will be discussed in more detail in the theoretical framework, so I will not dwell on them for too long here. I will focus instead on the importance of reflection, dialogue, and experience. These are core elements of Freire's 'liberating classroom' and are also core elements of the LCA classroom. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996), Freire argues that through critical reflection and dialogue individuals possess the ability to discover themselves and realise their potential. Through dialogical encounters, individuals can perceive their current realities and the contradictions that exist within that reality and begin to critically interrogate their perceptions of that 'given' reality. It is only through critical reflection that we can begin to transform and produce reality. This critical reflection for Freire must be dialogical.

The LCA curriculum aims to promote dialogue between students and teachers. As already outlined, the construction of the curriculum and the accompanying assessment procedures place emphasis on active learning and discussion. Freire argues that the students' participation in the co-construction of knowledge is not only more democratic but is more efficient. Freire sees this as a process of becoming free and more human. Through dialogue and the co-construction of knowledge, a space is opened up for student voice and this in turn can offer a counter narrative. Freire believed that discovery is a social

process, and dialogue is the cement in this process. As such learning is dialogical, and teaching is not transactional but is always relational (Freire, 1970). The humanist or 'revolutionary' teacher is a partner with her learners and trusts their creative and critical ability. This engagement and pedagogical relationship built on trust is essential in a quest for mutual humanisation. Freire argues that 'much formal education fails because the learners are not included in the search, in the rigour and thus are not motivated' (Shor, in Shor & Freire, 1987, p.4). For Freire, 'motivation takes part in the action' (Ibid). What Freire is saying here is that motivation takes places in the 'acts of cognition' that take place within the classroom, not in a process of transmission. Critical education 'must integrate students and teachers into a mutual creation and re-creation of knowledge (ibid, p.8). The structure and design of the LCA curriculum aims to foster 'acts of cognition' where learning through discovery is relational. This design aims to re-engage students who may for various reasons have become disengaged with processes of formal learning within school. This is a commendable aim; however, it has the unintended consequence of positioning LCA students in deficit terms i.e. 'disengaged' or 'unsuited'. This will be returned to later in the thesis in the thematic chapter, Thinking Contextually and Thinking Politically.

The relationship between student and teacher is 'a horizontal relationship…. Fed by love, humility, hope, faith, and confidence (Godatti, 1994, p.39). Teaching is, for Freire, an act of love and there are always affective and emotional processes involved in teaching and learning: both students and teachers *feel* and experience learning. There is no binary between mind and body; pedagogy is affective. This conception of the student teacher relationship as a horizontal relationship fed by love does not mean that Freire does not appreciate that the teacher is different from the student and possesses a different kind of authority. Freire highlights the difference between authority and being authoritarian and as such does not defend a non-directive position. So too, the LCA curriculum is designed to be taught in a different way with importance placed on making a connection between pedagogic content and students' lived experiences. The dialogic approach to teaching and learning, a focus on group work and learning by doing, demands something different from teachers and entails a different kind of student teacher relationship. As highlighted in an ESRI report on LCA in 2014, the success of the programme very much depends upon the relationship between students and teachers, requiring a pedagogic approach that is dialogical in nature and based on student experience. I will return to explore further the contextual nature of schools and the various enablers and inhibitors of such a pedagogical approach in the thematic chapter, Thinking Relationally.

3.10 Curriculum as Process and Practice: Integration, Collaboration and Cross Curricular Tasks

The student tasks in the Leaving Certificate Applied programme are defined as 'a practical activity by which learning is applied to the development of a product, the investigation of an issue or the provision of a service' (DES/NCCA, 1995b :Section 1.1). The primary aim of the student tasks was to avoid what Jim Gleeson referred to as 'fragmentation' (Gleeson, 2009). The tasks would ensure collaboration amongst teachers across subject areas thus avoiding a subject centred divide in the curriculum. The LCA curriculum was to be viewed as a 'whole', comprised of courses. This was a new way of thinking for many teachers who up to this point had worked within their subject faculty.

Summary of cross curricular tasks:

Task	Credit (%)	Completed in Session	Assessed
General Education	10 (5)	1	Jan/Year 1
Vocational Preparation	10 (5)	2	May/Year 1
Vocational Education – 1st Specialism	10 (5)	2	May /Year 1
Vocational Education – 2nd Specialism	10 (5)	3	Jan/Year 2
Contemporary Issues	10 (5)	3	Jan/ Year 2
Practical Achievement	10 (5)	3	Jan/Year 2
Personal Reflection	**10 (5)**	**2 and 4**	**May/ Year 1 and May/ Year 2**

The criteria laid down for the completion of tasks states that the 'task must involve the integration of as many courses as possible in addition to the course from which the task originates' and further 'the task must involve the application of knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies arising from the courses being taken in the relevant element' (DES/NCCA, 1995b: Section 6). The LCA courses are transdisciplinary and require collaboration amongst teachers. I will explain in a later chapter the role of context in transferring this transdisciplinary philosophy into practice. This integration of courses focuses on the practical use of knowledge, that is, students must be able to apply the knowledge they have gained and be able to use skills and competencies gained from acquiring this knowledge. Being

a pre-vocational course, the focus is on practical knowledge or 'useful' knowledge. Attention is drawn again to what Bruner called the 'how', students and teachers through dialogue and collaboration learn by doing.

As the tasks are cross curricular in nature, planning for the tasks was to be undertaken by a team of teachers led by the coordinator with students actively involved at all stages. Teachers were to ensure 'that students are given the support necessary to achieve as much integration as possible' (DES/NCCA, 1995b: Section 3). The curriculum was structured in this integrated way in order encourage and facilitate teachers working together as an LCA team and also to promote a spirit of teamwork and collaboration amongst students. The LCA programme statement reminds principals that LCA is 'an integrated programme' and this is 'important when planning and designing the timetable' (DES/NCCA, 2000a, p.4). The planning guidelines for the task also state the wider community should be engaged with as much as possible and that tasks should be put on display when completed. However, in the initial stage of development there was a dispute over teacher-based assessment, the LCA design team had envisaged teachers formally assessing LCA student tasks. Although the TUI agreed to this, the ASTI objected on the basis that this would have a negative effect on student-teacher relationships. Eventually, after protracted discussions, the envisaged teacher-based assessment procedure was abandoned, and the DES introduced a system of external examination. All this meant that the design team did not have the opportunity to think through the specific forms of integration envisaged. Due to a separate industrial relations dispute between the teacher unions and the DES, teachers were not given in-service training on the structure or ethos of the LCA programme before its introduction in 1995. Both Trant (2007) and Gleeson (2009) contend that this had a major impact on the overall implementation of LCA as an integrated programme. The programme was envisaged as an integrated programme with a strong emphasis on collaboration amongst teachers and an importance placed on working as a team. My study through a case study approach examines how this is being lived out in practice and the effects this has on both the students and teachers' overall experiences of the LCA programme. This, in turn, relates to values and perceptions and how included or excluded LCA students feel as part of the wider school body. The programme recognised that all students have different talents and that 'it is essential that the talents of all Leaving Certificate participants are recognised' (DES/NCCA, 2000a p.4), to what extent this is being lived out in practice will be explored in this study.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter sought to examine and analyse the discourses and theories that influenced the rationale and curricular design of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. In order to assess the extent to

which the LCA programme continues to fulfil its original aims, it was important to begin by examining the rationale upon which the programme is based. In order to effect such an examination, this chapter began by looking at the competing definitions of curriculum within the Irish Education system at the time of the introduction of the LCA programme and assessed the impact this had on the conception and implementation of the programme. The influences of the theories of Bruner and Stenhouse on the programme were examined, as well as the aims and potential of LCA in realising critical pedagogy; in particular, a critical pedagogy as espoused by Freire. The values underpinning the programme namely human capitalism and equality of opportunity were also discussed, values in attention with the approaches of Freire and others. This was important work to begin with, as we could not analyse how well LCA continues to fulfil its original aims without first having a thorough understanding of what those aims were and how they came to be. In order to bridge the gap between policy and practice, we must first comprehend the theories and values underpinning the policy and then we can turn to examine how these are lived out in practice. Let us now turn to the voices of policy makers, and their hopes and vision for the programme.

Chapter Four:

The Voice of Policy Makers

4.1 Rationale

The purpose of this chapter is to listen to and draw on the voices of policy makers involved in the conception, development, and implementation of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. The three conversations below provide invaluable insights into the workings of the original LCA steering committee, as well as the original aims, rationale, and ethos upon which the programme was based. Through these conversations, we are given an insight into the vision of the programme and the hopes these policy makers held for its future. Subsequent thematic chapters will examine the ways in which these aims, and the rationale, have been lived out and felt in schools by both students and teachers. As one of the aims of this thesis is to bridge the gap between policy and practice, the last chapter, Thinking Possibilities, will bring these policy voices into dialogue with the voices of both students and teachers. I decided to interview Feargal Quinn, as he was the Chairperson of the Steering Committee. Professor Gleeson was the Education officer of the Steering Committee and, as such, I felt he would be very interesting to speak to in terms of the pedagogical design of the programme, as well as the influences on the design of the programme. Harry Freeman worked with the PDST as National LCA Advisor for over twenty years and, as a result, has a massive wealth of experience in implementing the programme in schools nationwide.

4.2 Senator Feargal Quinn – Chairperson of the LCA Steering Committee

I interviewed Senator Feargal Quinn on a very cold January afternoon in his home in Howth. I was very grateful for the warm cup of tea kindly offered to me upon arrival. I had been in contact with Senator Quinn over email prior to our meeting. He was very enthusiastic about the work I was doing and invited me to his home to discuss it further. I did not realise at the time that he was ill. When I first met with him face to face, the effort he needed to muster in order to talk with me became quickly apparent. In spite of his ill health, he wanted to speak to me and to speak about LCA. The passion and belief he still had for the programme, almost thirty years after his initial involvement in its development was incredibly inspiring. He died three months later on the 25th of April 2019.

Senator Quinn was the Chairperson of the original Steering Committee tasked with developing the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. He recalled being approached by Niamh Breathnach, the then Minister for Education, who asked him to chair the Steering Committee. He believed he was approached because he was a successful businessman and the Minister wanted someone with a

strong and successful background in business to chair the committee; as he states, 'this programme was about preparing students for the world of work'. He recalled having a conversation with her where they spoke about students who were leaving school after the Junior Certificate or students who for various reasons where unsuited to the Leaving Certificate Established. These students were leaving school without any qualification and as such were experiencing difficulties in gaining employment. Senator Quinn told me:

> We spoke about how a lot of these kids had been left behind. So, the students who didn't get the academic qualification of the Leaving Cert were regarded as the back of the class. You sit there and listen. Niamh Breathnach said to me that they need something other than that and it was called Leaving Cert Applied. (Interview, January 2019).

He explained how he and the rest of the Steering Committee believed that these students deserved a better educational experience, where their talents were formally recognised, talents that had not been recognised thus far in the formal education system. As such, the rationale governing the development of the LCA programme rested on aims such as increased retention rates in schools, lower youth unemployment, and recognising that students have other talents and abilities that were not being recognised within the confines of the current system. Senator Quinn stated that the,

> great thing about the steering committee was that everyone had some sort of experience in business and everyone knew that there was much need for a programme like this, most were very enthusiastic about the programme and what it was trying to do (Ibid).

He recalled how from the beginning everybody involved in the Steering Committee and Minister Breathnach were adamant that the new course would have Leaving Certificate in the title. He explained:

> We wanted to make sure that it was seen as a Leaving Certificate programme. It was a Leaving Certificate qualification. So, the name was important. I can remember the first time it happened where I was in a school and they said the Leaving Cert people here and the LCA people are here. I'd say, excuse me what do you mean? LCA is Leaving Cert (Ibid).

Senator Quinn explained that from the beginning there was an acute awareness around issues of parity of esteem and recognition:

> We recognised that happening from the start, from the very beginning. Even amongst the committee members, there was one or two that you felt didn't want to be there. So, one of the ways to counter that was to make sure it had the Leaving Cert in the title and really promote it among employers… We had to

knock on doors, we had to try and proclaim it from a height and sometimes even then it was just taking second place (Ibid).

I asked if the fact that the programme was ring-fenced and not part of the CAO points system contributed to this lack of parity of esteem. He agreed that it was, but stated,

...it was ring fenced to say to the students that you're different, and they are different. They had talent and ability and these talents were otherwise not recognised. LCA was that recognition (Ibid).

He went on to describe how he felt this issue of parity of esteem and lack of recognition could be rectified:

Schools need to get rid of Leaving Certs *here* and LCA *here*. Get rid of that. Treat them all the same. Just as you're doing Spanish, you're doing Italian or Irish and you're doing LCA. I think that will be achieved when LCA is recognised by future employers. Future employers might not be the same employers that you would have got from the academic Leaving Cert, but it is still employment that should be valued just the same (Ibid).

He also spoke about lack of recognition from what he termed 'the top':

I think it is led from the top. So, the Minister of Education and the people at the top of the Department need to recognise it and they just don't, or at least not visibly or publicly, so then people like teachers or parents or employers just don't understand how important it is (Ibid).

This issue of recognition and parity of esteem was crucial in terms of encouraging students to follow the LCA programme:

The more you get the traditional Leaving Cert people to recognise, gosh there's a great talent among a large number of LCA students and when they blossom and grow in front of them then you'll see other students go gosh that's not a bad idea. Whereas now I wonder if students going into senior cycle if they even consider Leaving Cert Applied (Ibid).

Senator Quinn stated that the Steering Committee were very aware that 'success breathes success'. Students needed a clear pathway or progression route out of LCA:

If you wanted students to give the LCA a go they needed to see where they'd be accepted into employment, employment that they might not have got otherwise. It might not be regarded as your high-class employment, but you have got it and your skills have been recognised (Ibid).

The Steering Committee were aware that the Leaving Certificate Applied faced a battle to achieve parity of esteem and Senator Quinn believed that in many ways this was a historical battle:

> There is and I'm afraid to use the word snobbery, but there is a snobbery thing around LCA, well around vocational education from the beginning. Especially among traditional teachers and indeed parents. That was a historical thing that I suppose from the beginning was working against us (Ibid).

Another key issue for Senator Quinn was a lack of promotion of the LCA programme. He explained that in the beginning they pushed hard to promote it as much as they could, but that level of promotion has dwindled over the years and is almost non-existent now.

> Again, I'm going to talk about success because I do believe that success breathes success. You need to be shouting about the LCA student who has their own business now or who is the manager of wherever. When you get a success story, I think that it is important for the schools and educational facilities to proclaim that. People would start to look at LCA differently and think of gosh, I hadn't thought of that. So, in other words you need to recognise this other kind of success. Not the 600 points but another kind and not only recognise it but celebrate it. Talk about it (Ibid).

The Steering Committee tried to design the LCA curriculum in such a way as to 'recognise these other talents'. Senator Quinn believed that curricular design of the LCA programme was incredibly forward thinking. There was an emphasis placed on a need for all learning to be practical. There was a deconstruction and reconstruction of traditional subject area into courses. There courses were integrated across what was in design a broad curriculum:

> When we designed the curriculum, we did it in such a way that schools could just select what they want. There was so much choice given. There were modules that were practical. All of LCA was practical. Hands on learning. That was the point of it. It really was brilliant. The idea was really brilliant. Something different for these kids. It was meant to be integrated. An integrated curriculum. That was the whole point of it, but I just don't know how much that ever really happened in reality (Ibid).

In a nostalgic mood, Senator Quinn reflected on what he would do differently telling me:

> If I could go back in time, I'd just proclaim it from the rooftops and I'd take every opportunity to talk or shout about all the success stories. The steering committee did recognise from the beginning that we needed to have it recognised but maybe we didn't recognise enough just how much it needed to be proclaimed (Ibid).

He also expressed a lingering frustration at what he felt was a continued lack of recognition and promotion:

> For me it was a joy to be part of that group and see success and you'd just like to think that the success of developing such a programme was recognised wider, particularly among other second level teachers who would say yeah, I'm going to recommend LCA because they still don't and that is frustrating. Some just turn a blind eye to it (Ibid).

He ended the interview by highlighted how LCA had changed the lives of students who had otherwise been 'left behind' and hoped that with 'some TLC' the programme could still prove valuable.

4.3 Professor Jim Gleeson – Education Officer on LCA Steering Committee

I interviewed Professor Gleeson on a sunny afternoon in May in a meeting room he had kindly booked on the campus of the University of Limerick. Like Senator Quinn, Professor Gleeson's belief in the original aims and rationale of the programme was also palpable. We spoke for almost four hours. We began by speaking about his role as Education Officer on the original steering committee.

> Why I was there first of all would have been arising out of the work at Shannon at Senior Certificate and so Albert O Ceallaigh who was Chief NCCA Officer at the time asked me to get involved (Interview, May, 2019).

He went on to explain that from the very beginning the steering committee 'didn't operate according to house rules' but rather was given 'free reign'. Mainly because 'none of the usual suspects had any major involvement in the two EU funded initiatives that fed into it: they being the Senior Certificate and the VPT programme'. He explained that the make up of the steering committee 'was a very rare example of an NCCA committee that was not as representational as the others, it was a much broader base' (Please see appendix 9). Professor Gleeson, in reflection, stated:

> I suppose in a way the fact that it wasn't as tightly representational as the others again is indicative of the fact that this thing wasn't seen as being so important, that seems to make sense to me now…The Department had an inspector taking responsibility for LCVP and the work was done in Department offices out in Marino. So LCVP was still very much a creature of the Department, whereas they hived off LCA to the NCCA, which in those pre-statutory days was only an advisory body…I was always subconscious of the fact that, the NCCA can have that one but we're [the Department of Education] holding on to the LCVP and the Leaving Certificate Established (Ibid).

Professor Gleeson made clear that there was a divide between the academic Leaving Certificate programmes namely LCVP and LCE and the LCA both physically and in terms of importance placed on the programmes. He spoke about how this divide manifested itself in a very real and physical way within the Department:

> Go back to the vocational/ academic divide. For many years, the inspectorate had three separate conferences every year: primary inspectors, secondary inspectors, vocational inspectors. Floor 11 is where the vocational inspectors were, in Apollo house, as far as I remember, or Hawkins house, one of those but they were quite separate from the people up in Marlboro street. They were the secondary people, and the others were in the vocational sector. So, if you had that divide, inside, at the very heart of the Department…. (Ibid).

This is in keeping with what Senator Quinn spoke of when he described that from the beginning the Steering Committee had to battle against what he called a 'snobbery' around vocational education. To illustrate this point further Professor Gleeson recalled how Liam Lane the then Secretary of the Department of Education opened the national conference in 1983 at the end of the first Leaving Certificate Transition programmes. Professor Gleeson explained that Lane 'basically said, what is good enough for the boy from Bruree, namely Éamonn de Valera, should be good enough for us today. Meaning academic, grammar school type education – he just didn't get it'. However, Gleeson goes on to explain that by the time 1993 came around there was a greater understanding within the Department of Education of the need for a programme like LCA.

We then went on to discuss what were the big influences on the conceptualisation and development of the LCA programme. I asked if the various educational reports and policies published in the lead up to the LCA programme had any impact on the thinking of the Steering Committee. Professor Gleeson replied:

> I think they were ships in the night. The first transition projects started in the 1970's and being part of Europe was critical. The big influence was Europe. Denis O Sullivan has this lovely phrase 'the influence of the cultural strangers on Irish Education policy', to me this is a classic example of it (Ibid).

He went on to explain that Europe exerted a huge influence both economically and also in terms of policy agenda:

> There would have been absolutely zilch curriculum development activity in Ireland through the 1980's only for Europe. The funding arrangement was pound for pound. Europe was prepared to give you so much as long as you matched it and that was a gift horse you could not afford to look in the mouth. Now, Europe had its own agenda and that was primarily to do with human capital (Ibid).

He described how this influence from Europe shook Ireland from its insular state, as 'we were now part of a network of 30 European projects' and 'that was a very rich environment'.

He also highlighted the importance of the 1991 OECD report:

> The OECD 1991 report, that's very important. They reviewed Education in Ireland and concluded that the Irish post-primary system is a derivation from the classical, humanist system with an overlay of the curriculum projects. So classical, humanism, grammar school type education, what we call academic subjects – that was the mindset (Ibid)

When discussing why this was the case, Professor Gleeson commented:

> Who are the decision makers in terms of education in Ireland? On the one hand, the politicians but they have been through and are product of this system. Take then the people in the Department, well they got to where they are on the back of this system. It is a Kathleen Lynch argument; people who got to where they are on the back of the system, including the assessment system, are loathe to want to change it (Ibid).

He discussed how both the LCA and LCVP steering committees were set up in 1993 and in many ways were a response to this report by the OECD and were an effort to change this 'mindset'.

Professor Gleeson then went on to describe the hopes and rationale for the assessment structure of the LCA programme. He explained that one of the main aims of the steering committee was that the LCA programme would be internally assessed by teachers:

> We were hopeful about having a lot of school-based assessments, which never materialised. In a way they designed the programme on the understanding that there would be school based assessment… I mean we took the view that if you're talking about a student-centred programme and developing skills and competencies that need to be accredited then and there, like we did in senior cycle for example, that it has to be – the teacher as a professional has to take responsibility for more of the assessment… We got acceptance for that at the steering committee, but then, somebody put a motion to ASTI at the annual conference, about 6 weeks later, that blew it out of the water (Ibid).

Teachers award credits for the completion of key assignments and 90% attendance but the tasks are all assessed by an external examiner. Professor Gleeson felt that this had a massive impact on the overall success of LCA as it was designed for something 'which never materialised'. Therefore, what was hoped for by the policy makers and what materialised in reality were two very different things. As such from the outset there was a mismatch between policy intentions and practical application.

The conversation then moved to the 'ring-fenced' structure of the LCA programme. I asked Professor Gleeson why the Steering Committee made that decision:

> That was laid down from day one. There was never any discussion about that…We felt that it wasn't possible to provide a meaningful education experience for all young people within the confines of the existing Leaving

> Cert and because that wasn't possible, in order to do it, you had to ditch the points system and go for a meaningful alternative (Ibid).

He described how in the beginning they worked hard 'to try and get some recognition' for the programme. There were attempts made that LCA students would be eligible for the Gardaí, the ESB, the Civil Service at clerical officer level and CERT, 'it was always a struggle'. He describes how prior to the introduction of LCA, the National Convention of Education report in 1992 had strong proponents and opponents of a dual system. LCA can almost be seen as a compromise. It is not purely vocational whereby students develop specific skills but is pre-vocational where there is equal emphasis on both general and vocational education.

Professor Gleeson stated that, for the Steering Committee, there were three crucial elements to the success of the programme: leadership, teamwork, and integration.

> One of our core principles was around leadership. As a school leader you should be choosing a team that shouldn't be too big, because it is about teamwork…and that you should try to ensure that people volunteer to teach LCA rather than be volunteered (Ibid).

He was aware that this didn't happen very often and discussed Gerry Jeffers concept of 'domestication' where a programme has been 'around so long, people make it their own' and 'indeed the Department made it their own'. He felt that there are no longer any of the original leaders around now to say, 'you've domesticated this thing too much'. Leadership on a national level disappeared as those involved with LCA from the beginning retired and the in-depth knowledge that they possessed was lost. This is a point that Harry Freeman will also make.

For the Steering committee, teamwork was a 'critical point':

> We wanted to move towards an integrated programme…but integration is another example of people just not getting it… In the criteria of assessment for the tasks they gave the huge amount of 10% for integration and to me that finished integration, which was a core curriculum principle of a student-centred programme. There were critical questions there about packaging of knowledges into subjects versus an integrated approach and teacher centred versus student centred (Ibid).

As such, structural restraints placed on the LCA programme, both in terms of school-based assessments and the integrated curricular approach as envisaged by the policy makers, had a major impact on how their vision was realised practically in schools.

When speaking about LCA, as it is experienced today, Professor Gleeson stated:

> It was high time to do a root and branch review…because curriculum is something organic and it's not a document and that curriculum is totally dated now (Ibid)

4.4 Harry Freeman – Former National LCA Advisor

Harry Freeman was not an original member of the Steering Committee but was involved from 1996 onwards. He reviewed and wrote some of the modules offered in LCA and acted as National Advisor for the LCA programme for over twenty years. When recalling the work of the Steering Committee he stated:

> The Steering Committee was very much focused on the educational experience of the students. They wanted it to be a valuable, prevocational learning experience. That's what they wanted (Interview, January, 2019)

Freeman recalled the work of the Senior Cert and how it had, in the end, become 'diluted' or 'watered down'. With that experience in mind, it was decided that LCA would not have an approach where you could take both programmes but would rather be a separate, stand-alone programme:

> They wanted a programme that could stand on its own…We got a lot of questions at that time -can you do a little bit of LCA- and the answer was absolutely no. It was about the entire experience; it was the student-centred programme whose aims were to develop the person. To prepare them for adult and working life, that was the aspiration of the programme (Ibid).

He described how the pedagogical approach in LCA was 'radically different from the traditional model':

> The active learning approach, the application of knowledge in a practical way, work experience and the assessment method was radically different from the traditional model. Through all of that you were building a person wo had not been suited to the academic, traditional model and was now going to be better prepared for their future, who was going to be more informed and as a result was going to be in a much stronger position to enter the workplace than they would have been had they stayed in the traditional system. That was the ethos of the development of the programme (Ibid).

Freeman explained that for him the biggest issues around LCA today were status, recognition, and perception. He outlined four issues that he believes impacts on the negative perceptive of the LCA programme:

> Firstly, the Irish perception of education is very narrow. Success is measured in narrow term – CAO points. Secondly, if LCA offered a worthwhile route into further education of higher education it would have been much more acceptable, particularly to parents. I also acknowledge that a significant number of students

would not be able to do that, so that's the challenge. Thirdly, there is a general snobbishness towards it and fourthly it tended to attract students with behavioural problems or Special Educational Needs (Ibid).

He elaborated on this by pointing to his own in-depth experience as National Advisor:

Quite a few schools used the term, without apologies, as a dumping ground for kids that were going to distract from the learning in the Leaving Certificate Established class (Ibid).

LCA was seen as a way of keeping these students in school but separating them out from the 'real' learning taking place in the LCE classes. However, Freeman also says that he went in to 'many, many schools where they were passionate about LCA and were doing their best'. He spoke about how at times resources and funding curbed this:

LCA is very expensive to run, simply because you tend to have such small numbers. It is hugely expensive in terms of the timetable (Ibid).

Two major implications of this lack of funding on the running of the programme were, firstly, it limited student choice in term of modules and, secondly, it led to schools being forced to amalgamate the LCA1 and LCA2 groups:

In terms of amalgamation of year groups, fifteen years ago I would have said don't go there. But as time went on, I realised that if they didn't go there, that meant the programme would have been dropped altogether, which was unacceptable to me. This isn't perfect and the kids do lose out, but it is better than them not doing it at all (Ibid)

Freeman also highlighted leadership as being an issue both nationally and contextually in schools:

Nationally there is a huge lack of leadership. The real experts like Jim Gleeson and Gary Granville are gone. The original support team that was deeply immersed in it, gone. There is no-one high up in the Department that has that depth of knowledge now'.

This is reminiscent of Professor Gleeson's point regarding leadership. Freeman argued that within schools, an enthusiastic and supportive principal is vital for the successful running of the programme:

During my time as National Advisor I have helped to introduce the programme into hundreds of schools. I found that the role of the principal is crucial. Principals need to be engaged and know what is happening and they need to support the programme in terms of facilitating meeting time for the LCA team in the school…If that meeting time isn't happening than those conversations around the objectives and ethos of the programme are not happening and they are vital (Ibid).

These meetings are vital because the integrated curricular approach of the LCA programme demand teamwork. Indeed, if these meeting don't happen, then teamwork is non-existent. Freeman also highlighted the importance of the role of coordinator. He saw this role as both administrative and pastoral:

> Coordinators are also vital. You need someone who can inject passion and knows the ethos of the programme. For me, the best coordinator is like their Ma or their Da. That was the term I felt really captured what this thing was about (Ibid).

He also emphasised how important it was to have teachers who believed in the programme and recalled how sometimes this was the biggest challenge he faced in his work:

> Teachers were often negative. Not all teachers. Every school would have a bunch of teachers that passionately believe in the programme. But there would be resistance from other teachers who did not want it in the school and did not want to teach on it. They felt it wasn't good for the school. I often found those the most challenging (Ibid).

When asked why he thought certain teachers felt like that, he explained that they thought it would 'attract the wrong clientele to the school' or that they would be 'seen as the special needs school in town'. For Freeman, certain schools really promote the programme amongst students and parents and really believe in the value of the programme. There are schools where there isn't a stigma and where the LCA coordinator proactively promotes the programme. However, he explained that there are other schools where the programme is not wholeheartedly promoted:

> I have gone into schools and seen kids who are catastrophically failing in the established Leaving Cert, but would you consider changing programme, ah that's for stupid people. They're getting F's the whole way across and they don't mind, they would rather fail the established Leaving Cert gloriously than do LCA, because then everyone would see them as thick. So that again is back to perception (Ibid).

In schools, promotion is a visible and spatial thing:

> Are they seen? Are they involved in school events, ya know, let them help organise the first-year quiz or make the tea at parent teacher meeting or let them organise sign posting or meet and greets, that kind of thing to give them value. I have gone into schools and the LCAs are at the backend of the school or in a prefab (Ibid).

This notion of the spatial deployment of LCA students within schools is something that I will examine further in my first thematic chapter, *Thinking Contextually*. Freeman also made clear that for all the

difficulties involved in the LCA programme it was still an incredibly important programme and made a huge difference to the lives of students. He told me that over his twenty years as National LCA advisor he had seen,

> many cases where LCA had not just changed lives but in some cases had saved lives. They were some kids who were having a very tough time and LCA changed things around from them. There were students who would have left school and gone down very different paths but LCA kept them in school and meant they could leave with a Leaving Cert (Ibid)

Finally, we discussed the progression routes of LCA students, and the lack of recognition afforded to the programme by employers:

> The other thing is, there's not enough employers or colleges or particularly further ed colleges understand the credits of LCA. When it started out, going back around mid-1990's us as a support service, we did a lot of work with employers to come up with a certain level of recognition. For example, in the early days the bank would take you on with a merit, the guards took you on with a merit overall and others that would take you in with a distinction so there was that recognition there- that was another huge gap, employers lack of understanding. I quite often got phone calls from employers asking was LCA meant, so that would be a difficulty.

Freeman believed that, if LCA was to 'stand a hope in the future', then the current Senior Cycle review needed to address this issue of the progression routes of LCA students. This is something I will explore in my final chapter, Thinking Possibilities.

4.5 Conclusion

There is a very strong commitment to equality evident in the voices of policy makers. The design of the programme was innovative and conceptualised difference in positive terms. The assessment system of the programme sought to have this difference formally recognised. However, the policy makers realised very early that this was going to be difficult. They spoke of how they struggled from the very beginning to have the LCA programme recognised by employers and Further Education. There is a sense of frustration that LCA was not fully recognised or understood in the way they intended. However, there is also an awareness of the positive difference LCA has made in the lives of many students and a tentative hope for what it can still contribute to the Irish Education system.

I remain grateful to the three individuals above for taking the time to speak with me and for taking such an interest in this research. Their dedication, passion, and belief in the programme was very evident and is inspiring. A discourse of care and social justice is evident in these conversations, as well

as a discourse of human capital. The insight these conversations have afforded me was instrumental in deepening my understanding of the original aims and rationale of the programme and, as such, helped me to examine in a very authentic way how these aims and objectives have been lived out in practice.

Now that we have a firm understanding of the historical discourses and curricular developments leading to the implementation of the LCA programme, as well as the theories and values underpinning the aims of the programme, and have listened to the voice of policy makers, I can now turn to discuss the methodological design of the study. The methodological design of my research is in keeping with the rationale espoused by the LCA programme itself i.e. it requires the active participations of students involved and is dialogical in nature. The study recognises students as experts and positions them as the starting point in a politics of possibility and transformation. The study also mobilises a critical epistemology, as it is hoped that, by opening up a space for dialogue and listening to voices that have been subjected to various forms of discounting, it may affect the insurrection of subjugated knowledges. And it is precisely these knowledges that will be a starting point in a politics of possibility.

Chapter Five:

Methodology

5.1. Introduction

The following chapter outlines and explains the research design of this study, as well as highlighting the rationale underpinning the various methodological decisions taken.

5.2 Rationale

This research seeks to examine the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA) as it is lived out and experienced today and to investigate whether or not these experiences continue to marry with the original aims of the programme. At the heart of this research is student voice and lived experience. Policy makers, researchers, teachers, principals, and coordinators all have an in-depth knowledge of the curricular content of the LCA programme and its aims and rationale and these perspectives are valuable; however, to understand this curriculum what is also needed is the knowledge and experience of the LCA students who 'live' the programme. Hence, their voice, opinions, and experiences were paramount to this research. In keeping with Freire (1970), this study sought to enter into meaningful dialogue with students, dialogue grounded in their lived experiences, thus resulting in new knowledge and new ways of thinking about LCA and inclusion.

Over the course of my fourteen years teaching on the LCA programme, working collaboratively with colleagues, facilitating Continuous Professional Development on behalf of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) to fellow LCA teachers, as well as the five years spent carrying out this research, a recurring theme seemed to be that no-one was listening. Principals feel that the Department of Education doesn't listen; teachers and coordinators feel principals and policy makers don't listen; and students feel that the school doesn't listen. This was reminiscent of what Jim Gleeson in his book, *Curriculum in Context* (2009), referred to as 'fragmentation'. To summarise, he states that fragmentation is 'a prominent feature of Irish education and curriculum as reflected in organisational structures and inter- and intra- organisational relations and in the curriculum reform process, the primary/post-primary and academic/vocational divides and the social class and gender divisions within Irish schools' (Gleeson, 2009, p.310). Oftentimes, students and teachers do not feel part of curriculum design and can see curriculum as a product designed by experts and given to them to deliver or cover. I have carried out this research with a dual perspective of practising teacher and

PhD student and I have continued to teach while conducting my PhD research. This has afforded me an opportunity to attempt to bridge a gap between policy and practice in relation to the LCA programme.

The LCA curriculum was designed in such a way as to allow for creativity and freedom on the part of teachers when designing their lesson plans. However, this seems to be curtailed by lack of experience, time to plan and collaborate, and resources, as well as perhaps confidence. As will be elaborated on in ensuing chapters, an interesting ambivalence arises here. On the one hand, teachers are encouraged to be creative and free with the curriculum, while on the other hand, due to an increasing amount of inspections, schools are evaluated against certain 'norms' and 'standards'. Furthermore, the influence of bodies such as PISA have ensured a focus on numbers and scores, making nations and schools 'legible' (Ozga, 2008, p.268). Teachers are brought into what Foucault terms the 'gaze of judgement'. There is a marked paradox here, in that autonomy on the part of teacher and student is encouraged yet the adherence to 'norms' and 'standards' is seen as essential. The LCA programme also suffered from budget cuts during the last recession which has made it difficult for teachers to be creative with the programme, given the lack of resources to facilitate out of school learning. Oftentimes, modules offered are dependent on the resources within the school i.e. having teachers available who are qualified to teach the module. As such, even though the LCA curricular design allows for flexibility and creativity often times schools have to make it their own by providing what is already on offer in the school.

The desk-based research that I undertook before completing my field research elucidated many issues surrounding the LCA programme. Some of these issues such as parity of esteem, the ring-fenced nature of the programme, and inclusion have all been highlighted; even before the programme was introduced in 1995 (Doyle and Tuohy, 1994). The *Report of the National Convention* raised concerns stating that, 'since the course will not lead to formal qualifications and the certificands may only progress to limited courses of post-secondary education, there is a distinct possibility that it will be seen as a "soft option" track and of limited value by students' (Coolahan, 1994, p.76). However, Gleeson and Granville (1996) also argued that the ring-fenced nature of the programme had the potential to have a liberating effect on students and teachers, liberating students from the 'rat-race' of the 'points system', allowing schools choice in how to provide the programme i.e. what modules to offer etc., and affording teachers the opportunity to be innovative in their teaching methods.

Therefore, I was very aware from the outset that this research involved a multitude of issues and a variety of participating cohorts: policy makers, principals, coordinators, teachers, and students. As a

result, a variety of methods would be needed in order to ensure that as much data as possible could be collected to develop a full picture. The methods of inquiry needed to be appropriate to the aims. If the aim were to collect data from principals regarding the logistical challenges of providing the LCA programme, then Photovoice would not be an appropriate method. Whereas if the aim was to collect data from LCA students about their lived experience of the programme, then Photovoice could prove very useful. This in keeping with Aristotle's dictum that each 'science' has its own methods and these methods can only be found in the distinctive subject matter. Foucault believed that method should be carefully chosen and should be dependent on the construction of the problem or object of the research. This should lead the researcher to a choice of strategies or methods. As such, the method understood as the path towards the result is not given *a priori* but rather is something that is shaped, reviewed, and refined throughout the research process. It is this rationale that underpins my mixed methods research design. My research took place in phases, whereupon, after each phase, analysis took place. This analysis informed the next phase of the research. This will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

5.3 The Rationale for Using Mixed Methods Research

As noted by Greener et al. (1989), there are five major reasons for using mixed methods research. They are as follows:

1. Triangulation: cross-checking the existence of some phenomena and the veracity of individual accounts by gathering data from a number of participants and a number of sources and comparing and contrasting one account with another in order to ensure as full and balanced as study as possible,
2. Complementarity: finding clarification or seeking elaboration of the results from one method with the results from another method,
3. Initiation: finding paradoxes or contradictions of the results from one method to another that may lead to a re-framing of the research question,
4. Development: using the finding of one method to help inform another method, and
5. Expansion: ensuring depth and breadth in the research.

These five reasons were very important for my research. Triangulation is discussed in more detail later on in the chapter. The fact that methods chosen were complementary to each other meant that data gathered from one method could be enhanced, elaborated, and developed. For example, data gathered in student interviews was then used to design the activities of student workshops.

It was of crucial importance to me that the field research be mutually beneficial for both the researcher and the participants involved. I wanted to ensure that schools also gained from the experience. The data gathered pertaining to each school was presented to the coordinator of that school. Each principal and coordinator said they would like to use the information gathered to assist in their own LCA programme evaluation. This was done very carefully; ensuring that all data given was anonymised and that information shared with the school pertained to their school only. Teachers were also offered the opportunity to take part in a Community of Practice. I decided to use a Community of Practice model, as I wanted to draw on and acknowledge the wealth of experience and knowledge that the teacher participants had. This afforded teachers the opportunity to share experiences and resources and to find opportunities of affirmation and encouragement amongst colleagues. The Community of Practice offered teachers the opportunity to review the LCA programme and express their opinion on how or if the programme could be changed.

Mixed methods also provide experiences that are opportunities for lifelong learning. As a young student teacher, I was incredibly fortunate to have Pádraig Hogan as a tutor. He often spoke about teaching as a journey of lifelong learning and explained that the day you think you know everything is a sad day because that is the day you stop learning. This really inspired me and has continued to inspire me ever since. Therefore, I wanted to ensure that the research design afforded everyone involved the opportunity to gain new skills and to learn from each other. I wanted to ensure that I did not present myself as the 'expert' but rather was there to listen and to learn from all the participants involved in the research, especially the students.

A mixed methods research design lends itself to 'practical enquiry' that speaks to policy and policy makers and informs practice (Hammersley, 2000). Mixed methods can also allow for evidence-based policy decisions (Ritchie, 2003; Tashakorri and Teddlie, 2003a). The overarching aim of my research is to effect policy decisions relating to the LCA curriculum and, as such, I felt that a mixed methods design best studied my study.

5.3.1 Mixed Methods Research Design

The primary aim of this research was to gather and analyse the data in such a way that allowed themes and issues to emerge organically, as well as ensuring the amplification of teacher and student voice. Therefore, I was drawn to mixed methods research design, which incorporated quantitative research methods but which also had a strong emphasis on qualitative methods. I wished to use a variety of

research methods that afforded participants as much opportunity as possible to have their voices heard.

Verma and Mallick (1999) define quantitative research as 'any approach to data collection where the aim is to gather information that can be quantified; that is to say it can be counted or measured in some form or another.' (Verma and Mallick, 1999, p. 26). It was important for me to gather quantitative data before beginning field research. I wanted to study local issues pertaining to the four case study schools, but I also wanted to see if these issues were indicative of national issues. I wanted to be able to contextualise the experiences of the four case study schools within the national experience of the LCA programme. Shimahara (1984) asserts that human experience is shaped in context and that events cannot be understood adequately if isolated from their contexts. Chapter Two of this study sought to explore the historical context of the development of vocational education in Ireland and how this impacts on the lived experience of LCA students today. An analysis of the quantitative data also helped to inform the field research; for example, what was obvious from the quantitative data was that the numbers of students completing the LCA programme had remained low and had in fact progressively fallen from a high of 7% in 2010/2011 to 4.7% in 2016/2017 (DES website). Through my inquiry, I wanted to discover why this was the case.

The quantitative research data gathered at the beginning of this research was very useful and helped me to gain a strong understanding of the genesis of the LCA programme, as well as allowing me to contextualise the programme within the broader Irish educational landscape. Although useful, quantitative research can feel indirect and abstract. One has a feeling of grouping experiences together as similar and adding or 'quantifying' them. In keeping with a qualitative rationale, I wished to have those whom I was studying speak for themselves.

Qualitative research implies a direct concern with the 'lived or 'felt' experience of those whom one is studying. Like Foucault, Dewey places strong emphasis on experience (1929a; 1916b). Dewey believes that all inquiry arises out of qualitative life, or the lived experience of life. In other words, all inquiry derives from the environment in which humans are directly involved. Thus, according to Dewey, the qualitative relates to 'concerns or interests' or 'values' (Dewey, 1916b, p.4). This helped to orient my research, as carrying out an evaluation of the LCA programme is tied up with examining values; what is valued in education, in the curriculum, and in the school. Dewey also highlights the importance of experience in developing forms of inquiry. Inquiry is developed within experience itself, with the aim of understanding it more clearly and being able to respond to it more intelligently. Foucault also talks about the transformative effects of inquiry on both the subject and the object. He affirms that

research simultaneously transverses and transforms both the researcher and the research problem. He states that 'a field of experiences in which the subject and the object are both constituted only under certain conditions, but in which they are constantly modified in relation to each other' (Foucault in Faubion, 1998). Indeed, '[t]he research not only changes what the researcher thinks but – by analysing the character and correlations of its objects on its axes of knowledge, power, and subjectivations – it is configured as a contingently produced entity liable to transformation' (Ferreira-Neto, 2018, para. 2)

Hence the research possesses the possibility of changing the state of things and producing a new reality. This was important to me when carrying out this research. Not only did I want to learn about the experience of LCA students completing the programme, I also wanted them to be fully involved in the experience of research just as I too wished to learn and be transformed during the experience of research. That is why being a reflexive researcher was so important to me. I kept a reflective journal throughout the process and used my reflections and analysis to continue to inform each stage of the research. Ross states that there is an important role for appraisal in qualitative research. She states that 'the function of criticism is to describe the essential qualities of the phenomena, to interpret the meanings and relationships among these qualities; and to give a reasoned judgement about the significance and value of those things (Sherman and Webb, 2005, p.18). This is keeping with Foucault, who highlights the notion that inquiry through research can change the state of things and produce a new reality. Sherman and Webb state that certainly quantitative researcher generates an abundance of information but wonder 'what does it tell the teacher to do?' (Ibid, p.19). They contest that the 'teacher wonders how such researchers can claim to know more and more, and more minutely, and not be able to indicate the significance or use of that knowledge' (ibid, p.19). I want to ensure that my research is useful to those students, teachers, coordinators, and principals who gave up their time to participate in it. The research design developed over the course of my inquiry had incorporated into it an emancipatory element. I wished my inquiry to enable the amplification of student voice and to make a difference to the lived experience of LCA students.

A mixed methods design best suited my study as I was working with a variety of cohorts: those involved in the initial design and implementation of the LCA programme included principals, coordinators, teachers and students. However, as mentioned earlier, methods used to gather information from policy makers and principals for example may not be best suited to gathering information from students. From my many years of experience of teaching and particularly of teaching LCA students, I was very aware that students enjoy 'doing' and working collaboratively as well as working individually; therefore, I wanted to ensure that my research design would facilitate this. It

was also really important to me that students were offered a variety of ways in which to respond. Many (not all) students who complete the LCA programme have literacy difficulties. One of the eight underlying principles underpinning the rationale of the LCA programme is to improve students' literacy. I wanted to offer students a variety of methods in answering the research question such as individual interviews, group work in student workshops, and Photovoice, as well as narrative inquiry. I wanted students to feel empowered and I wanted to recognise the many different ways in which students could voice their opinions and analysis. This study wanted to recognise and value difference, not just in theory, but in practice. This is also in keeping with the rationale of the LCA programme, which places active methodologies as one of its key principles.

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods allowed me to view the broad overall issues of the national LCA curriculum as well as allowing me to look specifically at local issues. Mixed methods allowed for multiple approaches in answering my research question, rather than restricting my choice. It allowed for creativity and encouraged me to take an eclectic approach to research design and data collection methods. It also allowed for creativity on the part of the participants; i.e. the use of Photovoice. However, what is fundamental is the research question. With the research question always in mind, *Does the lived experience of the LCA programme continue to marry with the aims upon which is was based?*, I constructed my research design in such a way as to ensure the best chance of obtaining useful answers, as well as ensuring that participants were given multiple and varied opportunities of having their voices heard. Therefore, a mixed methods design, which followed a sequential typology and placed an emphasis on qualitative methods of data collection, was chosen. This mixed methods designed utilised a case study approach.

5.4 Case Study

Qualitative research, sometimes referred to as 'naturalistic inquiry' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), focuses on the natural settings of the research. The context of the inquiry must not be constructed or contrived or modified but must be taken as they are. In keeping with this I decided to conduct my research in four schools over a ten-month period; investigating students', teachers', coordinators' and principals' perceptions and lived experiences of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme as part of a collective case study; the case study being the LCA curriculum itself. I choose to conduct the research over the course of a full school year, as I wanted to immerse myself in each of the four schools as fully as I could in order to get a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of LCA students and teachers. I had lunch in the staffroom with teachers, I sat in the General Purpose (GP) areas and classrooms with students, I saw assemblies take place, I spoke with secretaries and SNAs; all of this helped me to come to a deeper and broader understanding of life for LCA students in each of the four schools. A case

study, sometimes described as 'the study of an instance in action' (Cohen et al., 2000, p.161.) best suited my intention to evaluate the LCA curriculum and examine how different actors perceive it. Yin states that the case study method is best utilised when descriptive and explanatory questions are posed and when a first-hand understanding of people and events is sought.

