Voices of Educators in 21st Century Ireland

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Foreword by Dr Séan M. Rowland (President)
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As editors, we would like to acknowledge the encouragement and support we received from so many people in the production of this book. First, we owe a great debt of gratitude to the contributors who took time from their very busy lives to write these important chapters. As educators at primary, post primary and third level, they are at the coalface of teaching and bring their unique perspectives and experiences to bear on universal issues concerned with education. The chapters in this book contain much original work from master’s and doctoral research.

The idea for this book came from the Research Sub-Committee, who wished to promote academic writing and publications as reflected in the Hibernia College Research Strategy. Staff and faculty in Hibernia College were invited to submit an abstract for the book on any issue related to education. All contributors were encouraged to participate in a writing group, which met online every two weeks from April to November 2017. Wendy Belcher’s book was used to structure the meetings. Belcher provides a framework for writing a journal article in 12 weeks; however, we gave ourselves six months for the project (see Belcher, W. (2009) Writing your journal article in 12 weeks A Guide to Publishing Success. London: Sage Publications). During the writing process, members of the writing group collaborated and engaged in constructive criticism in a spirit of collegiality. Submissions went through a rigorous peer-review process. Sincere thanks to peer reviewers who provided valuable advice and feedback.

This book has been made possible through the generous support of senior management in Hibernia College, who encouraged us at all stages of the journey. Sincere thanks to Regina Hayde and Shirley Benton-Bailey for their very detailed corrections and to Stephanie O’Brien for creating the art work for the book cover. We would also like to thank the greater Hibernia Team for their support and advice.

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**LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS**

**Dr Jemimah Bailey,** after a career as a newspaper journalist, Jemimah Bailey returned to the academic world, gaining an MSc in Applied Social Research in 2005 and PhD funded by a Government of Ireland Scholarship in 2011, both from Trinity College Dublin (TCD). She has organised and presented at national and international conferences and worked as a researcher on an EU Framework 7 project, exploring women’s experiences of combining work and caring responsibilities. Jemimah has also taught at undergraduate and postgraduate level, with an interest in research methods, the sociology of education, social theory and gender. She lectures for the Department of Sociology in TCD and has a particular interest in master’s supervision. She is a member of faculty in Hibernia College and has supervised students on the Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning and the Professional Master of Education in Post-Primary Education. As a lecturer and a supervisor, Jemimah aims to support students in developing the skills they need to explore and understand new ideas, about both their academic field and also about themselves.

**Anne Beechinor** is an experienced educator who has been teaching for over 30 years in Irish primary schools. Currently, she is a Learning Support/Resource Teacher in a primary school in West Cork. Anne tutors in the Arts for the Professional Master of Education in Primary Education in Hibernia College. She has worked as Arts and DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Advisor with Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST) and has delivered numerous in-service courses to teachers. As part of the Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning in 2015, Anne researched the fitness for purpose of standardised testing in literacy in a primary school in West Cork. She acknowledges Dr Jude Cosgrove’s supervision of her dissertation. From this research, she presented a paper entitled Are aggregated standardised test data for literacy submitted by Irish Primary Schools fit for purpose? at the Hibernia College Conference (Mind the Gap: Forging Links Between Theory and Practice in Teacher Education — 3 November 2016 in Dublin).

**Karen Buckley** is Head of Research and Assessment in the Post-Primary School of Education at Hibernia College. She is a qualified post-primary school teacher and has over 10 years’ experience in second- and third-level education. She holds a Master of Arts Degree in Sociology and Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) from the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. Before joining the team at Hibernia College, Karen led a research project commissioned by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Accelerating Campus Entrepreneurship (ACE) Consortium based in Dublin City University. Karen is a doctoral candidate in the Education Department in Maynooth University where she is researching Teacher Education, Identity and Professional Development practices among educators. In October 2017, Karen was appointed to the Board of Council for Gaisce — The President’s Award by Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone. Karen has presented her research at national conferences.

**Dr Ann Caulfield’s** background spans the fields of education, community development and health. She has a particular interest in mindfulness in the workplace and advocates the practice of mindfulness among educators by designing and delivering Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in schools and education centres. She has completed doctoral research into the implication of mindfulness on stress reduction among primary school teachers. Her work is deeply informed by her personal mindfulness practice. As a co-founder of Mindfulness Matters, she facilitates the popular face-to-face and online summer courses for teachers, including Level 1: Developing Mindfulness and Wellbeing in Primary School Children and Level 2: Mindfulness, Wellbeing and Resilience for Teacher and Pupils. Ann is a part-time lecturer in Applied Social Care at the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology and is a graduate of DCU and the University of Lincoln. She has recently completed a chapter entitled ‘Wellbeing in Schools Everyday: A Whole-school Approach to the Practical Implementation of Wellbeing’ (2018) to be published in a book by Mary Immaculate College.

**Dara Cassidy** possesses a wealth of knowledge about online and blended learning, with a specific focus on areas such as digital pedagogy, instructional design and blended programme design, development and delivery. As Director of Online Learning, she plays a key role in devising and implementing Hibernia College’s digital learning strategy and ensuring that the College continually integrates new technologies to enhance the learning experience and facilitate access for students. She has been involved in a number of projects for the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, including partnering with DIT, ITB and ITT on An ePortfolio strategy to enhance student learning, assessment and staff professional development and participating in the learning analytics and digital policy scoping groups. More recently, she has been lead developer of the Getting Started with Online Teaching digital badge. Dara has had a long career in technology-enhanced learning having worked as a writer, editor and instructional designer.
in a number of e-learning companies, including Knowledgewell and SmartForce. Since joining Hibernia College in 2002, she has expanded the digital development capacity of the College considerably, establishing a robust infrastructure of systems and procedures to enable the design and delivery of high-quality online and blended education. She holds a BSc (Hons) from University College Dublin and an MA from Dublin City University. She is currently studying for a Doctor of Education (Ed D) in Queen's University, Belfast. Her thesis — Navigating Teacher Identity in Evolving Technological Contexts — explores the impact that technology in its wider sociocultural context is having on teachers’ sense of professional identity. Dara has presented her research at national and international conferences.

Dr Anne-Marie Clarke is an art and religion teacher at post-primary and QQI levels 5 and 6. She coordinates Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate Vocational (LCVP) programmes. She is also a Research Associate at Hibernia College and a member of the Research Sub-Committee, which reports to the Academic Board. Anne-Marie achieved her Bachelor of Education Degree at the University of Hull in the UK in 1976 and started her teaching career in England. She completed a master’s degree at Trinity College, Dublin (TCD) in 2004 using action research to develop and implement a skills portfolio for TY students. This has since become a Digital Portfolio using MYTY.ie. She also completed a Higher Diploma in Management in Education at TCD, where the main focus of interest was in leadership and collaboration. Anne-Marie achieved a Doctorate in Education at Queen’s University, Belfast in 2016 in which she explored, through narrative inquiry, the challenges and limitations of teachers creating and using instructional digital stories. Anne-Marie describes herself as a constructivist in the classroom and is continuously searching for new and innovative ways to teach. She has presented her research at national and international conferences.

Dr Lorraine Duffy joined the primary education team at Hibernia College in 2015 as Head of Teaching, Learning and Assessment and is currently working as a lecturer on the primary school placement team. Lorraine graduated from Mary Immaculate College in 1996 and received a PhD from Trinity College Dublin (2007). She received an INTO bursary award in 2002 in recognition of her doctoral research, which examined cultural diversity and intercultural education in the early childhood classroom. She worked as a primary school teacher in mainstream and resource classes in a variety of school settings in Ireland. In addition, she worked in the European School Copenhagen where she had school management and team teaching roles. Lorraine worked as a researcher at the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) targeted at researching the needs and well-being of children in disadvantaged communities. Her research interests include Early Childhood Education, Intercultural Education, Childhood Wellbeing and Development, Initial Teacher Education and Reflective Practice in Education. Her research has been published in national and international journals.

Mary Kelly is Director of Primary Education at Hibernia College, leading the Professional Master of Education in Primary Education programme since 2014. Validated by Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and the Teaching Council, this postgraduate initial teacher education (ITE) programme is the largest of its kind in Ireland. Before becoming Director of Primary Education, Mary was Deputy Programme Director and Head of School Experience on the primary school team in Hibernia College. She is committed to ensuring that Hibernia College continues to prepare, develop and support reflective teachers who are academically strong, pedagogically skilled and responsive to the needs of all the children they teach, their parents and wider society. Having graduated from St Patrick’s College Drumcondra, Mary began her career as a primary school teacher and taught at all class levels both in Ireland and abroad. In 2001, she was seconded by the Department of Education and Science to provide professional development in the area of Learning Support with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP). She then went on to work in several roles before taking over as Deputy National Co-ordinator PCSP with specific responsibility for the implementation of numeracy and literacy programmes under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. Her research interests include educational leadership, teacher education and early childhood education. She has presented at national and international conferences including the INTO Education Conference, the Reading Association of Ireland Conference and the United Kingdom Literacy Association International Conference. She is currently pursuing doctoral studies with Dublin City University.

Dr Michael Flanagan is an experienced educator at all levels of the education system and is committed to lifelong learning. He has a number of roles in Hibernia College: member of the Academic Board, Lead Tutor on the History of Education module on the Professional Master of Education in Primary Education programme, School Placement Supervisor and a member of the interview panel for entry to the Professional Master of Education in Primary Education programme. He is Module Leader, School Placement, on the BA (Hons) in Montessori Education in St Nicholas Montessori College Ireland and works in Adult Education in the Waterford Institute of Technology. He is a retired primary schoolteacher, graduating from St Patrick’s College as a National School Teacher. He also holds a BEd and Master of Arts (MA)
Dr Aoife M. Lynam is Head of Research for the Primary Programme at Hibernia College. She is a qualified primary school teacher, who received the Trinity College Dublin (TCD) Gold medal upon completion of her BEd. Aoife holds an MA from TCD and was awarded a TCD Faculty scholarship (2012) and a Government of Ireland postgraduate scholarship (2013) by the Irish Research Council (IRCHSS) to complete a PhD in Education (completed 2015). Aoife’s research interests include Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), mental and emotional well-being among primary and post-primary students, and pre-service teacher training and education. She has presented papers at national and international conferences discussing pupil well-being in education. Aoife is a board member of the ICBN Advisory Panel and the education sub-group, as well as a member of the SPHE Network.

Alice McDonnell is an experienced educator in second- and third-level education. She completed her primary degree in mathematics in University College Cork and her Master’s degree in Science (Information Technology in Education) in Trinity College Dublin. Alice taught mathematics at post-primary school level for over 30 years. She has worked for Hibernia College since 2011 in a number of different roles: authoring modules, teaching/tutoring and supervising (research and teaching practice). Alice authored the Teaching Subject Mastery 2016 (TSM) and the Teaching Methodology (TM) online sessions and has taught and assessed the TSM and TM Mathematics modules for the Professional Master of Education in Post-Primary Education programme. She supervises students undertaking research dissertations and is a supervisor for school experience in Hibernia College’s School Experience Professional Practice (SEPP) module. Alice holds a Doctorate of Education (Mathematics Education) from the University of Exeter (2014). She has attended a number of national and international conferences—most recently, ‘ePortfolios in Ireland’ in March 2016.

Professor Conor Mc Guckin is a Chartered Psychologist (CPsychol) with The British Psychological Society, a Chartered Psychologist (C.Psychol., Ps.S.I.) with the Psychological Society of Ireland, and a Chartered Scientist (CSci) with the UK’s Science Council. Conor is also an Associate Fellow of both the British Psychological Society (AFBPsS) and the Psychological Society of Ireland (A.F.Ps.S.I.). He is based in Trinity College Dublin and his research interests are in the areas of bully/victim problems among children and adults, psychology applied to educational policy and processes, and the need for a fully inclusive education environment for all children and young people (for example, special educational needs and disability). Conor has a long track record of involvement in, and management of, collaborative research projects. He gained his PhD in Psychology for his research exploring bully/victim problems among Northern Ireland’s school pupils.

Julie O’Sullivan is a primary school teacher in Cork, where she is currently teaching junior and senior infants. She is also the Literacy Link representative and the Green School Co-ordinator. She graduated with an Honours BEd from Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, in 2004 and, since then, has taught a range of junior, middle and senior classes as well as spending some time as a language support teacher. She completed the Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning with Hibernia College, graduating in 2013. Her research was based on receptive language disorders, Julie has continued to explore the issue of receptive language, which is currently very topical due to the introduction of a new oral language curriculum at primary level. She has presented her work at several conferences as well as having articles published in education. She also tutors and supervises research dissertations on the Professional Master of Education in Primary Education. In recent years, Julie became interested in mindfulness on both a personal and academic level. She completed a range of mindfulness courses and has introduced mindfulness techniques to her students. Having experienced the positive effects mindfulness can have on both teacher and students, Julie continues to explore and engage in research on mindfulness.

Naomi Pasley joined Hibernia College as part of the programme development team for the new undergraduate BSc (Hons) Degree in Nursing (General) programme in 2015 and is part of the team responsible for its validation with QQI and NMBI. Her current work involves developing the curriculum content of this programme for a blended learning environment. Naomi is a member of the Hibernia College Ethics Committee and currently serves as a healthcare subject matter expert for QQI. Naomi specialised in Coronary Care having qualified as a Registered General Nurse in the Adelaide Hospital, Dublin. She gained an MSc in Nursing from Trinity College Dublin (1998). Her research focused on Continuing Education Needs for Critical Care Nurses. Naomi then moved into full-time healthcare education and gained expertise in developing and implementing innovative educational courses.
for nurses and those in other healthcare-related disciplines in Ireland and the UK. Her lifetime commitment to education extends into her leisure time where she is a committed leader of The Girls’ Brigade and was awarded an International Award in 2017. Naomi is a doctoral candidate in the School of Education in Plymouth University.

Eoin Shanahan is an experienced educator at first and third level education and a keen historian. He taught at primary school for almost four decades. More recently, he has worked as an advisor with the Professional Development Service for Teachers. In that capacity, he has worked on the design and delivery of school-based support as well as national seminars and workshops and on the development and facilitation of local teacher networks. He supervised and assessed graduate students undertaking research on Hibernia College’s Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning programme since 2011. Eoin graduated from Dublin City University in 2010 with an MSc in Education and Training Management. His research interests include phonology and phonetics; the teaching, learning and assessment of spelling; and all aspects of literacy in the primary school. He has also conducted extensive historical research and has published in a wide variety of journals including History Ireland, Clare Association Yearbook, Breac: A Digital Journal of Irish Studies (University of Notre Dame) and The Old Limerick Journal. Eoin has presented regularly at education conferences and at historical society events.

Dr Maura Thornton is an experienced primary school teacher in County Mayo, where she is responsible for music education. She also works on the Professional Master of Education in Primary Education programme in Hibernia College, on the Arts education: music and drama module. She is also a research supervisor for students writing their master’s dissertation. Maura has been a keen traditional Irish musician all her life and, along with her family, the Heneghans, she frequently tours nationally and internationally. Maura’s doctoral thesis from the University of Lincoln grew out of her love of Irish traditional music. It explored how Irish traditional music was used by nationalists to create Irish identity through the primary school curriculum. She has presented her research at many national and international conferences on music education and has published several articles. She is involved in the design and delivery of many continuous professional development courses for teachers, including the National Induction Programme for Teachers funded by the Department of Education and Skills. Maura serves on the Board of the Mayo Education Centre. She is founder and director of the very successful summer school Westport-Scoil-Cheoil

Dr Teresa Whitaker is Director of Research and Director of the Hibernia College Research Node with Plymouth University since 2013 and former Director of the Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning (2012–2017). Since 1991, she has either been teaching in higher education institutions or conducting research on national and international projects. Teresa has worked for Hibernia College since 2010, writing, teaching and assessing modules (Intercultural Education, Research Methods, Sociology of Education) and supervising graduate students undertaking research. She holds a bachelor’s degree from Trinity College Dublin and a Master’s and PhD from University College Dublin. Her PhD was funded by a Government of Ireland scholarship. Most recently, she received an MA in Training and Education from Griffith College. Teresa is an Associate of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning and Hibernia College’s representative on the HECA Teaching and Learning Committee. She has national and international publications and launched A Handbook and Tool Kit for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment in Independent Higher Education Institutions in Ireland at the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) conference in Griffith College (April 2017). She has presented papers at national and international conferences. Her research interests include sociology of education, intercultural education, stigma and oppressed groups, qualitative methodology, continuing professional development for teachers in higher education, mentoring and eportfolios (see www.teresawhitakerblog.com).
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AERA: American Educational Research Association
APA: American Psychological Association
BERA: British Educational Research Association
CCK: Common Content Knowledge
CDS: Centre for Digital Storytelling
CDU: Curriculum Development Unit
CECDE: Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
CoP: Community of Practice
CPD: Continuous Professional Development
CSO: Central Statistics Office
DCG: Design Communication and Technology
DCYA: Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES: Department of Education and Science (1997-2010)
DES: Department of Education and Skills (2010 to present)
DLD: Digital Learning Department
DPRT-R: Drumcondra Primary Reading Test- Revised
DS: Digital Story
ebrary: Online library
ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education
email: Electronic Mail
ERC: Education Research Centre
Et al: And all
EU: European Union
GUI: Growing up in Ireland study
HC: Hibernia College
HEA: Higher Education Authority
HECA: Higher Education Colleges Association
HEI: Higher Education Institution
HETAC: Higher Education Training and Awards Council
HSE: Health Service Executive
ICBN: Irish Childhood Bereavement Network
IDS: Instructional Digital Stories
INTO: Irish National Teachers Organisation
ITE: Initial Teacher Education
MATL: Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning
MCK: Mathematical Content Knowledge
MICRA-T: Mary Immaculate College Reading Attainment Tests
MKO: More Knowledgeable Other
MPCK: Mathematical Pedagogy Content Knowledge
NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCME: National Council on Measurement in Education
NCSE: National Council for Special Education
NF: National Forum for the Enhancement for Teaching and Education in Higher Education
NFQ: National Framework of Qualifications
NMBI: Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland
NPC: National Parents Council
OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
oTPD: Online Teacher Professional Development
OU: Open University
PCK: Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PD: Programme Director
PDST: Professional Development Service for Teachers
PhD: Doctor of Philosophy
PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment
PSC: Primary School Curriculum
QQI: Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RDS: Reflective Digital Story
SBE: Standard British English
SCK: Specialized Content Knowledge
SIE: Standard Irish English
SMK: Subject Matter Knowledge
SPHE: Social Personal and Health Education
STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TC: Teaching Council
TCD: Trinity College Dublin
TEDS-M: Teacher Education and Development Study
TLA: Teaching Learning and Assessment
TPACK: Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge
TPK: Technological Pedagogical Knowledge
From its naissance in 2000, Hibernia College has sought to be a pioneer in online and blended learning models of teacher education. Currently, we deliver two initial teacher education programmes (Professional Master of Education) for postgraduate students who wish to be primary or post primary teachers. We draw inspiration from John Dewey, who said, 'If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow.' We have strived to promote innovative and creative pedagogies, research and academic scholarship. This book is one such example. The contributors to this book have drawn from empirical research and published literature to highlight issues related to 21st-century education in Ireland. This book on education brings together contributions from the primary, post-primary and third-level education sectors in Ireland. *Voices of Educators in 21st Century Ireland* discusses macro societal issues, such as the construction of Irish identity, to very specific issues in the primary school classroom, such as how to teach children to spell and questioning the fit of standardised tests for literacy. The book also explores topics in the post-primary school sector, such as promoting digital storytelling and the teaching of maths. As befits a digital age, there are a number of chapters which explore innovative pedagogies and online learning. There are also chapters on contemplative pedagogies such as mindfulness and the importance of teachers supporting bereaved students. Based on the success of the teaching programmes, which involved a mix of theory and practice, Hibernia College is developing an undergraduate programme in nursing. One chapter in this book explores the online delivery of the nursing programme.

Hibernia College is very proud of its faculty and staff and happy to support such a worthy venture. I am grateful to the editorial team for their hard work in bringing this publication to fruition. This book will be of value to educators and students and as such, we are happy that it is an open-access online publication.

President Seán Rowland (PhD)
Hibernia College
March 2018
INTRODUCTION

First, second and tertiary-level education have been transformed and modernised in the last two decades in Ireland. The establishment of the Teaching Council in 2006 initiated many reforms to the education system in the primary and post-primary sectors. As the statutory professional standards body for teaching in Ireland, the Teaching Council is underpinned by The Teaching Council Act 2001, which was revised and updated in July 2016. Under Section 30 of that Act, teachers must register with the Teaching Council in order to teach and their registration must be renewed every year. This Act seeks to promote teaching as a profession; to promote the professional development of teachers; to maintain and improve the quality of teaching in Ireland; to provide for the establishment of standards, policies and procedures for the education of teachers and to enhance professional standards and competence. The Teaching Council launched a research strategy in 2016, and in common with those teaching in third-level education, primary and post-primary teachers today are expected to engage in and draw from research to inform their practices. The three pillars that underpin teaching as a profession are research, reflective practice and relationships (Teaching Council, 2016). In this book, we showcase research conducted by primary, post-primary and third-level educators in Ireland. The Teaching Council (2011) also referred to a continuum of teacher education from initial teacher education to teachers being ‘lifelong learners’. This book reflects teachers’ engagement with lifelong learning.

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 – Report of the Strategy Group (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2011) acknowledges the central role of research in changing Ireland into an ‘innovation society’ (p.3) and in Ireland’s economic, cultural, and social development. High-quality research is an integral aspect of teaching. This report argues that the three interconnected roles of higher education are teaching/learning, research and engagement with wider society. It presents a vision of Irish higher education for the future that can address the social and economic challenges through the three interconnected roles (DES, 2011). The establishment of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Third Level Education in 2012 represents a watershed in the history of third-level education in Ireland. Its role is to enhance the teaching and learning of all students in higher education through engagement with students, teachers, and managers in order to determine best practice in the sector (Whitaker, 2017). Established by the Higher Education Authority, the National Forum enacts the objectives set out in
the National Strategy, such as the introduction of innovative pedagogies and the technologies that support these (Clancy, 2015). In common with primary and post-primary levels, teachers in third level are encouraged to gain a teaching credential and to be fully engaged in research. In addition to their roles as primary or post-primary teachers, the contributors to this book also teach and supervise (either teaching practice or students’ research projects) in third-level education. They are also researchers at master’s or doctoral level. This publication provided them with the opportunity to share their research with other teachers and students. The book is divided into four parts: Part 1: The social construction of Irish identity historically, and current diversity in Irish society; Part 2: The digital age: online teaching, learning and supervisory practices; Part 3: Contemplative pedagogies, bereavement and mindfulness in education and Part 4: Specific issues in education: leadership, professional development, pedagogy and standardised testing.

Part 1 begins with a historical perspective because for the years 2016-2022 Ireland celebrates her centenary as a newly formed state, with Irish identity being celebrated at home and across the world. Therefore, the question is posed: ‘What does being Irish mean?’ Maura Thornton addresses this question through an analysis of how Irish identity and culture was deliberately socially constructed through religion, language, sport, music, dance, art and folklore. She concludes that cultural nationalism created a unified Irish identity and that teachers as cultural workers are charged with directing the identity of the Irish nation. This theme carries through into Michael Flanagan’s chapter, which examines the role of the Christian Brothers in constructing an Irish identity based on Catholicism and in particular the role of the comic Our Boys in inculcating an Irish identity based on anti-British and anti-Protestant sentiments and which drew on a mythical past. Although a distinct Irish identity was socially constructed, there have always been ethnic minorities living in Ireland; Lorraine Duffy’s chapter considers historical and current ethnic diversity and the role of policy documents such as the Intercultural Education Guidelines (NCCA, 2005) and Aistear The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) for embracing difference and promoting an anti-bias curriculum and tolerance of ethnic minorities.

Part 2 explores current issues related to digital pedagogies and the affordances of technology and online education. Dara Cassidy considers the design and evaluation of an online orientation course developed for Professional Master of Education (PME) initial teacher education students (n=556), to scaffold them in their transition to an online mode of learning. The data revealed very high levels of satisfaction with the orientation and a feeling among students that it had helped prepare them for their programme. Teresa Whitaker explores the benefits and disadvantages of the fully online delivery of a master’s programme for experienced teachers. The benefits included accessibility, flexibility, embedded technology, access to an online library, availability of resources, cost, work-life balance, networking and accessing tutors. The disadvantages were feelings of loneliness, time-zone differences, no face-to-face contact, power outages and the inability of some tutors to create an online community of practice. Online education also embraces distant supervision. In a case study, Jemimah Bailey reflects on her experiences of supervising the master’s dissertation of a student called Tom (pseudonym) based in Asia. She argues that the key skills for effective supervision are flexibility and clear communication between student and supervisor. Continuing with the theme of online teaching and learning, Naomi Pasley uses Eun’s (2010) theoretical framework to analyse the congruence between constructivist theory as espoused by Hibernia College’s Teaching and Learning Strategy (Hibernia College, 2016) and the development of a new undergraduate nursing programme which will be delivered through blended learning. Eun (2010) argues that the learning environment should be interactive, collaborative, dynamic and dialogical. She concludes that the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) does conform to broadly constructivist principles but some constraining factors were identified. Anne-Marie Clarke’s chapter explores how teachers can develop and share innovative pedagogy in an environment of situated learning within a local community of practice. Emanating from her own experience of a successful innovative practice within her own pedagogy, she explored the experiences of four post-primary teachers in creating and using instruction digital stories, which is a technology tool that intertwines story, images, voice and music in a video. The four teachers shared a common interest in storytelling pedagogy and had a desire to learn new technology; when ideas and innovations were shared, it facilitated membership of a shared identity within a community of practice.

Part 3 focuses on extracurricular issues. Aoife Lynam’s chapter highlights the importance of teachers being aware that children are ‘coming to school with more than just bags on their back’ and many will have experienced the death of a loved one. Throughout the school-age years, young people can be faced with a psychosocial crisis such as bereavement, which can significantly affect development and normative task fulfilment and can present complex concerns for educators. She gathered qualitative data from seven teachers and conducted ten focus groups with over forty participants. She concludes that teachers require additional resources and training to support young bereaved people and that the Social, Personal, Health and Education (SPHE) curricular area could provide a space for providing support to bereaved students to understand their grief experience. Ann Caulfield then discusses the role of mindfulness in reducing teacher’s stressors in the primary
school classroom. The policy documents of the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health highlight the importance of well-being for children and provide practical guidance on how primary school teachers can promote mental health and well-being. Her chapter invites us to hear teachers’ voices and to learn their strategies on stress reduction and mindfulness. Julie O’Sullivan and Teresa Whitaker explore mindfulness as a contemplative pedagogy. Their chapter reports on a short introductory course on incorporating mindfulness in their pedagogies for experienced teachers on the Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning.

Part 4 focuses on specific issues such as leadership, pedagogies and standardised testing. Mary Kelly focuses on the experiences and leadership styles of four female Irish primary school principals. The data revealed that there was no dominant model of leadership, but rather leadership was a multidimensional phenomenon that was facilitative, consultative and visionary; principals strived to create team-oriented, collaborative and people-oriented cultures. Although the primary school principals found their roles as being arduous and impinging on work-life balance, they also spoke positively of the support they received from parents and the community. Eoin Shanahan’s chapter proposes an inventory of phoneme-grapheme units to address the absence of a phonemic code that specifically addresses the Irish dialect. Standard Irish English and Standard British English differ in terms of pronunciation. Eoin concludes that it is important that Irish primary school teachers are trained in and develop their phonological awareness based on an inventory of phonemes that is specific to the Irish context. Alice McDonnell’s discussion chapter focuses on the importance of examining teachers’ beliefs about teaching Mathematics (maths) in Ireland because national and international policies highlight the centrality of Maths as one of the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects and as a central component of knowledge-based societies. She also examines reforms to the post-primary curriculum and the new Project Maths curriculum. Anne Beechinor questions the fitness for purpose of Aggregated Standardised Test Data for Literacy (MICRA-T and DPRT-R) in Irish primary schools. She concludes that the aggregate scores submitted by primary schools to the Department of Education and Skills are unfit for the three stated purposes outlined by the DES: identifying and evaluating the needs of students in schools; informing educational policy for literacy and numeracy or for identifying ways of improving the performance of the school system; for informing the development, implementation and revision of the model for allocating resource/learning support teachers to schools.

This book is published at a time of major changes in primary, post-primary and tertiary education in Ireland. In particular, technology is changing how we think about teaching, learning and assessment. The chapters in this book contribute to an understanding of how the education system shaped and shapes a distinct Irish cultural identity. Innovative pedagogies based on constructivist thinking are highlighted and the affordances of online education to effect change. This book illuminates research conducted by educators from all stages of the Irish education system and confirms the need for contemporary research on education and lifelong learning.
Part 1
The Social Construction Of Irish Identity Historically, And Current Diversity In Irish Society
1 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF IRISH IDENTITY: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Maura Thornton

INTRODUCTION

The question ‘What does being “Irish” mean?’ is a very important question in contemporary education in Ireland: it has profound implications for policy, pedagogy and teachers’ practice. Both national and identity issues are particularly relevant because from 2016 to 2022, Ireland, as a nation, celebrates its centenary as a newly formed state and Irish identity is celebrated both at home and by the worldwide Irish diaspora. This chapter argues that by becoming politically conscious, by reflecting on how Irish identity was ‘created’ or socially constructed historically, this may help us, as teachers, to critically evaluate what being ‘Irish’ means at this decisive juncture in a globalised world. This chapter purports that by learning about the social construction of our past national identity, we, as teachers, come to understand our present, thus empowering us to prepare for our future identity, now that we are critically aware of the issue.

The chapter opens by reviewing the literature on the role of education and schools in creating culture — namely, enculturation. Next, it moves on to consider how, in the eighteenth century, or what is often referred to as the Romantic Period, the very idea of a nation was a new and novel idea. The subsequent section explicates that the identity of all new nations is based on its culture: its language, sport, music, dance, art and folklore. The term cultural nationalism best describes this process. The following segment deals specifically with the eighteenth century formation of Irish national identity that was deliberately created to support the newly formed Irish nation. However, to completely understand the creation of the Irish nation and Irish identity, it is necessary to explore the legacy of British Imperialism on Irish identity. The subsequent section, therefore, analyses the significance that the British Crown placed on the Irish language, Irish sport, Irish music and Irish dance as it passed a series of laws to annihilate their practice because the Crown was aware that these cultural activities served to perpetuate Irish identity. Afterwards, this chapter discusses how it was, for the most part, an urban, bourgeois, intellectual Protestant class that led the revolution against the British Crown in what is commonly referred to as the ‘Celtic Revival’. The following section explicates the importance of linguistic theory on national identity, as espoused by Bourdieu and Anderson. It continues by deliberating on the irony of how the English language became the vernacular
of the New Ireland despite the Celtic Revival naming the Irish language as the new identity for the new nation of Ireland. Of course, Irish identity can never be discussed without considering the powerful role that the Catholic Church assumed in their control of the management of national schools; indeed, Irish identity became synonymous with Catholicism in the Irish Free State. Finally, this paper looks at some key organisations in the creation of Irish national identity and concludes by asking teachers if they, in the manner of Freire (2005), consider they have a role as ‘cultural workers’.

EDUCATION AND POLITICAL ENCULTURATION

For teachers, it is very significant that a review of educational literature reveals that deliberate cultural change, namely, political enculturation, is brought about by education (Reese, 2011; Bourdieu and Passeron, 2000; Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu, 1979). Enculturation is achieved particularly through the subjects of language, music, sport, dance and art (Reese, 2011; Berry, 2007; Gruhn, 2010; Baumann, 2004; Giroux, 2004). In fact, Reese, in his critique of the American public school, acknowledges that ‘Schools have always been the battleground for shaping society’ (Reese, 2011, p.ix). Baumann concurs, ‘the nation-state school is expected to perpetuate a sense of nation-state identity’ (Baumann, 2004, p.1). Very significantly then, the exercise of power in society is achieved through teaching ideology in the school classroom; teachers, therefore, exert very powerful political influence on children and on their sense of identity (Berry, 2007; Freire, 2005; Freire, 1970; Fairclough, 2001; Bourdieu and Passeron, 2000).

THE NATION STATE AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

As Irish citizens, in our psyches, it may seem that our nation is an ancient structure stretching back into the timeless past (Gellner, 1983). It should be remembered that nations are social constructions and that it was only in the 1770s that the term nationalism, ‘nationalism’, was coined by the influential Romantic German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) (Taylor, 1995). Having endorsed the French Revolution, Herder attached great significance to patriotism and novelly held that language and cultural traditions, such as language, folklore, sport, dance, music and art, should form the fabric of the new concept of ‘the nation’ (Taylor, 1995). Although many modern nations boast of ancient lineage, the concept of ‘the nation’ - that each national group should dictate its own destiny and that its people should express its unique culture and become a state - was a novel idea in the eighteenth century (Hutchinson, 2003). Romanticism was an artistic, literary and intellectual phenomenon which took place roughly between 1770 and 1850; its ideology was totally opposed to the preceding ideology of Enlightenment, as it embraced the individual experience as its essence (Day, 1996). Independent nations, ‘exclusive clubs’, had the objective of achieving ‘one culture, one state’ (Gellner, 1983, p.68). Undeniably, the literature demonstrates that the most enduring legacy of the Romantic Movement has been the creation of the nation state, with its attendant focus on the development of national languages, folklore and cultural traditions (Garvin, 2005; Hutchinson, 2003; Connor, 1994a; Kedourie, 1966). According to liberal social theories, nationalism ought not to have been viable in a Romantic-individualistic post-Enlightenment world, referring as it does to primordial loyalties and solidarity based on common origins and culture (Eriksen, 2002). Paradoxically, the introduction of a free standardised education system in the mid-nineteenth century, coupled with a reaction to industrialisation, the uprooting of people from their local communities and the subsequent loss of a sense of place are identified as prerequisites to the cultural nationalist movement of the last century (Garvin, 2005; Connor, 1994b; Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983).

CULTURAL NATIONALISM

In Ireland, it was in the latter part of the nineteenth century that the Irish nationalist agenda gathered full momentum, inspired by the political independence that the Romantics in France and America had achieved (Garvin, 2005; Connor, 1994a; Connor, 1994b). The discourse on the formation of the nation (nationalism) clarifies that the quest for nationhood has ‘everywhere been preceded by emerging cultural nationalist movements’ (Hutchinson, 2003, p.2). Cultural nationalism is described as a form of nationalism in which the nation is defined by its shared culture. It focuses on creating national identity by identifying shared cultural traditions such as language, sport, music, dance, art and folklore (Hutchinson, 2003). In Ireland, such cultural movements in colonial times had a very important role in creating cultural nationalism. One organisation in particular, the Gaelic League, was singularly influential in forging the path of Irish nationalism (Garvin, 2005; Hutchinson, 2003; Eriksen, 2002; Gellner, 1983). In Ireland, the nationalist political agenda of the Anglo-Irish Romantics was diametrically opposed to the preceding British colonialist view. Nationalism, as advocated by the Irish cultural nationalists in the emerging Republic, sought to create a thoroughly nationalist identity because it was believed that political independence was meaningless if the cultural individuality of the Irish nation could not be restored (Daly, 1974, citing Douglas Hyde, a Protestant and subsequent first president of the Free State 1938–1945). Hyde, a graduate of
Trinity College Dublin, became Ireland’s leading cultural nationalist. He founded the Gaelic League in 1909, 13 years before independence, as a countrywide nationalist, cultural, educational movement that would permeate all sections of Irish life.

A review of the literature on nationalism reveals that all nation states have had to invent and re-invent themselves and present themselves ‘as stable, organic, and self-perpetuating entities’ (Baumann, 2004, p.1). However, in order for the nation to portray itself thus, there must be a formulation of what ‘the nation’ is thought to stand for. Therefore, when the national or civic ideology is formulated through the process of cultural nationalism, it is then necessary for the ordinary citizens to adopt the social construction as formulated by those in power. This is achieved mainly through education (Bruner, 2005; Freire, 2005; Baumann, 2004; Bourdieu and Passeron, 2000; Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu, 1979).

To fully understand the Irish cultural nationalist movement, it is necessary to set the movement against the political backdrop from which it was born, namely, British Imperialism. Not surprisingly, the literature on Irish national identity suggests that it was the Anglo-Norman invasion of the twelfth century that had the most enduring effect on Irish identity as it remained a constant for a millennium (Beckett, 1976). The process of the ‘anglicisation’ of Ireland is inextricably associated with the decimation of the Gaelic language and all aspects of its culture (Kiberd, 2001, p.460). Hiberniores Hibernis ipsis (More Irish than the Irish themselves) — this, much-quoted truism illustrates the degree to which the Anglo-Norman invaders had become assimilated into Irish culture during the Tudor reign (Ellis, 1977; Beckett, 1976). For centuries, the cultural integration of the Anglo-Normans was of grave concern to the British Crown. The English monarchy understood the unwelcome influence of Irish music, language, and customs on the ‘Gaelicisation’ of the conquistadors and sought to rectify the situation (Ellis, 1977; Beckett, 1976). Hence, in an effort to maintain an English settler identity, contact between colonists and native poets and musicians was banned by law in the Statutes of Kilkenny of 1366 (De Paor, 1986; De Paor, 1982). The cultural frontier of the statute, however, was largely ignored by the ruling Anglo-Norman families, and they continued their patronage of Irish musicians and bards (De Paor, 1986; De Paor, 1982; Ellis, 1977; Beckett, 1976). Several centuries later, in 1603, a further attempt at banning Irish music was made by the English rulers when the British Lord President of Munster issued a proclamation for the extermination by martial law of bards, pipers and poets as they were ‘an important moral resource’ for the society the colonists sought to subdue (De Paor, 1986, p.171). Interestingly, the significance of Irish traditional music was further recognised by Queen Elizabeth I. Her decree of 1603 to ‘Hang all harpers where found and burn their instruments’ demonstrates the Crown’s understanding of the cultural significance of the Irish traditional music (O’Boyle, 1976, cited in Williams, 2010, p.53).

THE CONSTRUCTION OF IRISH CULTURAL NATIONALISM

After the notorious failure of the United Irishmen in the 1798 Rebellion, The Act of Union of 1800 brought Ireland under the direct control of the parliament at Westminster and endeavoured to bind Ireland more closely with Britain through a deliberate policy of cultural assimilation (Coolahan, 2004). Education in Ireland in the nineteenth century was recognised as one of the most important means of imposing colonial ideology on the Irish. British cultural imperialism deliberately set out to influence the psyche of the Irish natives to becoming loyal to Britain (Coolahan, 2004). The Irish language, Irish music, Irish sport and Irish dance were banned in Irish schools and changing political circumstances such as the inevitability of Home Rule, land reforms led to an increasingly vociferous Catholic middle class. In nineteenth century Ireland, the millennium old, relentless British cultural annihilation of ‘Irishness’, moved a young, mainly Protestant bourgeois urban intellectual class to at first develop a social critique of corrupt imperialism, which later advanced to creating an alternative ideology for the new Free State (Dunne, 1988). It is ironic then that the main Irish instigators of separation from the British Empire, the Anglo-Irish, were, in fact, descendants of the Anglo-Norman class and as the landed class, they held a privileged position in Irish society. The estrangement of Ireland from the British Empire was therefore problematic for the leading Irish cultural nationalists. As members of the dominant Protestant ruling class, they advocated their own form of Irish cultural nationalism. They did not wish to promote the culture of the Catholic Irish peasantry. This powerful, minority Protestant class were acutely aware of their very marginal status in a country that was inevitably moving towards Catholic self-determination (Castle, 2001). The Anglo-Irish Romantics felt compelled to create an Irish identity that was acceptable to them as the minority Protestant dominant class. This elite cultural class adopted the Irish language, literature and music because these cultural elements did not threaten their hybrid composite identity (Smyth, 2009; White, 2008). It is well documented that the troubled mindset of the Protestant Ascendancy is indicative of the inherent paradoxes and unresolved ambiguities that continue to dominate the discourse on Irish nationalism to the present day (Coogan, 2002). It is timely now to consider the role of language in the creation of national identity.
THE IRISH LANGUAGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Bourdieu, in his forceful critique of linguistic theories, proposes that language has a central, social and political role in the arbitrary divisions between peoples (Bourdieu, 1991). Anderson’s important work in ‘imagined communities’ agrees, concluding that ethnic identities were ‘imaginable largely through the medium of sacred language and written script’ (Anderson, 1991, p.13). It is really ironic then, that in the case of Ireland, despite the Irish language being promoted by the Anglo-Irish elite as the facade of the new Irish nation, Irish nationalism coincided with the precipitous decline of the Irish language, even though it had remained the vernacular through the harshest restrictions of the Penal Laws (1691–1760) (Tymoczko and Ireland, 2003). In the nineteenth century, the Irish people made an extraordinary shift to the English language and the majority gave up speaking Irish (Tymoczko and Ireland, 2003). The reasons for this remarkable change are complicated and multifarious: the compulsory use of English in national schools, combined with the dire economic considerations inescapable to the Irish after the appalling losses of the Great Famine (1840–1845) as well as a population increasingly looking to emigrate to North America and England. These reasons proved too strong a force for Irish to survive as the common language of the Irish people (Tymoczko and Ireland, 2003). The next section continues to consider the significant role of language in our Irish identity. It continues with analysis of the irony of how Irish literature in the English language became the facade of the New Ireland despite the Gaelic League’s endeavours to promote the Irish language as the vernacular of the Free State.

IRISH LITERATURE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory and J. M. Synge were the first directors of Dublin’s Abbey Theatre and are accredited with working ‘legend and folklore into the fabric of a modern Irish literature’, albeit in the English language (Castle, 2001, p.6). Yeats considered Douglas Hyde the authoritative voice in the literature genre, as Hyde’s contributions were in the Irish language unlike Yeats himself, who, unable to write in Irish, had to write in English (Pethica, 2006). Indeed Hyde, amongst other Irish linguists, criticised ‘The Abbey Literary Theatre for promoting ‘Irish’ plays in the English language — ‘Plays set in folk-influenced milieu of historical peasant realism’, (Pethica, 2006, p.138). Nowadays, however, it is the English-language writers Yeats, Synge and Joyce, not Hyde, who retain the title of Irish literary giants in the story of Irish identity, with Joyce’s critique of Revivalism guaranteeing its relevance as a contemporary context for Irish production (Pethica, 2006). It is ironic then that, in their creation of this new state, the Anglo-Irish Romantics articulated that Gaelic be Ireland’s first language and Irish traditional music its national music (Kearney, 1988). As already mentioned, Hyde’s Gaelic League was the most powerful Irish cultural nationalist movement; Pádraig Pearse became editor of the Gaelic League’s newspaper An Claidheamh Soluis (The Sword of Light). For Pearse, the Irish revolution began with the establishment of the Gaelic League as he viewed the Irish language as the soul of the new nation. Pearse became a martyr after he was executed following the failed Easter Rising of 1916. During his occupation of the General Post Office (GPO), he read ‘The Proclamation of the Republic’. Indeed, the very powerful force of the cultural nationalist Gaelic League exerted enormous influence on the ideology of the Free State:

The spiritual thing which is essential in nationality would seem to reside chiefly in language and to be preserved chiefly by language. (Pearse, 1916, p.3)

CATHOLICISM AND THE IRISH LANGUAGE

As well as language, another equally, if not more influential force on the creation of Irish identity was the Catholic Church. Jorgensen, in her critique of how the religious and artistic elite use music in the exercise of power, admits identification of ‘the elite’, whilst difficult, none-the-less exists (Jorgensen, 2003). The Catholic Church was very aware that they needed to control the national schools if they were to have control of the Free State (Coolahan, 2004). In Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century, members of the Gaelic League were ‘elite’ as they held the positions of power in the Free State. The presence of Seán Ó Murthuile ‘representing the Gaelic League’ at the first National teachers’ conference, when the first curriculum of the Free State was drawn up is evidence of the power of this elite class (National Programme Conference, 1922). Present also, at the hugely influential First National Programme for Teachers of 1921 (implemented in 1922) was An tAthair (Father) Pádraig Breathnach, a staunch member of the Gaelic League. The presence of the Catholic Priest, An tAthair Pádraig Breathnach, is illustrative of the fact that, in Ireland, any discussion on ideology in education in the last two centuries is inextricably bound with the Catholic Church. Akenson points out that it was the giant historical Irish figure, ‘The Liberator’, Daniel O’Connell, who ‘made the conscious decision to leave educational dealings in the hands of Irish bishops’ (Akenson, 1970, p.99). McManus expands further by adding that the two principal power brokers in Irish Catholic education in the eighteenth century were the hedge-school masters and the Catholic Church; however, they espoused very different political stands (McManus, 2004). The
Catholic Church decided that the best vantage was to be gained by engaging in talks with O'Connell and in secret talks with Dublin Castle—the seat of English power in Ireland. The Catholic Prelate, Dr Doyle's hostility to Protestant schooling in Ireland, 'was equalled only by his disdain for hedge-school-masters,' (McManus, 2004, p.66). Doyle became the main powerbroker for the Catholic Church’s supremely powerful position in Irish education so that by the nineteenth century:

The Catholic Church had not only won a victory over the [British] government supported Kildare Place Society, but it had also won a major victory over that sturdy figure, the old independent hedge school-master. (McManus, 2004, p.68)

The Catholic Church resented the hedge-school masters’ autonomy and used the British Commissioners’ report of 1825 to their advantage when the Commissioners’ report stated that the minds of Irish children were being corrupted by hedge-school education as its ‘books calculated to incite lawlessness and profligate adventure, to cherish superstition, or to lead to dissention or disloyalty,’ (McManus, 2004, p.46). It was thus that the Catholic Church came to control the management of the national schools of the Free State of 1922. Schools became synonymous with the creation of a new Irish identity and, thus, Irish identity and Catholicism were inextricably intertwined.

THE GAELIC ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION AND IRISH IDENTITY

As well as the dominant role of schools in creating an Irish identity, another prominent feature of the new nation was the formation of new agencies to promote Irish identity. For instance, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was founded in 1884, in Lizzie Hayes’ Commercial Hotel, Thurles, County Tipperary. Its primary focus is on promoting Gaelic Games such as hurling, camogie, Gaelic football, handball and rounders (Mandle, 1987). Despite being a private agency, the GAA’s power was significant and it banned its members from playing sports such as soccer, cricket and rugby until 1971 (Mandle, 1987). Scór na nÓg is a GAA music competition that ‘combines all the colour and rivalry of Gaelic games with the social and fun elements of Ireland’s traditional pastimes’ (GAA, 2013). The competition was established by the GAA in 1969 with the aim of promoting Ireland’s culture whilst offering club members the chance to meet up, have fun and represent their club during the winter months when football and hurling have ceased. Many national schools still partake in Scór competitions.

IRISH MUSIC AND DANCE AND IRISH IDENTITY

Another major organisation in the social construction of Irish identity is Comhaltas

Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ) (Society of the Traditional Musicians of Ireland). It was founded in 1951 to continue the aims of the Gaelic League in a musical arena. This organisation is recognised as institutionalising the process of revival in Irish traditional music in Ireland today (Smyth, 2009). Apart from the perceived political agenda of CCÉ, the Traditional Music section of Northern Ireland’s Arts Council takes exception to the bureaucratic apparatus of the organisation and the heavy emphasis on competition (through local and All-Ireland fleadhhs, or festivals) rather than on participation. Despite such criticism, CCÉ has more than 400 branches worldwide with membership of around 75,000 people.

Another gatekeeper in Irish identity is An Coimisiún Le Rincí Gaelacha (CLRG)/The Irish Dancing Commission. Interestingly, in 1901, members of the London Gaelic League attended the Oireachtas, the annual gathering of the Gaelic League in the Mansion House in Dublin. They held the first céilí. It was thus the fashion for céilís in Ireland was born (Brennan 2004). In the early 1900s, there was great debate as to which dances were acceptable as authentic. The debates filled the columns of the Gaelic League’s newspaper An Claidheamh Soluis. Such was the controversy that, in 1903, a Commission of Enquiry was established (Brennan, 2004). By 1939, the Gaelic League had an acceptable canon of dances deemed authentic by them, and they were published in a book entitled Ár Rincí Foirne (Our Dances) (Brennan, 2004).