The case study approach

> [..] provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply presenting them with abstract theories or principals. Indeed, a case study can enable readers to understand how ideas and abstract principles fit together. Case studies can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis. Case studies can establish cause and effect. Indeed, one of the strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects. Cohen et al., 2000, p.181).

This is in keeping with Cornbleth, who stated that 'curriculum as practice cannot be understood adequately or changed substantially without attention to its setting or context. Curriculum is contextually shaped' (Cornbleth, 1990, p.6). Through the gathering and analysis of quantitative date, as well as tracing the historical curricular developments pertinent to the LCA programme, I have examined the context from which the LCA curriculum emerged. The research carried out in the form of a mixed methods collective case study attempts to understand the localised contexts within which LCA exists. I believed that a collective case study using a mixed methods approach had the potential to capture different perspectives of the same reality, namely the LCA curriculum, particularly across the four sites.

5.5 Phases of Research

As already alluded to, my research took place in phases. I wished to be reflexive and analytical when carrying out the field research and, as such, I wanted each phase to inform the next, through a process of analysis and reflection. This is in keeping with Dewey, who believed that each 'phase' of inquiry had the potential for clarifying experiences and directing the inquiry (Dewey, 1938).

5.5.1 Phase 1: A review of the literature and gathering of quantitative data

The research began by gathering quantitative data pertaining to the LCA programme such as the number of schools offering the programme, the type of schools offering the programme, the number of students following the programme, the number of girls in comparison to the number of boys

following the programme, the number of students obtaining a pass, merit or distinction, and the various destination studies available. The last destination survey was completed in 2010. This is an area that warrants further study and will be explored in a subsequent chapter examining the progression routes of LCA graduates. The quantitative data was analysed and used to inform the qualitative research that took place in the four case study schools. Quantitative data was also gathered at the beginning of field research in each school, using the schools' enrolment numbers and LCA policy. This was then compared with national statistics. Qualitative methodologies then followed in each school: semi-structured interviews, student workshops (utilising arts-based narrative inquiry and Photovoice), focus groups with teachers (using a community of practice model), and semi-structured interviews with key stake holders.

5.5.2 Phase 2: Sampling and Information Sessions

The research focused on four schools in the Northwest of Ireland; one in Co. Leitrim (mixed school), two in Co. Donegal (mixed schools), and one in Co. Sligo (mixed school). I focused my study on schools in this geographical location for a number of reasons. Firstly, very little educational research has been carried out on the Northwest of Ireland. I wished to address this imbalance. Secondly, the Western Seafront is traditionally seen as a disadvantaged area and, as such, there are less opportunities for employment. As one of the main aims of the LCA programme is to prepare students for the world of work, I wanted to examine how lack of employment affects students' and teachers' perceptions of the LCA curriculum. Thirdly, the research design will ensure that both teachers and students in this location have the opportunity to effectively express their responses to, and perceptions of, the LCA curriculum.

I began by researching which schools in Sligo, Leitrim, and Donegal offer the LCA programme. Out of the 27 schools in Co. Donegal, 16 offered the LCA programme. Out of these 16 schools, 10 were designated DEIS schools. Out of these 16 schools offering the programme, two were Voluntary Secondary schools. Out of the seven schools in Co. Leitrim, only one school offered the LCA programme. Out of the 13 schools in Co. Sligo, 6 schools offered the LCA programme; 3 of which are designated DEIS schools. This proved to be indicative of an emerging theme of social reproduction. Students predominantly from a lower socio-economic backgrounds tended to opt to complete the LCA programme. I then wrote a letter to the principals of these schools explaining my research and asking if they would like to take part. I included my email address and phone number on the letter. Only one school replied and asked to meet with me to discuss the project further. I then sent an email to the above set of schools again, explaining my research and inviting them to take part. I followed up these emails with a phone call to each school. In some cases, I managed to speak with principals directly. In

other cases, I left a message with the secretary or was asked to phone back. I met with schools who expressed an interest in getting involved. Some schools were interested but felt that their LCA numbers were too low or they just didn't have the time. In the end, the four schools involved in the research are the four schools who agreed to take part. I had initially hoped to work with schools with different gendered cohorts. However, the vast majority of schools in this geographical area offering the programme were mixed schools; there were two all-girls schools offering the programme, but they declined to take part in the research as the numbers enrolled on the programme were too low. Although my research was carried out in mixed schools, the gendered nature of the programme was still very evident. Out of the four participating schools, only 10 girls were enrolled on the programme in comparison to thirty-three boys. These schools will be referred to as School A, School B, School C, and School D.

I began by meeting with the principal and coordinator in each school. I explained the research and what it would entail for the school. I then arranged to hold an information session for teachers and students who wished to take part in the research. I asked the schools to inform parents of the LCA students that they were also invited. The information sessions took place in each of the four schools in early September 2018. I had suggested having the information sessions in the evening to facilitate any parents who wished to attend, but each of the schools felt that there was a strong possibility the LCA students may not attend if it was to take place outside school time, therefore the sessions took place during school time.

Information Sessions (Beginning of September 2018)

The information sessions in each of the four schools took place in the classroom of the LCA coordinator. The LCA students referred to these classrooms as the LCA room, as it is used predominantly by LCA students. I arrived early in all four schools and set up a PowerPoint containing information on the research and what would be involved if one chose to take part. The LCA coordinators attended the sessions, as did some class teachers. I was informed by the coordinators that other teachers were interested in being involved but could not make the information session due to teaching commitments. I gave the coordinators the consent forms and information sheets to distribute to those interested teachers. I also offered a reminder that my contact details were on the form if they had any questions.

I explained to students that I wanted to hear their opinions and hear about their experiences of the LCA programme. I explained that they were no right or wrong answers and that all opinions would be valued. I informed students that I was a teacher but was not there in a teaching capacity; rather, I had

come to learn from them. I also explained that participation was completely voluntary. They may choose not to take part or choose to cease participation at any time without offering an explanation and without negative consequences. This was to ensure that those who took part did do freely. There was a question-and-answer session at the end. Students had questions about when I would meet them, how often I would be coming in and how long the research would take. I handed out the consent forms and went through the information sheets with students. I explained that the students themselves needed to sign the consent form and if they were under 18 then they also needed to get the consent form signed at home by a parent/guardian. (Please see Appendix 1: Consent Form - Parents, Appendix 2: Consent Form – Student Over 18, Appendix 5 – Information Sheet – Students and Appendix 6: Information Sheet- Parents)

5.5.3 Phase 3: Student Interviews (September 2018)

As this study aims to foreground student voice and place these voices at the heart of analysis I believed it important to begin my field research with LCA students. The interviews with students were face to face and adopted a semi structured approach using open ended questions, which allowed respondents to 'answer the question in their own way and in their own words i.e. the research is responsive to the participants' own frame of reference' (Cohen, Mannion, Morrison, 2000, p.270). According to Briggs (1986), good interviews are those that encourage the interviewee to talk freely about their points of view. Such interviews produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspective. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) contend that an effective approach to qualitative interviewing is to treat the interviewee as an expert. I was drawn to this approach for several reasons. Firstly, it ensured that the interviewee felt that he/she is an equal partner in the study. This was important for me in addressing issues of power. I wanted to ensure that the students felt in control of the interview and free to express their opinion in their own style. Secondly, it established the student as the one who knows and the interviewer as the one who is coming to learn. This was very important for me, as I had come to learn from the students. Thirdly, it shows the student that his or her ideas and opinions are recognised, respected and are valuable. The semi-structured interview allowed me to follow an interview guide (a division of the interview into topics that will be covered with some initial wording of questions and a list of areas to be explored) and also provided me with the freedom to ask follow up questions that built on the responses received. This style of interviewing appealed to me as it gave the students the space to express meaning in his or her own words and to give direction to the interview. I was aware that this style of interview involved special considerations and as such certain ethical considerations were adhered to. These will be addressed later in the chapter when I come to talk about ethics.

The interviews with students were a different experience in each school. In School A, the interviews took place in a room used by students at break time. It had two sofas and some beanbags. It was a very informal setting, and this certainly assisted the relaxed nature of the interview. It also helped address power relations, as I was not sitting behind a desk. All students in School A volunteered to take part in the study. I interviewed three girls and eight boys. One student was absent, so I came back the following week to carry out his interview. They all seemed very eager to speak and have their voices heard.

The setting in School B was very different. The interviews took place in the LCA coordinator's office, as that was the only free room the school could provide. I did not sit behind the desk but rather took two chairs and placed them beside each other. One for me and one for the student. Again, all students in School B volunteered to take part. The coordinator expressed surprise at this as they felt there would be three or four who 'would not be bothered'. The interviews took place over the course of a morning and afternoon. I interviewed one girl and eight boys. Two more girls joined the class later in the year. They were interviewed in November. They took part in the student workshops. I tried to make students feel as comfortable as possible. I introduced myself as Annmarie and told them to call me by my first name. I again reminded them that I was not here as a teacher but as someone who had come to learn from them. All students were reminded that it was completely up to them whether they wanted to take part in the research. Students seemed eager to take part.

The setting was yet again different in School C. The interviews took place in the GP (General Purpose) area. At first, I thought this might be distracting but rather the reverse was the case. The canteen is situated in the GP area. The first student who arrived to be interviewed was very confident and chatty. Before the interview started, he said 'Will I ask can we get tea' (Interview 1, School C). I agreed and the canteen lady brought us over a cup of tea and some biscuits. She very kindly, without being asked, did the same for each of the following interviews. This added to a very relaxed setting and did a lot to ease any felt power differentials, as the interviews took the form of a chat and a cuppa. Students seemed very anxious to talk and express their opinions. There was only one girl in this LCA group and seven boys.

In School D, the interviews took place in a small room at the end of a corridor near the principal's office. The coordinator said that between LCA 1 and LCA 2, there were twenty-four students. All students wanted to take part in the workshops. However, most of the LCA 1 students said they would not take part in the interviews, as they had just started the programme and felt they would not have much to tell me. I offered the opportunity of having an individual interview at the end of the year if

they wished. All LCA 2 students took part in the interviews. There were three girls and ten boys. Three of the boys were absent and they were interviewed the following week in the same location. Again, this was a relaxed setting. The room was very small, with some chairs and a desk. I did not sit behind the desk but rather placed two chairs beside each other. All students were reminded that participation was voluntary and that I was not there as a teacher but rather as someone wishing to learn from them.

5.5.4 Phase 4: Student Workshop – Part One: Utilising Groupwork (October 2018)

After the first set of interviews, I spent some time reflecting on what I had learned. The interviews were very useful and the interview guide worked very well. The interviews were very much student led. The interview guide allowed me to ask follow up questions and these took the interviews in directions that were initiated by students while also ensuring that certain topics were discussed. However, I felt that the interviews were limited in that they were purely verbal. This suited some students but not others. As previously stated, I wanted to ensure that students were offered a variety of ways in which to express their opinion. The interviews did not allow the students to be actively involved in a creative or kinaesthetic way. In addition, in the interviews, students expressed a lot of similar opinions but also had some different insights. They all had a unique lived experience of the programme. The workshops offered me an opportunity to allow students to respond to the research in a different way. The workshops allowed students to listen to the opinions of others and to respond to them in group discussions. It offered students the opportunity to learn from each other. Some students may feel more comfortable working in groups than individually. By offering a variety of research methods I wanted to ensure that each student was offered a means of participating that suited them. This also helped me to gather a variety of rich data.

For the purpose of this research, I make a slight distinction between workshops and focus groups, in that the focus groups with teachers were discussion based, while the workshops with students, while having discussion, were also activity based. It was hoped that the workshops would help to develop transversal competencies such as communication, time management, and organisation, as well as develop other skills such as analysis, stimulating reflection on reality, developing writing skills as well as basic skills in photography. It was very important to me that the research be mutually beneficial.

Barone and Eisner state that Arts Based Education Research ‘at its best is capable of persuading the percipient to see educational phenomena in different new ways, and to entertain questions about them that otherwise might have been left unasked’ (*G*reen et al., 2006, p.96). Using an Arts based narrative approach allowed students to construct their own narrative of their educational experience of the LCA curriculum and in effect allowed them to tell their story. An Arts based narrative approach

elicits data from participants through a means that is not rigidly controlled by the research hence returning power and agency to the participants involved. Bakhtin states that using an arts based approach allows the data to become polyphonic 'offering an array of vernaculars that reflect a chronotope of personal histories, experiences, and outlooks, none of which is necessarily privileged over the other' (Green, Camilli, Elmore, 2016, p. 79). This involved students participating in activities such as vignettes, Photovoice, and conceptual mapping, as well as taking part in group discussions led by the researcher.

In keeping with Butler-Kisber, I believe that an Arts Based Narrative approach has the capacity to 'increase voice and reflexivity [..] and to expand the possibilities of multiple, diverse realities and understandings' (Butler-Kisber, 2008, p.268). Narrative inquiry amplifies voices that otherwise may have remained silent (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013). Thus, utilising an Arts Based Narrative approach allowed me to access rich layers of information that provide a more in-depth insight into participants points of view. The research both in theory and practice drew on the work of Anna Hickey-Moody in viewing art and pedagogy as affective. I contend, with Hickey-Moody, that arts-based methods can be used as 'a means through which young people can communicate complex ideas' and as such 'can make complex issues visible' (Hickey-Moody, 2017, p. 1084). In this study, the use of arts based methods help us to understand students' lived experiences of the LCA programme and how these experiences and everyday aesthetics impact on how valued and recognised these students feel. Arts based methods are an under utilised resource in the Irish Education field relating to inclusion and have not been used at all in research on the LCA programme. Therefore, the power of art-based research in examining alternative programmes in Irish Education, in this case the LCA programme, is as yet unexplored. This study aimed to address this gap in the field and by so doing offers a new way of looking of at the programme and the resulting issues of inclusion. By utilising arts based methods such as Photovoice students were offered different ways of communicating their experiences and this in turn provides an insight into the politics of policy as embodied. This allows us to view education and the spaces students occupy as emotional landscapes (Kenway and Youdell, 2011).

The first set of student workshops included individual work, concept mapping, the use of vignettes, as well as discussion. Vignettes are short stories about hypothetical people in certain situation, upon which participants are asked to formulate an opinion or comment on how they think the character in the story should act or how they themselves would act in such a situation (Hazel, 1995; Hughes, 1998; Barter and Renold, 1999, 2000; Schoenburg and Ravdal, 2000). Hughes highlights the capacity of vignettes in helping the researcher to explore participants' subjective belief systems by using 'stories about individuals, situations and structures which can make reference to important points in the study

of perceptions, beliefs and attitudes' (Hughes, 1998 p.381). Vignettes have been widely used as a complementary method in qualitative research (see Hazel, 1995; Hughes, 1998). I used vignettes in order to enhance existing data gathered from individual interviews as well as in an effort to generate as yet untapped data. I used vignettes in the student workshop to generate discussion about students lived experiences of the LCA programme. This allowed me to broaden the data collection from the personal experience of the LCA programme collected in student interviews to the wider collective student experience of the LCA programme. It also allowed students to contextualise their own experiences. The use of vignettes enabled students who did not wish to talk about their own personal experience to express opinions and beliefs based on how the character in the vignette should act.

The vignette was composed following reflection on and analysis of the individual student interviews. Emerging themes such as choice, inclusion, and perception were identified, and the vignette was developed based on these. Once developed, the vignette and associated questions was incorporated into the first student workshop. Questions following the vignette included how the students thought the character in the vignette felt and how they behaved and why, as well as how they themselves might feel or behave or respond in a similar situation and why. The reasons surrounding the students' responses were then freely explored, thus allowing students the space and time to re-define contexts and behaviours by drawing on their own experiences. Therefore, where the semi-structured interviews offered students a platform to draw on their own experiences, the vignettes provided an opportunity for students to comment on the experiences of others; enabling the students' judgement, evaluations, and meanings to be represented. This, I felt, was fundamental to my research exploring the experiences and perceptions of LCA students.

This first workshop also involved an introduction to Photovoice and narrative inquiry and provided students with a task to be completed before the second workshop. I explained to students that they would be asked to write a narrative piece to accompany two of their photographs, as well as discussing these photographs during the second workshop. The students liked the idea of taking photographs in order to 'present' their lived experience of the LCA programme. During the preparation phase, Photovoice was explained to the students. The students guided by the researcher discussed the LCA curriculum and their experiences of the LCA curriculum. They used this discussion to form concept maps. These concept maps aided students when considering what photographs to take. Students were issued with this guiding prompt - *Take photographs of anything that you think reflects your thoughts about or experiences of the LCA programme.*

Students could take up to ten photographs. Out of these, students picked two that they felt best described their thoughts or experiences of the LCA curriculum. Students then came up with a caption for each photograph and wrote a narrative to accompany the photograph. These photographs and the accompanying textual narration were used in the second workshop as a basis for discussion and storytelling. Some questions used to guide discussion around selection of photographs were:

- Why did you take this photograph?
- What does this image say to you?
- What do you see here?
- What is really happening here?
- How does this relate to your experience?
- Why does this problem/strength/condition exist?
- How could this image educate policy makers regarding a review of the curriculum on offer in LCA?
- What can we do to improve the situation or enhance these strengths?

This provided students with a guide to completing the task. It also allowed me time to adequately prepare for the second workshop. The students emailed me their chosen photographs, as well as their narrative piece. Some students just took one photograph, others decided to work in groups, others just sent a narrative piece. I printed all of this work out and had it on display for when the students arrived for the second workshop. This was a physical recognition for students that their opinions and the work they were doing as part of the research was important and valued.

5.5.5 Phase 5: Teacher/Coordinator/Principal Interviews (November 2018 – January 2019)

During the ten-week gap between Workshop One and Workshop Two with students, I conducted the teacher interviews. I began by working with students first as I wanted to use their lived experience of the programme to form the basis for the evaluation of the LCA programme. Teachers, coordinators, and principals clearly possess a wealth of professional expertise and experience relating to the LCA programme. However, this experience is a very different kind to the lived experience of students completing the programme. All teachers, coordinators, and principals interviewed had completed the Leaving Certificate Established and as such did not share the same lived experience of the LCA programme. The issues explored in teacher, coordinator, and principal interviews emerged during work with the students, as well as from the quantitative and desk-based research. This helped ensure that student voice was always at the centre of my research.

Like the student interviews, the interviews with teachers were also face to face and adopted a semi structured approach using open ended questions. As already discussed, this approach was adopted, as open ended questions allow respondents to 'answer the question in their own way and in their own words i.e. the research is responsive to the participants' own frame of reference' (Cohen, Mannion, Morrison, 2000, p.270). The overall rationale underpinning the method adopted for the student interviews was the same for interviews with teachers. It was important to me that I use a style of interview that would recognise and acknowledge the wealth of experience and depth of knowledge that teachers, coordinators, and principals possessed regarded LCA. I used semi-structured interviews and open-ended question to ensure that these participants effectively led the interview. The interview guide ensured that certain issues or topics were covered but also allowed the time and space to ask follow up questions and to explore emerging themes or issues.

In total, I interviewed 19 teachers, one SNA, four coordinators, and four principals. There were quite a few logistical challenges involved, as I needed to work around teachers' timetables and principals' busy schedules. It involved me going back and forth to the four schools over a two and a half month period; from November until the middle of January. This was difficult, as the schools were in three different counties, and I was also still teaching, albeit in a job-sharing capacity. There was an SNA assigned to the LCA class in School B. She came to me and asked if she could be interviewed as well. I was delighted. Her interview proved to be very interesting. She remained with the class all day. She was not a disciplinary figure but rather a pastoral figure for the students and hence had a wealth of experience about the everyday running of the programme.

All the interviews with principals took place in their offices. The interviews with two of the coordinators took place in the coordinator's office and the other two interviews took place in classrooms. Teacher interviews took place in a variety of places; classrooms, parents' rooms, small offices and in one case an empty GP area. This was indicative of the busy nature of schools and the lack of space. All interviews remained informal. Out of all the teachers, coordinators and principals interviewed, only one sat behind a desk. All other interviews were conducted with the participant and I sitting side by side. Although I followed an interview guide, it remained a work-in-progress. After each interview, I spent time reflecting and analysing how the interview went. I transcribed the interviews verbatim each evening and although this was extremely time consuming it did allow me to identify emerging themes while still in the field. This is in keeping with Galletta (2013), who argues that feedback begins to accumulate very quickly in the field and as such adjustments may need to be made to the interview guide. Having been in each of the schools for several weeks prior to teacher interviews proved very useful. I had sat in the staffroom with staff and shared lunch, I was welcomed

in everyday by secretaries who used my first name and who were all so incredibly helpful in organising meetings with principals etc. I had built up a rapport with the staff and hence teachers were very willing to speak with me. Issues explored in these interviews included: pathways into the programme (for students and teachers), experience of teaching on the programme, the curriculum on offer, level of challenge afforded by the LCA curriculum, unique assessment system of LCA, perception, inclusion, promotion, strengths and weaknesses of the programme, main challenges when teaching on the LCA programme. (Please see Appendix 3: Consent Form – Teachers and Appendix 7: Information Sheet – Teachers).

5.5.6 Phase 6: Student Workshop – Part Two Utilising Photovoice and Narrative Inquiry (End of January 2019)

The student workshop was designed as having two parts. The activities in the first workshop formed the basis for activities in the second workshop and gave students enough time to complete the Photovoice task. During the first workshop, Photovoice was explained to students and they were presented with a guide on how to go about taking photographs. The ethics of taking the photographs was also clearly explained, along with narrative inquiry.

Photovoice is an arts-based qualitative research technique and was developed in 1992 by Caroline C Wang as a means for women living in rural China to communicate important health issues with policy makers. Wang stated, *'what experts think is important may not match what people at the grassroots think is important'* (Wang, 1999). In this current study, Photovoice enabled the students to control the photographic process in order to communicate their express, reflect, and discuss their everyday experience of the LCA programme. The use of Photovoice allowed me to acknowledge the significance of student experience in curricular and programme evaluation. Paulo Freire noted that one means of enabling people to begin to think critically about the social and political forces that influence their everyday lives was the visual image (Freire, 1970). This Freirean approach highlights the expertise of the students; expertise professionals and outsiders may lack. However, Wang and Burris make clear that:

> People merely creating images is not the key to photovoice, however. The process also requires that people define these issues. Photovoice entails people's discussing the images that they have produced, and by doing so, they give meaning to, or interpret, their images (Wang and Burris, 1997, p.187)

Therefore, discussion formed an important element of the student workshop. The second workshop began with students walking around and examining the photographs and written pieces. Following my request, students had not included their names on the pieces of work. This also acted as a very

good warm up activity; students were up and moving around and already discussing various issues with each other. The workshops were very productive. Some students who seemed quiet during the interviews were a lot more animated in the workshops.

During this workshop, the LCA students presented their experiences of the LCA curriculum in the form of narratives on their photographs of objects, symbols, or situations that they felt best depicted what the LCA programme means to them personally and/or socially. The students revealed what is displayed in their photographs in the form of a narrative that is both written and spoken. The written pieces were on display beside the photographs and students were also given the option of speaking about what they had photographed and why. Out of the 43 students who took part in the research, 4 decided not to verbally present. They were happy with their written pieces and photographs. This highlighted for me the benefit of using a variety of methods in collected data. Those students who did not feel verbally confident could still express their opinion through photo elicitation and narrative inquiry. By sharing their photographs and narratives with each other students were able to engage in dynamic interactions regarding the themes that emerged. I utilised Larkin et al. (2007, p.36) SHOWED method in order to stimulate discussion and interaction between participants. SHOWED is an acronym for a series of questions that may be asked. What do we **S**ee? What is really **H**appening? How does the narrative relate to **O**ur lives? **W**hy does this weakness or strength exist? How might we become **E**mpowered now that we better understand the problem? What can we **D**o about it? This helped to stimulate conversation yet allowed a freedom for those conversations to take different directions.

The students were involved in three stages of analysis: selecting (choosing the photographs which they felt best depicted their experiences of the LCA programme), contextualising (telling their story about what the photograph means to them), and codifying (identifying themes and issues that emerged from the examination and group discussion of the photographs produced). This meant that the process of coding the emerging themes from the photographs and their accompanying written narrative pieces as well as the verbal explanation of the photographs was very much student led. The student voice was amplified during this process. Students were not passive subjects but rather were actively involved in the analysis of the data gathered. This meant students participated in a reflective process; critically discussing emerging themes.

5.5.7 Phase 7: Teacher Focus Group – Community of Practice Model (April 2019)

Individual teacher interviews were followed up by teacher focus groups. This took place once student interviews and student workshops were completed. I wanted information gathered in the work completed with students to inform the teacher focus groups. As alluded to at the beginning of this

chapter an emerging theme was that no-one is listening. I wanted the work done with teachers to be informed by student voice. The teacher focus groups took the format of a community of inquiry. Hess (1968) noted distinct advantages of focus group interviews, these include; synergism, snowballing, stimulation, security and spontaneity. Focus groups offer an opportunity to elicit a range of responses and opinions and because each participant is not required to respond to every question or comment, the responses that are made may be more genuine and substantial (Schoenfeld, 1998; Hisrich and Peters, 1982). The teacher interviews focused on the personal experience of the teacher. Their own experience of teaching on the LCA programme, whereas the use of focus groups made it possible to explore different avenues of importance and allowed participants to be informed and learn from the experiences of others. According to Byers and Wilcox one of the major advantages of conducting focus groups in educational research is the ''loosening effect''. In a relaxed, collaborative setting, participants are more likely to express opinions and perceptions candidly thus facilitating reflective responses (Hillebrandt, 1979). From the initial teacher interviews, it was clear that LCA teachers and coordinators wanted an opportunity for open discussion with other LCA teachers, as well as an opportunity to share experiences, discuss difficulties and challenges, along with methods for overcoming these challenges. Therefore, the community of practice model offered a coming together experience where teachers could talk about their experiences and share in the experiences of others. The community of practice model allowed me to guide the discussion, but it also allowed for the acknowledgment of the wealth of expertise within the room and thus not present myself as an 'expert'. The issues explored in the teacher focus groups were informed by emerging themes from individual teacher interviews, as well as fieldwork completed with students

Issues explored in the interviews and focus groups with teachers:

- How do teachers teaching on the programme perceive the LCA curriculum?
- How do teachers not teaching on the LCA programme perceive it?
- What level of support is offered to schools offering the programme and teachers teaching on the programme?
- What are the main strengths/weaknesses of the LCA programme?
- What could or should be done to improve the programme?
- Are links with industry and local employers important?
- How do you view curriculum?
- Are teachers seen as curriculum makers and shapers?
- Progression routes for LCA students?
- Senior cycle review and the review of apprenticeships

- Do they feel that the curriculum on offer challenges students and caters for their academic needs?
- Do they feel that the LCA curriculum allows for a different style of teaching?
- What are their views on how the curriculum is assessed?
- What are their views on how is the LCA curriculum is perceived by the whole school body?
- Does this have any impact on levels of recognition afforded to LCA students?
- What are the pathways into LCA in the school?
- How is LCA promoted within the school?
- What are the main challenges they face when teaching on the LCA programme?

5.5.8 Phase 8: High Profile Interviews (January – May 2019)

Over the course of my research, I interviewed two members of the original LCA steering committee as well as a former National LCA Advisor. These interviews were semi-structured in nature and followed an interview guide. Senator Feargal Quinn was chairperson of the LCA steering committee and Prof. Jim Gleeson was the Education Officer. Harry Freeman worked for almost twenty years as National LCA Advisor. It was so important for me in my research to interview these three individuals. These participants possessed a vast amount of knowledge about the LCA programme. Harry Freeman has worked with countless schools over the years, assisting them in introducing the programme and supporting them in continuing to offer the programme. Senator Quinn and Prof. Gleeson were there from the very beginning. They worked on the design of the LCA programme as well as the aims and objectives underpinning this design. Prof. Gleeson was also involved in various curricular initiatives prior to the introduction of the LCA programme, in particular, the Senior Certificate and the Vocational Preparation and Training programme. This was very important as these programmes were precursors to the LCA programme and had a huge influence in the design of the LCA programme. One of my aims during this research was to bridge the gap between policy and practice. I wanted to understand the decision for the design of the LCA programme; the hopes and vision of those involved in the programme design and how that is lived out in schools today. As themes such as inclusion and recognition emerged in the data gathered from students and teachers, I therefore wished to ask Senator Quinn and Prof. Gleeson about issues such as the 'ring-fenced' nature of the programme and progression routes for LCA students. I needed to work around the schedules of these participant therefore the interviews with Senator Quinn took place in January 2019 as did the interview with Harry Freeman. The interview with Prof. Gleeson took place in May 2019 (Please see Appendix 4 -Consent Forms for Key Stakeholders and Appendix 8 - Information Sheet for Key Stakeholders)

5.5.9 Phase 9: Debrief session with students and teacher/coordinators/principals (May 2019)

The debrief session in each school took place during May 2019. Students, teachers, coordinators, and principals were all invited. I thanked everyone for the time they had given me and for all the experiences and opinions they had shared. I asked if anyone had any questions or anything they would like clarified. I left my contact details if anyone wished to contact me with any questions.

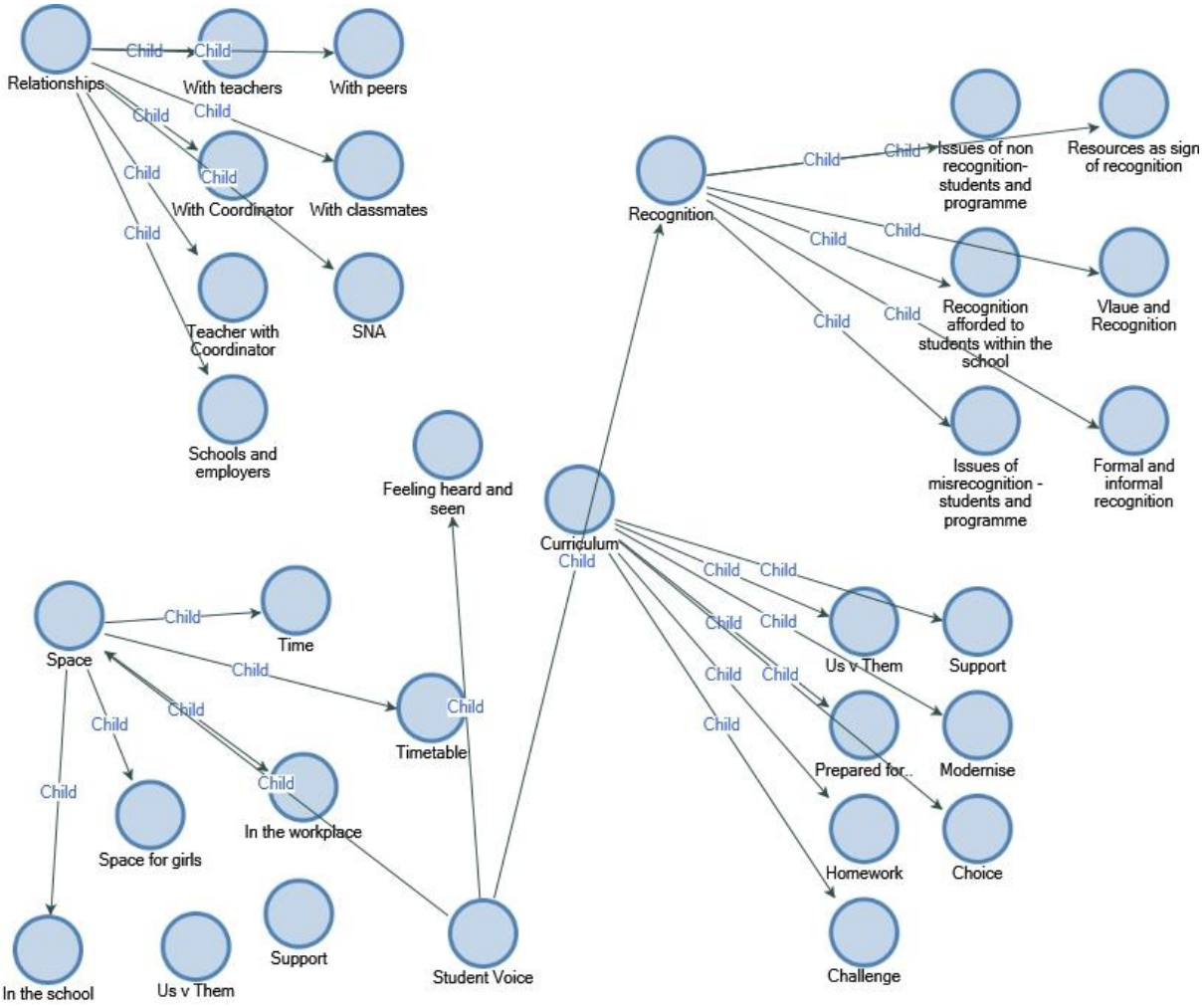
5.6 Thematic Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis (TA) 'is a method for systematically identifying, organizing and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set, TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences' (2004, p.57). I used a primarily inductive approach to data coding i.e. the analysis is driven by what is in the data. The aim of the research was to amplify the voice of the participants and hence allowed the data to determine the themes analysed. The emerging themes derived from the content of the data gathered. It was of crucial importance to me that what was mapped during analysis closely matched the semantic data content. However, my approach was also deductive as I drew on various theoretical constructs when examining emerging themes such as: power, space, agency, voice (Foucault), ways of learning, recognition of difference and student/teacher relationships (Freire), the embodied nature of policy and the affective nature of curriculum (Hickey-Moody).

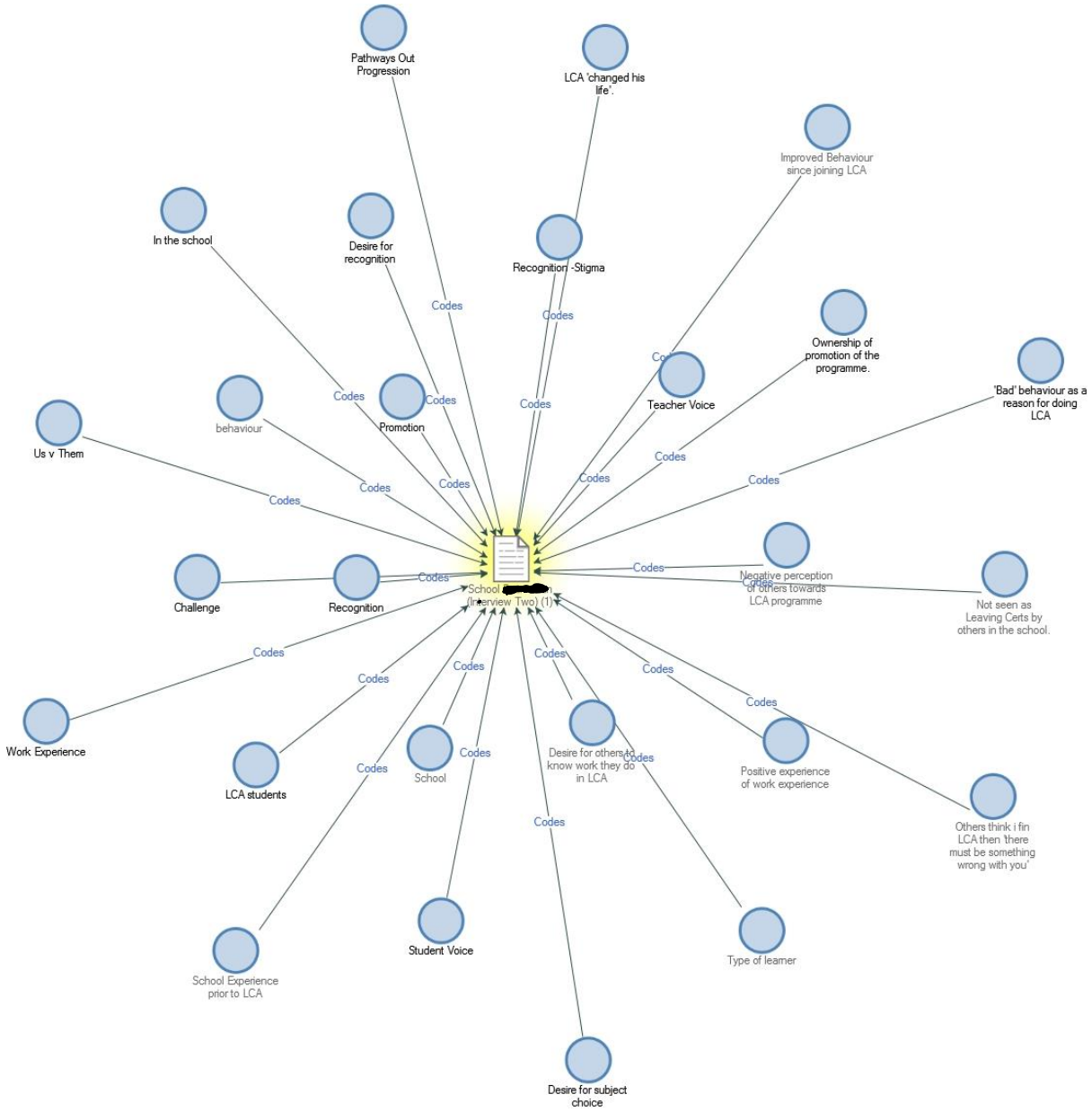
Braun and Clarke set out a six-phase guide to carrying out Thematic Analysis which I found extremely useful:

- Phase 1 -Familiarise yourself with the data
- Phase 2 - Generate initial codes
- Phase 3 -Generate initial themes
- Phase 4 - Review and develop potential themes
- Phase 5 -Refine, define and name themes
- Phase 6 - Produce the report

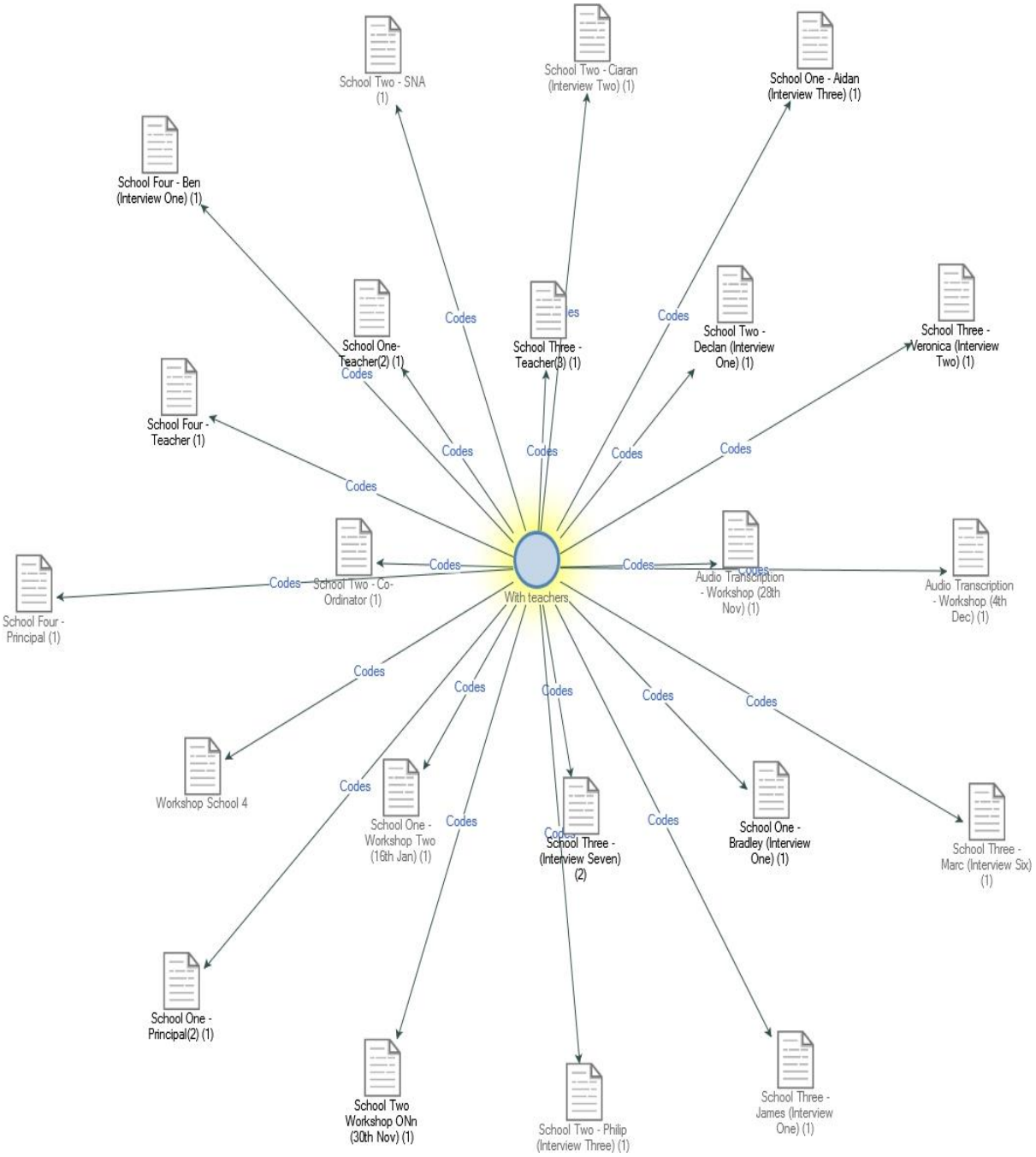
Phase One involved really immersing myself in the data. I read and re-read textual data as well as listening to the audio recordings. I had transcribed the data verbatim and printed out then transcripts. I read the transcripts critically and analytically and made notes on the transcripts as I read. In phase Two I began to generate initial codes



Braun & Clarke state that 'codes identify and provide a label for a feature of data that is potentially relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.61). Codes identified were both semantic and latent; looking at the surface level of the text but also what lies beneath the surface of the data. I coded each transcript fully before moving on to the next. I was reflexive throughout this process returning to previously coded material to review and possibly recode as codes began to develop. The following diagram shows an example of a coded transcript from a Student in School C.



Phase three involved identifying emerging themes. A theme 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned responses or meaning within the data set' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). I reviewed the data again and clustered codes that shared a unifying feature together into a theme. At the end of this phase I have developed a thematic map with data collated to each theme. As the sample diagram below illustrates:



The next phase entailed a review of the themes developed. In doing this I followed questions suggested by Braun & Clarke in order to carry out a comprehensive review of the themes developed. These were as follows:

- Is this a theme?
- If it is a theme, what is the quality of this theme (does it tell me something useful about the data set and my research question)?

- What are the boundaries of this theme (what does it include and exclude)?
- Are there enough (meaningful) data to support this theme (is the theme thin or thick)?
- Are the data too diverse and wide ranging (does the theme lack coherence)? (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.68)

Phase five and six entailed drawing on relevant theoretical constructs when examining and analysing these themes. I then divided these themes into thematic chapters which comprise the remainder of the thesis.

5.7 Reliability, Validity and Rigour

I sought to guarantee reliability, validity, and rigour throughout the entire process of this study. I used various techniques and methods in doing this.

(i) Prolonged engagement in field research

Credibility was strengthened by a prolonged period in the field. This provided an opportunity for me to learn build trust, learn about the culture and context of each school, as well as check for misinformation. I designed the field research in such a way as it ensured a prolonged engagement with the case study schools. This allowed me to immerse myself in the world of the participants in my study. Kreftling (1991) observed that 'extended time period is important because as rapport increases, informants may volunteer different and often more sensitive information than they did at the beginning of the research project' (pp.217-218) This allowed me to gather rich data, as well as providing me with a very good understanding of each school setting. Spending a full academic year in the schools also enabled me, throughout the course of the thesis, to provide thick descriptions of the research and the setting that facilitated a contextual evaluation of the findings.

(ii) Triangulation.

Triangulation is important in providing rigour and reliability. Triangulation helped me to capture different perspectives on the LCA programme. Using more than one method and working with a mixed cohort allowed for a deeper understanding of the object of inquiry. According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 'triangulation involves the use of multiple and different methods, investigators, sources and theories to obtain corroborating evidence' (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 239). Triangulation helps the researcher to avoid bias as it cross examines the integrity of the data gathered. I used two triangulation techniques in my study. I used methodological triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). In my mixed methods research

design interviews, workshops, focus groups, Photovoice, and Vignette were all utilised. This allowed for the gathering of data in a variety of ways that ensure all participants were offered an opportunity to have their voice heard. It also allowed me to cross examine and analysis responses gathered from a varied cohort relating to the same research question. I also used data/informant triangulation. This meant that a variety of participants were involved in the research: policy makers, principals, coordinators, teachers and students. This allowed multiple perspectives to be put forth and analysed.

(iii) Member Checks

At the beginning of each workshop with students and at the beginning of the teacher focus groups a summary of the main finding thus far was presented. Participants were offered an opportunity to discuss and analyse these findings. This allows data to be constantly checked and tested, not only by the researcher but by the participants involved in the study (Guba, 1981). This was importance to my research, as it meant that not only were participants' voice amplified through the data gathered but it was also included in the analysis and interpretation of the data. This went some way towards eliminating researcher bias when it came to analysing and interpreting results.

(iv) Coding and re-coding

By using Braun and Clarke's guide when thematically analysing the data I was committed to coding and recording the data. This involved me fully immersing myself in the field data. After the initial coding was complete, I re-read all the transcripts and re-coded where necessary. This ensured that the themes which emerged were reflective of what was in the data gathered. Thus, all thematic chapters are based on the voice of participants.

(v) Reflexive practice and reflexive journal

Qualitative writers have long imparted the value of reflexivity. According to Krefling, reflexivity is 'an assessment of the influence of the investigator's own background, perceptions and interests in the qualitative research process' (Krefling, 1991, p. 218). It also highlights the importance of the researcher's own personal story and dismisses the idea that research takes place in a vacuum free from the influence of the wider context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). During the course of my research, I tried to be reflexive at all times. The research was designed in phases so as to allow time for reflection and analysis. This reflection and analysis then informed the next phase of research. I was reflexive when I was in the field, viewing my interviews guides as a work in progress and amending the schedule of questions etc. based on emerging issues and themes. Reflexive practice was also

accomplished through the use of a reflexive journal. A reflexive journal is defined by Wallenderf & Belk as 'reflexive documents kept by the researcher in order to reflect on, tentatively interpret, and plan data collection' (1989, p.77). The use of a reflexive journal also provided me with an enhanced understanding of personal bias and as such helped me to plan in such a way as to limit this bias. See extract below:

Sample from Reflexive Journal

Thoughts in brief after today..

Really productive day today. One student was absent. The workshop started off a little slowly. The coordinator walked me to the classroom and sat in for the first few minutes. At the beginning students did not seem as forthcoming as in the individual interviews. We started off by talking about the purpose of the research and I reminded students that they were free to cease participation at any time. They were all happy to continue. I called one student by name and the rest of the group expressed surprise that I had remembered his name after only meeting him once. I told them that I remembered all of their names. They thought that I wouldn't be able to and challenged me to name each student in the room. Once I had finished students were surprised but very happy. This impromptu activity really succeeded in generating a relaxed atmosphere. I also think it helped highlight the point that they are all recognised as individuals and that their contribution to this research is unique and valued. The coordinator joined in with the conversation and it was obvious that he had a close relationship with the students. After about 10 minutes he left for class and the students and I continued on for well over an hour. The workshop ended as students had class. Students were very talkative by the end of the workshop and had a lot to tell me. One student in particular spoke quite a lot while another boy didn't say too much. He enjoyed writing things down rather than speaking. Hopefully the Photovoice task in the next workshop will offer him more ways to contribute.

5.8 Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by Maynooth University Research Ethics committee. Ethical considerations were to the forefront throughout the entire field research. As Hughes states, 'Ethical practice is an ongoing interaction of values in shifting contexts and relationships rather than something delivered by a signed consent form or adherence to a static set of principals' (Hughes, 2005, p.231). Farrimond, in her chapter in the SAGE/BERA *Handbook of Educational Research*, contends that 'much ethical thinking about research is based on principles or values which are theorised to guide decision-making' (2017, p.76). She outlines six core principles which she argues underline the core

principals found in the BERA guidelines *Ethical Considerations for Educational Research* (BERA, 2011) as well as *The Code of Ethics* of the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2011). These are (i) Respect for persons, (ii) Justice, (iii) Beneficence (iv) Nonmaleficence (v) Fidelity (vi) Academic Freedom (Ibid). These six principles also guided my research. Goredema-Braid (2010) argues that ethical educational research draws on such norms in situational decision making. As such ethical considerations are ever present in research.

My participants were all under the age of eighteen and, as such, consent was sought from parents/guardians. However, I was conscious that most participants were close to becoming young adults and as such I ensured that I gained the assent of the students themselves and not just the consent of their 'proxies' namely parents/guardians or teachers (Alderson and Morrow, 2003; Lindeke et al., 2000). In keeping with Farrimond (2016, p.80), this was done in a number of ways. I introduced myself to students at the beginning of the research in the information sessions. We also met again individually in the first set of interviews. I explained what my research was about, why I was carrying it out, how it would be used and what their participation would entail. I then asked the students themselves if they would like to participate. I clarified how they could dissent. I made clear that they were free to change their mind about participating in the research at any time, without giving reasons and without any negative consequences. I ensure that they were opportunities at the end of the information session for students to ask questions or seek clarifications before deciding to participate. As this research was centred on listening to student voice, I wanted to ensure that I did that from the beginning in a very real and practical way.

The purpose of the research was clearly stated again at the beginning of each interview, focus group and workshop and opportunities were offered for students to ask questions, seek clarifications or cease participation. I assured all respondents that any data volunteered by them would be treated in confidence and anonymised with all identifying features removed. The limits of confidentiality were made clear in the consent form and information sheet. In accordance with Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy and subject to the requirements of legislation, including the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act, I ensured that the confidentiality of each participant was protected, and that each participant understood the extent of anonymity and confidentiality offered at all stages of the research from data gathering to dissemination. Respondents were made aware of their right to access their personal data and be provided with a copy upon request (this information was also made clear on the information sheet that each respondent was given before participating in the research). This is in line with Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy.

During the use of Photovoice, the following ethical guidelines regarding taking photos were given to students:

1. You must not take a photograph where someone's face is recognisable.
2. It is important not to take a picture that will affect the reputation of others.
3. Before taking a photograph, ask yourself the question: *Does the image I want to capture relate to the issue being discussed i.e. my thoughts and experiences of the LCA curriculum?*
4. Use cameras safely and correctly.
5. Do not put yourself in an unsafe situation in order to capture a photograph.
6. Any personal issues discussed in the workshops is private to the group and must be treated in confidence.
7. We must always treat each other with respect.

I gained permission from all four principals for students to take photographs within the school before the commencement of the student workshops. All photographs were taken during school time and students used their own phones to take the photographs. This was done in liaison with the LCA coordinators. Students picked two photographs that they had taken that they felt best described their thoughts or experiences of the LCA curriculum.

5.9 Bias

In a case study, the researcher is central to the collection and analysis of data (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p.87; Stake, 1995, p.91; Simons, 1996, p.225). Therefore, particular attention must be paid to bias (Cohen et al., 2000, p.120). Inevitably, my own perspectives are coloured by my experiences; mainly as a teacher who has been teaching on the LCA programme for over thirteen years and most recently as an LCA associate with the PDST; reviewing and giving input on LCA curricular design, as well as delivering continuous professional development (CPD) to fellow LCA teachers. As such, I am a teacher-researcher or an 'insider', rather than an outsider. This position brings with it strengths and weaknesses. As a teacher, I am very familiar with the everyday workings of school life and as such implemented a research design that afforded schools with maximum flexibility so as to ensure adequate time was provided in order for schools to participate fully in the research. I also had a deep knowledge and understanding of the topic being studied not just theoretically but also practically. As a teacher I was able to quickly build rapport with teachers, coordinators, and principals. This was hugely beneficial when gathering data as it meant that many of these participants were willing to speak to me openly and at length as well as participate in the focus group. As an LCA teacher, I have a vast amount of experience working with LCA students and as such constructed a research design that

would interest and engage these students; utilising Photovoice and arts based narrative enquiry. Many students taking the LCA programme do so because they enjoy the practical nature of the programme. Having this prior knowledge gained through over thirteen years' experience meant that I ensured the research carried out with students also had a practical element. Many (not all) students following the LCA programme have struggled academically in Junior Cycle. Therefore, one of the main objectives of the LCA programme is to improve students' literacy and numeracy. With this in mind, I ensured that consent forms, information sheets, interview questions, and workshop activities were written and explained in a manner that allowed them to be easily understood. The researcher also ensured that students had adequate time to process the information and to ask clarifying questions if needed.

As a teacher, I was worried that students may view me as an authority figure. To minimise this, I decided not to conduct research in my own school. I felt that if I conducted research in my own school it would be very difficult to ensure that students or colleagues were participating voluntarily and were not doing so because they felt they had to, this would further add to potential power relationships. As such I was a stranger to both the students and staff in the participating schools. During the information I explained to students that I was a teacher but was here not in a teaching capacity but to conduct research. The students referred to me by my first name throughout the ten-month period. This went some way in setting me apart from teachers in the schools who were addressed by the appropriate title prefixing the teacher's surname. The interview style I used was also very much interviewee led, acknowledging the participants as the experts; this also went some way in addressing power relationships.

However, as Foucault wrote, 'power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared…. power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations' (Foucault, 1998, p.94). Power relations are immanent in all research settings. This required that I be as reflexive as possible, constantly aware of and critically analysing the power relationships at play between me and the participants in the research. Makieson et al. (2018) argue that 'reflexivity refers to the researcher's awareness of the influence they are having on what they are studying and simultaneously, of how the research process is affecting them' (p.267). To this end, I kept a reflective research journal; noting, reflecting and evaluating on each day's research activities and then using these evaluations to inform and shape the following day's field research. This journal also enabled me to track my own journey; documenting the learning taking place as well as skills acquired and improved upon over the course of the field research. This went someway in minimising bias.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research design and the various phases involved in this design. It also highlighted the rationale underpinning the methodological decision taken. The following thematic chapters will examine and analyse key themes that emerged from the collected data.

I will now turn to discuss the theoretical framework of my research.

Chapter Six

Theoretical Commitments: Power, Affect and Pedagogy

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the principal concepts underpinning this study's theoretical framework, focusing in particular on the work of Michel Foucault, as well as Paulo Freire (critical pedagogy) and Anna Hickey-Moody (affective pedagogy). The philosophical positions articulated here inform the empirical aspects of my study in highlighting the importance of voice, recognition, and lived experience in inclusive education. The research employs a critical emancipatory perspective, as informed by a Foucauldian critical approach to analysis, as I discuss in the methodology chapter. The aim of the choices of theoretical sources and key concepts is to change the focus from students and their perceived deficits and instead focuses on the practices and discourses within schools and how these affect students' experiences and their ability to voice these experiences. The Leaving Certificate Applied programme is in this study, as I have outlined, explored through the lens of multiple voices and experiences, which include student voice, teacher voice, as well as the voices of school leaders and policy makers. These voices are held in tension and dialogue throughout the thesis. As the voices of Leaving Certificate Applied students are often subjected to many forms of discounting, part of this process involves the 'insurrection' of subjugated knowledges and recognition of these students as credible givers of knowledge. Listening to the knowledge and experience shared by students invites a 'politics of possibility' and social transformation, involving the self-emancipation of students.

However, the research also involves exploring silences and dominant hegemonies. Using a Foucauldian framework and drawing from the epistemic injustice literature, the research examines why and how some voices are silenced or marginalised. In keeping with Freire, this research views schools as sites of both struggle and possibility. Whilst this chapter primarily focuses on Foucault and Freire as critical theorists, key concepts introduced by Anna Hickey Moody, in particular affect, are explored later in the thesis. Nonetheless, this chapter should be seen as opening up the possibilities of affective and creative pedagogies.

6.2 The Critical Emancipatory Tradition: From The Frankfurt School to Foucault

At the heart of this study is a commitment to student voice and lived experiences and, as a consequence, the study is situated within a critical emancipatory tradition. The term critical, as used in this research, comes from the tradition of critical theory and refers to the social analysis tradition developed by the Frankfurt School. This was comprised of a group of writers, including Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. These early critical theorists initiated a conversation with the German tradition of philosophy and social thought, in particular that of Marx, Hegel, and Weber, and began to analyse the mutating forms of domination that accompanied the changing nature of capitalism. For the Frankfurt school, the primary aim of critical theory is the actualisation of a just society that is underpinned by the concepts of equality and liberation; in other words, a society where one can live free from domination and exploitation in all its forms and be free to achieve self-fulfilment (Fuchs, 2015). Therefore, critical theorists place emphasis on the social construction of experience and the potential of human agency in determining one's own existence. This framework lends itself to critical reflection and analysis. For this research, this involves looking beyond and challenging what appears to be neutral or 'taken for granted' practices within schools. It involves making visible the invisible microphysics of power at play within the various relations and networks of power in schools. It also highlights, not only sites of power within schools, but also sites of resistance. That is why schools are seen as, not only sites of struggle, but sites of possibility. As such, theoretical commitments of this kind are generally concerned with creating a space where voices that had been disqualified or marginalised can be heard. These are the voices have been deemed 'beneath the required level of scientificity' (Foucault, 1980, p.82) in order to be considered capable givers of knowledge. In this spirit, this research sought to understand what might be understood by a counter narrative or counter discourse, where these voices are placed at the heart of analysis, and to draw on a critical emancipatory framework to do so.

Critical theory provided new hope for emancipatory forms of socio-educational research and extended the Marxist view of the proletariat as the privileged subject and agent of social change. Many critical theorists view emancipation as an attempt to gain power and control over one's own life, in solidarity with a justice orientated community. Critical emancipatory theorists seek to throw light on those forces that prevent individuals and groups from exercising autonomy and making decisions that shape their lives (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2010). However, this view of emancipation has been criticised by some theorists who view it as potentially being counter-productive in that rather than effecting emancipation it risks creating dependency - the theorists or experts risk becoming the ones effecting emancipation rather than the individuals themselves. Jacques Rancière has also raised

questions about the logic of this approach and, in particular, the idea that the main aim of education is the emancipation of students from oppressive forces in the name of social justice and human freedom. Throughout his career, Rancière has developed an alternative approach; a different way to understand and do emancipation. He argued that the above model rather than leading to emancipation, introduces a fundamental dependency whereby the one to be emancipated depends on another to reveal truth and knowledge. As he states in *The Politics of Aesthetics* 'a position of mastery is established' (p.49). In *The Philosopher and His Poor,* Rancière highlights this inherent contradiction within the logic of emancipation and goes on to argue that in his view emancipation entails a 'rupture in the order of things' (p. 219). This rupture is the appearance of subjectivity and in this sense emancipation can be understood as a process of subjectification.

Likewise, Foucault has urged us to move beyond inside-outside thinking. Many argue that Foucault has led us to understand the workings of power in a different way and as such has made a significant contribution to the understanding of emancipation (Inglis, 1997; Biesta, 2008; Biesta & Leary, 2012). For Foucault, power is everywhere. Thus, he rejects the notion that we can use knowledge to combat power as, for him, power and knowledge come together, as expressed in the formulation of 'power/knowledge'. As such, Foucault argued that we should abandon 'a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can only exist where the power relations are suspended' (Foucault, 1975, p.27). Indeed, there is still a potential for action and change, but this is very different from the Enlightenment approach. As Rabinow details:

> If the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge had to renounce transgressing…the critical question today has to be turned back into a positive one: in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? (Rabinow, 1984b, p.45)

For Foucault, this kind of critical question results in a complication or a pluralisation of our understanding of events and hegemonic discourse. This succeeds in unsettling the 'taken for granted' and opens up a space for the insurrection of subjugated knowledges. Rather than seeking demystified insights that I could use in order to 'emancipate' LCA students, I aimed instead to open up a space where these students could be heard and make possible a new way of seeing or doing things and the concepts offered by the thinkers that I present in this chapter offered a conceptual language for this. The way things are is only one, limited possibility. As Foucault puts it, 'it is seeking to give a new impetus…to the undefined works of freedom' (Rabinow, 1984b).

6.3 Why Foucault?

Foucault's declared the primary objective of his life's work as follows:

> [My goal] has not been to analyse the phenomena of power, not to elaborate on the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects' (Foucault, 1982, p.208).

It is important to recognise here that Foucault sees the self operating simultaneously in two terrains; the inside, which refers to the individual's relationship with the subjective self, and the outside, which refers to the subject's relationship with 'networks of power', 'regimes of truth', and 'hegemonic discourses' that exist externally to the subjective self. Foucault identified the ways in which the 'inside' relates to power and knowledge from the 'outside', without being entirely dependent upon them (Deleuze, 1988). In Foucault's framework, the body is the point at which the 'inside' and 'outside' terrains 'fold' so that the outside influences the subjective self and the self in turn can influence the 'outside' (Deleuze, 1988). Foucault terms this process of the internalisation of the outside by the subjective self who acts as 'the double'. This notion of linking power with subjectivity or what Foucault calls 'subjectivation' is the primary focus of his work (Foucault, 1982) and, indeed, is also one of the primary foci of my study. The notion of 'the double' informs the primary structure of this chapter. I begin by looking at the 'outside' in relation to space and time and the effect this has on the subjective self. I then examine questions of pedagogy and curriculum, in particular the hidden curriculum or the 'taken for granted' practices within schools, in order to provide a framework to later reflect on the LCA programme. I go on to examine struggle, inclusion and resistance and finally the 'creation of self'. However, Foucault was a prolific writer; the breadth of his work also covered published interviews, lectures and recorded series (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Foucault, 1991; Foucault & Faubion, 2000; Foucault & Gordon, 1980; Foucault & Rabinow, 2000). The purpose of this chapter is thus to simply focus on the elements that are most helpful in understanding this research. Therefore, I will take the advice offered by Foucault himself:

> I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish, in their own area…I write for users, not readers' (Foucault, 1974, pp.523-524)

Foucault's framework provides both critical theory and critical methods for understanding curricula as discourse practice with power effects. The key theoretical concepts that relate to this study are (i) place as mechanism of power, (ii) power/knowledge, (iii) the Panopticon, (iv) subjugated knowledges, and (v) resistance and the care of self. The primary texts I draw on are *Discipline and Punish*, *Society Must be Defended,* and, to a lesser extent, *The History of Madness*.

6.4 Space and Time

Schools are sites of power and contestation. Foucault argued that power is not something that is possessed or owned but rather is something that is exercised in a multitude of ways across a multitude of power networks. The idea of space and time relates to much more than just the physicality of schools. Space is a discourse of power. Therefore, the 'place' of students, for example the LCA students who are the focus of this study, within the school and curriculum, as well as, for example the place of the LCA programme within the education system as a whole, is indicative of a wider discourse of power. The concept of power and power relations within the field of education has interested many educational theorists such as Apple (1982), Freire (1979), Hook (1994, 2003), and Bourdieu (1989, 1991). Here, I seek to add to this field by further interrogating the concept of power in education through a spatial lens. In order to do this, I will turn to Foucault. Although not a geographer, Foucault's notions of power and situated knowledges opens up many possibilities for us as we begin to imagine space as power. Space is a constant theme in Foucault's writings. He was interested in how people were deployed in space and how power relations were 'written' on their bodies. In an interview Foucault gave in 1982 entitled *Space, Knowledge and Power,* he stated:

> People's practice of freedom, their social relations and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves must not be separated out as one can only be understood through the other (Foucault, 1991c, p.246)

Foucault argued that 'space is fundamental in any exercise of power' and that knowledge itself is spatialised (1991b, p.252). Power is inextricably linked to our bodies and our bodies are inextricably linked with the spaces we occupy. So, to keep with the focus of this study, one cannot understand the lived experiences of LCA students without examining the space these students occupy within schools; and what Foucault termed the 'micro-physics' of power that exist within these spaces.

Foucault put forth the notion that the body is and always has been a target of power. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), he traces the move from torture and spectacle to discipline as two vastly different styles of punishment and methods of control. *Discipline and Punish* opens with a graphic account of the public torture and execution of regicide, Damians, in a public square in Paris in 1757. Through ritualised atrocities, the body of the condemned man is utterly destroyed and extinguished. This happens in full view of spectators. Their cries of excitement or protest and the cries of mercy from the condemned create a noisy, public spectacle, a loud demonstration of sovereign power. Foucault then takes us to a Paris reformatory some 80 years later. Here, we are presented with an institutional timetable and a strict ordering and sequencing of space and time. Punishment now takes place in silence and in private. These new methods of surveillance 'sought not to crush and dismember the

body, but to train and exercise it, to make it productive and cooperative' (Ryan, 1991, p.106). In other words, the public spectacle of power had now been superseded by a controlled exercise of power. This is what Foucault refers to as the production of 'docile' and 'productive' bodies. As Dreyfus and Rabinow state, these new disciplines sought 'to forge disciplined bod[ies] that could be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (1982, p.154).

This led Foucault to examine the 'management of populations' or what he referred to as 'bio-power'. Foucault was interested in the ways in which power flows through spaces, architecture, the physical composition of space, organisational arrangements, systems of classifications and 'dividing practices'. He was interested in how power came to be 'written onto' our bodies and into our conduct. In other words, Foucault was interested in the totalising nature of power and the production of subjects. As he states: 'Power produces, it produces reality' (Foucault, 1979, p.194). In *The Archeology of Knowledge* Foucault writes:

> Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to language (langue) and to speech. It is this "more" that we must reveal and describe (Foucault, 1974, p.49).

It is possible to think about this "more" in a number of different ways. On the one hand, Foucault highlights ways in which certain discourses may be constrained or excluded but on the other hand, he speaks about the 'ponderous, formidable materiality' of discourse (Foucault, 1981, p.52). This materiality of discourse elucidated the importance of architecture, organisation of spaces and practices within spaces; in other words, the physical manifestations of discourse. These manifestations of discourse allow for a variety of forms of visibility. The materiality of educational discourses within schools make subjects i.e. students and teachers visible but simultaneously invisible. Students and teachers are rendered visible through 'normalising judgements' and 'examinations' and the written records that this entails. However, certain 'taken for granted practices' or the subjugation of their knowledge and the different form this takes, can also render them invisible.

According to Foucault, spatial discourses of power operates through visibility. Various rituals and different forms of architecture and physical arrangements regulate bodies in space (Foucault, 2005a). My interest in this study was to examine the regulation of bodies within space and the forms of exclusion and segregation that this involves and the resulting impacts this has on the lived experience of LCA students. The architectural discourse within schools highlights how and where different bodies fit within a school. The environment and spaces we find ourselves in impacts on how we view the world and ourselves. Therefore, this research seeks to undo the mind/body split that is prevalent in

modernist discourses. Quality assurance practices within schools ensure that all subjects (teachers and students) are made visible through the various systems and practices in place, operating as 'permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible' (Foucault, 1977, p.214). For example, LCA students accumulate credits after completion of each module, they must have 90% attendance, they must complete key assignments, teachers must keep a record of all of this, as well as more minute details such as permission to leave class early, to go to the bathroom, the office, etc. Teachers must have subject plans, lesson plans, records of meetings, and proof of work completed. This may be inspected at any time by the official inspectorate from the Department of Education. However, in relation to certain kinds of students, such as LCA students, space as a form of disciplinary power can also be exercised through invisibility and therefore, as I will suggest later, there can also be a deliberate attempt to invisibilise certain subjects (both teachers and students) through invisible obscure classrooms or through exclusionary discursive practices, both formally and informally within schools and within the broader educational landscape.

As stated by Peters and Besley, Foucault's analysis of power and space as power involves an examination of 'spatial metaphors detailing marginalisation, segregation, confinement and scientification or the production of scientific objectivity through architectures of the gaze, including the model of the panopticon' (2014, pp.100-101). The concept of 'the gaze' and 'normalising judgement' led to 'processes of naturalization and social construction that discursively created human beings as subjects or non-subjects, as human or something less than human, as abnormal' (ibid, p.101). Foucault is showing us here that the subject is a social construction that is discursively created; however, this also implies that these constructions can be undone and theorised differently. The space that students occupy within schools is a social and emotional space involving relationships with classmates, peers and teachers. How students are deployed in space is indicative of recognition afforded to them and this, in turn, affects students emotionally. I will discuss this later in the chapter when I come to examine the Foucauldian notion of the 'care of the self'.

6.4.1 Foucault and the Panopticon

In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault argues that the concept of the Panopticon is an example of the perfect disciplinary apparatus, as it allows for a single 'gaze' to see everything. The watcher sees all but without ever being seen. Foucault offers us a detailed description of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon:

> Bentham's Panopticon is the architectural figure of this composition. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows

> that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker, or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible- The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions - to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide - it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap (Foucault, 1979, p.200)

The Panopticon, as described by Foucault, results in the use of space and light as disciplinary mechanisms. Prisoners are removed from the darkness in which they were kept in the past, and instead light is shed on their every move; 'he is seen but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject of communication' (Ibid, p.200). Prisoners are segregated within the segmented space and are 'perfectly individualised', they are 'a collection of separated individuals' (Ibid, p.201). Foucault states that 'Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable' (Ibid, p.201), hence 'one is totally seen, without ever seeing' (Ibid, p.202).

For Foucault, this is important, as it has the double effect of de-individualizing power while simultaneously segregating and individualising those being observed. This produces homogeneous effects of power. Power now has its principle 'not so much in a person as a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individual are caught up' (Ibid, p. 202). Here, we see the importance of space as a mechanism of power. For Foucault, the unverifiable element of power produced through panoptic gaze resulted in the individual becoming the 'principle of his own subjection'. This is reminiscent of Nietzsche's notion of the 'internalised eye'. Surveillance or the constant threat of surveillance becomes disciplinary as it encourages individuals to 'self-regulate' their actions, behaviours, and mind to the extent of 'docility' (Foucault, 1975). As such, docile bodies are bodies that self-regulate and are subjected to societal control while simultaneously constructing their self-identity based on a constantly regulated self-knowledge and self-surveillance. This form of regulation can be both oppressive and productive as Foucault argued that through self-regulation individuals could improve their lot (Pringle, 2006). Therefore, according to Foucault, power can create 'docile' bodies but it can also transform bodies so that they can become productive (Lang, 2010; Pringle and Markula, 2005).

Foucault argues that the principles personified in the Panopticon increasingly became part of other institutions such as the hospitals and the schools. The rationale and mechanisms of the Panopticon proved effective in producing, not only 'docile' bodies, but also 'productive' bodies. The Panoptic model made it possible to observe differences, classify, and rank people, as well as intervene in ways that made people more 'productive' or more 'docile'. Space is important here, as Foucault explains that within institutions such as hospitals or schools, bodies are distributed into spaces that are enclosed, partitioned and ranked. A process of surveillance oversees these spaces ensuring that individuals are placed in such a way that allows for suitable classifications. 'Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual' (Foucault, 1979, p.143). For Foucault, then, the notion of exclusion operates spatially; through use of a 'normalising gaze' individuals are separated through what Foucault terms 'dividing practices'. Through the panoptic gaze and normalising judgement, individuals are ranked and classified in order of 'docility' and 'productivity'. This observation entails keeping records and hence a whole body of knowledge is built up around individuals who are observed. This knowledge is used to design interventions to 'normalise' individuals. This can be seen in a wide variety of schools in which significant importance is placed on differentiation and various initiatives are devised based on students' perceived difficulties or deficits. While this is presented as an attempt to ensure equality of opportunity, it is not clear how accepting schools are of difference. Indeed, various differentiation techniques are implemented by schools, but the overall aim seems not to be the recognition of difference but rather an attempt to 'normalise'. This leads us to Foucault's notion of 'normalising judgements', the 'examination', and 'power/knowledge'. I will not discuss these concepts here but will return to them later in the chapter when I come to discuss in more detail discourses of inclusion and exclusion within schools. At this junction, I will turn now to Foucault's notion of 'heterotopia'.

6.4.2 Foucault's 'heterotopia'

Foucault outlines his notion of heterotopia on three occasions: first, in his preface to *The Order of Things* (1966), second in a radio broadcast later that same year on the theme of utopia and literature and lastly during a lecture presented to a group of architects in 1967. During the radio broadcast, Foucault reflected on studying a range of 'different spaces' that challenges and contests the space we live in; he defines this as 'not a science of utopias but of heterotopias, a science of absolutely other spaces' (Foucault, 1966b). These other spaces mirror what is around them while also challenging what is around them, hence they reflect and contest simultaneously. Foucault goes on to list some 'counter-spaces'. He gives examples such as holiday homes, prisons, asylums, brothels, cemeteries. These places reside outside the ordinary. Foucault contends that modern heterotopian sites relate to some

sort of division or separating out. Schools are full of 'counter-spaces'. Students following the LCA programme are 'separated out' as the LCA programme is a ring-fenced programme and is distinct from the Leaving Certificate Established. Therefore, the LCA students take up different discursive and physical places and spaces in schools. One such place is the 'LCA room'. These classrooms can be viewed as a type of heterotopian space as at once they mirror and contest other classroom spaces within the school. I will discuss this in more detail later in the thesis.

For Foucault, 'space' is much more abstract than 'place'. Space can refer to an area or a measurement or a temporal period i.e. the space of two weeks. Foucault uses the word 'place' when there is a sense of intimacy or subjectivity. However, his preferred term seems to be 'emplacement'. This makes explicit the sense of placing in a certain area or location. Social theorizing of the body has moved away from a Cartesian distinction between body and mind and has moved towards an understanding of the mind as an integral part of an entire body subject (Shilling, 2012), challenging the mind/body binary or dualism and moving towards an understanding of the entire subject. The sociologist, Dorothy Smith, elucidates the idea that all individuals are based in their bodies, thus situating consciousness in a unique setting that no-one else shares (Smith, 2002). Howe (2005) builds upon this but also introduces the importance of location. Whilst recognising the importance of the unity of mind and body that is implicit in the idea of embodiment, he believes that recognising the importance of environment takes this further. He refers to this as 'emplacement'. Therefore, the notion of emplacement accounts for the relationship between minds, bodies, and the environment. Foucault's idea of emplacement also introduces the concept of power as he suggests that individuals are placed or separated into certain environments. Inclusion and exclusion are intricately woven into the structure of schools, in particular cohorts of students who are separated in different ways. Where students are located or physically placed within the school plays an important role in how included or excluded, they feel they are. The physical spaces and environments we occupy affect us emotionally and impact on how we view the world and how we view ourselves. Where students are 'placed' in a school is reflective of status and value. The location of classrooms, and which students occupy which classrooms, is part of the hidden curriculum and is an implicit or explicit political statement. This statement is felt by students emotionally. An examination of 'emplacement' involved navigating spatial ambiguities and exploring of a range of competing discourses; discourses of containment and discourses of safety, discourses of exclusion and discourses of control, discourses of 'otherness' and discourses of togetherness.

6.4.3 Place as a Mechanism of Power

Foucault viewed place as a mechanism of power. In *The Art of Distributions* (1991a), Foucault posits the notion that discipline proceeds from the distribution of subjects in space. According to him, this

involves four techniques. Firstly, the need for enclosure or confinement. He offers examples of obvious and discreet confinements 'of vagabonds and paupers to the more discreet, but insidious and effective…colleges or secondary schools' (p.141). In other words, certain students or certain classrooms are placed in certain areas of the school and this placement is not neutral but is rather a mechanism of power, a political statement. Secondly, Foucault explains that these enclosures are themselves divided up in a more detailed way. Foucault returns here to the architectural method of the monastic cell where 'each individual has his own space; and each space its individual' (p.143). This implies Foucault's notion of 'dividing practices' and involves a dividing up of space that includes presences and absences 'in order to be able to judge each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits' (p.143). The third technique identified here by Foucault is that all spaces would serve a function. In other words, they would become coded spaces. Each space would be useful in a particular way in producing 'docile' and 'productive' bodies. The fourth and final technique involves ranking individuals. Individuals are distributed within space according to a network of power relations. For Foucault, this notion of space has been crucial in the emergence of our modern education system and in how this system has been maintained. He states:

> The organisation of a serial space was one of the great technical mutations of elementary education… It made the educational space function like a learning machine, but also as a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding (Foucault, 1991a, p.147)

Foucault highlights the many points of resistance within disciplinary spaces and 'counter-spaces'. It is the body which is the point of entry. Foucault in his theory of bio-politics sees the body as being both subjected to power but also exercising power and resistance. For Foucault 'power is everywhere' but at every point where there is power there is also resistance. This is an important point, as it highlights the idea that people are not passive subjects but rather possess the potential for resistance and contestation at every point of power. This leads Foucault to suggest that power is positive as through this struggle power produces. Therefore, subjects, through resistance and contestation, can produce their own reality. This is important for both students and teachers. This notion of resistance and the concept of resistance as key in the creation of place will be examined in more detail in a later chapter.

Spatial practices entail experience, as well as a hierarchy of administrative control and organisational divisions of space, with an intrinsic element of social control. This social control, as already discussed, entails surveillance, what Foucault terms the 'Eye of Power'. Yet Foucault is always concerned with everyday life and experience. He defines experience as the interrelation between knowledge, types of normativity and subjectivity in a particular culture at a particular time (Foucault, 1984). From an

epistemological standpoint, this embraces a critical perspective which places emphasis on everyday experience and posits the notion that knowledge lies within human experience. In the context of this research, it will be argued that is impossible to study the everyday experience of LCA students in context without examining space and time. Therefore, Foucault's theory of heterotopias provides a theoretical framework in order to analyse these issues. Although other theorists such as Casey, Massey, and Ingold, as well as phenomenologists such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty have completed compelling work on space and time, the theories of Foucault resonated with me as Foucault's notion of 'counter-spaces' and power and resistance and resounded with emergent themes from data gathered in the field. I wanted to ensure that what was mapped during analysis of the data closely matches the semantic data content.

6.5 Critical Pedagogy: Dialogue, Lived Experience and Transformation of Self

Whilst Foucault offers a vital critical lens to examine the microphysics of power, Freire maintains a critical perspective but also opens up the possibility of pedagogy as creative and loving dialogue. The construction of the LCA curriculum lends itself towards a critical pedagogical approach. In a later chapter entitled *Thinking Pedagogically: Pedagogy in Practice*, I will examine to what extent this has been actualised and analyse the enablers or inhibitors to a critical pedagogical approach of the LCA programme within schools. Critical pedagogy entails critical reflection, creative resistance, and a focus on the lived experiences of students. It seeks to amplify student voice. A critical pedagogical approach, through dialogue and critical reflection, assists students in identifying oppressive forces in their lives and aims to enable students to achieve emancipation from these oppressive forces. Here, I will examine the Freirean notion of the dialogical nature of learning and introduce briefly the concept of affective pedagogy, drawing on the work of Hickey Moody, as well as Foucault's theory of becoming.

6.5.1 Freire and the Dialogic Nature of Learning

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996), Paulo Freire argues that a given reality is not something that must be accepted and adjusted to but rather sees it as a problem to be solved. This is in keeping with Foucault who likewise argues that a given reality is just one amongst a multitude, albeit often a product of contingency for him. Freire believes that every human being is capable of looking critically at the world, in a dialogical way with others. Through critical reflection and dialogue individuals possess the ability to discover themselves and realise their potential. Through dialogical encounters individuals can perceive their current realities and the contradictions that exist within that reality and begin to critically interrogate their perceptions of that 'given' reality. Therefore, for Freire, education is not a neutral activity and classrooms are not neutral spaces. Instead, schools and classrooms are

spaces of struggle, contestation, and possibilities. Freire contends that the education system and those working within it i.e. teachers can either integrate students into the logic of the current system and bring about conformity or to use Foucault's term 'docility' or the system and those working within it can enable students to engage critically and creatively with their own reality and as a result discover and produce their own reality. Freire used the term *conscientização* to describe the process of perceiving social, political, and economic contradictions and acting against these oppressive forces of reality. Freire argues that we can sometime confuse freedom with maintaining the status quo and therefore if *conscientização* questions the status quo it can be mistakenly identified with attacking freedom. He states that this notion of freedom exists because the norms of the oppressor have become internalised; we fear freedom because it demands autonomy and requires we take responsibility. It is only through critical reflection that we can begin to transform and produce reality. This critical reflection for Freire must be dialogical. He states '...pedagogy must be forged with, not for, the oppressed…' (Freire, 199, p.30). Through this dialogical reflection will come engagement. The oppressed will begin to see the reality of their oppression as 'a limiting situation which they can transform' (Ibid).

Freire used the term praxis to explain the concept of reflection through action. For Freire it is not enough that we engage with reality critically, we must act on this engagement. Therefore, for Freire true reflection leads to action and 'that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection' (Ibid, p.48). In other words, the aim is not to replace one status quo or one hegemonic discourse with another, but rather the aim is to remain critical. We must continue to engage critically with reality even as that reality is transformed. In this respect, Freire shares with Foucault a position that does not posit a correct way of being or doing things, as he believes that to do this is counterproductive as one dominant discourse is just replaced by another. For both Freire and Foucault reflection and resistance is a continuous process.

Freire's critique of 'banking' education is perhaps one of the best known denunciations of traditionalism in modern educational history. For Freire, banking education turns students into ''containers' or 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher'' (Freire, 1970, p.53). The more completely the teacher fills the 'receptacles' the better they perform hence the better a teacher he or she is. (Ibid, p.53). Both students and teachers are evaluated based on the extent to which students can demonstrate their success, namely performance in exams. Therefore, teachers may wish to teach the 'more able' students as these students will receive better grades in exams. Freire argues that this 'banking' model of education dehumanizes both the teacher and the student. It turns the teacher into a subject and the learners into objects or passive spectators. It positions the teacher and student as

opposites and creates a binary or dualism between the two. For Freire, this style of teaching obviates thinking and negates *conscientização*. Freire, in extraordinarily strong language describes this situation as one of violence:

> 'any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of enquiry is an act of violence…to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects' (Freire, 1996, p.66)

He argues that teachers should reject a 'banking concept' model of education and instead proposes a 'problem-posing' method in which students and teachers work together, through dialogue in the co-construction of knowledge. Therefore, 'problem-posing' education depends on dialogical theory of praxis and knowledge and a different view of student-teacher relationship. For Freire, the students' participation in the co-construction of knowledge is not only more democratic but is more efficient. Freire sees this as a process of becoming free and more human. Freire believed that discovery is a social process, and dialogue is the cement in this process. As such, learning is dialogical and teaching is not transactional but is always relational (Freire, 1970). The humanist or 'revolutionary' teacher is a partner with her learners and trusts their creative and critical ability. This engagement and pedagogical relationship built on trust is essential in a quest for mutual humanisation. Freire explains:

> In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation' (Ibid, p.61)

Therefore, the liberating classroom embracing problem-posing education should be a space of acts of cognition, not a space where information is simply transferred. This entails praxis as for Freire 'liberation is a praxis; the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it' (Ibid, p.60). Dialogue is essential as without dialogue 'there is no communication and without communication there can be no true education' (Ibid, p.73). Dialogue is crucial for critical engagement and the act of creation and transformation. For Freire dialogue involves a horizontal relationship of mutual trust. As he states:

> Because liberating action is dialogical in nature, dialogue cannot be posterior to the action, but must be concomitant with it. And since liberation must be a permanent condition, dialogue becomes a *continuing* aspect of liberatory action (Ibid).

Freire argues that much formal education fails because it does not adopt a truly authentic dialogical nature. Students are not involved in the search for the answer but instead are presented with

information already discerned elsewhere. Ira Shor says, 'Much formal education fails because the learners are not included in the search, in the rigour and thus are not motivated' (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.4). Rather, 'motivation takes part in the action' (Ibid). What Freire is saying here is that motivation takes places in the 'acts of cognition' that take place within the classroom, not in a process of transmission. Critical education 'must integrate students and teachers into a mutual creation and re-creation of knowledge (ibid, p.8).

Freire views dialogue as a pedagogical process whereby students and teachers engage in discussion and debate which results in learning and the production of knowledge. Therefore, for Freire, all learning is relational and knowledge is produced through democratic interaction between students and teachers. He argues that 'Knowledge is not a piece of data, something immobilised, concluded, finished, something to be transferred by one who acquired it to one who still does not possess it' (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p.41). In this concept of learning, knowledge is also produced in the classroom by students' interaction with each other. As Freire states:

> I cannot think authentically unless others think. I cannot think for others, or without others….. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry [people] pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other' (Freire, 1970, p.58)

The practice of this dialogical method of teaching and learning will be explored in the subsequent chapter *Thinking Pedagogically: Pedagogy in Practice*.

For Freire, student experience is essential for learning. Freire makes clear that students' experiences are a major source of their own learning and the learning of others; 'no-one knows everything, and no-one is ignorant of everything' (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p.41). Therefore, the starting point of all learning should be on student experience and the content of learning should reflect in some way the experiences and aspirations of the students. There are, however, differences between students' experiential knowledge and teachers' formal and official academic knowledge. He suggests that dialogue emerges from the dialectical opposition of student knowledge and teacher knowledge and that this resulted in the 'synthesis' of new knowledge.

> '…through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers…. The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is …. taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn, while being taught also teaches' (Freire, 1970, pp. 77-78)

The relationship between student and teacher is 'a horizontal relationship…. Fed by love, humility, hope, faith, and confidence (Godatti, 1994, p.39). This does not mean that Freire does not appreciate that the teacher is different from the student and possesses a different kind of authority. Freire highlights the difference between authority and being authoritarian and as such does not defend a non-directive position. The idea that the relationship between student and teacher is fed by love emphasises the affective and emotional aspect of pedagogy. We learn with our hearts as much as our heads. Teaching and learning are embodied, emotional experiences. Pedagogy and the liberating classroom, for Freire, is a form of art and as such can magnify difference and singularity and amplify voice. Together Freire's concept of problem-posing education and Foucault's notion of problematisation enables young people to emerge differently.

To discuss this further, I will draw on the work of Anna Hickey-Moody. Later we will learn how affective pedagogies can create the conditions for the creative transformation of school spaces and of students themselves.

6.5.2 Hickey Moody and Affective Pedagogy

Anna Hickey-Moody develops Deleuze's notion of affect as method. Deleuze states 'That bodies speak has been known for a long time' (Deleuze, 1990, p.285). Mind and body cannot be separated, we experience the world in an embodied way, and ideas are registered in the body, just as bodies express ideas. This proved interesting for my work when examining the embodied complexities of learning through school culture. I have already noted the importance of space in this context as well as the importance of dialogue and student/teacher relationships when analysing Freire's notion of critical pedagogy. Hickey-Moody explains that taking Deleuze's concept of affect as method 'also shows the impact that everyday aesthetics have on our subjectivities'. She refers to this as affective pedagogy and utilises Deleuze's writings on the politics of aesthetics (Deleuze 1990, 2003 and Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 1994) to demonstrate how 'embodied capacities are increased or decreased by sounds, lights, smells, the atmospheres of places and people' (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.80). In other words, our embodied experiences affect our emotions and can 'change people's attachments to subjects'. The lived experiences of students and teachers are always affective; according to Deleuze, our bodies and their affective registers are the flesh of pedagogy. For Deleuze and Hickey Moody, the idea of differentiation is the creative becoming of the world. Differentiation involves the material power of aesthetic sensibility to magnify difference, uniqueness, or what one may think about as individuality – the differences amongst people and their different 'becomings'. For Deleuze, and for this study, each voice matters precisely because it is different and singular. The value of each voice is increased as it is

magnified through art. Art is the material way of articulating difference and as such art amplifies voice. Creativity allows the world to become different from itself.

This brings me to discuss Deleuze's concept of *affectus* or affect, and what Hickey-Moody terms affective pedagogy. Hickey-Moody suggests that 'Deleuze's Spinozist notion of *affectus* can be read as an aesthetically based research methodology' (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.79). *Affectus* refers to the measured material equation of an interaction; the gain or loss recorded in the body, or the embodied subject, as the result of an encounter or experience. *Affectio* or affection is the feeling experienced by the embodied subject. Affects are confused ideas, a hunch or feeling, a visceral prompt. Spinoza defines an affect as 'a confused idea by which the mind affirms its body, or any part of it, a greater or lesser power of existence than before; and this increase of power being given, the mind is determined to one particular thought' (Spinoza, 2001, p.158). Put a little more simply, *affectus* is the thing that happens, the encounter or experience; an affect is the hunch or gut feeling, a transition in lived experience, based on this encounter and affection is when this hunch translates into a feeling an emotion. Thus, *affectus* is the materiality of change. This change generated through *affectus* either increases or decreases ones' ability to act. Hickey-Moody explains that this is Deleuze's 'Spinozist framework for thinking about the ways in which ideas and interactions create changes' (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.81), and this then allows Deleuze (2003) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 1994) to 'explore ways of thinking the body as a changeable assemblage that is highly responsive to context' (Ibid). Affective pedagogy centres on the idea that aesthetics can also teach us by challenging how we feel about things. For Deleuze, we learn first through the body and then through the mind, and he resists pre-existing frameworks that would deploy a logic of recognition, or logic of sameness. This causes us to look at things differently, to see with fresh eyes and hence increases our ability to see things critically, which also opens up the activist possibilities of education. For Deleuze, an example of this kind of shift in perception can be found in art which changes people's perceptions of how things are and of how they might be. Affective pedagogies invite new ways of being and knowing.

These processes of making feelings are an 'assemblage' of bodies, times, places, events etc.; therefore, the context individuals find themselves in and the lived experiences that take place within these contexts are hugely important in determining *affectus*. Hickey-Moody clarifies that for Spinoza, context lays down a range of paths in thought. She explicates:

> These paths arise from our patterns of experience. A variety of individual patterns exist in correlation with different people's lived experiences. All paths are the product of an individual's engagement with the community. Experiences form geographies of meanings that bind communities. Such a process of engagement occurs by virtue of a body's existence. Bodies' articulations of their surroundings are unique

> because they offer a distinctive extension of their context. How we feel about things impacts on how we think about them (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.83).

Hickey-Moody's use of *affectus* as research method is important for my study in a number of ways. To begin with, I will suggest that the space students occupy in school is not a neutral space but rather a political one, which is in keeping with Foucault and his notion of space as a mechanism of power, as discussed earlier in the chapter. Secondly, I postulate that the space and context students find themselves in affects them emotionally. The complex assemblages of schools affects their ways of being and knowing. Students and teachers are embodied within spaces within the school and this embodiment involves sensory experiences that affect students and teachers emotionally and determine their ability to act. This ability to act is a political endeavour and can have either an enabling or limiting effect on schools as sites of possibility. This also involves examining relationships that exist within the school context, relationships between teachers and students, LCA students and their peers, as well as the collaborative relationship or otherwise between teachers. Thirdly, in keeping with Freire, as discussed earlier, I see teaching as an act of love and as such can be seen as both critical and affective.

Lastly, as Hickey-Moody states, the 'aesthetics of everyday life choreographs connections and resistances to people, sensations, and events' (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.83). Art and affective pedagogy can also be used as a means of articulating resistances. They can offer an alternative discourse to dominant hegemonic discourses and as such lead to what Foucault termed the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges'. I will discuss this in more detail when I come to speak about voice and agency. I return now to the work of Foucault to explore his ideas of care of the self and his re-framing of the question of resistance that opens up the possibility of things, and oneself, being and becoming other.

6.6 Foucault: The Art of Becoming

In an interview discussing technologies of the self, Michel Foucault stated 'the main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not at the beginning' (Martin, 1988, p.9). This is the endeavour of 'becoming'. Thomas, in *Pedagogy and the Work of Michel Foucault*, 2018, draws attention to the fact that Foucault did not refer to himself as a historian, or a writer or a philosopher but rather as a teacher. If we follow Foucault's example, then a teacher is one who instigates or provokes learning or induces *affectus* by situating an encounter that stimulates change. This is in keeping with both Freire and Deleuze, who highlight the importance of encounters or experiences in

teaching. Freire in particular stipulates that these encounters and experiences must be in some way connected with students' lives in order to be meaningful or affective.