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM AND THE IRISH FLAG

Other socially constructed aspects of Irish identity include the national anthem and the Irish flag. Up until the formation of the Free State, God Save the King was sung as Ireland’s national hymn, but with the advent of a new state, it was necessary to have an Irish anthem. The song that gradually assumed the mantle was Amhrán na BhFiann (The Soldiers’ Song), a marching song that had been sung by the fighting rebels, the Irish Volunteers, led by Pearse in the 1916 rising in Dublin’s GPO. Another important facet of Irish identity was also adopted from the Irish Volunteers. In 1916, the Irish flag or tricolour was flown over the GPO as a symbol of a new nation. Green represented the Catholic Gaelic tradition, orange for the Protestant followers of William of Orange, and white, the aspiration towards peace between the two (Sherry, 1996). This is the flag that represents the Irish Republic today.
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, cultural nationalism endeavoured, as a social construction, to create, for the first time, a united Irish national identity. This chapter explored the prevailing socio-political conditions that encouraged the Ascendancy to seek political independence from Britain and how this powerful elite then sought to create an alternative nation—Ireland. The Ascendancy class was compelled to construct an Irish identity that was acceptable to their complex dual identity. This resulted in the Irish language and Irish traditional music, dance and sport being profoundly implicated with the attendant ‘Celtic Revival’ in order to create a new homogenous Irish identity. Central to Irish cultural nationalism, the revival of the Irish language, music, sport and literature became acceptable structures of Irish identity for the new state. The narrative of Irish cultural nationalism aligns itself with contemporary cultural national movements in an international context (Rabow-Edling, 2006; Bokovoy, 2005; Guo, 2004; Oommen, 2000). Indeed such concepts are reflective of the deeper social theories of Bourdieu and Passeron (2000) and Jorgensen’s (2003) notion of the process of how the cultural elite come to cultivate power in society.

Today, 100 years after independence, this social construction of Irish identity is still apparent in the success of the GAA. Irish music and dance was brought to a new level of consciousness with River Dance and Lord of the Dance (Fleming, 2004; McCann, 2001). Irish dancing continues to attract thousands of children from all over the world. The Irish language flourishes in some quarters with a substantial growth in gaelscoileanna (Irish language schools) as well as the popularity of the Irish language channel TG4 (Irish language television station) and Raidio na Gaeltachta (Irish language radio station). The Irish language is also now a recognised minority language of the European Union. The Catholic Church continues to exert power in education in Ireland with Catholic patronage of over 90% of primary schools. This chapter acknowledges that these are exponential times. The world is changing at a rapid rate. Teachers are being constantly reminded they need to be innovators, entrepreneurs, motivators, catalysts, illuminators and dynamic facilitators who will prepare our children for the technology, problem-solving, resilient, skilled workforce we need in a global market economy. It is incumbent that educators question their cultural identity and whether they are indeed cultural workers charged with directing the identity of our Irish nation and, if so, what should this look like in the curriculum and the classroom.

2 ‘GOD SAVE IRELAND, SAID THE HEROES’: THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS, OUR BOYS, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN IRISH POPULAR CULTURE

Michael Flanagan

INTRODUCTION

Around the turn of the twentieth century, conservative Irish society perceived itself to be under threat from a variety of ‘foreign’ cultural expressions in the decades (McLonne, 2000). The ‘sensational’ nature of newspapers and periodicals produced for the broader metropolitan market and espousing the values of a more urban and less-controlled society were particular sources of concern for Irish Catholics, as were the musical hall and the newly available cinema productions (McLonne, 2000). The Christian Brothers, as this chapter outlines, building on their long-established reputation as nationalist propagandists, entered the leisure reading market in September 1914 with their own magazine, Our Boys (Our Boys, 1914–1922; Coldrey, 1988). The primary focus of this publication was to compete with the imperial and Anglo-centric nature of the British Boys Own genre, a form of popular literature widely available in Ireland. In Our Boys, the deeds of Irish heroic figures of the past were emphasised, coloured with a pronounced emphasis on the religious persecution visited on Ireland at the hands of what was described as British ‘oppression’. Our Boys engaged in a policy of clearly associating Irish history with the Catholic orientation of the Irish people. Faith and Fatherland were one and the same entity in this mindset, inseparable in terms of Ireland’s national experience. In this chapter, I argue that there was a deliberate attempt to create a specific and unique Irish identity based on the centrality of Catholicism, the growth of Catholic schools, the Christian Brothers’ provision of education, and the influence of their comic, Our Boys, in inculcating an Irish identity which drew on a mythical past.

19TH-CENTURY CATHOLIC EXPANSION

The campaign for Catholic emancipation in the early decades of the nineteenth century was to have a number of long-term consequences for Irish politics (O’Brien, 1994). Perhaps the most lasting effect of this victorious campaign was the sense of achievement, identity and common purpose that it gave to Irish Catholics. They
came to realise that they formed the single largest grouping in Ireland, and if they continued to act in unison and press for full majority rights, there was no end to what they might accomplish. They gradually came to see themselves as constituting the true ‘Irish Nation’. Previous setbacks such as defeat in war and suffering ‘the political, legal and economic consequences of defeat’ had engendered a sense of solidarity among Catholics which extended far beyond their religious affiliations (O’Brien, 1994).

Due to the removal of the Penal Laws from 1778, which had obstructed its growth in the eighteenth century, the Catholic Church began to flourish in Ireland following the decades after the Act of Union (1801), which united Britain and Ireland. The most tangible evidence of the revival of Irish Catholicism was to be seen in the great expansion that took place in the building of churches, schools, diocesan colleges, seminaries, hospitals, convents, monasteries, orphanages and other institutions (McCartney, 1987). Between 1823 and 1852, 97 new churches were built in the archdiocese of Dublin alone. The Catholic Directory claimed in 1844 that within the previous 30 years, 900 Catholic churches had been built or restored throughout the country (McCartney, 1987). With this expansion in buildings, the number of nuns and clergy increased.

Much of the energy of Catholic organisation was directed towards the provision of education. The main religious orders involved in providing education to the poor were the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus or (Presentation Sisters) and the Sisters of Mercy under the guidance of Catherine McAuley, (Atkinson, 1969). Other Irish congregations of women devoting themselves to education included the Brigidine Sisters, the Irish Sisters of Charity and the Holy Faith Sisters. Irish houses of the Ursulines, Dominicans and Sisters of Louis assisted these native foundations (McCartney, 1987).

The Catholic education of boys was no less a concern for the church in the nineteenth century (Coldrey, 1988). The most important male teaching order during this period, with a number of establishments greater than the other four orders combined, was the Christian Brothers. The high numbers that attended Christian Brother schools and the widespread expansion they achieved by the turn of the century give this order a crucial influence in the development of Irish youth, not least because of the almost unique nationalist ethos that their schools developed and encouraged (Coldrey, 1988).

**NATIONAL SCHOOLS AND THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS**

There was a perceived need to provide a standard form of education on a national basis in the immediate post-emancipation era. In 1824, 50,000 children attended schools provided by the various Protestant societies, 46,000 were in Catholic free schools run by the religious orders, and 58,000 attended schools run by the Kildare Place Society (nominally a non-sectarian body for promoting the education of the poor in Ireland). Another 400,000 attended the so-called ‘hedge schools’ (McCartney, 1987). The government’s answer to the huge variation in standards, buildings, qualifications and availability of suitable texts was the establishment of the National Board of Education in 1831. The Board subsidised teachers’ salaries and set up ‘model schools’ teaching a utilitarian diet of values that ‘might be seen as a rather crude attempt at social control but were at least secular’ (Foster, 1988, p.304). This effort to provide an educational system along secular lines was to cause difficulties for the Catholic Church in general and the Christian Brothers in particular. These difficulties are exemplified by the conflicting positions adopted by some senior members of the Hierarchy, notably the Archbishop Murray of Dublin (who was a patron of the Board). Archbishop McHale condemned the schools as dangerous to Catholic children since they did not measure up to his ideal of a proper Catholic education. Archbishop Murray, with support from other bishops, sought to save the schools. Despite McHale’s efforts, theirs was the view that won the day where it mattered in issues of Irish Catholic Church affairs — Rome. The instruction from Church leadership was that each individual bishop could decide on his policy towards the national school system (Keogh and Kelly, 2000). Edmund Rice agreed to give the new system a fair trial in selected schools. Accordingly, Richmond Street, Mill Street, Ennis and Ennistymon were affiliated in 1833 and Waterford and Dungarvan in 1834 (Keogh, 1996). However, the restrictions imposed on the Brothers’ freedom to impart a Catholic education caused them to question the wisdom of remaining within the National Board system. As a result of a Chapter meeting in North Richmond Street on 27 December 1836, ‘it was unanimously decided that the Brothers would sever their connection with the National Board’ (Keogh, 1996).

The consequences of this rejection were wide-ranging and fundamental. One important repercussion was that the distinctiveness of the Christian Brothers schools was highlighted. There are several reasons why this was so. In terms of training, the Brothers were superior. The National Board took over many of the existing parish schools, hedge schools and private fee-paying schools and the largely untrained teachers holding positions in them (Coldrey, 1988). Catholic teachers were discouraged from availing of the training available in the Model Schools until a specific Catholic training college was granted (after 1880). Most national teachers taught in small, isolated rural schools that lacked the stimulus of size and
competition available in most Brothers’ schools. The clergy normally favoured the religious teaching orders over the national teachers wherever the former were available (Coldrey, 1988). Christian Brothers were, in contrast to the first generation of National Teachers, well trained (two years’ systematic training and nine years’ study under supervision). They taught in substantial buildings and with supporting aids, which only the best National Schools could match. In terms of competence and dedication, their public image was impressive and their standing with government officials, church dignitaries and ordinary people was high (Coldrey, 1988).

CATHOLIC/NATIONALIST SCHOOL TEXTS
Withdrawal from the national system gave the Christian Brothers a measure of independence both in their teaching and in the production of school texts. The Brothers of the North Monastery, Cork, appear to ‘have had a Catholicism which possessed strong nationalist overtones’ (Coldrey, 1988, p.51). It was with this group that the future leadership of the congregation rested. Under the control of Michael Riordan (from 1838), a spirit of anti-English Irishness and anti-Protestant Roman Catholicism was gradually to be reflected in the texts produced by the order for use in their schools.

This emphasis on nationalism was to take the form of seeing Irish Catholic history in terms of a providential view of the past — what T.W. Moody has termed ‘the myth of the predestinate nation’ (Moody, 1994, p.84). This conception of nationalist historiography is the notion that somehow Irish history is the story of an immortal Irish nation, unfolding holistically through the centuries from the settlement of the aboriginal Celts to the emergence of the national policy of modern times (Bradshaw, 1994). The emancipation campaign had mobilised the Catholic masses. The leadership of the Catholic community was gradually transferred from the aristocratic to the merchant and strong farmer class: Edmund Rice’s first disciples were drawn from amongst this second group. In the early formative years, members of the order were mainly from Munster and Leinster (Keogh, 1996). Being generally from the upper range of the Catholic socioeconomic population, the initial diffusion of the order’s schools was in the prosperous crescent running from Waterford to Limerick (Keogh, 1996). These young men came to their vocations with confidence and an independent spirit of mind that placed them in a position to make a significant contribution to the development of Irish nationalism. Textbooks, because they were a simplified version of knowledge, reflected closely the values and attitudes of the individuals who compiled them — tempered by the requirements of

the market. The Brothers’ textbooks reflected their values and the subculture of Irish society of which they were a part (Keogh, 1996).

These textbooks were produced by a small group of dedicated men who reflected and exemplified a new mood of confident Catholicism, assertive Irish and anti-English sentiment. Under the leadership of Cardinal Cullen, the Irish Catholic Church was to grow in confidence and become a pivotal force in terms of national identity. Riordan had corresponded regularly with Cullen before his appointment as Archbishop of Armagh in 1850 and considered himself a personal friend. Cullen's ideas of Catholic Education coincided exactly with those of Brother Riordan, 'a Catholic education, on Catholic principles, Catholic masters and the use of Catholic books' (Keogh, 1996, p.54).

1846 had seen the publication of The Literary Class Book. Brother Thomas John Wiseman had a major part in writing this and many other Christian Brothers’ texts and was well known as a militant nationalist. Brother Wiseman’s role as editor of historical material from a nationalist perspective was to continue with the publication of the Historical Class Book in 1859. The tone of this reader may be gauged by a quotation from Edmund Burke, which described government in the reign of Queen Anne as ‘well fitted for the oppression, degradation and impoverishment of a people as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man’ (Wiseman, 1859).

A tone of militant anti-English sentiment ran through Brother J. O’Brien’s Catechism of Irish History (1876). One example will illustrate this.

Q. Have the Irish preserved the faith preached to them by St. Patrick?
A. Yes: The Irish have ever been conspicuous for their devoted attachment to the faith from which not all the horrors of persecution nor the blandishments of proselytism have been able to separate them.

The thrust of Brother O’Brien’s writing is strongly propagandist and not untypical of nationalist writing of his time. His major work was published in 1905. The Irish History Reader continued the emphasis on nationalist historiography but had, however, elements of an ideology which had developed in Irish society from the 1870s onwards — that of ‘Irish Ireland’. The preface explains that the book groups the events of Irish history around the names of great Irishmen. Interspersed with these chapters are poems and ballads of a nationalist tone. Students are encouraged to appreciate the glory of Ireland’s ancient civilisation and to support the great movement for the restoration of the Irish language, native music and native Irish ideals.

Although some of their pupils were very poor boys, the quality of the education offered, together with the policy of the hierarchy, which in several instances deliberately used the Brothers to confront the National Schools, meant that many of
these students were moderately affluent — coming from what might be called the lower middle class. Their professional standing placed the Brothers in a position to exercise influence to a degree out of proportion to their numbers (Coldrey, 1988, p.47). This influence was to increase to a great extent after the Brothers became involved in the Intermediate Examination system after 1878. From that point, they offered their middle-class clientele a chance to participate at a higher educational level than before. The public examination and accreditation system also presented the brighter children of the poor with real opportunity for advancement. Such practical subjects as mechanical drawing and navigation gave many young men a foothold in careers like engineering and the navy (Coldrey, 1988).

IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS CATHOLIC/NATIONALIST POLICY

There was to be, however, another outlet for such enhanced educational standards. The leadership of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) came largely from those who got their education from the Brothers and got it free, or at very little cost. This was the first generation of men of no property among whom secondary education was sufficiently diffused to provide the effective leadership for a revolution (Martin, 1963).

An unusually large proportion of the leaders (and a significant proportion of the followers) of the revolution were past pupils of the Christian Brothers schools. What Barry Coldrey (1988, p.248) terms ‘the ideology of resistance’ was a highly defined product of the ethos of Brothers’ schools. Here, boys were socialised into nationalist values, if not necessarily revolutionary nationalist values. For 35 years before 1916, the exceptional achievement of the Brothers’ schools in the Intermediate Examinations had been creating a pool of well-educated, lower-middle-class young men who had little to gain from the existing social order and much to hope for in its passing (Coldrey, 1988).

Padraig Pearse attended the Christian Brothers School (CBS, Westland Row) in the 1890s and later taught Irish there for three years as a lay teacher (Coldrey, 1988). Here, he came under the influence of Brother Canice Craven, an advanced and outspoken nationalist, with whom he remained on exceptionally friendly terms. Others who were prominent in the nationalist movement and who were past pupils of Christian Brothers’ schools include Gerald Boland (CBS, Marino), Austin Stack (CBS, Tralee), Sean Treacy (CBS, Tipperary), the Mellows brothers, Liam and Barney, (CBS, James St.), Ernie O’Malley (CBS, O’Connells), Sean T. O’Kelly (CBS, St. Mary’s Place) and Eamon de Valera (CBS, Charleville). Seven of the fourteen men executed in Dublin after the Easter Rising of 1916 were former pupils of Christian Brothers’ schools: Padraig Pearse, William Pearse, Con Colbert, Seán Heuston, Eamonn Ceannt, Michael O’Hanrahan and Edward Daly (Coldrey, 1988, p.251).

Twenty past pupils of CBS schools were elected to the first Dáil, 27 elected to the second Dáil and 26 to the third Dáil (Coldrey, 1988, p.252). These figures reveal the degree to which the lower middle class, with which the Brothers had been most closely associated, had been empowered to participate in national life and the extent to which their Catholic/nationalist ideology had triumphed.

TOWARDS AN ‘IRISH’ IRELAND

The latter decades of the nineteenth century had witnessed a sea change in the orientation of Irish politics (Rees, 1998). In the period 1900–1910, a new form of Nationalism challenged the hegemony of the Irish Party. In common with other international developments such as the resurgence of the Magyar, Czech, Serb and Croat languages in the Austro–Hungarian Empire, there was a marked increase in interest in the revival of the Irish language, along with a heightened awareness of the cultural distinctiveness of such native elements as Irish folklore, music and games. This new national consciousness was to be termed the ‘Irish Ireland’ movement and, under the aegis of organisations like the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and the Gaelic League, was to attract a widespread membership, involving people from all strata of Irish society. The GAA became particularly strong in rural areas and the Gaelic League appealed to the urban cohort of the newly evolving middle class (Rees, 1998).

D.P. Moran was one of the most vocal proponents of the middle-class Catholic/Nationalist axis, which he viewed as representing the new political consciousness (Hepburn, 1998). Through his weekly newspaper, The Leader, he sought to open the debate around the whole question of Irish identity. In this process, there was little doubt in Moran’s mind that to be truly ‘Irish’ was only possible if one was truly ‘Catholic’:

Such being the facts, the only thinkable solution of the Irish national problem is that one side gets on top and absorbs the other until we have one nation, or that each develops independently. As we are for Ireland, we are in the existing circumstances on the side of Catholic development; and we see plainly that any genuine non-Catholic Irish nationalist must become reconciled to Catholic development or throw in his lot with the other side. If a non-Catholic nationalist Irishman does not wish to live in a Catholic atmosphere let him turn Orangeman. (Hepburn, 1998, p.76)
THE CONTESTED ARENA OF LEISURE READING FOR CHILDREN

It was perhaps inevitable that the perceived ‘alien’ influence of the British Boys Own genre should eventually be seen as an issue in the broadening of the Irish Ireland agenda. The Christian Brothers had developed a style of teaching that stressed nationalist historiography. They had produced their own textbooks to this end. The Brothers gave greater attention to the revival of the Irish language than any other group of schools in Ireland. They worked for the restoration of Gaelic games and promoted Irish music and dancing at feiseanna organised by the Gaelic League (Coldrey, 1988).

Nationalist education placed great stress on all these elements as being vital for the continued success of Irish Ireland. It was well understood how important the winning of young hearts and minds was in the struggle against the all-pervasive Anglo/Imperial influences. By the turn of the century, concern was expressed at the penetration of British newspapers and periodicals in this country. Such publications as Boys Own, Gem, Magnet and Dreadnought contained material of an ‘Empire-worship’ nature (Paris, 2000). This was anathema to nationalist educators. They well understood the formative influence of reading material on the impressionable young. In such publications as The United Irishman and An Claidheamh Soluis, a philosophy of cultural uniqueness and political independence was promulgated. In contrast, British magazines were actively encouraging its readers to admire the very institutions, both cultural and political, which nationalism opposed. Arguably, Sexton Blake and Sherlock Holmes, two stalwarts of the Boys Own genre may be seen to have been reasonably neutral figures on the literary landscape. However, the creation of a hero-worship myth around Clive of India, Wellington or Nelson — all subjects of Boys Own stories — was, for nationalist sensibilities, another matter entirely.

The period of what Roy Foster terms ‘nationalist irredentism’ saw the culmination of historical writing which mined the past for ‘political communities and extrapolations’ (Foster, 1994, p.137). Such sentiments were reflected in Patrick Pearse’s view of history — a visionary world of early Celtic tradition where racial identification was automatic, a national sense was the paramount priority and the sacrificial image of the ancient hero Cúchulainn was inextricably tangled with that of Christ (Foster, 1994).

This was the ideal vision for nationalist youth, an antidote to the worldview of the Anglo-centric boy’s papers. There was a perceived need for an Irish periodical to reflect this viewpoint. Within nationalist circles, a debate was conducted on the issue of appropriate literature for Irish youth. In 1904, for example, The United Irishman carried an article on the subject of ‘Juvenile Literature’ by ‘Sarsfield’ in which the imperial fiction of Henty came in for particular attention.

In all climes and in all ages his hero is English…and his books tend to foster pride of race and the plausible delusion that ‘God first made his Englishman’. The Englishman is always held up as a model, references are constantly made to his patriotism, his glorious heritage, civilising mission…and is it any wonder that so many of our boys become Empire worshippers when subjected to the insidious attacks of literature of this description. (Condon cited in Coghlan and Keegan, 2000, p.57)

In 1905, The United Irishman carried an article that stated ‘boys are potential heroes and are essentially hero-worshippers and identify with the man of action’ (Coldrey, 1988, p.124). The possibility of an Irish boys’ paper, which would provide such a pantheon of nationalist-orientated hero figures (Pearse’s synthesis of Cúchulainn and Christ), was discussed.

This may be understood in the context of nationalist Ireland’s desire to establish a distinctive national character, as different as possible from that of its ruler. Bhreatnach-Lynch (1999, p.148) asserts that because Great Britain was perceived as urban, English speaking and Protestant, Ireland would go to endless lengths to prove itself to be the opposite – rural, Irish speaking and Catholic. A significant aspect of this construct of identity was the belief that Ireland’s national identity was rooted in a Golden Age, that of the ancient Celtic past. Reconnecting with and restoring that past would provide the ground upon which a sense of national self could take root and flourish. The promotion of new heroes suggested not only a positive, affirming self-image but also implied that another such age would emerge in the near future (Bhreatnach-Lynch, 1999).

OUR BOYS — ADVENTURE NARRATIVE AS REPUBLICAN PROPAGANDA

In the 1914 edition of the Christian Brothers Educational Record, Brother P.J. Hennessy called for the establishment of a periodical for the pupils of Christian Brothers Schools, which would be ‘Irish and Catholic, supporting the language movement, the temperance movement and any other movement which acted to lift the standard of the Irish people’ (Educational Record, 1914). It would recall the events of Irish history for a generation already imbued with the ideals of nationalism through the orders’ texts. The intended Catholic tone of the proposed Irish boys’ paper was stated in no uncertain terms.

A paper for Christian Brothers’ boys should first and foremost be distinguished by
its high Catholic tone. Allegiance to the Holy See, for the Church’s ministers, and zeal for the propagation of our Holy Faith should be developed and fostered by thoughtful and attractively written articles. The Church’s work for the civilisation of the world under the inspired direction of holy and learned Popes, the thrilling scenes in the lives of the martyrs, the knightly deeds of the Crusaders, the labours of the monks in their monasteries, and of the missionaries in the mission field of the world are but very few of the very many subjects affording material in this for the editor of our paper. (Educational Record, 1914)

The Brothers had a ready readership in place. There was also an established network of outlets — every Christian Brothers’ school was charged with marketing and distributing the magazine. Many parents welcomed a competitor to the all-pervasive British Boys Own genre — one that would present an alternative, nationalist structure to impressionable readers. Under the editorship of Brother M.X. Weston (a confirmed nationalist), the inaugural issue of Our Boys was published in September 1914 (Coldrey, 1988). From the outset, previous periods of Irish history were ‘mined’ in an effort to represent the struggle of the noble Gael against overwhelming odds to achieve the holy grail of nationhood — albeit an Ireland that would be free from the oppression of Britain but, crucially, also a country that defined itself in unambiguous Gaelic, Catholic terms — morally pure and removed from the corrupt and malign influences of modernity.

Thus, Our Boys trawled across the full range of Irish history as it sought to offer its readers suitable adventure narrative of a Catholic/nationalist hue, attempting to compete with the perceived imperial ethos of imported magazines (Our Boys, 1914–1922).

In Elizabethan times, such heroic figures as Murrogh na Maor (‘Neath the Banners of Spain and Ireland’) challenge the might of British naval forces to hold a wish-fulfilling fastness on the western sea board. O’Hara the Outlaw leads the life of a raparee, collecting tribute from the local Roundheads and defies their plans to usurp the power of the O’Carrolls of Ely, the ancient (and rightful) native overlords of that part of the country (‘The Child Stealers’) (Our Boys, 1914–1922). ‘In the Days of Cromwell’ told the story of how a brave Irish boy led a Roundhead contingent to their doom rather than take them to the hiding place of a priest. The 1798 period was another source of rich material for this singularly nationalist-driven narrative dynamic. In ‘The Blacksmith’s Escape’ the eponymous hero defies the forces of oppression, battling against seemingly overwhelming odds to live and fight another day while ‘Paud O’Donoghue’ employs a similar theme — again a blacksmith, to illustrate the contrast between the ‘evil’ British officer, Major Dundass (a perennial favourite in popular culture, as in for example the American cinema production of The Patriot, starring Mel Gibson) and the brave and attractive Irish hero. Factual material that dealt with the 1798 period included a series entitled ‘Cruel Monsters of ‘98’, which told the story of such brutal characters as ‘Flogging Fitzgerald’ and Hempenstall in the ‘The Walking Gallows’ (Our Boys, 1914–1922).

It is significant that these stories were all featured in the Irish magazine at a time when its British counterparts were exalting the deeds of their own national heroes on the Western Front, the deserts of Mesopotamia and the waters of the North Sea. Here was a sharp contrast indeed in the projection of conflicting heroic archetypes. This was a contrast that was to be significantly deepened by the pace of events in Ireland in the post-1916 period.

June 1920 saw the publication of the first story to address topical events in contemporary Ireland. ‘Tragedy and Comedy’, based on the scene of a hunger strike, was to be the forerunner of a new sub-genre in Our Boys — one that dealt with the events of the War of Independence in an unambiguous and uncompromising manner. ‘The Three Boy Martyrs’, ‘An Exciting Holiday’, ‘The Boy Hero’s Ruse’ and ‘The Fourth Classical’ were all adventure narratives that placed young Irish heroes in the front line of national events.

This was a new departure — the Christian Brothers were now directly involved in the propaganda campaign that was such an essential feature on the battle for hearts and minds in the Ireland of 1919–1922. It may be argued that in the stories, which feature anti-government activity, it is notable how the magazine skirts the issue of depicting guerrilla activity. The IRA campaign was to prove an inspiration to many popular national movements across the world and was seen at the time as being revolutionary in its development of insurgency tactics. The British were to complain vigorously that this was a ‘dirty’ war — that the Irish forces did not have the courage to face them in straightforward conventional combat. In the mythology, which was to later grow around this entire issue, there was to be little equivocation in showing IRA men as a ‘people’s’ army — dressed in civilian clothes, covered with the trappings of war, as in for example, Keating’s 1920s depiction of heroic Irish masculinity, The Men of the South. Bandoleers, Sam Brown belts, caps at rakish angles, rifles slung casually on shoulders, pistols and trench coats were the iconic trappings of this final, heroic and successful assertion of heroic Irish masculinity. In such films as The Informer (1935) and, later, Shake Hands with the Devil (1959), and in such standard works on the War of Independence as Guerrilla Days in Ireland (Tom Barry, 1949) and My Fight for Irish Freedom (Dan Breen, 1924), there was no hesitation in portraying the IRA man as an icon of the Irish revolution. In its representation in fictional terms of anti-government activity during this highly contentious era, this chapter has set out the manner in which, aligned with the order’s well-established record in producing
anti-British history textbooks, the policy of the Christian Brothers may be viewed as a confirmed endorsement of the justice of the republican cause.

*Our Boys* sought to repossess the Irish past in support of a conservative, traditional agenda. Driven by an ethos of conformist Catholicism, the rurally orientated majority of the country (at least in the south, an area that had not benefited to any large extent from industrialisation) perceived the modern world as somehow 'unIrish'— the metropolitan condition a place of temptation and grave moral danger. This was a worldview that looked on modern media forms such as cinema as a force of potential corruption with its 'foreign' images. Radio was no less a source of potential evil, with its dangerous rhythms, as the 1930s campaign against jazz music on the radio was to reflect (Mcloone, 2000). The true soul of Ireland was in the rural heartland, specifically the west. This was an ideology that was to come to full fruition after the foundation of the Free State in the development of an iconography of national symbolism. Irish coins had farm animal motifs and Irish stamps reflected rural life. The iconography of the paintings of Paul Henry and Maurice McGonigal depicted a western world of timeless western landscapes where hardy peasants lived in unity with mountain, bog and sea (Kennedy, 1994; Gibbons, 1984; O'Giollan, 2000; Brown, 1985; Dalismer, 1993; Crang, 1998; Lee, 1983).

*Our Boys* popularised a view of Ireland and its history that firmly complemented the Christian Brothers’ policy on conservative, anti-metropolitan nationalism as elucidated in their school texts. This was an ideology that gradually began to find mass acceptance outside the narrow sphere of advanced nationalism, most specifically in the electoral success of Sinn Féin.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, in this chapter, I argue that the social construction of Irish identity as Catholic, anti-British, anti-Protestant and rural was successfully pursued by the Christian Brothers in their schools. The graduates of these schools would go on to become Irish revolutionaries and would die in the 1916 Rising. Others would become parliamentarians of the new Irish government. Sinn Féin became the successor movement to the Irish Parliamentary Party, but in everyday ways, which were strategically underplayed at the time. Its emphasis was upon a specific reading of history (Foster, 1994, p.136). *Our Boys* was to play its own part in creating the conditions for the popularisation of such a ‘specific reading of history’. This was to be achieved in various ways — conventional models of the adventure narrative (cowboys and detective stories) sitting side by side with the magazine’s own unique creations of Irish historical and contemporary fiction, alongside moral and devotional material. This was all filtered through a prism of Gaelic/nationalist ‘manliness’ — an indigenous expression of a unique construction of Irish heroic masculinity.
CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN IRELAND: THE ROLE OF POLICY AND AISTEAR IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN THE INFANT CLASSROOM

Lorraine Duffy

INTRODUCTION

The early years are a crucial part of a child's lifelong development because they play a significant role in the child's emotional, personal, social and cognitive development. According to Schaffer (1996, p.1), 'social development refers to the behaviour patterns, feelings, attitudes, and concepts children manifest in relation to other people and to the way that these various aspects change over time.' A child's cultural background and influences play a significant role in their overall social development, including their experiences with family, friends, schooling and religion. Culture 'refers to a people's way of doing things, a system of rules for making meaning of their world, a system of values and beliefs that affect their behaviour. 'Culture is learned' (Bukato and Daehler, 1995, p.259). Similarly, French (2007, p.7) states that 'culture infers an identity which everyone has, based on a number of factors from memories, ethnic identity, family attitudes to child rearing, class, money, religious or other celebrations, or division of family roles according to gender or age. Culture evolves for individuals and communities. "The term “ethnicity” in a sociological context was developed by D. Riesman in 1953 as a means to ‘make sense of a specific form of cultural difference’ (Malešević, 2004, p.1) and includes many definitions and can be viewed interchangeably with race. The International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences (Shills, 1972, p.167) defines an ethnic group as 'a distinct category of the population in a larger society whose culture is usually different from its own' and will be central to the meaning of ethnicity as part of the discussion that follows.

This chapter sets the scene by examining cultural diversity in Irish society from a historical perspective and is mindful of the link between culture and ethnicity as part of this diversity. The development of policies to support cultural diversity in primary education in Ireland will be outlined, from the 1990s to the present day, with specific focus being placed on the infant classroom. Finally, this chapter will explore the implementation of Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) in the infant classroom as a means to support the social and cultural development of all children.

THE EVOLUTION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN IRELAND AND ITS LINK TO PRIMARY EDUCATION

The presence of religious, racial and ethnic diversity has long been part of Irish society. Immigrants included the Celts, Vikings, Normans, English, Scots and Huguenots who have contributed to Ireland's cultural diversity in the past (NCCA, 2005, p.12). What it means to be Irish is a common question amongst researchers and Irish citizens. The stereotypical 'Catholic and Gaelic' definition was commonly used to describe a 'true' Irish person in the past (Foster, 1988; McVeigh, 1996). However, the emphasis has shifted from this to a definition that is still quite unclear and one that researchers often debate. At the beginning of the 19th century, there was a distinction made in Ireland between ‘us’ and the ‘other’ — the other being the coloniser, or the English/British. In a way, the term 'Irishness' was similar to the term 'Britishness'; for example, Britons were understood to be Protestant and Irish people were understood to be Catholic. Similarly, the Irish people were seen to be rural and the Britons urban (Haran et al., 2002, p.14). According to Haran and Tormey (Haran et al., p.14):

Ethnic nationalism is based on the assumption of a shared culture—an assumption that we have already seen does not make sense in modern societies such as Ireland, even if it ever did so. This suggests a logical, as well as moral inclusive sense of what it means to be Irish.

Thus, the origin of Irishness is highly debatable, but it is clear that the meaning from the past needs to be adapted to suit the cultural diversity that is evident in modern-day Ireland. Contemporary Ireland is closely tied to the European Union (EU), and as a result, the issue of Irish people having dual identities — both Irish and European — has been raised (O’Toole, 2017; Duffy, 2017). It is even suggested that Ireland may have multiple identities, meaning local, national and European (Inglis, 2017). A further development of this is the possibility of multiple identities, meaning that one could be both Irish and British or American at the same time, due in part to the number of people who have immigrated and emigrated to and from Ireland. As Bhatti (1999, p.9) argues, the term 'ethnic minority' is a contested one because 'everyone belongs to an ethnic group'. This issue should not be overlooked.
In the case of Ireland in 2017, the term ‘non-national’ is a widely used term in many forms of legislation to describe migrants who, for different reasons, have come to Ireland. For example, the Immigration Act (Government of Ireland, 1999, p.3) states that a non-national is ‘an alien within the meaning of the Act of 1935 other than an alien to whom, by virtue of an order under section 10 of that Act, none of the provisions of that Act applies.’ In addition, the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act (Government of Ireland, 2001, p.3) refers to a non-national as ‘a person who is not an Irish citizen.’ This term is exclusionary and a crude way of marking off those who do not ‘belong’ from those who ‘do.’ The question is raised: why should anyone be described as a ‘non’ anything? The term does not portray a very positive image of any person. The term ‘newcomer children’ is being used by primary schools to refer to migrant pupils (NCCA, 2005). The next section will explore ethnic diversity, drawing from the most recent census data.

Current Ethnic Diversity in Ireland
The 2016 census statistics (CSO, 2017) reflects an Ireland that is ethnically and culturally diverse, as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Population Statistics in Ireland 2016

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<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>4,761,865</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of Irish residents born abroad</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of countries from which non-Irish immigrants arrived into Ireland</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Irish Travellers</td>
<td>30,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of white Irish</td>
<td>3,854,226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other white</td>
<td>446,727</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Irish or black African</td>
<td>57,850</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other black</td>
<td>6,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>19,447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>79,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>70,603</td>
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According to the 2016 census (CSO, 2017), 82,346 people arrived to live in Ireland in the year prior to April 2016. Of these, 53,708 were non-Irish nationals while 28,143 were Irish nationals. The total number of people with dual-Irish citizenship has risen by 87.4% since the 2011 census, which now stands at 104,784. The total number of non-Irish nationals living in Ireland is 535,475, which has decreased by 1.6% since the 2011 census (Duffy, 2017).

The top six non-Irish nationalities living in Ireland include the following (CSO, 2017):

![Top 6 Non-Irish Nationalities in Ireland](image)

1 'Newcomer children who arrive into a classroom from a country or background that is different from that of the majority of children in the classroom.' (NCCA, 2005, p.169). Also as described in NCCA (2006) Up and Away – A Resource Book for English Language Support in Primary schools. Dublin: Integrate Ireland Language and Training.

The economic boom (Celtic Tiger) of the mid-1990s attracted many immigrants and increased cultural diversity in Ireland; however, Ireland was a multicultural society long before this period. A pertinent example is the Travellers, who have their own ethnic and cultural identity and have been present in Ireland for centuries. Although a minority group in terms of numbers, the Travellers are Irish but with a heritage and culture that is unique to that of the majority of Irish citizens. According to the 2016 census (CSO, 2017) there are 30,987 Travellers living in Ireland, an increase of 5.1% from the census 2011 figure of 29,495. Of these, almost 8,000 are in the age range 5–14 years (CSO, 2017). On 1 March 2017, Taoiseach Enda Kenny recognised the Irish Traveller community as being a distinct ethnic group within the Irish nation (O’Halloran, O’Regan, 2017). Research by Tormey and Gleeson (2012) demonstrated that Travellers are also the most discriminated against and the most stigmatised group in Irish society.
Noteworthy is the fact that the first group of Vietnamese refugee children arrived in Ireland in 1979, over a quarter of a century ago (Gartland, 2016). Thus, historically, Ireland was a country of cultural diversity, which in turn has contributed to our current Irish heritage. In a similar way, the diversity evident in contemporary Ireland will contribute to our culture of the future (O’Halloran, O’Regan, 2017). Issues related to equality and diversity are essential to the overall experience of a child’s primary education (Lodge and Lynch, 2004, p.2). According to the 2016 census, the total number of primary school age children stands at 548,693, an increase of 8.8% on 2011 census figures. It is estimated that ‘newcomer’ children (whose parents are born in a country outside of Ireland) make up 10% of the total number of primary school children in Ireland (Darmody et al., 2012, p.37). The increase in cultural and ethnic diversity in Ireland has increased the demand for multi-denominational schools (such as Educate Together schools) as opposed to the traditional Catholic/Protestant schools that have existed in Irish society since the foundation of the national school system in 1831 (Darmody et al., 2012). All religions are protected by the Irish Constitution, Bunreacht na hÉireann (1937) as there is now such a wide variety of school types and population within each school in the Irish State. Data from the most recent Primary Online Database (POD) demonstrates the level of variety in school types and pupil population as follows (Tickner, 2017):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethos Description</th>
<th>Mainstream Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>2,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Ireland</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-denominational</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-denominational</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quaker</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of pupils enrolled in mainstream schools as classified by ethnic or cultural background for the academic year 2016–2017 are shown in Table 3 (Tickner, 2017).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic or Cultural Background Description</th>
<th>Mainstream School (Total Male and Female Pupils)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Irish</td>
<td>316,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Traveller</td>
<td>7,802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>1,303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other White Background</td>
<td>33,743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black Irish-African</td>
<td>8,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black Irish-any other Black background</td>
<td>1,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian Irish-Chinese</td>
<td>2,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian Irish-any other Asian background</td>
<td>10,351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (including mixed background)</td>
<td>8,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Consent</td>
<td>64,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Provided</td>
<td>96,506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>550,304</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of pupils in Junior Infants as of 1 January 2017 was 68,593. The total number in Senior Infants was 71,436, giving a total of 140,029 children who are currently accessing early childhood education within the primary school in Ireland (Tickner, 2017, p.13).

According to Devine, ethnic groups tend to cluster in certain areas, for example, Scoil Íosa (Catholic primary national school) in Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo is situated in what is now referred to as ‘Ireland’s most cosmopolitan town’ (McGreal, 2015). In the 1970s and 1980s, Pakistani and Syrian nationals arrived in the town to establish meat companies, thus changing the ethnic and cultural profile of the town. Of the 322 pupils in the school, a mere 92 were of ‘White Irish’ backgrounds (McGreal, 2015). This is just one example of a school community that has had to adapt its teaching and learning policies and strategies to address the ever-changing face of cultural diversity within Irish society in recent years. The migration data recorded from the 2016 census shows that Ireland has returned to net inward migration, as opposed to the net outward migration that was recorded in previous censuses. If Department of Education and Skills projections in relation to migration and fertility are accurate, enrolments will peak at 567,369 by 2018 and steadily decline to a level of 398,419 in the years up to 2035 (DES, 2017).

Societal changes, such as population growth or immigration, result in...
implications for the education of all children. Devine cites Gillis (2002), Hendrick (1997) and Jencks (1996) by stating that 'socio-historical analyses point to the evolving nature of childhood and how children's lives change in line with economic and social development' (Deegan et al., 2004, p.110). According to Kenny et al., ‘education is inclusive when it contributes to pupils’ opportunities and skills to function in a just and pluriform society, which ideally, is characterised by social cohesion and room for different perspectives on the world’ (Kenny and McLaughlin, 2004, p.11). Although Irish society has faced significant changes and challenges in recent years, it is important to remember that Ireland has a long history of diversity, which includes linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity. The State has been proactive in addressing the educational needs of all its citizens in recent years, particularly those in the early years. For example, the introduction of Aistear (2009) and the free pre-school year scheme in 2010 and have had a positive impact on the education of children in the early years. In addition, the NCCA’s (2005) guidelines for primary schools on intercultural education complement the aims of the primary curriculum in addressing the diverse needs of all children. The surge in the cultural diversity of the Irish population has an impact on all facets of Irish life, including education policy and schooling, and in turn influences the cultural attitudes and personal development of teachers, children and parents alike.

A Review of Policy in Ireland: Cultural Diversity and Early Childhood Education International and national policies protect and respect all children worldwide, and Ireland is no exception. This protection and respect refers to all aspects of children’s lives, including diversity issues such as culture and race (Deegan et al., 2004, p.8). Education is central to the concept of diversity and its relevance in a child’s life. The most significant international policy to have influenced policy-making in relation to the lives of children is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989). The UNCRC refers to the principles of diversity and anti-discrimination in several of its articles.

For example, in Article 29, it states that the education of the child should be directed to:

…the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for the civilisations different from his or her own

And

…the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of the sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.

In Ireland, the National Children’s Strategy, Our Children - Their Lives (Department of Health and Children, 2000) identifies diversity as an important aspect of a child’s education. Objective K of the strategy states that ‘Children will be educated and supported to value social and cultural diversity so that all children including Travellers and other marginalized groups achieve their full potential’ (Department of Health and Children, 2000, p.70).

Significant policy has addressed the needs of children in early childhood education in a progressive way since the National Forum on Early Childhood Education (1998), which led the way for Ready to Learn: The White Paper on Early Childhood Education (Department of Education and Science, 1999a). Both the National Childcare Strategy (Government of Ireland, 1999) and the White Paper ‘Ready to Learn’ (DES, 1999a) highlighted the need to link the care and education of young children. In addition, the publication of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum addressed early childhood education and made recommendations for the educational provision of children in Junior and Senior Infant Classes. The curriculum is child-centred, which is demonstrated in its three general aims (DES, 1999b, p.7):

☐ To enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual

☐ To enable the child to develop as a social being through living and cooperating with others and so contribute to the good of society

☐ To prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning
As a result of the increase in immigration into Ireland in the 1990s, a need emerged for additional support for teachers to reflect on their teaching practices in relation to their new diverse classrooms. As a result, *The Intercultural Education in the Primary Schools – Guidelines for Schools* were published in 2005. The guidelines (NCCA, 2005, p.20) indicate that there are seven characteristics of intercultural education in Ireland, which are based on the aims of the *Primary Curriculum* (1999).

These include:
- Intercultural education is for all children.
- Intercultural education is embedded in knowledge and understanding, skills and capacities, and attitudes and values.
- Intercultural education is integrated with all subjects and with the general life of the school.
- Intercultural education requires a real-world focus.
- Intercultural education takes time.
- The school context is important in facilitating learning.

The aim of the guidelines is to ‘contribute to the development of Ireland as an intercultural society based on a shared sense that language, culture and ethnic diversity is valuable’ (NCCA, 2005, p.5). The guidelines (NCCA, 2005) demonstrate that children from all cultural backgrounds can be socially included in primary schools through various means, for example:
- Involving parents and the wider community in schools’ activities, such as parents’ associations
- Inviting parents to become involved in extra-curricular activities
- Providing information for parents that takes into account the range in literacy levels and diversity in languages amongst the school community, for example, providing school handbooks in different languages
- Developing school mission statements, policies and plans that demonstrate that all children are respected and that they are in an inclusive intercultural school
- Curriculum and assessment should provide provision for the needs of all children
- The school plan should ensure that the school is inclusive, for example, providing language support, promoting intercultural education in all classrooms and ensuring equality of access for all

- The school environment should promote inclusivity, for example, the physical environment should clearly represent all children, it should avoid stereotyping of minority groups and it should ensure that all children feel that they are an equal part within the school community
- The social environment of the school is equally important and should be one that is welcoming to all children, one where all children see themselves in a positive way and one that allows children to learn about the school and their new education system in a clear way. Schools should also take the differences between education systems into account, which may affect a child’s level of confidence and ability in settling into a new school environment, for example, the age at which children start school, the length of the school day or the approach to homework
- School procedures should be explained to children and their parents from the outset and should require the same information from all children. The school should be mindful to ensure that the child’s language needs are addressed, that all names are pronounced and written correctly and subject exemptions are adhered to if required (as per the Education Act, 1998)

It is clear that school planning and classroom planning are a significant aspect in creating a culturally inclusive school. The guidelines recommend that planning should be a collective process where all members of the school community have input in creating an intercultural learning environment and maintaining the values of a culturally inclusive school (O’Sullivan, 2013, p.74).

More recently, the DCYA published its national policy framework for children and young people from birth to 24 years, *Better Outcomes: Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014–2020* (DCYA, 2014). The policy shares a commitment for Ireland ‘where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future’ (DCYA, 2014, p.vii).

Children in Ireland can start school once they are four years of age on 1 September of the school year, but ‘the compulsory school age in Ireland is six and all forms of pre-primary education are optional. However, children from the age of four can be
enrolled in Infant Classes in primary schools’ (DES, online). Traditionally, a high proportion of children started school at four years of age; however, this trend has been changing since the introduction of a free preschool year in 2007. Department of Education statistics showed that two-thirds of junior infant children were five years of age or older on 1 January 2017. A database from September 2016 demonstrated an equal proportion of 50% each between four and five year olds enrolled in Junior Infants (Irish Times, 2016). From September 2016, children from the age of three years are entitled to two years’ free preschool education until they enrol in primary school up to the age of five years six months (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, (DCYA)). As of January 2017, the number of children availing of the free preschool scheme reached 108,019. This is a significant increase in the number of children attending preschool compared to the figure of 68,333 recorded in 2014/2015 (DCYA). The development of the free preschool initiative has had an impact on education in the early years in primary school. As a result of significant policy developments, a greater link has been developed between the education of children in preschool and infant classes in the primary school. This is evident by two new policies: Siolta the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, (DES, 2006) and Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009).

TEACHING IN AN INFANT CLASSROOM IN IRELAND: USING AISTEAR TO SUPPORT CHILDREN’S CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) is a curriculum framework that is designed for implementation with all children aged from birth to six years. Curriculum ‘refers to all the experiences, formal and informal, planned and unplanned in the indoor and outdoor environment, which contribute to children’s learning and development’ (NCCA, 2009, p.54). Curriculum framework ‘is a scaffold or support which helps adults to develop a curriculum for the children in their setting’ (NCCA, 2009, p.54.). Scaffold and support are key words in the overall approach to the implementation of Aistear. Before the implementation of Aistear, the NCCA engaged in a significant period of research and consultation which informed the publication and implementation guidelines (Murphy, 2014). Aistear supports the learning and development of children in early childhood settings and provides ‘guidelines on supporting children’s learning through partnerships with parents, interactions, play and assessment’ (ibid. p.6). It is used in a variety of settings including daycare settings, sessional settings, childminding settings and Infant Classes in the primary school.

In addition to the guidelines for good practice, Aistear is a theme-based curriculum framework, which is underpinned by 12 main principles within three specific groups (ibid. p.7).

Group 1
- The child’s uniqueness
- Equality and diversity
- children as citizens

Group 2
- Relationships
- Parents, family and community
- The adult’s role

Group 3
- Holistic learning and development
- Active learning
- Play and hands-on experiences
- Relevant and meaningful experiences
- Communication and language
- The learning environment

Group 1 clearly relates to a child’s cultural development and demonstrates that equality for all children is emphasised in Aistear. The principles of Aistear are closely aligned with the principles of quality outlined in Siolta (CECDE, 2006), which ‘is designed to define, assess and support the improvement of quality across all aspects of practice in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings where children aged birth to six years are present’ (ibid. 2006). In addition to 12 principles, Siolta identifies 16 standards and 75 components of quality, which allow for the practical application of the framework across all settings.

There are four interconnected themes within Aistear, each of which contains aims and broad learning goals, as outlined in Figure 2.
The theme of ‘identity and belonging’ is about ‘children developing a positive sense of who they are, and feeling that they are valued and respected as part of a family and community’ (NCCA, 2009, p.25). It is this theme that highlights the importance of culture in the social development of children in early childhood classrooms, as demonstrated in the four aims of the theme (NCCA, 2009, p.26):

**Aim 1**: ‘Children will have strong self-identities and will feel respected and affirmed as unique individuals with their own life stories.’

**Aim 2**: ‘Children will have a sense of group identity where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended.’

**Aim 3**: ‘Children will be able to express their rights and show an understanding and regard for the identity, rights and views of others.’

**Aim 4**: ‘Children will see themselves as capable learners.’

In all aims, respecting the diversity and equal rights of all children is paramount. Learning through play and assessment are key components of *Aistear*, and play is integrated across all four themes to support children’s learning and development (NCCA, 2009). Children love to play indoors and outdoors, and it is a means for them to use their imagination in an active way and to use play to relate to their own life experiences and environment. Montessori (1912) defined play ‘as the work of the child’ (Child Development Institute) and defined the main dimensions of play as:

- Voluntary, enjoyable, purposeful and spontaneous
- Creativity expanded using problem-solving skills, social skills, language skills and physical skills
- Helping to expand on new ideas
- Helping to the child to adapt socially
- Helping to thwart emotional problems

According to Berger (2000, p.241), the early childhood years (two to six years) emphasise the importance of play:

> Young children spend most of their waking hours at play, acquiring the skills, ideas, and values that are crucial for growing up. They chase each other and dare themselves to attempt new tasks, developing their minds; they invent games and dramatize fantasies, learning social skills and moral rules.