A reading of Foucault then implies that the teacher and student must be constantly engaged in critical reflection. The subject is not a static being but rather is in the continuous process of 'becoming'. Foucault views the subject as both constituted and self-constituting in the relationship between discursive practices, power relations, and ethics. In Foucauldian terms, ethics implies a different kind of self-government, one based on a 'complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed and modified by himself' (Foucault, 1993, p.204). This critical reflection involves a way of rethinking our relationship with ourselves and with others as well as exploring other possible ways of being. This is what Foucault refers to as *askesis*. Askesis is a way of thinking and acting that will allow us 'to fully confront the world in an ethical and rational manner (Foucault, 1983a). We must commit ourselves to a form of 'permanent agonism'. As Foucault explicates:

> The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them (Foucault, 1984b, p.118).

Here, it is incumbent upon the teacher and the student to examine taken for granted practices that exist within schools and render them intolerable by opening them up to scrutiny. In other words, as Foucault states, one must exert 'a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same thing in different ways' (Foucault, 1988a, p.321). This espouses an ontology of becoming rather than being. By utilising a Foucauldian framework we can come to view teaching and learning not as a state of being but rather as an act of becoming, a constant struggle between capabilities and constraints in an effort 'to become again what we should have been but never were' (Foucault, 2004, p.45). By rejecting the modernist notion of an essential self and embracing the concept of becoming through processes of self - care, Foucault offers us a way of rejecting the 'normalising gaze' of others. I will explore this in a little more detail later in the chapter. Foucault's notion of critical reflection and 'agonism', I will argue is quite different to the current model of school self-evaluation and the in-school processes of programme reviews. I will not discuss this here but will return to this in the chapter entitled Curriculum and Pedagogy. This idea of looking at things differently and exploring other ways of being leads me back to Foucault's interest in subjugated knowledges. I will explore this further now.

6.7 Voice and Agency

Utilising a Foucauldian framework highlights the emancipatory potential of critical theory and brings the possibilities of resistance and change to the fore. As Medina makes clear:

> Foucault's methodology offers a way of exploiting that vibrant plurality of epistemic perspectives which always contains some bodies of experiences and memories that are erased or hidden in the mainstream frameworks that become hegemonic after prevailing in sustained epistemic battles (Medina, 2011, p.11).

Foucault defines subjugated knowledges as forms of experiences that are pushed to the margins and are judged unqualified or unworthy of epistemic respect by prevailing hegemonic discourses. As such, these subjugated knowledges remain unseen or invisible and go unnoticed in mainstream discourses. He states that subjugated knowledges are knowledges,

> that have been explicitly disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity (Foucault, 1980, p.82)

The critical and emancipatory potential evident in a Foucauldian framework resides in challenging dominant hegemonic discourses through the excavation of subjugated knowledges, 'forgotten' experiences and marginalised voices, hence bringing to the fore other perspectives and alternative ways of being. This is also true for Freire through his use of dialogue and reflection in critical pedagogy and for Hickey-Moody through the use of *affectus* as method. For Foucault, the critical task of the scholar is to produce an insurrection of subjugated knowledges; to make the invisible visible, to reinstate in the foreground experiences and memories that have been relegated to background by the 'taken for granted' nature of dominant hegemonic discourses. I contend, like Medina, that the insurrection of subjugated knowledge requires collaboration between scholar and those whose experiences and knowledge has been subjugated, as 'those subjects by themselves may not be able to destabilize the epistemic status quo until they are given a voice at the epistemic table' (Medina, 2011, p. 11). Likewise, scholars 'could not get their critical activity off the ground if they did not draw on past and ongoing contestations, and the lived experiences and memories of those whose marginalised lives have become the silent scars of forgotten struggles' (ibid, pp.11-12).

Foucault's theory of subjugated knowledges goes against the portrayal of the oppressed as merely powerless and ignorant. Indeed, use of a Foucauldian framework unmasks this misconception and instead positions the oppressed as those whose knowledges have been disqualified and marginalised.

Foucault goes on to say in *Society must be Defended* that the critical task is not about replacing one form of knowledge with another:

> An immense and multiple battle, but not one between knowledges and ignorance, but an immense and multiple battle between knowledges in the plural – knowledges that are in conflict because of their very morphology, because they are in the possession of enemies, and because they have intrinsic power-effects' (Foucault, 2003, p.7)

For Foucault, the critical battle against the monopolization of dominant knowledge producing discourses is the insurrection of subjugated knowledges; the return to lost voices and forgotten experiences. This is what Foucault terms 'counter-history' and 'counter-memory'. I will not expand further on these concepts here but will return to them in a later thematic chapter focusing on voice.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault writes:

> ……discourse is secretly based on an "already said"; and that this "already said" is not merely a phrase that has been already spoken, or a text that has been written, but a "never said", an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as breath, a writing that is merely the hallow of its own mark (Foucault, 1974, p.25)

Foucault sought to place these 'taken for granted' exercises of power under scrutiny. He aimed to show that the exercise of power only remains tolerable when hidden away in the taken for granted practices of everyday life. Therefore, an important task of the scholar (but not theirs alone) is to make visible these invisible or taken for granted aspects of power and invite people to see that this is just one way of being: things could be different. This entails 'a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way' (Foucault, 1998a, p.321) What is unsaid and the 'taken for granted' practices within schools are important and powerful. The hidden curriculum consists of experiences that are not explicitly planned for or overtly referred to but are none the less real and consists of a multitude of taken for granted exercises of power.

Discourse, as we have seen, is not the same as language. 'Discourse is that which constrains or enables, writing, speaking and thinking' (Ball, 2013, p.19). Discourse produces the objects about which they speak. As such discourse is fundamentally linked to the exercise of power. The materiality of discourse draws attention to space, place, subjects, and subjectivities. These are the manifestations of discourse. Those who can exercise control over discourses possess a certain power. In *The Order of Things,* Foucault defines discourse as 'representation itself, represented by verbal signs' (p.81). He argued that each institution had its own distinguishable mode of discourse. Discourse evident in post-primary schools is dominated by topics such as exam results, entry to college, content of curriculum etc.

6.8 Struggle, Inclusion and resistance

Foucault identifies certain knowledges or human sciences as central to the normalisation of social practices, education is one of these human sciences. By normalisation, Foucault means the establishment of 'normalising judgements' and measurements that succeed in hierarchizing or ranking individuals. This in turn constitutes human beings as subjects i.e. the academic student, the weak student, the 'at risk' student. Foucault posits that discourse constitutes both subjectivity and power. That is to say discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak…Discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own identity' (Foucault, 1974, p.49). Therefore, the possibilities of meanings and definitions are controlled to a certain extent by those who control powerful or hegemonic discourses. For example, in relation to LCA, students are defined in terms expressed by teachers or policy makers, i.e as 'at risk', 'non-academic', 'unsuited' to traditional Leaving Certificate etc. Teachers are also defined by institutional practices such as inspection, exam results, and ability to maintain discipline in their classroom. Schools are sites of discourse and discursive practices but are also active in the selection and dissemination of certain discourses to the neglect of others. Certain individuals can access these discourses whereas others cannot. As Foucault asserts:

> But we know very well that, in its distribution, in what it permits and what it prevents, it follows the lines laid down by social differences, conflicts and struggles. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the knowledge and power they bring with them (Foucault, 1971, p. 46).

For Foucault, the access to discourse involves processes of classification and division or what he terms 'dividing practices'. Lynch and Lodge argue that a source of inequality experienced by many marginalised groups within schools is non-recognition, they are rendered invisible, or a misrecognition, they are subjected to negative stereotyping. They go on to assert:

> Not only are their values, perspectives and life rendered invisible by the life worlds of the dominant group which permeate cultural and institutional norms; this invisibility causes members of oppressed groups to view themselves through the lens of supposed 'normality' (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, pp. 131-132).

As the values and perspectives of dominant groups permeate cultural and institutional norms, members of marginalised groups have their lives interpreted through the lens of the dominant hegemony or 'common sense'. In other words, they are subjected to a 'normalising judgement through the daze of the more dominant other. Bell (1997) believes that marginalised groups can internalise this negative stereotype and that this can and does have an impact on their self- esteem.

Lynch and Lodge argue that inequalities of recognition are forms of social injustice and relate to identity and status. They go on to state that these issues of misrecognition or nonrecognition are grounded in the practices or processes of curriculum provision and pedagogical approaches as well as school culture and organisational norms and processes. They also argue, however, that the level of nonrecognition or misrecognition experienced by marginalised groups varies depending on school culture and context (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). As Taylor states:

> ….. our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (Taylor, 2011, p.25)

According to Taylor, due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people but is rather a 'vital human need' (Ibid, p.26). In contradistinction, Foucault speaks about the 'normalising gaze' and the idea of surveillance and judgements. According to Peters and Besley, Foucault's analysis of exclusion is 'based on the complex binary of "exclusion/inclusion"….that intimates spatial metaphors detailing marginalisation, segregation, confinement and scientification or the production of scientific objectivity through architectures of the gaze, including the model of the panopticon' (2014, pp. 100-101). This is accompanied by a 'realisation of processes of naturalisation and social construction that discursively created human beings as subjects' (Ibid, p.101). However, Foucault also gives us a way of escaping or resisting this through 'care of the self' and a 're-writing of the self'.

6.9 Foucault and resistance

The idea of power, as we have seen, was a concept that permeated much of Foucault's work. He viewed power as related to concepts of freedom, authority, subjection, and resistance. Deleuze and Guattari introduced the notion of 'war machine' as a way of thinking about resistance. They did this in order to solve the political problem of groups formed in opposition to state power modelling themselves on parties and states (Deleuze, 2004; Sibertin-Blanc, 2010); in other words, as a means of not reproducing the power structures they wished to replace. The 'war machine' is transhistorical and realises itself in a range of social environments without ever taking war as its object. Like Deleuze, Foucault (2003) inverts a proposition by military theorist Claus von Clausewitz by arguing the politics is a continuation of war by other means. For Foucault, power is everywhere. It is coterminous with the social. Where Deleuze and Guattari identify the war machine, Foucault posits the notion of resistance. Foucault's theory of resistance moves from something very structured to a definition of resistance as

something that is fluid. He first implicitly introduced resistance into his thinking in the 1960's with the publication of *Madness and Civilisation*. Whilst he identifies rules and norms that have been placed on individuals by history and which have come to be seen as natural, he argues that it is always possible to destabilise these limits through transgression and contestation. In the early 1970's, he moved away from the term contestation and began using the terms 'struggle' and 'resistance':

> As soon as there is a power relation, there is the possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy (Foucault, 1988, p.123)

Foucault understood resistance in relation to power. Any discourse on power can be reversed into a discourse of resistance (Simons, 1995, p.83). Indeed:

> There are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance from power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. It exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence like power, resistance is multiple. (Foucault, 1980b, p.142)

Therefore, just as power is not owned neither is resistance, both are exercised at multiple points over a variety of power networks. Both power and resistance exist within everyday human relations. Hence, social change does not always need a revolution but rather can be brought about through everyday resistances. These resistances take many forms. Teachers, as well as students, are capable of resistance. In keeping with Foucault's theories of power and resistance, resistance cannot be seen as unidirectional. Those who do not want change are also resistors. If resistance is thought of as only in relation to the status quo and students are the only resistors, then the implication is that all teachers work to maintain the status quo. Most critical pedagogic theorists leave a student-teacher binary in place by casting students as the ones who must learn to resist and teachers as the ones who can remedy this lack of resistance. Freire, by positing that students are also teachers and teachers are also students, problematises this student-teacher binary:

> Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power ...[There is] *a multiplicity of points of resistance*: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead, there is a *plurality of resistances*, each of them a special case (Foucault, 1990, pp.95-96).

Like power, resistance is also diverse and heterogenous. Resistance cannot be placed outside power but rather is exerted from within power relations. The totality of human experience is imbricated with relations of power and resistance. Our cognitive, affective, social, and political lives exist within a multidirectional network of relations of power/resistance. As Medina makes clear:

> 'our ways of thinking, feeling, and acting become empowered and disempowered in specific respects, as they are formed and remain inscribed within the different networks of power relations and the different forms of resistance that shape our lives in various (and not always fully coherent) ways. (Medina, 2011, p.10)

Freire's concept of teaching as an act of love can also be viewed as a form of resistance. For Freire this love was an 'armed love – the fighting love of those convinced of the right and the duty to fight, denounce, and to announce' (Freire, 1998, p.42). Critical pedagogy, therefore, as conceptualised within a Freirean framework, can be viewed as possessing the ability to be counter-discursive or going against the grain.

6.10 Subjectification and Self-Creation

The processes of freedom and liberation are in part processes of knowing and caring for the self. In his later work Foucault appeared to acknowledge that his earlier work was too insistent on the formation of subjectivity by discursive practices (Defert and Ewald, 2001). He came to grant considerable importance to self-constitution. Besley writes that in his later writings Foucault attempts to 'emphasise games of truth not as a coercive practice, but rather as an ascetic practice of self-formation' (Besley, 2005, p.78). By ascetic, Foucault means an 'exercise of the self upon the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being' (Foucault, 1997b, p.282). Through this process of reflection one can engage in self-creation. This can constitute and construct their own self thus rejecting the 'normalising gaze of others'. Smith asserts that Foucault 'appeared to live out a life reflexively engaged with forming itself and the world even while describing the massive restraint on possibilities, for which the panopticon, or total institution, was a vivid symbol' (Smith, 2007). As Foucault asserts:

> The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them (Foucault, 1984b, p.118).

He suggests that a task for intellectuals is to make people aware of how intolerable taken-for-granted exercises of power are and to show them that things can be different. This involves looking 'at the same things in a different way' (Foucault, 1988a, p.321). To be able to look at things differently, one must engage in reflection and 'care of the self'. This involves disturbances in the conventional ways of thinking and a search for new modes, spaces and players in the 'game of truth' (Youdell, 2006), or as Taylor says 'making ourselves open to transformation' (2011, p.112). Foucault believes that, through reflection and care of the self, we can 'become again what we should have been but never were' (Foucault, 2004, p.95). This relates to Foucault's interest in marginality, resistance, and the insurrection of subjugated knowledges, all of which are major themes in this thesis. Freedom is not a state of being but rather a 'relation to ourselves' (Taylor, 2011, p.112) Freedom must be maintained and sustained through everyday resistances. As Butin explains:

> For Foucault, resistance was not an isolated, quixotic event; rather, Foucault saw it as a means of self-transformation through the minimisation of states of domination (Butin, 2001, p.158).

Here, resistance and struggle are both informative and formative. This involves an 'establishment of a certain objectivity, the development of a politics and a government of the self, and an elaboration of an ethics and practice in regard to oneself' (Foucault, 1997a). This is practical work and requires one to engage in ongoing critical reflection as well as never accepting anything as 'definitive, untouchable, obvious or immobile' (Foucault, 1988c, p.1).

6.11 Conclusion

This chapter sought to outline the theoretical framework underpinning this study. This research adopts a critical theoretical perspective and devotes attention to what Foucault termed unqualified or disqualified knowledges. It may be seen as counter-hegemonic in that it brings into view the unseen and makes audible the unheard and thus challenges the taken for granted nature of practices within schools. As already stated, a Foucauldian framework provides both critical theory and critical methods for understanding curricula as discourse practice with power effects. Foucault offers a critical lens to examine the microphysics of power and placed in conversation with Freire opens up the possibility of pedagogy as a creative and loving dialogue. For Freire dialogue is crucial for critical engagement and the act of creation and transformation. Together Freire's concept of problem posing education and Foucault's notion of problematisation enable young people to emerge differently. Freire contends that pedagogy is a form of art and as such can magnify difference and amplify voice. This in turn is brought into conversation with the work of Hickey-Moody who contends that affective pedagogies can create conditions for the creative transformation of school spaces and of students. These key interlocuters

enable us to move from the critical to the dialogical and the creative when imagining new ways of instituting pedagogical relationships. This work examines the embodied complexities of learning through school culture and how this impacts on students' lived experiences of the LCA programme. I will now turn to examine the importance of space in this context.

Chapter Seven:

Thinking Contextually: The language of Space

Everything that the LCAs do, stays in the LCA room. The good things and the bad! (Student, School C)

We've given them their own room and we allow them their own space and maybe you could say that isn't a good thing because I suppose it is a symbol of separation or lack of integration, you know? (Principal, School B)

'I think they like their own room…they definitely don't like to be taken out of it' (SNA School, B)

'They see it as their place…That's their identity, their little place in the school' (Teacher, School D)

7.1 Introduction

This research is deeply sensitive to the contextual nature of schools and, consequentially, the contextualized nature of policy enactment. Contexts are multidimensional. This study views space and place as just one just dimension of context. These spaces are not neutral and how students are deployed in spaces, both in policy and in the school, is indicative of issues such as value and recognition, issues that I contend are central to inclusion. Therefore, matters such as curricular aims and objectives do not remain static in policy but rather are lived out in the complexity of school spaces. Students and teachers embody policy, and this embodiment takes place within spaces and places in schools. This embodiment involves emotional encounters, and these encounters occur within the spaces of schools. As such, it is important that any analysis of policy, such as the Leaving Certificate Applied, is 'responsive to material and emotional truths and must approach these pedagogical considerations as a political project' (Hickey-Moody, 2017, p.1086). Policies are experiences in practice. Schools are sites of experience. This chapter, then, will explore the 'significance and workings of space, subjectivity and affectivity in the everyday life' (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011, p.144) of LCA students within schools. The chapter will begin by looking at spatial practices of separation and will then examine how the deployment of student relates to concepts of visibility and voice. I will draw on Foucault's concept of normalising judgements and dividing practice and analyse practices of inclusion

and exclusion with spaces. Lastly, I will explore Foucault's concept of heterotopias and how this may be used when evaluating the LCA programme.

This research is concerned with the lived experience of the LCA. In the previous chapters, I have examined the historical curricular events leading up to the design and introduction of the LCA programme, as well as the LCA curriculum itself. This was important in contextualising the rationale of the programme and examining the various influences on the development and implementation of the programme. This allowed us to examine the context outside of schools that impact on the implementation of the programme. However, as argued, of equal importance is the context within schools. This study argues that, in order to fully understand a curricular innovation such as the LCA programme, we must see how it is experienced and lived out in practice. I have argued from the outset that there is, at times, a gap between policy and practice and this is due to the contextualised nature of schools or, what Gerry Jeffers in his PhD thesis on Transition Year termed, the 'domestication' of curricula.

For this study, an examination of context involves paying attention to relationships, perceptions, diversities, lived experiences of curriculum and spaces within schools. Spatial discourses are value laden and are reflective of a hierarchy of values within schools. Some students, some subjects, some programmes are front and centre, whilst others are backgrounded. This, one may argue, is an expression in physical or material terms of the hidden curriculum; the unspoken taken for granted practices within schools.

Our experiences are shaped by our environment. For example, Shimahara argues that events or experiences cannot be understood adequately if isolated from their contexts (Shimahara, 1984). For this study, an examination of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme also provides a lens through which we can examine wider issues of inclusion in post primary education in Ireland. When thinking about education and particularly inclusive education, it is not enough to focus on curriculum alone; one must also examine spaces afforded to students within schools in terms of physical space but also in terms of values within the school and areas of recognition. As stated, how students are deployed in spaces is indicative of how valued, included, and recognised they are. This, in turn, affects them emotionally. As such, school spaces can come to be seen as emotional geographies (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011) of inclusion or exclusion. Dussel (1997) argues that we can understand a system better by looking at it from the outside. He asks us to think from the perspective of the marginalised, those who are excluded or silenced. Dussel believes that we each should be aware of the existence of

the other, of their living and their experiences. This places a focus on the voices of the other, on those for whatever reason feel excluded or exist on the margins.

In many ways, the LCA programme is on the outside of mainstream post primary education. It is 'ring fenced' and is viewed as a very separate programme to that of the Leaving Certificate Established. The term 'ring-fenced' has many spatial connotations and the process of ring fencing a programme entails a certain amount of separation in policy, assessment, and practice. Therefore, we can learn much about inclusive education in Ireland by examining the ways in which the LCA programme is viewed and lived out in practice and by listening to the stories of LCA students and teachers.

Observers and researchers such as Gleeson, Clifford, Collison, O'Driscoll, Rooney, Tuohy (2002) Gleeson (2009), Gleeson and O Flaherty (2013), and Tuohy and Doyle (1994), as well as Banks, Byrne, Mc Coy and Smyth (2014), have carried out various studies of the LCA programme. Commentaries as opposed to systematic studies on the LCA existed in the early days of its introduction. These focused on the 'ring-fenced' nature of the programme in terms of curricular content and assessment (see Tuohy and Doyle, 1994 and Gleeson and Granville, 1995). Tuohy and Doyle (1996) also expressed concern regarding parity of esteem and feared that the programme may further rather than reduce inequalities. In 2002, Gleeson et al., utilising a framework put forth by Dalin (1993), examined the LCA as an example of curricular change and school culture. Dalin states that schools have five mutual and interdependent variables: environment, values, structure, human relations, and strategies. Gleeson et al. (2002) analysed the LCA in relation to four of these five variables; they did not examine environment.

For this study, environment is crucial, as I view spatial discourse as discourses of power. How students are dispersed within space speaks to how they are valued within schools and within the education system more generally. The environment of the school, the classrooms, the corridors, the yard, the canteen; these places within school are of huge importance to students. These are places where learning takes place, where friendships are formed, where students feel safe or feel isolated, where they spend eight hours per day of arguably the most formative years of their lives. The experiences they have in the physical environment of the school stay with them for the rest of their lives. Therefore, the physical environments of schools greatly impact upon students' lived experiences of the LCA programme. Pillow (2006) also argues that spatial practices are written onto the bodies of teachers and students and affect their experience, sense of self, and issues of recognition or non-recognition. As our bodies are inextricably linked to the spaces we occupy, the affective experiences students have within the spaces they occupy can encourage various forms of resistance and protest

and these, in turn, produce subjects and identities. Schools are sites of power and contestation. Foucault argued that power is not something that is possessed or owned but rather is something that is exercised in a multitude of power relations. Where there is power, there is resistance. A Foucauldian framework drawing on his concept of heterotopias highlights the many points of resistance within disciplinary spaces and the resultant 'counter spaces'. This will be explored later in the chapter.

Many studies on LCA have focused on outside contextual factors such as retention rates, academic outcomes, progression routes, the dominance of economic and technical interest, as well as the impact of the European Social Fund on curricular innovation in Ireland (see Gleeson and Granville, 1996; Gleeson et al., 2002, Mc Coy et al., 2014). This study is different in that it places emphasis on spatial discourses of inclusion in relation to the LCA programme as well related issues of value and recognition. Of importance is the contextual nature of the school itself. How students exist within spaces in the school affects their construction of self as well as raising issues of recognition or non-recognition. The multi-method approach to the research design allowed for a broad and in-depth analysis of how the LCA programme is experienced in schools and invited students and teachers to voice these experiences. We will now explore the ways in which spatial practices within schools are also discursive practices of power and provide a lens through which we can focus on issues of inclusion and how these unfold in a physical way within schools.

7.2 Space and separation

> *'In the announcements it says 6th years come to the hall for assembly but that's not us, even though we are 6th years we are LCA, but we are different to them. That's the downfall of it really. We are separate to them. That's really a downfall. So, if there was something I could change, well that'd be it.' (Student, School D).*

The above quote summarises what students in the case study schools felt was the main issue with the LCA programme – separation from their peers. This separation involves physical separation within the school, curricular separation, and separation in terms of perceptions and relationships. It also involves the construction of a 'them' and 'us' rhetoric. Students following the LCA programme see themselves as being different to their peers in the Leaving Certificate Established and identify this as the reason for separation from their peers in physical terms.

For Foucault, exclusion operates spatially; spatial discourse separates people through processes of dividing practices and surveillance. Foucault explains that within institutions such as schools, bodies are distributed into spaces that are enclosed, partitioned, and ranked. A process of surveillance oversees these spaces, ensuring that individuals are placed in such a way that allows for suitable

classifications. 'Each individual has his own place; and each place its own individual' (Foucault, 1979, p.143). For Foucault, then, the notion of exclusion operates spatially; through use of a 'normalising gaze' individuals are separated through what Foucault terms 'dividing practices'. Through the panoptic gaze and normalising judgement, individuals are ranked and classified in order of 'docility' and 'productivity'. This observation entails keeping records and hence a whole body of knowledge is built up around individuals who are observed. This knowledge is used to design interventions to 'normalise' individuals. This can be seen in a wide variety of schools in which significant importance is placed on differentiation and various initiatives are devised based on students' perceived difficulties or deficits. While this is presented as an attempt to ensure equality of opportunity, it is not clear how accepting schools are of difference. Indeed, various differentiation techniques are implemented by schools, but the overall aim seems not to be the recognition of difference but rather an attempt to 'normalise'.

These dividing practices are part of the social construction of schools that discursively creates students and teachers as subjects or non-subjects. As such space is much more than just the physicality of schools; it is a discourse of power. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault writes:

> Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to language (langue) and to speech. It is this "more" that we must reveal and describe (Foucault, 1974, p.49).

It is possible to think about this "more" in a number of different ways. On the one hand, Foucault highlights ways in which certain discourses may be constrained or excluded, but on the other hand he speaks about the 'ponderous, formidable materiality' of discourse (Foucault, 1981, p.52). This materiality of discourse elucidated the importance of architecture, organisation of spaces and practices within spaces. In other words, the physical manifestations of discourse. These manifestations of discourse allow for a variety of forms of visibility and the materiality of educational discourses within schools make subjects, i.e. students and teachers, visible but simultaneously invisible. Students and teachers are rendered visible through 'normalising judgements' and 'examinations' and the written records that this entails. However, certain 'taken for granted practices' or the subjugation of their knowledge and the different form this takes, can also render them invisible.

As I have argued, it is not possible to thoroughly examine the LCA programme and the lived experiences of students without examining the spaces these students occupy within schools: the utilisation of space within the school and the deployment of bodies within this space are indicative of the school's value system. What is implicitly taught through the hidden curriculum occurs through a spatial discourse. Students are aware of their value within the school by way of their spatial

representation and recognition within the schools. This space does not just involve spaces within the classroom or the corridors but also the designation of spaces on the noticeboard, on the schools' website and visual information displayed within schools, as well as sound spaces such as announcements over the intercom. As such space is understood here in extensive terms incorporating physical space, representational space, and sound space. This study is also interested in the gaps, what does not appear, what is not heard or seen. Through these spatial discourses students are rendered visible or invisible. As a student in School C noted:

> *I am six years in the school now and I don't think I've ever heard LCA being mentioned once on the intercom if I'm going to be honest with you.*

Likewise, a student in school A noted:

> *Everyone knows about TY, there are posters for them everywhere. There is nothing for LCA. I think they should put up like an advertisement, well not an advertisement but like a poster telling people about us and what we do cos I think no one here knows what we are doing. They need to know that it is like the exact same thing except it's LCA*

For many students in the case study schools, they felt that their peers lacked an understanding of the LCA programme and the work that they as LCA students do. Many students felt that this responsibility was that of the schools and that schools had failed to properly explain or promote the LCA programme. One student felt that schools should:

> *Explain what we do and explain that it is a good year and actually recommend it. (Student, School A)*

Another student felt the programme needed to be marketed better in order to attract other students:

> *There's always gonna be that stigma. There's always gonna be people thinking they know best. We can't change what people think but at least we can manipulate the programme to getting people to like it cos there's no point going like "Oh, we'll just do the programme and if they join, they join". I feel like that's the way it is now. They don't want people to join'. (Student, School C)*

> *A few times some people make smart comments and all this to us. I just ignore it because I know it's not really true about the whole thing. But like I do feel the school should be explaining that what they are saying isn't true. Like actually promote the programme. (Student, School C)*

This lack of promotion suggests, at least to the students, a lack of importance placed on the programme, which is indicative of a hidden curriculum within schools. Through lack of promotion of

the programme, the implicit message received by students is that LCA is not as valued as TY or LCE. This is very much felt by LCA students and it has impacted on their lived experience of the programme.

7.3 Space and student visibility

Many spatial discourses within schools render LCA students invisible. The LCA programme is viewed and treated as a separate entity within schools. As one coordinator explained:

> *It is a completely different programme to the other two Leaving Cert programmes. It has a totally different curriculum and a completely different assessment system. The programme itself is ring-fenced so it is just very different. (Coordinator, School B).*

Whilst LCE students and TY students are very visible within schools, LCA students due to the separate nature of the LCA programme are often times rendered invisible:

> *They are given their own room and they do their own thing. I suppose they are fairly separate in a lot of ways but that's just the way the programme is. (Teacher, School D)*

As the LCA is an alternative programme, and as policy makers explained (see Chapter Four), a deliberate decision was made to ring fence it so as to facilitate work experience, out of school learning, and small class sizes. However, decisions such as these can have other unintended consequences when lived out in practice. As the principal in School B stated:

> *LCA is a ring-fenced programme. The curriculum is very different from that of the Leaving Certificate Established and as such schools, in order to run the programme properly, must treat LCA students differently. It is a totally different course. The programme requires their separation in a certain sense from their peers. The LCA's don't really seem to mind too much. We try to integrate them as much as we can but for the most part, they seem happy enough in their own little group.*

The idea that 'for the most part they seem happy enough in their own little group' is true to a certain extent. Students in all four case study schools stated that they felt close to their classmates and that the LCA room was a safe place for them where they could work together as a small group. However, the interview transcripts from all four schools are fraught with tensions and ambivalences. On the one hand, students felt safe and together:

> *Because we are such a small group and we spend all day everyday with each other we are very close' (Student, School C).*

However, this discourse of safety was in tension with a discourse of separation and isolation:

We're just, kinda, our own class. We are fairly separate from the rest of them (Student, School A)

It should be more integrated with the other leaving certs (Student, School B)

Sometimes we are just forgotten about, yeah that is true to say forgotten about. If it wasn't for the coordinator, we wouldn't know about anything that is going on in the school (Student, School C).

That same student in school C, in order to illustrate his point, recounted the following story:

I remember there was a sports day. They forgot to tell us about it. They remembered that morning, so we got to go. When we got up to the field the teacher was like "Leaving Certs to the top of the pitch", so we went up cos we are Leaving Certs and they were like "the LCAs are back over there". And we said no we are staying here. We are Leaving Certs too. We are doing a Leaving Cert, we are leaving school next year aren't we, so if we are not Leaving Certs, what are we? The teacher said I know that, but this isn't your area to stand in. Your space is over there. So, we had to move. I was thick about that (Student, School C)

The comment 'this isn't your area to stand in' is an interesting one. As we know schools are full of designated spaces. This serves to organise students into year groups and classes and also serves a practical purpose in that it helps teachers to ensure that each student is present and accounted for. However, the ways in which students are subdivided or separated into spaces speaks to ideas around value and identity. In this instance the LCA student identified himself as a Leaving Certificate student, and presented himself in the designated Leaving Certificate area. When told this is not your area to stand in the student felt frustration and anger stating, 'I was thick about that'. This anger or frustration related to issues of identity. The student perceived himself as a Leaving Certificate student but was confronted with an alternative perception. The resulting question posed by the LCA student was a question of identity: 'If we are not leaving certs, what are we?'.

In the case study schools, the Leaving Certificate Established was repeatedly referred to as the 'normal' leaving certificate by both students and teachers alike:

From what I can see they all hang around in their own circle; the LCA lads and your normal leaving certs (Teacher, School A)

Well, there are the actual leaving cert classes, you know, like the normal leaving certs and then there is us. But there is a stereotype on us; the normal leaving certs think we don't do anything even though we are actually doing work. (Student, School C).

I think it should be mixed in with the other more because it's always just LCAs and Leaving Certs and we're very separated from the normal ones but really, they're similar to us. (Student, School D)

The LCAs would be very different to your normal leaving certs. A lot more needy academically and some years there can be a lot of behaviour problems. Having said that they are a lot easier to build a relationship with. They are the very ones that in five years time if they see you down the town will shout "Hello Sir".

In many ways, this referral to LCE students as 'normal' was done simply as an attempt to linguistically differentiate the LCA students from the LCE students and seemed to be a cultural practice within schools. Even the LCA students themselves referred to the 'other' leaving certs as the 'normal' leaving certs, implying that they were following the normal or standard leaving certificate programme. However, this use of terminology within schools, for the most part unwittingly, succeeded in othering LCA students and hence identifying the LCA programme or LCA student as somewhat "abnormal". As such, it thus needed to occupy a different space in the curriculum and, subsequently, the schools.

7.4 Foucault's normalising judgements and dividing practices

Foucault's work on the practices of exclusion and his references to the 'norm' and 'abnormal' are relevant here (Ball, 2013). For Foucault, the gaze of the other results in normalising judgements, and based on these judgements, some people are separated out. Foucault's concept of the gaze and normalising judgements led to 'processes of naturalisation and social construction that discursively created human beings as subjects or non-subjects, as human or as something less that human, as abnormal' (Peters and Besley, 2014). This use of 'normalising judgements' and a subsequent separating out is seen in the way schools 'identify' or 'select' LCA students. Some students proactively choose to do LCA stating it was more practical, had smaller class sizes, and was an 'easier route'. However, most students in the case study schools were identified by teachers or the coordinator as being suitable for the LCA programme. This was something schools felt they needed to do as those students who teachers felt would struggle enormously in LCE did not initially volunteer to do the LCA programme. Teachers and coordinators stated that this was due in large part to the stigma attached to the programme. Therefore, in order to have enough numbers to run an LCA classes, schools needed to identify students who they believed would benefit from following the LCA programme. These students were identified as potentially struggling in the LCE established for a variety of reason; Junior Cert results, academic difficulties, SEN diagnosis, attendance issues, behavioural problems and being at risk of dropping out. Schools implemented the following different procedures in identifying students who may benefit from following the LCA programme:

So, first of all I suppose we do a talk and students opt-in, then we get them to fill in an application form and we do an interview. However, there are students we feel might be suited to it, so we sit down with the Year Head and we sit with the SEN co-ordinator and the Pastoral team and they identify students that they think might benefit; so then the Deputy Principal links with the Co-ordinator and has a conversation with them to

see what they think and would they know more about it and sometimes they'd bring in parents etc. So, the co-ordinator would be saying that they think they might be suitable and leave it there. We try and tap into them again a few times you know? Em, some of them are just disengaged – that'd be the main thing – at risk of drop-out, no interest, em yes we would have a good few with additional learning of some sort… we might have some that come from disadvantaged backgrounds etc. so attendance would have been a problem etc. Some of them do present behaviourally, but not many. Sometimes it doesn't occur to the child to go into it, you see? So, once you work on that, it's normally, we never had a class that may not run or something…(Principal, School D).

It depends on the year and it depends on demand. What we'll do, say this particular year for example, we're going to have a lot of demand; we know from the cohort of students coming through that there's going to a lot of them that we'd see would probably be potential LCA candidates or students that would succeed in LCA where they might not in Leaving Cert. What we do then is we have an interview process; what we do is, both myself and the co-ordinator and the guidance counsellor will visit 3rd year group at different times and we'll talk about next year and things like that. What we'll do then is we'll interview every student that comes into LCA and we have clear criteria marked out – we have a marking sheet – and em, some of it's built around research so 30% is around the programme, 30% is around suitability – where I suppose we'd be looking at students, we'd be looking at their profile, looking at their experience in exams and things like that – and also anecdotally we'd hear from staff; we don't have a formal process where staff feed in and say this student should do it and this student should not. After that then we have things like attendance because that's obviously a key factor for students so there's 10% for attendance, there's 10% for discipline as well. So, we've only ever once had a situation where there were too many candidates, OK? So, we have to refuse 3 candidates and it's interesting to see one of those students, he's in Leaving Cert not engaging very well in Leaving Cert attendance issues and 2 others left school. (Principal, School A)

In an ideal world the parents would be coming to us now but, it's never happened. Em, what we do is we go round each of the class groups, so this week I've 4 next week, we go round all the 3rd year classes and TY classes. They get a talk on what options they have for next year and there is a specific LCA talk that will go on as well; it's only a couple of slides, but it's given as much ownership as the talk for TY and I think that, that's something – now we've only done that for the last 2 years – but the Principal came in for the talk last year. I think that makes a difference that the students don't see it as a get out clause or the dumping ground, they saw it as a valuable programme, but we do have to chase them up individually. So, one of the things we'll do next week is we'll identify the students that we believe might be best suited to and we'll have a parents evening, just for those parents. Now, for the last 2 years, nobody turned up to those evenings. (Co-ordinator, School B).

Even though these procedures are well intentioned, and, in many cases, students identified would struggle in LCE, they also entail identifying students based on perceived deficits i.e. academic ability,

behavioural problems, and disengagement. Students internalise this and explain their own reasons for doing LCA also in deficit terms. A student in School A explained his choice:

'I just wasn't the best, you know? Not the best at listening' (Student, School A).

Again, in deficit terms, another student explained:

'I'm not good at reading or books. The teachers thought I might be better at LCA and I thought that meself too' (Student, School A).

Another student decided to do LCA based on a recent AEN diagnosis:

After my Junior Cert results, I found out I had severe ADHD and severe dyslexia and from that point I thought LCA would be a good option' (Student, School C).

LCA is a more practical programme where the emphasis is on learning by doing. Although some of the reasons given above may be legitimate reasons for choosing to follow the LCA programme, a negative perception and deficit framing has often been attached to the programme. For example, LCA is seen as for those who for whatever reason are unable to complete the Leaving Certificate Established rather than it being for those students who are gifted in practical ways and may wish to pursue a career in this area. This places schools in a vicious cycle as they must select students to follow the programme, as the majority of students do not self-select into the programme due to the stigma associated with the programme. Moreover, the criteria used to identify potential LCA students further perpetuates this stigma i.e. it is for students who have difficulties. This negative perception of the LCA programme is due in part to the place occupied historically by vocational education in the Irish psyche, discussed in the earlier chapter outlining the historical and policy context.

This identification of the other as 'normal' had a huge effect on LCA students' construction of self as they began to see themselves as different to everyone else. They readily recognised that there was a stigma attached to the programme and as students following the programme this stigma was attached to them:

'*I think they should change the name of it cos we are seen as LCAs'. (Student, School B)*

'They think the programme is a doss and that we are all lazy cos we couldn't do the normal one'. (Student, School A)

'The stigma put on LCA is terrible, and then they put that stigma on us, but I don't care. It doesn't bother me'. (Student, School B).

Some students reacted by trying to correct this. In one case study school, after they had participated in the first student workshop, three LCA students took it upon themselves to speak at an assembly to the third years about LCA, one of whom was the student quoted above who said he didn't care. In one of the other case study schools, some LCA students decided to place information about LCA on noticeboards in the school.

However, the majority of LCA students in the case study schools decided that they were going to own this perceived difference and stake claim to their own space within the school:

It's just the majority of the boys I teach have a 'hard-man' approach. It's like there is this persona that goes along with LCA and students seem to morph into that. Even lads who you would've had in 1st, 2nd and 3rd year. It is like they are taking on how they think the school sees them. They definitely copy the LCA lads who left the year before. They take their place in the pecking order. They are separated out in a lot of ways from the other leaving certs. Maybe I don't know, I'm just thinking here, but maybe if they are the hard man then they won't get picked on' (Teacher, School D)

There is definitely a bit a gang mentality with LCA students. A kind of a us against them thing. You see them straight away with the hoodies. (Teacher, School C)

They felt they weren't being treated like everybody else and they would argue that they wanted to be treated like everybody else, yet for example, they had a big difficulty wearing the uniform where it would, on the surface at least, make them look part of everybody else. So it is – and I do think there is a lot of lip service paid to that element that you bought up but you know it is hard to integrate them; they do feel they are apart and in a very formal way they are apart. In an informal way they start to drift apart. Our answer to that is we try to bond them as a group and we give them their own room and we allow them their own space and again you could argue that's not a good idea because, again, it's a symbol of separation or lack of integration. (Principal, School B)

Foucault argues that subjects are discursively created. Here we see students take on a persona that has been discursively created within schools i.e. the typical LCA student. As the teacher above states, students just 'seem to morph' into this persona and, as such, are readily identifiable within the school as an LCA student. This raises a number of questions: When students adopt what is perceived as a 'typical' LCA persona, is this an effort to conform - this is how everyone sees me, so this is how I am going to act? Or is it a form of resistance and protest?

A Foucauldian analysis of the technologies of power encourages one to examine phenomena from the perspective of those on the outside, those who are marginalised. Foucault views power as constituted within and between subjects, and as such opens up new ways of viewing students' relationships with their peers and with teachers. This perspective places an emphasis on student agency and the various ways in which students can accept, resist, or modify subject positions.

Various techniques within policy such as ring-fencing the programme and subsequent techniques within schools such as the academic and physical separation or segregation of LCA students has resulted in an invisibilisation of these students within the school. Students in case studies schools told me that sometimes LCA students are *'forgotten about'*. The LCA coordinator in School D stated:

> *Sometimes you need to remind Year Heads to include the LCAs. It is not that they leave them out, it is just that they can forget about them sometimes.*

7.5 Spatial Practices and Inclusion/Exclusion

According to Foucault, spatial practices can be also regarded as techniques of government (Huxley, 2007). Techniques of government can be described as 'those technologies imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired effects (Rose, 1999, p.32). The organisation of space within schools serves as governmental practice in that it shapes and influences the conduct of both students and teachers. Through the organisation of spaces within schools, LCA students are rendered somewhat separate from the LCE peers and although they do possess opportunities for social interaction with their peers over the course of the school day, these opportunities are somewhat limited. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault contends that 'discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space' (Foucault, 1991, p.114) and this is especially evident within schools. Through the use of spatial tactics particular subjective positions are produced i.e. the LCA student and the LCE student. Spatial practices serve to constitute LCA students as different or other and LCE student as 'normal'. The organisation of students into LCA classrooms serves as a material or symbolic separation and this spatial segregation serves to reinforce differences between LCA students and LCE students. In my four case study schools, LCE students tended to move between classrooms depending on what subject they had whereas LCA students, for the most part, remained in what was commonly referred to as the LCA room. These practices of physical separation are regarded as normal or the only way of doing things, as the LCA programme is ring-fenced. For example, LCA students complete a lot of their work using computers and, as such, they need access to a room that has computers. LCA students for the most part, don't use books but have individual folders in which they keep their work. It was feared by teachers and coordinators that,

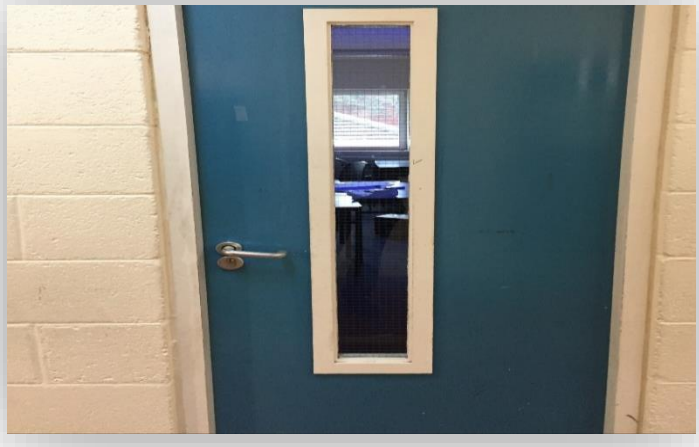
if LCA students were to move from classroom to classroom, these folders would get lost. These 'taken for granted' practices are discursively and materially created. Ironically, it is a discourse of inclusion that legitimises spatial practices of exclusion within schools.

LCA was introduced at a time when the Department of Education was working hard to increase Ireland's retention rates to over 90%. The benefits of staying in full time education for as long as possible have been well researched and include effects such as increased life satisfaction, health benefits and improved educational outcomes (see Speilhofer et, 2007 for further discussion). Here, one may argue, inclusion is conceptualised primarily as keeping students in school. When speaking of the benefits of the LCA programme for students one principal explained:

> *Well, for the school in general there's a couple of smaller points. It does – I'm confident it helps retain students and that helps the school in general because they're our kids, you know, where would they go? It's the right place for them to be at their age, it's right that they're in a place and receiving education, you know… In other words, it's a place that they come that is a normal part of their development and their progress, and it's good that they're here. I suppose I would've feared for them if we didn't have it (Principal, School B).*

This is a discourse of safety and protection in the above quote. This is very indicative of teachers in general who work with LCA students. There is certainly a sense of school being a safe space for them. School, as we know, provides a protective space for many students, however, the LCA classroom in the four case study schools also provided a space where students experienced a sense of belonging and acceptance. Students spoke of positive relationships with teachers and with fellow classmates. They enjoyed learning in a different way without as much pressure. These social relations and material practices such as accumulating credits as they go, enjoying the camaraderie of a small, close knit class group, enjoying a different kind of student teacher relationship contributed to the constitution LCA as a positive emotional space, a safe space. However, it was simultaneously constituted as a 'space of containment' (Nairn and Higgins, 2010, p.184). Students were very aware of the ways in which the LCA rendered them separate from their peers and reported feelings of marginalisation and alienation. When thinking about truly inclusive education we need to pay attention not just simply to the physical presence of students within school buildings but rather we need to examine the spaces they occupy and the inherent ambiguities, contradictions and tensions evident in these spaces. This will be explored in a little more detail now by drawing on Foucault's concept of 'heterotopias'.

7.6 Foucault's Heterotopias



This is where we can talk to our LCA coordinator if we have problems. We can talk to each other here and talk about things other than schoolwork. (Student, School C)

Foucault defines heterotopias as 'counter-sites' or 'other spaces' (Foucault, 1996b). These spaces simultaneously mirror and challenge what is around them; hence they at once reflect and contest. Schools are full of such counter spaces. This study utilises the notion of heterotopias or 'counter-spaces' as a theoretical lens to examines the spatial position of LCA students within schools. By positioning the LCA classrooms as counter-sites it is possible to assess their relationship with the rest of the school body. Therefore, using the lens of heterotopias is useful not only as a point of philosophical conjecture but rather because perceiving LCA classrooms as heterotopias makes possible an examination of their position within the wider school system. The LCA classroom can be seen as a counter-space because it mirrors and contests other classroom spaces within the school. The LCA classroom mirrors what is going on in other classrooms in that it too is a place where learning takes place and is a place that is full of relationships and different subjectivities. The LCA classroom is simultaneously part of the school body but it also apart, different, 'ring-fenced'. Students in the LCA classroom are following a very different programme and as such learn in a different way. There is more emphasis on student autonomy, on learning by doing, on tasks and assignments, interviews, groupwork and out of school learning. Students have claimed the LCA classroom as their own space within the school. Yet, this claiming of the LCA classroom has many ambiguities. As already argued, LCA represents a safe space for students, a space of acceptance and belonging:

We all get on well. There is only a few of us so we are very bonded. There's no-one that's up themselves or anything like that. We're all just doing the same stuff (Student, School A).