*Aistear* (2009, p.54) outlines the different types of play that teachers use across all four of its themes as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Types of Play Across Aistear Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Play</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>Children use their bodies and materials to make and do things. They share feelings by dancing, painting, playing with junk and recycled materials, working with playdough and clay and using their imaginations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games with rules</td>
<td>Games with rules allow children to develop skills of negotiation by recognising what can and cannot be done. At a young age, children are flexible with rules; however, over time they begin to understand how to follow rules and use language to communicate with their peers during games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>This type of play involves playing with word, rhymes, stories, sounds and patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Physical | **Physical play:** Children develop and practice movements using their whole body with co-ordination and balance being central to each activity. Children master their gross motor skills prior to their fine motor skills.  
**Exploratory play:** Children use skills and senses to explore their bodies and environment.  
**Manipulative play:** Physical dexterity and hand-eye co-ordination are developed. Children manipulate objects and materials.  
**Constructive play:** Children build something using natural and manufactured materials. This type of play can become more complex over time. |
| Pretend | **Pretend, dramatic, role-play, fantasy and make-believe:** Children use their imaginations and engage in pretend play with objects, actions and situations. Children get into roles; explore occupations and experiences, and use props and the environment as part of the role-play. Early literacy and numeracy are part of this play as children write shopping lists, menus and so on and use items such as mobile phones, tablets, cameras and calculators.  
**Small-world play:** Children play with small versions of real-life animals, people, cars and play-props.  
**Socio-dramatic play:** This area allows children to play with children and adults and encourages social skill development. The use of language and writing stories are central in the socio-dramatic play area. |

Each of these play areas can allow a child to express their cultural identity and allow for their social development to be enhanced. In order to be culturally inclusive, a teacher could use resources and topics within the ‘Identity and Belonging’ theme that take into account the cultural diversity of a class group and the local/national environment. Such resources could include classroom displays, toys and play equipment, art materials and books (NCCA, 2005, p.40). Classroom displays should always represent diversity in a positive way and should be inclusive and respectful of the various nationalities within the class. Such displays could include images of people from various cultural backgrounds, positive role models from different cultural backgrounds, or artwork which is representative of a range of cultural traditions. According to the NCCA (2005, p.41):

A classroom display can identify the historical diversity of Irishness, can model the positive contribution of people from diverse backgrounds to Irish arts, science and culture, and can provide positive role models of people who fought for human rights and social justice issues.

Many nationalities have dance and music, and children could be encouraged to identify with their own culture within the infant classroom. York (1991) suggests using instruments such as maracas, gongs, metal and bongo drums, flutes, bells, shells, castanets and wooden xylophones in addition to the traditional rhythm instruments. Traditional dance costumes can be used as part of the dress-up box and would allow children to explore multi-ethnic dance costumes. Dolls of various ethnicities and of both sexes allow children to explore diversity and see a true representation of themselves in the dolls they play with. The Traveller culture can be represented in an additional way by including toy trailers and halting sites (NCCA, 2005). Similarly, literacy development can take place using dual language books that allow children to use their first and second language as part of a play session and anti-bias books that encourage positive cultural role models and situations. Ibby Ireland provide a wide selection of books and resources that promote national and international identities and understanding. The art area can include skin-colour crayons, markers, paints and mirrors which would allow children to explore their skin-colour and facial features (York, 1991; NCCA, 2005). The manipulative area can be enhanced by multi-ethnic jigsaws, foreign coins for sorting or handmade matching games (York, 1991). A teacher can enhance the small-world area by including ethnically diverse small people and indigenous animals from different countries. York (1991, p.60) suggests that the dramatic play area encourages cooperative play among children and should always allow children to ‘explore a variety of lifestyles, including family systems, economic class, and culture’. Accessories and props in the dramatic play area can include plastic play food, ethnically diverse cooking utensils, ethnically diverse clothes and shoes, and so on (York, p.61).

Essentially, learning should relate to the context and environment in which the children and teachers are living in. Nimmo (NCCA) cites Elizabeth Jones (1994), who coined the term ‘emergent curriculum’ in the 1970s. Jones referred to the curriculum where teachers teach directly what they are told as a ‘boxed curriculum’. This, according to Nimmo, is the antidote to an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum, which is flexible, adaptable, play based and focuses on the individual needs of the child. As Aistear is based on themes and principles, it reflects the emergent curriculum and other international theme-based curricula such as Te-
Derman-Sparks (1989, p.11) states that ‘what is in the environment also alerts children to what the teacher considers important or not important’. As a result, children see the presence of appropriate intercultural displays, materials and resources within a classroom as a normal part of their day-to-day learning environment (Duffy, 2013). Children define themselves by what they believe they have in common with others around them, which Connolly (2008) refers to as in-group preferences; however, difference is also noted by children, which is referred to as out-group prejudices. A teacher is always a role model for young children, and it is clear that the importance they place on objects and people affects children’s opinions and development.

According to Schonfeld (Barnardos, 2002, p.4), there are two reasons for the importance of diversity in early childhood; firstly, ‘children are not just individuals but are members of distinct cultural groups’, and secondly is ‘the need of civic society to promote each child’s comfortable, empathetic and respectful interaction with people from diverse backgrounds’. In diverse environments, it is through the development of positive self-esteem and social competence, and the involvement of parents, that true inclusiveness can be attained (Siraj-Blatchford, cited by Pugh, 2001, pp.102–107). Thus, ‘an integrated, holistic and developmental approach is needed to learning, teaching and care with children from birth to seven years of age’ (Siraj-Blatchford, cited by Pugh, 2001, p.101), and if this approach is achieved, the possibility will exist for teachers to help create a culturally inclusive school environment.

The Role of Assessment in Supporting All Children’s Learning Through Aistear

Curriculum and assessment are underpinned by the core principles of the primary curriculum, and therefore complement each other in ‘developing each child’s potential’ and in ‘making provision for individual differences’ (NCCA, 2005, p.30). Assessment in Aistear focuses on both assessment of learning and assessment for learning. A teacher’s assessment methods, whether they involve collecting, documenting, observing or using information, will always look for evidence of a child’s progress across the four themes of Aistear (NCCA, 2009, p.73). These include dispositions (for example, curiosity), skills (for example, cutting), attitudes and values (for example, respect for themselves and others), and knowledge and understanding (for example, finding out about people in their community) (ibid. p.74). There is a clear link with some of the key messages of the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) and the principles of Aistear (NCCA, 2009). One of the principles of learning in the Primary School Curriculum is ‘the child’s sense of wonder and natural curiosity’ (DES, 2009, p.14) which highlights the child’s ‘spontaneous impetus’ to explore the wonders of the world through play.

Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum is viewed as being an integral part of all areas of the curriculum and includes the assessment of the child’s whole development, including socially and emotionally (DES, 2009). Children often experience significant differences between the teaching and learning that takes place in preschool and primary school (Woodhead and Moss, 2007, p.46). However, Aistear is a curriculum framework that can be enjoyed by children from zero to six years and therefore ensures continuity in learning from preschool to primary school in Ireland. Woodhead and Moss (2007, p.50) suggest that it is vital to avoid the ‘schoolification’ of pedagogy from infancy through to eight years and to ensure that the continuity is based on ‘strong and equal partnerships’ and ‘positive teacher-child interactions’. Wood (2016) states that play has a role in supporting children’s learning, creativity and imagination and can be used as a teaching methodology across all subject areas with children from four to eight years.

The Aistear guidelines for good practice (NCCA, 2009, p.5) define how adults can support children’s learning and development across the four themes and focus on:

- Building partnerships between parents and practitioners
- Learning and developing through interactions
- Learning and developing through play
- Supporting learning and development through assessment

Derman-Sparks (1989, p.97) views parent work as being ‘vital to an effective anti-bias curriculum’. In a similar way, Aistear regards parental involvement as being central its effective implementation.

By embracing difference, by exploring their own attitudes in relation to equality and diversity, and by realising that their attitudes and values influence children, adults can develop the insights, self-awareness and skills that are needed to help children develop a strong sense of identity and belonging. (NCCA, 2009, p.25).

Ireland is a culturally diverse society; therefore, parental involvement will encourage an inclusive, culturally diverse learning environment for children in the infant class where they feel respected and valued for whom they are.
CONCLUSION

The study of social development in early childhood examines the interaction between children and other people. The role of culture in relation to social development is clearly an important aspect of child development research in the 21st century. Positive relationships between educators and families, in turn, display respect for diversity and supports the child's social and emotional development (Kidsmatter, p.5). As outlined in this chapter, Ireland is a culturally diverse nation and this is evident across all walks of life from work places to schools. National policies have been implemented to address the growing needs of children in primary schools due to the increase in the ethnic and cultural diversity of school populations. Within the infant classroom in the primary school in Ireland Intercultural Education Guidelines (NCCA, 2005) and Aistear (NCCA, 2009) support the social and cultural development of all children through a thematic, playful approach to teaching and learning. The Intercultural Education Guidelines were devised in response to the aims and vision of the Primary School Curriculum. Although there was a significant period of research before its implementation in 2009, no significant empirical research has been conducted on the impact of Aistear to date, meaning the main source of literature has been disseminated by the NCCA. It would be beneficial to research how infant class teachers view the benefits and challenges of Aistear. Its aim is to complement the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) and ensure a natural progression in teaching and learning from the preschool to infant classroom, providing a continuity of learning through a common curriculum framework. One obstacle in all children accessing this level of continuity is that the DES have not formally implemented Aistear as a mandatory curriculum framework. It remains to be seen whether this will happen in the future and what official level of continuous professional development will be provided for primary school teachers.

Part 2
The Digital Age: Online Teaching, Learning And Supervisory Practices
EASING THE TRANSITION TO ONLINE LEARNING; EVALUATING AN ORIENTATION COURSE FOR PME STUDENTS

Dara Cassidy

INTRODUCTION

From an early age, for many people, education may be associated with attendance in a physical structure overseen by a teacher who is there to instruct and guide. Deciding to take a course online, without those familiar spaces and relationships, is a big departure for many and some feel apprehensive as they embark on an online programme of study. So much is different in the online environment. No longer will they be in close physical proximity to their teacher and their fellow students, and their interaction will be mediated by a computer, a tablet or a phone. While it is difficult to get precise figures, it is generally accepted that online students are more likely to drop out than their campus-based counterparts. Bawa (2015) states that the drop-out rate is 10–20% higher for online courses than for traditional face-to-face ones. Tyler-Smith (2006) contends that ‘cognitive overload brought about by the multiple learning curves that confront a learner’ at the start of an online course is a significant contributory factor to this. Dropping out from higher education can have a negative effect on self-esteem and opportunities for employment. From a financial perspective, the impact can be severe for students and educational institutions. Getting online students off to a positive start is thus extremely important. Motteram and Forrester (2005) emphasise the importance of understanding online students’ needs and providing them with effective support as they commence their studies.

A large-scale factor analysis by Muilenburg and Berge (2005) identified four critical barriers to online learning: 1) concerns about social interaction, 2) administrative or instructor issues, 3) learner motivation and 4) time and support for studies.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the design of an online orientation that was developed to provide a scaffold for learners to help them transition successfully to an online mode of learning. It will also discuss the approach taken to evaluating the orientation and outline the findings of that evaluation (n=556 students). The evaluation focused on three specific elements: 1) the extent to which students felt the orientation helped prepare them for the blended academic programme, 2) the extent to which the orientation affected student sentiment towards studying
online and 3) the extent to which students engaged with the orientation activities and resources. The data for the evaluation was generated from surveys and virtual learning environment (VLE) usage logs.

**CONTEXT OF STUDY**

Hibernia College has been delivering initial teacher education (ITE) programmes using a blended learning approach (Graham, 2006) since 2005 and now runs the Professional Master of Education (PME) programmes at Primary and Post Primary levels. Students of these programmes complete approximately 45% of their studies online, with the remaining 55% comprising school placements, Irish language residential elements and onsite workshops, seminars and conference days. Online study is divided into a series of weekly tasks that students must complete. These encompass activities such as watching videos or multimedia presentations, reading articles, writing reflections, creating blog posts, participating in forum discussions and attending online tutorials. The vehicle for the delivery of these tasks is a Moodle-based VLE. The typical student embarking on these programmes has earned a bachelor's degree from a traditional university and has no, or limited, experience of online learning. Consequently, they face all the challenges associated with online learning mentioned above, as well as the additional anxiety of taking on a master's level programme and negotiating teaching practice.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The value of designing some type of orientation for students embarking on an online programme of study has long been recognised (Salmon, 2004; Motteram and Forrester, 2005; Wozniak et al., 2009). Such programmes should include guided learning activities that allow learners to experiment with the technology without fear of making mistakes (Wozniak et al., 2009). Levy (2006) identifies four areas that are central to successful student engagement in an online environment: an understanding of the features of the VLE, an effective means of communication, the ability to develop social networks, and the self-regulation and time-management skills necessary to manage workload. Song et al. (2004) sought to identify features that might help learners make the transition to online learning; among other things, they identified time-management strategies, a sense of community, daily activities, and clear objectives and expectations as key elements.

Levy’s recognition of the importance of creating social networks is echoed in much of the research on online learning. Such networks enable students to ‘find reassurance, build relationships, and use each other as a “cognitive resource”’ (Motteram and Forrester, 2005, p.283). The construct of ‘social presence’ is central to much of the literature (Garrison, 2011; Anderson, 2008; Kehrwald, 2008; Richardson and Swan, 2003). Social presence is characterised by the extent to which individuals can project their presence online in the absence of the visual or verbal signals that are integral to face-to-face communication. A strong sense of social presence from classmates and instructors has been shown to increase motivation and satisfaction levels in online learners (Richardson and Swan, 2003). According to Ribchester et al. (2104, p.356), good practice in orientation programmes encompasses strategies that help students establish ‘peer support networks’, facilitate access to academic staff, create a sense of inclusion, nurture engagement and disseminate important information gradually so as to avoid overload. Motteram and Forrester (2005) found that online students often had to balance employment and other commitments and raised concerns about feeling isolated while studying online. A strong theme that emerged was the need for ‘human’ interaction with peers and tutors (Motteram and Forrester, 2005). Interaction in the discussion forums helped reassure students that ‘other people were feeling the same thing’ (Motteram and Forrester, 2005, p.288). It is important, therefore, that the projection of social presence, the creation of community and assistance for students in balancing their studies with their other commitments should be central elements of an orientation programme.

The first hurdle that online students need to overcome is familiarising themselves with the technology they need to use. As Motteram and Forrester (2005, p.286) point out, ‘Initial enthusiasm for learning can be quickly thwarted by unfortunate early encounters with technology.’ It is important to introduce the learning tools students will need within a no-stakes orientation period rather than expecting them to master them while grappling with academic content. The technology is only one piece of the jigsaw, however. Learning online involves whole new styles of learning with which most students will be unfamiliar. Orientation periods provide an opportunity to introduce students to these different styles by designing activities that will help them ‘become technically oriented, discover key functions, and ascertain how online tasks can be performed’ (Motteram and Forrester, 2005, p.286). They can also be used to identify and introduce key administrative and academic staff, provide information about the programme of study and show students how to perform critical functions, such as submitting assignments and using the library.

**ORIENTATION PROGRAMME DESIGN**

Using Salmon’s (2004) five-stage model as a basis, the team sought to deal with the first three stages in the orientation programme: Access and Motivation, Online
Socialisation and Information Exchange. According to Salmon (2004, p.107), orientation to online studying ‘requires a staged but extensive process’ involving the use of structured activities to provide the necessary scaffolds. In the design of the programme, the team drew heavily on the recommendations of Motteram and Forrester (2005) as well as Levy’s work on ‘learning to learn’ in a networked environment (Levy, 2006, p.226). Having carefully considered the type of knowledge that the students would need, four areas were identified that should be addressed in the orientation process: 1) Technical, 2) Administrative, 3) Academic (including study skills) and 4) Social and Well-being.

**TECHNICAL**

According to Levy (2006, p.227), a key focus in preparing students for online learning should be on empowering them to embrace unfamiliar learning approaches and ‘engage actively and productively with the range of pedagogical, social, informational and technical resources that are at their disposal’. Bearing this in mind, the technical component of the orientation focused mainly on the use of the VLE and the various tools that would be used to deliver the programmes. Materials included screencasts and guidance documents as well as practice-based activities such as uploading mock assignments, posting in the forums and searching for titles in the electronic library. Another key technical aspect was training in the Blackboard Collaborate™ virtual classroom, which is used for delivering webinars and small group tutorials. Over the course of the orientation, the technical support team ran a number of live sessions, which gave students an opportunity to try out the application and ensure they could use the key functions. Anyone who experienced technical issues that could not be addressed during these sessions received follow-on one-on-one support from the team.

**ADMINISTRATIVE**

Among the findings of Motteram and Forrester (2005, p.288) were that online students sought ‘knowledge of who to contact about specific queries’ and clear guidance about what was expected of them throughout the programme. To address this, information about the programme staff and structure was made available during the orientation and tasks that required them to use this information were included. Questions on key processes were included in the weekly quizzes that acted as a refresher for the weeks’ activities. These quizzes served to reinforce students’ knowledge of where to find the information required (Roediger and Butler, 2013). In tandem with the general administrative items that need to be attended to on any academic programme, the online nature of the PME programmes is associated with additional administrative aspects. For example, the orientation included a focus on appropriate online communication and introduced students to guidelines for communicating in the discussion forums. It also required explicit guidance on aspects relating to the online submission of continuous assessments.

**ACADEMIC**

The academic aspect of orientation is mainly concerned with what Levy (2006, p.227) refers to as ‘the development of meta-cognitive and other practical capabilities… which contribute to learners’ effectiveness’. Here, the focus was on equipping students to engage with their studies at master’s degree level but also to attend to the added complexity that might arise from the online environment. There was a need to explain the various technological tools in the context of how they would be used in the programme. Consequently, guidance was given on the use of blogs and discussion forums as well as a step-by-step breakdown of the elements that would typically comprise an online lesson. Students also received guidance on responding to and reflecting on the feedback they would receive from tutors during the course of their studies. For students studying to become teachers, reflective practice is a critical component of their developmental journey (Jay and Johnson, 2002). During the orientation, videos and presentations were used to explain the reflective process and students were required to complete reflective tasks to add to their digital portfolios.

**SOCIAL AND WELL-BEING**

The importance of social presence and the creation of community has already been detailed above. Within the orientation programme, the team adopted a number of strategies to promote interaction and help students form networks with their peers. One was the extensive use of video to present a human face whenever possible, thus contributing to the sense of social presence (Borup et al., 2012). Motteram and Forrester (2005, p.285) found that distance students felt that video introduced ‘a more human’ element to online learning. In addition, students were asked to upload a photograph of themselves to the VLE to help establish presence (Cyr et al., 2007) and assist their classmates in identifying them when they met at onsite events. Another key community-building activity was the inclusion of an introductions forum thread where students were invited to tell their classmates about themselves. This was designed to introduce students to those who might be geographically close to them. Of key interest was engagement between people from the same regional areas as these would be coming together throughout the programme for small
group tutorials. Throughout the orientation, forum questions were posted that were designed to elicit engagement by focusing on issues that were felt to be of interest to students.

For all students, but particularly those juggling study with work, as many distance students are, time management is a key issue (Motteram and Forrester, 2005). Levy (2006, p.222) found that students require ‘self-management skills to cope with information overload and time constraints’. In order to address this, the team created a number of activities designed to help students appreciate the time commitment involved in the programme and manage their time accordingly. In addition, a forum thread was created in which they could share time-management strategies they found useful.

ORIENTATION STRUCTURE

The orientation was run over two weeks and it was available for students to return throughout their time on the programme. During this two-week period, to allow them to focus on their orientation tasks, students were not given any academic work. The material was released on a week-by-week basis. Tasks addressing each of the core elements were added to the VLE under the following colour-coded headings: Technical, Programme (which incorporates the academic and administrative aspect) and Social and Well-being. To provide additional motivation to complete the orientation tasks, students could earn two digital badges — one for Social and Well-being and one for Technical — by completing all tasks that related to these headings. Digital badges and such ‘gamified’ elements have been touted for their potential for increasing engagement in online environments (Glover, 2013).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The evaluation sought to assess the usefulness of the orientation in preparing students for their blended programme of study. The focus was on a cohort of 578 students’ perceptions of the extent to which the orientation helped prepare them for online study and whether it affected how they felt about such study. Quantitative methodology emanating from the philosophy of logical positivism was chosen as the most appropriate way of addressing the aim of the research (Cohen et al., 2007). Quantitative data collection methods included questionnaires and observations of student engagement in the VLE. Two anonymous surveys were designed as a means of generating a high-level view on whether the orientation was serving its intended purpose and how the student population engaged with it. The evaluative survey featured nine multiple-choice questions that required students to agree or disagree with various statements about the orientation using a five-point Likert scale (Cohen et al., 2007). Two open-ended questions were included. Another pre- and post- five-point Likert-scale survey was designed to gauge student sentiment before and after the orientation.

One of the drawbacks of using surveys as a research method is the likelihood of response bias (Furnham, 1986). Observational research, in contrast, focuses on what the subjects actually do and, thus, it can be useful when conducting an evaluation to triangulate observation data with survey data. A useful feature of VLEs is that they create a record of every student interaction with them. This record can provide a proxy measure of engagement (Lonn et al., 2015; Douglas and Alemanne, 2007; Friesen, 2013). It should be noted that quantitative measures of engagement, such as student views and clicks in the VLE, provide only a limited perspective on the student experience. They make no claims as to the quality of that engagement or the meaning of that engagement for the participant. Moreover, they do not in themselves provide conclusive evidence of the usefulness of the orientation materials. Nevertheless, previous studies have found positive correlations between VLE activity of this nature and student performance in academic programmes (Agudo-Peregrina et al., 2014; Ramos and Yudko, 2008) and so it is reasonable to consider it a useful indicator for providing a high-level view of engagement with the orientation process. This type of analysis is one component of the growing field of learning analytics, which has been defined as ‘the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimising learning and the environments in which it occurs’ (Siemens, 2013, p.1382).

ETHICS, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Before the study began, ethical approval was sought and granted by Hibernia College’s Ethics Committee. Following approval, the pre- and post-orientation surveys were inserted as links within the orientation in the VLE. The pre-orientation survey remained live for two weeks after the orientation was over; the post-orientation survey was live for a further two weeks.

Following the closing of the surveys, the data were exported to Microsoft Excel and cleansed by removing duplicate and blank entries. The evaluation data were analysed within Excel. The pre- and post-orientation data were merged and transferred into SPSS v22. The before and after scores were then compared using the Mann-Whitney U test.

To analyse the VLE usage data, the logs were downloaded to Excel two weeks
after the orientation ended. The data were cleansed by removing academic and administrative staff. Following this, usage scores were generated for the following variables for each student: forum activity (including posts and views), forum posts, blog posts, quiz submissions, other activities and total activities. Score in this case relates to the number of actions — clicks or views — performed in the VLE. Following this, the data were transferred into SPSS v22 for analysis.

STUDENT EVALUATION OF ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

Students were asked a total of nine questions designed to gauge how useful they found the programme. A total of 556 students completed the survey, representing a response rate of 96%. The results can be seen in Figures 1 to 4.

Figure 1: General Thoughts on Orientation

Figure 2: Length of Orientation

Figure 3: Helpfulness of Orientation

Figure 4: Supports, Expectations and Tools
The survey also included two open-ended questions to give students an opportunity to highlight anything they thought was missing from the orientation and to make any further comments they might have had. In total, 30 (5.4%) of the 556 respondents completed this part. Of these, 7 (23%) felt they would have liked to have received more detail about the timetable for the academic programme. The other 23 identified disparate items, with only five issues being raised by more than one person. In relation to further comments, a total of 41 (7.4%) respondents provided feedback here. Of these, 23 (56.1%) left comments that could be considered positive, for example, thanking the team for the orientation or stating that they found it useful. The remaining 18 comments were quite varied although there was some overlap between the issues raised. Three respondents expressed a degree of anxiety about having to post forum contributions or blog posts that would be accessible to large groups of students and expressed a preference for carrying out such activities in smaller groups.

**SENTIMENT TOWARDS ONLINE LEARNING**

A total of 522 students out of a possible cohort of 578 (90.3%) completed the pre-orientation questionnaire. The results can be seen in Figure 5.

A total of 556 students completed the post-orientation survey, representing a response rate of 96%. The results are presented in Figure 6.
In order to discover if there had been a statistically significant change in attitude towards online learning, the data were analysed in SPSS using the Mann-Whitney U test since the Likert data were ordinal. The findings for each of the questions are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Attitude Changes Pre and Post Orientation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Mann-Whitney U</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like using new technology tools.</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>137,752.00</td>
<td>-1.535</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre: n = 522; post: n = 555</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel confident about using the VLE.</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>117,700.00</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre: n = 522; post: n = 555</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that online courses offer good opportunities for collaborative work.</td>
<td>0.585</td>
<td>141,543.50</td>
<td>-0.547</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre: n = 522; post: n = 552</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that online courses allow for effective engagement with tutors.</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>118,700.00</td>
<td>-5.501</td>
<td>0.168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre: n = 522; post: n = 553</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that online courses offer good opportunities for social interaction.</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>127,362.50</td>
<td>-3.591</td>
<td>0.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre: n = 522; post: n = 553</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect to make new friends on this programme.</td>
<td>0.687</td>
<td>142,482.00</td>
<td>-0.403</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre: n = 521; post: n = 555</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident that I will be able to manage my time effectively.</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>134,668.50</td>
<td>-2.021</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre: n = 521; post: n = 552</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ENGAGEMENT PER STUDENT**

Engagement with the orientation overall was very high, with 574 out of a possible 578 (99%) students engaging at some level. As can be seen from Figure 7, activity was concentrated over the two weeks the orientation programme was officially running. Although it peaked in week one, it remained very strong in week two. By week three, however, when the official academic programme started, it had decreased substantially.

![Figure 7: Orientation Engagement by Week](image)

In total, 191,714 actions (page views or edits) were recorded over the four-week period observed, an average of about 334 actions per participant, which equates to roughly 4.5 actions per participant per activity. Histograms were created for actions within the orientation as a whole as well as the specific components mentioned above. All except forum posts, blog posts and quiz submissions were determined to be normally distributed. Tables 2 and 3 show the summary statistics for these elements.

**Table 2: Component Engagement – Normally Distributed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forum activity</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>17.80</td>
<td>7.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other activity</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>258.80</td>
<td>62.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total activity</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>334.00</td>
<td>84.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Component Engagement – Non-Normally Distributed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>IQR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiz submissions</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum posts</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog posts</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into students’ perspectives of an online orientation programme designed to help them transition to online or blended learning. Data were collected directly through solicitation of feedback and indirectly by examination of usage patterns. The study also sought to explore whether the orientation might influence students’ awareness of the affordances of online modes of study.

STUDENT EVALUATION OF ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

As can be seen from the evaluation data, the orientation programme was extremely positively received and students felt that it was valuable in helping them prepare for their academic programme. The results also suggest that the orientation achieved its purpose of making students aware of the academic and technical supports that were available to them and gave them a degree of confidence as they embarked on their academic programme. The responses to the open-ended questions reinforced the view that students were generally very well disposed to the orientation. A request for more information about timetables was signalled by a few students, and this is something that should be taken on board for future iterations. There were also a few issues raised that while not numerically large are worth bearing in mind in the future in order to enhance the student experience.

SENTIMENT TOWARDS ONLINE LEARNING

As previously discussed, one of the goals of the orientation programme was to help students to start their academic programme with a positive attitude about the affordances of studying online (Motteram and Forrester, 2005). Review of the literature had highlighted areas where online students might experience difficulty and had thrown light on important areas on which to focus (Muilenburg and Berge, 2005). Of primary concern were participants’ feelings about technology and the social and relationship aspects of online learning. In particular, there was a recognised need to foster a sense of community between students who are geographically dispersed. Another important element was students’ assessments of their ability to interact with tutors and academic staff, and whether they had confidence that they could have the sort of positive engagement that underpins good teaching and learning. While it is recognised that two weeks is a very short time in which to bring about changes in student sentiment, it was felt that a positive initial experience might go some way towards creating a mindset that was conducive to operating successfully in the online environment. Within this context, it can be determined that the online orientation was successful in creating a positive view of the possibilities of online learning. At the end of the orientation process, students showed statistically significant increases in their confidence navigating the VLE, engaging effectively with tutors and interacting socially with their peers. While they did not show statistically significant changes in their thoughts about the opportunities for collaborative work or the possibility of making friends through the programme, these were both measures on which they were highly positive before starting the orientation (84% positive and 92% positive respectively) so there was not a huge level of scope for improvement.

Engagement per student

In total, 574, out of a possible 578 (99%), students engaged with the online orientation at some level. There was a good level of forum engagement, with 496 (85.7%) of students creating a total of 1,582 forum posts in response to three forum questions. Engagement with blogs was generally lower than for other elements of the orientation. In total, 320 (55.3%) students posted a blog, compared with 574 students who participated in the orientation overall. Writing a blog post is one of the more unstructured activities that students are required to do and it may be the case that some felt uncomfortable about completing such a task. Anxiety about writing something that would be visible to all students was something that was raised as a concern by a few students in the free-text comments from the evaluation survey, so
it is plausible that this may have been one of the reasons for the relatively low levels of participation in this activity.

LIMITATIONS

Before concluding, attention is drawn to some of the limitations of this study. Although the sample size was large, it was a convenience sample taken from a very specific type of student body — master's level teacher education students in the Republic of Ireland. Moreover, the students had chosen a programme that had a significant element delivered online, so it is likely that they may be more open to studying in this manner than the general population of students. It would therefore not be advisable to generalise the findings to the wider student population. Another limitation arose from the fact that the student surveys were anonymous. Consequently, it was not possible to pair individual students' before and after responses to the survey questions. Structuring the analysis in this way might possibly have yielded a more complete view of the impact of the orientation on students' attitudes. However, this would need to be balanced by the fact that students may have been less likely to answer the questions candidly if they were required to include their names. Notwithstanding the anonymous nature of the survey, the researcher's role as a member of staff involved with the design of the orientation may have made the students more likely to rate it favourably. Finally, this was a predominantly quantitative study with only a limited qualitative element — open-response questions in the survey. More focused qualitative approaches, such as interviews, focus groups or textual analysis of blogs and forum posts, have the potential to reveal a more nuanced perspective on the student experience.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to design and evaluate an online orientation that would prepare postgraduate students to undertake a blended PME degree. The orientation sought to address those areas identified in the literature on online learning as important for creating the conditions within which students could have a positive learning experience — technology, social community, administrative matters and study skills, and time management. In conducting an evaluation of the orientation, it was considered important to gather data on how useful the participants found the orientation, how it impacted their feelings about studying online and the level to which they engaged with the programme. The data revealed very high levels of satisfaction with the orientation and a feeling among students that it had helped prepare them for their programme. Following the orientation, there was an increase in positivity regarding opportunities for interacting with tutors and classmates online. However, there was a decrease in students' confidence that they could manage the workload associated with the programme. This can probably be explained by the fact that the orientation placed quite a heavy emphasis on preparing students for the rigorous workload associated with the programme. Examination of the VLE logs revealed a high level of engagement by students, with the vast majority (99%) engaging at some level and 78% completing all Technical and Social and Well-being activities to achieve their digital badges.

The transition to online learning is not one that can be assumed to occur naturally and with ease. There is a need to engage students in purposeful action that can help prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead. This study focused on master's level students embarking on an ITE programme, but there is a need to examine the supports than can be put in place for different types of students with different needs who may be transitioning to very different types of academic programmes. There is therefore much scope for more focused work in this area. Another area on which this study touched, but was not developed due to scope limitations, was the impact of gamified elements, such as digital badges, and the part they might play in encouraging students' participation in online activities. This is a burgeoning area of research and one that could usefully be applied to the study of student orientation.
THE BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE ONLINE DELIVERY OF A MASTER’S PROGRAMME FOR EXPERIENCED TEACHERS; STUDENTS HAVE THEIR SAY

INTRODUCTION
The growth of technology has enhanced learning and virtual learning environments (VLEs) (Risquez et al., 2013) and has presented many opportunities for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), not least that an entire programme can be delivered online (Phineas, 2012; Cowen and Tabarrok, 2014). It also presents benefits to students, namely accessibility and flexibility (Cowen and Tabarrok, 2014) and the added value of VLEs for clarifying issues covered in class (Risquez et al., 2013). However, the delivery of online programmes also poses challenges for educators in that tutorials may be didactic and dominated by teacher talk with students remaining passive (Hallissy, 2016). VLEs may also pose communication challenges for students in that only 33% of students (n=15,000) found them useful for online discussions (Risquez et al., 2013). Kirkup and Kirkwood (2005) argued that the growth of online education is one of evolution rather than revolution in that technologies simply build on traditional pedagogies rather than maximising the potential of VLEs for innovative pedagogies. Through an analysis of survey data (n=40) and interviews (n=10), this chapter explores the benefits and disadvantages of an online Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning (MATL) for experienced teachers and what lessons can be learnt to ensure other online programmes are successful.

The research questions were:
What were the benefits of the online aspect of the MATL?
What were the disadvantages of the online aspect of the MATL?

This chapter commences by describing the background of the research followed by a brief look at national and international policies on technology and education and peer-reviewed literature.

BACKGROUND
The rationale for this research arises from my role as the MATL programme director (PD). The MATL was structured, formal, accredited, post-graduate and part-time — designed and taught by (mainly) primary school teachers to enhance professional development. It also attracted post-primary, early childhood education and care (ECEC) and third-level education educators. The majority were teaching in Ireland (68%) with other participants teaching in international contexts: Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Canada, China, Japan, Morocco, Singapore, South Africa, United Arab Emirates and England. This chapter explores its online delivery. The programme was validated at Level 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications (2003) by the Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC) in 2008, and the first iteration in 2009 was of three years’ duration. It was substantially redeveloped in 2012 when two new modules were added (Leadership and Ethics of Education) and Quality Qualifications Ireland (2012) revalidated it in 2013.

There were substantial changes in the Irish economy during the period 2009 – 2016. When the MATL was rolled out in 2009, primary and post-primary teachers received an incremental increase in salary; however, the collapse of the Irish economy in 2009 heralded many cutbacks in education. Incremental increases were discontinued in 2012 (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2012), consequently, the numbers applying diminished, and the programme was withdrawn in 2016; the last cohort graduated in November 2017. Another possible reason for a decline in student numbers was the title of the programme, which was a Master of Arts rather than a Master of Education (MEd). At that time, HETAC/QQI did not have a MEd award title, although the content of the programme was very similar to other MEd programmes. I commenced designing modules for the MATL in 2010 (Intercultural Education, Sociology of Education, Research Methods) and became PD in October 2012, leading the team in a successful programmatic review with QQI in 2013. In addition to my role as PD, I tutored, assessed and supervised students’ research.

PROGRAMME DESIGN
The programme was fully delivered online in a VLE (Techtarget, 2011) called the Higher Education Learning Management System (HELMs). A constructivist approach (see Pasley, 2018, chapter 7) to pedagogical design was taken which encouraged exploration, enquiry and discovery based on innovative pedagogies suitable for the online learning environment. The programme was designed and developed by a team comprising the PD who oversaw the programme, subject knowledge experts (tutors) who designed modules, learning designers who converted raw lectures into asynchronous lessons (downloadable as podcasts) and visually pleasing Articulate presentations with links to outside curriculum resources, such as YouTube videos. Synchronous tutorials offered opportunities for higher-order questioning, reviewing of readings and sharing current teaching experiences.
Forums and blogs provided online learning ‘communities of interest’ for students to engage with each other in a virtual environment (Elwood and Klenowski, 2002). Tutors moderated the forums and posted higher-order questions in relation to lesson content, affording students the opportunity to connect with each other and the tutor. Connectivism explains how technological advances are changing the way teachers teach and students learn (Marais, 2010). It refers to the capacity of learners to make connections in the virtual world within new specialised networks such as education to produce new knowledge and to apply this knowledge to their learning environment. Marais (2010) suggests that teaching easily transfers to the online environment by gaining the learner’s attention; informing them of the learning objectives, outcomes and assessment strategies; stimulating recall of prior learning; presenting stimulus in the form of content to the learner; providing guidance; eliciting performance through instructional activities; providing feedback; assessing performance; and enhancing retention and transfer.

Other teaching and learning strategies, such as peer learning (student presentations) and collaborative student learning were used. All lessons were constructively aligned with programme and module learning outcomes and assignments (Biggs and Tang, 2011). Learning sessions had built-in knowledge checks and quizzes to encourage formative learning. Assignments combined theory and reflective practice, and students used everyday authentic experiences to illustrate their assignments (Whitaker, 2017). Students uploaded assignments on their due deadlines and got timely feedback based on a rubric of criteria supporting Risquez et al.’s (2013) assertion that the use of the VLE can lead to ‘improved staff-student communication, assessment and feedback’ (p.106). For example, students posted questions about the assessment, and when the tutor responded, all students gained from the interaction.

Software programmes such as AT&T Connect® and Blackboard Collaborate™ were used for synchronous tutorials. The tutorials were recorded and posted online to be accessed later by students who could not attend or those who wished to revise or reinforce information. All faculty received training on how to teach online and how to moderate the forums. They engaged in a peer review process where best practices and learning needs were identified and circulated to all tutors. To ensure quality assurance, student feedback was elicited at the end of each module and at the end of the programme. The feedback was shared with tutors and changes were made to modules and practices, which constitutes an important component of critical reflective practice (Brookfield, 1995). The MATL was the first fully online master’s degree in Ireland and, initially, tutors found the new technology daunting. However, as time went on, they became more competent and confident teaching online. This experience was replicated in a study of lecturers involved in the creation of an undergraduate nursing programme through blended learning (Sweeney et al., 2016).

In designing the MATL, cognizance was taken of Koehler and Mishra’s TPACK framework for integrating technology into teaching (Koehler and Mishra, 2009). Their work built on Shulman’s (1986, cited in Koehler et al., 2014, p.102) concept of pedagogical content knowledge, referring to how teachers interpret and present knowledge to learners and the complex interaction of three bodies of knowledge: content, pedagogy, and technology (Koehler et al., 2014).

POLICY ON ONLINE EDUCATION

National and European policies highlight the importance of using new technologies to enhance teaching, learning and assessment in higher education. The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, DES) suggests that key challenges to teaching and learning lie in the development and adoption of new forms of pedagogy for greater student engagement (DES, 2011, p.52). It argues that traditional teaching methods in higher education such as
Because they will be able to introduce ‘economies of scale’, they suggest that ultimately online courses may be less expensive for colleges to run.

ONLINE PROGRAMMES

Phineas (2012) suggests that the growth of open and distance learning (ODL) courses is a result of their flexibility (students can work and study at the same time). They can increase the participation of those who cannot access traditional universities due to geographical, domestic or financial constraints. Phineas (2012) surveyed 400 students and conducted interviews with a small sample of students and lecturers in an investigation of an online programme for adult learners in South Africa. He found that learner support and contact discussion classes were critical to the success of student learning (Phineas, 2012). Cowen and Tabarrok (2014) suggested that there are benefits associated with online education: opportunities for access to quality faculty, less repetition, greater flexibility, increased opportunity for productivity, incentives to invest in quality improvements, greater and more immediate feedback that is measurable and, finally, that online courses are less expensive to produce. They suggest that ultimately online courses may be less expensive for colleges to run because they will be able to introduce ‘economies of scale’ (Cowen and Tabarrok, 2014). Bowen et al. (2012, cited in Cowen and Tabarrok) found that the quality of education delivered by online courses is just as good as traditional courses and that students internalised as much content in a quarter less study time, in addition to saving time travelling to college. Russell (1999, cited in Layton, 1999) collated the findings from 355 research reports, summaries and papers relating to the use of technology, particularly in relation to distance learning compared to alternative teaching methods. He found that there was no significant difference between distance learning and alternative teaching methods in classrooms (Layton, 1999).

Weschke et al. (2011) examined the efficacy of a graduate online programme in enhancing teacher effectiveness in the public elementary school system in the United States of America. They studied 70 teachers and observed their students on 3,828 occasions to determine whether graduates could improve the reading skills of their students in a large urban public school. The results of the study indicated that the online teacher education programme had significant and positive effects on their pedagogical practices (Weschke et al., 2011). This study:

> …also gives traditional teacher education programmes further evidence that it is possible to create a standards-based education programme that can be delivered fully online and meet the diverse access and learning needs of schools, teachers, and students. (Weschke et al., 2011, p.36)

Dede et al. (2010) conducted a broad sweep review of 400 articles on online teacher professional development (oTPD), guided by the following questions:

Did the research have a clear research question?
Were the methods, analysis and findings informed by a research question?
Were they rigorous?

Of the 400 articles, they found only 40 articles that fitted their criteria for high-quality empirical research. The four major themes arising from the studies were programme design, programme effectiveness, programme technical design and learner interactions. Their findings challenge Russells’ (1999) theory of no significant difference and argue that online professional communities can enhance teacher effectiveness but that this is highly dependent on leadership. They recommend further research on oTPD in order to build collective usable knowledge — knowledge from insights from research that can inform practice (Dede et al., 2009). Roval and Jordan (2004) conducted a causal comparative study to examine the relationship between ‘sense of community’ in traditional, blended and full online courses in higher education and found that blended learning produces a better sense of community (Roval and Jordan, 2004).
RESEARCH DESIGN

This study took a pragmatic approach based on the philosophy of pragmatism blending key tenets of logical positivism, interpretivism and constructivism (Hammersley, 2012). To address the research questions, a combination of quantitative (survey) and qualitative methods (interviews) was used. This use of mixed methods enhanced validity and reliability (Sarantakos, 2013) and ensured there was breadth and depth.

QUANTITATIVE METHODS

The first phase of data collection was based on a survey of all graduates of the programme (n=131). Based on concepts arising from the literature review, indicators in the form of 49 questions were designed (de Vaus, 1996). A mix of question types was used: forced choice, Likert Scales and open-ended questions (Bell, 2005). One forced choice and two open-ended questions were asked about the benefits and disadvantages of online delivery:

- Did the fact that the MATL was delivered 100% online influence your decision to register for the programme? Please select [yes] or [no].
- What were the benefits of the online aspect of the MATL?
- What were the disadvantages of the online aspect of the MATL?

To increase the validity of the questionnaire, it was piloted on a similar but smaller sample (three primary school teachers) (de Vaus, 1996). The questionnaire was administered via email with a link to the electronic survey (survey.net) to all teachers who had completed the programme. The response rate was 40 completed questionnaires; based on a confidence level of 95%, the margin of error is 13%.

QUALITATIVE METHODS AND SAMPLE

The second phase of the research used a qualitative methodology with a constructivist approach (Sarantakos, 2013). Initially, graduates were contacted via email, the study was explained to them and 10 participants volunteered to participate, which may be described as a purposive sample (Bell, 2005). Six interviews were conducted using Skype; two were telephone interviews, with the remaining two face-to-face. Cohen et al. (2007, p.153) suggest that telephone interviews can be more reliable because the interviewee may feel freer to disclose information and be more forthcoming with material. All interviews were relaxed and provided ‘thick descriptions’ of experiences of professional development (Cohen et al., 2007). To ensure anonymity, participants were asked to provide a pseudonym based on the first seven letters of the alphabet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Educational Profile</th>
<th>Experience (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Primary school teacher teaching in rural Ireland</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbey</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Primary school teacher now working in HEI that provides initial teacher education</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blathnaid</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Primary school teacher teaching in urban Ireland</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Irish teacher working in higher education in Japan</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Primary school teacher working in South Africa</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Primary school teacher teaching in urban Ireland</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deirdre</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Irish primary school teacher working in a private school in China</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emer</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Primary school teacher working in urban school</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Primary school teacher teaching in suburban school in rural Ireland (entered MATL through RPL)</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gemma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Post-primary school teacher teaching in rural Ireland</td>
<td>32 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Primary school teacher teaching in an urban school</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DATA ANALYSIS

The data from the online survey were imported into Microsoft Excel. Preliminary data analysis was conducted using simple descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions focusing on one variable, and bivariate analysis (Sarantakos, 2013). The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, which ensured familiarity with the data. Whereas quantitative methods use deduction, qualitative analysis uses inductive analysis, which is the process of discovering patterns and themes in one’s data (Quinn Patton, 2002). Interviews were imported into a software package for analysing qualitative data (QSR NVivo) and two nodes were created: benefits and disadvantages of online delivery.
ETHICAL ISSUES

This research complies with the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines (BERA, 2011). An ethics committee provided ethical approval. All participants were over the age of 18 years and were provided with a research information sheet and consent form. They were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time up to four weeks prior to the report being published. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality in that their name or the name of their school would never appear in any published document. The research complies with Data Protection Acts (Government of Ireland, 2003) in that data were stored on a password-protected computer and the data was used for the purposes for which they were gathered and will be destroyed at an appropriate time.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the online survey and interviews. The vast majority of respondents (90%) stated that the online delivery of the MATL influenced their decision to take the programme.

BENEFITS OF ONLINE DELIVERY OF MATL

Responses to the question on the benefits of the online delivery were categorised into four themes: Accessibility, Flexibility, Enhanced ICT and Access to an online library (ebrary).

Figure 1: Benefits of Online Delivery of MATL

These themes also emerged from the interviews, in addition to other themes: embedded technology, cost, availability of resources, work-life balance, networking and access to tutors.

ACCESSIBILITY

Many of the teachers were working parents, so the online delivery enhanced accessibility and meant that they did not have to travel, could look after their children, and combine work and study, as exemplified in the following statements:

I could study at home, which saved time, money and effort. I didn't have to organise the babysitting of children. I could organise and manage my time around my home life.

And another mother stated:

This was hugely beneficial as it allowed me to incorporate my teaching, family and study life. I know of several teachers who dropped out of [master's programmes] as the driving was just too arduous. Being able to come home, log in, study and attend lectures from home was invaluable.

Grades living in rural areas or abroad found that the ‘freedom to access material at a time that suits and no travel time’ were major benefits.

Accessibility from abroad, live interactive lectures, suits without interrupting work.

And

I lived in the countryside at the time, so I would have had to travel a long distance to attend an onsite.

And

...it suited me because I was working and I’m based in a town where there are no colleges nearby, so I would have had at least a 45-minute journey if I was to do a master’s in a college like in traditional setting. So just it gave me that freedom to be able to study.

And

Oh! The fact that I was in China and I could still do it.

These findings concur with Phineas (2012), who suggested that online programmes can lead to increased access by those who cannot access traditional universities due
to geographical constraints.

**FLEXIBILITY**

Online delivery enhanced flexibility, which meant that students could combine study with travel. One student described how he listened to the learning sessions/online lectures as he drove to and from work every day. Others extolled the benefit of saving on travel time by not having to drive to a college.

Flexibility – I could get an Irish master’s while living and working in Africa.

And

I found the online learning was flexible with a busy lifestyle. I did not have to travel, which saved time.

And

I spend a lot of time commuting by train, so the chance to use that time more effectively was an advantage. Also, living in Japan means that I need to do a programme online — there is little choice. I also like that online enables me to plan study time around work and family commitments.

And

I could study at a time that suited me and didn’t have to add on an hour or more commuting to a university and the associated costs of public transport, parking etc. You’re not grounded down to [a location], I [don’t] have to set off on a journey to a place, worry about getting parked, I found the flexibility that the online learning gives you is great.

These data are supported by Phineas (2012), who suggested that students choose open and distance learning because of their flexibility. Risquez et al., (2013) reported that the VLE increases flexibility because it changes the hours that students can study. In their research, 89% of students (n=15,000) accessed the VLE from home and outside ‘normal’ working hours (Risquez et al., 2013, p.104).

**EMBEDDED TECHNOLOGY**

Technology was embedded and integrated into all aspects of programme delivery, which improved students' ICT skills, as exemplified in the following statement:

My research skills and computer [skills] really improved, I was very good at computers/tech before I began, but MATL celebrated my skills both through ICT module but more so through the format of delivery of the course and my engagement with participants.

This obligatory interaction with technology modelled good practice for students and provided them with ways of enhancing their own teaching in the classroom. This resonates with Koehler and Mishra’s TPACK framework that 21st-century teachers seamlessly integrate content, pedagogy and technology (Mishra and Koehler, 2006).

**RESOURCES**

Students expressed the positive benefits of the online library and having other resources readily available, including access to recorded lectures and tutorials, PDFs, and the fact that the written word was available either in blogs, forums or emails.

The online library was very useful as I did not have to leave home to study.

And

Access to library resources helped me to learn even when I was out of country, with basically an Internet connection.