Others in the schools also saw this space as belonging to LCA students:

The LCA room is definitely their space. They can make it fairly intimidating. I don't think other students would really go in there but then, I don't know (SNA, School B)

The fact that LCE students don't 'really go there' highlights the notion that the LCA room exists in a different way to other classrooms. However, it is interesting to see that the above staff member believes the LCA students make the classroom 'intimidating' resulting in 'other students' not going in there. The implication here is that the alienation LCA students sometimes experience is produced by the students themselves:

They are very separate, and they do feel that, but some of them maybe they come across like they enjoy that – maybe play down that they don't, you know? (Teacher, School B)

Perhaps LCA students act 'intimidating' or 'come across' like this in an effort to protect this space or perhaps this is a projection subconsciously constituted by how LCA students have been discursively created as 'other'. However, this was not evident from my study. In fact, from speaking with LCA students themselves it was clear that their desire was quite the contrary. They desired to be included and integrated more fully with their LCA peers. It is true that LCA students, for the most part, reported enjoying having their own room however the reason given for this was mainly as a means of escaping what they perceived as negative judgements from their peers. The heterotopic nature of the LCA classroom is symbolic of how LCA students felt in the school. One student explained:

It is like we are on the outside looking in. Like we're in the school and all but we are just looking at things different like. Don't get me wrong we have the craic with each other and our coordinator is sound, but it is like we are just always on the outside of everything, just looking in.

The above quote is a very powerful statement. The student feels as if he is just 'looking in'. This idea of looking in positions the student on the outside and his LCE peers on the inside. This is more than a discursive othering but rather speaks to a kind of psychic and social alienation or othering. When thinking of discourses of participation and discourses of inclusion, this experience by this LCA student undermines these discourses and demands we examine how we conceptualise and live out inclusive

practices in our schools. This is the photograph that student took as part of the Photovoice task to explain what he meant.

It is clear that the LCA classroom represents ambivalent discourses that are held in tension with each other. As already stated, students feel safe in this room. In the four case study schools each LCA group was small. Students spend all day together and as such were bonded as a tightly knit group. They saw the LCA classroom as their space within the school:

> *they see that as their place…. That's their identity, their little place in the school. They really don't like to be taken out of it. (SNA, School B)*

I discussed this idea with students in the student workshops and they agreed:

> *It's grand here. We are comfortable and it is a handy spot. Don't have to trek around the school. We have the craic here (Student Workshop 1, School B).*

> *No one really annoys us here. The teachers comes in for whatever subject and the coordinator is beside us there but other than that we are left alone.*

Students in the workshop in school C offered differing opinions:

> *I think we should be more integrated really. Like, we are very separate from the rest of them*

> *It would be a lot better if we were mixed in more. Just think that would be better.*

> *I like our room. We all get on and are doing the same thing so there's no like oh I'm better than you or you're a bit thick. We're all the same here.*

Now, it's like, we're like brothers and sisters because we talk and everything…

For LCA students, there seemed to be a collective identity. This 'politics of identity' was heightened by being with other students who share similar experiences of school. This being together and being at a remove from 'others' within schools provides a 'safe space' in which students can experience a sense of acceptance and solidarity (Fyre, 1997). For students, the LCA room represented a safe space. This discourse of safety is common when speaking about inclusive education and is frequently aligned with a discourse of vulnerability or 'at risk'. Many students following the LCA programme are doing so because they have been identified as at risk of early school leaving. The earlier quote from the Principal in School B also highlights this notion of inclusivity and safety:

In other words, it's a place that they come that is a normal part of their development and their progress, and it's good that they're here. I suppose I would've feared for them if we didn't have it'. (Principal, School B).

It is important that students feel safe in school. However, feeling safe does not equate with feeling included. Examining LCA through a spatial lens highlights the importance of feelings of belonging and positive relationships. Positive relationships with classmates and with teachers impacts on students lived experiences of the programme and their construction of self. As such a focus on the affective possibilities of positive relationships and the emotional landscapes of schools can teach us much about promoting belonging and effecting inclusion.

Many teachers expressed a strong emotional connection to their LCA students and some expressed frustration and annoyance at the ways in which LCA students were sometimes rendered separate from the rest of the school body:

And it's not fair, it's really unfair on them and if you interview them they'll probably tell you that I promote them and I'm always taking them up and doing things for them and trying to keep them included in what is going on in the school (Teacher, School C)

I often thought that we should try and start afresh…Like even incorporating LCA with TY activities to try and keep them more involved…instead of driving a wedge between them, dividing them, maybe we should try and combine them a wee bit more.. (Teacher, School D)

On announcements it says can all Leaving Certs and LCAs come to the GP area – they're either Leaving Certs or there not. It's not Leaving Certs and LCA, it's would all Leaving Certs come to the GP area. That's the way it should be, it puts me bananas. (Teacher, School C)

However, other teachers believed that students were included, as much as possible:

Well, they are invited on every trip. A lot of them, they don't want to go. They want to be separate. They enjoy it. (Teacher, School A)

They should be more integrated, and we always work on that. We try, but it doesn't always happen as much as it should. For two reasons, they tend not to want to go to things and be involved either… so, it's a two-way thing. (Principal, School D)

Well, no they wouldn't say that they are glad, happy to be in it, but they still like to keep themselves apart from the rest of the school. (Teacher, School C).

Another teacher expressed an inevitability about this separation:

The reality is if you gave me a list of individuals who talked about if we look at this and this… the reality is, in any given set of circumstances and whatever you did, some of those students are going to end up in a particular environment or in a particular place. That's the reality of it, if we're going to be honest. (Teacher, School D)

There are a multitude of discourses here. Students feel safe, protected, and accepted as part of the LCA group but also feel separate from and different to their peers. Some teachers see this separation as unjust and unfair while others see it as a type of 'voluntary separation' on the part of LCA students. Others still see it as inevitable; some students are different and, as such, will inevitably be separate from their peers.

7.7 Conclusion

Inclusion and exclusion are intricately woven into the structure of schools. Where students and classrooms are placed in the school has an effect on how important or valued students feel they are. The physical places students occupy affect them emotionally and impact on how they view the world and themselves. An examination of the LCA programme through a spatial lens involves navigating the spatial ambiguities and competing discourses explored above. The discourse of inclusion may be read as a discourse of retainment or containment, if students are in school and are part of the education system then, they fit the dominant narrative of inclusive education. However, this study's examination of the LCA programme through a spatial lens demonstrates that this is not always the case. Inclusion is about relationships and value and recognition and these concepts are played out and lived and felt in spatial terms. Although the objective of inclusive education is commendable and just, the decentred nature of power relations in Foucauldian theory and how these are felt through spatial practices allows us to critically examine how we as teachers and policy makers, albeit unwittingly, can contribute to and perpetuate the marginalisation of some students within our schools and education

system. I do not aim to argue that a Foucauldian framework is the only one of use in examining such issues, however I do contend that Foucault's framework provides us with sophisticated ways of examining power relations and the organisation of social space within schools. Through a Foucauldian analysis, space within schools is revealed as complex and fluid and allows us to focus on the ways in which spatial practices affect students' lived experiences. Thus it enables this study to overcome the theoretical silence on space and spatial practices influencing the everyday experiences of LCA students.

Chapter Eight:

Thinking Politically – Voice and Recognition

I'd love to talk to the whole school, everyone, first years right up to the 'normal' Leaving Certs and tell them all about LCA and all the work we actually do, but sure they wouldn't listen to me, I suppose' (Student, School C)

8.1 Introduction

This study views voice as the capacity to make oneself heard. This ability to 'voice' one's experience or make oneself heard is always situated and socially contextualised and determined. This view of voice connects with notions of knowledge, inequality and power as mediated and felt through everyday experiences and practice. It may be argued that all institutions are regulated in terms of the organisation of voice. This is certainly true for education. Schooling is a process that works in and through voice. Through schooling one's voice may be transformed and empowered or silenced. In Bakhtinian terms education and voice is characterised by a multi-layered plurality. It is 'polyphonic' and subject to forms of policing (Blommaert et al., 2009; Androutsopoulos, 2009; Agha, 2005). This policing involves imposing processes of 'normalisation.' Some voices are deemed legitimate while others are silenced. A Foucauldian framework allows us to interrogate dominant voices and hegemonic discourses by listening to those voices that have been marginalised, silenced, or 'othered', as well as questioning why some voices and forms of knowledge are dominant while others are subjugated. Therefore, voice is a lens through which we can examine the inclusion of difference of students who may be 'othered' in post primary education. Voice, as conceptualised in this study, renders actors within schools visible and heard or invisible and silenced. There is a duality within Foucault's work in relation to voice; 'we are subjugated to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth' (Foucault, 1980, p.93). The production of truth or knowledge produces subjects, bringing them into being and categorising them e.g.. the LCA student. Some groups are able to speak 'knowledgeably' about 'others' who are concomitantly rendered silent. Educational discourse and expert knowledge constitute the 'good' student or the 'weak' student, as well as the 'good' teacher or the 'bad' teacher; 'the subject emerges within discourse, the individual is not a pre-given entity' (Foucault, 1980, p.73).

In previous chapters, I traced the historical emergence of the LCA programme and the curricular context of the programme. This was not an attempt at a Foucauldian genealogy but did however endeavour to trace the historical value placed on vocational education and subsequently LCA, as a pre-vocational programme, and track how certain kinds of valuing (or discounting) persist. It was an attempt to raise critical awareness that the idea that 'things are the way they are because of a history of past struggles…. which can have a great impact on how we confront our struggles in the present' (Medina, 2012, p.19).

The previous chapter analysed spatial discourses within schools and examined the ways in which students occupy or are deployed in space speaks to issues of value and recognition as well as inclusion. This chapter will examine voice. It will begin by discussing voice and the politics of hearing. Voice will then be related to space (as discussed in the previous chapter). Discourse and power will then be examined as well as the LCA programme and subjugated knowledges. Issues of normalisation and exclusion as well as recognition and resistance will then be discussed. This notion of voice and resistance will lead into the next chapter *Thinking Pedagogically: Pedagogy in Practice*, which will utilise a Freirean concept of critical pedagogy, as well as affective pedagogy as espoused by Hickey-Moody. The use of these key theorists enables us to move from the critical to the dialogical and the creative when imagining new ways of instituting relationships.

8.2 Historical Hegemonic Discourses

The official and hegemonic discourse since the introduction of free post primary education in the 1960's is one of inclusion. All children are entitled to an education regardless of economic or social background. A discourse of social inclusion became dominant. Donogh O'Malley did much for families in Ireland who were simply unable to afford to send their children to second level school. Having the opportunity to attend school and participate in education is extremely important and life changing. This discourse of inclusion is one of participation and seeks to overcome economic obstacles to education. However, as previous chapters have discussed, inclusion is not simply about participation; it is also about value and recognition. As student participation increased vocational tracks were developed for students who were viewed as being academically 'less able' or 'unfit' for the traditional academic option, the Leaving Certificate Established. Tracing the historical narrative (see Chapter Two) surrounding vocational education allows for a greater understanding of issues such as parity of esteem still evident today. The negative perception of vocational education has been extensively documented (see Lynch and Lodge, 2002 and O'Sullivan, 2005). As Lynch and Lodge argue, 'it is difficult to escape a given identity, especially when the historical profile is a low-status one' (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 48). Mc Cormack et al (2020) argue that historically vocational education was seen as being

on the outside of academic education. Vocational schools were viewed negatively, and a certain 'stigma' was attached. The same may be said of the LCA programme and as evident in the participating schools the programme has found it difficult to shed a historical profile of being 'low-status'.

LCA students can be seen as outsiders on the inside. They are simultaneously a part of the school and apart from the school body. The official policy documents pertaining to the LCA programme and LCA students position students in deficit terms stating it is '*designed for those students who do not wish to progress directly to third level education or for those whose needs, attitudes and aptitudes are not adequately catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes*'. Nonetheless, the LCA programme does offer students an alternative option the Leaving Certificate Established and it does keep students in school and much research shows the benefits of the programme in terms of students' self-esteem (Banks, Byrne, McCoy, Smith, 2010) The vast majority of students following the programme told me that if it were not for LCA they would not be in school:

If it wasn't for LCA, I wouldn't be here. I hated school before this (Student, School A).

I know for a fact if they didn't run LCA this year I would be gone (Student, School D)

A lot of us here would have left school if it wasn't for the fact of LCA (Student, School B)

As such, the LCA programme is an incredibly important programme and, as Harry Freeman informed me, 'it has not just changed students' lives but in some cases has saved lives just by keeping kids in school' (Interview, January, 2019). The idea that LCA keeps students in school and allows them to leave second level education with a qualification is crucial. Equality of opportunity, access, and participation are central in terms of inclusion, but they are not enough. This study examines inclusion, not just in terms of participation, but in terms of value and recognition.

8.3 Student voice and the politics of hearing

The methodological design of this study aimed to facilitate students speaking for themselves. The use of interviews, workshops, vignettes, and Photovoice endeavoured to amplify student voice. Therefore, voice was, not only important for this study in theoretical terms, but also influenced the shape and design of the study. The voices of Leaving Certificate Applied students are often subject to various forms of discounting or as Foucault puts it set 'beneath the required level of scientificity' (Foucault, 1980, p.82). It is certainly true that student voice has taken on more importance in recent years both in terms of educational research and in terms of the practical running of schools. All post primary schools now have student councils, and the members of such councils are there to speak on behalf of

the student cohort in order to affect decisions taken in schools, although further research needs to be done in order to determine how effective student councils are in this regard. In my four case study schools, each school had a student council. However, LCA students were only represented on one of the four student councils. When discussing student councils at the workshops with LCA students, they told me:

> *Ah sure we wouldn't get on that. Are ya joking? That's only for the real good ones, you know smart and no demerits or anything. The goodie two shoes kinda ones. I wouldn't want be on it. No-one asked me anyway but if they did I wouldn't bother. Sure, what's the point. They* wouldn't *be talking about LCA anyway. So we'd just be sitting there.*

I asked LCA coordinators the same question and they told me that LCA students are asked to go on the student council but don't volunteer, stating they are not interested. This may be true but perhaps the reason they are not interested is because, as they told me during a student workshop, 'LCA wouldn't be talked about anyway'.

In a very real way then, LCA students feel that their voice is not heard. A student in School D told me *'we aren't asked our opinion on anything'*. However, there is a contradiction here that I will explore later in the chapter as a common theme in the interviews with teachers was that LCA students were asked but that *'they didn't seem to care'* (Community of Practice, Teachers) – so there is a tension between these positions and perceptions. From my first interviews with LCA student participants it was very clear that students felt a strong sense of frustration about not being listened to. When I first met with coordinators and teachers at the various information sessions in each school, a common theme was a fear that LCA students would not want to get involved and that none would speak to me. This fear proved to be unfounded. This was interesting as it highlighted from the beginning a disconnect between how LCA students saw themselves and how they were perceived by others. In all four schools, every LCA student volunteered to be involved and each engaged actively with the research, some even going on to give talks about LCA in their own school after having taken part in the workshops. They were eager to have their voice heard, not just by me, but by their peers and the wider school body.

Through participation in this study, LCA students voiced their own lived experience and offer their expert analysis of the LCA programme. Through this piece of academic research, their voice is given a seat at the epistemic table, ensuring that their voices are not simply listened to but are actually heard, not just by school management, but by those in powerful positions who can affect curricular and policy change. As such together with the students, I present a counter narrative or counter discourse here:

the notion of inclusion and recognition is examined by those who have been 'othered'. A Foucauldian framework draws on hidden or silenced voices and in so doing troubles the prevailing hegemonic discourses, in this case the discourse of inclusion. The exploration of voice allows for the manifestation of different power relations. These power relations are characterised by interconnected systems of domination and subjugation. The excavation of hidden voices elucidates how restrictive accepting one dominant voice is; to 'favour a single, dominant voice is to reify social inequalities' (Duffy and Bailey, 2010). This is in keeping with critical theorists such as bell hooks who argues the importance of listening, for it is only through listening and recognising the alternative narratives of silenced groups that we may truly overcome social inequalities (2009). Utilising a Foucauldian framework provides new spaces in which these other voices can be heard and allows one to ask questions such as who gets to speak, whose voice is heard, and which voices ae valued.

8.4 Space, voice, and inclusion

In the previous chapter, I examined the discourse of space within the participating case study schools and how these spatial discourses affect the lived experiences of LCA students. It was argued that the distribution of space can invisibilise students and affect their sense of self. The concept of space and the hidden curriculum was also discussed. Values are not just spoken they are also lived, embodied, and felt. Educational discourses within official policy and within schools may state that all students are valued, and this was certainly true within my four case study schools, but are they all valued equally? In our examination of space, we saw how some students are placed front and centre while others are backgrounded. The architectural discourses within schools speak loudly. Just as space can 'other' students by rendering them 'invisible', voice can other students by rendering them 'silent'. How we are seen by others and the ways in which we are listened to affects us emotionally and this in turn affects our feelings of recognition and our identity.

Inclusion is a key concept at both Irish and European policy level. Much has been written about inclusion in Irish Education (see Drudy and Lynch, 1993, and Lynch and Lodge, 2002). The report by Educational Disadvantage Committee (2005) highlighted the fact that many previous policy interventions in Ireland had the goal of improving equality of opportunity, access, and participation. These are important in order to effect inclusion. However, as Baker et al. suggest, there are also inequalities in terms of value, recognition, and parity of esteem. The hegemonic discourse of inclusion in Irish education ironically justifies the notion of segregation and 'othering' through processes of interventions aimed at what Foucault terms 'normalisation':

I think it is important to keep them in school. It is only right that they should be here. There are safer in school. They are our kids and we try to look after them as best we can. We give them their own room and they have a different timetable to the rest. We try to encourage a bonding amongst them as their own little group (Principal, School B)

The principal here is well intentioned. There is an obvious social justice discourse at play in the above quote, with the principal stating 'it is right that they should be here', as well as a discourse of care and safety 'they are our kids...we look after them as best we can'. And yet as Foucault states 'the best of intentions' can become the 'tools of oppression' (Foucault, 1988, p.10). The school, in its effort to keep these students in school, effectively segregates them from their peers. Principals and coordinators argued that in a way this is inevitable as the curricular content of the LCA programme is structured in such a way that it almost necessitates segregation. As result, in all four case study schools the LCA students experienced segregation from their peers. LCA may be described as a policy intervention aimed at 'normalisation'. Some students self-select for LCA but as we have learned a large proportion of LCA students are identified as being suitable for LCA through processes of 'judgements' and 'categorisation'. These students are identified as students who are at risk of early school leaving due to a variety of difficulties including both academic and behavioural difficulties.

Within the participating schools the dominant hegemonic discourse of inclusion paradoxically legitimises spatial practices of separation and these practices in turn become hegemonic discourses. Therefore, the LCA student is produced both spatially and discursively in schools. Labels such as 'at risk' or 'weak' or 'unsuited to the LCE' or 'behavioural difficulties' discursively 'other' the LCA student and this othering takes on a physical, material characteristic through the architectural discourse of schools (as discussed in the previous chapter). Here, we will examine how this 'othering' takes place through discourse and voice.

8.5 Discourse and taken for granted practices

For Foucault, discourse is important because it is through discourse that subjects are made. Foucault uses the term discourse in different ways. It is more than just the equivalent of language, it is that which *'constrains or enables, writing, speaking and thinking'* (Ball, 2013, p.19). In *The Archeology of knowledge*, Foucault writes:

> …..discourse is secretly based on an "already said"; and that this "already said" is not merely a phrase that has been already spoken, or a text that has been written, but a "never said", an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as breath, a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark (Foucault, 1974, p.25)

He goes on to state:

> Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to the language (langue) and to speech. It is this more that we must reveal and describe (Ibid, p.49)

This can be likened to the 'taken for granted' discourses within schools. One such discourse within the participating schools in this study was a discourse which positioned LCA students for variety of reasons as being 'unsuited' or 'not able' for the LCE. This situated the LCA programme within deficit terms, as opposed to acknowledging that LCA students may just simply possess different talents. As one principal stated:

> *I think that perception that it's for weaker kids is very common. Now, it's hard to argue against that; we've never had a child who's capable of getting 500 points in the CAO system operating in LCA. It generally is kids who struggle. I know the LCA programme was set up initially the aim would have been to give those kids, there was an element of introducing equality into the system, to give those kids a chance to play to their particular talents and to a large degree that is functioning and it is working and they are more suited to the LCA programme (Principal, School B).*

This discourse was also evident when principals spoke of how they identified teachers who they would like to teach on the programme:

> *You'd be hoping all your teachers could differentiate and work with them…I suppose there is a certain way of dealing with them. You need a good respectful climate in the classroom and at the same time you need to challenge them otherwise they get bored and idle and disruptive (Principal, School D)*

There is an obvious othering of LCA students here. It is implied that LCA students are to be dealt with in a different way to their LCE counterparts and they must be kept challenged primarily as a means of keeping them disciplined or in Foucauldian terms 'docile'.

The principal in school C stated:

> *You look for teachers who can work with students who are not as able. Who have heart and who can build a relationship with them. There are teachers who don't like teaching LCA and will come and tell you so for the students' sake you couldn't put them in.*

Here, again, LCA students are constructed in deficit terms as 'not as able'. However, there is also an obvious discourse of care here. The principal speaks of the importance of a teacher who has a 'heart', so someone who will care. He also highlights the importance of relationships. This will be examined in

the next chapter. This principal also highlighted his belief that the negative perception of LCA within schools was coming from the Department of Education. He believed that the programme is not valued by the DES and as such it is all the more difficult for schools to encourage students to follow the programme:

> *I mean really, if we are being honest about it, when did you last here anyone from the department come out publicly and say anything, anything at all about LCA? It is just never mentioned. The inspectors that come often times have a very poor understanding of the workings of LCA and more often than not have never taught it. The only time the DES acknowledges LCA is to cut funding or resources. That feeds back to people on the ground. If they themselves don't value it, how can you expect schools to? (Principal, School C).*

This view was also expressed by the other principals and teachers in the case-study schools. Students themselves also voiced concerns regarding national recognition:

> *You never hear anything about us on the news, it's all just the Leaving Cert, the Leaving Cert'. I had a cousin who did LCA a few years ago and he said they went to LCA awards. They got to dress up and all and meet other LCA students. I asked the coordinator about it, but he said they quit doing them.*

This lack of national recognition is certainly felt within schools and does have an impact on how the programme is viewed.

Many young teachers, some of whom were teaching on the programme for the first time, told me that they had never even heard of LCA before it appeared on their timetable. One such teacher said:

> *It was never mentioned in college. Not even once. I literally had never heard of it and then it was just on my timetable. I think that happens a lot. Some of the older teachers are burnt out teaching it or want a break so the younger teachers are given it. In this school there seems to be a high turnover of LCA teachers each year Teacher, School C).*

Jim Gleeson, in my interview with him, also spoke about a lack of value or recognition placed on LCA by both the universities and the DES. He explained that from the very beginning LCA was viewed differently. This was a hidden discourse manifested in actions and decisions taken rather than in speech acts, in other words, what was said in formal documents did not always match with decisions taken. The first action taken by the DES which showed a lack of value for LCA was the fact that the development of the LCA programme became the responsibility of the NCCA, who at the time were still an advisory body. Gleeson explained that the LCA steering committee:

was not as representational as the others…it had a broader base and again that is indicative of the fact that this thing wasn't seen as being so important (Interview, May, 2019)

In keeping with Foucault, it is important to ask why. How did this discourse become dominant? As Gleeson explained:

> LCA didn't just fall out of the sky…it was a product of the vocational programmes that had gone before it and these too had issues when it came to parity of esteem...the OECD 1991 report highlighted the fact that the Irish post-primary is a derivation from the classical, humanist system with an overlay of curriculum projects...so that was the mindset (Ibid)

Here, we can see that a historical discourse relating to parity of esteem issues between academic and vocational education still has very real effects on how a pre-vocational programme such as LCA is experienced and lived out today. This historical discourse of deficit in relation to vocational and pre-vocational education is still evident in schools (O' Flaherty and Liddy, 2020). LCA students can internalise such a discourse of deficit and thereby construct their subjective selves in negative terms:

I'm not very good at books (Student, School A)

I hated the Junior Cert. Far too much writing. I'm not good at that. I rather learn by doing. I'm better with my hands (Student, School C)

I didn't do great in the Junior Cert. I knew I'd fail the normal Leaving so I decided to do LCA (Student School D)

I tried the normal Leaving Cert for a few weeks and I just wasn't able for it at all. I far rather LCA. It's practical, there isn't all that writing (Student, School B).

Another student explained his experiences of having been in 5th year and then deciding to do LCA:

I know myself anyways, even when I was in the normal Leaving Cert, it didn't suit me. There's no point going into class and you are just clueless. Like, at least I'm not like that anymore. I know in the corridors and stuff we might get the piss taken out of us by the normal Leaving Certs but at least its better than being in the class with them all day feeling stupid (Student, School A).

Here, we see an internalisation of this negative hidden discourse regarding LCA students. The student describes himself as *'clueless'* and seems willing to accept the negative treatment by some of his LCE peers in the corridor. LCA and the LCA room are viewed as being a safe space and place where one feels better about oneself 'I'm not like that anymore'. Utilising the notion of 'curricular location' by

Heek et al., the student here seems very aware of a perceived academic and social position within the school. Choosing LCA allows him to remove himself from this situation and instead 'choose respect' (Yonezaura, Wells and Serna, 2002). In the LCA classroom, he feels accepted and his cultural background is valued. The LCA classroom clearly provides a safe space free from receiving verbal abuse from some of his LCE peers and as such he is 'happy' to be separate. His story was certainly not unique. Many students in all four schools reported being bullied by some of their peers due to their enrolment in the LCA programme. In the student workshops, students discussed how LCA was known in the school as 'Lazy Cunts Association'. As students stated:

> *It doesn't bother us. We are smart enough to know LCA is the right choice for us and smart people don't care what other people think. We do our own work here and we'll get on just as good as them, probably better' (Student Workshop, School C)*

Here, LCA and the LCA classroom is seen as a 'safe space' (bell hooks, 1990). In this safe space, the 'politics of identity' is heightened by being with others who share similar experiences to you. Being together and having a sense of 'us' as seen in the quote above, provides a 'safe space' in which students can experience acceptance and solidarity (Frye, 1997). This notion of a safe space and the voices of these LCA students provide a counter narrative to the dominant discourse of inclusion and also pose challenging questions for inclusive education. Inclusive education is frequently aligned with a discourse of vulnerability and at risk. There is a tension here between a discourse of safety and a discourse of acceptance and recognition. It is clear that LCA students do not feel recognised or valued by some of their LCE peers. They feel different and separate. An obvious 'us' versus 'them' discourse exists, 'we'll get on just as good as them'. The students feel that the school is providing them with a programme that 'suits' them and the LCA classroom is constructed as a 'safe space', however, there is a very felt need for recognition evident and a frustration about a lack of understanding about 'what work we actually do'. As one student explained:

> *They make these judgements, but they don't actually know anything about the programme. I say come and spend a week with us and then you'll know all about it. I do kinda blame the school a bit though too. They don't tell the other Leaving Certs about us. We are never mentioned. There is a big show made of the work TYs do but we are never mentioned. So, I kinda don't blame them for thinking we do nothing. (Student, School D)*

These feelings of separation and exclusion voiced by LCA students counter the dominant narrative of inclusion.

8.5.1 A Discourse of Care

When speaking to school principal and LCA coordinators, a discourse of care was very obvious:

> *They're our kids, it is only right that they are here (Principal, School B)*
>
> *We try to do our very best for them. One of the arguments levelled against LCA is that they are too well looked after here and then maybe struggle to cope after school (Coordinator, School C)*
>
> *We look after them as best we can. They are given their own room. We try to bring them on a few trips. You really spend your time building self-esteem (Coordinator, School D)*
>
> *They do need a bit of mammying. Someone just checking up on them. You know, like if they were in late, did they sign in, have they had breakfast, all that kinda thing. Maybe making a bit of tea and toast. It's about relationships. They have to know you care (Coordinator, School B)*

One of the ways schools care for students and ensure that they are helped to reach their full potential is to identify any academic needs students may have and to put interventions in place to help students overcome these. In an effort to look after the needs of students, a whole network of paperwork and documentation has built up around each student. This documentation aims at helping students and providing teachers with the knowledge they need to differentiate teaching and learning in their classroom. This is valuable and important. However, it may also be argued that this is an effort at 'normalisation'. As Ryan writes:

> Pervasive observational practices, meticulous partitioning of space and time, examination and documentation allow for the accumulation of knowledge on the activities, capacities and performances of each student and provide the condition (ideally) to correct them who deviate from acceptable norms. But even this relationship of knowledge, power, and bodies may generate what many would believe to be ideal organisational patterns for productivity (in this case the production of student skills and knowledge), it also produces inequalities among students (Ryan, 1991, p.112)

I am not arguing against these practices within schools. Schools in an attempt to care for each student and their individual needs utilise many resources at their disposal. Each post-primary school now has an AEN (Additional Education Needs) coordinator. This coordinator, in liaison with the principal, will organise resources and additional supports for those students who need it. These students are identified through procedures such as observation, testing, and exam results. The work of outside agencies is also often utilised. Expert voices of educational psychologists provide various diagnoses for students i.e. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, Oppositional

Defiance Disorder, Emotional Behavioural Disorder, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia etc. A vast array of documentation is built up around each student. This can be very useful, and it does aim to ensure that every effort is made so as students get the help they need. However, through this process students are constructed as being outside the 'norm'. Interventions are put in place to assist in 'normalising' students. There are unintended negative consequences. Firstly, these processes of surveillance, examination, and judgement result in what Foucault termed 'dividing practices'. Students are discursively separated out. Secondly, students are labelled and then proceed to internalise these labels, this in turn effects their construction of self. This was seen in my work with LCA students. Numerous students offered various diagnoses they had received as rationale for entering the LCA programme:

I thought LCA would be an easier route for me because I have dyslexia you see so that means I wouldn't be able for the normal leaving cert (Student School C)

I got my Junior Cert and I ended up finding out that I have severe ADHD and severe dyslexia and from there I decided that it would be a good point to choose LCA (Student, School C)

I have that ADHD so that means I'm not good at listening so there was no point in doing the normal one (Student, School A)

I have dyslexia so sure I couldn't be doing all that reading. LCA is a lot handier for me (Student, School D)

The decision to enter LCA for these students was motivated by these perceived deficits and an opportunity to remove themselves from their previous negative educational experience (Hodkinson and Sparks, 1997). The LCA provided students with the possibility of removing themselves from an academic culture and discourse within schools and instead construct a counter culture or counter discourse based on different values (Willis, 1977). The expert discourse of teachers and outside agencies place academic labels on students and these labels construct and produce student identities. Students' subjectivities are constructed by expert knowledge. This expert knowledge becomes the dominant voice, and the voice of the student is marginalised. In all four case study schools the AEN coordinator had a role in identifying students who may be suitable for the LCA programme. This hidden discourse positions the LCA programme as a programme that is primarily suitable for students who have additional needs. This then is how it has come to be seen in schools and nationally. It is true that the curricular structure and assessment procedures may suit students with additional educational needs but that was not the original intention of the programme. This is an example of what Gerry Jeffers terms 'domestication'. A programme may be designed with particular goals in mind in policy but can take on a different life in the practice of schools.

Schools are caught between two competing discourses: the discourse of care and the discourse of competition. The Leaving Certificate Established is often referred to as a 'points race'. It is highly competitive. Students are competing with each other for third level places. The LCA students have left this race in so much as LCA is not part of the CAO points system. This may have many benefits for students in terms of less stress, or an alternative route, but it certainly does affect how the programme is perceived and valued. The points system in upper secondary is an all-consuming discourse and LCA students are very much on the outside of this powerful discourse within schools.

8.6 Student voice – the insurrection of subjugated knowledges

According to Foucault, power is not monolithic but is rather heterogeneous, flowing in multiple directions. For him, where there is power, there is resistance, therefore there are multiple and diverse forms of resistance that find expression in a multitude of ways including space and voice. These points of resistance are complicated and nuanced. Our social, emotional, and cognitive lives are inscribed within these multidirectional relations of power/resistance. As such our ways of thinking, feeling, and speaking are caught up in these relations of power/resistance. An epistemological framework informed by the theories of Foucault calls to attention marginalised and silenceed voices and highlights the emancipatory potential of this study. Foucault urges us to question taken for granted practices and encourages us to question who decides what voices are listened to; how some voices become dominant while other voices are subjugated. I have already examined how some discursive regimes within the case study schools produce certain knowledge about LCA students. These expert or official knowledges subjugate the voices of LCA students. For Foucault subjugated knowledges are forms of experiencing that are pushed to the margins and rendered unqualified or unworthy of epistemic respect by prevailing hegemonic discourses (Medina, 2011). These subjugated knowledges are unnoticed or undetected. By virtue of exclusions or lack of 'presence', official voices and meanings succeed in dominating discursive spaces. By excavating the subjugated knowledges of LCA students and bringing them to the fore, this study aims to disrupt and interrogate epistemic hegemonies and mainstream perspectives on inclusion and instead offer marginalised perspectives voiced by students who often times have had dejected experiences.

There is what Slee termed an 'inclusion paradox' evident in relation to LCA. There is a discourse of inclusion where students are still in school and are completing a Leaving Certificate programme but as we have seen there is also a discourse of exclusion, where LCA students feel 'othered' and separate from their peers. Paradoxically then, through interventions aimed as inclusion, various forms of exclusion are realised:

> 'What looks like right, law, or obligation from the point of view of power looks like the abuse of power, violence, and exaction when it is seen from the viewpoint of the new discourse (Foucault, 1975-1976, pp. 69-70)

Examining the LCA programme from the outside, in other words from the perspective of one who has not completed the programme, it does appear to do much that is right. It does keep students in school. It does provide students with a qualification and, in many instances, provides students with experiences of academic success. Students themselves reported feeling 'much happier' since joining LCA and many in fact suggested that if it were not for LCA they would no longer be in school. However, students also reported feelings of exclusion and a lack of parity of esteem with their LCE counterparts. As such to examine the LCA programme from the viewpoint of a new discourse, i.e. the experiences of LCA students themselves, invites a questioning of taken for granted practices within schools as well as forms of silencing produced by discursive practices.

One such taken for granted practice apparent in the case study schools was a belief that LCA students are integrated 'as much as possible'. It was taken for granted or perceived as an 'already said' that due to the nature of the programme LCA students could not be fully integrated and as such as certain amount of exclusion, while perhaps not desirable, was in fact necessary. One principal explained that the nature of the course necessitated a certain amount of separation in that the programme is 'ring-fenced'. Another dominant discourse appeared to be that, for the most part, LCA students were quite happy being separate and at times resisted integration. Another principal explicated that they are working on integrating LCA students more but,

> *It doesn't always happen as much as it should. For two reasons: they tend not to want to go to things and not want to get involved. You know, sometimes they can be their own worst enemy (Principal, School B).*

Another principal noted:

> *It's not that kind of school; the school has a very supportive culture… teachers are not really adverse to teaching it. LCA are just a different class group but within the same. They are absolutely integrated. From what I can see they all hang around in their own circles; the LCA lads and your normal, well you know what I mean. If they are not integrated, a lot of the time it is because they don't want to be, but promoting them is very important and including them is very important (Principal, School D).*

A teacher in School D shared the same view:

> *They like to keep themselves apart from the rest of the school…yeah, they definitely do'.*

This discourse attributes a certain amount of blame to LCA student themselves; they are their 'own worst enemy' and if they are not integrated then 'it is because they don't want to be'.

However, this was countered by some teachers, one of whom explained:

> *I often thought, I spoke to the principal before about it a couple of times, about trying to start afresh. I thought of incorporating LCA1 with TY's activities to try and keep them a bit more integrated, a bit more involved in things going on in the school…instead of driving a wedge between them, dividing them – try and combine them a wee bit more. They do feel it. They maybe come across that they enjoy it, being separate, but I know that they don't (Teacher, School D).*

Listening to the voice of students as they voice their lived experiences of the LCA programme provides a counter narrative to the one above. Students suggest that they would very much like to be included. When asked at student workshops to name one thing, if any, they would change about the LCA programme they all stated they would like to be more included and less separated from their peers. One student wrote 'If there was one thing I could change it would be that we are not left out of everything. I'd like us to be mixed in with the others a lot more' *(Student workshop, School D).* One student recounted a time when 'there was a study skills on for Leaving Certs but the LCAs didn't get invited'. He explained 'I thought well that either means we don't study or the school doesn't think we study'. Another student discussed the fact the LCA students were not included on trips she recalled a time when a trip was organised for Leaving Certs but LCA were not included. She stated that 'the LCA coordinator spoke up for us and we got to go. We had to go on a separate bus with just our class but at least we still got to go'. There was a common ambiguity and tension in competing narratives in schools. On the one hand I was told by school staff in the case study schools (although not by all), that LCA students were included and invited on different trips and activities but LCA students themselves argued that they were rarely included and in fact were actively excluded.

When discussing the inclusion of LCA students in the school, one principal posed the following:

> *Why can't they be more involved in the different events that we're planning? Why can't they be more involved in the student voice of the school? Why can't they be more involved in the production of whatever… you see what I'm saying. Maybe we need to be pushing them more' (Principal, School C)*

I put these questions to LCA students in that school at our second workshop. They replied:

> *Well for one they'd need to actually listen to us for that to happen and second they'd have to act like we are part of the school – actually talk about us. TY is plastered everywhere, nothing for LCA. We're never even*

mentioned on the intercom. Sure apparently, according to everyone, we do nothing. (Student Workshop, School C).

All schools stated the importance of LCA to the school. However, students expressed concerns that LCA was not actively promoted in the school.

They talk about LCA but only to the ones they want to actually do it. No-one else hears that talk. (Student, School A)

A friend of mine wanted to do LCA and they actually talked him out of it. Told him that he was far too good for LCA. What does that say for us that they told to do it. (Student, School C)

I don't think they try to sell LCA at all. You have to sell it. Tell people what is great about it and all the reasons to do it but they don't do that at all. It's just sure it's there if you want it. I don't think they want people to do it at all. Only the messers (Student, School, D).

Many schools described the difficulty in getting students to enrol in the programme and this in turn resulted in difficulties in running the programme. Some schools could only run the programme every two years and, as a result, have had to amalgamate LCA1 and LCA2 for some subjects. Schools suggested that this was down to the historical stigma attached to the programme. However, students and some teachers said it was down to a lack of promotion, both nationally and within schools. One teacher in school C told me:

That whole thing about not having the numbers is a load of rubbish. If it was promoted you'd have the numbers. We were even told in our inspection that they were very surprised that a school like ours doesn't have more LCA students. We have numbers. Every year we have numbers, it's a lack of desire. We don't have a policy, we don't have a plan; it doesn't exist. It infuriates me (Teacher, School C).

In a similar vein, a teacher in School B stated:

You hear every year about this difficulty in getting students to do LCA. But sure, would you want your child doing it, the way it's spoken about? It's not valued in schools and that's the biggest problem, but I don't think schools or the department are doing anything to counter that. I really don't think the department care about it at all. I'd say there are people in the department who haven't even heard of it. It's sad really, because it could be great. (Teacher, School B)

The students saw this lack of promotion as being indicative of the level of care and value placed on the programme:

They say it is important, like I bet they'll tell you LCA is so important, but when you go, we'll be forgotten about again. If they thought it was that great they would actually promote it, instead of telling people not to do it. (Student, School C).

This negative perception of the programme and the stigma attached to it was the biggest concern and cause of upset amongst LCA students. There was a tangible sense of frustration about not having their work or abilities recognised or their voices heard. LCA students placed the blame here on the schools. They felt that school management do not effectively explain to other students 'what LCA is all about' and, as such, LCA students are the subject of misunderstanding and misrecognition. Students wished to speak but felt that their voices would not be heard. They contended that only the 'expert' voice of the teacher would be listened to:

I'd love to be able to talk to them. To show them what it's all about. It is just looked down on, like, oh that's for lazy people or stupid people. I'd love to tell them but like why don't the school? They should tell them the truth about us. They might listen if an actual teacher said it (Student Workshop, School C)

Another student discussed the emotional effect this lack of understanding and recognition had on her:

I remember when I first started LCA. We had a free class and I didn't see who did it but as they went past someone threw in apples and said 'here, count them'. 'Cos that's what LCA stands for Lets Count Apples -LCA. I felt really embarrassed that day but I'm happy now. I love LCA. They are the ones who should be embarrassed'.

Traditionally, there is very little homework given in LCA. Teachers explained that some LCA students got into a lot of difficulty in their Junior Cycle years because homework wasn't done. Coordinators explained that the curricular content of the programme is mostly task based and a lot of key assignments for the various modules involves group work and as such is done in school. As such, many LCA's don't need a school bag. One teacher stated:

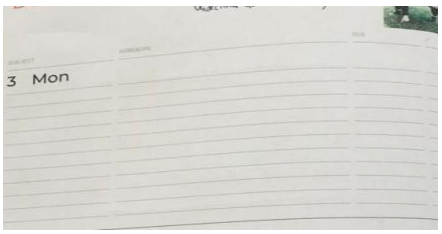
Oh I think they enjoy not having to bring a bag although it does really make them stand out (Teacher, School B)

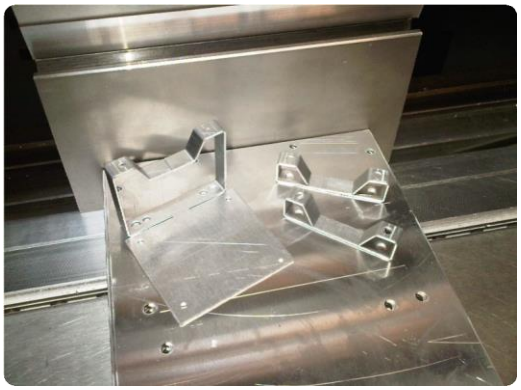
Very few LCA students complained about not having homework, however, they did contend that the lack of a need of a school bag perpetuated this negative stereotype of LCA students.

I don't need a bag, most days I just have a pen in the pocket. I still get all my work done but the rest of them cos I'm not coming in carrying a lump of books think I do nothing'.

During our Photovoice activity, students were asked to take a selection of pictures that summarise their experience of the LCA programme. One student took this:

Underneath he wrote *'Empty bag, empty head or so they think'*. Another student took these photos and explained: *'The empty page in the diary in what people think my experience of LCA is, that I do nothing. The other pictures are my actual experience. Using my hands, making stuff, learning all about computers and actually going to the theatre with my English class in LCA'*





Another student took the above picture and wrote the accompanying narrative:

> *Here is one of the Art works I have done I the Art room. I have very proud of myself for creating a piece like this. I got help from my classmates as well. Each of us picked a famous painting we would like to do and then we made it into a cut out. It was used in the open night of our school. I am happy that I got an opportunity to make something like this.*
>
> *I want people to know LCA is about you, your ways of doing things, whether it be learning your way or thinking your way. You find your true self. You will also know the areas where you are good and areas where you are not so good but, that's okay because you have the support of your teachers and classmates.*
>
> *To me I don't think all students learn the same way some learn by writing stuff down as in theory but there are also students who learn much better practically. LCA does both, there is still work involved but also team work and practical stuff too.*
>
> *I think LCA is looked down on. I feel like schools all around Ireland should have talks for their students about LCA and to give them options rather than jumping straight from the Junior Cert. to the Leaving Cert.*

The voices here of LCA students provide a counter discourse to the dominant narrative that LCA students are 'lazy' or 'weak'. The knowledge of LCA students is mobilised here against established or official knowledge pertaining to inclusive education. Students, who for the most part enjoy the nature of the programme itself, do not feel valued or included. The voices of these students destabilises the

normative order by introducing a counter perspective on inclusion and resists the dominant perspective that inclusion pertains in the main to access and participation i.e. LCA students are in school so therefore they are included. In his essay, *What is an Author?,* Foucault urges us to fight against 'omissions' and to return to listen to lost voices or those whose voices that were never heard. He is interested in how discursive practices produce exclusions. To fight against these exclusions, one must amplify silenced voices. As Medina states:

> Becoming sensitive to discursive exclusions and training ourselves to listen to silences is what makes possible the insurrection of subjugated knowledge, it enables us to tap into the critical potential of demeaned and obstructed forms of power/knowledge by paying attention to the lived experiences and discursive practices of those people who have lived their life "in darkness and silence" (Medina, 2011, p.17)

This is what I have attempted to do. The counter narrative provided by LCA students allows for a critique of discourses of inclusion within schools. As Foucault remarks in *Society Must Be Defended*, 'it is the reappearance of what people know at local level, of these disqualified knowledges, that make the critique possible' (Foucault, 1975-1976). This critique should cause us to re-examine what we mean by inclusion and this re-examination will not just benefit LCA students but will benefit all students who are subject to forms of discounting or exclusion. Indeed, as Woermann contends:

> It is really not so complicated; we must ask people and then listen. And as we listen, we must attend to difference, to particularity, the contradictory, the paradoxical. As we do this, we will attend to that which may be quantifiably insignificant but whose presence may question a more conventional interpretation and expand understanding (2012, p.22)

8.7 Voice and recognition

As already argued, much of the debate around inclusion in education has been dominated by concerns around access and participation, however, there have been calls to focus on how schools or the education system perpetuates exclusion by a lack of recognition of difference (Connell, 1993). The recognition model of social justice relates to how different values and abilities are respected. It recognises that exclusion can take the form of symbolic misrepresentation, misrecognition or non-recognition (Baker, 1987, 1998; Fraser, 1995; Young, 1990). This study has highlighted the many ways in which LCA students experience some forms of misrecognition or non-recognition. This is what Young terms cultural imperialism i.e. LCA students are rendered invisible (non-recognition) as for example on Leaving Certificate results day, and simultaneously subject to negative stereotyping (misrecognition). This negative stereotyping, as discussed above, further marginalises LCA students within the school and positions them as 'other'. These experiences provide a counter narrative to the

dominant hegemony of inclusion. This labelling or negative stereotyping often causes students to internalise negative perceptions themselves and results in students viewing themselves through the lens of 'normality' offered by culturally dominant groups.

Young (1990) argues that unquestioned norms and practices can further oppress marginalised groups. Likewise, Ball (1997) contends that inequalities are embedded in institutional and cultural norms. Many may argue that the segregation of LCA is necessary. It is a separate, ring-fenced programme and as such is very different in curricular content and provision than the Leaving Certificate Established. Jim Gleeson explained the rationale of the steering committee in deciding to ring-fence LCA:

> *We believed that it wasn't possible to provide a meaningful experience for all young people within the confines of the existing Leaving Certificate and because that wasn't possible, you had – in order to do it- you had to ditch the points system and go for a meaningful alternative. (Interview, May, 2019)*

It is certainly true that the Leaving Certificate Established does not 'provide a meaningful experience for all young people'. Whilst the LCA programme itself is generally enjoyed by students. The difficulty lies in recognition. As Gleeson himself explains, quoting the OECD report (1991), the Irish education system is a humanist, classical system with an overlay of curriculum projects. That report was thirty years ago and not much has changed. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic schools were forced to close for the second time. The Minister for Education, Norma Foley, prematurely announced the return of Leaving Certificate students, having not consulted with teachers' unions. The unions, on health and safety grounds, advised members not to return. Minister Foley in the days that followed opined that the Leaving Certificate was the primary and sole purpose of education, everything in a child's educational life leads up to the sitting of the Leaving Certificate. She repeatedly spoke of the Leaving Certificate Established. Stating on Prime Time 'I do believe it is correct to say that it is necessary for everyone to commit once again to deliver the established Leaving Cert' (Interview, Prime Time, January 7th, 2021). The Leaving Certificate Applied students were discursively omitted. The Leaving Certificate Established is still viewed as the most important thing in Irish education. So where does that leave a programme like LCA in which, if one was to receive a distinction in each subject, it would still not equate to points. It is this mindset that has led to a lack of recognition for the LCA programme.

8.8 Voice and resistance

> Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power…. [There is] a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present

> everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead, there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case (Foucault, 1990, pp.95-96).

LCA students can successfully use their voice to resist how they are constructed through hegemonic discourses and can instead re-write the self. Foucault views the subject as both constituted and self-constituting in the relationships between discursive practices, power relations, and ethics. For Foucault, ethics concerns the relationship one has with oneself and is based on

> ..complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed and modified by himself' (Foucault, 1993, p. 204)

As McNay explains:

> Through the formation of a "critical ontology of the self" it is possible to formulate an alternative ethical standpoint from which individuals can begin to resist the normalising force of the "government of individualisation" (McNay, 1994, p.133).

This notion of voice and resistance and Foucault's concept of an ethics of care of self will be the subject of my last thematic chapter, *Thinking Possibilities,* in which I turn to examine the creative role of critical and affective pedagogy in promoting student voice and supporting resistance. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996), Paulo Freire argues that a given reality is not something that must be accepted and adjusted to but rather sees it as a problem to be solved. This is resonant with Foucault who likewise argues that a given reality is just one way, amongst a multitude, of being. However, Freire also opens up other ways of instituting relations in education. Freire believed that every human being is capable of looking critically at the world, in a dialogical way with others. Teaching, in a dialogical fashion, listening to the voice of the other was for Freire an 'act of love' and a form of resistance. This notion of teaching as an 'act of love' conceptualises teaching and learning as emotional endeavours and schools as emotional landscapes. This enables a creative turn and drawing on the work of Hickey-Moody allows us to explore how affective pedagogies can create the condition for creative transformations of both students and schools.

8.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have mobilised student voice in order to interrogate dominant concepts of inclusion. In critical theory to criticise is to think about the ways in which our current practices can construct and constrain our ways of thinking and acting and by questioning such practices we can open up new possibilities for speaking, thinking, and acting differently. By examining the lived experience of LCA

students and listening to their voices, we can look again at inclusion with fresh eyes and what Foucault terms an ‘epistemic friction’.

Chapter Nine:

Thinking Pedagogically – Pedagogy in Practice

The teacher bond is great. It's not that they treat you differently but we proper talk and you actually get to know them personally, so you actually learn something (Student, School C).

9.1 Introduction

Critical and creative pedagogy play an important role in promoting student voice, creating a space for recognition, and supporting resistance. According to Freire, a given reality is just one way of being amongst a multitude of possibilities. This is in keeping with Foucault, who espoused 'things aren't as necessary as all that, we are freer that we think' (Faubion, 2002, p.226). In order to realise this freedom, reality must be problematised and interrogated. If we have become, then we can become differently. We do this through dialogue and listening to the voice of the other. For Freire, critical pedagogy entails recognising difference and listening to the voice of the other. This listening is 'an act of love' and a form of resistance. This act of love assists us in resisting powerful, hegemonic discourses and instead works towards the insurrection of subjugated knowledges. Knowledge in Freire's liberating classroom is produced by listening to the voice of the other. Students and teachers are partners in the co-construction of knowledge. This partnership is built on trust and lived out through love. This involves creating a class culture and climate that is both accepting and affirming; a 'safe space'. Through dialogue and reflection, the classroom then becomes a 'space in which it is once more possible to think' (Foucault, cited in Braidotti, 1991, p.1).

The curriculum of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme lends itself to a critical and creative pedagogy. The LCA curriculum places emphasis on student experience, learning by doing, group work, discussion, reflection, and out of school learning. For the remainder of this chapter, I will examine the enablers and inhibitors of affecting a critical and creative pedagogical approach in the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. I will begin by revisiting those theories of Freire's that are particularly pertinent to my study.

9.2 Freire: The Banking Model and Narrative Teaching

Freire's critique of 'banking' education is perhaps one of the best-known denunciations of traditionalism in modern education. In banking education, the teacher speaks, and the student passively listens. In other words, the students are the 'containers' or 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher (Freire, 1970, p.53). For Freire, this oppressive situation demonstrates the narrative character

of the student teacher relationship. The teacher actively infuses the student with 'static' content. This content is 'static' because it is so far removed from the students' lived experiences. Therefore, in narrative teaching, the student does not come to a full understanding of the material taught but rather memorises it for the purposes of an exam (Freire, 1970, p.71). Students and teachers are both held hostage by processes of standardization. The more completely the teacher fills the 'receptacles' the better they perform in the exam and, hence, the better a teacher he or she is judged to be. Freire argues that this 'banking' method of teaching only serves to dehumanise both teacher and student as it stultifies autonomy and critical consciousness, thereby negating possibilities of transformation (Freire, 1970, p.73). The teacher becomes an active subject, while the learners become passive objects. It positions the teacher and student as opposites and creates a binary or dualism between the two. This style of teaching obviates thinking and negates critical consciousness or what Freire terms 'conscientização'. Freire contends that this is a situation of violence:

> … any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of enquiry is an act of violence…. to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects (Freire, 1970, p.66)

Freire believes that it is incumbent upon teachers therefore to reject such a model of education and, instead, they should embrace a 'problem-posing' method in which students and teachers work together, through dialogue in the co-construction of knowledge.

9.3 Problem Posing Education, the Dialogic Nature of Learning, and the Co-construction of Knowledge

Through problem posing, education students begin to question the world and their lives, moving from fatalism toward a develop a critical consciousness which will enable them to perceive again their 'given' reality and take action to change it. Freire made central to his philosophy of education, pedagogical questions relating to voice, social agency, and democratic participation. Whilst much of Foucault's work was concerned with how human beings are made subjects, Freire is concerned with how teachers and students become subjects together. Freire's thinking on education is centred on an analysis and critique of student objectification and alienation, but also on creative transformation of these relations. For both Freire and Foucault, the problem of the subject is concerned with issues of discourses and voice, but Freire contends that the liberating classroom opens up a space for dialogue and student voice. Through dialogue, critical thinking and reflection students become partners in the construction of knowledge and as such can actively reconstruct their own subjective identity away from the normalising gaze. Freire contends that through dialogue, knowledge emerges. This

emergence takes place in the hopeful inquiry we pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Freire, 1970). As we have seen, a Foucauldian analysis interrogates 'regimes of truth', whereby some knowledges are legitimated, and others are subordinated. The turn to Freirean philosophy allows one to move this interrogation into the classroom and transform it by opening up a space for dialogue and student voice. This sheds new light on those practices within the classroom and the school that can either thwart or encourage a politically emancipatory climate and a humanising culture of participation, voice, and agency. Therefore, for Freire, education is not a neutral activity and classrooms are not neutral spaces. This is in keeping with Foucault who sees space as a mechanism of power (as discussed in Chapter Six. However, for Freire these spaces can become spaces of transformation through dialogue and inquiry. Although these spaces are not neutral or power-free education itself through processes of critical pedagogy allows for the exploration of these questions in a new light.

According to Freire, the liberating classroom embracing problem-posing education should be a space of 'acts of cognition', not a space where information is simply transferred. This entails praxis, as for Freire 'liberation is a praxis; the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it' (Freire, 1970, p.60). Dialogue is essential as, without dialogue, 'there is no communication and without communication there can be no true education' (Ibid, p.73).

> Because liberating action is dialogical in nature, dialogue cannot be posterior to the action, but must be concomitant with it. And since liberation must be a permanent condition, dialogue becomes a continuing aspect of liberatory action (Ibid)

Freire believes that much 'formal education fails because the learners are not included in the search, in the rigour and thus are not motivated' (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.4). In other words, motivation takes places in the 'acts of cognition' that occur within the classroom, not in a process of transmission. This involves relationships of dialogue and listening. A critical and creative pedagogical approach enables creative and critical reflection on the status quo or the 'taken for granted'. Teaching and learning must be based on the lived experiences of students. Critical pedagogy must 'integrate students and teachers into a mutual creation and recreation of knowledge (Ibid, p.8). He argues that 'Knowledge is not a piece of data, something immobilised, concluded, finished, something to be transferred by one who acquired it to one who still does not possess it' (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p.41) but rather knowledge is something that is produced through dialogue with others. He explains:

> I cannot think authentically unless others think. I cannot think for others, or without others… Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry [people] pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Freire, 1970 p.58).

This definition accentuates the autonomous character of knowledge production and thus succeeds in undoing dominant hegemonies and constructing new relationships of power/knowledge.

9.4 The Student/Teacher Relationship

Freire views dialogue as a pedagogical process, whereby students and teachers engage in discussion and debate that results in learning and the production of knowledge. Therefore, for Freire, learning is not transactional but rather relational, with knowledge produced through democratic interaction between students and teachers. The humanist or 'revolutionary' teacher is a partner with her learners and trusts their creative and critical ability. This pedagogical relationship is built on trust and is an 'act of love'. As Godatti explains, it is a 'horizontal relationship…fed by love, humility, hope faith, and confidence' (1994, p.39). Freire views the creation 'of the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge' (Freire, 1998, p.30) as an aesthetic endeavour. He argues:

> Even if we are not conscious of this [aesthetic] as educators, we are still involved in a naturally aesthetic project. What can happen is that, being unaware of the aesthetic aspect of education, we become very bad artists, but artists of a kind nevertheless, to the extent that we help the students enter a process of permanent formation (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.118)

Here, Freire equates aesthetics to a constructivist project i.e. the construction of knowledge and the construction of self. As such, education is simultaneously 'an act of knowing, a political act, and an artistic event' (Freire, 1985, p.17). Problem posing education is positioned as a moment of subversion whereby the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning are deconstructed and reconstructed in a relational fashion. If banking education results in 'narrative sickness' (Freire, 2001, p.71), then problem posing education works on restructuring the narrative understanding of reality. The liberating classroom holds political value as it opens up spaces for new forms of cognition and recognition. A Freirean pedagogy provides an aesthetic redistribution of who is seen and heard within schools. This takes places through dialogue. The teacher and student undergo a dis-identification as active teacher or passive student, through dialogue they are 'simultaneously teachers *and* students' (Freire, 2000, p.72). This generates a new configuration of inclusion and confirms an equality between students and teachers. Students and teachers through critical pedagogy can resist the ways in which dominant discourses have sought to construct them and instead engage in a construction of self through dialogue and critical reflection. These audible and visible acts of critical pedagogy open up a field for

true inclusion in the classroom; where students are heard and recognised. In banking education, the gaze of the other regulates, normalises, and homogenises. As already discussed, this gaze can work to position the student within a discourse of deficits i.e. the 'weak' student, the 'disruptive' student etc. This gaze may be powerful, however as Foucault states, where there is power there is resistance. Mieke Bal (1996), in her model of 'the glance', offers a way to rework and resist the stultifying gaze of the other. Lewis, when discussing Bal's concept of the glance, states:

> Rather than see the other as simply a passive object to be consumed, dominated, or subjected to social exclusion in the form of a no-count, the glance recognizes the autonomy of the other and as such is inherently dialogic. The glance is a form of visualization that opens up a space for dialogue where the other can define himself or herself outside of normalization, criminalization, and pathologization. It is in other words the glance that offers a verification of equality implicit in Freire's dialogic pedagogy' (Lewis, 2009, p.293).

Lewis goes on to explain:

> The resolution of the teacher/student dialectic demands a new aesthetics of visualization that will allow the teacher to see in the student the speaking subject capable of entering into a problem posing dialogue….. teaching becomes learning and all learning becomes teaching (Ibid)

In a Freirean pedagogical approach, the teacher becomes a 'humble and courageous witness'. For Foucault, the role of the author is to listen to marginalized, silenced, voices and, in so doing, attempt to insurrect subjugated knowledges. I argue here that the pedagogical equivalent of this insurrection is Freire's construction of the student/teacher relationship. Through the affective and political event of critical pedagogy, the student and the teacher can effect construction of selves that displace 'the order of things' within the school and the education system at large.

9.5 Student/teacher relationships in the LCA classroom

As highlighted by an ESRI report on the Leaving Certificate Applied programme in 2014, the success of the programme is very much dependent upon the relationship between students and teachers. The LCA curriculum demands a very different relationship between student and teacher; a relationship that is more in keeping with Freire's notion of student/teacher rather than the student teacher relationship as espoused by traditional banking education. The DES guidelines on LCA place importance on experiential learning and learning through discovery. In order for the programme to be successful the student must be active. This involves learning through 'acts of cognition' rather than the transferral of knowledge. Teaching and learning is relational not transactional. The curricular structure of the programme lends itself to this kind of student/teacher relationship and to acts of

cognition by centring learning around tasks, interviews, key assignments, work experience and group work and in all of this there is a very strong emphasis on dialogue. In many ways, the LCA programme seeks to engage students who have become disengaged or disaffected with school during their Junior Cycle. It was highlighted by teachers in my case study schools, as well as during my interviews with Harry Freeman and Jim Gleeson, that LCA has had a clear influence on the new Junior Certificate. The new Junior Certificate emphasises experiential learning and as such has introduced CBAs and Assessment Tasks. However, it should be noted that what was heralded as new here has been taking place in the LCA programme for almost thirty years now! As I have already noted, it was clear that many students enrolled in the LCA programme due to a negative experience of school at Junior Cycle. This negative experience of school was a strong factor in why students either self-selected or were identified as 'suitable' for the LCA programme:

> *It's not the teachers' fault, like I'm not blaming them, but they didn't have time for ya. There could be thirty of us in the class and then one teacher so sure they couldn't get round to us all. I just sat there a lot of the time. I wasn't disruptive or anything, but I just sat there. There were a few of us like that. I knew I couldn't do that for another two years (Student, School D)*

The student here is not blaming the teacher but rather the large class sizes at Junior Cycle. He did not feel seen or heard, he 'just sat there' and, as a result, opted for LCA. Many students interviewed explained that they just did not like school at Junior Cycle and wanted something different; in many cases something more 'practical':

> *Like we did groupwork an awful lot and that kinda thing, but it was still all exam. I didn't like school at all. I heard of LCA and it was more practical and stuff and I heard about the work experience, so I decided I'd do that (Student, School A)*

Principals and teachers drew attention to the fact that many students enrolled in the LCA programme in their school, for many different reasons, had a negative experience of Junior Cycle and as such they highlighted the importance of a positive teacher student relationship in order to re-engage students and to try to improve students' self-esteem:

> *Their academic self-esteem isn't great. A lot of them really struggled with the work at Junior Cycle and as a result don't feel great about themselves. Many of the behaviour problems is just a way for them to try to cover up how weak they are. Or how weak they think they are. So, a lot of your time is spent trying to build back up a little bit of confidence (Teacher, School B).*

Similarly, the principal in School C highlighted the importance of the student teacher relationship in terms of building self-esteem in students:

> *These students have to have a relationship with the teacher. I think LCA students need people who will relate to them, will take an interest in them – and when I say take an interest in them, I'm not just talking about their learning but their lives….in a sense when we are talking about self-esteem, that's it. (Principal, School C)*

There is a discourse of care apparent here and an awareness of the importance of building a relationship with students based on their 'lives', their lived experiences. This is in keeping with Freire who made clear that all learning must be based on the lived experiences of students i.e. students must be empowered to both 'read the word and read the world' (Freire, 1970). There is also an ambivalence or tension in this discourse of building self-esteem, in that schools feel it is their job to build self-esteem but equally blame school experience at Junior Cycle for damaging student self-esteem in the first place. Citing students' 'inability' to cope with work at Junior Cycle again, perhaps unintentionally positions LCA students within a discourse of deficit, rather than looking at any deficits that may exist within the system itself. The LCA programme in a way is seen as removing students from this system; they are removed from the points race and the pressure and 'stress' that comes from sitting the Leaving Certificate Established. LCA teachers, while in the LCA classroom are also removed from these pressures and as such 'have more time to sit and chat and get to know the students in a more personal way' (Teacher, School C). Another teacher described felling 'freer', explaining:

> *You don't have this big high stakes exam at the end of it so you are much freer and have time to try things that you just couldn't do in a Leaving Cert Established class' (Teacher, School B).*

This getting to 'know students in a more personal way' is an emotional endeavour and involves connecting emotionally with students. When identifying teachers who are 'suitable' to teach on the LCA programme, one principal explained:

> *I'm looking for someone with heart. Who will let a little more go. Not someone who is going to go in there and spend their time fighting with them (Principal, School A).*

Here, again, the discourse of care is highlighted and the notion that teaching is an emotional endeavour involving 'heart'. Teaching and learning is both cognitive and affective. Relationships within the classroom affect us emotionally and this in turn affects our construction of self. For Freire teaching is an 'act of love' and is based on mutual respect and trust. This is expressed through dialogue. According to Freire, dialogue is a pedagogical process, and this process results in the co-construction

of knowledge. In the schools participating in this study, both teachers and students placed importance on dialogue in building relationships.

> *In LCA the teachers chat to you a lot more. So you get to know them. They are a lot sounder in LCA. It's funny cos some of them are the same teachers I didn't get on with in Junior Cert (Student, School A)*

> *In LCA you definitely feel the teachers are more on your side. They aren't all in your face about work all the time. Sometimes we even have a cup of tea and chat in the morning. I really like that (Student, School B)*

> *I kinda feel like the teachers actually know me now. I suppose because there is less of us in the class. (Student, School B)*

> *The teachers aren't as thick, well not thick like but you know what I mean. They are a lot more chilled. The same as us really. We get the work done and ticked off as we go so its not all stressful like for them (Students, School C).*

During the student workshops, students described how as a result of a better relationship with teachers their behaviour had improved and as a result they got into less 'trouble' at school. This was two-fold, as on one hand the students said they didn't mess as much because the teachers were 'sounder' and they got on much better with them. On the other hand, students also believed that teachers got to know them better and as such were more understanding and not as 'strict'.

> *They get to know ya so say I was in late on Monday well the teacher might know that it was because I was coming from my Granny's, ya know that kinda thing (Student, School A).*

This improvement in behaviour was also seen as a response to less curricular demands. Especially not having homework and the nature of classwork involved in LCA:

> *I used to get a rake of demerits for not doing homework and not having books, that kinda thing, but now we don't have homework and don't bring books so its handy enough. Even if you don't have a pen the teacher will give you one (Student, School B).*

Another student explained:

> *I like the work now, it's not all writing and that kinda thing. It is more talking and you actually get to do stuff. So, I suppose the teachers don't need to fight with me as much to get me to do work! (laughs) (Student, School C)*

There was also an evident discourse of loyalty. Students discussed how when teachers were 'sound' they were happy to behave better and not cause 'trouble for the teacher'. Likewise, most LCA teachers felt a need to act as advocate for the LCA students:

> *I am always talking them up in the school. They'll tell you that if you ask them. I try to make sure they are involved in everything in the school. Often times they are just forgotten about…and it is unfair. It is really unfair on them (Teacher, School C)*

This was especially true when it came to the role of LCA coordinator. As one coordinator explained:

> *You spend your time trying to make sure they are not forgotten about. Reminding year heads that LCA is there too. When they don't teach LCA they know nothing about it.*

This is in keeping with Freire's notion of teaching as an act of love and, more specifically, an 'armed love'. Put another way, Freire believed it was incumbent upon teachers to speak up where they saw social injustices. In a Freirean philosophy teaching involves heart but also a critical eye. This relates to Freire concept of 'praxis' i.e. reflection *and* action, and brings us to Freire's notion of problem posing education.

9.6 LCA and Problem posing education – dialogue and the co-construction of knowledge

As already discussed, the LCA curriculum lends itself to problem posing education. The curriculum is practical in nature with a focus on learning through discovery. The Department of Education's guidelines on LCA describe it as 'a person-centred course involving a cross curricular approach rather than a subject-based structure… the programme is characterised by educational experiences of an active, practical and student-centred nature' (DES/NCCA, 2000, p. 6). The DES highlights the idea that the LCA programme and its curricular content 'focuses on the talents of individual students and helps them to apply their learning to the reality of their lives' (DES/NCCA, 2004, p.6). Smyth et al. (2006; 2007) found that more active teaching methodologies foster student engagement and promote enjoyment of learning. The ESRI report on the LCA programme in 2010 recognised that active teaching methodologies used in the LCA programme promoted student engagement. This is reminiscent of Freire's liberating classroom approach where a space is opened up for dialogue and student voice and learning is based on the lived experiences of students. Through the use of dialogue students participate in the co-construction of knowledge. When asked about how they learn in LCA compared to the Junior Cycle students told me:

Well, I think it is completely different. It's not all from books for a start. We go on work experience every Friday. I have learned more doing that than the three years at junior cert. You are out in the real world. (Student, School A).

It is great cos we get to do tasks and stuff. Like last year as part of Leisure and Recreation I actually learned all about coaching. Like I actually was a coach. I coached a first-year team. So, you know what I mean, its real-life skills and stuff (Student, School C).

Here, we can see a problem posing education at work. Students are involved in the 'rigour' of learning, in the 'acts of cognition'. Knowledge is not simply transferred but is produced by action. This kind of learning is also in keeping with the DES guidelines that LCA is characterised by 'educational experiences that are active, practical and student centred'. Students seem to differentiate skills learning 'from books' with 'real world' or 'real life' skills, real life skills were of value to students as they related directly to their lives and hence students could connect with the leaning:

Everything in LCA is practical. Like the Maths even is practical. In Junior Cert it was all x and y and Pythagoras, all that daft stuff. When is anyone ever going to use that? Seriously, when? Useless. But LCA Maths you learn about stuff that you actually need to know when you leave here. So straight away then you're like yeah, I want to learn that. Do ya get what I mean? (Student, School C).

The same student came up with a very interesting analogy to explain how he felt:

It's like a chocolate bar right. Imagine I was trying to give you a chocolate bar that you didn't like and had zero interest in, like say one of them Turkish Delight things, right? You really hated it, but I kept forcing you to eat it and got thick when you wouldn't eat it. Now imagine I had a lovely bar say like a Dairy Milk or something like that there and you were actually interested in it and wanted to eat it. I wouldn't need to keep forcing ya. Well, that's the best way I can say it. LCA is the Dairy Milk (Student, School C)

This was a very creative way of explaining to me that if students have a connection with their learning and are interested in the material, then they will be self-motivated, they will want to learn. A Freirean philosophy is evident here. Freire believed that for all learning to be meaningful it must connect with students' lives. The starting point must be the lived experience of students. This is where engagement begins and after engagement comes motivation (Freire, 1970). A student in school A expressed similar beliefs about learning:

We ran a mini-company. I want to be a carpenter but work for myself. So, when we did a mini company you know you learn about budget and expenses and making a profit. That's more the kinda thing I want to learn

and ya know you are doing it and working with everyone else, so you have to do your bit or they'll be on to ya. I don't remember much from books but I'll actually remember that kinda thing (Student, School A)

Here, again, a value is placed on learning by doing, learning through discovery, and learning that connects with real life. Students value learning that connects with their lives. The LCA curriculum was designed in such a way as to maximise connection with students' lives. The learning is practical and focuses on what students termed 'the real world'. Through class discussions, tasks, key assignments and group work, learning is very much structured as a group activity. Learning takes place through dialogue with the teachers and classmates. This is in keeping with Freire who believed that learning is not transactional but relational, with knowledge produced through democratic interaction:

> I cannot think authentically unless others think. I cannot think for others, or without others… Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry [people] pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Freire, 1970 p.58).

Students through action and dialogue are partners in the co-construction of knowledge. This is an alternative discourse to banking education where the students are positioned in binary opposition to the teacher. Here new relationships of power/knowledge are constructed that resist dominant hegemonies and offer LCA students an opportunity to recreate their subjective selves away from the normalising gaze of the other. The LCA programme values a different kind of learner and in many ways, a different kind of teacher.

9.7 Dis-identification of student and teacher – LCA and the construction of self (aesthetics)

This construction of knowledge and the resulting reconstruction of self is, for Freire, an aesthetic endeavour. Indeed, for Freire, pedagogy is an aesthetic project and, as such, teachers are artists:

> Even if we are not conscious of this [aesthetic] as educators, we are still involved in a naturally aesthetic project. What can happen is that, being unaware of the aesthetic aspect of education, we become very bad artists, but artists of a kind nevertheless, to the extent that we help the students enter a process of permanent formation (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.118)

Here, problem posing education is positioned as a moment of subversion, whereby the cognitive and relational aspects of education are deconstructed and reconstructed in a relational manner. The liberating classroom opens up new spaces for cognition and recognition thus offering a restructuring of the narrative understanding of a given reality. A Freirean philosophy provides an aesthetic redistribution of who is seen and heard in the classroom. As already discussed, this takes place through dialogue, whereby the student and teacher both undergo a dis-identification as active teacher or

passive student, through dialogue they are 'simultaneously teachers and students' (Freire, 200, p.72). In the four case study schools participating in this study, teachers viewed their role as teacher very differently within the LCA classroom:

> *It is definitely different. I'm a lot more laid back. Say for example in my higher level sixth year group I am very much under pressure. These students really want to achieve H1's and that can be very demanding. I'm very much in the role of teacher and like it or not you have to teach to the exam. That's what those students want and indeed their parents. LCA is a very different relationship. In a funny way LCA students take a lot more responsibility for their own learning. They are up and doing things. Not that they don't need a lot of help in terms of writing things up, they do, but the actual learning itself they are very independent.*

This is a very interesting quote, in that the teacher says she views herself 'in the role of the teacher' in her LCE class but views herself differently in the LCA class. Here, students are more in the role of teacher as they are 'up and doing things'. Through the active methodologies promoted in LCA students can become simultaneously teacher and student.

Another teacher explained:

> *Oh yeah, my role would be very different. I would let stuff go that I wouldn't in another class. You would have a different relationship with them altogether. Not authoritarian much more on an equal level. There is a lot of class discussion and debate and they are well able to argue with you (Teacher, School D)*

Here, again, we see Freire's notion of a 'horizontal relationship' between student and teacher centered on dialogue. The classrooms are more similar to democratic spaces with an organic equality that emerges through dialogue. Some teachers had perceived LCA students differently before teaching them, before getting to know them as LCA students, as argued in Chapter Seven, had been at times the victims of misrecognition:

> *Like before I taught them, I had a very different impression. When I saw they were on my timetable I was so nervous and to be honest, well I had them on a Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and I used to be nearly sick with nerves on a Sunday evening. But I was pleasantly surprised. They weren't rude or anything. They are actually a lovely class (Teacher, School C).*

A re-cognition happens here. The teacher gets to know the LCA students in a personal way and as such understands them or cognises them differently and this re-cognition allows recognition to take place. The students are now recognised as being 'a lovely class'. Clearly, this new recognition creates a different narrative to a discourse that the teacher had been exposed to previously, a discourse that resulted in her being 'sick with nerves' at the thought of going in to the LCA class on a Monday

morning. The issue of the misrecognition of LCA students was also highlighted by the principal in School B:

> *A lot of it is fear. Fear of the unknown. You might have teachers come in saying that they don't want to teach LCA but after having taught them they realise it actually isn't that bad. You'd have the same teachers coming in the following year asking to keep them on their timetable (Principal, School B).*

By teaching LCA students and getting to know them, this 'fear' is removed. Freire argues that what is most valuable in his philosophy of pedagogy through dialogue is the fact that dialogue opens up a space for students to be seen and heard (Freire, 1970). The liberating classroom should create a visual and verbal space whereby recognition may take place thereby creating a rupture or effecting in Foucauldian terms a 'discontinuity' in dominant hegemonies. Through this visual and verbal space, students are both recognized differently and recognize themselves differently and as such may begin to reconstruct their subjective selves I will return to this in more detail in the next chapter, Thinking Possibilities. Therefore, the liberating classroom employing a problem posing education is political and aesthetic. For Freire, the goal of problem posing education is the 'constant unveiling of reality' (Freire, 2001, p.81). This returns us to the goal of this thesis, which is to open up a space for dialogue where the voice of LCA students is recognised as the starting point in a 'politics of possibility'. The liberating classroom, like all spaces in schools, is an emotional place. The ways in which students are seen and heard affect them cognitively but also emotionally. As teaching and learning is always an emotional endeavour, we cannot truly explore the inclusivity of schools without examining the ways in which students feel recognised and valued within the school setting.

9.8 Affective pedagogy - teaching and learning as an emotional endeavour

I draw on the work of Anna Hickey-Moody when utilising Deleuze's notion of affect as method. Deleuze states 'that bodies speak has been known for a long time' Deleuze, 1990, p.285). What Deleuze is alluding to here is the totality of human experience. Mind and body cannot be separated and we experience the world in an embodied way. Oftentimes, when we speak about education, we talk about it in a cognitive way, both in terms of understanding the processes and purpose of education and this can result in us ignoring the emotional aspect of education. I argue that the emotional nature of education is of huge importance. We are thinking, feeling, and emotional beings. We learn with our minds and our hearts. Therefore, education is a series of embodied experiences and these experiences affect us emotionally. As Kenway and Youdell explain:

> Education is almost always positioned as rational – as a social and epistemological endeavor, as an abstract process, as a set of reasoned and logical practices, and as a series of formal spaces the production and use

> of which is as 'uncontaminated' by emotion as possible. Emotion is not formally part of education, its philosophical underpinnings, its policy and curriculum imperatives, or, often, even its day-to-day enactments (Kenway & Youdell, 2011, p.132).

This proved interesting for my work when examining the embodied complexities of learning through school culture. I have already discussed the importance of space in this context as well as the importance of dialogue and student/teacher relationships by utilising Freire's notion of critical pedagogy. Hickey-Moody explains that taking up Deleuze's concept of affect as method 'also shows the impact that everyday aesthetics have on our subjectivities', she refers to this as affective pedagogy. She utilises Deleuze's writings on the politics of aesthetics (Deleuze 1990, 2003 and Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 1994) and demonstrates how 'embodied capacities are increased or decreased by sounds, lights, smells, the atmospheres of places and people' (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.80). In other words, our embodied experiences affect our emotions and can change our attachments to subjects. This is keeping with Freire, who argued that pedagogy itself is a form of art and as such all teachers are artists (Freire, 1970).

I have argued in the previous chapters discussing space and voice that the embodied experiences of LCA students greatly affects their construction of self and as such the success or otherwise of the programme is centred on recognising the emotional aspect of learning and everyday school experiences. I now would like to argue that we can never achieve true inclusion while we continue to ignore the inherently emotional nature of education. A re-focus on the affective nature of pedagogy is necessary and the starting point for this is recognising and placing value on difference. Therefore, the culture of a school and students' embodied experiences within this culture is of vital importance when implementing curricular change, particularly in relation to a programme such as LCA. The lived experiences of students and teachers are always affective; according to Deleuze, our bodies and their affective registers are the flesh of pedagogy. For Deleuze, the idea of differentiation is the creative becoming of the world. Differentiation is the material and aesthetic power magnify difference, uniqueness, or what one may think about as individuality – the inherent differences amongst people. For Deleuze and for my study, each voice matters precisely because it is different. The value of each voice is increased as it is magnified through pedagogy. Aesthetic expression is one material way of articulating difference and as such aesthetic practices can amplify voice and allow for diverse kinds of expression. Creativity allows the world to become different from itself. Pedagogy conceptualised as an aesthetic endeavour enables young people to emerge differently.

Hickey-Moody suggests that 'Deleuze's Spinozist notion of *affectus* can be read as an aesthetically based research methodology' (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.79). *Affectus* refers to the measured material

equation of an interaction; the gain or loss recorded in the body, or the embodied subject, as the result of an encounter or experience. Affection is the feeling experienced by the embodied subject. Affects are 'confused' ideas, a hunch or feeling, a visceral prompt, and involve transitions or passages from one state of affection to another. Spinoza defines an affect as 'a confused idea by which the mind affirms its body, or any part of it, a greater or less power of existence than before; and this increase of power being given, the mind is determined to one particular thought' (Spinoza, 2001, p.158). Put a little more simply, *affectus* is the lived experience of thing that happens, the encounter or experience; an affect is the hunch, sense, or gut feeling based on this encounter and affection is when this hunch translates into a feeling an emotion. Thus, *affectus* communicates the materiality of change. This changes generated through *affectus* either increases or decreases ones' ability to act. Hickey-Moody explains that this is Deleuze's 'Spinozist framework for thinking about the ways in which ideas and interactions create changes' (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.81) and this then allows Deleuze (2003) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 1994) to 'explore ways of thinking the body as a changeable assemblage that is highly responsive to context' (Ibid). Therefore, affective pedagogy centres on the idea that aesthetic practices, including peagogies, teach us who we are by challenging how we feel about things. For Deleuze, aesthetics cannot be simply 're-cognised' it can only be felt. This causes us to look at things differently, to see with fresh eyes and hence increases our ability to see things critically. This elucidates the activist possibilities of education. This is in keeping with the epistemological commitments of my study; schools are sites of possibility. For Deleuze aesthetic practices change people's perceptions of how things are and of how they might be. Affective pedagogy allows for new ways of being and knowing.

These processes of making feelings involve an 'assemblage' of bodies, times, places, events etc.; therefore, the context individuals find themselves in and the lived experiences that take place within these contexts are hugely important in determining *affectus*. Hickey-Moody clarifies that for Spinoza context lays down a range of paths in thought. She explicates:

> These paths arise from our patterns of experience. A variety of individual patterns exist in correlation with different people's lived experiences. All paths are the product of an individual's engagement with the community. Experiences form geographies of meanings that bind communities. Such a process of engagement occurs by virtue of a body's existence. Bodies' articulations of their surroundings are unique because they offer a distinctive extension of their context. How we feel about things impacts on how we think about them (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.83).

Deleuze's concept of *affectus* and Hickey-Moody's use of *affectus* as research method is important for my study in a number of ways. Firstly, I have analysed how the spaces students occupy in school is not

a neutral space but are always politically inflected. I drew on a Foucauldian framework to analyse space as a mechanism of power; this was discussed in an earlier chapter. I have examined thus far the ways in which space and context students find themselves in, as well as the relationships they develop with classmate, peers and teachers affects them emotionally. It affects their ways of being and knowing. Students and teachers are embodied within spaces within the school and this embodiment involves sensory experiences that affect students and teachers emotionally and determine their ability to act. This ability to act can have either an enabling or limiting effect on schools as sites of possibility. In keeping with Freire and his concept of the liberating classroom, this study views teaching and learning as an artistic and aesthetic endeavour that provokes emotional responses and embodied experiences. In line with Freire, as discussed earlier, I see teaching as an act of love and as such can be seen as both critical and affective.

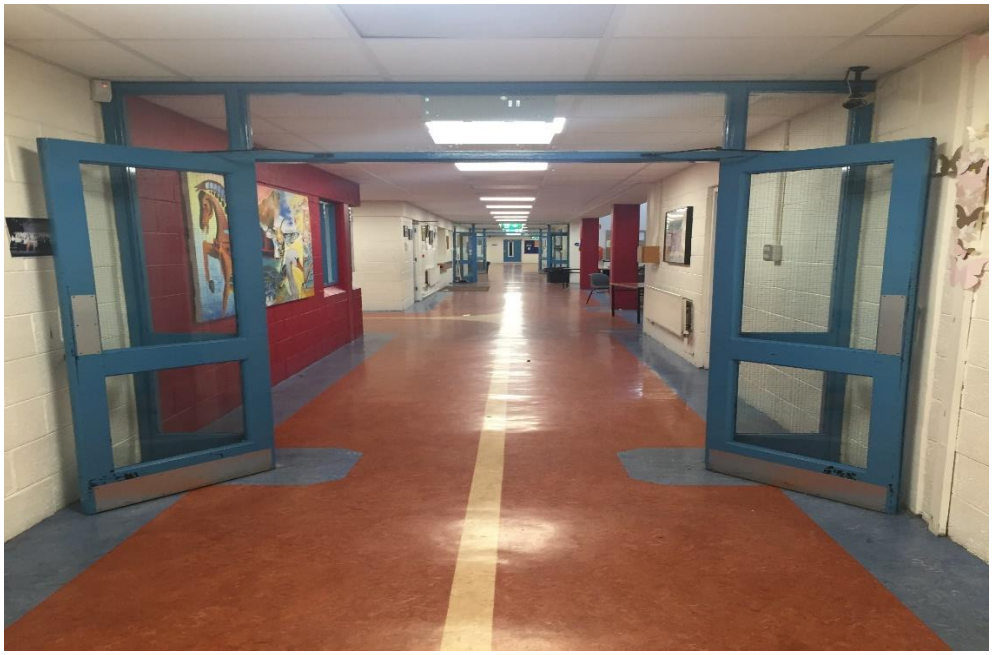
Affective pedagogy, as espoused by Hickey-Moody, was particularly important in terms of the methodological approach adopted, as I employed *affectus* as method through my use of Photovoice. The use of Photovoice in my research enabled students to emerge differently and allowed students to articulate feeling of belonging or feelings of isolation in a different way. My use of Photovoice attempted to create a space for students to effect change by broadcasting their own political statements through art. Through Photovoice, art became a vernacular and allowed for a different way of speaking experiences and raising issues for attention. When these photos were displayed for students and teachers to see, as well as school leaders, it was hoped that they would create connections that would lead to modifications or changes and allow for new possibilities. The photographs taken by students effected a movement from the invisible to the visible and this movement began with the senses; how one felt when looking at the photograph. This highlighted the critical cultural function of art and the possibilities of affective pedagogy.

I would like now to turn to discuss some images taken by students during my time with them. Students also wrote short narrative pieces to accompany the photographs they had taken. During the student workshops we discussed the experiences students had while following the LCA programme. Students spoke about the curricular content of the programme and how they learn in a different way. What emerged when speaking about everyday experiences of the LCA programme was students' emotional experiences. Students spoke about how they felt as LCA students in the school. They spoke about how a lack of recognition made them feel. I also aimed to realise a Freirean philosophy here by offering students a space where they could develop a critical consciousness in dialogue with their classmates which enabled them to perceive again their 'given' reality. During the workshops, they critically assessed why they were denied recognition, and many felt it was due to a lack of understanding on

the part of their peers. For the students, the emotional aspect of education was the most important. One student in school C summed it up eloquently when he said:

> *When I'm old, like 40 or 50, I won't remember what I learned in a particular say Maths class or English class or whatever, but I'll remember how I felt when I was in school. I'll remember if I was left out or included or if anyone actually gave a shit about me (Student, School C).*

The same student took the photograph below.



> *This sums up my view of the school. Not in a literal sense, I don't just mean I'm standing here all the time. Kinda on the outside looking in even though we are actually in here (Student, School C)*

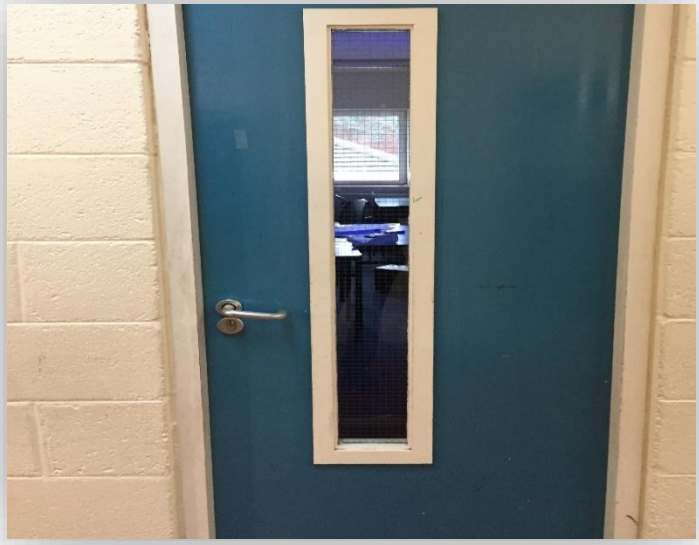
When discussing the image at the second workshop, he explained what he meant:

> *Like I love the LCA class. We all have a very close bond and I genuinely feel I have some friends for life here. The teachers too, the ones that teach us are fairly sound too. But I'm talking about the rest of the school. Like, we are very separate from them and that kinda makes you feel a bit crappy, you know, like we are not the same, not as important as them.*

Another student took the photograph below. He was very excited and proud that the LCA class had been chosen to go on the Erasmus trip. For this student that made him felt valued. The school had seen him, recognised him, and choose him and his LCA classmates to represent the rest of the school.

> *This for me was the best part of LCA. We were chosen to go on the Erasmus trip. The coordinator put us forward and the principal agreed. It was great because we were the ones chosen to represent the school. I think that this thing you are doing is great because a lot more people in the school are actually talking about LCA now.*

The next photograph was taken by a student who wished to highlight the importance of relationships and having her voice heard. She wrote the accompanying piece:



This is another photo which I find important. It's our maths class. It's special because it's the time where we enter this door and our co-ordinator is teaching us the maths. I think it's important to have a good relationship with your teachers and peers. This class allows us to talk to our co-ordinator and discuss matters other than maths.

I feel my relationship with my teachers and towards my classmates has gotten better because LCA is about communication and interaction with others (Student, School C)

Here we see an importance placed on dialogue and communication. The student is able to talk about and discuss things 'other than maths'. The student, in dialogue with the teacher can talk about things that matter to her. She also highlights the importance of 'communication and interaction with others'. Through communication, dialogue and interaction student voice is amplified. This returns us to the notion of dialogue and listening, of being heard.

This photograph was discussed during the student workshops. Students felt that their relationships with their classmates and their teachers added to their enjoyment of school. One student stated:

I really hated school. I missed a load of days. I missed so many days that I didn't even sit the Junior Cert. Since joining LCA I think I have only missed two days. There's no judgement from everyone in LCA. Well there is by the rest of them but I'm talking about in the actual LCA class – there's no judgement there (Student Workshop)

Here, again, we see a discourse of 'safe space'. In the LCA classroom, these students feel free from judgement. This judgement takes the form of comparison with their LCE counterparts. A comparison in which LCA students feel there were judged through processes of normalisation i.e exam results, academic standard, behaviour etc. We also see in the above quote an importance placed on relationships. Due to positive relationships the student above now comes to school every day. There is a clear connection here between school experiences and emotions, in particular the feeling of being accepted. The student feels accepted by his classmates and as such is willing to come to school.

Students highlighted the practical nature of LCA. This was connected to emotions as students felt they were 'able to learn' in this way and as such had a sense of accomplishment. One student recalled a table he made telling me:

> *I remember taking it home last year. It was well nice. Me Dad couldn't believe that I actually made that. It was great to actually be able to see something that you worked at. I still love looking at it. I was pure proud (Student, School B)*

The aesthetic nature of learning is highlighted here. The student could physically see what he had achieved, and he could show it to others and receive recognition from others for his accomplishment. This made him feel proud.

Another student had taken this picture of an artwork she had created during LCA and wrote the following:

Here is one of the Art works I have done in the Art room. I am very proud of myself for creating a piece like this. I got help from my classmates as well. Each of us picked a famous painting we would like to do and then we made it into a cut out. It was used in the open night of our school. I am happy that I got an opportunity to make something like this.

I want people to know LCA is about you, your ways of doing things, whether it be learning your way or thinking your way. You find your true self. You will also know the areas where you are good and areas where you are not so good but, that's okay because you have the support of your teachers and peers (Student, School C)

The following picture was used by a student to highlight the issue of subject choice. She did not write anything to accompany the picture, but in the workshop she explained:

LCA is definitely more for boys, like very few girls do it. In this school there are only two of us and for a long time it was just me. So, then the subjects are chosen to suit the boys. Like woodwork and metalwork and all of that. I wanted to do hair and beauty and we have a hair place upstairs, but we can't do it. I really don't like that. The other normal leaving certs get to choose what subjects they want to do but in LCA we can't have a choice cos there is only a few of us so you're just given a timetable and have to do them subjects (Student, School A).

This was a major issue in all schools for students. They did not have any power or control over what subjects they did. This was definitely an even greater issue for girls who were following the LCA programme. I will discuss this in a little more detail in the next chapter. The images and accompanying narrative pieces below highlight the value placed on experiential learning and learning through discovery. Here students are active participants in the co-construction of knowledge. This affects students emotionally as it encourages a deconstruction and reconstruction of self and enables the emergence of questions of pride, self-esteem, value, and recognition. Affective pedagogies can be viewed as an alternative discourse to the dominant norms, perceptions, and values. The pictures below were taken by a student in School A. He wanted to highlight the practical nature of learning in LCA and as he explained:

All the really good stuff about it that the other ones don't see. Maybe when the other ones see this, they might change their mind about us and see that we actually so stuff and that there is a lot of good in LCA.

I used this picture because I like getting my Friday in school off to go to work experience.

I used the school journal to represent homework but in LCA we don't get homework and that's what I like.

I enjoy the trips away and in LCA we get more trips.

Another student in the same school took the pictures below, again in an effort to change minds explaining:

It is just kinda ya know that's my experience of the actual programme, the learning and that. The only down thing of LCA is the stigma, like oh it's for lazy people or whatever. If that could just be changed then the whole thing would be better. More people would actually want to do it and then you could have different subjects and all then cos you'd have the numbers.