Students could listen back to lectures and presentations and enjoyed the availability of resources such as PDFs and other forms of written communication like emails.

For my own personal study skills, I could listen back to presentations. I could pause them and take a break, because the reading was available online; it was always at the tips of my fingers. In terms of organisation, it was also very handy because I could find articles and presentations easily.

And

…it was a godsend. I mean I could get all these PDFs. I was in this paradise. I couldn't believe them. They were all here for me. So, that was wonderful. I've always been fine with email … the written word — because for me it's a thought process. I think if you sit down and you write an email and before you send it, you know, you reread it. …we couldn't partake in the tutorials because of the online time difference and that was quite interesting. Of course, we listened back afterwards and maybe [took] a little bit more from it in a way.

Another student based in Japan described how the supervision of the dissertation worked well because his supervisor gave him feedbacks in emails whereas he might
have forgotten the feedback if it had been given to him on a face-to-face basis.

She [the supervisor] was fantastic; she was really good. Communicating online, the emails back and forward I think were the way to go because looking back on that... if we did it over the phone, I'm pretty sure I'd have hung up the phone, turned around and done something else and the next day go, 'Well what did she say again now?' That's where if it's written down it was just so good. That was the big take for me from the whole course in a way. I couldn't stress that enough; write it down, get your thoughts on paper. They may not be correct, they may not be exactly what you want, but it's in some shape there. And the forums...we talked about the blogs and the forums. That was wonderful.

This finding resonates with Risquez et al.'s (2013) research that the ability to access resources such as lecture notes was reported by students as being one of the most positive benefits of using a VLE.

COST

Respondents cited reduced costs and time saving as benefits in that it saved on petrol and travel expenses not having to go to a College locally or abroad. They did not have to forego income because they were able to combine study with their work.

Clare from South Africa said:

I think it worked to my advantage. I am a very firm believer in online learning. It's cheaper. If this programme wasn't online, there was no way I could have done a master's because here I would have had to go fulltime or I would have had to come to Ireland for two years. In terms of expenses, I wouldn't have afforded that. Whereas online, I paid my tuition fees and I could access all the information. You know, I could talk to fellow students. I could talk to lecturers. I could engage in tutorials. It was excellent for me. One of the benefits that I had was I could still work and study. I could still earn an income. It didn't affect my income at all, and I could still be able to pay for my studies. And I could still do it from the comfort of my own home. So, to me, that was a big factor.

And

I didn't have the cost of travelling to incorporate into my weekly budget.

Deirdre living in China said:

...not be treated as an overseas student either which, you know, [makes it] affordable.

This finding is supported by Li and Irby (2008), who suggested that online programmes may be more affordable for students.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The online nature of the MATL programme meant that they did not have to forego leisure pursuits, for example:

Alan:

You can actually do it all around what suits you, which means you can do everything as opposed to, if I was in college from 5:00 to 10:00 on a Wednesday and there was a Champions League Soccer or maybe a 5-a-Side going on ahead, I'd miss both of those and it might upset me ... affect my performance at work. You can do everything; watch your match, do your 5-a-Sides and then get your studies done as well. I do think that it was really good.

Abbey also spoke about being able to access the programme even when she was on holidays:

I never felt that it took away from that energy because, for me, my job was the first importance and then my study. I was able to do the two. It was flexible; there was a lot that happened in my own personal life throughout, but it was fine. I could still access it wherever I was. I was living out of home, then I moved back home, then I went travelling. It was fine; I could still access the course content.

The work-life balance is related to the flexibility of the online learning environment. Huge sacrifices do not need to be made; work, study and leisure can all be managed effectively. Citing Deal (2002), Li and Irby (2008, p.5) argue that 'online programmes also make it possible for parents to drop off their children at a soccer practice and work on their class project at the same time'.

NETWORKING

Some students believed that it was easier to network and make friends in an online environment.
...you could talk with your other participants, you know, in your private chats if you
wanted to put a question that everybody engaged in. I thought that was really, really
good. I would say that the whole networking idea with people from a wide range of
backgrounds and locations was great. Because a lot of the time, I think when you're
face-to-face, people are rushing away but when you're sitting in front of a computer,
people have a little bit of time. And they say, ‘...this is a really good discussion.’ Or
they might hang back and you make new friends that way where you’re contacting
by phone and you don’t have to drive to meet them, you know, as you have to do... face-to-face. So, I thought it was really good...

I developed really good professional and social friendships with these people as well.
I was very surprised from that perspective. I really felt that it was as meaningful now
as if I was going in and out [to College].

The data suggests that the online environment mediates relationships — not having
to meet people on a face-to-face basis could mean that learners transcend physical
or personal attributes based on normative expectations (Goffman, 1956) and simply
relate to others as fellow educators. For example, groups that may be stigmatised
(Goffman, 1963; Whitaker et al., 2012) in other contexts due to disability, race,
religion, shyness, age or sexual orientation can have a heightened sense of equality
in the online environment.

ACCESSING TUTORS

Some students believed that it was easier to access the tutors.

In the online learning, you could contact your tutors.

DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE DELIVERY OF MATL

The disadvantages of the online aspect of the programme included feelings of
isolation and loneliness, time-zone differences, no face-to-face contact, some tutors
were not good at creating an online community of practice, and technology (power
outages). However, some students said that there were no disadvantages. These
themes are summarised in the following pie chart.

Figure 2: Disadvantages of Online Delivery of MATL

Lack of Face-to-Face Contact
Participants described the lack of face-to-face contact.

Not having face-to-face contact with other students
And
Missed face-to-face classroom interaction
And
I am a visual learner so I did miss...the non-verbal communication.

One graduate stated that doing the dissertation was particularly challenging.

Yes, in truth, I found the thesis very difficult. I really struggled with it as it was just me and the laptop. We all pursued different topics and I lost confidence in my ability to continue. I remember feeling like this in college too, but then I would engage with my classmates in [the] college library or after class in [the] college canteen and somehow we all got through it. That support online was just not there. It made it so much harder; it was only at the final stages of the MATL I began to fully understand that I needed a connection with tutors and classmates beyond what online format could offer.
Some students suggested that a meet-and-greet session at the beginning would have been helpful.

At times, especially at the beginning, it may have been useful to have meet-and-greet face-to-face sessions to get to know colleagues and tutors.

Students spoke about the isolation of the online environment in a programme committee meeting, so I arranged for two cohorts of students to meet in the college on a Saturday morning, and students abroad could phone in using Skype. Although this helped to mitigate feelings of isolation for those present, the time differences for students in the Far East meant that they could not attend.

FEELINGS OF ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

In terms of feeling isolated and lonely, the following quotations highlight this issue:

I found it quite lonely.
And
Feeling isolated. I wish I had met the other students at some point, preferable at the beginning. I didn't really feel I could lean on anyone properly through the forums, and people in my 'real life' just didn't really understand the pressure of completing the course.
And
Sometimes I was isolated; saying that, the tutors made a great effort to use group work and encouraged students to contact each other via Skype. I did get to know two participants through this type of collaboration.

Although some students found online learning isolating, Alan blamed himself for not making a greater effort.

The only disadvantage I would say is that I didn't really know what anyone else was doing. You know what kind of views they were taking of any sort of, I mean any essay we were doing... I had no idea if I was interpreting it the right way or if I was going along it the right way. I just did what I thought and I suppose if you had someone else to talk to and discuss it with, you know, I think it might maybe have given you [a] better sense of and confidence in doing the assignment. Whereas I was just doing it, I wonder is this right? I'm not sure. That was my major disadvantage. But... that can be rectified in the sense that I could have emailed them. I met them all for the first time at the graduation and they all seemed so lovely. I think it would have been very helpful if I had made the effort. But I suppose in the online course, you're not forced to make the effort because you don't have to. Whereas, if you are sitting beside them in a lecture hall, it's a lot easier to, easier or it's easier facilitated, to talk to somebody if they're there beside you.

TIME-ZONE DIFFERENCES

Students living abroad and in other time zones were not able to connect with other students in tutorials, but instead had to listen back to them, as reflected in the following comment:

The only disadvantage was that, because of the time zone factor, I couldn't attend more tutorials.
And
The different time zones did not allow me to join in live tutorials due to work commitments.

TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGES

Challenges with technology and complaints about the tutorial software were stated.
Occasional Wi-Fi issues
And
I learn better in person, and some of the technical issues were tricky and time-consuming to resolve.
And
Tutorial software was very unreliable and often logged me out or did not work.
Clare from South Africa was often affected by power outages:
...they could just shed off power and I would worry; I don't know how long power would be gone. I couldn't log on. I couldn't access the Internet. That was the only thing I would have, a thunder storm and then all the network was down. That was the only disadvantage.

TUTORS INEFFECTICITY
Respondents highlighted the fact that some tutors were not good at creating an online community of practice. Tutors should be less concerned with technology and more concerned with building social relationships and online communities (Gilet-Swan, 2017).

Lack of connection with tutors. Less meaningful conversation/discussion during tutorials
And
A sense of community could have been developed further; some tutors were more aware of building that community than others; technical issues at times.

Finally, some graduates found no disadvantages with the online dimension of the programme.

None, as I found the support provided was excellent
And
Absolutely nothing for me!

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
This chapter explored the benefits and challenges of the online delivery of the MATL through an analysis of surveys (n=40) and interviews (n=10) with programme participants. It identified learning to ensure success of other online programmes.

Although marketed as a fully online programme, a small minority of students (10%) did not choose it for that reason. There were many benefits, for example, it was accessible (overseas students could take the programme and those living in rural areas did not have to travel, thus saving money and time). As the students came from diverse educational backgrounds, it provided a particularly rich learning experience. It was flexible (students could study at a time that suited them and could combine study with travel by listening to podcasts) and their technology skills improved because technology was embedded in all aspects of the programme. Access to an online library (ebrary) and the availability of auditory and reading resources were benefits. Students' had work-life balance in that they could combine childcare, personal relationships and pursuit of leisure activities with study and work. The online nature of the delivery did not deter students from networking, making friends and developing professional relationships. The disadvantages of the online delivery included no face-to-face contact and feelings of isolation and loneliness.

A team of experts combined technological, pedagogical and content knowledge (Koehler et al., 2014) to design and deliver the programme. No issues arose in terms of programme design or technical design (Dede et al., 2010). The findings challenge Kirkup and Kirkwood’s (2005) claim that technologies simply build on traditional pedagogies rather than maximising the potential of VLEs for innovative pedagogies. The design of the programme, incorporated tutor mediated forums and blogs and formative learning was enhanced by inbuilt quizzes in learning sessions.

Issues arose in terms of tutor effectiveness, suggesting that those teaching online should be fully prepared to meet the challenges of online learning and should optimise the potential of VLEs to build social relationships and create a positive online community (Gilet-Swan, 2017; Kirkup and Kirkwood, 2005).

In conclusion, this study adds to our knowledge and understanding of the benefits and challenges of VLEs and online learning from a learner’s perspective. The majority of students on the MATL found the online delivery advantageous and, as such, it could be seen as an example of good practice. However, fully online programmes are not recommended for all students; some students require face-to-face contact and personal support to minimise feelings of isolation.
6
REFLECTIONS ON THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF DISTANCE SUPERVISION OF A MASTER’S STUDENT CONDUCTING RESEARCH

Jemimah Bailey

Successful supervision requires experimentation and negotiation between the supervisor and the student so that they can settle into a default technology or set of default technologies which suits them both. (Sussex, 2008, p.135)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out to explore and reflect on the experiences of providing research supervision in a ‘distance learning’ setting, drawing on the author’s supervisory relationship with a student working on his master’s research project in Asia. The chapter adopts a reflexive approach, taking the opportunity to examine the processes of the supervisory relationship and to ‘examine the implications of some of [the] theoretical and empirical deliberations’ (Bryman, 2016, p.63) of the literature on research supervision. Reflexivity requires that researchers should think through the ‘implications of their methods, values, biases and decisions’ (Bryman, 2016, p.388) for the knowledge that they generate. Much of the literature and the best-practice guidelines on the supervision of post-graduate students focuses on the doctoral supervision relationship, with master’s level supervision referred to briefly, but with very little specific guidance on this type of supervision, despite the fact that master’s graduates made up around 20% of the 2016 Irish postgraduate cohort (HEA, 2017, p.58, own calculations). Yet there are obvious differences between the master’s postgraduate and the doctoral postgraduate. Thus, one of the key questions that arose around this specific experience of the supervisor-student relationship was:

- How different is the supervisor-student relationship in a master’s versus a PhD context?

In addition, literature on supervising research students is primarily based on the traditional, direct contact/face-to-face supervision model rather than one of a distance supervision model. This led to two further key questions to reflect on during the supervision process:

- What are the challenges of distance supervision?
- What are the benefits of a distance supervision relationship?

The chapter starts by introducing the context of the supervision; gives a brief overview of the literature on distance learning and research supervision; and then moves on to describe and reflect on the experiences of a specific supervisor-student interaction. It concludes with some thoughts on the lessons learned from the experiences of this case.

CONTEXT OF SUPERVISION

For the purposes of this chapter, I refer to the student I supervised as Tom (not his real name). I discussed the work I undertook for this chapter with him; I sought and received his permission to quote from some of our correspondence. Tom completed his research project as part of the final capstone of his master’s programme in teaching and learning. He works teaching English as a foreign language in an Asian university setting, and his research focused on the use of technology and mobile learning during his English language classes.

I was contracted to act as master’s research supervisor over a seven-month period by the student’s institution. At the outset of the process, Tom had already identified his research topic, submitted a research proposal to the institution, and had identified his methodological approach, planning to use both questionnaires and a small number of qualitative interviews. He had also completed a module in research methods as part of his master’s programme. This meant that the focus of the supervisor-student interaction was primarily on the fieldwork, data collection and analysis, and the writing up of the dissertation (15,000 words) rather than on the formulation of a research topic.

This chapter sets out to address some key questions that were triggered both by the experiences of supervising the student and also that arose from the literature on research supervision at postgraduate level. By looking at these questions, the aim is to provide some reflections on the supervisory style used in the distance learning situation and how this ‘fits’ with the discussions on supervisory models (Gurr, 2010, Guerin et al., 2015) and their effectiveness. Additionally, this chapter aims to look at the specific challenges and benefits of the supervisor-student relationship at a distance in the context of broader discussions on distance supervision.
DISTANCE LEARNING

Distance learning is not a recent phenomenon. It dates to the 1700s when 'students and instructors exchanged information (assignments, notes and tests) through the postal system' (Harper et al., 2004, p.588). New forms of technology regularly lead to new ways of delivering distance education. In the 1920s, radios were used to offer educational courses (Harper et al., 2004), and the establishment of the Open University (OU) in the United Kingdom in 1969 saw 'a commitment to use broadcast media and OU published texts as a means of teaching and communicating' (Young, 2011, p.95). The arrival of the Internet and digital forms of communication has resulted in further expansion of distance learning and, corresponding with this, a growth in the literature examining the characteristics and challenges of distance learning and supervision.

Nasiri and Mafakheri (2015) identify a number of studies that have explored the challenges of distance postgraduate research supervision and conclude that there are gaps in the literature with regard to developing 'appropriate and effective strategies to address these challenges' (p.1964). The challenges result from the 'difficulties of dislocation in time and space' (Sussex, 2008, p.125) that inevitably arise in the distance learning situation. Unlike more conventional supervisor-student relationships, opportunity for face-to-face communication between student and supervisor may be limited, or even non-existent, given that the individuals are in different geographical locations and may also be in different time zones.

An effective supervisor-supervisee relationship needs open, frank and bi-directional interchange. Developing relationships with such students takes time, and sustaining them requires special ongoing work. The interaction of relationships with information and communication channels therefore needs special attention. (Sussex, 2008, p.124)

Unlike traditional supervisor-student environments, distance students are unlikely to have the opportunity to discuss their research and dissertation processes informally with peer groups and report that a major source of stress is 'not knowing what [is] expected from them and not receiving sufficient support and feedback from supervisors' (Silinda and Brubacher, 2016, p.11)

HOW DIFFERENT IS THE SUPERVISOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP IN A MASTER’S VERSUS A PHD SETTING?

TIME CONSTRAINTS

Arguably, there are two key differences observed in comparing master's with PhD supervision. The first obvious one is that of time — master's students are generally working within a much tighter timescale than PhD students, and this clearly has an impact on the supervisor-student relationship. In this case, Tom had seven months to complete his research and write his dissertation of 15,000 words. This does not allow much time for the development of the student-supervisor relationship — a factor highlighted as crucial by Sussex (2008). Thus, the relationship between supervisor and student has limited time to develop and is likely to be much more superficial and less profound than the doctoral relationship has the capacity to become and less likely to be the ‘intense, exclusive relationship’ Guerin et al. (2015) refer to.

The relatively short time frame of master’s research also has an implication with regard to the student's competence and confidence. As Gurr (2010) notes, postgraduate students will vary in their level of dependency on a supervisor and the 'successful student will typically develop from a state of relative dependency to competent autonomy' (p.85) during their studies. However, there is a significant difference in the experience of a doctoral student who may have four plus years to develop this autonomy through their research project and the experience of a master's level student who may only have six months (or less) to complete their research project. The hands-on/hands off supervision approach referred to by Gurr (2010) based on sometimes using a direct ‘initiating, criticising, telling and directing’ (p. 86) strategy and, at other times, the more indirect ‘asking for explanations’ and ‘waiting for supervisees to process ideas’ would seem to assume that the student has the time to go through this process and to make mistakes. This may be a luxury a master's student does not have.

STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

Connected with this limited time frame is the second key difference identified, namely the stage of development that the student is at. Master’s students are more likely to be novice researchers with little or no previous experience of research. Alongside this, they may also have limited training in research methods and a limited time in which to acquire these skills. While, clearly, PhD students may also be novices, part of their doctoral journey is the acquisition of research skills. In a doctoral context, students can often learn ‘by working alongside a supervisor at first’
(Guerin et al., 2015, p.113) and also from their peer group and more senior students. For masters’ students, similar opportunities for the development of their research skills are limited.

I found that both these issues of time and stage of development were relevant when it came to the supervision of this master’s student. When I was assigned as Tom’s supervisor, there was a short time frame before Tom was required to submit his research ethics application. He had already developed his proposed project and methodological approach, and his opportunity to start his fieldwork was rapidly approaching. The time pressure meant that when it came to his ethics application, I took a ‘hands-on’ and what I regard as a fairly directive approach, providing detailed feedback on his form and many suggestions about the wording of his consent and information sheets. In doing this, however, I did also make an effort to explain to him the reasons for my changes/suggestions, hoping that he would learn from this. Noting that Nasiri and Mafakheri (2015) found ‘there is a tendency among the students to accept track changes suggested by the supervisor, eliminating any constructive follow-up and debate’ (p.1966), I made a point of putting suggestions either into the comment bubble available in Word’s review options or into a separate memo-style written document.

For example, in feedback for the questionnaire, the comment given to the student was:

You might need to reconsider your layout for Q2. For example, how do I respond if I always use a desktop at home, but never at university?

Feedback regarding the interview schedule for the qualitative interviews Tom planned to conduct included:

□ You might want to consider writing out your questions using slightly more colloquial language. You will be best placed to gauge this — as you will know what kind of language is used in the setting you are researching in.

So, for example, ‘How confident are you about integrating ICT into your pedagogical practice?’ could become ‘How comfortable are you with using technology as part of your teaching practice?’

□ It is often the case, especially when we have been immersed in the literature, that, as researchers, we become very used to academic/technical language, and the people we are interviewing might not be as familiar as we are with this kind of academic language or jargon.

At one stage, Tom admitted that he experienced some difficulty in understanding the distinction between the consent form and the information sheet, and I suspected he had not spent enough time reading up on this part of the research process. Again, I provided an explanation and also directed him to resources for further reading. However, if I had only suggested further reading and resources and expected him to be self-sufficient in this process, and not also provided specific instructions on what he needed to do, I was concerned that his ethics application would be unsuccessful, and he would have to reapply — thus losing valuable time for his fieldwork. So, it seems that, in this case, both the pressures of a shorter time frame and a relatively novice researcher make the approach to supervision a much more instructional and ‘hands on’ one when it comes to the supervision of a master’s student as compared with a PhD candidate.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF DISTANCE SUPERVISION?

In working with a student who is over 9,000 kilometres away and eight hours ahead in time zone, the key challenge observed was the potential isolation of the student, along with some of the practical and cultural factors, which influence the supervisory relationship. As Mowbray and Halse (2010) identify, students benefit from participating in a scholarly community, which allows them to ‘develop their abilities to present ideas, experiment with ways of thinking and arguments and build their capacity and confidence to engage in different settings’ (p. 658). In Tom’s case, not only was he working at a distance from his supervisor but also from his own peer group — including the other students on the same programme and other students in the wider institutional community.

Although the master’s programme was conducted entirely online and the institution providing the master’s provided an online community, my impression was that the value of this community in providing scholarly support was fairly limited. I encouraged Tom to identify a ‘critical friend’ more locally with whom he could discuss ideas, but much of our communication was along the lines of him saying ‘I’m thinking about doing this, but I’m not sure about it, what do you think?’, and he often seemed to be looking for reassurance and encouragement that he might get from his peer group in another setting — so it seems I was acting as a ‘critical friend’ some of the time.

Wikeley and Muschamp (2004) outline some of the problems of tutoring over a distance and question how effective student peer group contact is via email or online discussion threads in terms of providing critiques for one another’s work. The lack of a face-to-face on-campus dimension for supporting doctoral students is conceptualised as providing serious barriers for students. However, Butcher and Sieminski (2006) suggest that distance learning can provide a supportive route for
students but that this success is contingent on a ‘highly systemised structure’ and the ‘diligence of the distance supervisors’ (p.61).

My experience of supervising Tom (and also previous work supporting a group of PhD students working with supervisors based in another country) supports the importance of a highly systemised structure being important for supervising research at a distance. Tom and I agreed at the outset of our supervisory relationship that we would have some explicit ‘ground rules’ about our communication — such as responding to emails within a given timeframe and how regular our contact should be at different phases of his research project. The reality is somewhat more flexible and variable than these ground rules might suggest, but it was useful to have clearly communicated what each of our expectations were. I would suggest that it is helpful to start out with a high level of expectation and explicit agreement about the supervisor-student interaction, which can then be adjusted if necessary to suit the needs and style of the specific student. The ground rules should start from a position that the student will need a high level of input from the supervisor, and then adapt to the actual needs of the student, rather than starting from an assumption that the student requires a more ‘hands-off’ approach, only to find later in the process that they are floundering.

This corresponds with the suggestion that the process of distance supervision ‘should contain negotiation, experimentation and open debate about the means, depth and timing of supervisor-supervisee interactions’ (Nasiri and Mafakheri, 2015, p.1965). For example, initially Tom and I discussed having regular Skype conversations. However, in fact, we only spoke directly once in the seven months we worked together — primarily due to the difficulties of finding a time when it suited both of us to Skype, given our other work and family commitments and the time-zone differences. The asynchronous nature of email contact was more convenient and often meant that Tom sent me something in the evening his time and I would have a chance to respond to it by the time he woke up the next morning.

We exchanged around 95 emails in the seven months — some brief and some with extensive comments on drafts of research tools, materials and dissertation chapters. In the first two months, our contact was frequent (at least two or three emails a week) and once his fieldwork started, it was less frequent. When Tom moved into the analysis and writing phase, the contact picked up again, and in the final two months returned to a similarly frequent pattern, building up to several times per day as the dissertation deadline approached. This pattern is not that different to that which I have experienced in face-to-face supervision, both as a student and a supervisor.

It is not only distance learners who may feel isolated, and the move towards group supervision, where a relationship exists between a supervisor and a group of students (McCallin and Nayar, 2012), may act to mitigate this issue. It is possible that supervising a small group of students and facilitating a student community through online activities (such as online workshops or webinars and discussion groups) could also potentially help to tackle the issue of isolation.

Another key observation on the experience of distance supervision is the potential impact of cultural differences on the supervisory relationship. I have been involved in teaching via the Web, in live synchronous tutorials, with students based in a variety of cultures and countries. In this case, Tom and I shared a cultural background but he was operating in a different and unfamiliar culture and so was acting as a sort of guide/interpreter of that culture for me as a supervisor. For example, in one of his emails Tom explained:

*Most people not familiar with Asia tend to think that it is a technology powerhouse and that all students are extremely computer literate. However, that’s not at all the case in my experience and I have actually seen students abandon the computer in front of them in class in favour of their smart phones because they don’t know how to use the computer!*

In some ways, this was a useful exercise for him as it meant he needed to explain and tease out some of the assumptions he was making or that his research participants made. On the other hand, he was surprised by some of the findings where his own assumptions or predictions had not been borne out, and this provided good material for his own study and the development of his own reflexivity.

In a context where there are an increasing number of international master’s degree programmes, and an increasing number of international students, there is growing awareness of the complexity of intercultural supervision. Filippou et al. (2017) highlight the importance of students and supervisors discussing cultural issues and developing ‘mutual understanding regarding cultural differences...[and] the exchange of information on cultural differences’ (p.349). The fact that distance learning programmes tend to be more diverse in terms of the geographic and cultural borders they reach across means that supervisors and students need to be aware of ‘the norms, differences, preconceptions and potential conflicting issues’ (Nasiri and Mafakheri, 2015, p.1965).
WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF A DISTANCE SUPERVISION RELATIONSHIP?

When it comes to the advantages of a distance supervision relationship, the key factor identified as being beneficial was the clarity that can result from written communication and the practice of putting explicit agreements and expectations in place, which provided a supporting framework for the supervisory relationship. This was in line with the advice provided by Gina Wisker (2012), who emphasises the importance of negotiating and establishing ‘effective, regular, not too intrusive, open, enabling communication strategies’ (p.92) at the outset of the supervisor-student relationship. Alongside this, Wisker also suggests putting in place ‘learning contracts’, setting agendas and keeping formal notes to ‘scaffold’ the supervision process.

It is certainly useful for both the student and the supervisor to have a lot of communication in writing to refer back to and to have clarity on what needs to be done or what was discussed. (I remember leaving apparently productive meetings with my own supervisor wondering what we had actually concluded, and what I should be doing next!) The fact that the distance context does not allow for the more informal ‘dropping in for a chat’ approach encouraged us to develop these clear lines of communication and to manage our expectations.

Arguably, the more formalised nature of the relationship also seemed to result in Tom and I having a very clear focus on the project and, hopefully, this resulted in an effective use of time for both of us. Given that distance learning students are often also students who have other demands on their time — whether family or employment commitments — this factor should not be undervalued. Perhaps this might be regarded as a clinical and detached version of supervision and perhaps this model ‘drives the supervisory conversations towards a formal format and makes it harder to create an informal environment for discussions’ (Nasiri and Mafakheri, 2015, p.1964). In some ways, however, it also felt like a ‘professional’ relationship, with clear boundaries, where each of us knew where we stood with the other. This is in contrast with other experiences, both of supervising and of being supervised, where the boundaries often felt a lot more ‘blurry’, and is also perhaps in keeping with attempting to balance the professional working relationship and the social aspects of the supervisory relationship (Sambrook et al., 2008). The limited opportunity for ‘social’ interaction with a distance student/supervisor can be disadvantageous in terms of the isolation discussed previously but, on the positive side, it can also result in a focused and organised use of both the student and the supervisor’s time and effort.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in this chapter, I explored the main challenges and benefits of providing supervision to a particular student in a distance setting, and I reflected on differences between the supervision of master’s and doctoral research. The biggest challenge of this distance relationship was the time difference between Europe and Asia, which prohibited finding mutual times to talk on the telephone or on Skype and the potential isolation of the student. However, frequent written communication in the form of 95 emails provided opportunities for detailed feedback and discussion, and established a productive form of communication.

Differences between doctoral research supervision and master’s supervision include the student’s stage of development (research skills may not be honed) and the shorter period of time to complete the research, which led me to take a ‘hands on’, prescriptive and didactic approach — in particular to the development of the ethics form. The key skills identified as promoting a positive supervisory relationship are flexibility and communication. The most valuable insight I have gained from reflecting on this process is identifying how important it is, as a supervisor, to identify what the specific needs of a distance student might be, and how best to adapt my supervisory style to meet this situation and accommodate the student. The type of communication and feedback I provide as a supervisor needs to vary according to the student’s requirements and at different stages of the supervision process, just as it does in a more traditional position. What requires attention in a distance situation is how the communication and feedback is delivered, and alongside this is the value of clear communication between student and supervisor: ‘Supervisors need to be adaptable and supervision style discussed openly to ensure compatibility that meets the needs of both parties’ (McCallin and Nayar, 2012, p.67). Perhaps the last word should go to Tom:

*Regarding the supervision process and the ‘distance’ element, I have to say I am more than happy with it…Your help in advising on both the ethical issues and the questionnaires has been very good and I feel I have been exposed to a lot. I may not be very confident yet, but I do feel I could attempt some research on my own steam now.*
AN EXAMINATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GENERAL NURSING PROGRAMME FOR THE CONGRUENCE BETWEEN ‘CONSTRUCTIVISM’ AND THE PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

Naomi Pasley

INTRODUCTION

Hibernia College is currently developing a new undergraduate nursing programme which will be delivered through blended learning (Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI), 2017). This chapter will examine the extent to which the delivery of the theoretical content within the online learning environment conforms to the constructivist principles (Brandon et al., 2010, Eun, 2010, Vygotsky, 1978) espoused by the College and the School of Health Science within the College. The College Teaching and Learning Strategy states that the mode of programme provision is ‘blended and constructivist in nature’ and is described as a ‘scaffolded structure which fosters collaboration and discussion’ (Hibernia College, 2015). These themes are adhered to in the design of the proposed undergraduate nursing programme. This chapter provides an analysis of the theoretical content of the nursing programme using Eun’s (2010) sociocultural framework, to establish if the elements offered in the online learning environment conform to constructivist principles. This will involve an exploration of the enabling and constraining factors for the educator, creating new insights into the nursing content for an online environment as well as a mechanism to improve practice for future educators in partnership with learning technologists.

CONTEXT OF NURSING PROGRAMME

Since its inception in 2000, Hibernia College (HC) has been a leader in the provision of professional education through blended and online programmes. In seeking to expand its suite of programmes, nursing offered a natural extension of the professional education programmes. The undergraduate initial nurse education programme will be offered through a blended medium and combines core theoretical content delivered through the online learning environment complemented by face-to-face learning experiences in both classroom and clinical skills laboratories.

The online component of the programme is provided through the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and is divided into synchronous and asynchronous activities. Asynchronous activities can be accessed and engaged with by the student at a time of their choosing and include artefacts such as video or exploratory activities. Synchronous activities bring educators and students together in real-time tutorials and webinars. Hibernia College’s Digital Learning Department works in partnership with the programme director and educators. A team approach is taken to the development of the programme and modules on the VLE, involving the educator or subject matter expert, the learning designer and multimedia designers.

Similar to the teaching programmes offered by Hibernia College, practice-based learning forms a significant part of nursing education. This is a real-time and face-to-face learning experience supported in the workplace though preceptorship with registered nurses (NMBI, 2016). The structure of the programme is prescribed by this professional standard and is divided into four incremental stages, culminating in an internship in Stage Four. The programme follows the calendar year rather than the academic year so that the students can undertake their main clinical placements over the summer months when other nursing students are on holiday.

The focus of this chapter is on the development of the online learning component of the nursing students’ education.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

The principles of social constructivism are based on the original work of Vygotsky (1978). A key principle of this approach is that students should be ‘active creators of their own knowledge’ (Brandon et al., 2010, p.90). To achieve this, the student needs to be supported and assisted through their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by a more knowledgeable other (MKO). The MKO may be a teacher, mentor, peer or a nursing preceptor. The work of Vygotsky focused on learning and development in childhood; however, its principles can be extended and applied to adult professional learning (Peters, 2010). Eun’s (2010) analysis focused on childhood learning in the formal context of schooling and is based on the sociocultural framework emanating from Vygotsky’s (1978) developmental theories. This allowed the examination of interrelated factors that impinge on the complex relationships between humans in a social and cultural context and which affect the educational process. Eun’s work (2010) outlines four main themes and a set of eight interrelated principles of instruction by which a sociocultural learning environment can be recognised. These themes and principles were used to examine the nursing programme for adherence to a sociocultural approach to education.
LEARNING AS AN INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS

The first theme in Eun's (2010) framework is the integrated nature of development. Eun (2010) argues that learning is not a simple linear process, but a complex interrelational activity which encompasses teaching, learning and development. This, she asserts, relates most closely to the Russian word 'obuchenie', which is at the foundation of Vygotsky's theory of learning and development. Eun (2010) acknowledges that there is no direct translation of 'obuchenie'; however, her explanation is the 'dialectical dynamic relationship that exists between teaching and learning' and that 'children not only develop but are developed' (by others) (p.402). In other words, the educator helps to develop the student. Although Vygotsky focused on childhood development, the theory can be applied to adult learners (Eun, 2008). Indeed, recent developments in medicine have revealed that processes which were once thought fixed are continually undergoing growth and development even in adulthood and later life (Dias et al., 2014). The concepts of neurogenesis and neuroplasticity have confirmed the development of new neurons and neural pathways in response to stimuli within the adult human brain (Dias et al., 2014, Boore et al., 2016). This physiological evidence lends credence to the belief that learning continues throughout life and supports the concepts of ongoing and lifelong learning.

Therefore, for any student regardless of age, the entry into a new profession can be described as a developmental process; in this instance, the nursing student must move from a position of 'not knowing' to being a knowledgeable and competent practitioner. A significant part of this involves the acquisition of the professional language of nursing, which assists the student in integrating into the culture of the nursing profession. Vygotsky viewed the development of language as an integral part of learning and development. The acquisition of this nursing language is an essential element of the professional development of a nurse, the use of which confers a legitimacy in the workplace (Wenger, 1998).

Examining the design of the theoretical content allows us to recognise this developmental approach, which is sometimes referred to as a spiral approach to learning. In a spiral curriculum, core concepts are revisited in deeper and more complex ways as the student moves through their learning journey (Bruner, 1996). For example, a core skill such as handwashing can be used to demonstrate this approach. The World Health Organisation (2009) states that effective handwashing is the single most important strategy in preventing the spread of infection. This key skill is introduced at the beginning of stage one and relates to familiar concepts and situations. As the student moves into stage two, they extend their knowledge from social and antiseptic handwashing to surgical handwashing for the interventional or operating theatre environments. As the student continues to progress, opportunities occur to apply and integrate this knowledge to complex care situations. In this example of hand washing, the instructional principles of contextualised learning can be recognised, because each stage is clearly related to nursing practice. However, the mediating artefacts which are used are carefully designed in the earlier stage to reflect students' own experiences, thus enabling them to build on them as they integrate and progress to the more complex concepts and language. The approach is inherently encouraging and affirming because the student is working from the familiar towards the new. The wealth of material within the VLE provides a rich store of resources that can be revisited at any stage for revision, integration and application.

LEARNING AS A PROCESS, NOT A PRODUCT

The second theme in Eun’s (2010) framework reflects learning as process, not a product. This principle fits well into the requirement for ongoing and lifelong learning. In considering the volume of learning which is required in a professional programme, it appears impossible that this ‘knowledge’ be delivered to and absorbed by any student, nor, given the dynamic and changing world in which the student must work, would this process be safe or effective. Therefore, the educator must support the student to develop the skills of enquiry and exploration so that the student can construct the knowledge they require, and most importantly continue to do so throughout their career. In this way, the student and teacher become partners in the learning process, or, as many educators term it, co-constructors of knowledge (Brandon et al., 2010). This aligns with the handwashing example given above; however, Eun (2010) asserts that learning should be activity-orientated and collaborative. This is evident in the design of the learning activities; students are offered a variety of inquiry-based exercises, some individual, others as collaborative or group work. The focus is on providing the student with solutions rather than answers.

INTERACTIVE, COLLABORATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Eun’s (2010) third theme directly flows from the idea of providing students with solutions rather than answers; she asserts that the learning environment must be interactive, collaborative, dynamic and dialogical. This is the area where there are opportunities and challenges in creating a learning environment within an online environment. The original work of key theorists such as Vygotsky (1978)
and Dewey (Ashford et al., 2004) all took place using face-to-face interactions. It cannot be inferred that this was because the face-to-face environment was believed to be superior but rather, at the time the online environment was not yet in existence. To facilitate learning in the VLE, it is necessary that the educators become active enquirers, with the aim of co-constructing knowledge with students, thereby challenging established norms and encouraging students to do likewise (Eun, 2010). Indeed, it is necessary for teachers to become explorers of the digital world so that they can direct and support students in their learning journey (Redecker, 2017). To this end, those who aim to foster learning in the online environment must ensure that the mediating artefacts designed are culturally relevant to the digital world which our students inhabit. This is not limited to the design of our learning artefacts. Students are guided to refer to the literature published in peer-reviewed journals as the gold standard for academically sound learning material; as part of this process, they are guided to appropriate journals and supported to develop the critical reading skills to discern a reliable source from a questionable one. However, journal articles represent one form of recorded knowledge, and while it is true to say that journals are now easy to access in digital form, the article as viewed online differs little in its presentation and layout from the time when the compositor selected his type from the tray and set it into a frame for the printing press. This is not to say that the use of the printed article is not useful; rather, it suggests that the over-reliance on one form of knowledge delivery represents a limitation. In other words, the medium is not the message, it is the message that is important.

Therefore, acceptance of wider formats needs to be encouraged, and the internet can supply access to expert opinion and research. To a generation who are accustomed to finding and viewing information through this medium, the valid internet source should be given credibility. To this end, learners must be encouraged and supported to cite valid digital sources. Knowledge-sharing sites such as TED talks are one such example; others may include lectures or conferences streamed live or available as podcasts or YouTube videos. Module resources can be seen to include this rich blend of resources alongside the traditional recommended academic readings (All Aboard, 2016, Whitaker, 2017).

Within sociocultural learning theory, the concept of collaboration is a core tenet (Eun, 2010). This can be seen as a challenge within an online learning environment where the student has the choice to study at a time of their own choosing. In the programme design, opportunities for collaboration between students, or between teachers and students, have been consciously included. These include moderated forums as well as collaborative or group activities.

Eun (2010) discusses the importance of communication as a medium for this type of learning. It is a criticism of online learning that the student and teacher are physically separated, and this suggests that there could be a barrier to effective communication. This assumes that at the higher education level, all communication within teaching is part of the face-to-face learning process; however, it would be simplistic to reduce communication to a verbal and face-to-face interaction. It must be remembered that communication may occur in multiple and diverse ways. Throughout history, technical development has changed the way people communicate; arguably the development of written language is a key milestone. Early forms of distance education used telephone and radio to facilitate conversation and communication between student and teacher. This was complemented by feedback in the written text (Mood, 1995). The modern VLE is an extension of this development and has the ability to combine different discursive elements, speech or audio, text in the form of chat or forum posts, and imagery. Within the virtual classroom, if video is not in use, responses may be communicated using emoticons or other icon-based indicators (Lynch, 2008). In recognition of the potential challenges in communicating in an environment where the visual cues are muted due to distance, teachers need to be educated to develop these skills (Sweeney et al., 2017).

It may be argued that learners who have grown up in the digital age are more comfortable and responsive using these communication tools and educators must move with them. Indeed, the term ‘digital natives’ describes those born in the 1980s who have grown up surrounded by technology (Prensky, 2011). Educating the educators to work within this medium has been identified as a challenge to effectively linking with students in the online environment (Paulus et al., 2010, Sweeney et al., 2016). Also, new rules and customs are needed to facilitate the engagement of students in this new learning situation. Students need to be taught how to negotiate learning within this learning environment and thereby establish a new learning culture rather than merely an extension of the traditional format of learning. In the development of the nursing programme, the Digital Learning Department provides ongoing support to the educators in developing curriculum content. In addition, Hibernia College provides all new educators with the skills necessary for online teaching through the faculty training hub in the VLE.

THE ‘HOME-SCHOOL’ CONNECTION

Finally, Eun’s (2010) fourth theme refers to the importance of the ‘home-school’ connection, in that learning, to be meaningful, must be culturally situated and based within the sphere of the students’ existing knowledge. For an adult learning programme, this is no less important, particularly in the context of
professional education because the student comes with significant stores of existing knowledge. In the context of a nurse education programme, the school element of the equation is replaced both by Hibernia College and practice-based learning environments. The design of the online learning environment, reflects the students’ prior experiences; specific learning activities draw on this, for example, in initial learning for patient safety, the students are asked to reflect on safety in the home situation; this is then linked to community nursing and further extended to the acute or hospital situation. Additionally, the mediating artefacts used are closely aligned to the culture of Irish healthcare, where the hierarchy of application moves from the international to the national. Wherever possible, images, artefacts and other resources are taken from an Irish healthcare setting. Close alignment with the real world of clinical practice learning is seen in the use and choice of assessment tools introduced in the VLE and in the contribution of clinical partners to the learning environment, thus ensuring that the culture presented in the VLE is consistent with the culture of real-world practice.

THE INTEGRATED PROGRAMME/DISCUSSION

Eun (2010) asserts that an integrated approach to learning or an integrated programme is a key instructional feature of a constructive learning environment. When conceptualising and designing the proposed nursing programme, key themes and instructional principles were identified in the discussion and are aligned, including 1) the contextual and culturally relevant learning, 2) appropriate mediating artefacts and 3) collaborative and activity-orientated learning activities. However, the integrated nature of the programme means that these principles interweave and appear in different ways and applications throughout the programme content. This interweaving demonstrates another, and arguably the most important, element of a sociocultural approach to learning — that of the Integrated Programme (Eun, 2010). The different strands or subjects are presented in a way that is linked and interdependent. In many ways, this programme demonstrates features of integrated learning; the Link icon within the online learning environment enables the student, with one click of their mouse, to access learning content in an interrelated session; for example, clicking the Link icon in the ‘Preparation for Clinical Placement’ session will bring the student directly to the learning on hand hygiene. These sessions or lessons are situated in two separate modules and linked to a third, the Clinical Placement module, where the application of this learning to real-life practice occurs.

CONSTRAINTS TO INTEGRATION

However, constraints to full integration were identified. The presentation of the indicative content for the undergraduate nursing programme is presented in defined subject areas. In the earliest versions of the programme, to adhere to our constructivist philosophy, the educators integrated the teaching of anatomy and physiology into nursing care modules, thereby creating an integrated learning experience contextualised to nursing. However, during the validation process with QCI (2017), it was required that the science element (anatomy and physiology) was separated from the nursing element. The constraining factor here was the professional standard which prescribes the subject areas or domains and the minimum number of hours required within each domain (NMBI, 2016). Thus, although the educators wished to adhere to the constructivist model, it was not fully achievable.

Cost of development, both in terms of time and expense, can be a constraint in creating a truly integrated learning experience; for example, the in-house guidelines do not permit the direct reference to the next session or learning event in the script of asynchronous content. This policy exists to ensure that sessions can be re-sequenced as necessary in response to student or educator feedback. Consequently, this does not fully align with the ideals of an integrated programme. Thus, there is a potential for tension between the pedagogical requirement of the educator and the technical and practical requirements of policy which must be overcome by careful compromise in both domains to ensure the best educational experience for the student.

The creation of mediating factors or instructional material is a key element in the success of an online programme. Mediating artefacts may be very varied, including imagery and the written or spoken word; however, it is important not to overlook the human mediating factors, which in the context of a blended learning programme may be physically present or may be an online presence in mediated forums or other recorded artefacts.

In the early stages of content development, it became apparent that the style guides and protocols developed for the teaching programmes did not fully align with the needs of a nursing programme. The choice of imagery is an interesting example; many repositories of high-quality stock images emanate from the USA, thus some depictions of nursing do not align with Irish nursing standards, for example, pictures which show nurses caring for patients while wearing long sleeves and highly coloured nail polish contravene Irish infection prevention and control guidelines (Health Information and Quality Authority, 2017). Challenges arise between the requirements to create a learning environment that is engaging while using realistic artefacts to create the most effective learning experience for the student. The resolution of these factors requires a strong collaboration between the learning
designers, educational technologists and nursing educators. This evolving and strong relationship will assist in developing an enriching and effective programme over the coming years and is key to the creation of a constructivist learning environment.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to use Eun’s (2010) theoretical framework to examine the delivery of the theoretical content of a new nursing programme within an online learning environment and to see whether it conformed to the constructivist principles espoused by the College and the School of Health Science. Viewed through Eun’s lens, it was possible to identify all four themes, firstly recognising the developmental nature of learning within the programme, secondly the process of learning through active inquiry methods and collaborative activities, and thirdly the interactive and dialogical environment through the integration of varied communication formats and the active inclusion and support of discussion forums. Fourthly, the ‘home school connection’ to the world of the adult learner was aligned, recognising that the learning material was linked to personal and healthcare-related experiences. It was also possible to identify that the instructional environment and artefacts were contextualised, responsive, mediated, activity orientated, developmental, discursive, collaborative and integrated.

Through this analysis, it can be seen that the VLE does conform to broadly constructivist principles but some constraining factors are identified. The requirement to conform to the demands of professional education standards imposes some limitations on the freedom to be truly constructivist. This limitation is not restricted to nursing but is a feature of all programmes which lead to an externally recognised professional qualification. Eun’s theoretical framework may be critiqued on the grounds that she did not make any reference to online teaching and learning.

The need to ensure that instruction was discursive was highlighted as a challenge within the online environment. Ensuring that specific focus is provided on the mediation of forums will increase the discursive element of this part of the programme. The strength of a blended learning programme is that the need to be discursive and responsive can be fulfilled though other elements of the programme, such as tutorials or practical learning in skills laboratories. Analysis such as this provides an opportunity to review and reflect on current practices and provides a mechanism for continuous improvement for this and other programmes within

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HOW A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE EXPLORING DIGITAL STORY FOR INSTRUCTION CAN OFFER A WINDOW INTO THE WORLD OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Anne-Marie Clarke

INTRODUCTION

Researchers and practitioners involved in professional development and reform suggest that changing curriculum demands and a growing diversity among students are presenting challenges to teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden, 2005; Adamson and Darlington, 2012). The focus is now on teaching for understanding and application rather than teaching traditional rote learning. This focus not only requires teachers to capitalise on individual levels of student thinking but also to develop technology, pedagogy and content knowledge (TPACK), which is a framework developed by Mishra and Koehler (2006) to address the type of knowledge required by teachers to successfully integrate technology. Bereiter (2002) argues this requires a level of creativity among teachers within their knowledge and practice. In addition to this, Mishra et al. (2015) related the importance of teacher creativity to TPACK when reporting on their research involving design experiments. They defined creativity within TPACK as novel, which must be connected to the usefulness and value of the work. There are various definitions of creativity. However, two essential criteria existing within most of them, according to Cply (1999), are that it a) involves an unusual or unique action or product and b) is of use and some value. Therefore, when a teacher develops a unique or novel way to combine existing knowledge, or create new processes to develop greater understanding by students, they are displaying creativity. The integration of technology is described by Mishra and Koehler (2006) as a complex issue for many teachers. They suggest that rather than concentrating on the technology itself, professional development programmes should follow the lines of curriculum content and pedagogical approaches to integrating new technologies. Mishra and Koehler (2008) also suggested that the environment and context within which teachers’ work should be taken into account.

This chapter explores how teachers can develop and share innovative pedagogy in an environment of situated learning within a local community of practice (CoP). It presents data resulting from four teachers who participated in an inquiry. The inquiry emerged from what I found to be a successful innovative practice within my
own pedagogy. I wanted to explore the experience of other teachers creating and using Instruction Digital Stories (IDS). Digital Story (DS) is a technology tool which can be used by both educators and students for teaching and learning. It weaves together story, images, voice and music. The teachers involved shared a common interest in storytelling pedagogy and an ambition to learn new technology.

The data from the teachers illustrated how technology pedagogy can be shared across curriculum subjects and enhance teacher development of TPACK at individual levels. The use of the narrative as a methodology afforded opportunity to explore sociocultural influences on practice and knowledge development.

The data revealed that when ideas and innovations are shared over a period of time, a type of membership evolves and becomes linked to identity within the community. This chapter also illustrates how reflection on practice was deepened as teachers shared their ideas, beliefs and experiences, and membership aroused interest from other teachers within the school setting. In the following sections a selective review of literature is presented on situated learning and the use of digital stories as an aspect of professional development. Firstly, it is necessary to situate this within recent Irish policy on continuing professional development (CPD).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN IRELAND

The importance of CPD for teachers in Ireland is highlighted in the consultation process with teachers, by the Teaching Council, to learn about their experience of professional learning. When the feedback of 3,300 registered teachers was analysed, a first draft consultation paper Cosán (Teaching Council, 2014) on the framework for teachers’ learning became available. Cosán is an Irish word for pathway, reflecting that while learning is a journey, the act of travelling on that journey is more important than reaching the final destination as individual teachers map out their career paths. It liberated teachers to identify and engage in professional development which would benefit themselves and their students and, thus, proposed professional autonomy. Engagement can mean either within or outside the school context as either an individual activity or within a collaborative learning community.