This picture is taken on a school trip in carrick on Shannon
At the go karting track this is one of many trips we go on
During LCA it's was a brilliant trip.

This is another great trip in Dublin we visited the abbey theatre and we seen
The play let the right one in and it was brilliant we all, enjoyed it and did some
Shopping after.

This study attempted to conceptualise recognition, as it is felt spatially, discursively and relationally and as such offer a fresh insight that may serve to counter dominant hegemonies of inclusion that effectively exclude emotion. Kenway and Youdell contend that:

> Conceptualisations of emotion that are situated in the social, the discursive, the spatial and the affective offer a set of perspectives that have the potential to generate new understandings of emotion; how emotion circulates in education; and how education is both produced in and constitutive of particular spaces and in relation to various scales (Kenway & Youdell, 2011, p.132).

They go on to explain:

> …putting together socio-cultural and discursive understandings of emotion, a conception of the spatiality of emotion, and a focus on affectivities does promise fresh insights (Ibid).

Hickey-Moody states the 'aesthetics of everyday life choreographs connections and resistances to people, sensations, and events' (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.83). Art and affective pedagogy can also be used as a means of articulating issues of recognition and value. They can offer an alternative discourse to dominant hegemonic discourses and as such lead to what Foucault termed the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges'. The work produced by students here is counter-narrative that places importance on being recognised and feeling valued. This highlights the notion that inclusion is about much more than just being in the school or having access to education. It is also about voice and visibility and the deployment of students in space and relationships and recognition, as well feeling success, all of which exist within the emotional realm of education. To be recognised by others or to experience misrecognition or non-recognition affects us emotionally.

How LCA students are seen and heard or invisibilised and silenced within schools and within and the education system at large affects these students emotionally. Therefore, to talk openly and honestly about inclusion, we must first recognise and acknowledge that schools are political and emotional places.

9.9 Feeling Absences: Inhibitors to a critical pedagogical approach

I have discussed how the LCA programme lends itself to both a critical and creative pedagogy. However, many factors within school and the education system inhibits this. The first of these is time and resources. All four principals interviewed discussed the issue of resources and how this greatly impacted on the successful running of the programme within the school:

Well, it's not sustainable in terms of, general subjects in the school. In 5th or 6th year, if it doesn't get around 11 or 12, we won't run the subject, just because you are giving too much resources to that subject for those numbers. Realistically we apply to same rule to LCA and we have to be more strict with it in LCA nearly because you get .5 of a teacher to run it, but it takes more than .5 of a teacher to run it. So, I think that LCA is probably the most, in terms of students, it's the programme that is best for student development across the education system. I think it's a fantastic programme, but schools aren't giving an awful lot to it because we don't get the teacher hours to cover it (Principal, School A).

The principal had an obvious belief in the programme but due to a lack of resources could not run it 'properly'. There is a gap here between policy and the material possibilities of practice. Policy and department guidelines expect or encourage students to provide an engaging student-centred programme, but the principals interviewed felt the Department of Education does not provide the resources that would allow them to do this. The principal in School A had clearly put a lot of thought into this problem and described what he felt might be a solution:

If you take a look at the Department's budget – 19% of the budget goes on special education needs provision and I do think the department are missing a trick in that, let's say we have an SEN inspection over the next number of months and we have X number of teachers doing so many hours of support around the school – all very valuable. But in terms of allocation, for example, why can't a programme like LCA be seen as part of that support model? It doesn't have to be labelled as the support model, so that when you're looking at and if the department viewed it in that, that they want supports for students to achieve their best, they want them to stay in school as long as they can and if LCA fitted into that SEN model of support and was given some of that budget out of the SEN model, then I think you'd have the opportunity to develop an even more engaging programme with better outcomes and – from the department's perspective themselves – they should be able to see well these students required extra support; whether it's because of their socio-economic backgrounds, maybe it's just because they found school difficult as some students do, but at least you'd be able to say well how did we succeed? We succeeded because these students came out, they have a qualification and they're now able to access the world of work, is that not what we're about? (Principal, School A).

The principal here is highlighting the fact that the LCA programme is not resourced adequately and if the DES could find some way of putting resources into the programme then it stands a greater chance of succeeding. The principal in School D expressed a similar opinion:

The resource limitations would be the main challenge so; money, subject choice and having the right mix of teachers and having the right personalities on your teaching staff as well. It is great having this wonderful policy on paper and the ideas are great but then they don't actually resource it (Principal, School D)

This lack of resourcing, arguably, is indicative of a lack of formal and official recognition for LCA students and teachers. As one teacher put it 'if they valued it, they'd fund it' (Teacher, School D).

9.9.1 Provision of Modules

The ability to offer different modules as suggested in the LCA policy was also a source of frustration for principals:

> *Again, that comes back to resources. You can offer hair and beauty for example but who is going to teach that? You end up offering the modules where teachers are qualified to teach like Graphics or Business. You can't offer students a subject choice really because often times there's only 11 or 12 of them in the class (Principal, School B).*

This lack of choice was also an issue for students who in some cases spend two years studying a subject that they didn't choose, have no interest in and in some cases didn't even do for the Junior Certificate.

> *We are just given the timetable. We don't get a choice. I would have loved to keep Geography but you can't do that in LCA. I had to do Woodwork. I hated it at first cos I didn't know what I was doing but I don't mind it now (Student, School B).*

There is also a gendered nature to the choice of modules on offer. The majority of LCA students in all four schools were boys and as such schools offered subjects that would 'suit the boys':

> *There aren't many of us so we just have to do subjects for the boys. Now I'm not saying like oh there are boy subjects and girl subjects but a lot of the stuff we do is all like Woodwork and Metalwork and that kinda thing. Like, seriously, me and the other girls are there trying to use saws and things and its a joke. What takes the boys five minutes takes me a week. I wanted to do hair and beauty cos I want to do a PLC in that after school. I love the rest of LCA. If we could do stuff we actually wanted to do after school then it be great (Student, School D).*

As another girl explained:

> *They wonder why girls don't do it but sure they put girls off it by just doing all boy stuff. They think oh it is for apprenticeships and that's all for boys.*

This brought up the issue of how the workplace had changed and how students felt LCA needed to be updated to continue to prepare them for the workplace:

Like I think LCA is out of sync now if you know what I mean. The stuff on it is all old. I'm doing work as a carpenter and there are far more modern ways of doing things than they show you on LCA. They need to update it big time, that's just my opinion now (Student, School A).

This has a very negative effect on the programmes ability to effectuate a critical pedagogy as students struggle to become motivated when they did not exercise subject choice.

This concern was also expressed by teachers:

They really need to update it. The workplace and industry have moved on over the last thirty years and LCA has remained the same.

Arguably, the existence of this inaction, the lack of a wholescale review or updating of the programme, is also evident of a hidden discourse of lack or recognition or value.

9.9.2 Out of school learning as a mode of learning through discovery

The fact that my four case study schools were in small rural towns in Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal posed issued in terms of out of school learning; a core element of the LCA programme. One teacher explained:

To go anywhere we have to book a bus for 12 kids. You feel like, am I wasting resources here? But the reality is that is what we would have to do. Like for example, I would bring them to the cinema for a particular module that we're doing, we've to book a bus to go. There's no money. It is almost cruel really because it's like, here are all these wonderful ideas but ya know we won't actually give you the resources to do most of them. Maddening. (Teacher, School B)

Some teachers felt that some of the out of school learning was aimed at schools in larger urban areas and didn't take into the account the contextual nature of schools in rural areas trying to run the programme:

Say for example you are asked to visit the Credit Union as part of the module, well the Credit Union only opens in the evening or the weekend here. Or you are asked to visit a theatre, it;s difficult. We did visit a theatre, but it took us the whole day to get there and back. Now the kids loved it and it was a fantastic experience for them and I'd love to do that kind of thing every week but there aren't the resources. You can't ask these kids for a fiver for the bus every week. A lot of them just don't have that and it is not fair that they would have to pay when it is meant to be part of their programme (Teacher, School A).

This was also a major issue for student. In the student workshops, one student explained:

One of the main reasons I did LCA was cos I thought there would be trips and we'd be away doing thing but sure there are none at all. I think we've had one. The TYs then are away the whole time Student, School B).

This again inhibits the capacity of the LCA programme embrace critical pedagogy as due to lack of resources student learning is confined to the classroom and as some students themselves suggested 'does not take place in the real world'. For Freire it was crucial that learning was based and students' lives and their worlds. Likewise, the original aim and rationale of the programme placed emphasis on out of school learning but due to lack of funding and resources this takes place in a limited fashion in the four case study schools.

9.9.3 Combination of classes

The lack of resources also posed a major issue in terms of teaching and learning in the classroom. In order to continue to run the programme some schools had to resort to combining the LCA1 and LCA2 classes for some subjects:

So basically, resources would be the main problem, you would only have .5 given to you and you're trying to run two classes out of that; so you need 1.3 for each class for a week so we don't have the resources. So, our attitude is to put both classes together and that's very difficult trying to teach two classes at different levels and different materials etc. So that's the biggest challenge really is the resources, the rest is all manageable (Principal, School C).

This posed major challenges for teachers:

It presents plenty of challenges; it's just, you're breaking the group into – when you're dealing with one group, the other group tend to go off task and then you get problems because you're trying to give instructions on one side and then; you're trying to do two jobs at once. Now, I'm not saying this doesn't happen in every other school – primary school teachers do it all the time – but it's just difficult because the nature of the student tends to… if you're not watching them, they'll do something else. Normally they're not being disruptive but normally what they're doing is going on Done Deal, looking to see if they can buy a tractor or… (Teacher, School C).

Another teacher described how combining the two LCA classes does cause behavioural problem and this in turn impacts on learning:

It's the disruption when you've given people work that they've already done and then you're trying to give them – you know, you've to spend that much time dealing with them to give them add-on tasks and it's difficult; and if anyone gets into bother it all grinds to a halt.

This combining of classes for students represented as lack of value and recognition:

> *Sure, they won't even give us our own class. We are just lumped in together and then we're sitting there doing stuff we have already done. You wouldn't see them put the normal Leaving Certs together like 5th and 6th years but its okay to do it to us (Student, School B)*

There was a discourse of blame and anger here directed towards the school but there was equal frustration on the school's part who in turn placed blame firmly at the feet of the Department of Education. One teacher who was clearly annoyed about the situation stated:

> *Actions speak louder than words. The Department are all about inclusion and every child is valued but the amount of money they put into it shows how much it is really valued. They come and inspect us then and blame us if it isn't going well when they have tied one hand behind our back from the start (Teacher, School C).*

This quote really sums up how most teachers and principals felt – the Department don't invest in the programme and the implicit or hidden narrative suggests that they don't really value it or recognise it as something worth putting money into. The effects of this are felt in a very real way in schools by teachers and also by students who live these policies every day.

> *There are lovely things you could be doing with them, but it doesn't – the thought didn't go in that way. You're trying to create a programme but you're still keeping kids in class with no budget to do all those lovely things.*

9.9.4 The transdisciplinary nature of LCA

Freire places importance on dialogue within the classroom but also places importance on collaboration and dialogue amongst teachers (Freire, 1970). The LCA programme is structured as a transdisciplinary programme. There is a deliberate effort to connect courses and to connect teachers in a very collaborative way. Jim Gleeson envisaged that this was the rationale of the programme. 'It was meant to be a whole team-based thing. Where teachers were working together in a collaborative fashion and in so doing were aware of the bigger picture. It was a more holistic approach' (Interview, 2019). The CPD that teachers avail of from the PDST also highlights the importance of the transdisciplinary nature of the programme. However, in reality, this does not exist.

> *We rarely meet. I think we have had one official LCA meeting this year. There is no time given. It is all informal, just a chat in the staffroom (Teacher, School C)*

We'd have maybe three meetings in the year. The rest of the time you just keep going yourself. I don't think anyone really realises that they are courses and not subjects. We just each teach our subject (Teacher, School D).

9.10 Conclusion

This chapter examined some of the ways critical and affective pedagogies can offer a lens to understand the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. The chapter discussed the importance of critical and affective of pedagogy in terms of opening up a space for dialogue where students are both seen and heard. The aesthetic nature of a liberating classroom was discussed and the impact this has on students' emotions. It was argued that in order to effectuate a truly inclusive climate in schools we must acknowledge that schools are both political and emotional sites. An examination of the lived experiences of LCA students teaches us that real inclusion involves the recognition and value of different talents and different voices. In the next chapter Thinking Possibilities, I will discuss the notion of resistance and self-creation, as well as the LCA programme going forward and lessons we can learn in terms of inclusion.

Chapter Ten:

Thinking Possibilities: Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This study offered a spatial, discursive, and relational analysis of feelings of inclusion and inclusive/exclusive practices within schools from the perspective of Leaving Certificate Applied students. This involved examining the embodiment of policy and the discursive, spatial, and relational encounters of such an embodiment. I have argued that these encounters are emotional and, as such, inclusion itself needs to be understood as an emotional endeavour. This study makes a unique contribution to this specific field of literature on the LCA and its relation to inclusion, as thus far commentaries on the LCA programme have failed to recognise the importance of a spatial discourse and the emotions involved in the materiality and contextualised nature of policy implementation and the resultant feelings of inclusion or exclusion. This study also aims to contribute to the wider field of education and to how inclusion is conceptualised in schools. The emphasis placed on differentiation in discourse relating to inclusive education can at times be seen then as an effort at 'normalisation' rather than one accepting of difference. In a Deleuzian vein, this study values different voices precisely because they *are* different. An effort was made to undo silences and to offer alternative perspectives and interpretations of inclusion that focused on the feeling of inclusion and the opportunities for real participation in school life. Listening to the voices of these students, voices that are often subject to discounting and marginalisation, allowed the study to tap into a subversive power, an alternative narrative. Listening to silences and being sensitive to contextual practices of discursive and spatial exclusions enabled a movement of freedom from hegemonic discourses and subjective constructions for a number of those interviewed and opened up some possibilities to develop an alternative discourse of inclusive practices within education that look at inclusion with fresh eyes. I do not contend that inclusion is simple or easily achieved; inclusion is complicated and necessitates a certain messiness where voices are held in tension and ambiguities are welcomed and explored. However, I argue that how we conceptualise inclusion affects how it is lived out in practice. As such, how inclusion is conceptualised in policy is not the endpoint, but rather inclusion takes on a dynamic life of its own when it comes to be lived out in practice.

This chapter will begin by reviewing the complexities and unintended consequences of policy enactment in relation to the LCA programme. It will then explore Foucault's notion of becoming and

the ways in which critical and affective pedagogies, as aspired to in the LCA programme, can enable students' *becomings*. The chapter will then move to discuss the embodied nature of policy, alongside epistemic injustices and issues of recognition. I will then turn to the voices of participants and continue to hold these voices in tension. The chapter will then examine progression routes of LCA students and present a piece on 'blue skies thinking' as conceptualised by the participants in this study. Lastly, the chapter will discuss what an examination of the LCA programme can teach us about inclusion in education and highlight the unique and original contributions this study has made to the field.

10.2 The complexities and unintended consequences of policy enactment

The policy makers I spoke to as part of this study had a vision for the LCA programme. This vision was based on a strong commitment to equality and a commitment to a positive conception of difference and a desire to have difference recognised, both formally and informally, by the Department of Education and by schools. As Senator Quinn stated:

> *...it was ring fenced to say to the students that you're different, and they are different. They had talent and ability and these talents were otherwise not recognised. LCA was that recognition (Interview, January, 2019).*

Likewise, Professor Gleeson stated that this decision to 'ring-fence' the programme was based on a desire to 'offer a meaningful alternative' to the Leaving Certificate Established and the points system. To offer something different but equal, something 'meaningful'. Harry Freeman explained that they wanted a programme that could 'stand on its own' and offer something different to these students who as Senator Quinn explained 'were being left behind'. Freeman described the pedagogical approach to LCA and the impact it was hoped this would have on the life of the student:

> *The active learning approach, the application of knowledge in a practical way, work experience and the assessment method was radically different from the traditional model. Through all of that you were building a person who had not been suited to the academic, traditional model and was now going to be better prepared for their future, who was going to be more informed and as a result was going to be in a much stronger position to enter the workplace than they would have been had they stayed in the traditional system. That was the ethos of the development of the programme (Interview, January, 2019).*

The vision offered by these policy makers was full of hope and the design of the programme was innovative and forward thinking. However, their vision and the realisation of the programme as 'meaningful' depended upon the programme being recognised and promoted by the Department of Education and by schools. Gleeson speaks of the fragmented nature of curricular reform and how this results in 'piecemeal' reform and 'add ons' to the system without any real substantial change. He and

others argue how the curriculum in Irish Education has predominately been viewed in terms of subjects; inspectors are experts in their subject areas. As Gleeson explains, this nullifies any 'macro thinking' resulting in curricular changes here and there, namely in terms of subject content, but no real change to the system (Gleeson, 2000). LCA was an example of an attempt at real change but also a victim of this 'fragmentation' and lack of macro thinking:

> The LCA is essentially about the empowerment of young adults through experiential learning…Surely there would have been more contestation, more debate and critical evaluation if the enormity of what is being attempted had sunk it! (Gleeson, 2000, p.28).

The LCA is an example of the unintended consequences of policies and the complexity of policy enactment. It is a case in point demonstrating how 'the best of intentions' can contribute to the 'tools of oppression' (Foucault, 1988, p.10). The policy makers decided to ring-fence the programme in order to provide a different programme, a different way of learning, an alternative to the LCE and the points system. What was conceived of as an inclusive policy became, when lived out in practice, despite those best of intentions, a form of exclusion in terms of lived experiences in schools and also in terms of progression routes after school. The 'ring-fenced' nature of the programme and the spatial discourses this entails has many ramifications both discursively and spatially. It involved a physical and discursive separation from LCE peers. This has already been discussed in detail in the previous thematic chapters.

The ring-fenced structure of LCA employs a view of inclusion that is centred around a discourse of participation and access. As Gleeson informs, there was a concerted effort to increase retention rates in the early 1990's, with the introduction of the LCA playing 'a key strategic role in the state's plan to increase school retention rates' (Gleeson, 2000, p.27). One may argue that herein lies the problem. The policy innovators viewed LCA as an inclusive programme that aimed to recognise and value difference. The Department of Education viewed LCA as an inclusive programme in terms of keeping students in school. As such inclusion is conceptualised as remaining in school, being 'in' school. This was evident in my field work, with one principal telling me that it is 'only right they should be in school; I mean where else would they be' (Principal, School B). The goal of access to education and the right to participation is crucial. The principal above is absolutely correct when he says it is only right that these students are in school. However, this has come to dominate the discourse and has over-shadowed or eclipsed the original vision of the policy makers which was the recognition and value of difference. Students being in school does not mean that we can now tick off inclusion as being done. We have seen over the course of the thematic chapters how LCA students are 'othered' both discursively and spatially in schools. The principal went on to explain 'The programme is ring-fenced and that necessitates a certain amount of separation for it to work' (Principal, School B). This is true.

For schools to run the programme, it logistically and practically does require a certain amount of separation, as it is a different, distinct ring-fenced programme. However, how that separation takes place – and the extent to which students are separated, not only from their LCE peers, but from the school body in general – has alienating and 'othering' effects for students. It creates an 'us' and 'them' rhetoric, with LCA students perceiving themselves as not as valued in the school as their LCE peers:

> *'We are very much separate from them. We are in our own room and do our own thing. Like, don't get me wrong. I like that, but it's just we wouldn't be seen as important as them' (Student, School B).*

This was evident in all four case study schools. This 'spatial separation' attributes a 'status of outsiders' to the LCA students (Youdell, 2003, 2006). As such, they are still 'in' school but are viewed as outsiders on the inside. As one student in School C put it: 'It's like, we are here, like we are in the school, but we are just kinda looking in on the rest of them'. There are many ambiguities and tensions apparent in students' lived experience of the LCA programme. In many ways, LCA students like being in their own room and doing their own thing but feel that they are not perceived as being 'as important' as their LCE counterparts. As discussed in Chapter Seven: Thinking Contextually, LCA was simultaneously seen as a 'safe space' (bell hook, 1989) and a place of containment. For students, the LCA programme represented a place and a way of learning where they felt accepted and accomplished. It represented a place of collaboration and collegiality both between students and between students and teachers. Students could escape 'the gaze' or normalising judgements of others. The LCA programme, as such, represents an emotional space quite different to students' previous schooling experiences. However, students were also very aware of their spatial and discursive alienation and separation and this had very real effects on them in terms of feelings of value and recognition.

10.3 Foucault: the 'care of the self' and processes of becoming

According to Foucault, qualities such as hopes and dreams, self-esteem and recognition are all part of a greater power/knowledge network. This is apparent in the manner in which the hopes and vision of the policy makers was subsumed by the Department of Education into a more dominant, hegemonic discourse of inclusion. This one could argue is also true for the hopes, dreams, and visions of students and teachers who 'live' these policies in a material and contextualised way. The possibilities of subjectivity exist within contextualised settings that are political. The subject is both produced in and produces this space. This is the double bind I spoke of earlier in the thesis. Our subjective selves are both produced by and have producing effects on the spaces and discourses we occupy. Where there is power, there is resistance. Subjectivity is not a state of being but rather an act of becoming, or as Foucault termed it 'the care of the self'. Resistances can lead to something new. Listening to the voices

of those who are marginalised can help us to see that reality is just one way of being amongst a multitude. We have become and as such we can become differently. In an interview discussing technologies of the self, Foucault stated 'the main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not at the beginning' (Martin, 1988, p.9). Here, we see that identity is not something that is static. Through resistances everyone is capable of deconstructing and reconstructing their subjective selves. This is the endeavour of 'becoming'. The subject is not a static being but rather is in continuous process of 'becoming'. Foucault views the subject as both constituted and self-constituting in the relationship between discursive practices, power relations, and ethics. In Foucauldian terms, ethics implies a different kind of self-government, one based on a 'complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed and modified by himself' (Foucault, 1993, p.204). We must, therefore, commit ourselves to a form of 'permanent agonism'. As Foucault explicates:

> The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them (Foucault, 1984b, p.118).

As such we must examine taken for granted practices that exist within schools and reveal which are intolerable by opening them up to scrutiny. In other words, as Foucault states, one must exert 'a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same thing in different ways' (Foucault, 1988a, p.321). This espouses an ontology of becoming rather than being. By utilising a Foucauldian framework, we can come to view teaching and learning not as a state of being but rather as an act of becoming, a constant struggle between capabilities and constraints in an effort 'to become again what we should have been but never were' (Foucault, 2004, p.45). By rejecting the modernist notion of an essential self and embracing the concept of becoming through processes of self-care, Foucault offers us a way of rejecting the 'normalising gaze' of others. As Youdell puts it:

> ..the person is made subject by and subject to discursive relations of disciplinary power, but being such a subject s/he can also engage self-consciously in practices that might make him/her differently. The subject acts, but s/he act within/at the limits of subjectivation (2006, p.42).

This way of conceptualising subjectivities enables and requires us to rethink our relationships with ourselves and with others. Foucault is asking us to re-examine and disturb and unsettle taken for granted practices, that is to 'to look at the same things in a different way' (Foucault, 1988a, p.321).

This involves what Burchell suggest is a 'problematisation' of the present and a seeking of what he terms 'ways out' (Burchell, 1993, pp.30-31). The Leaving Certificate Applied for many students represents a 'way out', not just in terms of escaping a school culture that is dominated by performativity and competition based on the yearly points race, but also as a way out that enables us to look again at these practices within schools; to see the same things but to begin to *see* them differently. This may be likened to what Youdell terms a reinscription of a 'politics of performativity' where students can become 'something or someone, they were not before (Youdell, 2006, p.180). This looking again at taken for granted practices is connected with Foucault's insurrection of subjugated knowledges, that is, listening to those on the margins and those who have been silenced. This promotes 'new knowledge of experiences' Youdell, 1999, p.108) and involves looking anew at practices within schools, particularly inclusive practices, from the outside, so to speak. LCA students in many ways may be viewed as 'outsiders on the inside' in terms of schools as institutions but also in terms of the education system at large. I am not suggesting that LCA students are unique here, there are many other cohorts of student who may viewed in the same way, for example, students from marginalised backgrounds or students with an ASD diagnosis and although the focus of this study is on the LCA programme the issues of inclusion raised here speak to wider issues of inclusion within the education system as a whole. The voices of LCA students here offered new knowledges and new ways of thinking about inclusion within schools. As argued in Chapter Three, the design of the LCA programme is, in many ways, premised on critical and affective pedagogical thinking. This contains possibilities for students to reject how they have been constructed by dominant hegemonies in deficit terms and instead to recognise themselves and their talents differently, to become again.

10.4 Critical and affective pedagogies and the processes of becoming

For Foucault, one of the primary roles of the teacher is to lead students in the processes of becoming, in the 'care of the self' (Peters, 2003). Freire, too, sees the job of the teacher as empowering students to look critically at the world and themselves and to realise that this way of being is just one way amongst a multitude. Freire conceptualises teaching as both an emotional and artistic endeavour. Teaching is an 'act of love' and a work of art (Freire, 1970). Foucault demands we unsettle and disturb taken for granted practices or dominant hegemonies through the insurrection of subjugated knowledges. Freire and Hickey-Moody offer us a way and a means of effecting this insurrection through critical and affective pedagogies. As Freire states:

> For me education is simultaneously an act of knowing, a political act, and an artistic event. I no longer speak about the political dimension of education. I no longer speak about a knowing dimension of education. As

> well, I don't speak about education through art. On the contrary, I say education is politics, art and knowing (Freire, 1985, p.17)

The beauty in critical and affective pedagogy, as aesthetics practices, including those that generate works of art, is found in the *process*. This process involves students in the co-construction of knowledge and opens up discursive spaces that stimulate critical dialogue. Dialogue, as conceptualised by Freire, enables students to create again their subjective selves but this time utilising an inward gaze that opens the future rather than the normalising gaze of the other. This opens up a space for new cognition and recognition. The LCA programme can be seen as a counter discourse to 'banking education'. Instead LCA is centred on problem posing education where students are actively involved in the 'acts of cognition'. This collaborative approach and the resulting co-creation of knowledges succeeds in an effecting a dis-identification of the binary of teacher and student and instead results in what Freire terms student/teacher (Freire, 1970). This view of teaching as art involves students in the making of new knowledges, and this involvement in the making of curriculum stimulates new ways of thinking and being. As such the LCA programme runs counter to the dominant hegemony of performativity, standardisation, and competition found in education today. However, one may argue that this is the very reason it is deemed to hold lesser significance at system level. The Leaving Certificate Applied programme teaches us that another way is possible, but this other way needs to be recognised and valued. The pedagogical approach adopted by LCA allows us to conceptualise inclusion in a different way, not in terms of identifying differences as difficulties or deficits needing intervention but rather by recognising the innate value of *difference*.

This study has shown that inclusion and recognition involve emotion. Students *feel* included or excluded, they *feel* a sense of belonging or being othered, they *feel* valued and safe, or alienated and marginalised. Policies relating to the LCA programme and commentaries written thus far on the programme have failed to recognise that inclusion and lived experience are fundamentally emotional. When the policy makers (although well intentioned) decided to ring-fence the programme, they did not recognise the emotional consequences for students of such a decision. Processes of differentiation found in every school and every classroom in the country are attempts at inclusive education. In many ways they hold merit. They identify difficulties (often literacy and numeracy) students may have and try to realise teaching methodologies to help students overcome these difficulties. However, this form of differentiation recognises but does not value difference. Methodologies are used to effect normalisation and standardisation, to help students to 'perform' to the best of their ability. This places an emphasis on student deficit rather than examining deficits in the system itself. This form of differentiation also results in the labelling of students, in the creation of student subjectivities. As my

research showed, this labelling can be internalised by students who then see themselves in these narrow terms. Some student participants in this study choose LCA because they had been diagnosed as having ADHD or dyslexia and as such felt that meant there were 'not able' for LCE and 'more suited' to LCA. This kind of differentiation results in 'dividing practices' and a separating out. In the case of LCA, this separating out was both discursive and physical. Ironically, then, inclusive policies and discourses can inadvertently result in excluding practices. These practices are embodied, lived, and felt.

10.5 The embodied nature of policy

I agree with Hickey-Moody way of understanding inter-relationships of bodies and things, and draw on this to reflect on how policies are embodied. As she and Page explain:

> Bodies and things are not as separate as we once thought, and their interrelationships is vital to how we come to know ourselves as human and interact with our environments (Hickey-Moody & Page, 2015, p.2)

This has very real implication for how we view the discursive, spatial and relational practices with schools and highlights the complexities of lived experiences. The materiality of context in itself is potentially pedagogical. As this study has explored how we are deployed in spaces and the discursive spaces we occupy both in official policy and in everyday discourses within schools, both implicit and explicit, teaches us about how we are seen, heard, recognised, and valued. These lessons are emotional and affective. As Hickey-Moody explains:

> Affect expresses the embodied experience of learning, the places in which we learn and the histories and desires we bring to learning. Affect is the lived reality of the situation, the feeling of learning and the excesses not captured through academic frameworks for considering teaching, learning and making' (Hickey –Moody & Page, 2015, p.9).

This 'making' is in keeping with Freire's conceptualisation of teaching as art and his notion of 'praxis' (Freire, 1970). Through 'praxis', that is through dialogue, reflection and action knowledge is made or constructed. This making undoes the binary of mind and body and instead unifies mind, body and spirit resulting in a 'pedagogy of entanglement' (Hickey-Moody & Page, 2015, p.4). In a critical and affective pedagogical approach to learning, LCA students are involved in the making of 'acts of cognition'. This involvement is embodied. Students are no longer passive, and teaching is no longer neutral. These predominantly positive experiences of learning within the LCA classroom are tangled up with students lived experiences in the school as a whole. As the voices of students in this study have taught us these experiences in the wider body of the school often involve feelings of alienation

and 'othering'. It is my intention that examining the affective agency of LCA students and foregrounding their voices may lead to a re-conceptualisation of inclusion in education in Ireland. This reconceptualization of inclusion must recognise the embodied experience of learning, the *feeling* of learning, and as such must place a greater emphasis on the contextualised nature of schools; the spaces and places in which we learn and become. The spaces we occupy in schools are pedagogical. We don't just learn in spaces but rather by being in spaces. Therefore, the spaces LCA students occupy in schools is important.

As this study has shown there are inherent ambiguities in these spaces. Students feel simultaneously safe and excluded, seen and invisibilised, heard and silenced. The LCA programme provides students with a space where their talents are recognised. Through the visual and verbal space provided by the LCA programme students are recognised differently by teachers teaching on the programme and recognise themselves differently and as a result begin to reconstruct their subjective selves. The majority of students involved in this study said that they were happy they chose LCA and felt that the programme itself did recognise their varied and different talents. Students reported feeling happier in school, having a better sense of self-esteem and getting on better with their teachers. However, much of this was undone by their experiences in the school and indeed the education system at large. In these spaces they felt alienated and reported feeling unrecognised or misrecognised as 'lazy' or 'thick' or 'trouble'. This lack of recognition affects students' sense of belonging to the school and this, in turn, affects them emotionally.

As already discussed in Chapter Two, this lack of recognition has a historical legacy relating to the historical division, both in policy and practice, of vocational and academic education. It has been argued that the lack of recognition afforded to the LCA is in part due to this historical discourse. There are however many other factors such as the neo-liberal culture that permeates education and places emphasis on performativity, standardisation and competition. This necessitates a meritocratic discourse whereby people succeed if they work hard and if they don't succeed then it is seen as their own fault, as they must not have worked hard enough. This focuses deficits on the individual rather than the system. Success, or more specifically, the kind of success that is valued is that which is measured and measurable. This is not to say that other aspects of learning are not valued within education. Of course, they are. The new Junior Cycle is an example of an effort to focus more on the process of learning rather than the product, and in education in general there is a focus on active teaching methodologies that promote student engagement. This is welcomed and important. However, at the end of their second level schooling experience students' success or otherwise is still

measured in how well they are able to perform in state examinations that value linguistical and mathematical/logical capabilities. Difference is not recognised here.

10.6 Epistemic injustice and issues of recognition

This conceptualisation of inclusion is based on a social justice that is concerned with respect for and value of difference. It highlights how social injustices can take the form of symbolic misrepresentation, misrecognition, or non-recognition (Baker, 1987, 1998; Fraser, 1995; Young, 1990). Drawing on the work of Medina here helps us to make sense of and articulate the issue of recognition as a social justice issue. As Medina contends:

> Dysfunctional or morally deficient patterns of recognition attributions erode the epistemic respect that individuals and groups deserve, and they deprive these individuals and groups of environments in which they can make sense of their experiences (hermeneutical injustice) and in which they can credibly communicate their experiences (testimonial injustice) (Medina, 2018, p.2).

Medina goes on to explain two deficient patterns of recognition: quantitative recognition deficit and misrecognition. Quantitative recognition deficit can range from individuals and groups not being recognised at all, being rendered silent and inaudible to be given scarce opportunities to be seen or heard. Misrecognition relates to whether or not the way in which individuals or groups are recognised is appropriate or not. Medina argues that these two deficient patterns of recognition don't just relate to individuals or groups but also to the subject or topic or issue, in this case inclusion and the LCA programme itself. The LCA programme suffers from a quantitative recognition deficit in that it is rarely spoken about. It has not been updated since its inception almost thirty years ago and is rarely alluded to in mainstream media discourses on education. Inclusion, however, is a pressing concern in educational discourse and so we cannot argue that it goes unrecognised. However, is it attended to fully? Are issues of voice and space and emotion evaluated and debated in articulation of what inclusion means?

As I have argued, inclusion in relation to LCA has come to be viewed in the narrow terms of participation and access to education and that this has overshadowed what was initially envisaged by the policy makers i.e. inclusion in terms of recognition of difference. Although participation in and access to education are incredibly important, examining inclusion and LCA through this narrow lens only serves to distort our view of inclusion and in fact hides the most dehumanising aspects of exclusion; the emotional effects of not feeling seen or heard. Inclusive discourses relating to LCA speaks of keeping students in school, students who were at risk of 'dropping out' or 'opting out' or at risk of early school leaving. Even by staying in school but following the LCA programme they are still

seen as 'opting out' of the Leaving Certificate Established. This is a distorting narrative and masks deeper issues of inclusion by positioning LCA students in deficit terms. I contend with Medina that issues of misrecognition affect both the students and the subject matter, namely the LCA programme. This has a double whammy effect for students in that they are misrecognised but the misrecognition of the programme itself furthers the misrecognition of students enrolled on the programme. Medina states that what is needed to rectify or ameliorate this situation 'is a shift in recognition dynamics' and this can be achieved through 'a cultivation of alternative ways' of viewing inclusion. This can be done through engaging critically and deeply with 'experiential perspective', in this case the voices of the LCA students who live the programme and the teachers teaching on the programme. This is what this study aimed to do. I will turn now to their voices and what we can learn from them and then discuss how this learning can help us to reconceptualise the LCA programme and inclusion more generally.

10.7 Holding voices in tension

The voices involved in this study represented varying perspectives and experiences of the programme. There are commonalities as well as differences, ambiguities and tensions amongst these voices. Students, policy makers, and teachers all placed importance and value on the programme but also had criticisms of the programme in its current state. The vast majority of students in all four case study schools reporting enjoying the programme; this was despite experiences of othering, alienation, and negative stereotyping. Their enjoyment was based on positive relationships with teachers and an enjoyment of the practical nature of the LCA curriculum, as well as feelings of success and accomplishment. Students spoke about the LCA as a space where they felt valued, accepted recognised while simultaneously feeling marginalised and alienated. This has already been discussed, both in Chapter Six and earlier in this chapter. Students felt that the programme was not recognised or valued by others namely their LCE counterparts, other teachers who do not teach on the programme, and the school at large. This was the biggest issue of all for students: 'I think if it wasn't for all the stigma LCA would be great. If they could just get rid of that then it would be great' (Student, School A). This is reminiscent of what Senator Quinn said when he stated: 'Get rid of that. Treat them all the same'. This issue of recognition and value has been discussed already in some detail and will be returned to at the end of this chapter as such I will not discuss it further here.

The critical and affective pedagogical approach of LCA was what proved most enjoyable for students. They liked the practical nature of the programme, the doing and the making of learning. They felt they had a lot more ownership of their learning and experienced success that many had not experienced over the course of the Junior Cycle; one student explained 'I feel a lot better about myself cos I can actually do the work' (Student, School A). However, although students enjoyed the ways in which they

learned many felt the curricular content of the programme was not challenging enough and at times was repetitive of what they had already covered in Junior Cycle. This was particularly true of English and Maths. As such, even though the pedagogical approach of the programme and the more positive relationships with teachers that this entailed built student's self-esteem, the felt lack of curricular challenge had, for some students, a negative impact:

> *It kinda just makes you think that they must think we are really thick, like if that's all they think we can do. Some of it is first year stuff that you are back doin' (Student, School A).*

Teachers also felt that some subjects on the programme lack challenge for students. However, as one teacher explained:

> *Well, it is a tough one because you have such a varied intake in LCA. You might have students with a lot of additional needs and you might have other students who are well able but have behavioural problems or other problems that means they struggle in mainstream. You want to build up self-esteem. But yeah, it lacks challenge for some and often times the ones it lacks challenge for are the very ones that you don't want to be sitting there bored' (Teacher, School D).*

In the student workshop in School A, students debated the possibility of being able to do LCA courses at a higher or ordinary level in keeping with the Leaving Certificate Established. Through discussion students came to the decision that this would not be possible because 'there are too few of us'. Students argued that if they had more choice within the programme it would be a lot more enjoyable. One student explained: 'It's like a catch 22, if we had more numbers, we could have more choice, but we don't have numbers because there is no choice. It's a tough one for them [school management] to solve' (Student Workshop, School A). Another student argued 'well it's not really that tough, if they'd promote it, they'd have numbers' (Student Workshop, School A). Choice of modules was also an issue; 'we are just given a timetable. There you go. Them are the subjects you are doing for your Leaving. I don't think that's fair' (Student, School C). This also really affected girls (who were in the minority) following the programme. One girl explained 'for the most part we just have to do the subjects suited to the lads. Like Metalwork and stuff. Then they wonder why girls won't do it' (Student, School D).

Teachers and school leaders acknowledge that LCA students were not afforded much choice in terms of which modules they would like to do. Principals explained that this was down to small numbers opting to follow the programme and the funding provided to run the programme. As one principal explained:

LCA is incredibly expensive to run. The numbers are so small and the funding has been cut. We only get .5 of a teacher now. We would love to be able to offer a lot more choice and we do where we can but a lot of the time it is just impossible. Students just don't understand that. Like it is great to say oh you can choose from all these modules but in reality, that choice isn't there at all. If they would actually fund it then maybe it would be (Principal, School B).

However, students argued that there would be more numbers if it were promoted more in schools. This was a common theme across all four schools. Students felt LCA was not spoken about, was not visible in the school and that there was no concerted effort on the part of the school to promote it and to encourage students to choose LCA and this was the reason the numbers were low:

They only talk to the ones they have already decided will do LCA. On the opening night they go on and on about TY and how great it is and then they talk about LCA for five minutes at the end. Sure, that's joke! Would that convince you to do it? (Student, School C).

This was countered by principals and coordinators who argued that a lot of effort goes into promoting the programme. One coordinator explained how they put projects LCA students have completed on display during the open nights. Another coordinator spoke of how they had invited parents in to speak to them about LCA but that no-one turned up. However, these were only parents of students who had already been identified as being suitable for LCA. Some teachers agreed that it was promoted; however, others argued that this promotion was just a 'token gesture'. With one teacher explaining 'this thing of not enough numbers is a load of rubbish. If they promoted it, they'd have the numbers…even the inspectors coming in couldn't understand how a school this size would not have more students completing LCA' (Teacher, School C). Principals contended that it was the Department of Education who did not value or promote the programme, and this was subsequently felt in schools. All principals described a lack of funding and resources and explained that this in turn made it extremely difficult to run the programme successfully. For principals, this lack of funding represented a lack of official recognition and support of the programme. Some teachers felt that the Department of Education or the policy makers when designing the programme did not consider the geographical limits placed on school; 'All this out of school learning is great. I used to teach in an inner-city school in Dublin and everything was on your doorstep. Here we need to hire a bus to go anywhere. That eats into any kind of a budget. So, all these trips are great in theory, but it is just not reality for a lot of rural schools' (Teacher, School B). This, again, was an issue of the Department underfunding the programme.

These small numbers led to small class sizes and both LCA students and teachers spoke of the benefits of this in terms of building relationships and also in terms of teaching and learning. Students and teachers said the small class sizes allowed them to get to know each other better. One teacher explained 'you can chat to them and build up a different relationship with them to the kind of relationship you'd have with other students (Teacher, School D). A student in school B related how 'the teachers have move time for ya. They actually get to know you as a person and they have move time for to actually sit and help you if you are stuck'. Students also felt the small class sizes allowed them to build strong bonds and friendships with their classmates. One student told me about how in first, second and third year he didn't really have any friends and that now in LCA he felt he was part of a group where 'everyone in the class looks out for each other'. This is interesting, in that, even though he was part of a mainstream Junior Cycle group, he still felt alienated and marginalised. He went on to explain 'I didn't get what the teachers were on about and most of the time just sat there'. Other students described similar experiences. As an LCA class students feel separate from the school but together as classmates. In Junior Cycle many students felt alienated and separate within the mainstream class. Harry Freeman in our interview described how he felt there were many students in the Leaving Certificate Established who felt completely lost and isolated but would still not consider LCA due to the stigma attached to the programme. How different might life be for these students if LCA was promoted and valued and recognised and as such presented as a viable alternative to the LCE. Ironically, the stigma and perception attached to the programme may play a part in enhancing a level of camaraderie amongst LCA students in schools where a rhetoric of 'us' and 'them' persists.

Teachers believed that the assessment system of the programme meant that they had a lot more time to develop relationships with students; 'In the other Leaving Cert classes it is total curriculum overload. You are under enormous pressure to get the course covered. You don't have that pressure in LCA' (Teacher, School D). Students also felt this lack of pressure contributed to their relationship with teachers 'You're not been given out to for no homework and it's not all exams. Sometimes we just chat to them [teachers]. They are actually fairly sound' (Student, School C). During a student workshop in school B students described being much more relaxed as they could see all the credits they are building up as they go. However, students did not really understand the assessment system. Many students did not know how many credits they had or what modules had a final exam etc. This also posed a problem for teachers new to the programme, with one teacher explaining: 'The way it is marked and assessed is very confusing. It takes you a while to get your head around it. I would be surprised if students understood it' (Teacher, School A). Coordinators explained that most employers still had either not heard of LCA or did not understand the assessment system: 'You'd have employers ringing you up asking what does a distinction mean or what does a merit mean. To be honest, they

over complicated the credit system. Teachers don't even understand it. I am doing this for years and I only just about understand it now.' (Coordinator, School D). Worryingly, a small number of students did not understand that the credits were not the same as points. There were some students who believed they could go straight to third level or get onto an apprenticeship. One girl in School A told me that after she completes LCA she intends to do LCVP – another Leaving Certificate programme.

10.8 Progression routes

The narrow progression routes available to LCA students was an issue for policy makers from the beginning and continues to be the major issue faced by the LCA programme today. Both Senator Quinn and Professor Gleeson described how concerted efforts were made to have LCA recognised by employers and Further Education. This proved difficult. Harry Freeman believed that 'if LCA offered a worthwhile route into further education or higher education it would have been much more acceptable, particularly to parents' (Interview, January, 2019). In a paper presented by Gleeson and Granville in 1996, they argue that it would be morally wrong to offer students an alternative programme without real progression routes. This has become reality. The limited enhanced pathways that existed for LCA students at the beginning such as entry into the Gardaí or the ESB or FÁS have all but disappeared. The vast majority of apprenticeships now require Leaving Certificate Established Maths thus excluding LCA students. As LCA students are excluded from the CAO points systems they cannot proceed directly to Higher Education. The only viable route for LCA students is to go directly into employment, where available, or enrol on a Post Leaving Certificate programme (PLCs). A study by McCoy et al. in 2014 highlights how since the economic recession 'unemployment levels appear to have risen disproportionately among LCA school leavers which may be due to the over reliance on construction sector for young male LCA leavers (p.36). The enrolment in PLCs proved difficult for some students in my four case study schools. As one teacher explained 'they either can't afford it or have no way of travelling to it. For example, we have a lad here and the PLC he wants to do is over an hour away on a bus. Any PLC course is at least forty minutes away from them and sometimes there isn't a bus' (Teacher, School B).

Many LCA students have literacy and numeracy difficulties. This may explain why the curricular content of Maths and English was devised in such a way as to make it more accessible. One of the aims of the LCA programme is to improve the literacy of students. However, LCA students are not formally assessed on their spelling, grammar, or punctuation. This has an impact on their ability to complete PLC programmes. Coordinators reported that many students enrol in PLCs but quite a few 'drop out'. A student in school C (this was the same student who gave us the analogy of LCA and the chocolate bar) was adamant about what he wanted to do after school when I interviewed him:

I know what I want to do. I have a plan, I have it all planned out. I want to do a PLC in online marketing. Why would I go through the stress of the normal leaving cert when I know what I want to do and I know that LCA can get me there (Student, School C)

I was very upset to learn that this student left the PLC programme after two months. The coordinator explained 'he just couldn't cope. He couldn't cope with being given tasks and then having to go and do them by himself'. (Coordinator, School C). He was unsure about the destinations of all the students who completed LCA but noted that some were completing PLCs, some had dropped out, some were unemployed, and others were working in local shops etc. When discussing the progression routes of LCA student, one teacher stated:

It is very sad really. They are very well minded in school. Maybe too well minded in LCA in terms of all the support and help they get. LCA tries to include them and keep them in the system but it doesn't protect them from the alienation they still experience in the world once they leave us (Teacher, School C).

I also discussed the progression routes of LCA students with Professor Gleeson and he referenced a paper he had written with Joanne O Flaherty in which the destinations of LCA students made for 'fairly dismal reading'. Is it possible then for the Department of Education to continue to offer LCA as an alternative to the Leaving Certificate Established when it is underfunded, outdated and offers extremely limited progression routes? Is there an implicit covert official narrative where LCA is seen as 'key strategy in improving retention rates' (Gleeson, 2000) and little else? The obvious questions are if it is valued, if these students are valued then why is it underfunded? Why has the curricular content not been updated in almost thirty years? Why does it continue to lack recognition from employers, apprenticeship bodies, Further Education or Higher Education? What does this tell us about how the Department really views inclusion? In 2017, 50,000 students sat the Leaving Certificate, of those only 2,758 (4.7%) students completed LCA. This represents a thirteen percent drop since 2012. In 2020, 60,419 students sat the Leaving Certificate with 2,850 completing LCA. The overall cohort sitting the Leaving Certificate therefore increased by almost 10,500 whilst the number completing LCA only increased by 92. Yet, no-one really seems to be speaking about it. The Senior Cycle review being carried out by the NCCA is currently underway. The NCCA are reviewing TY, LCVP and LCE. The ESRI have been asked to conduct the review on LCA. This is reminiscent of the original steering committee all those years ago where, as Professor Gleeson told me that LCA was 'hived off' and this was indicative of it not being seen as all that important. Here we are thirty years later and LCA is still being 'hived off'. When discussing this with Professor Gleeson he expressed grave concerns about the ESRI conducting this review stating: 'they are not teachers, they don't know the programme'. In the *Senior Cycle Review – LCA – Discussion Document* released by the ESRI, they state:

> The research suggests the need for further examination of the role of LCA in catering for students with SEN. The increasing prevalence of Sen would suggest a greater need for programmes such as LCA… (p.17).

It is true that LCA can be a viable option for students with varying special educational needs. Students with special educational needs have a much right to complete the programme as anyone else. However, the danger is that it is being promoted here as a programme purely for students with an SEN. Students who follow the L1 or L2 plans are forgotten about in policy at Senior Cycle and have nowhere else to go other than LCA. The senior cycle review seems to not include an option of developing a senior cycle equivalent of the L1 or L2 learning plans. The above statement from the ESRI will serve to reconceptualise LCA, not as a pre-vocational programme but rather as a programme for those students who have a diagnosed SEN. Here LCA is the victim again of misrecognition and this time this misrecognition is on the part of those charged with reviewing the programme.

In September 2019, the House of Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and skills published a report on *Hearing related to Uptake of Apprenticeships and Traineeships.* In the report, they discuss the action plan to expand apprenticeships and traineeships. In her foreword, the Chairperson, Fiona O Loughlin, TD states:

> We have heard that apprenticeships suffer from a lack of parity of esteem with other educational options, which is an issue that must be addressed for our young people who are preparing to leave school. Parents and School Guidance Counsellors have a large role to play in promoting the benefits of this path (p.6).

This is an interesting statement in that firstly the wording almost implies that this idea of apprenticeships suffering from a lack of parity of esteem is a new finding, rather than a problem that has been in existence for decades. Secondly, it is implied that this problem must be dealt with by parents and those working in schools; however, there is no mention of what the role of the Department of Education must take. The report goes on to discuss how this lack of parity of esteem is not felt to the same extent in other countries with Switzerland offered as an example. The report argues:

> In many countries, apprenticeships is something that begins in schools at secondary level, around fourth or fifth year. After sitting the equivalent of the Junior Certificate, students choose to go either an academic or vocational route. In Ireland a different system operates.

The LCA programme as an available alternative programme that was designed and is promoted as school to work programme is not mentioned at all. In its recommendation as to how this lack of parity of esteem afforded to apprenticeships may be addressed the report recommends that they be more

of a focus on apprenticeship in second level education. The recommendations of the report pertaining to second level education are as follows:

> 5. …transition year work experience programmes be developed to let students know what day-to-day activities of an apprenticeships are like.
>
> 6. Leaving certificate subjects and curricula should be evaluated to see if what extent they can lead to an apprenticeship, in terms of motivation and content.
>
> 7. Consideration given to introducing a separate subject in tourism and hospitality to the leaving certificate curriculum (p.17)

Nowhere in the report is LCA mentioned or acknowledged. I contend that there can only be two possible reasons for such a glaring omission and exclusion; those involved in the committee are not aware of the existence of the LCA programme or they are aware of its existence but do not recognise it as offering any valuable contribution. This is indicative of what Medina terms 'quantitative recognition deficit'. The LCA programme is not offered any recognition at all. Rather, it has been invisibilised and silenced. Here, we have a joint committee on education debating how they could encourage students in second level to consider taking up apprenticeships. They talk about the role of Transition Year and the Leaving Certificate Established but do not see LCA as having any role at all. LCA is a pre-vocational programme. The vast majority of students in my four case study schools wished to complete apprenticeships but are excluding from going directly onto any apprenticeship programme. So here we have students, 4.7% of the second level cohort who have been directed into or chosen a pre-vocational programme that is promoted as a viable alternative to the LCE. Yet, its complete exclusion within the above debate would cause one to wonder how viable it really is. If the role of LCA is not recognised here, then one must question how does the Department of Education envisage the LCA programme? What do they see as the purpose of the programme? It is promoted as an alternative programme for those who do not wish to progress directly to third level yet is not acknowledged at all in the above report. The report suggests developing a separated leaving certificate subject in tourism and hospitality. This subject, Hotel Catering and Tourism, has been in existence in the LCA programme since 1995! This is indicative of what Gleeson terms the 'fragmented' nature of Irish educational policy thinking. If LCA could be included in the above discussion and embraced as having a real role to place in these developments, it would go a long way in recognising the true value of the programme and the talents and abilities of LCA students. It is also worth noting that simultaneously to this report happening and these developments in apprenticeships and traineeships

is the Senior Cycle Review process. There seems to be little evidence here that these two reviews are in conversation or are learning anything at all from each other.

10.9 Blue skies thinking

In my last workshop with students, we did some 'blue skies thinking' where I asked students to imagine how they would like to see LCA in the future. Students were given the option of drawing this, writing about it or just simply voicing it through discussion. Most students choose to just speak about it, while others decided to write a short piece. What follows is a space where these voices are simply presented:

There's no us and them (student, School B)

We are not as separate. I would still like to see LCA as a different programme, more practical and all but just more included in the school. I would like to see it renamed. It should be updated and more helpful with modern jobs. I think the no homework is good, but I'd like to see them make some textbooks and stuff for us (Student, School D)

I wouldn't like to see LCA back in with the Leaving Certs. I think it is a good programme as it is and the way we learn is good. It just needs a bit of work. I just think that the ones higher up need to see that not everyone likes books. We don't all want to go to college. There shouldn't be anything wrong with that. I want to be a carpenter and I bet I'll make more money than any of them. This thing of oh everyone has to like books and everyone has to like reading is pure wrong. I hate books but I can make anything. That should be as good. That's what I think (Student, School A).

I'd like to see them give more thought to girls and what we would like to do. We are forgotten about even more than the lads. At least they like most of the subjects. I think as well that a lot more thought needs to be given to what we want to do after school. I think it should be more tailored to the job you actually want to do. Then the stigma thing. That's the biggest thing they need to change (Student, School D.

They need to employ some to market it. Promote it properly, up the numbers. Then all of a sudden you can do all these things and have all this choices. Another thing is to explain to people what we actually do. That's the thing that really annoys me. They think we do nothing just sit drinking tea and talking yeah they might see us drinking tea but we have all our work done but they don't know that cos no one tells them (Student, School C).

Stop thinking we're shite and thick and lazy. I only did it cos otherwise they were going to kick me out. All I'll do after is sit on the dole. There's nothing round here (Student, School B).

I think we should be picked before them for apprenticeships. They have the points and college. We don't have that so it isn't fair then if they can just go for apprenticeships cos someone was telling me a lot more of them are doing that and they are going to get taken before us. LCA is meant to be the vocational thing and the normal leaving cert is meant to be academic and that kind and that there so that should mean they can get the college with the points and let us have the apprenticeships. The way it is now they have it all and we have nothing (Student, School D.

I'd love to see LCA as a bigger class. Not on the computer all the time. I'd like to see more girls on it. I'd like to see it with a different name. I'd like to see them talking about it and making it important. I'd like to see all the stigma gone and I'd really like to get people to just know what it is all about. I think that would be far better for the new ones starting in LCA (Student, School A).

I think LCA should be given points. We get things called credits but I don't really know if they are that good. We don't get any real points. Like you can fail English in the normal one and still get points. I could get top marks in LCA in English and not even get one point. The modules need to be changed too. It is all so old. All the jobs are different now (Student, School A).

In interviews with teachers, I also asked them to imagine LCA in the future. This is what they said:

I'd like to see better progression routes for them after school. As I said they are minded here but sometimes lost when they leave (Teacher, School C).

I'd like to see them mixed in more. Even with TYs. Like PE class with LCAs is a bit of a joke. You might only have 6 or 7 of them. I think they would like that too. Then obviously I would like to see it updated. That is long overdue. It would be great if they gave us a bit more money! I think it is a great programme in many ways and should stay stand-alone. A lot of what is good would be lost if it was just incorporated back into the LCE. I know they are talking about these flexible learning plans but I don't think they'd really work logistically. Most of the students doing LCA want to do apprenticeships. They should focus on that, on getting LCA recognised by those bodies. I think a lot more kids would want to do it then (Teacher, School B).

Get rid of the European languages. They hate them. Most of this kids have an exemption from Irish but have to do European languages as part of LCA. Ridiculous. Spend more helping them with literacy and numeracy that will help them when they leave school. Sort out the whole credits system. No-one understands it. Too complicated. Update it. Fund it. Have it recognised by employers and apprenticeships. Here that's what the kids want to do. They love LCA because it is practical. I bet if you ask them 90% want to do apprenticeships but the way LCA is now they can't get onto them. So, it is a vocational programme that isn't understood by employers or accepted by apprenticeships bodies! (Coordinator, School D).

Progression routes that's the main one. You try your best to get parents on board but then they ask you, well what does it qualify my son or daughter for, what can they do afterwards. After that you have lost them (Coordinator, School B).

They need to rename it. Rebrand it. They need to focus again on building links with employers. These students need to have enhanced pathways provided for them. Otherwise, we can move mountains for them in school but what about when they leave? (Principal, School C).

The policy makers also offered their thoughts on the future of the programme:

I think it is about recognition. Get it recognised by employers and parents and teachers. the other thing them is integration. Get them integrated with their peers. Get rid of all the snobbishness (Interview, Quinn, January 2019)

Well, the first thing, I would want to take it out of ESRI and I would want to, I would engage very much with the National body that we talked about and take advice from them, but not exclusively. You need people engaged in such a revision who appreciate the importance of a student-centred approach. So I suppose, notionally, that should include then involving a primary education perspective because I always pause about this. In theory, they have a primary student-centred perspective that diminishes in the later stages. What else would I do? I would certainly see the need for empirical research, I would certainly think that that after 25 years now it is high-time to do a route and branch review. That brings the point about liaising with and plugging into developments like the review of apprenticeships that is going on at the moment. Include LCA in that conversation (Interview, Gleeson, May 2019).

I think you'll have combinations of subjects, modules, experiences, assessments – I just think there would be a wider curriculum that's not specific subjects. I think there will be a greater flexibility involved and people can take a combination of 5 subjects and 6 modules – combination of short course modules, out of school stuff; I think you'll have a broader. I think it will take away the issue of status and I think there will be an opportunity, this is what I hope would be, again thinking about being able to design a programme that is able to respond to everybody? If we have a shot at that that would be the way I would be thinking of it, so people would be able to pick a route and would up with a certificate of completion that acknowledges a combination of points for academic, project-based learning or other skill-sets that they would develop like traditional ones they develop in LCA (Interview, Freeman, January 2019).

The above quote from Freeman is in keeping with what is being muted by the Senior Cycle review carried out by the NCCA (private conversation with NCCA member responsible for LCA). It is interesting that this is in stark contrast to what students and teachers want. This would cause one to question to what extent or if the voices of LCA students have been listened to during the review process. In my study LCA students, for the most part, did not want to see the LCA subsumed into the Leaving

Certificate Established, even if this contained a lot more flexibility and would offer a way of ridding the programme of a negative stigma. During our last workshops together, students expressed a desire for LCA to be recognised and valued, they wanted it to be more included in the school and to have their voices heard. However, they enjoyed the structure of the LCA programme. They enjoyed small class sizes. They enjoyed more positive relationships with teachers. They enjoyed learning by doing. They feared that much of this would be lost if LCA were to disappear or be subsumed. Towards the end of the *Senior Cycle Review LCA Discussion Document* presented to the NCCA by the ESRI, the following is stated:

> The research raised the important questions around whether we need a stand-alone vocational programme or whether the methods adopted in LCA could be used to re-engage students into 'general' education' (p.19).

It would certainly be a good thing if the methods adopted in LCA, particularly a critical and affective pedagogical approach, could be used in the Leaving Certificate Established. However, this discourse of re-engaging students again misrecognises what the programme is all about. The policy makers designed it as a vocational alternative to the Leaving Certificate Established. It is a vocational programme in ethos and design i.e work experience, interviews, tasks, the practical application of knowledge and the practical ways of learning enabling a co-construction of knowledge. Can we just subsume all that into 'general' education? Perhaps, we can. Perhaps it is possible to vocationalise 'general' education and adopt more critical and affective ways of teaching and learning, introducing creative and practical ways of assessment such as tasks and interviews, introducing a continuous assessment model, and offering work experience to all students. If this is possible, and we dare dream, then LCA has taught much to the Irish Education system.

10.10 Blue skies thinking policy– actionable recommendations

The original vision espoused by policy makers interviewed for this research was full of hope and based on a strong commitment to equality and the recognition of difference both formally and informally. The LCA programme was envisaged as a meaningful alternative to the Leaving Certificate Established where talents that thus far had not been recognised by the education system would be formally recognised. The Senior Cycle Review process is currently ongoing. After having listened to the voices of students, teachers, school leaders and policy makers the following are some actionable recommendations for policy makers when reviewing the LCA programme as part of the Senior Cycle Review process:

Funding and resources

School leaders and teachers in all four case study schools described the impact a lack of resources and funding had on the practical running of the programme. This resulted in limited out of school learning and the amalgamation of LCA1 and LCA2 groups. The difficulties this poses has already been discussed. The ways in which the programme is funded speaks to the value placed on the programme by the Department of Education. Principals stated that this is then felt in the school body as a whole and impacts on how the programme is perceived by students, teachers and parents. As such any review or restructuring of the LCA programme must begin with a commitment to fund and resource the programme properly. This resourcing of the programme fully also involves providing in-service training for teachers (not just teachers new to the programme), as well as allowing time for core team meetings. These meetings are essential if the original vision of teamwork and collaboration is to be realised. It is also important here to remember the contextual nature of schools and the impact this has on funding requirements. Some schools due to geographical location may require more funding than others – a one size fits all approach does not work.

Promotion

The LCA programme suffers from a lack of promotion both in schools and nationally. Again, this speaks to how the programme is valued. The late Senator Feargal Quinn spoke to me about the need for promotion stating 'it needs to be shouted from the rooftops'. He also spoke of how those 'at the top' need to recognise the programme and promote it 'visibly and publicly'. Likewise, Harry Freeman spoke of the 'visible' nature of promotion of the LCA programme within schools asking are LCA students 'seen'. Students as well as some teachers also discussed the lack of active promotion of the programme within schools. As such any review of the programme should work to actively promote the programme both nationally and in schools. If the Department of Education truly values the LCA programme then they must work hard to promote it.

Update of modules and resources

The LCA programme has been in existence now for almost thirty years. As Gleeson stated it is now time for 'a root and branch review' of the programme. This includes updating the content and structure of modules on offer and course descriptors. This is already taking place in that the DES have reviewed and restructured the English and Communication course as well as the Mathematical Application Course and the Information Technology courses. However, it is important that this updating of the programme does not take place in piecemeal fashion or as Gleeson comments as a

'tinkering at the edges'. A systematic review of the programme needs to draw on macro thinking where the programme as a whole is reviewed in the context of the changing nature of society and the workplace and this should be in keeping with the voices of those who experience and live the programme on a daily basis.

Links with Employers, Apprenticeship bodies and Further Education

I have already discussed the importance of enhanced pathways for LCA students. This is crucial in terms of being able to promote the programme and also in ensuring that the LCA programme really is a valuable and meaningful alternative to the Leaving Certificate Established. Gleeson and Granville stated back in 1994 that it would be morally indefensible to offer students an alternative programme with no real progression routes available to them afterwards. At the moment this is the most pressing concern for the continuation of the LCA programme. Work must be done in providing LCA students with enhanced pathways into employment, Further Education or apprenticeships. The LCA programme and the voices of LCA students must be included in the ongoing review of apprenticeships in Ireland. This will entail the Department of Education and Department of Further and Higher Education working together in a collaborative fashion.

Establishment of a Community of Practice for LCA Teachers

Many teachers in the four case study schools reported feeling isolated as an LCA teacher. Team meeting did not happen as often as they should and inservices were mainly offered to teachers new to the programme. The Community of Practice model used in this research was enjoyable and beneficial for teachers involved in that it acknowledged and drew on the wealth of expertise teachers have. Teachers were also able to share ideas and concerns as well as resources and ideas for best practice. This community of practice model is used by the JCT and is something that should be considered in the current Senior Cycle Review process.

The importance of listening

This work when examining students' lived experience of the LCA programme looked at questions of voice and listening. This involves listening to student and teacher voice within schools as well as listening in terms of the hierarchies of the state and wider educational discourses and policy priorities. When speaking to Prof. Gleeson he spoke of how 'the top' didn't listen or just 'didn't get' what the Steering Committee was trying to achieve with the LCA programme. The current Senior Cycle review and the various bodies involved need to really listen to the voices of students, teachers and school

leaders when implementing changes to the LCA programme. Students also need to play an active role in each school's self-evaluation process, particularly in relation to yearly reviews of special programmes on offer, such as the LCA. I hope that this work has gone some way in ensuring that these voices are heard.

Renaming of the Programme

The majority of students, teachers and school leaders in all four case study schools spoke of a desire to rename the LCA programme. They felt that 'LCA' now carried with it negative connotations and a certain stigma and labelling. One principal stated that 'work needs to be done in rebranding the whole thing' (Principal, School C). During the workshops with students there was unanimous agreement in a desire to change the name of the programme. Students did not wish to be referred to as LCA1 or LCA2.

The importance of relationships

This study has shown the importance of student/teacher relationships and the relationships LCA students form with their classmates. When asked what the best thing about the LCA programme was most students spoke about positive relationships with teachers and with classmates. The importance of this cannot be underestimated. Principals involved in the study suggested that in many ways the success or otherwise of the programme is dependent on these relationships. Students pointed to small class sizes as being a primary factor in the development of positive relationships. Sometimes the counter-argument to smaller classes is that they don't affect academic outcomes, but they might effect educational outcomes when education is understood more expansively in terms of belonging and feeling accepted and valued. This involves recognising and acknowledging that schools are emotional landscapes, and this must be remembered when implementing policy or curricular change. This brings me to discuss what this study of the LCA programme has taught us about inclusion and how we might use these lessons when implementing policy change at senior cycle.

10.11 What has this study of LCA taught us about inclusion and how does it contribute to the field

An examination of the lived experiences of LCA students has offered us a different way of thinking about inclusion. This process began by listening to the voices of LCA students, voices that as this study has demonstrated are often subject to various forms of discounting and silencing. The voices of LCA students provide us with a way of re-imagining what inclusion in Irish schools may look like. Dussel advises us to think from the other side, thus opening up a space for the voices, stories, and experiences

of those who have been marginalised. Entering into dialogue with these quieted voices can affect critical and transformative moments, not just in our thinking and re-thinking of LCA, but when thinking about inclusion more generally. As such this study hoped to address gaps, confront silences, and explore forms of exclusion in an education system that promotes inclusion. Students have taught us that inclusion is about participation but also about recognition. They told us about the many ways in which they have suffered from non-recognition or misrecognition. This impacted greatly on how included or excluded they felt. By being denied recognition or being misrecognised students felt that their voices where not being listened to and their presence was not visible in schools. As such students felt apart from the school body rather than a part of the school body. This affected them emotionally. Recognition, and therefore inclusion, is an emotional endeavour. Inclusion is not something that is done to students i.e. we include them in the school, or we include them in events, inclusion is something students feel. It is something they experience not just physically or spatially but rather is something they experience emotionally. This study is unique in addressing the emotional effects of non-recognition or misrecognition suffered by LCA students. This is something that has not been explored thus far in literature pertaining to the LCA. I argue that how these students feel in school as LCA students is so important. We cannot begin to evaluate the success or otherwise of the programme or examine the lived experiences of these students without examining how following the programme makes students feel. We don't just learn with our heads but with our hearts. As one LCA student put it, 'when I'm old like 40 or 50 I won't remember what I learned in the class, but I'll remember how I felt'.

Listening to the voices of these students then has also taught us that pedagogy is affective and that there are many forms of pedagogy within the school. The school culture, the ways in which students are deployed in space, the ways in which they are seen and heard or invisibilised and silenced, the discursive spaces they take up within implicit and explicit discourses in the school all teach students about how valued and included they are. The ways in which students have voiced their lived experiences of the programme have highlighted the fact that policy enactment is difficult and often times has unintended consequences. When designing policy, particularly policies that have the intention of effecting inclusion we must pay attention to the contextualised setting in which policy will be experienced and embodied. Policy does not remain static but is, instead, embodied. Indeed, students 'live' this policy. This study's examination of spatial discourses and the ways in which the LCA policy is embodied in contextualised settings also contributes something new to the field. This study aimed to address this gap and to confront this silence in the literature.

This study also examined the enormous potential of critical and affective pedagogies in effecting inclusion. The study highlights the capacity of these pedagogical approaches in enabling students to deconstruct and reconstruct their subjective selves away from the normalising gaze of the other. The LCA student is often put forth in policy and literature in deficit, static terms. I argue that identity is not static and as such teachers and students are not in a state of being but rather are in a constant state of becoming. As such this is a counter narrative and seeks to undo taken for granted practices and discourses relating to inclusion and LCA. By positioning LCA students as experts and foregrounding their voices this study sought an insurrection of subjugated knowledges and by so doing challenged taken for granted notions of the LCA programme and the ways in which dominant hegemonies have constructed LCA students in deficit terms. This study, in unique and original way, has elucidated how the embodiment of the LCA policy is a process of discursive, spatial, and relational encounters. These encounters are emotional and serve to co-construct students' subjective selves. Through transformative processes embedded in critical and affective pedagogies, this study has shown that students, in this case LCA students, can resist negative stereotypes and instead engage in continuous processes of becoming. Pedagogy, as an artistic and affective endeavour, as conceptualised by Freire and Hickey-Moody, can allow students to become again. Students can 'reassemble subjectivity through affect' (Hickey-Moody, 2012, p.120). This also enables students to be seen and heard again. As Hickey-Moody states art, in this case teaching as artistic endeavour, has the capacity to 'effect a movement from invisibility to visibility' (Ibid). This is an empowering experience for students, many of whom, for a variety of reasons did not have positive experiences of Junior Cycle. However, the visibility and audibility of students remains limited if it is only realised within the LCA classroom. This study aimed to have these students seen and heard and recognised beyond the confines of the classroom. It sought to enable these students to take up a seat at the epistemic table and, consequently, have themselves heard by those with the ability to effect curricular change.

As already argued, present methods of differentiation within schools, while well intentioned, seek to 'fix' or normalise through various interventions. This study is a counter narrative in that I argue with Hickey-Moody that differentiation is the 'creative becoming of the world' (2012, p.121). Therefore, instead of attempting to realise sameness differentiation should aim to 'magnify uniqueness'. Likewise, as O' Donnell states 'real inclusion involves recognising the plurality of ways of belonging' (2015, p.250). LCA and its pedagogical approach and assessment techniques can teach us much in recognising a 'plurality of ways of belonging'. This study of the LCA programme sought to both recognise difference and to make a difference. The LCA programme and the experiences of those who 'live' the programme teach us that there are other ways of becoming. If the LCA programme was funded and valued and the different talents of students were recognised, it possesses the potential to

make a real difference to how we conceptualise and realise inclusive education in this country. This potential was not recognised by the Department back in 1995. Let us hope it will be recognised now.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent Form - Parents

Title of study: An Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied Curriculum: Origin, Policy and Practice.

Name of researcher: Annmarie Curneen
School of Education, Maynooth University.
Email: anne.curneen.2014@mumail.ie

Names of Supervisors: Prof. Aislinn O Donnell
School of Education,
Maynooth University.
Room 206
Phone: (01) 708 3604 Email: aislinn.odonnell@mu.ie

Dr. Anthony Malone School of Education,
Maynooth University.
Room 215
Phone: (01) 708 3760 Email: anthony.malone@mu.ie

Aims of the research:

This research aims to carry out an evaluation of the curriculum on offer on the LCA programme. The Western Sea Front has traditionally been neglected in educational research. I wish to address this imbalance. I want to give students and teachers here a chance to have their voices heard regarding curriculum provision on the LCA programme by sharing their lived experiences of the programme. Your thoughts and opinions are valuable and will be of huge assistance to me in this research project.

☐ I have read and understood the information sheet and I had an opportunity to ask questions

☐ I understand that my child's data will be kept confidential and kept in accordance with data protection legislation

☐ I agree to the use of data gathering devices such as tape recorders and understand that data gathered using these devices will be kept confidential (only shared with the research team) and kept in accordance with data protection legislation.

☐ I understand that my child's name will not be used in any outputs (publications, reports) however, I understand that the researcher will refer to the group of which I my child is a member i.e. and LCA student.

☐ I understand that my child can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

☐ I agree to assign the copyright of my child's interview data to the researcher, Annmarie Curneen. I understand that this data will be used in the writing up of the researcher's Ph.D. thesis and may be used in further publications.

☐I agree to usage of any photographs my child takes pertaining to this research project by the researcher, Annmarie Curneen. I agree that these photographs may be used during the writing up of the researcher's Ph.D. thesis. I understand that the ownership of these photographs remains my child's.

☐ I understand that the researcher, Annmarie Curneen, will at all times protect my child's right to confidentiality, however, I understand that this right is not absolute and may in some circumstances be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authorities.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Name of Parent: _____ Signature of Parent: _____

Name of student: _____ Signature of Student: _____

Name of Researcher _____ Signature of Researcher _____

Date: _____

*Please note: The child may choose to not take part in this research even if parental consent has been obtained.

*Two copies of the above form will be issued, one to be retained by the participant/parent, the other to be retained by the researcher.

Appendix 2: Consent Form – Students over 18

Title of study: An Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied Curriculum: Origin, Policy and Practice.

Name of researcher: Annmarie Curneen
School of Education, Maynooth University.
Email: anne.curneen.2014@mumail.ie

Names of Supervisors: Prof. Aislinn O Donnell
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Dr. Anthony Malone School of Education,
Maynooth University.
Room 215
Phone: (01) 708 3760 Email: anthony.malone@mu.ie

Aims of the research:

This research aims to carry out an evaluation of the curriculum on offer on the LCA programme. The Western Sea Front has traditionally been neglected in educational research. I wish to address this imbalance. I want to give students here a chance to have their voices heard regarding curriculum provision on the LCA programme by sharing their lived experiences of the programme. Your thoughts and opinions are valuable and will be of huge assistance to me in this research project.

☐ I have read and understood the information sheet and I had an opportunity to ask questions

☐ I understand that my data will be kept confidential and kept in accordance with data protection legislation

☐ I agree to the use of data gathering devices such as tape recorders and understand that data gathered using these devices will be kept confidential (only shared with the research team) and kept in accordance with data protection legislation.

☐ I understand that my name will not be used in any outputs (publications, reports) however, I understand that the researcher will refer to the group of which I am a member or use my job title.

☐ I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

☐ I agree to assign the copyright of my interview data to the researcher, Annmarie Curneen. I understand that this data will be used in the writing up of the researcher's Ph.D. thesis and may be used in further publications.

☒I agree to the usage of any photographs I have taken pertaining to this research project by the researcher, Annmarie Curneen. I agree to these photographs being used in the writing up of the researcher's Ph.D. thesis. I understand that the ownership of these photographs remains mine.

☐ I understand that the researcher, Annmarie Curneen, will at all times protect my right to confidentiality, however, I understand that this right is not absolute and may in some circumstances be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authorities.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Name of Participant _____ Signature of Participant _____

Name of Researcher _____ Signature of Researcher _____

Date: _____

*Two copies of the above form will be issued, one to be retained by the participant, the other to be retained by the researcher.

Appendix 3: Consent Form - Teachers

Title of study: An Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied Curriculum: Origin, Policy and Practice.

Name of researcher: Annmarie Curneen
School of Education, Maynooth University.
Email: anne.curneen.2014@mumail.ie

Names of Supervisors: Prof. Aislinn O Donnell
School of Education,
Maynooth University.
Room 206
Phone: (01) 708 3604 Email: aislinn.odonnell@mu.ie

Dr. Anthony Malone School of Education,
Maynooth University.
Room 215
Phone: (01) 708 3760 Email: anthony.malone@mu.ie

Aims of the research:

This research aims to carry out an evaluation of the curriculum on offer on the LCA programme. The Western Sea Front has traditionally been neglected in educational research. I wish to address this imbalance. I want to give teachers here a chance to have their voices heard regarding curriculum provision on the LCA programme as well as sharing their lived experiences of teaching on the programme. Your thoughts and opinions are valuable and will be of huge assistance to me in this research project.

☐ I have read and understood the information sheet and I had an opportunity to ask questions

☐ I understand that my data will be kept confidential and kept in accordance with data protection legislation

☐ I agree to the use of data gathering devices such as tape recorders and understand that data gathered using these devices will be kept confidential and kept in accordance with data protection legislation.

☐ I understand that my name will not be used in any outputs (publications, reports) however, I understand that the researcher will refer to the group of which I am a member or use my job title.

☐ I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

☐ I agree to assign the copyright of my interview data to the researcher, Annmarie Curneen. I understand that this data will be used in the writing up of the researcher's Ph.D. thesis and may be used in further publications.

☐ I understand that the researcher, Annmarie Curneen, will at all times protect my right to confidentiality, however, I understand that this right is not absolute and may in some circumstances be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authorities.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Name of Participant _____ Signature of Participant _____

Name of Researcher _____ Signature of Researcher _____

Date: _____

*Two copies of the above form will be issued, one to be retained by the participant, the other to be retained by the researcher.

Appendix 4: Consent Form – Key Stakeholders

Title of study: An Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied Curriculum: Origin, Policy and Practice.

Name of researcher: Annmarie Curneen
School of Education, Maynooth University.
Email: anne.curneen.2014@mumail.ie

Names of Supervisors: Prof. Aislinn O Donnell
School of Education,
Maynooth University.
Room 206
Phone: (01) 708 3604 Email: aislinn.odonnell@mu.ie

Dr. Anthony Malone School of Education,
Maynooth University.
Room 215
Phone: (01) 708 3760 Email: anthony.malone@mu.ie

Aims of the research:

This research aims to carry out an evaluation of the curriculum on offer on the LCA programme. The Western Sea Front has traditionally been neglected in educational research. I wish to address this imbalance. As someone who was or still is highly influential in the inception, development and implementation of LCA I really want to involve you in this research as I believe your thought, opinions and experience is invaluable to me.

☐ I have read and understood the information sheet and I had an opportunity to ask questions

☐ I understand that my data will be kept confidential and kept in accordance with data protection legislation (Unless otherwise requested i.e. unless you request to be quoted directly).

☐ I agree to the use of data gathering devices such as tape recorders and understand that data gathered using these devices will be kept confidential and kept in accordance with data protection legislation.

☐ I understand that my name will not be used in any outputs (publications, reports) however, I understand that the researcher will refer to the group of which I am a member or use my job title.

☐ I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

☐ I agree to assign the copyright of my interview data to the researcher, Annmarie Curneen. I understand that this data will be used in the writing up of the researcher's Ph.D. thesis and may be used in further publications.

☐ I understand that the researcher, Annmarie Curneen, will at all times protect my right to confidentiality, however, I understand that this right is not absolute and may in some circumstances be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authorities.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Name of Participant _____ Signature of Participant _____

Name of Researcher _____ Signature of Researcher _____

Date: _____

*Two copies of the above form will be issued, one to be retained by the participant, the other to be retained by the researcher.

Appendix 5: Information Sheet for Students

Title of the Study: An Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied Curriculum: Origin, Policy and Practice.

Purpose of study:

The purpose of this study is to examine the LCA curriculum; to have a look at the different subjects and modules on offer and to see what is good about the LCA curriculum and what could be improved. As you are a student on the LCA programme your thoughts and opinions are invaluable to me in completing this research. I want to know what you think and I want you to have a say in how the LCA programme could be improved.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you are a student on the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. No-one knows the programme better than the students. Your thoughts and opinions of the LCA curriculum are so valuable because you are the ones experiencing it every day.

What will happen if I take part?

If you choose to take part in this study you will be asked to agree to be interviewed and take part in two workshops. With your consent audio recording equipment will be used.

Interview One: This interview will last for around 30 minutes. You will be asked very informal questions relating to your thoughts and experiences of the LCA curriculum.

Workshop 1: As a group we will discuss the LCA curriculum. We will have various activities and group work that you will take part in such as mind mapping, group discussions, storytelling etc. You will also learn about Photovoice. You will be given a camera and asked to *Take photographs of anything that you think reflects your thoughts about or experiences of the LCA curriculum*. From the photographs you take you will be asked to choose two and write about how these photographs represent your thoughts of and/or experiences of the LCA curriculum. You will have between 4-6 weeks to take these photographs and write about them. You will be given help and support in how to do all of this.

Workshop 2: During Workshop 2 we will have a look at the photographs you and your classmates have taken. We will discuss the photographs and what they tell us about the LCA curriculum as well as discussing your written pieces. We will listen to each other and discuss any common themes that emerge e.g. Have you all had similar experiences or are there things that are different? Every point of view is valuable and significant.

Interview Two: This will be a brief interview. We will discuss your experiences of the LCA curriculum and you will be allowed to tell your story of your experiences of the LCA curriculum thus far. If you wish you may discuss your experience of taking part in this research and what you have learned from listening to the views of your classmates.

Debrief Session: Before I leave the school I will have a debrief session with all students who have taken part in the research. Here you can ask any questions that you have and discuss your experience of the process. During this session I will explain again the importance of confidentiality and that all the identifying features of students and the school will be removed so as to ensure that you remain anonymous.

How will the information gathered during this research be used?

The information gathered will be used in the writing up of my Ph.D. thesis and may be used for further publications.

What are the benefits of taking part?

You will be given the opportunity to share your own experiences of the curriculum on offer on the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. It is hoped that this research will help to contribute to improvements, if deemed necessary, of the LCA programme. The experience and knowledge you share regarding the Leaving Certificate Applied curriculum will be vital in bringing about any changes that may result from this research.

What are the risks of taking part?

During the course of the interviews you will be speaking about your experiences of the LCA curriculum. As is always the case when we speak about personal experiences there is a very small chance you may for one reason or another become uncomfortable if this should happen I will be able to offer you the name and contact details of the school counsellor with whom you can speak to or an outside counsellor in your local area if you would rather speak to them. However, it is very unlikely that this should happen. Please note you are free to cease participation at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

All information I collect will be treated as confidential. All information collected will be anonymous i.e. I will not use your name or the name of your school. All data will be processed fairly and kept only for the specific purpose of my research. All data given will be used only for the purposes for which it was volunteered initially. All data will be safely secured in accordance with Data Protection legislation and Maynooth University guidelines. You have the right to view your own personal data and have the right to retain a copy upon request. You may choose to stop participation in the research at any time, without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

In some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

Who do I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or want any more information on the research please do not hesitate to contact me, Annmarie Curneen Ph.D. student, Maynooth University on 086 3526550 or anne.curneen.2014@mumail.ie

You may also contact my Ph.D. supervisors Prof. Aislinn O Donnell on (01) 7083604 or aislinn.odonnell@mu.i or Dr. Anthony Malone on (01) 7083760 or anthony.malone@mu.ie

Appendix 6: Information Sheet for Parents

Title of the Study: An Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied Curriculum: Origin, Policy and Practice.

Purpose of study:

The purpose of this study is to examine the LCA curriculum; to have a look at the different subjects and modules on offer and to see what is good about the LCA curriculum and what could be improved. As your child is a student on the LCA programme their thoughts and opinions are invaluable to me in completing this research. I want to know what they think and I want them to have a say in how the LCA programme could be improved.

Why has your child been invited to take part?

Your child has been invited to take part because they are a student on the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. No-one knows the programme better than the students. Their thoughts and opinions of the LCA curriculum are so valuable because they are the ones experiencing it every day.

What will happen if your child takes part?

If you choose to allow your child to take part in this study and if they themselves agree to take part they will be asked to agree to be interviewed and take part in two workshops.

Interview One: This interview will last for around 30 minutes. Your child will be asked very informal questions relating to their thoughts and experiences of the LCA curriculum.

Workshop 1: As a group students will discuss the LCA curriculum. There will be various activities and group work that your child will take part in such as mind mapping, group discussions, storytelling etc. Your child will also learn about Photovoice. He/she will be given a camera and asked to *Take photographs of anything that they think reflects their thoughts about or experiences of the LCA curriculum*. From the photographs they take they will be asked to choose two and write about how these photographs represent their thoughts of and/or experiences of the LCA curriculum. There will be a gap of between 4-6 weeks between Workshop 1 and Workshop 2, students can use this time to take these photographs and write about them. They will be given help and support in how to do all of this.

Workshop 2: During Workshop 2 we will have a look at the photographs the students have taken. We will discuss the photographs and what they tell us about the LCA curriculum as well as discussing students' written pieces. We will listen to each other and discuss any common themes that emerge e.g. Have they all had similar experiences or are there things that are different? Every point of view is valuable and significant.

Interview Two: This will be a brief interview. We will discuss your child's experiences of the LCA curriculum and they will be allowed to tell their story of their experiences of the LCA curriculum thus far. If they wish they may discuss their experience of taking part in this research and what they have learned from listening to the views of their classmates.

Debrief Session: Before I leave the school I will have a debrief session with all students who have taken part in the research. Here they can ask any questions that they may have and discuss their experience of the process. During this session I will explain again the importance of confidentiality and that all the

identifying features of students and the school will be removed so as to ensure that they remain anonymous.

How will the information gathered during this research be used?

The information gathered will be used in the writing up of my Ph.D. thesis and may be used for further publications.

What are the benefits of taking part?

Your child will be given the opportunity to share their experiences of the curriculum on offer on the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. It is hoped that this research will help to contribute to improvements, if deemed necessary, of the LCA programme. The experience and knowledge your child shares regarding the Leaving Certificate Applied curriculum will be vital in bringing about any changes that may result from this research.

What are the risks of taking part?

During the course of the interviews your child will be speaking about your experiences of the LCA curriculum. As is always the case when we speak about personal experiences there is a very small chance they may for one reason or another become uncomfortable. If this should happen I will be able to offer them the name and contact details of the school counsellor with whom they can speak or an outside counsellor in their local area if they would rather speak to them. However, it is very unlikely that this should happen. Please note your child is free to cease participation at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

All information I collect will be treated as confidential and will only be shared with my supervisors. All information collected will be anonymous i.e. I will not use your child's name or the name of their school. All data will be processed fairly and kept only for the specific purpose of my research. All data given will be used only for the purposes for which it was volunteered initially. All data will be safely secured in accordance with Data Protection legislation and Maynooth University guidelines. You have the right to view your own personal data and have the right to retain a copy upon request. Your child may choose to stop participation in the research at any time, without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

In some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

Who do I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or want any more information on the research please do not hesitate to contact me, Annmarie Curneen Ph.D. student, Maynooth University on 086 3526550 or anne.curneen.2014@mumail.ie

You may also contact my Ph.D. supervisors Prof. Aislinn O Donnell on (01) 7083604 or aislinn.odonnell@mu.ie or Dr. Anthony Malone on (01) 7083760 or anthony.malone@mu.ie

Appendix 7: Information Sheet for Teachers

Title of the Study: An Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied Curriculum: Origin, Policy and Practice.

Purpose of study:

This study seeks to assess the curriculum of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme both in respect of accomplishing the original aims and rationale on which the LCA programme is based, and in respect of the contemporary context. The original aim of the LCA was to create a curriculum that would: prepare learners for the transition to adult and working life; recognise talents of all learners; provide opportunities for learners to develop in terms of understanding, responsibility, self-esteem and self-knowledge; develop communication, decision making and reflective skills; help learners develop an independent and more enterprising approach to learning and to life as well as developing basic skill such as literacy. ('Introducing the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme' DES/NCCA, 2004). This project will examine how the LCA curriculum is being implemented in schools, analysing students', teachers' and LCA coordinators' perceptions and experiences of the LCA curriculum and assessing how or if it needs to be changed.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you are a teacher or coordinator of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme and as such your experience and knowledge of the curricular content of the LCA programme and thoughts and opinions regarding the curriculum of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme are invaluable for this research.

What will happen if I take part?

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to agree to be interviewed and take part in a focus group. Each interview will last for approximately 40 minutes. The community of practice groups will be comprised of fellow teachers in your school who are also teaching on the LCA programme and who have also agreed to take part in this research. Each community of practice group will last for approximately 1 hour. The community of practice groups will involve discussions both in small groups and in one large group. All discussions will centre on the curriculum of the LCA. With your consent, audio recording equipment will be used. All gathered data will be anonymised with any identifying features removed.

How will the information gathered during this research be used?

The information gathered will be used in the writing up of my Ph.D. thesis and may be used in further publications.

What are the benefits of taking part?

You will be given the opportunity to share your own experiences of the curriculum on offer on the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. It is hoped that this research will help to contribute to improvements, if deemed necessary, of the LCA programme. The experience and knowledge you share regarding the Leaving Certificate Applied curriculum will be vital in bringing about any changes that may result from this research.

What are the risks of taking part?

During the course of the interviews, you will be speaking about personal experiences. As is always the case when we speak about personal experiences there is a very small chance you may for one reason or another become uncomfortable. If this should happen, I will be able to offer you the name and contact details of the school counsellor with whom you can speak or an outside counsellor in your local area. Please note you are free to cease participation at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

All information I collect will be treated as confidential. All information collected will be anonymous i.e. your identifying details such as name, school etc. will be removed. All data will be processed fairly and kept only for the specific purpose of my research. All data given will be used only for the purposes for which it was volunteered initially. All data will be safely secured in accordance with Data Protection legislation and Maynooth University guidelines. You have the right to view your own personal data and have the right to retain a copy upon request. You may cease participation in the research at any time, without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

In some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

Who do I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or want any more information on the research please do not hesitate to contact me, Annmarie Curneen Ph.D. student, Maynooth University on 086 3526550 or anne.curneen.2014@mumail.ie

You may also contact my Ph.D. supervisors Prof. Aislinn O Donnell on (01) 7083604 or aislinn.odonnell@mu.i or Dr. Anthony Malone on (01) 7083760 or anthony.malone@mu.ie

Appendix 8: Information Sheet for Key Stake Holders

Title of the Study: An Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied Curriculum: Origin, Policy and Practice.

Purpose of study:

This study seeks to assess the curriculum of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme both in respect of accomplishing the original aims and rationale on which the LCA programme is based, and in respect of the contemporary context. The original aim of the LCA was to create a curriculum that would: prepare learners for the transition to adult and working life; recognise talents of all learners; provide opportunities for learners to develop in terms of understanding, responsibility, self-esteem and self-knowledge; develop communication, decision making and reflective skills; help learners develop an independent and more enterprising approach to learning and to life as well as developing basic skill such as literacy. ('Introducing the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme' DES/NCCA, 2004). This project will examine how the LCA curriculum is being implemented in schools, analysing students', teachers' and LCA coordinators' perceptions and experiences of the LCA curriculum, and assessing how or if it needs to be changed.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you were involved in the initial conception and development of the LCA programme and as such your experience and knowledge of the curricular content of the LCA programme as well as the original rationale upon which it was based and your thoughts and opinions regarding how or if the programme should be updated are invaluable.

What will happen if I take part?

If you choose to take part in this study you will be asked to agree to be interviewed. With your consent, audio recording equipment will be used.

How will the information gathered during this research be used?

The information gathered will be used in the writing up of my Ph.D. thesis and may be used in further publications.

What are the benefits of taking part?

You will be given the opportunity to share your own experiences of the curriculum on offer on the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. It is hoped that this research will help to contribute to improvements, if deemed necessary, of the LCA programme. The experience and knowledge you share regarding the Leaving Certificate Applied curriculum will be vital in bringing about any changes that may result from this research.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

All information I collect will be treated as confidential and will only be shared with the research team. All information collected will be anonymous i.e. your identifying details will be removed. (However, as someone who is or was directly involved in the inception, implementation and development of the Leaving Certificate Applied curriculum I understand if you wish to be quoted directly. If this is the case you may request this at the beginning of the interview otherwise all data gathered during the

interview will be anonymised with all identifying features removed). All data will be processed fairly and kept only for the specific purpose of my research. All data given will be used only for the purposes for which it was volunteered initially. All data will be safely secured in accordance with Data Protection legislation and Maynooth University guidelines. You have the right to view your own personal data and have the right to retain a copy upon request. You may cease participation in the research at any time, without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

In some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

Who do I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or want any more information on the research please do not hesitate to contact me, Annmarie Curneen Ph.D. student, Maynooth University on 086 3526550 or anne.curneen.2014@mumail.ie

You may also contact my Ph.D. supervisors Prof. Aislinn O Donnell on (01) 7083604 or aislinn.odonnell@mu.i or Dr. Anthony Malone on (01) 7083760 or anthony.malone@mu.ie

Appendix 9: Makeup of the LCA Steering Committee

Chairperson: Fergal Quinn.

Vice-Chairperson, NCCA

A member of a religious order, and the JMB (Joint Managerial Body)

NCCA Council Members:

A representative of the ASTI (Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland)

A representative from the TUI (Teachers Union of Ireland)

A representative of the IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation)

A representative of the ICTU (Irish Congress of Trade Unions)

A representative of the ACCS (Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools)

Others: A Chief Executive Officer of a VEC (Vocational Education Committee)

A Guidance Counsellor

The Programme Manager for the LCA

A representative of the Association of Senior Certificate Schools

A representative of the Council of the NCVA (National Council for Vocational Awards)

The Chief Executive of the NCVA

An official of the NCEA (National Council for Educational Awards)

A representative of the National Parents' Council: Post-Primary

An Assistant Chief Inspector, Department of Education