SITUATED LEARNING

Cosán is welcomed more than 20 years after Lave and Wenger (1991) highlighted the importance of communities of practice (CoPs). Such communities provide opportunities to embrace links between learning and practice among teachers, encouraging them to cross boundaries and enhance a sense of autonomy. Lave and Wenger (1991) presented a perception of situated learning as a theoretical description of learning which takes place within CoPs. They identified it as a social process which inspires participation of practitioners, both newcomers and the more experienced members of any organisation. The social process not only enables the learner to gain a body of knowledge but also a set of competencies to perform by engaging in the process. As well as bringing teachers together, it empowers them to engage in vigorous discussions and serves to inspire learning.

Initially, a situated learning space was defined in relation to non-school-based environments where Lave and Wenger (op. cit.) provided examples of American Navy Quartermasters and Yucatec midwives that focused on ‘the structure of social practice rather than privileging the structure of pedagogy as the source of learning’ (p.133). They illustrated how peripheral skills and practices are developed by newcomers to a community of practice, implying a group of people working together and supporting each other in order to develop new knowledge. From this perspective, situational learning offers a theoretical lens for understanding innovative action among a group of teachers within a school situation. It can be argued that Cosán (2014) attempts to present collaboration as situated learning when it guides teachers to: ‘engage in professional conversations’, ‘engage in peer observation’, ‘actively participate in learning communities’, ‘subject associations’, ‘share experiences with colleagues’ (p.14). As members of learning communities socially engage in negotiated practice they develop a shared repertoire which includes ‘routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence and which have become part of its practice’. (Wenger, 1988, p. 83)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INVOLVING DIGITAL STORY

In the field of education, it is becoming more accepted that professional development that is situated in the reality of teachers’ lives, and aimed at peer collaboration, is advantageous to teaching and learning (Chan and Pang, 2006; Richardson, 2003). Situated learning within a CoP affords the opportunity to provide teachers with a powerful learning experience, which in turn will provide a powerful learning experience for their students (Chen, 2004).

However, the social structures of a CoP need to be cultivated, and the key part of the process in creating a digital story is the story circle, which is an ideal environment. Although Digital Storytelling is relatively new in Great Britain and Ireland, it is more established since the 1990’s in the Centre for Digital Storytelling...
(CDS), California. It is defined by the Digital Storytelling Association (2011), an international organisation sponsored by the CDS, as: ‘The modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling. It uses digital media to create media rich stories to tell, to share, and to preserve.’ It is a modern-day expression of telling traditional stories — suggesting storytelling and the addition of technology equals Digital Storytelling, hence the capital letters used. Technology has served to enhance storytelling by making it the newest and quite fashionable version of telling stories.

The role of creating DS for both instruction and reflection in education is, according to McGee (2015), a well-known strategy, particularly in pre-service teacher education programmes (Ohler, 2007; Robin, 2008; Thompson-Long, 2014). Stories are explored and shared through the concept of a story circle in the world of Digital Storytelling, before creating them (Lambert, 2013; McGee, 2015; Meadows, 2008; Ohler, 2007). Such circles create a sense of bonding among sharing communities according to Lambert (2009), who, along with Dana Aitchley (at the Centre for Digital Storytelling, CDS, California), was the founder of the concept of story circle as an integral component of Digital Storytelling.

Story circle creates space for teachers to share their anecdotal stories in a collaborative environment. It also provides effective professional development within the conceptual framework of TPACK through the constructivist nature of creating DS. This type of situated learning can be described as ‘more encompassing in intent than conventional notions of “learning in situ” or “learning by doing”’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.31). It describes a group of people such as the storytelling secondary school teachers who participated in my inquiry, shared an interest for something they were doing, and illustrated how they could learn new knowledge about their interest through interacting with each other. Wenger (1998) argues that communities of practice are widespread yet are seldom focused on. The focus on the development of such a community among the storytelling teachers afforded the opportunity to explore the sociocultural influences on teachers’ knowledge development and changes in their technological pedagogical practices and identities.

**METHODOLOGY**

The choice of narrative as a method of inquiry was a legitimate method for gaining in-depth knowledge of participant experience. It was also a method which highlighted ‘teacher voice.’ The narratives provided a valuable database as a starting point for analysing teacher experience in that ‘education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories, and teachers and students are storytellers and characters of their own stories’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, p.5).

In this case, the narratives provided immediate experience of creating two types of DS, one for instruction and a second as a reflection on the experience of creating an instructional DS. Although there are times when narratives are deliberately engaged as part of the research process, it is important to acknowledge that narratives are ongoing all the time within any given community. The focus was on how each teacher experienced successes, and challenges, and how they negotiated tensions and conflicts while creating the Instructional Digital Story (IDS). After the creation of the IDS, the focus moved to the experience of sharing of the IDS with students as a meaningful part of the aim of a lesson and the evaluation of student response. The creation of individual teacher Reflective Digital Story (RDS) had a two-fold purpose in that reflection in and reflection on are an integral part of professional development for teachers expressed by the Teaching Council of Ireland (2012). The RDSs also enabled each teacher’s voice to be heard as part of the narrative methodology used in this inquiry.

The participants were experienced teachers, voluntarily agreeing to participate in a professional development process. They made time in their busy lives to integrate a new technology into their pedagogy as part of their classroom practice. As well as being a group of teachers who shared a passion for what they do, they were also eager to learn new ways of enhancing their pedagogy. The unique factor in this inquiry is that all four teachers came from different subject disciplines: Business, Mathematics, English and Design Communication Technology (DCG).

Traditionally, in post-primary schools in Ireland, teachers collaborate within each subject discipline through Teacher Professional Networks (TPN) which provide funding for specific subject associations, and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and, more recently, onsite since Whole School Development (WSD) became established.

When a researcher pursues the path of narrative inquiry, he or she is often required to play multiple roles in the process of gaining new knowledge for the purpose of an inquiry. This includes becoming a member of the CoP, sharing experience and, in this instance, the participating teachers were encouraged to look upon themselves as co-inquirers in viewing their own practice. As the researcher, I fulfilled the role of colleague, friend and principal researcher. When teachers talk about their pedagogy of teaching and the type of technology they use, they are more than likely discussing what already works or does not work in their lessons. This is what Wenger (1998) calls a typical repertoire of CoP. He suggests this repertoire includes the way in which members think and do things in the course of their meetings.

At the start of the school summer break, we met in a local hotel. Each teacher was given a tablet and shown how to create a simple DS. The aim of providing a
As the story circle evolved, so too did the consideration of how important the emotional aspects of learning were. Egan highlights this aspect as an important factor in assisting the listener to make sense effectively as well as cognitively. A group sense of comprehending the importance of knowing and understanding the needs of students emerged as a common ground within the CoP. Shared experience of engaging students in the past enabled development of future pedagogy and influenced some of the teachers when making choices of images and music to enhance the IDS.

There are challenges and limitations to storytelling as pedagogy and, of these, Tan et al. (2014) highlight the possibility that such pedagogies are not always optimal for student learning of particular forms of knowledge. This view is based on the work of Bernstein (2000), who distinguished between hierarchical and horizontal forms of knowledge. Mathematics and sciences were viewed as hierarchical knowledge structures where the lesson objective is student learning of deep canonical knowledge. However, the social sciences’ student learning is through multiple perspectives in that a story is told from a privileged point of view. Tan et al. (2014) experienced limitations in the use of storytelling pedagogy in the case of hierarchical knowledge unless it was being used to catch student attention or introduce a topic.

**FINDINGS**

When the teachers storied their experience during meetings after creating and using IDSs, they did not completely agree with this view or limitations. While the DCG teacher had a similar experience to Tan et al., the mathematics teacher differed. He shared his IDS and illustrated how he posed a problem using the topic of trigonometry. His story character was a 2-year-old child attempting to find the height of a flagpole. As the story unfolded, she discovered certain tools to help her, and as she named the tools, the students watching the IDS learned the terminology. The climax of the story was where the child worked out the formula and found the answer. However, she did not share her answer and challenged the students to use her formula to find the height of the flagpole. This teacher explained how the emotional hook was the cute 2-year-old child. The class comprised 14-year-old boys and girls, who he believed were still living in the children world but had also stepped into the world of adolescence. If a 2-year-old could solve the problem, then they had to meet the challenge. They learned the terminology and the formula, and all found the answer within the lesson.

Similarly, the Business teacher developed an IDS based on problem-solving, which was followed up by role play. She invented two story characters, naming them Mr Jones (the boss) and Mary (the secretary). She thought about characterising Mary as the boss and Mr Jones as the secretary but decided gender was not the focus of the content and so did not change it. Mr Jones expected Mary to organise tea-break refreshments, and her problem arose when she needed to record the money
spent on tea, coffee and biscuits. She eventually organised a petty cash till after requesting money from Mr Jones. Following this, she organised a petty cash book to record money in and out. When tested on a similar problem one year later, the class remembered the story and applied the solution.

The English teacher based his IDS on a scenario of a traveller who set out on foot across several countries and terrains. His aim was to motivate the students to use descriptive words, and his IDS challenged them to describe the bay outside their classroom window. When sourcing images and music, he used his knowledge of the students and developed quite an emotional aspect to the story in promoting aesthetics.

The DCG teacher, however, revealed a similar experience to Tan et al., suggesting his subject did not necessarily lend itself to IDS. He shared how he deviated from the story core of IDS and created a digital demonstration of creating a product. This teacher demonstrated use of everyday creativity referred to by Craft et al. (2001) as ‘little c’ (p.57) in order to overcome the problem of not developing a story.

As each teacher shared their IDS at the group meeting, a deepening of relationships was observed. The level of trust to share personally created work and accept suggestions and tips of how to improve the next IDS had reached new levels across subject disciplines. These teachers had enacted a new form of pedagogical practice and, therefore, developed technology pedagogy within the TPACK framework. Equally, as the teachers evaluated their creation and use of IDS during a story circle session, they developed a belief in creating and using their own material in the form of an IDS. They reported on self-efficacy after they had met the challenges involved in creating and using an IDS. Personal values on teacher-student relationships were shared, with several expressing feeling a deepening of respect and trust from their students after using the IDS for learning. One teacher shared the value he attached to classroom control with the particular age group for which he had created the IDS and how this possibly influenced the style of IDS he created. This teacher had a great deal to reflect on and interpreted his experience based on the story plot used in his IDS. Having earlier described himself as a storytelling teacher, he had not used story for the IDS. Instead, he created a narrated visual demonstration. He was, however, happy with the outcome in terms of student learning and had developed technology pedagogy knowledge. After viewing the IDSs created by the other teachers, he reflected that he may repeat the exercise but with an older age group of students where he valued a more relaxed classroom control. Some of the teachers shared how ‘good’ they felt after showing their IDS — not only to their students but also within the group. One teacher described how a student asked ‘Did you make that for us, Sir?’ and another teacher said she valued the affirmation she received within the group. The story circle process deepened reflection on practice and posed several questions for future discussion. All four teachers reported 100% student engagement and accelerated learning.

**REFLECTION**

The professional development of each teacher was made possible by various elements of the digital story process. By participating in the study, the teachers had gained membership of a CoP. As members of this community they shared fears of recording their voice-over for the IDS, their experience of observing student reaction and learning, and their frustrations experienced while searching for images to edit and enhance the IDS, their expertise and their technology knowledge. From the perspective of a situated learning context, professional growth occurs through evolving practices and new knowledge by the teacher. As the teacher reflects upon these practices, they are further refined, and when the experience of practice is shared within a community, it initiates growth in other teachers. It is purported by Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) that when the focus is on knowledge rather than practice, teacher growth becomes part of the process through different knowledge types within the TPACK framework. Individual knowledge growth within each TPACK domain depends on each teacher’s response to their experiences gained through their involvement in any given professional development programme or exploration, such as within the Digital Story study. In other words, each teacher’s existing perception of the instructional goal, along with classroom practice, influenced the growth of knowledge within any of the domains. This relates directly to the learning components described by Wenger:

> On the one hand a community of practice is a living context that can give newcomers access to competence and can also invite a personal experience of engagement by which to incorporate that competence into an identity of participation. On the other hand, a well-functioning community of practice is a good context to explore new insights without becoming fools or stuck in some dead end. A history of mutual engagement around a joint enterprise is an ideal context for such leading-edge learning which requires a strong bond of communal competence along with a deep respect for a particularity of experience. When these conditions are in place, communities of practice are a privileged locus for the creation of knowledge. (Wenger, 1998, p.214)

The work of Lave and Wenger (1991) moved to a more social view of learning, changing the focus away from individual learning to learning situated in social practice. The focus of my study concentrated on the challenges and limitations...
of creating and using an IDS, lending itself to a situational learning experience, and it inadvertently created a CoP. As other teachers in the same school became aware of the four teachers collaborating and working on technology pedagogy, they expressed interest to learn about IDS. Lave and Wenger (op. cit.) term these teachers as peripheral members of CoPs. When peripheral members join a community, it strengthens and develops sustainability.

**IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE APPLICATION OF COP**

The development of a CoP within this study has significant implications for future professional development within schools. Professional development and growth is a complex issue and a challenge to designers of in-service programmes. The CoP in this study has illustrated an example of situated learning practices which lead to development and growth at a personal level. In support of this, a large-scale study by Mansour et al. (2014) on the views of science teachers on CPD in the Canadian context provided evidence of how CPD can be more beneficial onsite within school settings and illustrated a preference for it. They reported how such settings enable opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and participate in the content in an individual way, which served to motivate. Similarly, a study of creativity among Canadian teachers by Reilly et al. (2011) highlighted four major themes: ‘Creative person; creative process; outcomes and community’ (p.536). The types of community referred to were those whose membership had an impact on the teacher.

The growth and acknowledgement of a diverse student population and teacher desire to meet ambitious learning goals create many challenges. A wide range of teaching strategies are required in response to such diversity, interpretation of lessons and continual reflection. For this to be realised in any given educational organisation, a CoP needs to be launched which will connect it to a strategic focus to encourage teachers to move forward. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) suggest teachers can play certain roles within their school communities, such as collaborators, supporters and change agents, in the face of challenges and limitations in the school setting. They advocate this as a change to the hierarchical system, which is prevalent in many education systems.

Recent studies in education have highlighted the need for a facilitation process in developing CoPs (Flogaitis et al., 2012; Murugaiah et al., 2012). The type of facilitation required is defined by Townsend and Donovan (1999) as a way of making things easier by using skills and methods which bring out the best in members as they collaborate to achieve results in interactive events. The type of facilitation strategy is crucial to the development of the CoP. This may involve either content or process or both. The process facilitation provides the environment, structures and support while the content is the focus for sharing. Cowen (2012) argues the need to recognise teaching content, and process facilitation is a means of developing higher-order thinking among teachers and enhanced learning for students.

Consciously developing a CoP within a school environment is not without challenges. Unless successful leadership, as part of the facilitation, encourages participants to buy into the process and share their experience of content or knowledge, the sustainability of the CoP will be short-lived. Leadership comes in many forms and can materialise through teachers sharing best practice. Such forms of leadership are golden moments which, when embraced by schools, engage facilitation and process.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this chapter investigated the experiences of four Irish post-primary school teachers while creating Digital Stories for instruction. While meeting challenges and rewards, the teachers displayed the ability to overcome the complexities of professional development when integrating technology pedagogy by developing a CoP. While facilitating the teachers who participated in this inquiry, time and space were created in order to share, establish trust and eliminate any suspicion. The story circle process encouraged listening and respectful critiquing, enabling teachers to overcome fears of criticism or undermining. The success of the community was a direct result of a focused agenda on Digital Storytelling for both instruction and reflection, regular meetings and personal professional growth within the framework of TPACK.

Schools are now in a position to offer teachers opportunities to share best practice, identify leaders to develop communities of best practice and empower teachers with local knowledge of teaching and learning in a situated learning environment. Teachers must share an interest in gaining membership in these communities and be willing to take risks in order to grow professionally. The teachers who became members of the Digital Storytelling community within my inquiry reported self-efficacy, ownership of their lesson content and accelerated student learning. They overcame challenges of sharing their work with their students. These findings are to be celebrated at local level, and there are many opportunities out there for further celebrations.
Part 3
Contemplative Pedagogies, Bereavement And Mindfulness In Education
A CASE FOR DEVELOPING NORMATIVE BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT THROUGH THE SPHE CURRICULUM IN IRISH PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Aoife Lynam, Conor Mc Guckin

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the school-age years (approximately 4 to 18 years of age), young people are faced with various crises that can significantly affect development and normative task fulfilment; bereavement is one such crisis. Physical and psychosocial crises such as bereavement intensify throughout the developmental process and present complex concerns for educators. Researchers agree that young people are often seen as the ‘forgotten mourners’ in a family unit (Packman et al., 2006; Wender, 2012) and that support from ‘one good adult’ can be a significant positive factor in the mental well-being of young people (Dooley and Fitzgerald, 2012). Findings from research states that teachers play a vital role in recognising the child’s grief as well as aiding the psychosocial well-being of pupils in their care (Donnelly, 2001). While the psychological pain and processes of grief are mostly unavoidable, the behaviour of adults towards pupils who are bereaved is a major contributory factor towards what is often referred to as a healthy progress through grief (Cranwell, 2007). In Ireland, 43% of nine years olds have experienced the death of someone important to them (for example, a parent, a sibling, a grandparent or a close friend; Williams et al., 2009). However, there is an evidential gap in the empirical findings in relation to how young people are supported in the Irish school environment following bereavement (Holland, 2008; McGovern and Barry, 2010; McGovern and Tracey, 2010; Rowling and Holland, 2000; Tracey and Holland, 2008).

This chapter explores the potential role of Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) as a curricular area for providing bereavement support to pupils to understand their grief experience. Pedagogically, teachers do not need to be experts in bereavement counselling in order to support a pupil who is grieving but they should be aware of how to respond appropriately and use the curricular areas to support and guide pupils in their classroom. As pupils spend one third of their lives in school, the reactions of teachers and their peers to a significant bereavement in their lives are important, as is the role of the school in ensuring that the needs of those who are bereaved are recognised and responded to in an appropriate manner.
The curricular area of SPHE provides ample opportunity for the issue of death to be discussed but teachers in the current research have expressed a lack of training and guidance in the area, which has resulted in an avoidance of the topic in the classroom. This chapter provides an overview of findings from research in relation to how SPHE is currently being utilised for grief support in the teaching profession and the classroom. Qualitative data was collected from: (a) interviews with representatives (n = 7) from organisations with expertise in bereavement support, and (b) focus groups (n = 10) with primary and post-primary teachers to explore their views about how bereavement is currently tackled in the classroom.

PREVALENCE OF BEREAVEMENT IN IRELAND

Currently, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) does not have statistics on the number of young people who have been bereaved in Ireland; however, the number of deaths that occur each year is known. In 2016, a total of 30,390 people died, of whom 15,499 were male and 14,891 were female (CSO, 2016). If one looks beyond these statistics to consider the young people who could be potentially bereft, this number multiplies and quickly becomes a large percentage of the population. It was estimated that, in 2011, 3,360 Irish 16 year olds had experienced the death of one or both parents, and a similar number had experienced the death of a sibling (Irish Hospice Foundation, 2012). To estimate the number of grieving young people in Ireland, McLoughlin (2012) extrapolated UK statistics and estimated that between 36,000 and 60,000 young people in Ireland have experienced bereavement. The Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) research follows the progress of two groups of children, nine year olds (n = 8,000) and nine-month-old infants (n = 10,000). The project began in 2006 and one of its aims is to examine the factors that contribute to or undermine the well-being of pupils in contemporary Irish families (Williams et al., 2009). GUI produced their first publication in 2009 from the cohort of nine year olds that showed that 43% of nine years olds had experienced the death of someone important to them (for example, a parent, a sibling, a grandparent or a close friend).

IRISH PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULA

In order for support and understanding of bereavement to be developed among the bereaved and their peers who may be supporting them, the curriculum is an area where positive responses and discourses can be promoted. For example, if a teacher were to use the words ‘death’ or ‘died’ in lieu of ‘gone to asleep’, it would aid the pupil in understanding their experience (Mahon, 1993). These practical forms of support are a way in which teachers, through subjects in the curriculum, can help pupils who are grieving. The primary school curricular area aims to promote the personal development, health and well-being of the child:

\[
\text{through provision of opportunities for children within a safe environment, to name and manage their own feelings and behaviour and to cope with various kinds of change thus facilitating children to be more in control of their own lives. (INTO, 2005, p.9)}
\]

In the primary school, death (for example, bereavement and grieving) is taught through the Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE: Government of Ireland, 1999) curriculum under three strand units: (a) Growing and changing; (b) My Friends and Other People; and (c) Myself and Others. Throughout these strands, the general objective is to examine some factors that can affect family life; to understand that families often undergo planned or unplanned changes that may be pleasant or difficult; to begin to cope with disharmony in, or loss of, friendships; and to begin to understand that reproduction, birth, life, growth and death are all part of a life cycle. It is also possible that educators may use the curriculum in other ways to indirectly teach pupils about death (for example, Science, the life cycle; Religion, the death of Jesus), but it is up to the discretion of the teacher as to how they approach this topic and whether they discuss death directly or not. However, reports (Inspectorate Evaluation Studies, 2009) exploring SPHE in post-primary school found that there was significant difference in the quality and level of consultation to create the whole-school SPHE plan. In the curriculum, SPHE is allocated 30 minutes of teaching time per week.

In post-primary school, the junior cycle module ‘Belonging and Integrating’ deals partly with the experience of loss. The pupils identify different types of loss and recognise the personal, emotional and social consequences of each type of loss. In the senior cycle, bereavement and loss is explored at senior cycle where pupils examine different experiences and stages in bereavement and loss and discuss how to support themselves and others (NCCA, 2006). Research exploring the implementation of SPHE at post-primary level (Nic Gabhainn et al., 2007) found that parents’ expectations of SPHE were positive and that bereavement and grief were mentioned as areas that they would like addressed in the programme. Throughout the curriculum, there are further areas where bereavement and loss can be addressed in both primary and post-primary schools (for example, Biology in Science). However, the way in which this lesson is taught is up to the discretion of the teacher. With limited time available for SPHE, it is timely to explore teachers’ perspectives of SPHE when teaching the sensitive area of normative bereavement at
both primary and post-primary level.

**SCHOOL POLICY: WELL-BEING**

In 2011, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) conducted a public consultation to discover the key priorities for primary education. The resulting report (NCCA, 2012) identified six priorities for primary education, which included well-being as one of the key areas. In 2012, Well-being in schools: Guidelines for addressing mental health promotion and suicide prevention in post-primary schools was released (DES, 2012), and in 2015, Well-being in Primary Schools (DES, 2015) was launched. In relation to the guidelines in both sectors, bereavement is mentioned on two occasions. For primary schools, the first mention of bereavement indicates how topics such as bereavement should not ‘...be treated in isolation, but rather in the context of the overall SPHE curriculum’ (DES, 2015, p.43). The second mention of bereavement states that a small intervention support group should be put in place for pupils who are bereaved (DES, 2015). In the post-primary school guidelines, bereavement is mentioned in relation to training that should be delivered by personnel who have availed of professional development (DES, 2012). The second mention refers again to a small group support that should be offered in schools (DES, 2012). While these guidelines are an indication that the DES is acknowledging the role of the educator in the overall well-being of pupils, the lack of training and guidelines mean that imminence implementation of these recommendations is unlikely. Daly et al. (2017) state that when the NCCA published proposals in 2015 in relation to new ‘Education about Religions and Beliefs’, a key finding that emerged was the emphasis that teachers placed on SPHE and the need for more time to be given to this subject area. In 2016, the NCCA published proposals in which they began the process of redeveloping the whole primary school curriculum in Ireland (Daly et al., 2017), which will have implications for SPHE and the area of bereavement. With such an emphasis and the increased discourse around well-being, it is both timely and necessary to put forward a strong argument for why bereavement support is required in schools in order to aid educators in their support of pupils who may be grieving.

**THE IMPACT OF BEREAVEMENT ON PUPILS**

Findings from research suggest that there are common reactions expressed by young people following bereavement, which are generally considered to be normal in the first two years after a death (Kaplow, Layne, Pynoos, Cohen and Lieberman, 2012). Young people can be at an increased risk of impaired academic attainment (Abdelnoor and Hollins, 2004; Capewell, 1999; Downdney, 1999; Mallon, 2011; Rowling, 2003); combined with physical (Lloyd-Williams, Wilkinson, and Lloyd-Williams, 1998; Worden and Silverman, 1996); psychological (Downdney, 1999); social and behavioural issues (Downdney, 1999; Kaplow et al., 2012; Mallon, 2011); elevated levels of depression (Melhem, Walker, Moritz and Brent, 2008; Worden and Silverman, 1996); generalised anxiety (Kranzler et al., 1990); separation anxiety (Kaplow et al., 2012); post-traumatic stress (Melhem et al., 2008) and significant adverse consequences for psychosocial development, especially the onset of mood disorders in late adolescence and young adulthood (Breier, Kelsoe, Kirwin, Beller, Wolkowitz and Pickar, 1988; Tennant, 1988; Kendler, Neale, Kessler, Heath and Eaves, 1992; Kessler and Magee, 1993). Stroebe et al. (2001) characterise the responses of grief into the following four categories: (a) affective responses (for example, depression, despair, anxiety); (b) behavioural responses (for example, crying, fatigue, social withdrawal); (c) cognitive responses (for example, problems with concentration); and (d) physiological and somatic responses (for example, loss of appetite, sleeping problems, susceptibility to illness). Common reactions to childhood bereavement, as observed by Capewell (1999), which may subsequently affect a bereaved pupil in the classroom environment include: acting rebellious; substance abuse; psychosomatic complaints; changes in behaviour; performance decline; eating problems; specific fears triggered by reminders of the trauma; overwhelming emotions and a foreshortened future. These negative outcomes call for appropriate care, training, and support from both the school and its staff. Furthermore, pupils may experience a lack of concentration (Downdney, 1999), poor school attendance (Black, 1978) and distress when memories of their dead parent are evoked in school (Silverman and Worden, 1992). Furthermore, lower self-worth may cause a young person to be less interested or involved in esteem-building activities, which include academic performance (Worden, 1996). Silverman and Worden (1996) suggest that young people with greater levels of affective distress outside the school are more likely to have poorer performance in school.

Academic achievement is an important determinant for quality of life, future income and personal success which, cumulatively, provides an indirect measure of well-being over time (Abdelnoor and Hollins, 2004). Silverman and Worden (1993) reported that one year following bereavement, an equal number of participants felt that their school work had improved as had deteriorated, suggesting that the reaction to school and work may not be a simple one. Children bereaved at the age of 12 scored an average of 1.3 grades below their controls. Employment of the surviving parent was another significant factor. Where the surviving parent was not working, there was an average deficit of 1.8 grade points when compared to those whose
surviving parent was employed (Abdelnoor and Hollins, 2004). Pupil achievement rates are multidimensional, and one aspect of this is how parents support children (for example, homework). Research suggests that the effect of bereavement may be prolonged and that intermittent support could be needed throughout the school years, and perhaps even in tertiary education (Abdelnoor and Hollins, 2004). A criticism of the assessment of the impact of bereavement on academic performance has been presented by Dowdney (1999), who states that few studies use standardised instruments to measure academic performance, and instead use measures that are less reliable.

Silverman and Worden (1992) carried out research where the parents were living together at the time of the death and the surviving children in the family were aged 6–17 years. Their sample consisted of 70 families, with 125 children (65 boys, 60 girls) aged 6–17 who were attending the first through twelfth grades. 74% had lost a father and 26% had lost a mother. Results suggested that when a mother died after a long illness, children were more likely to be sent back to school the day after the funeral. 22% of the children thought that their school performance had changed for the worse since the death, and 18% thought that their work had improved. Silverman and Worden (1992) noted that the inability to function in school was one area in which the impact of the death could be seen concretely. In spite of the loss, most of the children (71%, n = 89) reported that they retained the ability to deal effectively with school. They note that some of the young people were sad and somewhat confused, but most were carrying on by going to school and by maintaining relationships with friends and family.

Overall, the research indicates that bereavement has a negative impact on young people, which may lead to problems in later life (for example, Kessler and Magee, 1993). However, Harrington and Harrison (1999) question how much evidence exists to support the assumption that bereavement has a negative impact, as well as asserting that little systematic research has been conducted among young people who experienced the death of an immediate relative. Harrington and Harrison (1999) state that many of the current assumptions about the impact of bereavement on young people are unproven and that existing data suggests that it is not a major risk factor for mental and behavioural disorder in either childhood or adult life. Furthermore, Silverman and Worden (1992) note that while bereavement is a significant event, most children cope surprisingly well with this trauma and do not show serious symptoms (e.g., depression) or dysfunctional behaviour. From an epidemiological perspective, bereavement does not appear to be a major risk factor for mental disorder in children (Harrington and Harrison, 1999), with data suggesting that sadness, crying and withdrawal occur in less than 50% of cases (Van Eerdewegh et al., 1985; Gersten, Beals and Kallgren, 1991). Earlier research is considered to have methodological flaws and researchers have suggested that the inconsistency in the bereavement literature is due to the heterogeneity of bereavement experience and methodological variation (Coffino, 2009). There are few studies reporting empirical evidence of outcomes, especially outcomes in the longer term or outcomes for bereaved pupils compared with those for the non-bereaved from similar backgrounds and circumstances (Akerman and Statham, 2014). Much of the evidence points to strong family support (Harrington and Harrison, 1999) or indeed the support of ‘one good adult’ (Dooley and Fitzgerald, 2012). In a study of youth mental health in Ireland, Dooley and Fitzgerald (2012) sampled 14,306 Irish adolescents and young adults aged between 12 and 25 years and found that ‘one good adult’ was important in the mental well-being of these young people. For young people, a teacher may be the only ‘one good adult’ in their lives. At times, the teacher can be the ‘one good adult’ in the life of a child, and with well-being high on the agenda in the education sector in Ireland, it is both timely and appropriate to explore both organisational support available to schools and teacher perspectives of how they approach SPHE in relation to bereavement.

METHODOLOGY

The current research presented in this chapter is part of a larger study. The data from two (of the four) studies is presented. Part one of the research involved qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews with seven participants (male, n = 1; female, n = 7) who were representatives from organisations in Ireland with a remit in the area of bereavement support for young people. The table below provides an overview of participant information and their role within their organisation:

**Table 1: Semi-structured participant information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Participant information</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant A</td>
<td>Female, member of charity for over 20 years</td>
<td>Northern Ireland charity for bereaved people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant B</td>
<td>Female, founder and counselling therapist</td>
<td>Local support service for school-aged young people affected by loss through death, separation or divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Participant information</td>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
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<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C</td>
<td>Female, Director of Support Service</td>
<td>National charity peer support service for school-aged children and young people affected by loss through death, separation or divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant D</td>
<td>Female, Head of Education and Research</td>
<td>National charity supporting areas of dying, death and bereavement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant E</td>
<td>Male, Chaplain</td>
<td>University Chaplain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant F</td>
<td>Female, Head of Education and Research and Professional Development</td>
<td>Providing services for communities and individuals experiencing death, dying and bereavement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant G</td>
<td>Female, Chair of committee</td>
<td>National organisation providing support to those working with young people affected by grief</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part two of the research involved focus groups (n = 10) that took place with primary school (PS: n = 5) and post-primary school (PPS: n = 5) teachers across seven different counties in Ireland in DEIS, non-DEIS, rural and urban settings. The table below provides an overview of the type of schools taking part, their religious ethos and location as well as the role of the participants and the length of the focus group. The final column in the table provides information as to how the schools were selected to take part in the focus group:

Table 2. Focus group participant information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Number</th>
<th>Stage of School</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Religious Ethos</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Non-DEIS</td>
<td>Non-secular</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Four mainstream teachers</td>
<td>Sourced from questionnaire previously sent to schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Non-DEIS</td>
<td>Non-secular</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Four mainstream teachers</td>
<td>Sourced from questionnaire previously sent to schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>DEIS 1</td>
<td>Non-secular</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Four mainstream teachers</td>
<td>Sourced from researchers’ contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Non-DEIS</td>
<td>Non-secular</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Five mainstream teachers</td>
<td>Sourced from questionnaire previously sent to schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>DEIS 1</td>
<td>Non-secular</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Six mainstream teachers</td>
<td>Sourced from researchers’ contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>PPS</td>
<td>DEIS 1</td>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>One guidance counsellor, One chaplain, Five mainstream teachers</td>
<td>Sourced from questionnaire previously sent to schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>PPS</td>
<td>Non-DEIS</td>
<td>Non-secular</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>One guidance counsellor, Three mainstream teachers</td>
<td>Sourced from researchers’ contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>PPS</td>
<td>Non-DEIS</td>
<td>Non-secular</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>One chaplain, Three mainstream teachers</td>
<td>Sourced from researchers’ contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>PPS</td>
<td>Non-DEIS</td>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>One chaplain, One guidance counsellor</td>
<td>Sourced from questionnaire previously sent to schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All focus groups took place within school settings (with the shortest focus group lasting 28 minutes, and the longest lasting 42 minutes, with a mean time of 26 minutes, on average, for each focus group). The research was guided by the ethical principles and protocols of the British Psychological Society, the Psychological Society of Ireland and the British Educational Research Association. Ethical approval was granted from the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. All participants have been provided with pseudonyms to protect their identities and the identities of their schools.

**FINDINGS: INTERVIEWS WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM ORGANISATIONS**

The data from the interviews in relation to bereavement and the SPHE curriculum is presented. All participants in the focus groups agreed that bereavement has an impact on the pupil in school. Participant A stated that school can often feel like a safe environment for pupils and it is regularly the place where grief manifests: ‘...it erupts in the school, that’s where they feel safe.’ (Participant B). Participant C notes how grief can impact on a pupil’s academic attainment following bereavement:

*children ... who are experiencing bereavement or loss ... they are almost knocked sideways ... it impacts highly on their thinking skills and on their whole concentration and their energy levels, so ... how can that be managed in a school environment? (Participant C)*

Participant G said that there is room to teach about bereavement and loss because currently it is being avoided in the school curriculum, and uses an example of replacing the ‘goldfish’ rather than using the opportunity to talk about the death of the goldfish to illustrate her point:

*I always say don’t replace a goldfish, you know we seek out when the fish dies on Friday to replace it so the children don’t know on Monday, but actually, if we were working quite naturally and saying: “well the goldfish has died” and looking around the ritual of loss (Participant G)*

Participant G noted that it is important that school staff work as a team and do not feel under pressure to come up with solutions on their own:

*I think that is the key piece - that they don’t feel ‘oh gosh I had come up with all of the answers’ and the other piece that they are not alone in the work that they should be able to have a team around them that can be supportive of them within the school (Participant G)*

In terms of young people who have been bereaved, Participant G noted that it was particularly important to be aware of pupils in the school community who have experienced similar losses in the past, as a new loss or a fellow pupil’s loss could *‘stir up the loss for them’.* Participants agreed that bereavement would undoubtedly have an effect within the classroom ‘...when a child is going through any kind of difficult emotional journey, it will reflect on how they are in the classroom, you know, their behaviour...’ (Participant A). Participant C noted how bereavement can have an impact on a young person within the school environment and how important it is that teachers have an understanding as to why a pupil may be acting in an unusual manner:

*I have seen children who were very socially adapted and then following some significant loss in their lives, their behaviour changes, and that wouldn’t be met with anger or with impatience, that it would be met with understanding because behind all of that, that is a child struggling to tell you that they don’t know what’s going on for them, they can’t get those feelings out because children don’t have the language (Participant C)*

Acknowledging that a pupil has experienced bereavement is very important to young people: ‘...acknowledging for a child that life, you know, that something has gone wrong for them, or that they are struggling’ (Participant C). However, as teachers lack confidence, they often do not acknowledge the loss, for fear of making things worse:

*Many teachers are terrified of saying something that is going to do more damage. Part of that is because they are not trained. Perhaps they have never had the experience of loss themselves, and so, part of not responding is that they have a fear of doing more damage (Participant A)*
As a result, grief is very much 'hidden' in schools: ‘it is very much hidden because there is no process in schools…’ (Participant C). Participant C indicated that school staff want to be told what to do and what to say when a pupil experiences bereavement:

…the kind of calls that we get from teachers and principals is generally around children where a bereavement is anticipated or has happened or that child is returning to school…in particular, they will say things like ‘just tell me the words to say — what am I supposed to do?’ (Participant C)

For changes to be made, things need to emerge from ‘the top’, with national agencies and organisations providing the support, training, and resources that are needed:

…it needs to come from the top, it needs to come from … a Department level, at the curriculum level … it is in the SPHE curriculum…there are no supports there for teachers to actually…address that [bereavement] (Participant C)

Representatives believed that for changes to be made, and support provided, that guidance needed to come from the ‘top’ (i.e., the Government; Department of Education and Skills). However, many feel that there is no opportunity for such resources to be developed:

…it’s a closed door at the moment and it’s not out of lack of concern, I would think, I think it is out of lack of knowledge and understanding and also defining what is the role of the school, is it the academic? Of course it is the academic, but it is wider, children are coming to school with more than just the bags on their back … it’s looking at the whole child and recognising that some children are in very difficult circumstances and the fact that they even get to school … (Participant C)

It was stated that dealing with grief needs to be developed further in the curriculum, perhaps through Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE). At the moment, there is a small part of the SPHE curriculum that deals with loss, but it was noted that ‘…like any other profession … there are people who will do the grief bit and other people who will say “let me teach my English French and Irish” or whatever’ (Participant G). One participant stated that it was important to incorporate this topic naturally into the curriculum so that it is not avoided: ‘…to discuss a topic that is very naturally part of the curriculum in a way in SPHE … where we talk about life skills. Doing nothing is like avoiding the elephant in the room’ (Participant G).
DISCUSSION

In the interviews with representatives from organisations, participants felt that teachers lacked confidence due to their lack of training. This supports much research that highlights that teachers feel inadequate when supporting students (for example, Papadatou, Metallinou, Hatzichristou and Pavlidi, 2002). As a result, there are many teachers who are afraid to approach young people regarding bereavement; therefore, many pupils do not receive acknowledgement of the death. Furthermore, there are no directives from governmental agencies to identify the role of the teacher or provide them with guidelines of best practice in the area of bereavement support for pupils. Many participants from the stakeholder interviews believed that teachers are anxious about making things worse for the pupil by mentioning the death, and therefore, the subject is avoided in the classroom context. One participant also mentioned an example of when a teacher, in trying to provide support to a bereaved pupil, had been using therapeutic books (for example, books used by trained counsellors in a therapeutic setting with children who are bereaved) as a guide to provide support. This was noted as dangerous, as teachers do not have a remit for providing therapeutic support and, therefore, could cause harm to a pupil. It was stated that this lack of a definitive role for teachers can cause confusion as to the correct approach required when a pupil is bereaved. Cranwell (2007) states that bereavement resources should be part of the ‘toolkits’ for all resources, but the current research extends this by stating that all resources that are used by teachers must be appropriate to their role.

The focus group data indicated that all schools believed that educators should provide support; however, there was uncertainty in relation to what kind of support would be most appropriate. This supports research carried out by Holland (2008), which stated 84% of schools in his study rated the area of bereavement as important or very important. However, most of the participants stated that they relied on personal intuition when supporting pupils who were bereaved. This is a concern for vulnerable pupils, as support can be coloured by a teacher’s bias and previous experience. What is evident is that a consistent approach is required. In many of the focus groups, there was at least one or two participants who felt that they did not have the appropriate qualifications to be part of the conversation with the researcher, or with pupils. This extends research by Mahon et al. (1999), which found that only one-third of teachers felt qualified to discuss death with pupils, with many teachers indicating that they were interested in receiving additional training in order to help pupils through the grieving process. Other than the critical incident policy, most participants were unaware of whether or not they had a bereavement policy in their school. Overall, participants lacked confidence in relation to how to support pupils, with most opting not to acknowledge the death for fear of causing more distress to the pupil. This is in line with previous research that found there is almost a total absence of support from school personnel with regard to bereavement support (Hogan and DeSantis, 1994; Patterson and Rangganadhan, 2010).

Participants in the focus groups identified appropriate training for bereavement support was lacking, particularly in primary schools. This extends research by Holland (2008), which revealed a ‘training gap’; loss and bereavement were rated highly in importance but schools lacked the skills necessary to support their pupils, and 58% of schools continued to report that more training was needed in the area of childhood bereavement. Similarly, Wass, Miller and Thornton (1990) found that many teachers in the US had received little or no training in grief support. This supports the current research, which found that teachers in Ireland require further training in the area of bereavement support. Furthermore, many other studies have highlighted the necessity for further training in the area of bereavement support for teachers (Lowton and Higginson, 2003; Mahon, Goldberg and Washington, 1999; Reid and Dixon, 1999; Rowling and Holland, 2000; Shipman, Kraus and Monroe, 2001; Wass, Miller and Thornton, 1990). Some form of training is essential to raise awareness among practitioners about how to respond when a pupil has experienced bereavement and how to recognise and refer for outreach and specialist support when young people display high levels of distress (Akerman and Statham, 2014). Participants felt that it would be most helpful if there was a link between support services and the school so that experts could advise teachers as to the correct approach in supporting the pupil in the classroom. Research by Shipman, Kraus and Monroe (2001) indicates that 56% of teachers in the UK feel inadequate in supporting young people who have been bereaved. This research supports this view and finds that training and guidance is not only needed, but is essential to the overall well-being of pupils.

Holland et al. (2005) state that there can often be a temptation to focus on the academic content of the curriculum and to avoid the potentially more difficult emotional aspects of education. The findings of the current research support this view and found that teachers who participated in the focus groups felt ill-equipped, untrained and lacking in confidence with regard to issues relating to grief and bereavement in the classroom. Opportunities for discussion of these issues arise
naturally during most subjects in the curriculum but the lack of confidence expressed by teachers in this research has led to evasion of the subject of death among pupils. Jackson and Colwell (2014) state that there is no prescribed way to teach about death and loss as a separate subject but it should instead be discussed naturally within almost all areas of the curriculum, particularly SPHE. The subject and topic of death is already present in the curriculum and there should be acknowledgement of this area, rather than avoidance (Jackson and Colwell, 2014).

CONCLUSION

With the growing discourse in relation to well-being in the classroom, one possible way to improve this is by empowering educators to have open and honest discussions with pupils about emotionally challenging topics such as bereavement. In order to do this, additional resources and training for educators is required in order to support young people bereaved under normative circumstances. Training provides information, builds skills and establishes norms about what teachers can and should do to support grieving students. The more educators understand and acquire vital skills relating to supporting young people, the greater their confidence when confronted with students who are bereaved. Furthermore, clear guidelines and information to formally state the role of the teacher in supporting pupils is needed, both at a national and international level. It is of social, pedagogical, and national interest to optimise the bereavement provision available to young people in order to minimise long-term difficulties (for example, National Advisory Committee on Drugs, 2009). In Ireland, more support and guidelines are needed from the DES as a large proportion of respondents stated that further support is needed in their schools, as there is a lack of policy, teacher-training and clear boundaries as to the role of the teacher. The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN), established in 2012, created a sub-committee dedicated to providing information to schools about bereavement, of which the first author, Dr Lynam, is a member. On the ICBN website (www.childhoodbereavement.ie), there is a dedicated section on ‘Teachers’ Resources’ which provides information in relation to, for example, pictures books about death and bereavement, information sheets about dealing with special occasions and information about self-care for teachers.

Acknowledgement of this research will raise awareness of the issue of potential barriers to education and show how bereavement and grief issues may affect a young person in the school environment. An overview of the literature regarding the different approaches and formal training available internationally indicates the need for consistency and robust procedures and policies to be developed both nationally and internationally. At an international level, it is clear that different countries approach well-being support in different ways (O’Neill, 2017). More research is needed to assess the best way to support pupils in order to provide consistent training for teachers and appropriate support for pupils. Small interventions could potentially make a significant difference to the way pupils experience bereavement and all teachers need some form of training in handling bereavement, as this is an inevitable part of school life.

It is clear from this exploratory study that future research needs to investigate bereavement support and provision that involves the school, the teacher, the pupil, and the home in order to find a robust international approach to bereavement support in schools. Bereavement support can no longer be segregated to the home environment as educators are aware that the role of the school involves more than academic instruction: ‘…what is the role of the school, is it the academic? Of course it is the academic, but it is wider…children are coming to school with more than just the bags on their back…’ (Participant C, Study Two). Again, there is nothing here about including discussions of death with children in SPHE.
TEACHERS’ VOICES ON MINDFUL TEACHING IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Ann Caulfield

INTRODUCTION

Teaching has become more challenging in recent years (Morgan and NicCraith, 2015) and is attentionally, socially and emotionally demanding (Roeser et al., 2012). Teachers find themselves dealing with a greater range of difficulties and complexities regarding educational and social needs for children, a myriad of stressors and potentially ‘little things’ that are deemed challenging (Kitching et al., 2009). Such demands cause distress at physical, cognitive and affective levels and reflect the importance of teachers needing clear strategies to respond efficiently and effectively (Caulfield, 2015; Jennings, 2015). Whilst pupil well-being has recently been given a significant focus alongside numeracy and literacy (Department of Education and Skills, 2017), teacher well-being and care are slowly gaining momentum (Caulfield, 2017). The 2017 Action Plan for Education strongly advocates well-being for children and the integration of the 2015 Well-being in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). Mindfulness practice has been suggested as one response to encourage teacher care and provide the necessary skills to respond in the daily tasks of teaching (Jennings, 2015; Schonert-Reichl and Roeser, 2016). This chapter invites us to ‘hear’ teachers’ voices and to learn from what they have experienced in relation to mindfulness and stress reduction. It defines stress and mindfulness, outlines five areas of teaching which were investigated in a research project, and gives an insight into the current experience of teachers in the classroom and the school context.

STRESS AND TEACHING

The popularisation of the term ‘stress’ is attributed to Hans Selye in the 1950s (Selye, 1956). Following extensive physiological studies, he defined stress as ‘the nonspecific response of the body to any demand, whether it is caused by, or results in, pleasant or unpleasant conditions’ (Selye, 1984, p.74). He also identified the term stressor as the stimulus or the event that creates internal or external stress (Selye, 1984). Teacher stress is referred to as ‘the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher’ (Kyriacou, 2001, p.28). This takes a serious toll on teachers, pupils and school communities. It is evident that primary school teachers in Ireland experience a significant level of stress and burnout (Darmody and Smyth, 2010; Morgan and NicCraith, 2015), being considered one of the biggest occupational hazards accounting for almost 40% of work illnesses and absenteeism (Condon, 2011). Concurrently, 40% of disability retirements from teaching have been ascribed to stress, depression and anxiety while 11% of teachers have retired on the grounds of ill health (Fitzgerald, 2008).

Emerging themes in Ireland indicate that teaching multi-ability and multi-grade classes, alongside relationships with pupils, colleagues and parents contribute to the highest stress levels among teachers (Darmody and Smyth, 2010). Additionally, poor communication, insufficient support and a lack of community experience are cited as significant stressors (Schlichte et al., 2005) culminating in job dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion and reduced well-being (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009; Schutz and Zembylas, 2009). Emotional stress and inadequate emotional management skills are cited as primary causes of teacher dissatisfaction and early contract termination (2005). Whilst this is so, findings show that when primary teachers and pupils are happy, stress levels are lower (Darmody and Smyth, 2010). Teachers, therefore, require effective coping strategies to regulate social and emotional responses within a profession that requires mindful responses.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness focuses on (a) ‘the intentional self-regulation of attention to facilitate greater awareness of bodily sensations, thoughts, and emotions’ and (b) ‘a specific quality of attention characterised by endeavours to connect with each object in one’s awareness (e.g. each bodily sensation, thought, or emotion) with curiosity, acceptance, and openness to experience’ (Lau et al, 2006 p.1447). It promotes self-awareness and self-reflection and involves paying attention to emotional and cognitive experiences as they occur. This awareness combined with non-judgemental responses promotes self-regulation of thoughts and emotions. As mindfulness practice promotes self-reflection and awareness, it may well be suited to assisting teachers to overcome reactive responses to themselves, pupils, parents and colleagues and, thus, support effective classroom climate and self-care.
METHOD
This chapter presents data collected during a study focused on the impact of mindfulness practice on stressors experienced by primary school teachers in the Republic of Ireland. The sample included:

![Fig. 1: Participants and schools](image)

Each participant was required to have practiced mindfulness for a minimum of six months. This was deemed appropriate to the development of a regular practice and an ability to purposefully inform the research enquiry. The study used qualitative methods with semi-structured interviews to explore the contribution of the practice of mindfulness towards stress reduction among school teachers. The epistemological and ontological underpinnings influenced the research approach in the search for the subjective material from the primary school teachers. The core research question was ‘What contribution does mindfulness practice make to stress reduction in primary school teaching in Ireland?’ It dealt with pertinent issues related to the teachers’ mindfulness practice and its impact on their professional practice, workload, relationships and classroom management. The University of Lincoln granted ethical approval and the study suggests interesting findings.

FINDINGS
The data revealed that there were a myriad of stressors and responses related to mindfulness practice. The interviewees suggested that mindfulness was not the only strategy used to respond to and regulate stress. Other strategies included exercise, diet and yoga, alongside consulting and socialising with friends and colleagues. Although not a correlational study, this indicates that it is not possible to totally isolate the mindfulness variable from other variables.

The following sections outline the causes of stress and the mindfulness practices engaged in by teachers. It continues with findings related to mindfulness and self-regulation, professional practice and workload management, relationships, classroom climate and mindfulness with children. Quotes from interviews are used, each using fictitious names.

CAUSES OF TEACHER STRESS
It was clear from the data that many teachers experienced job satisfaction with a feeling that their work was fulfilling. However, although they enjoyed their work, many reported experiencing stress and some revealed being stressed for a long time without realising it, both from internal and external stressors.

In the context of external stressors, teachers reported that government cutbacks had culminated in a reduction in classroom supports like Special Needs Assistants and English as Additional Language teachers. Kelly suggested that ‘lack of resources is one of the lows of my teaching, with Special Needs Assistants now unavailable to children and little support for children whose first language is not English.’ There were many challenges associated with working with children with special needs, typified by Mari:

> You might have children with Down syndrome in the class and not have the skill or knowledge...A child is only given a classroom assistant if she or he ticks certain boxes, but they might need a classroom assistant.

Interviewees conveyed that these and other government initiatives had changed teaching styles and necessitated additional report writing, monitoring and evaluation alongside extra academic and social challenge and issues of professional development. The Department of Education and Skills imposed additional Continuing Professional Development (CPD), known as Croke Park Hours, which are considered:

> …stressful and pointless…and really devalues you as a teacher when you give an extra hour for the sake of it when you know you are putting in three or four hours over what they think you do.(Helen)

From a different viewpoint, there was concern about a public perception that...
teaching is an easy job, that teachers have little to do, short hours and lots of holidays. Mari’s comment typifies the unseen demands and commitment mentioned by her and other teachers:

We do have a great job and we do have good time off, but come the holidays we are so wrecked...I was sick for the Christmas and Easter holidays...I was just worn out from the term and up and down the town with Christmas carols and play, etc. and my system was low...it’s very demanding of energy, and that’s not just me, that would be pretty common. (Mari)

Another commitment invisible to the public is the time spent in class preparation, exemplified by Helen reporting:

I’m there at eight planning and preparing and then come home in evening and have corrections...holidays are the only time get to switch off.

Helen suggested that:

You don’t switch off as a teacher...mind racing because as soon as I wake in the morning, I have my timetable in my head; Sunday evening I am planning the timetable.

Many described physical, emotional and psychological responses to stress. At an internal level, one teacher described stress as being physical and emotional. Another agreed, adding that it was also spiritual: ‘the sickening feeling, the low moods and the spiritual emptiness that comes with it...the breathing differently, the heart racing and the sweaty hands’ (Simon). While physical indicators included tiredness, exhaustion, anxiety, feeling overwhelmed and ‘the body telling of its stress’, common emotions referred to feelings of frustration, powerlessness, anxiety, being overwhelmed, irritability and vulnerability. At a cognitive level, some teachers noted a propensity towards ‘mind racing’ (Helen) and ‘rumination’ (Kate). Others reported ‘day dreaming’ (Helen), ‘mind wandering’ (Louise) and ‘projecting a lot of what will happen tomorrow’ (Chloe).

In referring to her teaching, Jacinta said she set off thoughts of self-doubt and self-blame, ‘blaming myself that it was my fault that they (the children) weren’t learning’. Chloe indicated that ‘for a long time I never knew if I was doing it right and had high expectations of kids, though I thought they were coming up short’. Jacinta continued that she finds ‘it hard to deal with’, indicating her strategy in responding to such self-criticism: ‘if that critical mode is switched on, I need to step back. I get a cold, my lower back aches, my body tells me it’s time to slow down, to take stock and take space’. These comments point to a need for personal patience and self-tolerance. They also suggested that despite mindfulness practice, the inner critic endured and self-criticality persisted, indicating the need for some means of managing thoughts, emotions and behaviours. Many reported that their mindfulness practice resulted in greater focus, concentration and attentiveness to thought patterns, thus showing evidence of teachers’ personal awareness and consciousness as a result of their practice (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005; Chaskalson, 2011; Caulfield, 2017).

MINDFULNESS PRACTICE AMONG TEACHERS

It was clear that teachers practised a variety of mindfulness techniques ranging from the body scan, sitting meditation, movement or walking meditation. Although they had learned mindfulness through differing avenues, 50% indicated that they practised daily, 45% said they did so two to four times weekly, and the remainder practised irregularly. Sitting meditation was the most popular practice with regular mindful moments scattered throughout their working day as a means of present moment awareness physically, mentally and emotionally.

Interviewees began to practise mindfulness for various reasons: many for health-related issues (including stress and depression), for general well-being and for CPD. Teachers named copious stressors that caused distress at physical, cognitive and affective levels and were aware of the need to deal with them at a conscious level.

Though not all interviewees disclosed being stressed physically, mentally and emotionally, the findings revealed a consensus that mindfulness practice is a means of self-regulation. The development of self-awareness and self-management was discussed as an integral feature of stress reduction and the creation of well-being, signifying ‘the link between the practice of mindful awareness and the creation of well-being’ (Siegel, 2007: 32). The findings are illustrated in diagrammatic form in Fig. 2.
MINDFULNESS AND SELF-REGULATION

Three key findings emerged from mindfulness practice, including the importance of awareness and consequent change in the thinking processes, the development of empathy and compassion towards self and others in times of distress, and a new focus on professional self-care.

Teachers identified the value of mindfulness to self-regulate thoughts and emotions. It enabled one to ‘stop and think’, becoming ‘aware of the important things in life’ (Brenda); to ‘notice a trigger and pause saying to myself this is happening and I don’t need to get stressed or feel guilty’ (Gráinne). These comments reflect a form of cognitive self-regulation ‘whereby a system maintains stability of functioning and at the same time, adaptability to new circumstances’ (Kabat-Zinn, 2001p. 227). This correlates with the suggestion that mindfulness may encourage cognitive and emotional regulation alongside the ability to evaluate one’s internal and external experience and interpretation of stressful situations (Zelazo and Cunningham, 2007).

Whilst cutbacks impacted negatively on teaching supports, a key response strategy was that of being attentive to one’s internal processing with the outcome of compassion and empathy towards self and, consequently, towards others. Mindfulness gave teachers a capacity to reflect on thoughts and emotions with a certain acceptance and openness, giving an ability to care for themselves rather than becoming involved in negativity, thus reducing internal stress.

It creates a stop gap in the hustle and bustle...to stop to look at what the reality is. It has taught me to recognise what a feeling is, what a thought is and what the reality is, that you are not the feeling, that you are not a mood; you are a bunch of everything together and you can control them. (Kate)

Many responses from teachers demonstrated an ability to regulate their emotions in a more positive manner as espoused by Davidson (2004). Evidence of an ability to feel good and recover from negative feelings is articulated by Jacinta:

I suppose I have more positive feelings and am better able to manage my stress, more of a sense of well-being and happier in myself and in my job.

The data thus suggests that mindfulness practice at a core level has contributed towards stress reduction. It has subsequently impacted upon stressors at a professional level relative to teaching style and practice (Caulfield, 2017).

MINDFULNESS AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

In relation to teacher attributes, the data showed that, through the process of paying attention to and regulating thoughts, emotions and environmental conditions in
the present moment, specific pedagogical qualities and characteristics emerged in response to stressors. Among the attributes identified were clarity, calm, clear thinking, concentration, confidence, empathy and compassion, and an ability to respond rather than react in challenging situations.

Some pointed to the manner in which thoughts, when integrated into mindfulness practice, had an effect on calmness and mental health (Kabat-Zinn, 2001). Brid reported:

I suppose it is disconnecting from the mind for a little while and not replaying everything again and again and again...I am calm and see things in a different light that maybe I may not have seen before.

As a result of their mindfulness practice, clear thinking (as opposed to mind wandering and day dreaming) was suggested as creating greater presence to the task at hand, greater focus, concentration and attentiveness to thought patterns, thus showing evidence of teachers’ personal awareness and consciousness (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005; Chaskalson, 2011) and an ability to respond to stressful situations with clarity (Zelazo and Cunningham, 2007). According to many interviewees, the practice of mindfulness afforded a greater ability to concentrate: to concentrate on conversations and on the task in hand by paying attention in the moment, ‘to hone your concentration and ... bring out the best in you’ (Kate).

Each interviewee made reference to empathy and compassion towards self and others as a consequence of mindfulness practice. A typical response was:

I think I am growing in empathy and compassion and therefore I can see where the kids are coming from a lot more easily and connect with them. (Sheila)

Moya, a Special Educational Needs teacher, indicated that she is more reflective and ‘inclined to be a bit more compassionate with myself and the children.’

I sometimes think: ‘Stop the curriculum for now, there are six kids sitting in front of me on Monday morning and they are wrecked tired, so let’s just check in and see where we are in our bodies or in our minds.’ It has given me that freedom too.

These personal developments are significant given that those who can manage their own distress, when in the company of another in need, are more likely to respond with empathy and compassion (Eisenberg et al., 1989). Furthermore, it signifies the use of empathy and compassion in the establishment of an optimal classroom climate by low levels of conflict and disruptive behaviour (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009: 492).

Another notable emotion commented upon by many teachers was that of isolation. Several spoke of being in the classroom with pupils from 9a.m. to 3p.m. with 10 to 15 minutes’ break and minimal opportunity to meet with colleagues to discuss pupil needs, let alone personal needs. In an exceptional case regarding staff relationships and interaction, another teacher revealed that:

In our school, we don’t have breaks at all. The principal and vice principal don’t take a break so the teachers don’t, so we don’t meet each other except at staff meetings or a night out. (Gráinne)

This socialisation into ways of working minimises the likelihood of collaborative working conditions and inclusive practices. However, a collegial support system was clearly present and greatly valued as a means of talking through challenges and gaining support and wisdom from colleagues. Self-care thus emerged as a personal commitment with well-being pointing to available resources relative to needs at a psychological, social and physical level (Dodge et al., 2012).

MINDFULNESS AND WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT

The findings revealed that a significant majority of interviewees considered an increase in paperwork unacceptable and that ‘accountability is gone too far with so much record keeping’ (Sadbh) that it ‘takes from the passion of the job’ (Helen). This was coupled with a consensus that the curriculum is now on ‘overload’ with ‘a sense of huge frustration that you never get everything done’ (Sheila) and an external perception where teachers are ‘expected to be a Jack of All Trades’ (Mari) with an attitude that ‘everything that is wrong with the world can be sorted by teachers’ (Noreen). These stressors implicated professional workload.

A response identified by teachers was that of being aware of the present moment. Louise noted that mindfulness practice assisted: ‘The mind is clear and the work gets done quicker because in your mind it is easier to do the paperwork or corrections because you are actually present. Simon indicated that he manages to ‘stop and think about my options and...to respond in stressful situations rather than to react as I was inclined to do’. Teresa, a learning support teacher for three rural schools, for whom paperwork is a particular stressor, had a contrary response: ‘I have a problem with all this documentation. So no, mindfulness doesn’t help me. No, it is the only area it doesn’t help me in.’ The same teacher, when asked about workload, articulated: ‘Well I’m so interested in what I do...it doesn’t get to me really.’

Interviewees’ responses pointed to a commonality in the use of time management, prioritisation and present moment awareness. While it was clear that interviewees placed importance on being solution-focused, two responses were typical:

Now I think ‘now I am going to sit down and I am going to be present’ and I do that one task and actually get it done an awful lot quicker than having my mind wandering or finding another thing to distract me. (Louise)

This reflected ‘intentional self-regulation’ (Lau et al., 2006: 1447). Brid identified
the need to respond to her perfectionist nature, suggesting: 

...mindfulness teaches me to say ‘right I am going to spend an hour doing this and if I don't get it done, I don't get it done.’

While these examples demonstrate the value of responding rather than reacting to workload stressors, they may also indicate increased freedom and choice of response (Chaskalson, 2011) and a capacity to catch problems before they become serious (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005). Equally, these examples show interviewees’ capacity to have ‘an intentional commitment to cultivate calmness and awareness in the domain of work’ by letting mindfulness guide their actions and responses, which Kabat-Zinn suggests greatly reduces work stress (2001: 388).

**MINDFULNESS PRACTICE AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH PUPILS, PARENTS AND COLLEAGUES**

The study illuminated that relationships are central to teachers’ work. The influence of mindfulness on relationships was considered to be integral to teachers’ social and emotional well-being. Some relationships with pupils, parents and colleagues were considered complementary, some conflicting and some caused frustration and tension. It was evident that there was great care and concern for children’s needs among interviewees, that parents offered both challenges and supports, and that collegial relationships were collaborative, harmonious and discordant.

Teachers recounted that mindfulness practice developed sensitivity to children’s stressors, ranging from economic and social situations at home, high expectations or lack of involvement from parents, and children dealing with personal relational issues. They reported being more sensitive to pupils: ‘It is my personal intention that children feel safe, secure and content in themselves’ (Niamh).

Present moment awareness, empathy and listening skills were noted as the key enablers to transformative interpersonal relationships. Louise reported that ‘because you are completely present, you actually get to know the children...watching them, listening to them...more aware and mindful.’ She later noted a parent’s comment: ‘You really know the children.’ Some interviewees indicated that having greater self-empathy prompted great understanding towards children. Sheila explained:

I think I understand the kids an awful lot better. I see them now as people, little beings, as opposed to little students...I can connect with them...on a more deep level and I think a more human level.

Other comments from teachers regarding changed attributes relative to pupil relationships included being ‘more helpful with kids who have emotional issues’ (Jacinta), ‘more aware of their enjoyment and the need to affirm them’ (Brenda), ‘not taking things personally from pupils’ (Chloe) and awareness of being ‘judgmental of myself’ (Sadbh).

Relationships with parents varied among interviewees. Some considered parents to be challenging and ‘more demanding in the current climate’ (Louise). ‘We're meant to be psychologists and social workers and everything rolled into one really’ (Teresa). Conversely, Sheila indicated that parents in her school are ‘not interested in their children's education so we don't have pressure from parents to teach the curriculum; we don't have that stress’.

Some teachers were cognisant of their listening skills and presence with others. Daniel referred to a rapport with parents and being ‘more conscious of listening to them rather than coming up with a quick solution’, and Jacinta suggested:

I used to do a lot of talking. Now I slow down a bit and give them a chance to talk. I can let the silence be silence. I am more aware of my nervousness and therefore can let it be and sit back a bit.

The development of a positive attitude in response to challenging relationships was deemed useful. One of the challenges referred to by learning support teachers was that of giving bad news to parents, for example, when a child is diagnosed with dyslexia. In such a situation, Teresa referred to focusing on the child’s strengths. Helen thought similarly, though clarified that: ‘mindfulness is an element of it, not the be-all and end-all of it, but an element where I do get that space and say, “Okay this is negative but I’m going to turn it into something positive”’. Perhaps mindfulness helps by allowing teachers to access skills they may not use habitually.

According to interviewees, the practice of mindfulness enhanced collegial relationships by increasing personal awareness, listening skills and confidence and developing the ability to hold boundaries and say ‘No’ appropriately. The outcome enabled teachers ‘to be more true to what I think’ (Moya), ‘to pull back a little bit’ when others are ‘highly strung’ (Teresa), to ‘contribute more at staff meetings’ (Sadbh) with honesty and openness, and with a mind that is ‘more settled and focused’ (Jacinta). Some suggested that formerly they would have accepted a task as it was easier to do so than to refuse and regretted it afterwards. Thus, it appeared that mindfulness practice impacted on personal awareness, which, in turn, impacted on self-confidence, self-assurance and self-care.

From the findings, it is apparent that there are two main aspects relative to collegial relationships, namely relationship with the principal and relations with other staff members. Many interviewees alluded to group dynamics and how ‘the principal can affect the rhythm of the school’ (Jacinta). A minority indicated that their principal was ‘highly stressed’ (Moya). In general, interviewees reported that principals were particularly supportive, helpful, dependable and had ‘an air of confidence (Nora).
Some teachers reported an organisational acceptance of mindfulness and its integration across the school with consequential positive implications for organisational stress reduction. Others struggled for its recognition. Whilst mindfulness in schools was generally introduced from a psychological perspective, a cultural issue was raised related to schools being under the patronage of the Catholic Church. A number of teachers verbalised concern that mindfulness has its roots in Buddhism and, therefore, would 'jar with the (Catholic) ethos of the school...I wouldn't tell some colleagues that I attended a Buddhist centre' (Jacinta). Conversely, two schools offered regular mindfulness sessions for staff while one school has integrated mindfulness across the school where children and staff members take a mindful moment twice daily with the sound of a bell through the intercom system.

MINDFULNESS PRACTICE AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Findings related to mindfulness and classroom management pointed to teachers' own presence, its impact on pupils and classroom climate, and the introduction of mindfulness to the pupils as a means of self-awareness and classroom management.

Teachers spoke of adequate preparation and planning as enablers to effective classroom management. In contrast, teachers referred to hindrances, for example, challenging behavioural problems and juggling children’s needs.

Kate’s response was typical:
...to have the time for kids you're differentiating all the time, for kids that are particularly weak or particularly strong, to have the time to give them and keep everything juggled.

There was a consensus among participants that challenging behaviour in pupils was one of the primary stressors relative to classroom management. Teachers’ motivation to practise mindfulness had a cascading effect on classroom management and classroom climate. They reported that the introduction of mindfulness with pupils manifested in increased calm and reduced behavioural challenges while also offering opportunities for calm and concentration for teachers.

Using ‘visualisation’ (Mari), a ‘body scan’ (Brid), a ‘simple body awareness technique’ (Daniel), ‘just being mindful of their breath’ (Louise) or ‘teaching children mindfulness as a game or mindful eating’ (Gráinne) were typical examples of the techniques used by interviewees with children. Some practised with pupils daily and others twice or three times weekly. Interestingly, one teacher who did not use mindfulness with the children stated that her personal practice had created ‘a certain sense of the children being more relaxed without even bringing it in formally’ (Sheila). The key outcomes of this practice were related to classroom atmosphere and children’s self-awareness. Kate’s response is typical of many:

The kids are now in the mode for mindfulness and ask me if we haven't had it for a few days. They really, really love it...one child in my class is quite antagonistic and creates problems in the yard. So, having a class going out in good form, they come back with a serious atmosphere. If I do some mindfulness with them, it dissipates it.

Jacinta referred to the need to know ‘particular special needs areas from ADHD to Autism’ and indicated that ‘mindfulness has been brilliant for me. That has been one of the biggest plusses in managing those children.’ The same teacher later reported that if a child was ‘having a moment’, suggesting a distressing moment, she would ask: ‘Can you notice what you are feeling or what is going on for you, and now, make a choice?’ (Jacinta).

Daniel reported that ‘aside from meditation, the child has learned to focus and concentrate’, indicating the same requirement used for English, Irish and Maths. For Brid, ‘the biggest thing, for the children is that sense of self and self-confidence, the empathy and the awareness of the world around them’ and epitomised by Gráinne who noted that it was ‘a great way of giving them a solid core’.

The pupils’ response to mindfulness appears to have corresponded to that of the teachers. There was a consensus among teachers who introduced mindfulness to children that its outcomes benefited both children and teachers. Kelly suggested that ‘it is so useful for classroom management’, contending that ‘for challenging pupils if I use the mindfulness in the class, it gives me a quiet space and also the children. This was echoed by Louise, who stated that ‘I need it sometimes too...it gives a general air of calmness in the classroom.’ These views reflect the literature wherein it is suggested that the most favourable classroom climate is distinguished by minimal conflict and disruptive behaviour (La Paro and Pianta, 2003). Daniel reported that being calm himself had a calming effect on the classroom climate. Similarly, Louise suggested that ‘being relaxed has definitely a knock-on effect’, echoing Jennings’ contention that teachers’ behaviours ‘are associated with optimal social and emotional classroom climate and desired student outcomes’ (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009: 492).

CONCLUSION

The responses of teachers in this study increase our knowledge and understanding of the prevalence of stress in primary school teaching and suggest that mindfulness may be a useful strategy to employ as a means of stress reduction. Not only does the current study illuminate the internal and external challenging tasks that are required of teachers to maintain health and well-being, it also highlights the ability
of mindfulness practitioners within the profession to self-regulate thoughts and emotions, which is indicative of continued focus and self-awareness. The study presents a comprehensive understanding of the many ways in which interviewees have practised mindfulness. Its integration into daily life implicates interviewees’ attributes, relationships, challenging behaviour, workload, time management and general professional practice as a means of reducing stress. Conversely, a particular tension experienced by some participants was a lack of acceptance by their colleagues of the practice of mindfulness and anxiety in relation to participating in mindfulness retreats while being employed in Catholic schools. Although the study does not suggest that mindfulness practice gets rid of stress, it does suggest its value towards stress reduction among primary school teachers.

The findings suggest that, although interviewees began the practice of mindfulness through varying approaches, they each used it in response to internal and external stressors at cognitive and affective levels. The findings indicate that internal stressors such as internal chatter, an inner critic and a variety of emotions were being filtered through a process of awareness and attention while external challenges were given consideration to culminate in a considered response as opposed to a reactive retort.

The findings demonstrate the contribution of mindfulness to occupational self-care and well-being. However, it is apparent that self-care is a personal commitment. The data has highlighted that there is evidence of minimal formal organisational policies in schools to address stress reduction. It also emphasised the value of informal collegial support that maintains collaborative responses to certain stress-filled experiences for individual teachers.

Mindfulness is only beginning to be used as a medium of well-being and stress reduction for teachers. The study investigated a motivated sample that practised mindfulness regularly and some acknowledged other influences on stress reduction. It is difficult to specifically isolate one aspect of stress reduction. It might be interesting to conduct a similar study with participants who practise other techniques towards resilience and stress reduction in the context of the demands on teachers in the 21st century.

This is one empirical exploration of mindfulness in teaching in the Irish context and an effort to support teacher development and well-being. It offers an initial step with scope for additional research into teacher stress reduction, self-care and self-awareness.

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11 INCORPORATING CONTEMPLATIVE PEDAGOGIES INTO ONLINE TEACHING FOR TEACHERS DOING A MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Julie O’Sullivan and Teresa Whitaker

INTRODUCTION

Defining contemplative pedagogies is not easy; they can focus on, among other things, mindfulness, meditation, reflection, obligation, loving kindness, goodness, presence, free writing, voluntary work, experiential learning, contemplative first-person learning, intersubjectivity, intuitive knowledge, expanded consciousness, unconditional compassion for self and others, appreciation of beauty, creative fulfilment, inner peace, heightened awareness, noticing silence, sustainability of society, global citizenship and global justice (Kahane, 2009; Coburn et al., 2011; Zajonc, 2013; Sable, 2014; Mah y Busch, 2014; Weare, 2012). The real issue for teachers and students is that teaching (pedagogy) and learning are not simply about curriculum content or grades but about acknowledging our basic humanity in order to foster individual mental wellness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Mindfulness can be used as a pedagogy and is defined as ‘the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experiences moment by moment’ (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p.145). It is centred on the importance of experiencing the now. Engaging in mindfulness means having an increased awareness of the surrounding environment in conjunction with one’s own internal feelings at that present moment in time. ‘It involves attending to the external environment such as sights, sounds, and smells, as well as to internal bodily sensations, thoughts and feelings’ (Hooker and Fodor, 1998, p.77).

This chapter reports on a small pilot study course in which graduate teachers, undertaking a Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning (MATL) in a private higher level institution (HEI) in Ireland, were introduced to ideas about contemplative pedagogies, specifically mindfulness, over a three-week period in September 2014. They were teaching in diverse educational and cultural settings, but the majority were teaching in a primary school setting. The intervention was delivered online through distribution of readings and synchronous tutorials. Attendance was voluntary, and there was no assessment of the learning outcomes, other than tutorial discussions. The research questions that underpinned the study were:
What was the teachers' knowledge about contemplative pedagogies?
Were teachers interested in incorporating mindfulness into their everyday teaching practices?
Were teachers satisfied with and did they gain knowledge about how they could incorporate mindfulness into their everyday teaching practices?

We provide a very short review of the literature on contemplative pedagogies and literature relating to incorporating mindfulness with children because many graduates taking the master's programme were primary school teachers. First, we present a brief summary of the background to the research.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Julie is an experienced primary school teacher with 11 years' experience of teaching young children. She completed a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course, 'Mindfulness in Education', in 2014, which gave her ideas for implementing mindfulness into her own teaching. It emphasised the importance of teacher well-being; if the teacher is not well, it will automatically affect the children he/she is teaching. This course provided sample lessons and drew attention to ways that teachers may already be using mindfulness techniques without even realising it, for example, with listening and responding activities in music or going for a nature walk. The course inspired Julie and started her on her mindfulness journey. She began implementing mindfulness in her daily teaching, seeing very positive effects — for example, at parent-teacher meetings, many parents commented on how the children enjoyed the mindfulness and said they were delighted to see it incorporated into school life. This ignited a passion in Julie to learn more about mindfulness, to help enhance her personal life, so she completed an additional 10-week mindfulness course for adults.

Teresa is an experienced educator in higher education. She became very interested in contemplative pedagogies from hearing about them at the International Conference on Engaging Pedagogy in 2014 and attending a keynote lecture and workshop with Professor Daniel Barbezat, who has written extensively about incorporating contemplative pedagogies into higher education (Barbezat, 2012; Barbezat et al., 2013). She joined the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/acmhe) and spent the next few months researching issues concerned with contemplative pedagogies. As programme director of the MATL, Teresa thought it would be informative for student teachers to learn about contemplative pedagogies. Therefore, Julie and Teresa collaborated and provided the three-week intervention for two cohorts (October 2013 and April 2014) of MATL students.

CONTEMPLATIVE PEDAGOGIES

Zajonc (2013, p.83) suggests that 'a quiet pedagogical revolution' has taken place at third level in the United States of America. New educational methods are being rolled out in courses as diverse as law, medicine, poetry and biology; course designs:

...that support the development of student attention, emotional balance, empathetic connection, compassion, and altruistic behavior, while also providing new pedagogical techniques that support creativity and the learning of new content. (Zajonc, 2013, p.8)

These approaches are not only for stress reduction but also help to develop student attention and capacity, for example, the 'contemplative practice of beholding in art history and compassion practices for game theoretical experiments in economics' (Zajonc, 2013, p.84). These practices improve attention, cognition and cognitive flexibility.

Coburn et al. (2011) teased out what is meant by the term contemplative pedagogy and why it should be included as part of an academic course rather than students simply going to a meditation centre. The benefit of teaching it as part of an academic course is that students can discover that there are ways of knowing other than cognitive learning. These ways of knowing include presence, direct experience, immediacy of attention, sensory experience, increased level of awareness, inner peace, awareness of silence and the practice of loving kindness. It may develop their capacity to relax, adapt and cope with student life. Contemplative pedagogy aims to change the nature of education, and this requires that it is integrated into academic courses. Contemplative pedagogy is not just for those who adhere to religious beliefs but rather to:

...unlock the innate yet often unexplored capacity for intuitive knowledge, expanded consciousness, unconditional compassion for self and others, appreciation for beauty and creative fulfillment. Religion may point to the Sacred but the Sacred exists apart from religion. (Coburn et al., 2011, p.169)

Contemplative pedagogy draws on the Latin meaning of the word education to ‘draw out’ the students' innate wisdom and intelligence and critically evaluate one's own assumptions. Zajonc (2013) outlines the practices associated with
contemplative pedagogy: mindfulness, concentration, open awareness and sustaining contradictions. Mindfulness means being awake in the present moment. Mindfulness-based stress reduction has been proven to reduce stress and improve concentration by focusing fully on an object. The art of mindfulness has been around for years and has its origins deep rooted in Buddhist practices; however, today, mindfulness may be separated from its origins and is used in medicine to relieve stress and anxiety (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Mindfulness techniques have been adapted throughout the world in varying contexts, mainly among adults. Baer (2003) outlines how mindfulness techniques used in a clinical setting can assist the treatment of anxiety and depression. She describes mindfulness as ‘the non-judgmental observation of the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise’ (p.125). Due to societal change and the challenges encountered in the educational setting, mindfulness is becoming increasingly popular among educators to help assist them in the promotion of well-being among their students (Baer, 2003).

TEACHING MINDFULNESS TO CHILDREN

Although research specifically relating to the benefits of mindfulness among children is quite limited, studies undertaken with children and adolescents indicate the positive implications of mindfulness (Burke 2009; Hooker and Fodor, 2008; Albrecht et al., 2012). The structure of educational curricula on an international basis has changed significantly in recent times to reflect the need to develop the child’s social, emotional, mental, spiritual and cognitive wellbeing as well as on an educational level (Albrecht et al., 2012; Tregenza, 2008; Yager, 2009; Garrison Institute Report, 2005). These aspirations resonate with one of the key principles of the Irish primary school curriculum, which states that ‘Social and emotional dimensions are important factors in learning’ (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 1999, p.8).

It is widely recognised that the child’s social and emotional development significantly influences his or her success in learning. This is addressed most effectively through a school ethos that is characterised by a caring, interactive relationship between teachers and pupils. It is also a central concern of learning in every curriculum area. Its importance is stressed too through social, personal and health education. By providing children with a successful and happy school experience, by nurturing essential intrapersonal and interpersonal development, and by developing communication skills, children's self-esteem and self-confidence are raised and their motivation to learn is increased (NCCA, 1999, p.16).

Not only is there a need to ensure that the child is fulfilled both emotionally and cognitively within the educational sector but also that mental health promotion is made a key priority for schools. Children spend much of their childhood in schools, and it is important that they learn coping and resilience skills to face stress and challenges that they will encounter in childhood and later in life. Stress and anxiety are prominent features in today’s youth in Ireland. A recent study (n = 1,131) of young people aged 11–13 in Ireland revealed that one in six or 15% were experiencing a mental disorder such as anxiety or behavioural disorder and one in three had experienced a mental disorder at some time in their lives (Cannon et al., 2013).

Cannon et al. (2013) suggest that mental health promotion is most effective when it is situated early in life in schools and when it is part of the school ethos. They argue that there are positive learning outcomes and evidence of improved coping skills and learning outcomes when a whole-school approach is taken. Dooley and Fitzgerald (2012) mapped the mental health of young people (n=14,000) aged between 12 and 25 in Ireland and argue that young people are vulnerable during their teens and that mental health difficulties can emerge in early adolescence with a decrease in protective factors such as self-esteem, optimism and positive coping strategies. They identified the influence of one ‘good adult’ (such as a schoolteacher) on the development of self-esteem and sense of belonging, and to the building of resilience and reduction of depression, suicide and self-harm (Dooley and Fitzgerald 2012).

Irish education and health policy also endorses the importance of schools and teachers for promoting mental health and wellbeing (Department of Education and Skills, 2015) and provides guidelines for schools, arguing that schools have a central role to play in building life skills and resilience. The policy emphasises the importance of listening to children and cultivating healthy relationships with peers and teachers and advocate for a whole-school approach. Psychologists (O’Rourke, 2015) also argue that schools have a role to play in promoting wellbeing and positive mental health to combat the high suicide rates for young people. Ireland is ranked fourth highest in the EU for those aged 15–19 who take their own lives. In Ireland, the suicide rates per 100,000 of population range from 13.5% in 2001 to 11.1% in 2012, reflecting 519 deaths in 2001 to 517 in 2012 (National Suicide Research Foundation, 2014). Statistics such as these highlight the need for contemplative practices such as mindfulness in schools to provide children with a set of tools or resources that they can use when faced by life challenges. Although, mental health promotion can be taught within the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) aspect of the curriculum (which is allocated a half-hour slot per week and focuses on whole-school approaches to well-being and health promotion), it is better if it is
integrated into all aspects of the primary school curriculum (DES, 2015).

Mindfulness practices used with children are similar to those used with adults, such as meditation, breathing exercises, visualisation techniques and increasing awareness of the environment. However, to ensure success, it is best to start these techniques for a short period of time and they can then be developed and prolonged, as the children become more confident practising them (Weare, 2013). Although there are no limits to when mindfulness techniques can be practised within the educational environment, it is deemed to be particularly beneficial at certain times during the school day (Hooker and Fodor, 2008).

The beginning of the day may be a useful time to practice bringing awareness to the present, perhaps using a visual meditation, in order to focus attention on beginning the school day, and to begin the day freshly. Similarly, mindfulness might be used at other transition points during the school day, such as before or after recess, after lunch, and the end of the day. Mindfulness practice can also be used before important events such as tests, sporting events, and competitions. (Hooker and Fodor, 2008, p.90)

In teaching children mindfulness concepts, practices and activities, it is important that the teacher is experienced and practising it. Kabat-Zinn emphasises the need for this by stating that mindfulness ‘cannot be taught to others in an authentic way without the instructor’s practicing it in his or her own life’ (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p.149). Currently, education centres in Ireland provide mindfulness courses to teachers (Keane, 2016). The Irish Teaching Council (which regulates the registration of teachers) has also included discussions on the benefits of mindfulness as part of its Research Meet (Fennelly and O’Brien, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

We took an action research approach (McNiff, 2002), which ‘involves identifying a problematic issue, imagining a possible solution, trying it out, evaluating it (did it work?), and changing practice in the light of the evaluation’ (McNiff, 2002, p.8). In this case, the problematic issue was that all modules on the MATL programme were accredited and assessed; we believed that teachers should also be aware of non-curricular issues such as contemplative pedagogies and mindfulness and their application in a teaching environment.

A short course, ‘Introduction to Contemplative Pedagogy’, was designed and offered to teachers (n=30). They were informed that it would be delivered online. We explained what the course and research entailed, with the caveat that participation was voluntary and that there was no assessment for the course.

Action research involves a deep examination of one’s values by asking questions like: What educational values can I connect with my educational beliefs? What are the areas in my everyday practices that are not in keeping with my values? (McDonagh et al., 2012). Although, the use of a reflective journal is advised, due to the short time scope of the intervention, rather than keeping reflective journals, we had a discussion before each tutorial and a debriefing session after each tutorial to see what was working and what was not working and how it was connecting to our values.

We value a student-centred approach, and believe in the importance of mindfulness. We believe that it is important to give children a set of tools that will help them develop resilience for all the challenges they will meet in life. We noted that some students appeared to be taking the short course out of curiosity, and it was obvious that they had not done the readings; however, others were clearly excited about it and were thinking about ways they could incorporate mindfulness into their daily teaching practices. In keeping with our values, we were not prejudiced against those who did not choose to participate.

RESEARCH DESIGN

We designed two short questionnaires consisting of forced choice and open-ended questions and administered them online via SurveyMonkey®. We surveyed the teachers before the intervention to find out if they had heard the terms ‘contemplative pedagogy’ and ‘mindfulness’ before, if they practised meditation and what mindfulness meant to them. We gathered demographic data in relation to gender and teaching experience. Of the 30 surveyed, less than half (14) responded to the pre-intervention survey.

Following the intervention, we surveyed students again to evaluate their satisfaction with and knowledge of contemplative pedagogies and the general effectiveness of the course. The response rate was low — only 9 responded to the post-intervention survey. We acknowledge the limitations of this pilot course and the surveys and cannot claim that the study is reliable or that the findings can be generalised beyond this small study.

ETHICAL ISSUES

The Ethics Committee in Hibernia College granted ethical approval for the course and research. All aspects of the research complied with the British Education
Research Association (BERA, 2011) guidelines. Students were informed about the tutorials and research, and it was emphasised that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time without any negative repercussions (BERA, 2011).

**INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPLATIVE PEDAGOGY COURSE**

The authors of this chapter designed and facilitated the course, and we explained to students that we were not experts in this field but that we were building knowledge together in a constructivist manner.

Before the first tutorial, we emailed three readings (Coburn et al., 2011; Zajonc, 2013; Kahane, 2009) to students and asked them to read them in order to have an informed discussion in the tutorial. We recorded tutorials and made them available to those who could not attend. We provided students with the link to the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society website (www.contemplativemind.org) so that they could study the Tree of Contemplation.

The first tutorial focused on the question: What is contemplative pedagogy? Links to YouTube videos on meditation and mindfulness were included on the Microsoft PowerPoint slides which were used during the tutorial and distributed to students. The next two tutorials focused on mindfulness. Before the second and third tutorials, the students received four readings (Hooker and Fodor, 2008; Young, 2013; Burke, 2009; Albrecht et al., 2012). The learning outcomes were as follows:

**SESSION 1**

- To familiarise learners with the key concepts which underpin contemplative pedagogy
- To critically evaluate key writers in the field of contemplative pedagogy

**SESSION 2**

- To enable the participants to identify the need for mindfulness in teaching practices
- To identify the seven elements of the mindfulness attitude
- To create an awareness of how mindfulness can be incorporated into everyday teaching practices

**SESSION 3**

- To enable the participants to explore further mindfulness techniques to use within their teaching
- To identify the advantages of mindfulness in an education setting

**DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS**

Two cohorts of students were eligible for participation (October 2013, n=18) and (April 2014, n=12). The majority of students were working in an Irish context (n=21). Others were working in diverse cultures such as the United Arab Emirates (2), Egypt (1) South Korea (1), South Africa (2), Singapore (1), Morocco (1) and Malta (1). The age profile was as follows:

Table 1: Registration breakdown by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>October 2013</th>
<th>April 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25–30</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–35</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36–40</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41–45</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46–50</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51–55</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of students were female with males representing 24% of the October 2013 cohort and 27% of the April 2014 cohort. Of those who could take the contemplative pedagogy course (n=30), almost half (14) attended the tutorials.

**FINDINGS**

The findings from the pre-intervention survey (n=14) revealed that the majority of the teachers were experienced educators in that 79% had been teaching in excess of 6 years whereas a minority of 21% had been teaching for 5 years or less. The majority (n=12) were female. Most (n=10) had not heard the term contemplative pedagogy before and had never learnt to meditate. Of those who did meditate, only 3 had meditated in the last month. However, most (n=9) said that they understood the term mindfulness and 12 teachers gave their definition of mindfulness as presented in the table below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think it is about the awareness and acceptance of our present feelings and thoughts in a calm manner.</td>
<td>Six teachers cited the importance of awareness, awareness of self, of feelings, of one’s mind, and awareness that we are not always in control. This resonates with Kabat-Zinn’s definition of mindfulness as ‘the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experiences moment by moment’ (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p.145).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being aware of one’s self to shut out all external distractions. Being 100% present in the actual moment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am unsure, guess it is an awareness of one’s own mind to its fullest.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being aware of one’s own actions and the purpose of such actions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be aware of inner self and being in tune of everything around, to understand the bigger purpose of existence as intended by the author.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of my personal control over my own state of mind and being but also awareness of my lack of control over broader issues that I can allow my state of mind.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in the moment and personal awareness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Defining mindfulness**

**Mindfulness for me is...**

“...what is happening around you in the macrocosm as well as the microcosm, being mindful of others and how you treat them and how they may be affected by what’s happening around them. The global situation is an area where we should display great mindfulness...that even the smallest thing we do has great ramifications for the earth and endeavouring in our day to day life to make sure that we do our utmost to make sure that we take responsibility for our actions.

Understanding yourself, a deep feeling for within that allows you to engage in things greater than yourself.

It is that compassion to ourselves, to everyone around us, it is also about teaching our minds to be more focused, to see with clarity, to have spaciousness for creativity and to feel connected.

Clearing the mind, slowing down a racing brain, being in the present moment.

Becoming mindful of your thoughts and emotions and learning to be relaxed and in control of your own self in mind and body.

These interpretations of mindfulness resonate with Kahane’s (2009) discussion of global citizenship and global justice.

These definitions of contemplative pedagogy are supported by Zajonc (2013), who suggests that contemplative pedagogies support the students’ development of compassion and creativity and connection with others.

Most of the teachers (n=8) associated mindfulness with education, and most (n=10) gave their students ‘mindful’ activities such as short breaks from work during teaching sessions. They described these activities as follows:

- They can stand and stretch and do eye exercises.
- Although drama and music are quite active subjects, there are times when you see the students are distracted or tired, especially if they sit down more than 5 minutes. When this happens, I ask them to move around the room in different ways such as jumping, running and so on.
- We have relaxation time after dinner at around 4 o’clock where the children...
I like the Tree of Contemplative Practices and the move beyond mindfulness. I think although mindfulness, yoga and meditation are very fashionable right now, although they are enjoyed by many, we should not lose the value or undermine other practices that allow an opportunity to clear our minds, such as music, journaling, gardening, taking walks, etc.

- The understanding of what it is to be mindful.

- The theme is interesting, I come to know for the first time about the importance of integrating contemplative pedagogy in the curriculum to help in teaching and learning. But I would like that the course was in terms of practice and training.

- It was interesting to know how many students suffer from depression and how much mindfulness helps the students.

- The material and the student dialogue

- The change that this mindfulness exercise can bring to our daily lives where everybody seems in a rush but nobody is aware of their surroundings and their deep personal emotions.

- I found the fact that mindfulness encourages learners to live in the now useful, also the fact that learners can be of any age. The use of the senses in mindfulness was interesting.

- Practical classroom strategies

- How to teach mindfulness to children

We asked teachers if they saw a need for mindfulness in the education setting. Eight teachers said yes and one teacher said no: ‘No, but it could be integrated when a teacher sees it as helpful and to also involve parents who are in support.’ Affirmative responses are presented in the table below.

Table 3: Is there a need for mindfulness in an education setting?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I see a need for a more holistic education. I think if the curriculum needs us to focus on more maths and science but our students are not undertaking basic healthy living practices in their lives, then our curriculum is wrong.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I can really use it with the children I teach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think so because it is a technique that helps in developing to using connections, clarity, creativity. It is important to start this technique in the early stage of learning for the child to adapt himself or herself to the stability of mind, soul as she or he is growing up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I do see it. Today’s world is very fast and people need to relax and think.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes for sure; in this busy time where children spend most of their time in front of the screens, it is important for them to be mindful that when they are finished or bored with the technology, they are not lost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The skills developed in mindfulness are excellent to promote positive learning experiences. Listening skills, cognitive development, helping with concentration skills, compassion and empathy and behavioural problems are all areas that benefit from mindfulness to name a few.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely. Children need to take structured breaks, with a focus on the break. I believe that this can have a big impact on children with DCD and ADHD as it allows for a brief respite. At the same time, everyone benefits from such relaxation techniques. Mindfulness would also be a useful strategy to calm children who may be over-stimulated after break time/PE/games, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yes, children today have lots of stress and to learn how to relax/enjoy the moment without the aid of electronics.

**DISCUSSION**

We took a constructivist approach in presenting this short pilot 'Introduction to Contemplative Pedagogy' course on the basis that the students were experienced teachers; therefore, it was our intention to ‘maximize students’ construction of their own knowledge and control of their own learning’ (Tenenbaum et al., 2001, p.88). Students were able to reflect on their own experiences in the classroom. This is congruent with Spigners and Chalon’s (1999, cited in Tenenbaum et al., 2001) observations that older learners develop knowledge internally and that information is connected to past experiences and knowledge; ‘As a result, effective learning is based on reflections, personal insight and permanent change in behaviour’ (p.204).

We posed the question: What was teachers’ knowledge about contemplative pedagogies? Although the majority of teachers had not heard of the term 'contemplative pedagogy', the majority defined it in terms of awareness, being in the present moment, being compassionate to self and others, acceptance of things that cannot be changed, seeing the bigger picture and so on. These definitions resonate with the writings of Kabat-Zinn (2003) and Zajonc (2013). They also cited the importance of other extra-curricular activities such as music, journaling, gardening and taking walks.

In response to the question ‘Were teachers interested in incorporating mindfulness into their everyday teaching practices?’ most teachers were interested and reported encouraging their pupils to engage in ‘mindful’ non-curricular activities such as listening to calm music, lying on the floor, breathing exercises, yoga exercises, stillness, relaxation, meditation music, breathing exercises, reflections and reading for pleasure.

In response to the question ‘Were teachers satisfied with and did they gain knowledge about how they could incorporate mindfulness into their everyday teaching practices?’ the majority of teachers said that they could use contemplative pedagogies to encourage basic healthy living practices. They said that contemplative pedagogy could help children to develop connections, concentration skills, and compassion, resolve behavioural issues, and bring clarity and creativity. It can also help to calm children who may be over-stimulated and may help to reduce stress.

Teachers saw a need for a more holistic education that does not just concentrate on particular subjects. One of the most positive outcomes of the intervention is that three primary school teachers conducted research on mindfulness in education for their minor dissertations.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, in this paper, we present an account of a small pilot study of a short online course on contemplative pedagogy, delivered to teachers undertaking a postgraduate master’s degree in teaching and learning. The findings indicate that some teachers were already practising contemplative pedagogies in their everyday teaching methodologies albeit unknown to themselves. They appreciated the short course and it provided them with ‘food for thought’ and deepened their knowledge and understanding about ways of incorporating mindfulness in their pedagogies.

We advised teachers that this was just an introductory course and, if they were interested, they should pursue accredited CPD courses in mindfulness. We recommended that they should be practising mindfulness before attempting it in the classroom. The literature and findings also suggest that contemplative pedagogies could be embedded in higher education.
Part 4
Specific Issues In Education: Leadership, Professional Development, Pedagogy And Standardised Testing
INTRODUCTION

There are many concepts and definitions of leadership, some focusing on traits of the leader (Northouse, 2013; Jago, 1982) and others focusing on the context of leadership (Fiedler, 1964; Leithwood et al., 2006). The concept of leadership that is most relevant to this chapter is defined as a process by which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve common goals (Northouse, 2013). This chapter explores leadership roles among females in the education sector in Ireland through the analysis of the work narratives of four successful, professional females in senior leadership positions (i.e., principal roles) in Irish primary schools. The aim of the study was to develop deep and robust insights into the ways in which female principals have experienced leadership and to understand how their experiences contributed to their growth as leaders. The four semi-structured interviews explored how these female principals shape and are shaped by their personal and cultural discourses about leadership. The chapter begins by exploring theories of leadership and leadership styles. This is followed by a discussion of school leadership and gendered school leadership. The methodology is outlined followed by the findings and discussion. The chapter concludes that there was no dominant model of leadership but rather leadership was a multidimensional phenomenon that was facilitative, consultative and visionary; principals strived to create team-oriented, collaborative, and people-oriented cultures.

LEADERSHIP

There is an abundance of literature on leadership; some authors adopt a management viewpoint which focuses on 'how to do it' (Blanchard et al., 1985; Goffee and Jones, 2006) while other work focuses on observation of effective leaders in the workplace (Kouzes and Posner, 2007; Hartley and Allison, 2000). Historically, leadership has centred on an individual in a specialised role; it considers the relationship of that individual to his/her subordinates or followers, and the consequences of the individual's actions.

The earliest research on leadership focused on the traits of individuals, which
were originally seen as innate characteristics of leaders (Stodgill, 1974). The belief was that certain people possess inherent qualities and traits that make them better suited to leadership roles. These studies have contributed to the notion of the ‘Great Man Theory’ popularised by Thomas Carlyle in the late 19th century, which purports the theory that leaders are born, not made. Most contemporary theories of leadership have moved beyond this notion and suggest that leadership cannot be separated from the context in which the leadership is exerted. Fred Edward Fiedler, in his landmark article in 1964, proposed the contingency theory of leadership. This theory was elaborated on, and it was proposed that leadership is, in fact, contingent on ‘the setting, the nature of the social organisation, the goals being pursued, the individuals involved, resources, timeframes and many other factors’ (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003, p.9). Others have argued that there are several major paradigms of leadership, such as the traits approach, the skills and styles approaches, situational and contingency approaches and charismatic and transformational approaches (Northouse, 2013; Bass, 1990).

More recent research has tried to identify the traits most commonly associated with effective leaders, such as intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability (Northouse, 2013). While other research suggests that leadership is a rational activity and that there are powerful contextual factors that impact the behaviour and effectiveness of leaders such as beliefs, values, ethics and character (Jago, 1982), Marlow (1986) suggests that social intelligence resides at the heart of effective leadership. Furthermore, he suggests that the ability to understand the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of persons in a social domain is what makes a leader most effective. According to Cox (2001), there are two basic categories of leadership: transactional and transformational. Burns (1978) distinguished between ordinary (transactional) leaders who exchanged tangible rewards for the work and loyalty of followers, and extraordinary (transformational) leaders who engaged with followers, focused on intrinsic needs, and raised awareness about the significance of specific outcomes and ways in which those outcomes might be achieved (Barnett et al., 2001; Cox, 2001; Gellis, 2001; Judge and Piccolo, 2004).

More recently, perhaps due to a globalised concern for human welfare, climate change and fear of the future, a more spiritual and inclusive leadership discourse has emerged, centring on empathy, integrity, truth and authenticity (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Avolio and Bass (1984) discuss the four I’s of transformational leadership: inspirational leadership, which relies on the charisma of the leader; individualised consideration, which is a focus by the leader on the personal needs of followers, intellectual stimulation, which involves influence on followers’ thinking and imagination, and idealised influence, which focuses on gaining the trust and confidence of followers. This is further expanded by Luthans and Avolio (2009), who suggest that authenticity is a ‘root construct incorporating charismatic, transformational, and/or ethical leadership’ (p.4). Authentic and global leadership styles are based on behavioural traits and support Kouzes and Posner’s (2007, p.4) assertion that ‘leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow’.

A central element of most definitions of leadership is that it involves a process of influence (OECD, 2001). Yukl contends ‘Most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person [or group] over other people [or groups] to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation’ (Yukl, 2002, p.3). For the purposes of this chapter, leadership is defined as ‘a process by which an individual influences a groups of individuals to achieve common goals’ (Northouse, 2013). The goal for many in leadership positions is to influence change and establish direction through the creation of a vision. Success comes when people are motivated and inspired to align with the vision, and change happens.

FEMALE LEADERSHIP STYLES: DISCOURSE ON DIFFERENCE

As already discussed, the earliest research on leadership focused on the traits of individuals; these were originally seen as innate characteristics of leaders. The assumption is that certain people possess inherent qualities and traits that make them better suited to leadership and that these qualities differ between women and men. Research has sought to identify the traits most commonly associated with effective leaders, such as intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability (Northouse, 2013). Some suggest that social intelligence resides at the heart of effective leadership; the ability to understand the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of persons (Marlowe, 1986) in a social domain is what makes the leader most effective. Other research suggests that leadership is a rational activity influenced by the beliefs, values, ethics and character of the individual (Jago, 1982).

As women increasingly enter leadership roles that were traditionally occupied by men, the possibility that the leadership styles of women and men differ began to attract attention. Rosener (1990) suggests that women’s leadership style differs greatly from men and suggests that women rely on a more interactive, collaborative and relationship-building style of leadership. The premise is that female leaders, compared with male leaders, are less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative, and more oriented to enhancing others’ self-worth. Feather (1984) suggests that
women are often characterised as being relatively submissive and passive; they possess feminine traits and are kind and selfless, whereas men are aggressive and independent. Betz. (1989) suggests that women place less emphasis on competitive success and more on doing tasks well and promoting harmonious relationships. Gender stereotypes are commonly described along lines of agency and communality. Bosak and Sczesny (2011) refer in their research to the stereotype of the female as ‘communal’, whereas males are seen as being ‘agentic’. Communality includes traits such as being affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, nurturing, and gentle. Agency involves traits such as being aggressive, ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, self-sufficient, self-confident, and prone to act as a leader (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

GENDER AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

A large body of research on school effectiveness and improvement from a wide range of countries and school contexts has consistently highlighted the pivotal role of school leadership in making schools more effective (Scheerens and Bosker, 1997; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000; Townsend, 2007). There is an emerging consensus that the quality of school leadership has a significant impact on school culture and is a major determining factor in ensuring quality educational outcomes among pupils in schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000). Sergiovanni describes the school principal as ‘the most important and influential individual in any school’ (1995, p.83). Miller (1990) defines school leadership as the ability of a teacher to engage colleagues in experimentation and examination of more powerful instructional practices to increase student learning. It may include teachers working with teachers, focusing their time and energy on the investigation of challenging instructional strategies, or merely taking responsibility for creating a working climate where others can be encouraged.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Teacher education carries with it a gendered social history and is suffused with domestic and maternal imagery (Acker and Dillabough, 2007). A major and well-documented pattern of the teaching workforce is its ‘feminisation’, with women dominating the primary teaching profession. Women have in fact continued to outnumber men among primary teachers in Ireland for the past seventy years. According to the latest Education Indicators in Focus (2017), the average share of female teachers across OECD countries increased from 61% in 2005 to 65% in 2010 and to 68% in 2014, in all education levels combined. Around 82% of primary school teachers and 63% of secondary school teachers are women. In 2003, women accounted for 87% of teaching teachers at the primary level. In the Republic of Ireland, 27,924 members (86%) of the primary teachers’ union, the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, were female, while 4,677 (14%) were male (McGuire, 2018). As of December 2012, however, 65% of primary school principals are female. The same gender patterns apply all over Europe: teaching is predominantly a female occupation, and the proportion of women teachers is even higher in nursery and primary schools compared with secondary schools. However, across all sectors, women are proportionally under-represented at management level. In the past, the lack of women in educational management roles was explained by the structure of the society where women had to leave their jobs once they had a family. The position of the Irish Catholic hierarchy on the education of girls was one which also favoured a religious and domestic emphasis in preparation for motherhood within a family structure. Traditional values defined the woman’s role in terms of home and family. Following the second wave of feminism and greater economic prosperity, there were shifts in the employment demographics and women began to take up more employment opportunities. This underrepresentation of women in leadership roles often goes unnoticed in the public domain. Much of the focus on gender in the Irish education sphere concerns itself with the under-representation of men in the primary school workforce. Significant attention is given to the ‘over-feminisation’ of the teaching workforce and on how men might be attracted into the profession (Lewis, 1997).

BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN

Levin and Young (1994) in Leithwood et al. (1999) describe how tension between workload expectations for educational leaders and parenting expectations for women inhibit the number of women willing to apply for educational leadership positions. Some suggest that male dominance in educational leadership roles is also seen as a barrier to women because men are more likely to use this leverage to perpetuate the status quo. Other research suggests that some women fear being successful and fail to make the transition to leadership or management roles due to lack of confidence or self-belief (Wentling, 1996; Fischlmayr, 2002). Success may be seen to be associated with aggressiveness and masculinity, which may cause social rejection, and women are seen to depend on approval and acceptance (Appelbaum and Shapiro, 1993). Internal barriers include women’s own decision not to apply for promotions, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, fear of failure and competitiveness (Acker in Oplatka and Beer-Sheeva, 2006). Rarieya (2005) documents work obstacles for women that include non-supportive work structures, inflexible work times, and intimidation
from male colleagues. The report Gender in Promotion: An Examination of the Issues (Saunders, 1996) identified five key barriers to promotion; structural barriers, mobility and family responsibilities, lack of incentives, lack of encouragement and mentoring and organisational culture. Catalyst (2000) notes that women are more likely than men to make life decisions such as delaying marriage or postponing having a child in order to manage both career and personal life. Hewlett and Luce (2005) consider the ‘opt-out revolution’ debate, exploring whether women leave full-time work because they are pushed or pulled. Kellaghan et al. (1985) conducted a study in which the representation of men and women in promoted posts in primary teaching was examined. The evidence from this study showed that even when women and men hold similar qualifications, women, for a variety of reasons, are not promoted and do not seek further promotion to the same extent as men. More specifically, a teacher’s decision to compete, or not to compete, for promotion was found to be related to a combination of personality, school and home-related factors, including self-confidence, areas of teaching experience and domestic responsibilities. Thus, while the results of the study drew attention to the influence of cultural constraints on women, they also pointed in the direction of explanations for gender inequality, which have to do with expectations transformed into personal choices or decisions.

In summary, the review of the literature relating to leadership reflects the diversity of opinions and themes related to females in the workplace. Females are seen as both different from and similar to men in the challenges they face and their leadership styles. Female leaders are seen as unique and strong in a transformational style of leadership, with inclusivity and consensus being important aspects of their decision-making. Successful leaders are seen to prioritise their careers, delegating at work and at home and ignoring potential discrimination.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

A qualitative methodology was chosen because it focuses on meaning and understanding (Cohen et al., 2011). The research design was semi-structured interviews, which are an essential source of evidence (Yin, 2009, p.108). Interviews are particularly suitable ‘where individual historical accounts are required of how a particular phenomenon developed’ (King, 1994 in Robson, 2002, p.271). The aim was to develop deep and robust insights into the ways in which female primary school principals have experienced leadership. The study was particularly focused on understanding how participants felt their experiences contributed to their growth as leaders.

**SAMPLE**

The sample consisted of four primary school principals working in Irish primary schools. The participants represent a range of different age profiles, leadership experience and school contexts. Two were established principals, one was newly appointed to the position and one was a retired principal. Respondents were selected on the basis of their willingness to participate. All completed postgraduate studies in educational leadership and have been in an educational career in the Irish educational system for a significant number of years. To ensure anonymity, the names of respondents and details of the schools have not been included.

**Table 1: Profile of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School type</th>
<th>Length of time as principal</th>
<th>Role of principal</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Urban DEIS school</td>
<td>19 years (previously principal in two other schools)</td>
<td>Administrative Principal</td>
<td>BEd MEd</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Urban school</td>
<td>16 years (previously principal in one other school)</td>
<td>Administrative Principal</td>
<td>BEd MEd</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rural school</td>
<td>1 year completed</td>
<td>Teaching Principal</td>
<td>BEd MEd</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rural school</td>
<td>5 years (retired)</td>
<td>Teaching Principal</td>
<td>National Teacher MEd</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The topics covered by the interview schedule were informed by the literature review. The questions cover a range of topics from the general (such as career history and leadership) to the specific (personal aspects of their leadership role). The topics addressed include perceptions and experiences of their role as leader, the impact of gender (if any) on that role, their perception of the barriers to leadership roles and managing their personal well-being. Inductive data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994) was used with emerging themes identified arising from the interview data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Six themes emerged from the interviews: (a) Becoming a principal; (b) Leadership styles; (c) Discourse on difference; (d) Challenging work; (e) Barriers to leadership and future career paths; and (f) Enabling factors. As this section discusses these themes, it is important to note that there was no dominant model of leadership that arose from the experiences of the four participants interviewed. However, the various approaches and emphases discussed here offer perspectives on this multidimensional phenomenon of leadership. The interviews and viewpoints presented highlight that the traits and characteristics of leaders are learned from the contexts in which they are situated. The traits, characteristics, values and beliefs of leaders emanate from their early experiences and influence the journeys they take. It is clear from the experiences outlined that leadership is not a static construct; the changing nature of the workforce and the ever-growing complexity of organisations and organisational changes necessitate a more collaborative outlook where leadership is concerned, and an ability to react and manage that change is crucial for effective leadership (Covey, 1991; Kets de Vries, 2006). However, one area that was dominant was that of visionary leadership. All of the interviewees highlighted the importance of being able to convey this vision in various ways to others, of the importance of motivating individuals to share and commit to this vision, and of the need to align resources and processes to accomplish it. Nanus (1992, p3) states:

There is no more powerful engine driving an organisation toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, and achievable vision of the future, widely shared.

BECOMING A PRINCIPAL

Gronn et al. (1999), cited in Christie (2002), highlight the importance of the formative years on future leadership development. There were remarkable similarities in the family backgrounds of the women who were interviewed that indicated that they all came from homes that were supportive, encouraging and had strong values. All of the women spoke fondly of inspirational teachers they had experienced in their own education and they spoke of being involved in extracurricular activities in local community initiatives and clubs from an early age. All women described themselves as being ‘focused’ from an early age and as high achievers who were motivated to do well. All of the women cited the notion of being an ‘excellent teacher’ as a prerequisite to leadership. They stated that having different experiences in different schools and taking on different roles within schools were important requisites for the job.

Fidler (1997) points out that the quality of leadership is heavily influenced by the opportunity to experience various tasks throughout the career path of teachers. The findings from these interviews indicate that the formative years of the participants endowed them with the intellectual capital (Dumais, 2002) which supported them in their later careers.

Blackmore and Sachs (2007, p.134) found that loyalty and persuasion were factors in women’s decisions to take up a management position. The entry stories of the women in this study were contrary to this finding. While the interviews did not generally feature career planning, the women had in fact made personal choices and decisions to apply for the leadership roles. In all cases, they cited further study as a motivational factor. All had completed a Master’s Degree in Education and it was during this time that they developed interest in thinking about and applying for the role. They saw this as a stepping stone to promotion:

I reached a stage where I had done everything and achieved everything as a teacher...I had to find something else that was going to inspire me. I started studying and it really made me want to stretch myself. (P2)

I worked in a variety of schools, saw different cultures, saw what was good and what could make a difference and thought I could do that too. It was while I was doing my Master’s that I decided I wanted to apply. (P2)

LEADERSHIP STYLES

The participants were asked to describe their leadership style. All of the women emphasised that their approach to leadership was ‘facilitative’ and ‘consultative’. They stressed the importance of ‘valuing their staff’ and of ‘working together towards better educational outcomes for children’. The principals in this study overwhelmingly presented their own leadership styles in ways that are consonant with much of the research on women managers (Shakeshaft, 1987; Ferguson, 1984): open, democratic, consultative, supportive, fair, consensual, listening, encouraging and drawing on people’s strengths. One principal commented: “I think my role is largely about enabling and motivating others...I think some of those kind of essential values like fairness and delegating are essential.” (P2)

All of the leaders referred to their leadership style as what Burns (1978) describes as ‘transformational’ rather than ‘transactional’. They used words such as ‘facilitative’, ‘collaborative’ and ‘consensus building’ to describe their style. Vinnicombe (1987) showed that women tend to demonstrate a leadership style based on empowerment and collective action in order to initiate and sustain change. However, this style of
leadership brought with it some challenges, which the women referred to. This style of leadership was often more time consuming and decisions were often made at a ‘slower pace’, but it ensured they had ‘buy in’ from everyone. Those who were more experienced cited that they had ‘got better at making decisions’ and if consensus could not be reached they now had the confidence to make the decision themselves and move on.

The women principals viewed their leadership style as both ‘creative’ and ‘visionary’. Bennis and Nanus (1985) suggest that the effective leader has a unique dream or vision, which helps in describing a view of an attractive and attainable future for the organisation. They suggest that this acts, or should be used, as a way of motivating members of an organisation. Lawler (1984) and Gardner (1995) consider that vision is a vital quality of leadership. Fullan (2005) argues that a vision based on values, purposes and integrity should pervade the school. One of the women commented: ‘I know where I want to go and my goal is to bring people to a shared vision, it’s my job to sell that vision and bring them on that road.’ (P3)

Sergiovanni notes that the primary trait of principals’ leadership behaviour is to ‘inspire all concerned to join in accomplishing the school’s mission’ (1995, p.4). Locke and Latham (2002) argue that formulating a vision for the organisation is one of eight core tasks for senior leaders and a key mechanism for achieving integration or alignment of activities within the organisation. Senior leaders need to be able to ensure that processes are not only tied together so that they are consistent with each other, but they need to actively support each other.

The theme of ‘making a difference’ surfaced throughout all of the interviews. Most of the participants’ motivations were rooted in notions of ‘doing good’, ‘serving the parents and children’ reminiscent of the many studies that find women doing a disproportionate share of service work in education (e.g., Pyke, 2013). The women discussed their desire to ‘make things better’, ‘make a difference’ and ‘impact on the lives of children.’ They talked about the importance of the school in the community and how the principal has to ‘be there for everyone’. Despite the many challenges facing them in their role, they still felt it was a ‘privilege’ to be in such a role. This is in keeping with Greenleaf (2002) who describe women’s approach to leadership as ‘servant leadership’. A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. Aspects of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002) and of stewardship (Block, 1993b) underpinned their daily task and motivated them to achieve in their role. School leaders play an important role in strengthening the ties between school personnel and the communities that surround them (Fullan, 2001). Leaders of the most successful schools in challenging circumstances are typically highly engaged with and trusted by the schools’ parents and wider community (Hargreaves et al., 2008).

DISCOURSE ON DIFFERENCE

Discourse on ‘difference’ arose across all of the interviews; doing things differently was a common theme that emerged. Throughout the interviews, the women described their leadership style by rejecting or comparing the ‘typical masculinist’ style. They challenged the traditional masculine type of dominance in primary school education. They were critical of the notion that some parents and Boards of Management would still regard ‘The Master’ or the ‘GAA appointment’ as preferable to a female principal. They spoke of some male principals as having excessive self-interest, lack of consensus, authoritative decision-making and non-sympathetic communication styles. They viewed their own styles as inclusive; one participant noted that women give more attention to people, while men give more attention to tasks and getting things done quicker.

‘I think women have a greater ability to find a solution, however they often doubt themselves and aren’t as decisive as men’ (P2)

This resonates with research which suggests that women place less emphasis on competitive success and more on doing tasks well (Betz, 1989) and research which suggests that women are more oriented towards interpersonal group processes (Eagly and Karau, 1991). Interviews with the principals included discourse on females as perfectionists while men often ‘settling for something less’. Striving for perfection in both life and work was explored. The women commented that women are often ‘more self-critical’, ‘harder on self’ and ‘never happy’, when compared to men. This self-inflicted perfectionism was noted as raising stress levels and preventing females’ progress.

CHALLENGING WORK

The principals in the study spoke of the difficulties and challenging situations they had encountered in their role. More often, they spoke of the demands of building projects, maintenance, renovations and school extension project work which is by its nature complex and time-consuming. They spoke of the huge administrative burden that is placed on the principal, and in many cases they ended up having to bring work home or stay late in school: ‘That was the hardest part of the job, managing the administration and paperwork’ (P1). They felt that the positions carried significant
and extensive responsibilities, although they were not always fully defined. One noted that she had never received a proper job description and remarked how the arrival of every new Circular from the Department of Education and Skills meant the job of principal would change again. Connolly compares the work of the principal to 'Atlas carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders' (2009, p.7) and this was certainly indicative of the way in which the women in this study felt about the huge volume of work they faced.

BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP AND FUTURE CAREER PATHS

One of the most consistent findings of school leadership literature is that the role of the principal is critically important (Leithwood et al., 1999; MacBeath, 1999; Staratt, 2005). As pressure for school reform mounts, for some, the possibility of becoming a principal has become less attractive (Hargreaves et al., 2003). This concern was noted by all of the women. They cited a number of factors which they felt were barriers to other women; financial remuneration, overload of the job, policies and more recently accountability: ‘The Education Act, the PISA results, WSE…all of these new policies have made the job far more accountable and this is putting a lot of people off…men and women…’ (P4). This perspective is supported by Hargreaves and Fink (2006) who describe initiative overload as ‘the tendency of organisations to launch more change initiatives than anyone could ever reasonably handle’ (2006, p.8), thereby causing a sense of related chaos among employees, the most eager of whom either burn out or simply leave.

Three of the women who were married commented on the fact that it was very difficult to have a family and commit to the additional meetings at night time. One talked about the fact that so many women have a ‘double work shift’, taking care of most of the childcare and domestic responsibilities at home as well as working all day. Another commented that it was easier for her now that her children were older, while others had made a very conscious decision not to go for the role while their children were young.

The women attributed the huge workload as a potential reason why more women don’t apply for the role of principal. The Board of Management meetings and Parent’s Association meetings at night encroached on family life and having to be seen at events in the local parish, were cited as disincentives to taking the role. Sugrue (2005) argues that there is a decreasing interest in the position of the principal teacher in recent years, because teachers perceive it as being too onerous, unattractive and ‘suffering from chronic workload’ (2005, p.200). Sugrue’s research indicates that ‘being cast in the role of school leader appears to carry significant expectations from the community itself’ (2005, p.166). Bubb and Earley comment that ‘headteachers often put the needs of others before themselves’ and thereby undergo the risk of overloaded responsibilities, which can in turn give rise to evidence of a work-life imbalance (2004, p.108).

Future career paths were explicitly mentioned. Participants stated that simply encouraging women to aim for leadership positions is not going to reform the phenomenon of underrepresentation, especially when many in those positions find themselves frustrated and unhappy and often overworked. None of the women reported strong institutional supports in place as they struggled with their roles. Instead, they were caught in the revolving door. When they stepped out, the knowledge and skills they gained were lost to the school. They suggested that the Department of Education and Skills needed to put into place better succession planning and leadership development for middle management. All of the women noted a frustration with future career paths and the lack of any defined progression. For the two principals in large schools, there was no other path. They both mentioned that ‘joining the Inspectorate’ might be seen as the next step, but that this did not appeal to them and so they were ‘stuck’ with ‘nowhere to go’.

ENABLERS

Enabling factors were discussed by the participants, factors which they felt supported them in their role. Participants drew strength from what they felt they had accomplished or what they had learned and this was what sustained them in the role. They spoke positively of the support they received from the community and from parents, and this gave them confidence. All of the women felt that the surge of female leaders in the political and sporting arena had given a sense of ‘greater equality’ in Ireland and had led to a sense that ‘women can do it and women are doing it attitude’. All of the women leaders used mentors in their early years, and benefitted in terms of advice and direction in the role. The support was seen as informal and unsolicited, and typically came from other principals in the local area or friends who had taken leadership roles. They described this support as ‘positive, ‘helpful’, and ‘nurturing’. All had taken part in the Misneach programme, a professional development programme offered to principals by the former Leadership Development Support Service (LDS). However, none of them continued to use mentors.

The women were, in the main, positive about the value of networking. Particular mention was given to the Irish Primary Principal’s Network (IPPN) in respect of the invaluable support structure it offers. All of the women were members of a
principal's network and attended regularly. They all attended IPPN conferences and availed of their professional development programmes. The high regard with which this organisation was held among all four women was particularly noteworthy. None of the women favoured a women's only network, stating that 'gender balance was crucial'. This is in contrast to much of the literature on leadership development by leading feminists. Vinnicombe (1987) suggests that if women are to have an equal chance to succeed, the development of distinctive leadership networks is necessary.

CONCLUSION

This study offers perspectives on the multidimensional phenomenon of educational leadership among Irish female primary school principals. Specifically, it presents information on their experiences and perspectives about managing and leading in their schools. Findings from the research were consonant with both a number of feminist articulations of management and organisational practice and with some of the management literature. The results of the study provide support to the claim that female leaders were visionary and strive to create team-oriented, collaborative, and people-oriented cultures. However, the study found that the role of primary school principal is an onerous one as the women shared experiences of how they grapple with administration, building work and meetings that impinge on work-life balance. The principals spoke positively of the support they received from the community and from parents, and this gave them confidence. However, the need for a refocus on middle management in schools, the need to address career progression and proper remuneration for the role of the principal were cited as key concerns. Ensuring women are equally represented at principalship level is not just about statistical data or counting the numbers. Given the clear commitment of the participants in this study to ‘making a difference’ in their roles, whatever the untoward circumstances under which they had to operate, there is an issue identified here that goes beyond simple counting. The value of the women's contribution must be recognised and valued. Appreciating and respecting their experiences can deliver great benefit to individuals and organisations alike.

INTRODUCTION

A significant body of research evidence underpins the critical importance of alphabetic knowledge for balanced quality instruction in reading and spelling. Phonological knowledge and higher-level phonemic knowledge, when supported by complementary insights, are identified as an essential pathway towards an understanding of the alphabetic code. However, orthographies (writing systems) vary in complexity and in deep orthographies like English, the acquisition of literacy demands greater levels of alphabetic insight than in shallow orthographies like Finnish. Dialects also differ and in the Irish context the phonological components of the Standard Irish English (SIE) dialect are better facilitators of reading and spelling development than those of the non-rhotic Standard British English (SBE) dialect. The absence of a phonemic code that addresses the sounds that are specific to the Irish dialect can result in teaching approaches that are grounded in phonemic conventions that are not relevant to the Irish context. This chapter proposes an inventory of phoneme-grapheme units that addresses the lacuna. The use of phonetic symbols is avoided in favour of a format that is readily accessible to teachers.  

BUILDING BLOCKS OF READING

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), in preparation for drafting the Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2016), commissioned Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3–8 years) (Kennedy et al., 2012). This research report recommended that the new language curriculum would include a number of aspects of literacy that were not fully addressed in the revised Primary Curriculum (NCCA, 1999a). Phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle were two of the aspects that were identified in the report (Kennedy et al., 2012, p.33). The Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2011) highlighted the need to equip teachers to teach:

1 Throughout this chapter, letters and letter strings are presented between angled brackets (< >). Phonemes and strings of phonemes are enclosed in single diagonal slashes (/ /) and are represented by their common spellings in SIE. Morphemes are enclosed in curly brackets ({ }).
…the basic building blocks of reading: awareness of words and word parts (phonological and phonemic awareness), letter-symbol recognition, phonics…

(DES, 2011, p.31)

PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Phonemic awareness is the ability to identify, think about and manipulate the sounds in spoken words (Torgesen, 1998; Kennedy et al., 2012). The phoneme is the smallest unit of sound that can affect the meaning of a spoken word and a single phoneme may be represented by one or several letters. For example, the word chop has four letters and three phonemes: /ch/, /o/, /p/. The substitution of the /ch/ phoneme with /sh/ changes the meaning of the word, thereby distinguishing them as separate phonemes. The word fox has three letters and four phonemes: /f/, /o/, /k/, /s/. Phonemic knowledge is key to learning the alphabetic principle (Adams et al., 1998; Byrne and Fielding-Barnsley, 1989; Shiel and Murphy, 2000; Dehaene, 2010), and learning to read and spell an alphabetic language is significantly boosted when learners have awareness of the phonological components of words such as syllables, rimes and discrete phonemes (Ehri, 2014; Seidenberg, 2017). Knowledge of phonemes, in particular, is acknowledged as a strong predictor of future progress in reading and spelling (Gillon, 2007). Such knowledge, however, is not intuitive because phonemes are not pronounced individually in common speech; in fact, they are co-articulated in the speech stream, which renders them difficult to segregate (Seidenberg, 2017). Explicit teaching that acknowledges the reciprocity between phonemes and graphemes is required to facilitate what Dehaene (2010, p.201) describes as ‘a true mental revolution’ where children discover that words can be segmented into phonemes. Apel (2007) argues that the central role of phonological awareness in literacy acquisition has been one of the most important findings (for educators) of the twentieth century.

ALPHABETIC PRINCIPLE

All teaching efforts should be initially focused on a single goal, the grasp of the alphabetic principle whereby each letter or grapheme represents a phoneme.

(Dehaene, 2010. p.228)

The alphabetic principle refers to knowledge that the sounds of spoken words can be represented by single letters or groups of letters (Joshi et al., 2008–2009; Hulme, 2000). An understanding of the alphabetic principle is identified as an important contributor to effective reading of an alphabetic script (Byrne, 1998; Byrne and Fielding-Barnsley, 1989; Ehri, 1992; Seidenberg, 2017). However, while many European orthographies have a high degree of predictability in letter-sound mapping, the English alphabet does not represent phonemes with the same consistency because spelling and pronunciation have drifted apart over the centuries (Goswami, 2008; Treiman and Kessler, 2014). In English orthography, one letter pattern can spell a number of sounds as the <ough> pattern does in lough, bough, cough, rough, through, thorough, hiccough and thought. Likewise, one sound may be represented by numerous letter patterns, such as the tense (/e/) sound in meat, feel, happy, debris, key, quay, ceiling, believe, Egypt, phoenix, people, anaesthetist, spaghetti and the magic /e/ in Steve.

Moreover, English writing represents speech not only at the level of the phoneme but also at the level of the morpheme (Treiman and Kessler, 2014; Devonshire et al., 2013; Carney, 1994). The morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in a word. The word walks has two morphemes, [walk] and [s]. In contrast with the less predictable phonemes, morphemes tend to retain their structure in English orthography. Thus, the morpheme [s] is consistent in the plurals cats and dogs, but the phonemic representations of [s] are /s/ and /z/ respectively (Byrne, 1998). Similarly, while the [ed] inflection is consistent in many past tense forms, it has three different pronunciations (/t/ in pushed, /d/ in climbed and /ed/ in painted).

While inconsistencies in graphemic representations of speech sounds are sometimes interpreted as evidence that the English spelling system is irregular, research has demonstrated that more than 50% of all English words are predictable in their correspondence of spelling and sound (Crystal, 2000; Hanna et al., 1966) and a large body of research has shown that, through acquired knowledge of the letters and letter patterns that represent sounds in print, together with knowledge of meaningful word parts such as roots and affixes, children learn that English orthography is logical and learnable (Henderson, 1990 in Kennedy et al., 2012; Moats, 2006).

DEEP AND SHALLOW ORTHOGRAPHIES

The complexity of a language’s orthography can directly influence the ease and speed of students’ reading acquisition (Cossu et al., 1988; Oney and Durgunoglu, 1997; Wyse and Goswami, 2008; Marinelli et al., 2015). Orthographic complexity is mapped on a continuum that ranges from shallow to deep. The shallow, or transparent, Finnish orthography boasts an alphabet that has 26 letters, each letter representing only one sound, which facilitates near one-to-one correspondence between the phoneme and
its written representation, the grapheme (Muller and Brady, 2001; Devonshire et al., 2013). At the opposite end of the continuum lies the deep or opaque English orthography, whose alphabetic system contains 26 letters and over 40 phonemes (subject to dialectical exigencies), for which there are in excess of 250 spellings (Moats, 2006). It is not surprising, therefore, that Finnish students (and others who study shallow orthographies) learn to decode at a significantly faster rate than their English counterparts. In a comparative study across 14 European orthographies, Seymour et al. (2003) found that following their first year’s instruction, children learning to read in the shallow orthographies of Spanish, Finnish, Italian and Greek achieved accuracy levels of over 90% in correct word reading. In marked contrast, the accuracy levels of the English student participants were in the 30% to 40% range. Differences in student outcomes were not attributable to age of entry to primary school.

CODE-BASED INSTRUCTION IN IRELAND

The Revised Primary Curriculum (NCCA, 1999a) recognised the critical importance of phonemic awareness in literacy acquisition but stopped short of defining the phonemes for teaching purposes. The curriculum noted that students find it easier to ‘segment syllables into parts that are greater than a phoneme’ (NCCA, 1999b, p.53) and teachers were encouraged to teach the more accessible intrasyllabic onset and rime skills. However, in their summary of a number of significant recent studies that have relevance for early literacy practitioners, Kennedy et al. (2012, p.115) noted that:

> Code-based instruction focusing on alphabet knowledge or phonemic awareness can impact on a range of literacy outcomes, including phonemic awareness itself, print knowledge, spelling, writing, and, to a lesser extent, oral knowledge…Systematic phonics instruction can also support the development of reading, spelling and writing…

Code-based instruction involves the development of student phonological knowledge which, in turn, facilitates engagement with the alphabetic principle. Phonological knowledge incorporates a number of critical sub-skills such as awareness of spoken words, syllables, rhyme, onset/rime and the ability to recognise and manipulate individual phonemes. This knowledge, in turn, facilitates the development of the ability to map phonemes to graphemes (encoding) and graphemes to phonemes (decoding). While the set of graphemes is clearly defined in English orthography, Goswami (2008) and Brown (2001) note that experts rarely agree on the number of phonemes due to changes in pronunciation, variations in accent and differences in opinion. Notwithstanding this, the elements of a dialect that affect reading and spelling are (1) the number of phonemes and (2) their distribution — the words in which they are found and where they occur in those words (Honeybone and Watson, 2006). The teaching of the alphabetic code, therefore, needs to be informed by a set of phoneme-grapheme units that is broadly representative of the phonemes of the main dialect of a jurisdiction. In Ireland, the absence of this essential resource is a barrier to the promotion of quality literacy instruction since some of the most widely used phonic programmes are populated with the phonemes of SBE. While the consequences of this for student outcomes are as yet unknown, there are inherent pitfalls in basing the teaching of reading and spelling on a phonemic code that is not specifically representative of the standard dialect.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SIE AND SBE: CONSONANT PHONEMES

For the most part, SIE2 and SBE3 share a common set of consonant phonemes. There are, however, two noteworthy differences — one of which has the potential to affect spelling.

Carney (1994, p.87) cites the advantage to SIE speakers of having the phonemes /hw/ and /w/ when differentiating the graphic contrast <wh> as in whale and <w> as in wall in their spelling. SBE speakers (together with SIE speakers who have not learned the /hw/ phoneme) have only the voiced phoneme /w/ for both words. Consequently, spelling is often a casualty because such words are homophones. In Irish classrooms, lack of knowledge of and failure to distinguish between /hw/ and /w/ regularly manifests itself in misspellings of the words when (wen) and went (went).

In SBE, the voiced and unvoiced /th/ phonemes are dental fricatives (each sound is made by pushing air between the tongue and the top teeth). In SIE, however, both phonemes are dental stops (the tongue is pressed against the upper teeth, blocking the flow of air). The difference is not thought to compromise spelling. Problems do arise, however, when speakers fail to differentiate between the voiceless pairs /th/ and /t/ and between the voiced pairs /th/ and /d/, resulting in spelling confusions like thin/tin, then/den.

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2 Standard Irish English (SIE) refers to the subset of spoken varieties of Irish English that are most commonly represented in the speech of the educated Irish middle classes (Hickey, 2012). In this chapter, SIE does not refer to any specific accent of Irish English but rather to pronunciations that are commonly heard in Ireland.

3 Standard British English (SBE) has previously been known as Received Pronunciation and Southern British Standard. Each refers to the most common accent of spoken English in Southern England (Wells, 1982; Carney, 1994).
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SIE AND SBE: R-CONTROLLED VOWELS

The greatest disharmony between the phoneme inventories of SIE and SBE is found in the vowels, and the most significant differences have their origin in rhoticity.

Thus for people like me lava and larva are homophones. I had to learn by rote that the stuff that comes from a volcano is spelt without a letter r...We English face a spelling difficulty that the Scots, the Irish, and most Americans do not. (Wells, 2001)

The SIE dialect is described as rhotic (Bliss, 1984; Carney, 1994). This means that /r/ is pronounced in all positions in words. The SBE dialect, on the other hand, is described as a non-rhotic dialect, where the phoneme /r/ has been historically dropped in certain positions (Treiman et al., 1997). SBE does not pronounce postvocalic /r/ unless it is followed by a vowel (father and mother), it is followed by a vowel sound (merry) or when it is a linking /r/ (Chinar and Japan). For the most part, the units that do not transfer from SBE to SIE are the r-controlled vowel phonemes.

Due to the non-rhotic nature of the SBE dialect, these vowel segments do not recognise the /r/ as an entity in itself. Rather, the /r/ combines with a vowel or a vowel team to form a single phoneme (/æə/, /ɛəl/, /ɔər/) or a diphthongal phoneme (/aɪr/, /eər/, /uər/). In typical non-rhotic SBE phoneme inventories, there are no instances of /r/ in the spoken words ear, teacher, court, chair. In SIE, however, while postvocalic /r/ may influence the sound of the vowel, it retains its status as a phoneme in its own right. Second, there are cross-dialectical differences in the effects that the /r/ has on the preceding vowel. For example, in SBE, the words shore, shaw and sure are homophones and each word has two phonemes, /ʃ/ and /ɔər/. SIE, however, pronounces a different vowel phoneme in each of the three words (/əe/, /æə/ and /uə/ respectively). In rhotic SIE, each of the three words contains a /r/ phoneme and only shaw has two phonemes while shore and sure have three.

The articulation of /r/ in rhotic and non-rhotic dialects has implications for the number of vowel phonemes in the corresponding phoneme inventories. Bliss (1984, p.21) states:

*At the surface phonemic level, rhotic dialects can be described as having fewer vowel contrasts than non-rhotic in that the vowels in the forms here, fair, bore, moor belong to the same phoneme as heat, fate, boat, moot. In RP4 and other non-

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SIE AND SBE: OTHER VOWELS

SIE distinguishes between the vowels in the words put and putt, which Carney (1994, pp.88–90) describes as a ‘difference in lexical distribution’ that has little consequence for spelling. While SBE postulates the single short /u/ vowel phoneme for the set of words could, mud, put, putt, bush, rush, book, dull and pull, SIE has the low short vowel phoneme /u/ for the set could, put, bush, book and pull and high short /u/ for the set mud, putt, rush and dull. In certain Irish accents, however, pronunciations such as /buke/ for /book/ may introduce spelling confusions. The contrast between the vowel phonemes /i/ and /e/ is neutralised before /n/ in some West of Ireland accents, as evidenced in the Twitter parody account @lndakinny. This fusion of /i/ and /e/ gives rise to what is sometimes known as the pin/pen merger, which accounts for spelling errors of the pincil variety.

CHARTING THE PHONEMES OF STANDARD IRISH ENGLISH

VOWEL PHONEMES

The rhotic nature of SIE means that the dialect delivers 15 vowel phonemes that are represented by just five vowel letters; the same letters represent 20 vowel phonemes rhotic dialects additional vowel phonemes...in here, fair, bore, moor are postulated.

The practice of applying the phonological conventions of one dialect to teaching readers and writers of a different dialect would have some merit if it made it easier for students to read and spell. The opposite, in fact, is the case. While SIE offers full recognition to /r/ in all positions, SBE does not. Carney (1994, p.86) notes that spoken SBE has lost /r/ before a consonant sound but written English has not. He warns of ‘extremely important consequences for spelling’ for SBE speakers when spelling words that contain postvocalic /r/. A significant proportion of student spelling errors are vowel-related and reflective of dialect-related phonological differences (Read, 1986; Treiman and Barry, 2000). One study contrasted the spelling errors of students in the rhotic American jurisdiction with their non-rhotic British counterparts. A noteworthy finding was that American students sometimes neglected the vowel phoneme when spelling words like girl (<grl>) and doctor (<doctr>). The British students’ errors tended to omit the /r/ (<gel>, <doctr>). (Treiman et al., 1997). Therefore, just as the loss of postvocalic /r/ can cause spelling difficulty for speakers of SBE, its retention in SIE makes spelling easier for speakers of SIE.

4 The terms Received Pronunciation (RP) and Southern British Standard (SBS) may be used synonymously in discussions
in the non-rhotic SBE inventory. The reason for /r/ retention in SIE is likely to be part-historical due to the influence of spoken Irish. Wells (1982, p.418) explains:

Thus the short vowels /ɪ, ɛ, ə, æ, ɒ, ʌ, ʊ/ correspond to those of Irish min, deich, fear, mar, deoch, muc and the monophthongs /iː, cː, aː, òː, uː/ to those of min, féin, mean, fáth, bó, rún...and the diphthongs /ie/ and /ow/ in leigheas and leabhar respectively.

In fact, the diphthongal /oy/ is the only vowel phoneme in SIE that does not link with a spoken Irish counterpart. Bliss (1984, p.136) agrees on the distribution of vowel phonemes, though his inclusion of port with paw and talk as representative of /aw/ is questionable.

Thus, the vowel phonemes of SIE may be classified as follows:

- Lax (short) vowel phonemes: (/i/ as in bid; /e/ as in bed; /a/ as in pot; /u/ as in nurse and /oo/ as in put)
- Tense (long) vowel phonemes: (/ee/ as in peer; /ay/ as in pair; /ah/ as in calm; /aw/ as in talk; /oe/ as in boat; /oo/ as in tour)
- Diphthongal phonemes: (/oy/ as in boy; /ow/ as in bout; /ie/ as in buy)

(Adapted from Bliss, 1984, p.136)

### VOICED AND UNVOICED PHONEMES

All phonemes are either voiced or unvoiced in their articulation. Voiced phonemes are characterised by attendant vibration in the larynx, and unvoiced phonemes are spoken in a whisper. For example, the /z/ in the form dogs is voiced and the /s/ in sit is unvoiced. When we say the /z/ while holding our fingers to the throat, there is a vibration and a sound that is absent from the whispered /s/.

Each phoneme has at least one feature that sets it apart from every other phoneme, but nine pairs of consonant phonemes (Table 1) have a unique relationship in that they differ from each other in only one respect. Each of these pairs is produced using the same mouth movements and tongue position. The essential difference between each pair is that one is voiced (the vocal chords vibrate when it is articulated) and one is unvoiced (its articulation is more of a whisper).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unvoiced</th>
<th>Voiced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/p/ as in pat</td>
<td>/b/ as in bat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/th/ as in thin</td>
<td>/th/ as in then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/hw/ as in whale</td>
<td>/w/ as in wail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/t/ as in ten</td>
<td>/d/ as in den</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/k/ as in coat</td>
<td>/g/ as in goat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ch/ as in chin</td>
<td>/j/ as in gin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/f/ as in fine</td>
<td>/v/ as in vine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/s/ as in Sue</td>
<td>/z/ as in zoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/sh/ as in sure</td>
<td>/zh/ as in pleasure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moats (1998) found that children's spelling errors often reflect confusion between the speech sounds of these voiced/unvoiced pairs, a phenomenon that demonstrates the need to teach awareness of the features and speech sounds of similar-sounding pairs. Phonic programmes seldom teach the nine consonantal sounds in pairs while highlighting the identical mouth, tongue and lip movements in the production of each pair. Ehri (2014) cites research findings in support of instructional practices which focus students' attention on what the mouth is doing when producing the sounds that they hear. Other consonant phonemes that are common to SIE and SBE include /tr/, /y/, /h/, /ng/, /l/, /m/ and /n/.

### SCHWA

The phonological phenomenon that is known as schwa is common to all dialects of English. Carney (1994) and Venezky (1999) argue that schwa is the largest source of problems for spellers of English. Schwa is an /uh/ sound that is present in unstressed syllables of many thousands of spoken words. In the first syllable of the spoken word banana, the /a/ phoneme is a schwa. The word has three syllables (ban – an – a), each of which contains an /a/ phoneme. The pronunciation of the second and third syllables facilitates accurate spelling. However, the first syllable is unstressed in common speech and its pronunciation does not indicate clearly how it should be spelled. In fact, the /ban/ in banana could be spelled <bun>, <ban>, <bon> or <bin> if one were reliant on pronunciation only. Other examples of the schwa are actor, teacher, kitchen, present (noun), present (verb) and Saturday. In each of these, the spelling is not clear from the pronunciation. That is why children often misspell
Saturday as Saterday, or even Satrday. While Moats (2010) describes schwa as the most common vowel sound in spoken English, Giegerich (1992) and Weisler and Milekic (2000) contend that it does not merit the status of a phoneme in its own right. What is important for literacy acquisition is that phoneme inventories give recognition to the unique identity of schwa and that literacy instruction provides readers and spellers with strategies that facilitate the transfer of schwa from print to speech and from speech to print.

PHONEME GRAPHEME UNITS OF SIE

This chapter proposes an inventory of the phoneme-grapheme units of SIE that addresses the needs of Irish teachers and their students (Table 2). In this inventory, the phonemes of SIE are represented between diagonal slash marks (/\) as well as by typical examples of their spelling.

Table 2: Inventory of the phoneme grapheme units of SIE

This register is for the information of Irish primary school teachers. The list of possible spellings is not exhaustive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Possible spellings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/p/ (unvoiced)</td>
<td>Pot, happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/b/ (voiced)</td>
<td>Ball, Bobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/t/ (unvoiced)</td>
<td>Top, looked, butter, doubt, pterodactyl, yacht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/d/ (voiced)</td>
<td>Dad, paddle, stayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/f/ (unvoiced)</td>
<td>Fix, cough, photograph, puff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/v/ (voiced)</td>
<td>Van, of, Stephen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/k/ (unvoiced)</td>
<td>Kitten, cat, pack, boutique, choir, bouquet, lough, occult, acquire, khaki, saccharine, viscous, queen (the &lt;qu&gt; in queen represents two phonemes, /k/ and /w/), fox (the &lt;x&gt; in fox has two phonemes, /k/ and /s/)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/g/ (voiced)</td>
<td>Go, egg, exam (the &lt;x&gt; in exam has two phonemes, /g/ and /z/), ghost, rogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/s/ (unvoiced)</td>
<td>Sit, miss, cycle, mouse, place, whistle, science, psychology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Inventory of the phoneme grapheme units of SIE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Possible spellings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/z/ (voiced)</td>
<td>Zoo, is, buzz, exam (here, the /x/ contains two phonemes, /g/ and /z/), rise, trapeze, scissors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/sh/ (unvoiced)</td>
<td>Shop, mission, suspicious, extension, nation, Chicago, sugar, anxious, schedule, fuchsia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/zh/ (voiced)</td>
<td>Pleasure, azure, camouflage, equation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ch/ (unvoiced)</td>
<td>Chair, witch, fortune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/j/ (voiced)</td>
<td>Jump, Germany, dodge, educate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/th/ (unvoiced)</td>
<td>Thin, width</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/TH/ (voiced)</td>
<td>The, father, breathe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/hw/ (unvoiced)</td>
<td>Whisper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/w/ (voiced)</td>
<td>Wall, queen, one, penguin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other consonant phonemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Possible spellings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/r/</td>
<td>Rat, terror, rhino, write, colonel, centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/y/</td>
<td>Yellow, onion, use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/h/</td>
<td>Horse, whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ng/</td>
<td>Sing, thank, anxious, tongue, finger (in the word finger, the -ng- contains two phonemes, the /ng/ sound and the /g/ sound)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/l/</td>
<td>Like, kettle, ball, island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/m/</td>
<td>Mum, lamb, autumn, mummy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/n/</td>
<td>Nut, knot, gnome, penny, mnemonic, one, campaign, champagne</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lax (short) vowels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Possible spellings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/i/</td>
<td>Bin, busy, pretty, women, crypt, build</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e/</td>
<td>Get, bread, heifer, said, leopard, friend, guess</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Schwa is an unstressed /uh/ sound that we find in syllables of many polysyllabic words. For example, the final syllable of the word *important* could be spelt *<-unt>* , *<-int>* , *<-ent>* , *<-ant>* or *<-ont>* if one were reliant on sound only. This is because the pronunciation of the *<-ant>* syllable does not indicate which of the vowels to use for spelling. Other examples of schwa are found in the unstressed syllables of the words *actor*, *teacher*, *kitchen*, *Saturday*.

We can teach students some useful strategies for spelling words with schwa.

- Words with a schwa sound are syllabified and given to students to sort.
- Ask students to spell the –ant in *important*, the –er in *butcher* and so on.
- Over-pronouncing: Train students to over-pronounce the schwa syllable in order to facilitate accurate spelling, for example, Sat ur day.

### CONCLUSION

Alphabetic knowledge and phonemic awareness have been identified as building blocks of reading and spelling. Since English has a deep orthography that can have many sounds for one spelling and many spellings for one sound, students of English require greater levels of phonemic knowledge than students of shallow orthographies in order to skillfully decode and encode.

While dialects and accents differ, written English remains consistent and the spelling system does not adapt to accommodate individual dialects. However, when the phonological components of a dialect or an accent are a good match for the writing system, children’s spellings are likely, though not guaranteed, to be more accurate. For most children in Irish schools, the rhotic dialect of SIE is a better facilitator of literacy acquisition than the non-rhotic SBE. For this reason and for other reasons outlined previously, it is important that phonological awareness training in Irish schools is informed by an inventory of phonemes that is specific to the Irish context.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While he accepts full responsibility for the content of this chapter, the author acknowledges and is grateful for the expert support and advice of Professor Raymond Hickey, Professor of Linguistics, University of Duisburg-Essen and Máire Ní Chiosáin, Lecturer and Assistant Professor, School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, UCD.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Possible spellings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>Top, lough, watch, geography, knowledge, honest, auction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/o/</td>
<td>Cut, her, bird, rough, word, love, does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/u/</td>
<td>Foot, put, could, woman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tense (long) vowels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Possible spellings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/ee/</td>
<td>Feet, seat, here, weird, believe, phoenix, anaesthetist, people, happy, eat, stadium, debris, me, donkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ae/</td>
<td>Rage, chair, day, neigh, straight, great, gauge, Naas, aerial, grey, ballet, rendezvous, acorn, café, veil, eh!, gool, fiancé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ah/</td>
<td>Car, half, bra, baa, shah, guard, laugh, heart, sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/aw/</td>
<td>August, draw, walk, water, thought, broad, taught, cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/oe/</td>
<td>Go, hope, dough, mow, toe, fluoride, door, depot, goat, sew, Beaumont, pour, mauve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/oo/</td>
<td>Moon, poor, flew, through, flute, fruit, shoe, blue, you, move, two, do, group, fluid, canoe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other words in this set like mule, few, argue, unite, début, beautiful, view, Europe have the /y/ sound which is not represented in the spelling but is articulated as a phoneme. Thus, the phonemes of *mule* are /m/ , /i/ , /oo/ , /l/.

**Diphthongal phonemes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Possible spellings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/ie/</td>
<td>Kite, hi, tie, high, haiku, height, dye, my, guide, diamond, feisty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ou/</td>
<td>Out, brow, bough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/oy/</td>
<td>Boil, boy, buoy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Considerable interest has been shown in the research literature in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about the teaching and learning of mathematics1 (Barkatsas and Malone, 2005; Leder et al., 2002). This interest stems from assumptions that what teachers believe determines what gets taught, how it gets taught, and what gets learned in the classroom (Wilson and Cooney, 2002). In the current climate of significant educational reform in maths as a subject in Irish post-primary education, links between beliefs and classroom instruction are thought to be significant to achieving successful reform. Ernest (1989a, p. 249) argued that ‘Teaching reforms cannot take place unless teachers’ deeply held beliefs about maths and its teaching and learning change’. Recent national and international policies have highlighted the importance of maths as one of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. In recognition of the importance of maths, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) introduced 25 bonus points for students who undertake Higher Mathematics in the Leaving Certificate (CAO, 2012).

Science and Mathematics provide answers to the fundamental questions of nature and enable us to understand the world around us. Expertise in STEM disciplines is necessary to drive our economic ambitions, support innovation and provide the foundations for future prosperity. Knowledge-based economies are particularly dependent on the quality and quantity of STEM graduates. (STEM Education Review Group, 2016)

The Education Review Group recommended greater preparation of teachers of maths at 1st and 2nd level and that teachers undertake continuous professional development in the STEM subjects. This chapter discusses curriculum development in Ireland; the mathematical knowledge required by teachers for teaching; and studies carried out on teacher education programmes. Literature regarding teachers’ beliefs about the teaching and learning of maths will be explored. This will be followed by an exploration of graduate student teachers’ background and beliefs on the subject of maths; and finally implementing change and reform in the maths classroom. First, it is necessary to describe the Irish context.

THE IRISH CONTEXT

The vast majority (97%) of Irish students take maths (at some level) in the Leaving Certificate examination although it is no longer compulsory to do so. However, only a small minority of students take Higher Level Maths. As a result, this impacts on students wishing to pursue STEM programmes in Higher Education. The greatest number of entries for any subject in the Leaving Certificate examination is maths with 55,529 students doing the examination compared to 9,704 taking Art and only 17 taking Ancient Greek (The Irish Times, 2017). Due to the introduction of bonus points for Higher Level Mathematics, the numbers have increased (STEM Education Review Group, 2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of students taking Higher Level Mathematics</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10,435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>15,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17,065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>19,558</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although, the numbers have increased, HEIs say that second-level students are not prepared for studying maths in higher education. Therefore, many initiatives such as Maths Learner Centres and Mathematics Learner Supports were introduced to improve learning of maths (O’Sullivan et al., 2014).

POST-PRIMARY MATHS EDUCATION IN IRELAND

After the foundation of the Irish State, the Department of Education introduced the Leaving Certificate in 1924. Post-primary students were required to study a minimum of five subjects over five years and to sit the Leaving Certificate examination. To gain entrance to university, students were required to pass three core subjects: English, Gaeilge and Maths. Before 2010, there was little change to the teaching and learning of maths for four decades in Ireland. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) carried out a root and branch examination

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1 The word maths is used instead of mathematics (which is academically more accurate) because the word maths is used in colloquial language in Ireland and because many initiatives such as Project Maths, Maths Learning Centres, Maths Week and the DES Project Maths Development Team use the term maths rather than mathematics (STEM Education Review Group, 2016).
of post-primary maths education in Ireland in 2005. The result of their assessment indicated an overly abstract focus on a modern maths curricular culture. Reviews of post-primary maths education in Ireland in 2005 (Conway and Sloane, 2006) and PISA (2006) showed that students’ understanding of basic mathematical concepts had deficits with challenges for students in problem-solving and in tackling non-routine problems. Studies before 2010 claimed that there was an emphasis on rote learning and that cramming for examinations was taking place in Irish post-primary maths classrooms (Carroll and O'Donohue, 2009). Following consultation with Irish stakeholders including parents, maths teachers, mathematicians and maths educators, changes were made to the curriculum and assessment process. This resulted in the development of a new curricular development called Project Maths.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: PROJECT MATHS

Project Maths is a continuing curriculum development initiative in Irish second-level education (NCCA, 2015). The changes made resulted in a move towards a more real-life focus in the curriculum and in the assessment of second-level maths. Project Maths aims to empower students by helping them to develop essential problem-solving skills important for both higher education and the workplace. The NCCA conducted a pilot study of Project Maths in 24 pilot schools in the academic year 2008–2009. In 2010, the NCCA implemented the first two of five strands of the new curriculum in all schools with year 1 of the Junior Cycle and year 1 of the Senior Cycle cohort of students. Professional development programmes were provided for all teachers over the introductory period. Following this ongoing inservice professional development, continuous professional development opportunities continue to be provided for teachers. The full curriculum was introduced in 2015, and it continues to change.

Project Maths demanded new teaching and learning approaches for post-primary maths teachers. The changes resulted in new pressures on teacher education to reform to meet the challenges of a redefined maths education programme. Since 2011, studies have measured the outcomes from Project Maths; the results indicated that the scale of the initiative, including the pace of implementation, represented significant challenges for teachers and students (Cosgrove et al., 2012). Implementing Project Maths at Senior and Junior Cycle at the same time was very unpopular with teachers and arguably coloured their views of the initiative and resulted in considerable time pressures for teachers (Cosgrove et al., 2012). Project Maths is considered to be a work-in-progress due to the legacy that it attempts to address and the weight of the goals that it aspires to achieve (Ireland, Department of Education and Skills, 2012). Speaking on behalf of the Irish Teaching Council, Ó Ruairc (2013) argued the dynamics of change in teacher education and curriculum reform are converging at an accelerated pace. Curriculum reform will continue into the future with ramifications for teacher education (Ó Ruairc, 2013).

Achieving the fundamental changes required by the new curriculum necessitates, in this researcher’s view, continuing learning by teacher educators that will support and encourage meaningful changes in day-to-day practice in the classroom. The next sections of this chapter explore significant aspects of course requirements that are important to consider when preparing preservice teachers to teach post-primary maths.

MATHEMATICAL KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED FOR TEACHING (MKT)

Since 1986, there has been considerable research on the mathematical knowledge teachers should have in order to be considered effective teachers of maths in the post-primary classroom. Shulman (1986) challenged the sharp distinction between content and pedagogy and suggested three forms of teacher knowledge. He used the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in addition to subject matter knowledge (SMK) as a requirement for effective maths teaching. PCK included knowledge about how to make maths comprehensible to others as well as knowledge on students’ subject-specific concepts and misconceptions (Krauss et al., 2008). Ball et al. (2008) developed a model that built on Shulman’s work and describes ways in which mathematical knowledge plays out in the classroom (Ruthven, 2011).

![Model of Dimensions of Mathematical Knowledge for Teaching](Ball et al., 2008, p.403)
Ball et al. (2008) suggested an extention of Shulman’s concept and highlighted the need for teachers to be proficient in Specialized Content Knowledge (SMK) and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). Shulman’s model is further subdivided as shown in Ball’s model in Figure 1. A new tentative subcategory of PCK was proposed which relates to teacher awareness of how mathematical topics are related across the span of maths and how a topic being taught will relate to longer-term mathematical goals and purposes (Ruthven, 2011). Suggestions include that connections between subject matter and teaching be made explicit and include knowledge of content and students (KCS) that combines knowing about students and knowing about maths. Hauk et al. (2014) extended Ball’s model and stated there was a need for a model that considered classroom sociology and advanced mathematical understandings found in secondary school settings. The authors incorporated the interplay among content, beliefs, culture and values in PCK. Hauk et al. (2014) added a fourth sector, knowledge of discourse, to PCK to take these factors into consideration. They added connections to the three existing components of Ball et al’s PCK, and argue that curricular thinking is linked to knowledge of curriculum, which describes ways of thinking about approaches to mathematical topics, procedures and concepts as well as the relationships among them. Anticipatory thinking is linked to KCT and describes ways of thinking about approaches to how learners may engage with content, processes and concepts. It also includes awareness of and responsiveness to student thinking. This type of thinking, the authors believe, is intimately connected to teachers’ intercultural orientation. Furthermore, implementation thinking is linked to knowledge of content and teaching and describes strategies and approaches to how to enact teaching intentions in the classroom. Moreover, for Hauk et al., (2014) it includes how to adapt teaching according to mathematical content and sociocultural context and act on decisions shaped by intercultural orientation.

**NATURE OF MATHEMATICAL KNOWLEDGE FOR TEACHING IN A POST-PRIMARY CONTEXT**

Speer et al. (2015) attempted to characterise the nature of Mathematical Knowledge for Teaching (MKT) and its components in the work of teaching maths. They questioned the difference in common content (CCK) preparation by elementary school teachers and post-primary teachers. CCK, they claim, is based on mathematical knowledge held or used by the average mathematically literate citizen. SCK is described as mathematical knowledge that teachers engage in, particularly when teaching tasks. This includes how to accurately represent mathematical ideas, provide mathematical explanations for common rules and procedures, and examine and understand unusual solution methods to problems (Hill et al., 2008). Speer et al. (2015) also explored the relationship between CCK and SCK at second level and at undergraduate third level. Future research on the ways in which teachers use their knowledge in teaching could have implications for ways to help prospective and practicing teachers gain such knowledge and how it might be assessed (Speer et al., 2015).

**TEACHER EDUCATION**

Research in teacher education seeks to improve the preparation of maths teachers for the post-primary classroom. Central to this aim is the enabling of teachers to teach all students to learn and enjoy maths. In the last decade, international studies explored factors that might contribute to successfully educating preservice teachers for the maths classroom. The Teacher Education and Development Study in Mathematics (TEDS-M) compared the characteristics of programmes that prepared post-primary maths teachers in a number of countries in 2008. TEDS-M measured mathematical content knowledge (MCK) and mathematical pedagogy content knowledge (MPCK) for each country. Some of the countries included were Russia, Poland, USA, Norway, Germany, Singapore and Taiwan (Krainer et al., 2012). Taiwanese students performed extremely well at lower secondary level: one reason for this is thought to be that it recruits high-achieving students for secondary teaching programmes. Other possible reasons included additional topics being included in maths syllabuses and more opportunities being provided to students to perform challenging problems at secondary and tertiary level. However, Singapore students who had achieved poorer scores on MCK achieved similar results to Taiwan on MPCK. The TEDS-M study concluded that further research is required in this area with a view to discovering what elements of teacher education programmes impacted on outcomes.

TEDS-M aimed to understand how policies at national and provincial levels might influence the structure and practices of teacher education programmes and hence the knowledge and beliefs of future teachers (Tatto, 2012). Some of the variables of interest compared in the TEDS-M study included teacher knowledge, teacher beliefs and the provision of opportunities to learn in teacher education programmes. Future teachers’ and educators’ beliefs and views on pedagogy and practicums were compared. Beliefs were highlighted by TEDS-M as important to learning outcomes from teacher education programmes.

Teacher Education and the Practitioner in the classroom Teacher preparation programmes are characterised by learning about education theory and practical experience in school. There is a gap between theory and practice and the pedagogies
taught to preservice teachers (Hennessy, 2014). Zaslavsky (2011) contrasts the criticisms by preservice teachers of the remoteness of the content of teacher education programmes when compared to the positive reports they give on their teaching practice in schools. Elliot et al. (2015) recommend moving teacher education preparation into the midst of practice through a focus on the needs of practitioners. Ball et al. (2009) support putting teaching practice at the centre of teacher education preparation rather than an earlier emphasis on knowledge and beliefs. Bailey and Taylor (2015) found that factors such as beliefs and knowledge are just as important as practice to achieving successful outcomes to teacher education.

DEVELOPING BEGINNING TEACHERS’ MCK AND PCK

The mathematical knowledge essential for teaching described above identifies two main parts: mathematical content knowledge (MCK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). The literature with respect to MCK advocates a strong conceptual knowledge base and a commitment to engaging in hard mathematical thinking for beginning teachers (Borko et al., 1992). Borko et al. (1992) recommend maths methods courses which require that preservice teachers reconsider their knowledge base of maths and challenge their existing beliefs about maths and how to teach it.

In developing beginners’ PCK, Kinach (2002) suggested it is necessary to challenge teachers’ existing ways of thinking about subject matter and subject matter teaching in order to enable a shift in their instrumental PCK to a relational type of PCK. Before 2005 Ireland’s curriculum culture with respect to maths resulted in a formal, highly-structured approach to teaching with a strong focus on an instrumental understanding of maths (Conway and Sloane, 2006). In the process of learning to teach, Grossman et al. (2009) argue that knowledge, skill and professional identity should be developed. Defining a core set of practices in the literature, they argue that the following characteristics should be included:

Practices that occur with high frequency in teaching;
Practices that novices can enact in classrooms across different curricula or instructional approaches;
Practices that novices can actually begin to master;
Practices that allow novices to learn more about students and about teaching;
Practices that preserve the integrity and complexity of teaching; and
Practices that are research-based and have the potential to improve student achievement (Grossman et al., 2009, p.277)

Lampart et al. (2010) argue that PCK can be developed through supporting preservice teachers’ planning and enacting of instructional activities. They include introducing an activity, managing materials and student participation, managing discussions towards instructional goals and responding to student error. This places a demand in teacher education courses to build preservice teachers’ capacity with skillful instruction during training (Elliot et al., 2015).

SKILFUL INSTRUCTION

Developing instructional skill is thought to require integrating pedagogies of investigation and enactment into teacher education (Mapolelo, 2015; Valenta et al., 2017). Ball et al. (2009) maintain that the challenge lies in the lack of a broad and deep understanding of the kinds of instructional practices that make a difference to student learning. Valenta et al. (2017) promote maths instruction as the development of mathematical proficiency in students. Hunter et al. (2012) suggest teacher education programmes should better equip prospective teachers ‘to do’ interactive maths teaching by enacting pedagogical strategies in structured ways. This, they argue, will help preservice teachers develop their own pedagogical repertoire.

TEACHERS’ BELIEFS

Teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning maths are worth exploring. Beliefs are considered to belong to the affective domain of Bloom’s taxonomy of learning. Affective variables can be regarded as explicit factors that influence learning outcomes and instructional practices (Pepin and Son, 2012). Studies in the literature on beliefs and belief systems indicate different classifications and perspectives (Pajares, 1992). This would seem to be due to the complex nature of beliefs and belief systems (Liljedahl et al., 2007). Richardson (1996) developed a broad definition in which beliefs are seen as ‘psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world, that are felt to be true’.

Teachers’ beliefs about maths and how it should be learned and taught is thought to be one of the challenges for teacher educators (Ernest, 1989b; De Corte et al., 2002; Blomeke et al., 2014). Soldat (2009) claims particular attention needs to be paid to how beliefs relate to actual teaching practice in schools. Skott (2009) claims the purpose is to understand if and how they influence learning opportunities for students. Findings from Soldat’s study on the effects of a preservice programme on teaching science shed light on understandings of the evolution of teachers’ beliefs. Soldat’s (2009) study identified factors that affected beliefs, these were preparatory
programmes, school communities and individual teachers. Beliefs on the teaching of maths were examined in Tatto et al.’s study (2012). Teachers were asked whether they believed maths is a set of procedures best taught by teacher direction or a process of enquiry best taught by active student involvement. TEDS-M results showed several countries endorsed the belief that maths is a set of rules or procedures.

Teacher educators preparing preservice teachers to manage a changing curriculum in the Irish classroom will need to consider their own beliefs about maths and its teaching and learning. The TEDS-M study indicates that the beliefs of teacher educators impact on teacher education programmes. In addition to enriching preservice teachers’ knowledge, teacher education programs should also create opportunities for prospective teachers to develop productive beliefs and attitudes toward the teaching and learning of maths (Charalambos and Phiippou, 2010). Within this context, teacher educators in Ireland will need to encourage the next generation of maths teachers to be different from those who taught them. A review of post-primary maths in Ireland in 2005 indicated that mathematics education in Ireland is typically taught using a procedural approach for the most part (Conway and Sloane, 2006).

PRESERVICE TEACHERS’ BELIEFS

Wilson and Cooney’s (2002) interest in teachers’ beliefs is the impact, they argue, that they have on teachers’ ability to grow, change and develop new practices consistent with reform. In the context of an evolving curriculum in Irish post-primary maths education, consideration should then be given to prior learning experiences of preservice teachers to help teacher educators provide appropriate preservice education. Beliefs concern many different fields such as maths, classroom norms and an individual’s personality (Furinghetti and Pehkonen, 2002). Preservice teachers’ belief structures are thought to be built up over time and are centred around a pedagogical view of maths. Even those who are confident in their professional role can feel profoundly uncomfortable when they have to rethink their beliefs and practices (Timperly et al., 2007). The authors recommend that teachers analyse the impact of teaching on student learning, which may result in teachers being asked to test the efficacy of competing ideas by teacher educators (Timperly et al., 2007).

Maass (2009) describes two main types of teachers concerning their beliefs regarding effective maths lessons. Teacher Type 1 explains mathematical results which are then used by students to practise stereotype exercises. Teacher Type 2 focuses on learning and problem-solving processes. In Maass’s study in Germany, Type 1 teacher simply did not seem to know enough reality-based or open tasks that can be described as real-world problems. They recommended the teachers reflect on the nature of maths and its usefulness, and that teachers should reflect on the maths education they experienced as students themselves with the aim of changing their beliefs about maths teaching. In sum, the process of belief change is a complex one, there is a need to identify the beliefs of preservice teachers and the needs of students in the schools and the challenges for newly qualified maths teachers beginning their careers during a period of curriculum reform.

Modelling best practice in maths education is a reasonable strategy for teacher educators to adopt. One obstacle to modelling best practice is that some teaching placements in schools may not provide teachers with opportunities to teach using student-centred approaches. There is some evidence that preservice teachers adopt the beliefs and practice of mentoring teachers in schools where they undertake their professional practice (Swearingen, 2014). Nolan (2016) claims preservice teachers must experience innovative, inquiry-based learning for themselves if they are to be able to implement such approaches in their classrooms.

NAVIGATING CURRICULUM REFORM: BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

The new curriculum specification introduced in post-primary Irish maths classrooms in 2010 (Project Maths) was expected to develop students’ mathematical proficiency with an emphasis on developing essential problem-solving skills in learners. Current Junior Cycle reform for maths continues to emphasise the development of mathematical proficiency. Problems arising from curricular reforms tend to be alike from one country to another. In an international study, Eddy and Tanguay, (2008) listed four common problems in the implementation of new curricula:

- Teachers’ lack of preparation with respect to new pedagogical trends
- Textbooks written and edited in a hurry
- Poor planning and coordination in organising content
- Difficulty for teachers to adjust assessments to the new curriculum

A number of the common problems listed above have been mentioned in the research in Ireland on the impact of the new Project Maths curriculum. As mentioned earlier, the introduction of the new curriculum proved to be stressful for both students and their teachers. Students reported that they had found it challenging to adapt to the new approaches to learning maths promoted by the curriculum. This view was supported by assessment outcomes that indicated higher-order skills such as reasoning and an ability to transfer knowledge to new contexts proved to be difficult
Charalambous and Philippou (2010) explored teachers' efficacy beliefs and found teachers who were more comfortable with pre-reform instructional practices exhibited more intense concerns about managing the changes. The authors suggest that teachers require support to overcome management concerns if they are to recognise the value in the reform as a means of promoting student learning. Consideration of the many challenges to achieving reform in day-to-day practice also includes consideration of the construct 'transfer'. Research on 'transfer' addresses questions that affect the extent to which knowledge learned in one situation will transfer to other situations (Adler, 2000).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The literature has identified research in teacher education and teachers' beliefs about the teaching and learning of maths. Ball et al. (2009), writing on the attempts made to improve teacher education, argue that the curriculum of professional training must focus squarely on practice through the development of practice-focused education. Communicating the work that experts often perform tacitly involves creating language with which to talk about that work (Ball et al., 2009). Unpacking teaching and choosing significant elements of skilled practice on which to focus preservice teaching education is a challenge. A number of strategies to achieve this goal are suggested below:

- A focus on the work of the practitioner in the classroom through enjoying the logical, sequential and precise nature of maths; selling the relevance and the applicability of maths to real life
- The generation of a set of guidelines for the creation of new and effective teaching activities; hands-on-activities to use with active methodologies
  - Working together on mathematical tasks is thought to be at the heart of learning maths (Watson and Bills, 2011). Their approach to working with prospective teachers starts with a sequence of mathematical tasks and moves on to pedagogical questions. The tasks are chosen carefully to expose ambiguities, alternative conceptions of teaching and of school maths. The hope is to encourage preservice maths teachers to start by asking how their students will learn a concept and structuring what they do to support this (Watson and Bills, 2011).
- Promoting the development of learning communities through the use of technology and the encouragement of collegiality among teachers and learners
  - Encouraging and enacting a problem-solving/inquiry approach to the teaching of maths
    - Bailey et al. (2015) recommend the engagement of preservice teachers in a problem-solving approach using a core practice model for teacher education in order to focus on pedagogical practices associated with ambitious mathematical teaching.

In conclusion, this chapter has considered reforms in the teaching and learning of maths in post-primary schools in Ireland. McKinsey (2007, p.16) notes 'the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers'. The literature suggests that in order to enhance teaching, teachers need to examine their beliefs about maths. Further research is required in Ireland to evaluate the ability of initial teacher education to achieve positive changes in teachers' beliefs. Within this, the intentions for research are to empower teachers to develop effective practices in a constantly changing educational environment.
QUESTIONING THE FITNESS FOR PURPOSE OF AGGREGATED STANDARDISED TEST DATA FOR LITERACY (MICRA-T AND DPRT-R) IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

Anne Beechinor

INTRODUCTION

Standardised tests such as the Mary Immaculate College Reading Attainment Test (MICRA-T) and the Drumcondra Primary Reading Test—Revised (DPRT-R) are conducted routinely in Irish primary schools. However, much controversy surrounds their fitness for purpose (King, 2006; Odendahl, 2011; Shiel et al., 2010; Mac Ruairc, 2009). The Department of Education and Skills (DES) directs Irish primary schools to upload the aggregated frequency distribution of STen scores (score out of 10, http://www.anseo.net/bwl-knowledge-base/nqt-advice/explaining-sten-scores-to-parents/) from standardised tests to a national database annually. This chapter reports on a case study of a small primary school in Ireland, which investigated the fitness for purpose of aggregated test scores from these tests. The validity and reliability of the test instruments, test administration and test-user purposes were examined. Aggregated scores were scrutinised to ascertain if they were appropriate in providing meaningful, relevant and accurate representation of school-level data. At the outset, the premise was that if the tests were found to be invalid at school level, they would be unfit for DES purposes at system level. The research question underpinning this research was:

Are aggregated standardised test data for literacy submitted by Irish Primary Schools to the DES fit for purpose?

The structure of this chapter is as follows: firstly, the MICRA-T and DPRT-R are described. Then, the concepts of validity and reliability of standardised testing are explored in the context of standardised testing in Ireland. Findings from the qualitative data are presented. Finally, conclusions drawn from the research and recommendations for policy and practice are considered.

DESCRIPTION AND COMPARISON OF THE DPRT-R AND MICRA-T

MICRA-T and DPRT-R are currently the only tests which meet the criteria for literacy. Wall and Burke (1987) first developed the MICRA-T in 1987; the most recent edition (2004) was norm-referenced in 2002–2003. Following the introduction of the Primary School Curriculum (DES/National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA), 1999), the DPRT-R was re-standardised in 2006 (Educational Research Centre (ERC), 2007). The DPRT-R comprises six test levels, each corresponding to class levels (1st to 6th) in the Irish primary school system. The MICRA-T has four test levels, with Level 2 and Level 4 used for multiple classes (2nd and 3rd classes, 5th and 6th classes respectively).

Tests can be administered to groups or individuals. Parallel forms A and B are available for each level in both DPRT-R and MICRA-T ‘to reduce the possibility of copying and allow for repeated testing’ (MICRA-T, Level 1, 2004, p.3). Identical practice items are used in Level 3 to Level 6 in the DPRT-R and similarly in Level 3 and Level 4 of the MICRA-T.

The formats of the MICRA-T and the DPRT-R differ considerably from one another. The DPRT-R is primarily a multiple-choice-type test. MICRA-T Levels 3 and 4 are cloze/supply-type tests. Many espouse the notion that selection-type tests are more reliable than supply types as the latter may involve certain variations in the administration, interpretation, scoring, recording and subsequent submission of test scores to the DES. Hence, supply-type tests may be less valid because of administrator bias (Haladyna, 2006; Shiel et al., 2010). Shiel et al. (2010) argue that multiple-choice-type tests are generally not as effective an instrument for measuring higher-order thinking skills. Wall and Burke (2004) note that standardised tests may differ in the importance given to different components of the reading process. For example, one test may concentrate more on decoding skills as opposed to comprehension. In MICRA-T Level 4, the number of test items in the formal letter (persuasive), expository and narrative cloze tests in ‘parallel’ Forms A and B do not correspond with each other. Also in DPRT-R Level 3, the writing genres do not correlate, indicating that there may be disparity even within levels of the same test.

The DPRT-R is divided into vocabulary and comprehension subsets as well as total scores. The MICRA-T provides total scores only. The DPRT-R offers class-based scores while the MICRA-T generates age-based as well as class-based scores. As the database for submission of aggregated scores did not specify whether age-based or class-based scores were to be recorded up to 2014, there was room for discretion on the part of the school’s data-entry person and approver. Remarkably, the
DPRT-R and MICRA-T differ in the emphasis given to various reading and writing genres. While both tests use narrative and expository texts, the DPRT-R employs representational texts and web pages (albeit in hardcopy) while the MICRA-T relies more on formal and informal letter-writing formats. Two implications arise from observed differences in these test instruments: firstly, these tests may not measure the same domain and secondly, they may not measure in the same way.

Therefore, while the DPRT-R and the MICRA-T both purport to assess important aspects of the 1999 curriculum, it does not necessarily follow that the results on one test will be equivalent to the results on the other, for reasons relating to the design and content differences between the tests. In the absence of any empirical evidence, it is reasonable to assume that fair comparisons cannot be made between aggregated scores from the MICRA-T and the DPRT-R. It is unclear whether the DES has taken this fact into consideration as test scores from both are acceptable on the DES database.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF STANDARDISED TESTS

In determining the fitness for purpose of the MICRA-T and DPRT-R, consideration of threats to the reliability and validity of standardised testing in the Irish primary school context are critical. While commentators such as Kennedy (2013) report on the negative impact of standardised testing in Ireland, the validity of the test instruments themselves is rarely addressed. It seems there is an assumption and consensus that standardised tests are valid and the items which they gauge are measurable. However, Odendahl (2011, p.78) observes:

"...no single type of evidence suffices to address validity concerns; triangulation and cross-verification are needed. Thus validation draws upon an accumulation of different approaches developed over years."

Odendahl (2011) further comments that test reliability does not confirm its meaning or relevance.

The requirement to interpret standardised test scores within the wider context of assessment is widely acknowledged (Wall and Burke, 2004; Educational Research Centre (ERC), 2007; NCCA, 2007; National Parents Council (NPC), 2011; Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), 2011; DES, 2011). Indeed, many believe that validity depends on context (Odendahl, 2011). The purpose of standardised testing in Ireland changed significantly when Circular 0056/2011 directed that ‘Primary schools will be required to report aggregate standardised test results to the Department of Education and Skills once annually’ (p.10). Thus, reporting test results has increased the stakes, augmented the importance of standardised testing and, crucially, threatened the consequential validity of the test instruments. The NCCA (2005, p.1) claims that:

"...standardised testing in isolation from more general assessment practice and policy issues places an over-emphasis on what is just one of a range of assessment tools availed of by teachers and schools...What is intended as ‘low stakes’ could quickly become ‘high stakes’ in the absence of other data."

There has been much reservation amongst a variety of primary school stakeholders concerning the input of aggregated STen scores from standardised tests to the national database (Irish Primary Principals’ Network (IPPN), 2011; NPC, 2011; INTO, 2011).

DESIGN AND TEST-USER PURPOSES

The MICRA-T statements of purpose are summarised as tracking changes over time; communicating with parents; informing teacher planning; identifying difficulty and informing provision for differentiated educational plans; as well as determining pupil readiness to progress (Wall and Burke, 2004). They are specific and expressly qualified by the need for tests to be contextualised. These purposes centre on individual or school-level use within a particular context. Three purposes for standardised testing are outlined by the DES. They are used by the schools to:

- Identify and evaluate the literacy and numeracy needs of students in the school and how best to improve
- Inform educational policy for literacy and numeracy, and identify ways of improving the performance of the school system
- Inform the development and implementation of a revised model to allocate Resource Teaching/Learning Support teachers to schools. (NCCA, 2005; Circulars 0056/2011, 0027/2015; DES, Personal Communication, 18th September 2015).

These changes in test purposes have increased the stakes and altered the validity of the tests. The second and third purposes identified by the DES, are outside those stipulated by the test designers. Furthermore, there is a lack of detail on precisely how the test results are used at system level. For example, the DES does not specify states
how test results may be used to inform resource allocations for special educational needs.

The NCCA (2005) advisory document on standardised testing emphasises that a single assessment instrument cannot address multiple purposes. Similarly, the American Educational Research Association/American Psychological Association/National Council on Measurement in Education (AERA/APA/NCME), (1999, p.11) note that ‘when use of the test differs from that supported by the test developer, the test user develops special responsibility for test validation. There is no evidence that the DES has validated its use of these standardised tests for the purposes described above. It is reasonable therefore, to challenge the DES on the validity of using standardised test scores for purposes other than those for which the test was originally designed.

INCLUSION AND NORM REFERENCE

Literature on the demerits or possible bias of standardised testing in Ireland focuses on specific groups, such as those who are disadvantaged socioeconomically or sociolinguistically (Mac Ruairc, 2009) or children with special educational needs (Cosgrove et al., 2014). Mac Ruairc (2009, p.48) observes that:

*The manner in which standardised tests are increasingly being used internationally for a variety of accountability and comparative purposes demands that this particular dimension of assessment is rigorously critiqued and debated at policy formation and implementation levels in order to limit the negative consequences of this form of assessment for particular groups of children in our schools.*

Since the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (2004), there have been significant changes around the inclusion of and support for children with special educational needs in mainstream settings. These changes, however, are not reflected in policy and guidelines on the use of standardised test results. Wall and Burke (2004, p.3) state that:

*The determination of eligibility for special educational provision, such as resource teaching, typically takes account of scores on standardised tests...although test results alone should not be accorded undue importance in the making of such decisions.*

This raises a number of pertinent issues. Firstly, if these aggregated results are used to determine learning support and resource allocation to schools, it is probable that undue importance is being accorded to standardised test scores. Secondly, pupils who score at or below the 10th percentile on standardised tests are regarded as having low achievement and are eligible for learning support (Learning Support Guidelines, 2000, p.57). Hence, test scores have the added purpose of defining learning support itself and resultant provision. However, Wall and Burke state that MICRA-T is unfit for this purpose as the potential margin of error in test scores is ‘neither reliable nor appropriate to select pupils for supplementary tuition solely on the basis of arbitrary cut-off scores’ (MICRA-T, 2004, p.18). Thirdly, MICRA-T and DPRT-R were normed without the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream classes. Also excluded were pupils in special schools or in special classes in ordinary schools. DPRT-R explains in detail the guidelines for exempting four further subgroups of children: those with moderate to severe learning difficulty; pupils with a severe specific reading disability; pupils with a physical disability; and non-national newcomer pupils whose proficiency in English was deemed inadequate (DPRT-R, 2007). Therefore, both of these standardised test instruments are unlikely to be fit for the purposes pertaining to provision of resource or learning support. Fourthly, discretion is permissible in determining exemption from standardised tests.

_Students may be excluded from standardised testing if in the view of the school principal they have a learning or physical disability which would prevent them from attempting the tests or, in the case of migrant students, where the level of English required in the test would make attempting the test inappropriate._ (DES, 2011, p.6)

The application of exemption criteria could lead to non-uniformity from school-to-school and further compound the issue.

Significantly, both the MICRA-T and DPRT-R were revised and re-normed before the full implementation of the current Primary School Curriculum. The extent to which they provide instructional targets for teachers is questionable. Furthermore, the increase in ‘non-native’ pupils enrolling in Irish schools since the tests were developed, together with the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools (as a result of the EPSEN Act, 2004), implies that these particular standardised tests are less effective as instruments for comparison with current norms.

Since the MICRA-T and the DPRT-R may be outdated, the question as to why more current tests have not been developed emerges. The press release on the launch of Ireland’s Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in 2011 may explain this:
Given the financial constraints facing the country, Minister Quinn said the Strategy had been developed in a way that keeps additional costs to a minimum. (DES Press Release, 11 July 2011)

This approach may be a false economy. The government issued grants of approximately €2.8 million to schools in 2014 and 2015 for the purchase of test materials for 2nd, 4th and 6th classes. This figure rose to €2.9 million in 2016 due to increases in pupil population in these classes (personal communication from DES, 10 October 2015). The indirect cost of not updating the tests regularly to fit both the population and the construct being measured implies that, at best, test users have outdated or ill-matched information and, at worst, incorrect inferences are being drawn about pupils’ ability and the standards achieved by the population and the system as a whole.

METHODOLOGY: CASE STUDY

An investigative case study approach was adopted, which ‘provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly’ (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 289). A case study is, as Cohen et al. (2007) observed, the point where abstract meets concrete. It focused on one particular case, a small community of teachers and learners, who were studied in their natural setting and the test conditions were as would normally apply in the school. The school had 124 pupils, five class teachers, three resource teachers, and three special needs’ assistants. The case study comprised five interviews with teachers, non-structured researcher observations and an empirical analysis of children’s test scores that focused specifically on variation between (i) the DPRT-R and MICRA-T and (ii) the scores of children with and without special educational needs. This chapter draws on the qualitative component of the study. Results of the quantitative strand are in Beechinor (2015). The sample for interviews consisted of five teachers (n=2 male, n=3 female; n=2 SEN teachers, n=3 class teachers) from a staff of nine teachers (n=5 class teachers, n=4 SEN teachers). The criterion for selection was direct involvement in the testing process during the research. Three class teachers from 1st to 6th class administered the tests while two SEN teachers scored and recorded the results. The purpose of the interviews was to ascertain teachers’ perspectives on standardised tests and testing, their purpose, what is measured, the administration, communication, accuracy and interpretation of scores. The research received ethical approval from Hibernia College and all teachers received a research information sheet and filled out consent forms. The research complies with the British Education Research Association (BERA, 2011) guidelines.

FINDINGS

Eleven themes emerged from the data: compromised validity, reliability of test scores, ‘Test Wise’ classes, test security, teaching the test, administrator bias, access to the tests, raised stakes, children with special educational needs, clarity of purpose and value of standardised tests.

COMPROMISED VALIDITY

All respondents believed that standardised tests do not measure well because the test instruments were deemed to be too narrow in their focus and outdated in their standardisation and norm reference.

Things have changed...The identical same test, the identical same pictures [and] the same acceptable answers?...No. That can’t still be ok... Children are learning differently now and that’s not being reflected in the tests. (Teacher A)

All teachers questioned the validity of submitting scores from two tests which, while having strong and significant correlations, yielded significantly different scores for individual children at class level. As Teacher A remarked, ‘why are there two? They are actually quite different’ She also pointed out that differences between the tests undermine the meaning of the word ‘standardised’.

RELIABILITY OF TEST SCORES

Teacher B found that because Level 1 for the 1st class MICRA-T focuses more on decoding rather than cloze testing, the STen scores were consistently higher for children in 1st class than scores for the same children in 2nd class. Thus, the implications of the tests differing in their design, domain and construct became more pertinent. Reporting scores to parents in some instances gave rise to unrealistic expectations for the 2nd class results. ‘I try to explain to [parents]...in the nicest way possible...it is...an inflated score for some children in 1st class’ (Teacher B). This finding was investigated and validated statistically (Figure 1). It is worth noting here that 1st and 2nd classes are taught by the same teacher in both years.
Figure 1: Comparison of STen Scores from MICRA-T for Children in 1st Class and the Same Children When They Were in 2nd Class in 2015

‘TEST-WISE’ CLASSES

Teachers A and C had experience of MICRA-T test levels which span two class levels. According to Teacher A, this gave rise to the ‘test-wise’ 3rd and 6th classes scoring higher in MICRA-T Levels 2 and 3.

Very often then in 6th [class], they’ve seen [MICRA-T Level 4] the previous year... you know typically they’re that bit more comfortable with it...you kinda [sic] question the validity of that...should there not be a different test...it gives this kind of a false high [score]. (Teacher A)

It is implied here that the test scores of the higher class level, where the same test is used for two class levels in consecutive years, is upwardly biased.

TEST SECURITY

Non-uniformity from school to school and from teacher to teacher in the preparation of children for the test, its administration and ‘outside’ access to the test, were cited as significant concerns among all the teachers interviewed: ‘I’ve huge reservations about how various schools approach the test’ (Teacher C).

TEACHING THE TEST

The issue of ‘teaching the test’ was raised as key to compromising the validity of their scores. Teacher A offered a reason for this: ‘one’s results will look much better... there can be pressure on teachers to perform... to have...better results...pressure on principals.’ Teacher B spoke about ‘practising’ for the tests saying:

...you do hear anecdotally of schools where suddenly it becomes more important to practise...for tests which, if you’re being...difficult about it, you might say that’s more like teaching towards the test...It’s not like a Leaving Cert where we’re... training them to the test.

Teacher C succinctly stated: ‘your report to the Department can be...altered very easily if you’ve primed the children in a certain way...for the test’. Significantly, teachers’ familiarity with the exact tests mean that they could (consciously or unconsciously) teach to the test:

The tests are very specific...there are specific things that you can do with the children throughout the year which will influence the results enormously. (Teacher C)

Teacher B, in relation to textbooks and readers used in schools, observed that:

There...is a little bit of a change in some of...the new publications where some of the questions that are coming through are a little bit like things [that] turn up in the standardised tests.

The implication here is that if particular publications that were aligned with standardised tests were used in the schools, the children’s achievement scores might be enhanced.

Administrator Bias

Scorer subjectivity was highlighted: ‘I feel that I’m too involved with the child and with the way that the child thinks...we can’t help but be a little bit subjective when we’re talking about the children that we teach daily.’

Access to the Tests

SEN Teacher 1 was concerned about unauthorised access to the tests outside the school:

I distinctly remember a child who went for ‘outside’ help...so as not to have to attend the remedial teacher. You know, there was that kind of stigma and...it was actually very obvious that...the child had been tutored in the particular test totally from A to Z.

Procurement of the test by parents was highlighted:

I’ve had requests from parents in the past for test templates...because they wanted to familiarise their children with the test before it was actually given out...Templates are very easy to put your hands on, and for parents to actually gain access to. It’s just we don’t give them out to parents in this school. But if that’s the way everywhere...I don’t know. (Teacher C)
The suspicion of others’ practices outside the school further added to the lack of confidence in the nationally aggregated test scores’ fitness for purpose. While the level of threat to the integrity of the tests was unknown, there was palpable concern among the teachers interviewed about its potential impact on the validity and reliability of the scores. Teacher insights into test security provided further evidence that fitness for purpose of the aggregated test scores interpreted at system level may be compromised. Reservations surrounding test security were more apparent in the interviews than in the literature.

RAISED STAKES

Concurring with the literature, Teacher B described how standardised test stakes have risen:

*They have become more important...they are just more prevalent...We'd started doing them when we didn't have to do them in this school...we just thought it was a good idea...Then it became something that was reported on...When institutions start to know that results are collected, collated and are going to be put...somewhere...that raises the stakes.*

Interestingly, particular concern was expressed about reporting standardised test scores at local level to parents and Boards of Management.

*Schools can be compared. Children can be compared...using their standardised tests...occasionally parents will compare reports with one another...their results mightn't always...be comparable.* (Teacher C)

Problems keeping standardised tests in proportion to, and in the context of, other forms of assessment were also observed:

*It can be quite difficult to get across sometimes, that that's all it is...a test on the day...a child can have a good day or a bad day, and it's still all being compared...which isn't good.* (Teacher A)

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

All teachers expressed concern about the impact of standardised testing on children with special educational needs. Some felt that it reinforced failure and low self-esteem.

*Is it right to further reinforce that which [they]...are not capable of doing? Is it worth stressing a child? Is it worth stressing a parent?* (SEN Teacher 1)

Teachers recommended that the tests be formative as well as summative.

*[It]...should measure where the children are at [in a] particular point in time, but it should also measure where we need to go next.* (Teacher B)

*It should also be formative...it should be diagnostic to an extent... there should be a place for teaching what the children don't...achieve in the test.* (SEN Teacher 2)

CLARITY OF PURPOSE

Interviewees had a clear idea of school-level purposes for standardised testing. However, when asked about the purpose of submitting aggregated scores to the DES, considerable uncertainty pervaded:

*In the Department...I'm not sure, to be totally honest with you. We were never told what it's [sic] going to be used for.* (Teacher C)

*The results are collated, and... results are going... somewhere.* (Teacher B)

*Who's to say what the Department plan on doing with these results...who knows if these are going to be presented by the Department...in a league-table fashion?* (Teacher A)

In the absence of clarity surrounding the purposes for which aggregated test scores are being submitted, suspicions of hidden political agendas and public-servant accountability were put forward as the ‘real reason’ for aggregated scores collection by the DES.

VALUE OF STANDARDISED TESTING

While interviewees outlined many reservations on standardised tests, they were deemed useful as a point of reference:

*I think we need to know where our children are in terms of the other children in the ranking...that it's in line with what I would say about them and it's in line with what I see and what I experience and what I'm able to report to parents...[Standardised tests are]...evidence...to back that up.* (Teacher B)

Concurring with literature, standardised tests were found to be limited in the test scores they produce but useful if interpreted in context:

*My experience of standardised testing is that it can be very good. It can certainly be very beneficial...within a certain context...I'm not convinced that it gives a true reading at all times of where the children are at.* (Teacher C)
The core problems were seen as the increase in the stakes attached to test scores, their out-of-context interpretation, and their potential to be rendered invalid by malpractice.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of the research was to consider whether aggregated standardised test data (from MICRA-T and DPRT-R) submitted by Irish primary schools to the DES were fit for purpose. There was consensus among teachers that standardised tests may not measure well because of their compromised validity. The test instruments were deemed too narrow in their focus and outdated in their standardisation and norm reference. Scorer subjectivity and the test construct and design were criticised. Teachers found their scores to be unreliable when used in isolation from other assessment methods. Variances in administrative procedures potentially invalidate test scores, thus undermining their fitness for purpose. There were concerns surrounding the implications of changing the purposes/use of standardised testing, thereby raising stakes attached to their scores.

Themes not identified in the literature but emergent from the qualitative data identified some issues. There was a lack of clarity surrounding the purpose of submitting aggregated scores to the DES, and this gave rise to distrust and suspicion among teachers. Possible non-uniformity from school to school and from teacher to teacher in the preparation of children for the test, its administration and 'outside' access to the test, were of significant concern. Comparisons of individual children, as well as potential comparisons of teachers and schools, were the main issues cited in relation to raised stakes. There was difficulty in communicating the meaning, accuracy and relevance of test scores to parents.

The findings from the data suggest that the aggregate scores submitted to the DES are unfit for the three stated purposes outlined by the DES.

**PURPOSE 1: UNFIT FOR IDENTIFYING AND EVALUATING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS**

The data suggest that standardised test data from the DPRT-R and MICRA-T were inappropriate or inaccurate instruments for measuring how schools are providing for the literacy and numeracy needs of school students. Neither did they fully inform how to improve teaching and learning. While it was claimed that the DPRT-R and MICRA-T are aligned with the Primary School Curriculum (1999), ERC (2007), Wall and Burke (2004) argue that both tests were norm-referenced before its full implementation. The norm-reference did not include children with special educational needs. Children with special educational needs already in mainstream schools were deliberately excluded from the tests during the norm reference and, the norm reference took place before the enactment of the EPSEN Act where the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools became more commonplace.

Too many variables impacted on the scores derived from standardised tests, thereby affecting validity and reliability. These inconsistencies included:

- Subjectivity and teacher discretion in the scoring of the tests
- Potential for clerical error in scoring, recording, reporting of test results
- Non-uniformity in interpreting the inclusion or exclusion of pupils with special educational needs
- Non-uniformity in accommodations made during the testing conditions
- Out-of-date test items
- Pupil familiarity with the tests
- Integrity of the test administrators, as well as the quality of teaching and learning

Given the level of variation in test administration, the scores could be rendered at worst invalid or at least inconclusive.

The data suggest that aggregated test scores were narrow measures of two subject areas. They do not measure all aspects of literacy and numeracy. Neither do they measure accurately. As they do not provide information on the other nine subject areas in the 'broad balanced' Primary School Curriculum (1999), they are, arguably, an inadequate measure of how best to improve learning in schools. The DPRT-R and MICRA-T did not provide convincing statistics to identify how schools might provide for the literacy needs of students because aggregated scores are too general to provide information on how best to improve learning. Therefore, they are unfit for this purpose.
PURPOSE 2: UNFIT FOR INFORMING EDUCATIONAL POLICY FOR LITERACY AND NUMERACY OR FOR IDENTIFYING WAYS OF IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The standardised test data were considered unfit for informing educational policy for literacy and numeracy or for identifying ways of improving the performance of the school system. They were deemed inadequate for feeding into the review of the current Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. The data revealed that standardised test scores needed to be analysed in the context of other pupil information. If the standardised tests were found to be unfit for purpose at school level, their aggregated summaries are also rendered unfit for identifying ways of improving performance of the school system.

PURPOSE 3: UNFIT FOR INFORMING THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND REVISION OF THE MODEL FOR ALLOCATING RESOURCE/LEARNING SUPPORT TEACHERS TO SCHOOLS

The DPRT-R and the MICRA-T aggregated scores are unfit for informing the implementation of a revised model to allocate resource/learning support teachers for schools. They were not designed or validated for this purpose (Wall and Burke, 2004) because they were norm-referenced and excluded children with special educational needs. Discretion on exemption from the test potentially gives rise to non-uniformity/subjectivity on the part of the principal as to whether or not certain children with special educational needs could be excluded from sitting the test. Thus, the assumption that standardised test scores should define and identify children who are eligible for learning support is flawed.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the aggregate scores submitted by primary schools to the DES are unfit for the three stated purposes outlined by the DES:

- Unfit for identifying and evaluating the needs of students in schools
- Unfit for informing educational policy for literacy and numeracy or for identifying ways of improving the performance of the school system
- Unfit for informing the development, implementation and revision of the model for allocating resource/learning support teachers to schools

The following recommendations arise from the study:

- Overhaul the standardised testing policy, test instruments and their administration as a matter of urgency.
- Provide a greater investment in standardised test infrastructure; redirect funding to create appropriate standardised tests, designed and norm-referenced appropriately for the Irish primary school.
- Consider developing and maintaining one national standardised test for literacy from a test item bank.
- Review the scope, accuracy and relevance of standardised tests for primary schools.
- Tests should be normed to include children with special educational needs.
- In the interim, provide clarity and transparency of the purposes for which the tests are used; communicate them to all test users.
- Reconsider using standardised test scores for the development and potential implementation of a revised model to allocate resource/learning support teachers for schools.
- Prioritise the inclusion of other forms of assessment to reduce the negative impact of standardised testing.

The purposes for the use of standardised test scores, whether at school or at system level, should be validated (Odendahl, 2011). There should be a thorough examination of international practice in standardised testing before proceeding with policy.

The Education Research Centre (ERC) in Drumcondra, Dublin, is developing computer-based standardised testing. While this is welcome, we cannot assume that schools will readily adopt this innovation nor that technology-assisted testing is the answer. Updated paper-based testing may still be required, but this will still raise the question: can a school compare the results of this year’s computer-based test to last year’s paper-based test? It is vital that the instruments of measure be scrutinised, so that the weight given to their importance is not overestimated. It is vital that, that which is deemed important enough to measure is challenged, that the instruments of measure are scrutinised, so that the weight given to their importance is not overestimated. As Haladyna (2006, p.42) succinctly asserts:

*We need to evaluate these threats honestly and minimize or eliminate them. Without documentation or research that dismisses or qualifies such threats, it is hard to justify the public’s longstanding confidence in standardized achievement test scores.*
This book brings together topics related to 21st-century education in first-, second- and tertiary-level education in Ireland. Divided into four parts, it highlights various aspects of Irish education.

Part 1. The social construction of Irish identity historically, and current diversity in Irish society: In the years 2016-2022, it behoves us to reflect on how Irish identity was deliberately constructed as pro-Irish speaking, Catholic and anti-Protestant and how this has now changed in the 21st-century with greater inclusion of ethnic minorities reflecting current ethnic diversity in Irish society.

Part 2. The digital age — online teaching, learning and supervisory practices: As befits a digital age, this section explores the benefits and challenges of many aspects of online education, such as orientation, supervision and instructional digital stories.

Part 3. Contemplative pedagogies, bereavement and mindfulness in education: Students are more than empty vessels to be filled with information; this section explores the importance of mindfulness in education.

Part 4. Specific issues in education: leadership, phonology, pedagogy and standardised testing. This section explores leadership styles of female primary school principals and then examines the development of phonological awareness among primary school teachers based on an inventory of phonemes specific to the Irish context, challenges in maths teaching and the fitness for purpose of standardised tests in primary schools.

Essential reading for:
- Professional Master of Education (PME) students and educators
- Third-level educators of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes

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